



Boris Giltburg during the Schumann Forum interview with Christoph Vratz on 12th December 2015, Schumannhouse Bonn, photos: Barbara Frommann

DO YOU LIKE SCHUMANN?

Boris Giltburg in discussion with Christoph Vratz about Robert Schumann*

Schumann Forum Talk, held at the Schumann House in Bonn on
12th December 2015

V: Thank you very much for the friendly greeting and a very warm welcome from our side too. We will talk a bit about Robert Schumann, the composer, about Robert Schumann, this phenomenon of the 19th century and naturally also about the very personal approach that Boris Giltburg has developed to his music and how it all came about to be. Mr Giltburg, in the year 2010 i.e., in the Schumann year, one could read in the *Süddeutscher Zeitung* Schumann is the first composer of the modern age. Is this a bit overestimated or can you make something out of this exaggerated statement ...

G: This is an interesting sentence, because – what is the modern age? Is the last sonata of Beethoven more or less modern than the *Carnaval* of Schumann? Now, if modern means what looks forward i.e. does not look back, but something that has not yet ever been heard, then Schumann is certainly very modern. Whether more modern than Beethoven, I would not be able to say that, also not, whether more modern than Chopin. But, I would say that Schumann is the freshest of all. That is, his music, his musical language, his ideas are so fresh, they are a bit like fresh air that blows ... The works of Beethoven, for instance, which are very modern, never act refreshing ... at times they are something, for which one needs a lot of time to understand them,

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whereas in case of Schumann, this freshness, it starts right with the first note, if one ... Excuse me ... [Boris Giltburg stands up and goes to the piano in the background, public laughs] ... here is the start of *Carnaval* ... [Boris Giltburg starts playing]

V: What is this freshness here? Is it this harmony, is it this pointed rhythm? What makes up this freshness?

G: It is the complete unrestricted and completely honest, unaffected happiness for me. Which comes from a depth, but acts very young, always young. Mainly in the initial works like *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, *Davidsbündlertänze*. Yes, even when he writes something darker, when we see his later songs, these are sometimes dark, but still: his spirit was always young ...

V: In the case of his late works too – now the word late is relative for a composer who did not become so old –, but would you still talk about a freshness, for instance, in the so-called ghost variations or in the *Gesängen der Frühe*? After all, this youthfulness had changed a bit ...

G: Changed, yes, but if one takes, for instance, the *Three romances for oboe and piano* op. 94 [*Drei Romanzen für Oboe und Klavier* op. 94], one still finds a little of this freshness. Probably it was just a looking back there and nothing new. If we observe his works, they are almost arranged completely in a catalogue. At first, we have almost only piano works, then only songs, then the symphonies and so on i.e. it is almost like a specialist catalogue. For me, the piano works and the songs are the youngest and the most fresh and, in particular, the piano works, which consist of small pieces. This was a form, which he invented, developed himself and almost, I would say, brought to perfection as in the *Papillons*.[...] For me, it is the best in these short pieces. [Boris Giltburg stands up from the piano and goes back to his seat]

V: This short form, which was developed more or less at the same time by another composer too, who went on much more radically with it, this composer is Chopin. I believe, for piano there is hardly any composer, in whose case so much happens in such a cramped space. In contrast, Schumann is almost like an epic poet, formulated

somewhat over the top. We always locate Schumann in romanticism, he belongs there, he is at home there, this is the world, in which he grew up. What does this romanticism mean to you as an artist?

G: At first, something about Chopin, if one talks about him as a young composer – for me, Chopin is unbelievably “old”. Even in his early works, even when he [exuded] a lot of energy, the spirit for me is always “old”, for me, Chopin gives the impression of being very wise, as if he had already seen and experienced a lot, had lived ...

V: But he could also have been a fire head ... [laughs]

G: Yes, yes, in principle ... but for me they [Schumann and Chopin] are two extremes of this stretch, from young to old. Schumann as romanticist – the romantic things are for me at first a mixture of freedom and imagination, and completely unrestricted freedom i.e. everything is possible. And also an unrestricted fantasy! Everything is possible, as far as the sound is concerned, the story behind the music is concerned, as far as the transition is concerned, in the mood, in colour, in melody, in atmosphere ... Also ... the feeling lies much closer to the surface than – at least for me – in the classical period i.e. in case of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn. The feeling is [in case of Schumann] very noticeable, very strong i.e. outrageously open ...

V: This would actually again be an unbelievably modern composer, if he is so open ...

