

Bach Well-Tempered Clavier in A flat Major, BWV 862

This *Prelude in A-flat major* opens with radiant sunshine that dominates throughout the piece. And yet there is a darker side beneath the surface. Without being able to place it exactly, you hear that the intonation begins to strain and chafe. Even the 'home chord' of A-flat itself is not stable, which is heard clearly in the final chords. Maybe that is why music theorists of just after Bach's day linked unexpectedly dark descriptions to this key.

The summary prelude is followed by a fugue that appears to evoke precisely this sort of association. The piece is more solemn and feels like a wistful late summer. Whereas the prelude is practically all in major, the fugue keeps moving towards autumnal minor keys. In Bach's day, the seasons and strange weather phenomena often had ominous significance.

Haydn Sonata No.60 in C major, XVI 50

Haydn's last three piano sonatas, Nos. 60 to 62 (Hob. XVI: 50-52), were written during the composer's second trip to London in 1794-1795. In his Sonata in C, classed by musicologist Lázló Somfai as a *concert sonata* or *grand sonata*, Haydn takes advantage of the capabilities of this instrument in a score rich in punchy arpeggiated chords, sudden changes of dynamics, brilliant running passages and eerie pedal effects meant to make it a memorable 'performing' piece. Not missing, of course, is Haydn's famously dry brand of humor, so different from the more slapstick 'macho' mirth of his student Beethoven.

This sonata was a work of magnificent virtuosity and musical subtlety, giving it a sense of both wit and calm. This sonata is a more distinctive and more difficult work than his earlier and middle works, and it is a true "piano sonata". The piano works of the classical period were strongly influenced by Italian opera, and the melodies often imitated the actors' singing or speaking, portraying various characters, which gave the music a linguistic character. When listening to an opera, the audience does not always hear the lines clearly, but they can feel the emotions that the actors want to convey by the height of their voices, the speed of their speech, the tonality and the color of their voices. In piano performance, the structure of the melodic and

harmonic form is to a certain extent a characteristic of this "musical language". The performer can refer to this language in order to express the music in a structured way.

Schumann Papillons, Op.2

In Robert Schumann's music, there are many different characters changing during the piece. His works such as *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, *Kinderzenen*, etc, are formed with different small pieces, just like he was telling different stories or describing different characters.

In addition to music, Schumann had a huge interest in literature. His dual interest in both fields led him to include literature in his own music. He compared Bach with Jean Paul in a letter to Carl Kossmaly, "You will probably not need to be told that Bach and Jean Paul influenced me more than anyone in former times."¹ His outstanding compositional skill was applied to *Papillons*, a work intended as a musical representation of the masked ball at the end of Jean Paul's novel *Flegeljahre*. In a letter from Leipzig dated April 1832, Schumann wrote to his family, "Tell [my family] to read the last scene in Jean Paul's 'Flegeljahre' as soon as possible, because the *Papillons* are intended as a musical representation of that masquerade."² He wrote in an explanatory letter to Henriette Voigt, "When you have a spare moment do, please, read the last chapter of *Flegeljahre*... I could say to you, the kind reception I can only wish they deserved."³ Many other passages in Schumann's letters refer to the close links between *Flegeljahre* and his *Papillons*. He even draw attention to them in a letter to the critic Ludwig Rellstabn when he forward a reviewer's copy, "Because I consider you a poet and a kindred spirit with Jean Paul, I am going to add a few words about the origin of the *Papillons*, as the thread which connects them is a very slender one indeed. You may remember the last scenes in the 'Flegeljahre,' with the 'Larventanz,' 'Walt,' 'Vult,' 'Masks,' 'Wina,' 'Vult's Dances,' 'The Exchange of Mask,' 'Confession,' 'Anger,' 'Discoveries,' the hurrying away, the concluding scene, and the departing brother. I often turned to the last page, for the end seemed like a fresh beginning, and almost unconsciously I found myself at the piano, and thus one 'Papillon' after the other came into existence."⁴ The two protagonists of *Flegeljahre* are the twins Walt and Vult. Walt is a poet and dreamer, while his brother is a dark-complexioned, passionate artist. Together, the twins may be

¹ Dr. David Whitwell, *Schumann: A Self-Portrait In His Own Words*. P.66

² Dr. David Whitwell, *Schumann: A Self-Portrait In His Own Words*. P.29

³ Dr. Karl Storck, *The Letters Of Robert Schumann*, translated by Hannah Bryant. P.97-P.98

⁴ Dr. David Whitwell, *Schumann: A Self-Portrait In His Own Words*. P.29-P.30

seen as the literary embodiment of Schumann's own creative alter egos, Eusebius and Florestan. These two characters were created by Schumann, Eusebius represents a dreamy, calm character, Florestan is passionate. They are largely discovered in *Papillons* and Schumann's later compositions.

Papillons presents itself as a series of dances. Similar to all the balls, various types of dances come with one another, varying in rhythm, tempo, key, as well as dynamics. Many dances here are in waltz rhythm and the opening one are simpler, reminding us of Schubert's waltzes.

Debussy Suite Bergamasque

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the word *bergamasque* (or bergomask) referred to a fantasia or set of instrumental variations based on a folk dance—Shakespeare's rustic characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, dance a bergomask.

Suite bergamasque opens with an antiquarian-scented Prelude followed by a second-place Minuet cast in atypically jumpy rhythms. In last place comes a gently merry Passepiéd of infectious charm, the perfect ending for this graceful nod to a gracious past.

This four-movement work opens with "Prelude," which is full of dynamic contrasts, delicate runs, and chords, bringing a soothing and refreshing feel.

The "Menuet," probably set in the guise of an old style, does not conform to the usual design of most minuets. Rather than being airy and dainty, it has elements of a raw comedy character.

Before the Passepiéd comes *Clair de lune*, at first seemingly out of place amid all that rococo punctilio but upon closer inspection fitting right into place as the sarabande of innumerable Baroque dance suites—a slow dance in triple meter with a slight emphasis on the second beat of the measure.

Inspired by French court dances of the 17th and 18th centuries, the final movement, "Passepiéd," is written in 4/4 time instead of the usual triple meter. The left hand plays staccato arpeggios throughout while the right hand plays flowing themes, thus bringing this suite to a perfect ending.

Rachmaninoff Trio élégiaque No. 1

The single-movement *Trio élégiaque* No. 1 was highly influenced by Tchaikovsky, though the voice is already clearly Rachmaninoff's own. It is cast in a single long movement, with pronounced similarities to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in A minor, composed in 1882 after the death of Nikolai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky's friend, teacher, and the director of the Moscow Conservatory. Tchaikovsky's long first movement was called "Pezzo elegiaco" (Elegiac Piece), and like it, Rachmaninoff's "Elegiac Trio" ends with a funeral march. There are other points of reference to Tchaikovsky, but the Trio's powerful sweep, along an arc of growing animation before the somber close, is pure Rachmaninoff.

This trio starts with piano playing a mournful theme over a background of murmuring cello, extremely beautiful and moving, full of melancholy, and the cello and violin alternately repeat the famous melody, making it seem even more lingering and sentimental. In contrast, the second theme played by the cello is more lively and lucid, but in no way disguises Rachmaninoff's innate melancholy overtones. Normality is re-established via a formal recapitulation, in which the primary, secondary, and closing themes are restated but with appropriate adjustments of key. A coda pays further homage to Tchaikovsky's A minor Trio by restating the original primary theme as a funeral march.