

Sonata no.2 op.121

The second sonata that dates from the same year as the first sonata, in 1851, was written because according to his biographer Wasielewski, Schumann was not satisfied with the first sonata. The sonata is dedicated to the violinist Ferdinand David and had its first private performance on the 15th of November, just after he had finished the first draft of the sonata. From the diaries of Schumann, we can see that some possible changes were made around the middle of November 1851. The decision to dedicate the sonata to David was made probably in March 1852. David became a close friend until the end of Schumann's life in 1856 and when Schumann sent the score to him he attached the note:

"Here is the sonata that I have dedicated to you. You might like to accept it as a token of remembrance of happy hours spent in young years". (McCorkle, Schumann Werkverzeichnis, P.513)

According to the introduction of Henle's edition, the first four notes of the opening movement suggest the name of the David with the notes DAFD. This trick was not uncommon for Schumann to use. In the Fantasy, Op.17 for piano solo, which he wrote in 1836, it is known from his letters that the tonality of C stands for Clara's first name.

The premiere was planned on 31 January 1853 but for unknown reasons, the first sonata op.105 was performed. It was not until the 29th of October that the official premiere was made by Clara and Joseph Joachim.

The setup of the sonata is very different than the first sonata. It is almost twice as long in performance and has instead of 4 movements, unlike the first sonata that has only 3. Also one should take good care of the balance between the instruments because many sections are written in the lower area of the violin.

The first movement starts with a slow introduction with both instruments making a big statement. At the end of the introduction, we have a transition of the violin that brings us into the 'Lebhaft' part which is dominating throughout the whole movement. The general feeling which is provoked by this movement is of energy, power and restlessness. It clearly has a very different effect than the first movement of the first sonata and in terms of grandeur, it is incomparable with the first sonata.

The second movement is a Scherzo-type movement though he did not write it as such above the score. We know from his diaries in which he wrote on the 28th of October 'Scherzo for Sonata for violin'. Interesting to note is that Schumann wrote the main melody in the right hand of the piano with an F-sharp as a second voice making the high-point of the melody a minor 9th which can be uncomfortable for pianists with small hands. Also, the figuration with the octaves in the left hand can make a reminiscence of the Brahms Scherzo from the F-A-E Sonata. The two middle sections in this sonata are melodically completely for the violin, though in the second section there is a small hint with the same rhythmical pattern. Near the end of the movement, the pianist has to play a B-major chord spanning a tenth, in which the pianist has to combine the D-sharp and F-sharp with both the thumb. These strange type of techniques were not uncommon for the late style of Schumann's piano writing.

The third movement has a long pizzicato in the violin which is repeated melodically by the piano part. The repetition of the theme, without the pizzicato, gets longer lines than the first part and with the piano accompaniment, it tends to get more flow in character. The theme of the second movement is included in the middle of this movement. He comes back with the first theme in the violin and an accompaniment of 32nd notes which bring an intensification, in the musical flow, from the first and second time we heard it. The end gives another hint to the Scherzo. It is a true jewel in the repertoire and has one of the first 'am steg', ponticello sections for the violin.

The fourth movement hints towards a rondo-form. It continuously comes back to the main theme. The communication between the instrument is very dense with taking over thematic material between the instruments. The character of the movement is very uplifting and full of spirit. Something that is interesting to note due to the mental state that he was in at the time he wrote it. According to John Worthen's book 'Robert Schumann Life and Death of a Musician' Schumann did not even mention his illnesses anymore in his diaries.

'He was also ill a good deal, but -as before- this was now such a common occurrence that he tended not to record it' (John Worthen's book 'Robert Schumann Life and Death of a Musician' P.327)