G: Being modern for me is more the sharpness, sometimes also anger, the dissatisfaction ... Prokofjew is very modern ..., Schostakowitsch is very modern. And Schumann is still a romanticist.

V: Schumann is a romanticist. This is also related to the fact that for a long time he did not know, in which direction he should or want to move. Partly, he was drawn towards poetry – now let us view it from outside, what his mother wanted him to become – and then the music on the other side. This can be seen in the early works too. We have just spoken to some extent about *Papillons*. How is it for someone, who did not grow up have German as his mother tongue, when one

knows, Schumann had handled a lot of readings, influences of Jean Paul. If one then goes forth, from your look-out and tries to decode this unspeakable complicated [public chuckles], turned humorous Jean Paul and is afterwards totally resigned and says, well, I cannot do it – I can console you, as a native speaker even till today I have difficulties with him – what do you think of it?

G: I must say at first that I started learning German because of the songs of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms and Mahler ...

V: This is certainly not the worst reason ... [Public laughs]

G: Because songs for me are my favourite chamber music. And as a pianist, who plays the songs with a singer, I must really understand each and every word. I found the texts of Jean Paul much later and then, to be honest, read only parts of these, which Schumann had written in his notebook as a direct correspondence with music. And I must say, I did not find any correspondence between these points and the music itself. I could not understand anything in the text and then I read it again and again and when I understood it, I still could not find any direct connection with the music.

V: Opinions on that are certainly very diverse...

G: ... there is a nice piece, which I ..., well, it is not a direct connection with a text, which Schumann had written down, but is the result of a scientific research that a place in *Papillons* has a direct connection with a text of Jean Paul, where he talks about a dancing shoe. And Schumann has written that he hears a dancing shoe in F.sharp Minor and when I play this piece [Boris Giltburg stands up, goes to the piano and starts playing] – this could already be a dancing shoe.

V: One sees, what kind of strong shoes they wore at that time. [Public laughs, Boris Giltburg returns to his seat]. I did not want to say this now – Dutch wooden shoes ... [laughs]

G: But I find that a lot of poetry is still present in the music of Schumann. But always, if one wants to put it in exact words, whether of Schumann or of Jean Paul, the music then simply becomes weaker than when one permits himself a pure access to imagination and simply immerses oneself in the music.

V: It is ultimately so that correspondences can and should always be only approximations. This is also enigmatic in nature to handle things in a mysterious way. We are here recklessly dealing with terms, which were very essential for this Robert Schumann. You have just made use of the term *fantasy*, and before that the term *poetry*. What is this poetry after all?

G: This is easier to show ... [Boris Giltburg points to the piano over his shoulder]

V: Then please explain at the piano ...

G: I only wanted to say one more thing about the connection between word and music. Schumann himself wrote to Ignaz Moscheles about *Carnaval*. He wrote that in his opinion the complete work had a very low value. We would like to dispute this ...

V: Today we know better ...

G: Then he said, only the different states of mind were relevant for him. I completely agree with this. He could very clearly create a whole small world in two, three musical sets. Whether it was a character sketch, a musical portrait or an encounter, or whatever. He wrote [to Moscheles] that he added the title of the individual pieces much later and then asked himself – is the music by itself still not enough and expressive?

V: That is, the song name in case of Schumann, the nearness of word and music, these are sometimes intertwined ... Probably the most prominent or most apparent example is the end piece of *Kinderszenen*, where it says “The Poet speaks”, but naturally no one but the music is speaking. But then how he does it, this is such a mixing of choral

and recitative, and recitative is again something spoken, but this is certainly not an isolated case. We come across such phenomena quite often ...

G : So, I have to say two things here on poetry and on “The Poet speaks” [“Der Dichter spricht”]. The first work of Schumann, which I played as a child – and at that age I still could not understand the music so well – was the *Arabeske* op. 18. There is a very nice story about its origin. Schumann was in Vienna at that time and he had an idea of conquering Vienna musically. He wanted to become the favourite composer of all Viennese and he wrote pieces especially for women. The attempt [to conquer the Viennese through music] did not succeed and he returned. But the *Arabeske* was one of these pieces and whether or not written for women, it belongs to the pieces with the most poetic, lyrical pages, which Schumann ever wrote. And [in these pieces] we find an epilogue and this is for me...

G and V: [together] “The Poet speaks”. [Both laugh, Boris Giltburg gets up and goes to the piano]

V: Let him speak. [Boris Giltburg plays “The Poet speaks”, *Kinderszenen* op. 15,13] [Public applauds]

V: We can naturally be happy that Robert Schumann failed in conquering all women of Vienna for himself. On the contrary, he succeeded in acquiring millions of music friends in the decades and centuries afterwards. This concluding sequence speaks for itself, since it is available as recitative. Is this speaking in tones something, about which you said that it was so close to Schumann, because he had such an affinity for literature?

G: A poet, well, he was a poet in his soul and when we listen to his own musical embodiment of Eusebius ... [Boris Giltburg plays *Symphonic Etudes* op. 13,5] there is so much in it, it is almost like an image ... [Boris Giltburg plays]. This is asymmetric, this is not just a purely musical way of writing music ...

V: Does it also explain to you, why Schumann always had his problems with the traditional forms? Even his sonatas, these certainly are more fantasies ...

G: I know. I find that he knew exactly in these small pieces, when one should stop. He never exaggerates. They are exactly as long as he needs to depict a single musical idea, in order to give a feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment and nothing more. There is also, for instance in *Davidsbündlertänze*, normally almost no repetitions in these pieces. It goes on and on, it must go on, because it is like life, which never returns. But when sometimes something repeats, it sounds and affects so strongly! Such as, this ... [Boris Giltburg plays]. This is the number 2 from *Davidsbündlertänze* and then in number 17, almost at the end, it says "From afar" ["Wie aus der Ferne"] ... [Boris Giltburg plays and hums]. Also like a narration or a dialogue ... [Boris Giltburg plays and hums]. It then goes on ... and at the end he repeats number 2 ... [Boris Giltburg continues to play]. And this is dreamy and then one feels something. In these small pieces, he had such an idea of structure. This was his own idea of structure, not the sonata form, not even the variation form, but instead his own form, which he had found early – this series of small pieces, which become something in themselves.

V: Simply fantasy character. Fantasy, which always looks for spontaneous paths ...

G: But it is interesting, this fantasy. For instance, if one listens to a completely different thing, the first movement of the third symphony of Mahler, it is 3 minutes long and it sounds ...

V: I am curious about it.

G: [laughs] ... firstly one thing at a time, but like parts of a building, which keeps this movement together and does not break it down in small pieces. Then one analyses and finds all these pieces and all these parts ... Or the first movement of the ninth symphony of Mahler, this is even more complicated. It is the other extreme. Here, if we [in case of Schumann] find the perfect form ... in small things, like a pearl, in case of Mahler is it this enormous structure, but as a listener

one does not hear this at first, because there are no direct repetitions and no exposition, development, reprise as in the form of a sonata. It sounds like a melody after the others and still we have a strong feeling of form, structure and that it is a work and not a thoroughly composed movement. So, I believe the composers, they knew exactly, (what they wanted), they had a very clear idea, how their works had to be structured.

V: We might as well ascribe this to them, even to the great composers that they had this notion. There is always here a kind of sub-text, something binding. I do not know, whether this has been proved at any time systematically, but if one takes the example of *Kinderszenen*, since almost every piece – not all – but the absolute majority of pieces really act like a choral, this already begins at “Of foreign countries and people” [“Von fremden Ländern und Menschen”], if one would play this with an accordion ... or even a crazy piece like the “Rider of stick horse” [“Ritter vom Steckenpferd”], if one plays this slowly, this choral character is everywhere, which then appears again later in “The Poet speaks” [“Der Dichter spricht”]. Well, to this extent I would ...

G: Yes, and sometimes he had this motive of four notes as e.g. in *Carnaval* [Boris Giltburg plays four tones] ... this A, S, C, H, everything. And sometimes this motive appears in the inner voice and it is like a red line, which goes through the work – it lasts for 27 minutes ... We find the choral also in the *Davidsbündlertänze* ... [Boris Giltburg plays]

V: You just said this in passing, the first piece of Schumann, which I played, was the *Arabeske*. People like me, in other words i.e. the ones not so talented, they lead a miserable existence, if they get a few pieces of the *Album für die Jugend* right in the first piano years. How did your relationship with Schumann develop? [Boris Giltburg stands up from the piano and goes back to his seat.] ... Well, I may interpose briefly, in his family there is a so-called gene for pianists, because not just the mother was a pianist ...

G: Yes, even the grandmother and my great-grandmother were and are pianists and piano teachers and for this reason we have always had

a piano at home and I always wanted to play and my mother wanted that I did not ... [Public chuckles]. She said, we have a lot of pianists in the family and I should try something else.

V: Luckily, it did not turn out that way ... [Public, Boris Giltburg laugh]

G: Yes, when a child at the age of five wants something very, very much and does not get it, then it wants it even more and I was so stubborn. I think, I needed only three weeks and then my mother gave me the first lesson. But the *Arabeske* was the idea of my first teacher and I am not sure, that it was a good idea for a child at the age of eight. I believe, one can play the notes, but it was really, really difficult.

V: How did then this first encounter with Schumann, which I do not want to declare now as the love of an eight-year old for a composer, how did then this love for Schumann develop? You also just talked about the songs, which were the reason to learn the German language at all ...

G: After *Arabeske*, I played *Carnaval*. This was the idea of my second piano teacher and I am again not sure that it was a good idea for a child twelve years of age, but then at the age of seventeen I started as a student in the music academy of Tel Aviv and we had there a song accompaniment class and were divided in pairs – a singer and a pianist – and on the first day a song was given to us randomly, which we had to prepare till the next class. And I was lucky twice. Firstly, the singer, with whom I was paired had an excellent voice and her musical ideas were quite inspiring. And the song that we got – it was “Twilight” [“Zwielicht”] from op. 39.

V: But this is almost the most modern song.

G: Not only quite modern, but instead – I am a fan of fantasy literature – it appealed directly to me, acted on my imagination. It was dark and rich in colours and there was so much behind the notes, there was an interesting world, which I wanted to discover and research.

V: I am quite in agreement with you there ... well, even till today I do not understand a “Larventanz” of Jean Paul, but in case of “Zwielicht” one directly has a different access.

G: So, there my real love for Schumann began, with the songs and then we did the whole group of songs op. 39, then more songs and then later I played *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Papillons* and the piano concert, and till today they all are favourite works.

V: Can you explain, why just in case of Schumann there is a relatively high discrepancy between, if we stay with the piano works, the very well known pieces, which are played again and again, whether *Kreisle-riana*, *Carnaval* or similar ones and, on the other hand, those pieces, which fell behind. Well, I am thinking of *Intermezzi* [op. 4] or...also the latest ...

G: The four marches op. 76 [*Vier Märsche für Klavier*] ...

V: Yes, or also the late pieces op. 111 [*3 Fantasiestücke*] and also in case of *Novelletten* [op. 21] it is also. ..

G: ... only number 8, which is played sometimes.

V: Yes. But, I think we have there a clear imbalance. Or would you say, this ...

G: No, no, this is right!

V: But why?

G: Why? First, I must admit that I do not know all these works very well, which you have just mentioned. And the ones I know, the *Intermezzi* and the *Novelletten*, are for me probably not – if one talks about inspiration – so inspired like many other works of Schumann. They are always very good, but something is missing for me. The *Novelletten* are a bit “too worked” for me, the structure a bit too, well, too thought out – it does not seem so spontaneous as in the other works.

V: Would you say that in case of Schumann, in the piano pieces it is so often that the pieces lose, if he, so to say, looks for a form and somehow wants to fit in the tradition – I won't say that it goes wrong, we are talking here at an extremely high level – some of their spontaneous spirit, their freshness, which you talked about?

G: [smiles]. I want to say something. We are observing the work of Schumann as a thing. But for him, during his life, since he did not know what he would write and in retrospect, he could not tell you, this was my way for me. He had to find this way with each work and I have [the feeling] in case of many poets and also other composers, there are works, which are simply better than the others.

V: Still, Schumann is one of the composers, who never, so to say, fell down from their actual level ...

G: That's right, that's right!

V: But there are also other composers, in whose case the gap is bigger ...

G: Maybe it is that many works have had better luck than others, but still, while searching for the form – for me the form of *Papillons* is almost perfect, and then *Carnaval* and *Davidsbündlertänze*, in which something gets added through the repetitions. But *Carnaval*, *Papillons* – it is the same form and it is not better or worse, it is already what it is and it is perfect!

V: Yes!

G: With the sonata form there are many attempts to find something own, and then he returns to the classical, almost to the classical form of sonata in piano concert and then it is the best. It is the simplest, the purest ...

V: Which also matches a little his path that he decided more and more in favour of traditional forms with increasing age. Which, by the way, is not a phenomenon specific to Schumann, but appears again and again ...

G: In case of late Brahms it is vice versa. Or maybe not?

V: But in case of Brahms it was always that he was interested in the old masters. That is, he read the old sheet music, he knew even the ones of the French composer. So, maybe Brahms is a special case. But perhaps we take the late Beethoven, where forms like fugue and variation and the like increasingly played a major role. Naturally, the [composers] knew one another very well. And despite this, it is very frequent among composers that in the late years they decide anew to go in, so to say, for the old baroque forms.

G: Probably because, well, because the fugue is actually not a form, it is more ...

V: But it is also not a feeling ...

G: No, no ... not a feeling. I wanted to say that it is simply a way to write music. The sonata form has very clear parts – we have these expositions with the first topic, second topic, intermediate section and codetta. It is different with the fugue. Thus, we have exposition and an intermediate play, but this is so amorphous, – such as the great fugue of Beethoven. What I mean, just because [the fugue] so amorphous is and because the limits are so unclear and so broad, generations after generations of pianists can find something in it.

V: Yes, but I also believe that components like fugue certainly hide something in themselves, which maybe plays out at a more abstract level ... I would like to return once again – we have digressed from it – to the personal career of Schumann. I would like to know, with which pianists you have intensified your image of Schumann i.e. as audience or as visitor to concert ...

G: As a child, it was first of all Horowitz with *Arabeske*, *Kreisleriana*, *Kinderszenen*. Later Wilhelm Kempf with many things, also with *Arabeske*, completely different. As singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and here – if one talks about modern interpretations – his recording of op. 39 with Brendel, this is very modern. Very clever, sometimes over-wise ...

V: Yes, and just this recording banged often around his ears, because apparently 'Dr. Fischer-Dieskau' had sung there ... But he did not shy away from any risk, not even at the high tones. But these were also two intellectuals ...

G: I know. I wouldn't say it is his best recording. But it sounds very modern to me.

V: Yes. I am quite with you there. I wonder that earlier among the pianists, whom you mentioned, now with the exception of Horowitz, there was no Russian pianist. For instance, there is one Mr Richter, who campaigned very strongly for Schumann, but also always played very unconventionally. Thus, he never coherently played the *Fantasiestücke* op. 12.

G: Yes, a short diversion ... I do not know of any recording of the *Fantasiestücke*, which really convinced me.

V: By Richter or by all?

G: By all.

V: Why? What is missing there?

G: I find the work to be unbelievably difficult. More difficult than *Carnaval* and *Davidsbündlertänze*.

V: Yes, why?

G: Because the pieces are a bit longer and sometimes a bit longer than they should have been. Maybe too long for the material and then one must do something. But also, because the musical truth lies deep below the surface.

V: Can it perhaps be related to the titles? Because in the *Fantasiestücke* op. 12 I often have the feeling that they don't help me much. [Boris Giltburg laughs]. In case of *Carnaval* and also *Kinderszenen* it is similar like Debussy in the *Préludes* – he does not actually want to reveal

anything to us and then has written at the end and in case of *Fantasiestücke* “End of the song” [“Ende vom Lied”] ...

G: Or “crickets” [“Grillen”]

V: “Crickets” ... yes. [Boris Giltburg laughs] Why? That is also a very nice title. So, as mentioned, in case of op. 12 I sometimes suspect that the title names are not very helpful. If in case of *Carnaval*, “Chopin” or “Paganini” is written on the top, we know then what to make of it ...

G; Yes, certainly. Maybe, they are to be understood as a keyword or as a riddle, as a small riddle ... which we as artists and maybe also as the audience have to solve. But, I play the piece too, but was never satisfied with what I did.

V: Now it is so, the *Fantasiestücke* op. 12 are also among the works, which – totally unusual for a composer of the 19th century – very often, not always, but with very conspicuous frequency, end in nothing. Soft. Let’s take the *Papillons* or *Kreisleriana* or even op. 12, the “End of song” and we can now continue the series. ...

G : *Davidsbündlertänze* ...

V: Precisely. This is actually a high-risk number, which takes the composer to an age, where the virtuosity is written in capital letters.

G: This is interesting. Could it be related to the fact that he knew that he would not become any virtuous pianist? But in case of *Papillons*, he probably did not know there ... He wanted to become pianist, and then there was this silly story with this device, which he wanted to use, in order to make his hand bigger and (caused) so much damage that he could not play at all.

V: Naturally he wanted to become a pianist, but he also had a friend, respectively his later wife at his side, about whom he knows what she

is capable of and still we have so often these soft conclusions. Does this indicate that at the end he never really wanted to take us back to the this-side world - i.e. the world of virtuosity?

G: He could write very virtuous ... *Papillons, Carnaval* ..., "Prestissimo" – this is highly virtuous, and "Paganini" too. But maybe it is so that he never attached any importance to whether one cries bravo at the end or not. Maybe he did not become bravo-addicted. ... [chuckles] I don't know ... It is sometimes also like this with Chopin ... but still Chopin is in the chorus ...

V: But it cracks sometimes very well in case of Chopin and we need not talk at all about Liszt ...

G: Yes, yes, but the interesting thing is that Liszt completely changed the end of hammer sonata, which also should have ended with three-fold forte and a deep philosophical ...

V: Well, this is also the formal rounding, the sonata begins very softly and there had actually once been a suggestion – in case of a radio station – because the sonata was so low-noise at the beginning and at the end and in order to make the piece more popular, that one might as well cut it ... [Boris Giltburg and public laugh] then it would be thoroughly appropriate for listening while driving car.[Christf Vratz chuckles] I would leave this suggestion as it is. From these soft endings, I would like to come back once again to the Schumann-specific sound pattern, which you have already described in many facets and have also played. If one would do a blind test, for instance in "Who wants to be a millionaire" and one would lay on the table four different music sheets and one of these would be Schumann. I believe that one can identify Schumann always – not always, but very often – relatively well because of the inner voices. ... This is something completely new. [Boris Giltburg stands up, goes to the piano and plays]

G: It is always, almost always three-layered and even in "Eusebius", where it goes right down to the melody, but even there ... [Boris Giltburg continues to play]

G: He even wanted to put in a small line i.e. intermediate voice of four notes. It is very, very prominent.

V: This is naturally present even among the other composers of that time, in Liszt, but Schumann drives it excessively to the root. Is this his way of a new musical language?

G: Maybe. But then he found it very early, because already at the end of *Papillons*, he had this unbelievable multi-dimensionality ... [continues to play]. So, we have a bass note for 26 beats ... [continues to play]. Here we have the “Grandfather” ... [continues to play]. We have the “Papillons waltz” i.e. three layers ... [continues to play]. And then on that also A_6 ... [continues to play]. And the note should still sound. So, he had found his music language very early.

V: For this reason, I smiled a bit when you brought Gustav Mahler into play, because among the orchestra composers, Gustav Mahler is in my opinion someone, in whose case so much happened simultaneously that one could not keep it apart at all – and anyway not many conductors can do it. For this reason, I would like once again to go from the inner voices back to a phenomenon of that time, namely the piano making. I think that our pianos of today are not always suitable to establish this transparency, which Schumann’s music needs. What are your experiences with historical pianos?

G: Well, I know more the older ones. I have studied fortepiano for one year. But these were rather the instruments from the time of Mozart and early Beethoven i.e. not from the time of Schumann. I don’t know these so well. I played once on an instrument of Chopin, an Erard from the 1840s. But I found it very strange and very unsuitable for Chopin ...

V: Probably he had also thought so, but he had no alternative ...

[Public laughs]

G: Yes, that is true. But if we read the testimonials of people, of audience of Chopin, he is supposed to have an unbelievable legato, so con-

nected and so soft, like a painting. And if he could play like that on an Erard, it is unbelievable. It is a dry instrument, very, very detailed ...

V: Yes, the touch possibilities were different at this time, there was a different stringing and accordingly a different sound. Still, I sometimes think that this viewing through the historical glasses can change our hearing sensation or our consciousness for the options, under which the composers had to write at that time. Are you actually a man thinking like an encyclopaedia, who says, I have now crossed this and that station for a composer – in this case Schumann – and now I want to go further and so to say enlarge the spectrum in such a way one day a complete work results from it? Or you simply say – you have just mentioned Horowitz, who never concerned himself with anything like an encyclopaedia, who couldn't care less about that –, it was not in your interest?

G: First of all, I have not understood the question correctly. I thought you asked, whether I would like to play this on a historical instrument. And then I thought, which I find more interesting, is the diversity of instruments today. Thus, a Bösendorfer like today or Steinway or Fazioli – there is a lot to search and find. Whether there is an instrument, which would be better for one for which would be more suitable for one composer or not. Or whether this is a personal choice. There is no better or worse, but ...

V: Do you want to say then that with the current instruments, a piano manufacturer comes very close to that, what you understand by Schumann's music?

G: No. I feel that we had a long time with just one sound, a world of sound, it was the world of sound of Steinway. And it was a monopoly. And I feel that we are probably now living with more diversity at the start of a time. We have Fazioli with a completely different sound aesthetics and we have the new Bösendorfer. Thus, the ones assembled with Yamaha, they are very interesting and also different, with the personality of a Bösendorfer, but also with the modern feel of the 21st century, and Yamaha has its own concert piano. This is interesting too. I have played it only once, it was so orchestral and also

very well suited for polyphony, one could very softly divide the voices and separate from one another without any effort. I hope that we are probably now at the beginning of something new, as far as the pianos are concerned.

V: Often, the problem is then the cost. Namely, the concert houses have their Steinway standing there, and without any requirement one just not goes like that and buys a Fazioli or a Bösendorfer ...

G: That is true. But sometimes one can take up contact directly with Fazioli or with Bösendorfer or with Yamaha. They would very much want to make a piano available for a recital and then one has the possibility of selecting. And there are also halls, where one can choose from different companies. Or even between two Steinways and these can be very different.

V: They can also be different, well ...

G; Yes. And I also see that there are not only Steinways in concert halls that are played. And I find this good too. ... I hope it would inspire Steinway a little bit to do something new.

V: Yes, to move in this direction. You have now elegantly avoided the question of...

G: Really ...no, no ... [laughs] It was the question about the encyclopaedic, which I misunderstood. No, now as an encyclopaedia I would personally approach, nowadays, Rachmaninow, Brahms, Ravel ...

V: Why these three? Because I cannot now spontaneously find the common denominator ...

G: Ravel, since there is no work of Ravel, which I don't want to have and the complete work of Ravel is ...

V: It is manageably big ...

G: Two to two and a half hours, as compared to Debussy for instance, in whose case it is at least twice as much. Brahms, especially young Brahms and late Brahms. May be not yet the variations of Händel and Paganini, but the early sonatas ... and the ballads ... it is the young Brahms. And all this originated in three years. He was 19, 20, 21, 22 ... and then the late Brahms ...

V: The piano pieces ...

G: Yes. And Rachmaninow, he is my favourite composer and there are very few works, which I don't want to have.

V: This sounds almost like a keyword and a perspective outlook. [Boris Giltburg laughs and returns to his seat]. I also don't want to make it so easy for you. First of all, I would like to make use of the opportunity to encourage the public to ask questions, because I can imagine that something or the other has happened during the hour, which is now weighing heavily on your mind and which you want to get rid of. [Christoph Vratz looks asking towards the public, public laughs, brief silence, Boris Giltburg smiles]. This is still a bit restrained, but I am quite sure ... [Public laughs, brief silence]

Audience 1

Maybe only in the context of the encyclopaedic – I can understand this that there are certain musicians, as you have already said, about whom there is actually nothing that one does not like ...

G: Yes, yes, exactly ...

Audience 1

... that as a musician one would also like to express it musically ...

G: I found this, for instance, in the works of the young Brahms, which I discovered for myself only in this year ... So, that is, maybe the situation will change again in a few years.

V: The background of my question was something different, because in recent years themselves we have experienced something, which was

not existing till now in the frequency, namely to open up Schumann completely. We have had earlier Arrau or Kempf, who have although played a lot and there was also – keyword Jörg Demus – the one or the other pianist, who tried to play the complete work, but in recent years – Florian Uhlig or even Eric Le Sage – and maybe there are two or three more, who have developed the ambition of bringing Schumann to us as a package. And there my question aimed in the direction, whether you are also gripped by this ambition – even if it sometimes may only be purely a sporting ambition.

G: At first, a question as the answer. Could it be that with Schumann – maybe also with other composers – the difference between *Kreiseriana* and *Carnaval* is so big that perhaps it is not easy for a pianist to be able to play everything really well. ... I feel this e.g. in the symphonies of Mahler. Naturally there are a lot of recordings with all symphonies of Mahler. But, personally, if I would make a list of the best symphonies, of the best recordings – maybe there would be two of Bruno Walter or Klemperer, but all 9 or 10 as the best of just one composer do not exist, I feel ...

V: In my opinion, this would be very similar in case of Schumann too.

G: For instance, I find Rachmaninow more homogeneous. So, there are a lot of developments between the first piano concert and the symphony dances, but if the music of Rachmaninow is close to one, then, I would say, the complete music of Rachmaninow. Which, probably, is not the case with Schumann.

V: Sometimes the projects do fail. Cyprien Katsaris has also said, if he ever had a desire, it would be to record the complete Schumann. And then this project came to a standstill half-way through. And in case of other pianists, Schiff, for instance, it is so that he never had the aim of opening up the complete works of Schumann and despite this comes every 3, 4 years a concert recording, where works of Schumann have been played again and so gradually everything gets rounded off more and more.

G: Maybe he had this at the back of his mind.

V: But he is also one of these encyclopaedians, who recorded Bach completely and then after many years piano concerts and sonatas of Beethoven and Mozart and more like these and Schubert ... My question was pointed just in this direction.

G: Yes, I understand. Personally, for me, it is like this that the works of Schumann are the ones, which I have played till now and slowly maybe these will be more.

V: It remains with the public to ask questions. [Boris Giltburg, Christoph Vratz, public smile]

Audience 2

Yes, a question on rhythm. Schumann always obscures the beat ... it hovers ... and it is not always easy as a musician and as a listener to determine, where the actual beat is. The question for me, therefore, is – does Schumann really want to obscure it or only, let's say, let only the outlines of the beats become clear and how, as a musician, as a professional musician, does one handle this?

G: I can immediately [points to the piano, stands up and goes there]. So, this piece, which repeats itself in *Davidsbündlertänze*. That is, it is in 6, 8 ... [plays]. But it sounds simultaneously in 3, 4 and then, because everything is repeated, we have the option of playing this two times differently. For instance, the first time we can ... [plays and explains]. So completely in three ... [plays]. And then in two ... [plays]. Or then [plays]. It is not better or we are even very lucky that we have this possibility and that it is also given in the notes text i.e. it was planned thus. That is, he writes as different voices. It is not just in our ears, he had planned it out this way. [...]

Audience 3:

I come back once again to the start of your discussion, you mentioned there the influence of Jean Paul on the piano work of Robert Schu-

mann. I have met him once on the occasion of a CD release of your colleague Stefan Mickisch. I may assume that you are aware of this recording?

G: I know Mr. Mickisch personally, but not the CD.

Audience 3

On this topic “The influence of Jean Paul on the piano work” of Robert Schumann, I have tried twice with my wife to let it have an effect on us. We had a lot of difficulties. But now I am hopeful that I would find a way there after the discussion, for which I am very grateful. [...]

G: So there are very interesting things, all these questions regarding *Papillons* or the “Sphynx” from *Carnaval*. ... But the question is then, what do we do with them as artists. Should we play them differently? The question is, should be play a beat of Bach differently, because we know that there is beat 41 with 14 notes and also the motive B, A, C, H appears there. But this is in the middle of the phrase, what should we do with this innovation ...

V: This is just the advantage in music, it results in a lot of professional groups. .. [Boris Giltburg, public laugh]. One explains it and the other sits down and implements it practically. And this is a very big advantage of this discipline in my opinion.

G: Yes, I think too. For me personally, it should always come from the music, from the spirit of the music. One cannot draft a programme, even if the programme was present in the mind of the pianist. But, if one does not feel organic as an artist – I find it goes against the nature.

V: I rather would like to help you, it sounds only like a contradiction ... You said, I want to capture, map the spirit of music. But I simply believe – you have already tried to establish references to Jean Paul to some extent – that you involve not just the spirit of music, must instead the spirit of the whole i.e. the biographical background, this historical background. And there, I feel, Jean Paul is a classic example, even when we, and I count myself in, find this reading today as extremely difficult. But we know at least that it is also about developing

a specific form of humour, and if we are in a position to impart this humour by way of piano – and this is you – then the spirit has already been captured and mapped to some extent and in this way it helps further, when we connect one with the other. Particularly, because romanticism was an epoch, in which the different arts were combined together with one another so closely as never before.

Question from audience:

I have a completely different idea there regarding the relationship between rhetoric and music, since there was a very close relationship between rhetoric regularity and musical regularity in the earlier times. All of this got broken up in “Sturm and Drang”. Think of Carl Emanuel Bach. And the same also happened in literature and Jean Paul is an example. There is no rule there ...

G: I just thought of a three-fold repetition. If sequences are there, we normally always say, not more than three repetitions and this applies in the literature too. I have read that one acts even today, if one wants to support an idea, then three repetitions are the best. Better than two, better than four. When we sometimes find the fourth repetition in case of Beethoven, then we ask, is this really necessary? So, there is also a small connection between rhetoric and music, but these are only questions from my side, no answers ...

V: This is wonderful. There are only questions and no answers. In doing so, you have given us so many answers and, on that note, we will carry all these questions with us back home. And I would like to thank you heartily for your answers.

G: Thank you very much.

[Public applauds, Boris Giltburg and Christoph Vratz get up, shake hands]