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Review of John MacAuslan, *Schumann's Music and E. T. A. Hoffmann's Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, 2016

by Jeremy Orosz

Schumann's Music and E. T. A. Hoffmann's Fiction is the latest in a long series of scholarly works exploring the role of the literary arts in Robert Schumann's creative imagination.[1] Although a great deal has been written about this matter, the majority of scholarship to date focuses on Schumann's engagement with the writings of Jean Paul Richter.[2] This project addresses the relative dearth of attention devoted to Schumann's aesthetic relationship with the works of other Romantic authors. MacAuslan is, on the whole, successful in his stated objectives: to demonstrate that Schumann's works are kindred spirits with their literary counterparts by E. T. A. Hoffmann, and more broadly, to "illustrate in new ways how music and literature can enhance one another" (1). The book is therefore an essential contribution to Schumann studies, but its value is not limited to that; it likewise belongs on the radar of a great many readers of this journal—especially those with an interest in musical meaning and interpretation. Throughout the book, MacAuslan engages with the discourses of music theory, elegantly performing both structural and hermeneutic analysis—the former always in service of the latter. Although the author at times omits the analytical scaffolding necessary to support his arguments about form or other large-scale features, requiring the reader to either take him at his word or study the passage in depth to evaluate his assertions, the book is nevertheless recommended reading for music theorists as the vast majority of his observations about the music are sensitive and complete.[3] MacAuslan thoroughly intertwines the acts of analysis and interpretation, offering an attractive means of understanding the expressive potency of Schumann's piano music.

The book follows two discrete paths launched by a shared introduction. The odd-numbered chapters provide an analysis of an individual cycle and its relation to a literary work by E. T. A. Hoffmann, while the even-numbered chapters are (by and large) about how Schumann conceived of musical meaning during the 1830s. In the author's own

[1] See especially Newcomb 1987 and Daverio, 1993 and 1997.

[2] See Erika Reiman's monograph, *Schumann's Piano Cycles and the Novels of Jean Paul* (2004), which will inevitably be compared to MacAuslan's project. These two books differ fundamentally in focus, however, as Reiman examines a single argument in greater depth, while MacAuslan instead investigates a broader range of topics. One will learn more about the literature of Jean Paul from Reiman than one will about the writings of Hoffmann from MacAuslan, but the latter's broader focus casts light on a wider range of matters.

[3] For example, although I agree with MacAuslan's assertion that the creative treatment of rondo form in the four movements of *Nachtstücke* provides an interpretive window into this cycle, he does not provide adequate evidence (through some combination of formal diagrams and graphic examples) to support this claim. One wishes that he had followed Hedges Brown's (2011) example, grounding a hermeneutic reading of Schumann's rondo movements with clear formal diagrams and lengthy score examples.

words, "the odd-numbered chapters illustrate an approach in practical interpretations, while the even-numbered series … offers more abstract reflections" (27). The episodic nature of the book calls to mind Brian Massumi's comments about *A Thousand Plateaus*: that one may "read it as [one] would listen to a record" (ix), skipping around at will to find one's favorite cuts. The same could be said of *Schumann's Music*, which is perhaps more like a concept album than an "ordinary" record; that is, the book is most satisfying when read in full, yet each chapter can be excerpted comfortably as a stand-alone essay or read "on shuffle." Regardless of one's approach to the text, all are encouraged to read Chapter 2, "Notions of Resonance and Expression," before embarking on any of the analysis chapters to become familiar with the author's concept of "resonance" (27–33). "Resonance," MacAuslan argues, is a productive metaphor for the expressive "coupling" or "matching" of Schumann's music and Hoffmann's literature—an approach that privileges the shared cultural fascinations of Schumann and his contemporaries over seeking isomorphisms between music and other arts.

The first chapter of the "analysis path" provides an account of how Schumann's mutual infatuation with music and literature developed, examining his earliest explicitly "literary" works shaped by the writings of Jean Paul—*Papillons*, op. 2 and the *Intermezzi*, op. 4—as a foil to the later, more mature pieces composed in the decade that followed. The subsequent odd-numbered chapters explore the four Hoffmann works: *Carnaval*, op. 9, *Fantasiestücke*, op. 12, *Kreisleriana*, op. 16, and *Nachtstücke*, op. 23. The arguments made about each complete cycle, while all convincing, grow more compelling as the book progresses; few would dispute that *Carnaval* is a "capricious … exhilirating comedy of gesture and character with a dizzyingly humorous shape" which captures "the unruly spirit" (38) of *Mardi gras* rituals, or that *Fantasiestücke* relates to Hoffmann's 1814 work of the same name. The chapters on these cycles are nonetheless successful for their depth of commentary on both analytical and historical matters. It is especially challenging to provide fresh commentary on *Carnaval*, as this work has already been the subject of much analysis and criticism; some authors, like Kramer (2001) have explored the cultural resonances of this work, while others, like Kaminsky (1989) and Krebs (1999), have offered valuable insights into the cycle's structural processes. MacAuslan, rather, produces a novel synthesis of these perspectives, grounding his analytical observations in the work's cultural history to illustrate with great specificity both *how* and *why* this idiosyncratic, genre-bending cycle epitomizes the carnivalesque.

While Chapters 3 and 5 help to affirm the aforementioned views on *Carnaval* and *Fantasiestücke*, Chapters 7 and 9 call into question common assumptions about *Kreisleriana* and *Nachtstücke*. MacAuslan has his finger firmly on the pulse of these cycles, unveiling a dizzying network of signification in each. His Chapter 7 study of *Kreisleriana* goes against the apparent scholarly consensus of comparing this work to Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*,[4] instead providing focused exploration of the resonances between this cycle and Hoffmann's work of the same title, as well as the movements by Bach and Beethoven with which, MacAuslan demonstrates, this piece is in dialogue. The Chapter 9 analysis of *Nachtstücke* draws upon a wide range of approaches from both musical and literary theory to provide perhaps the most persuasive hermeneutic readings of the entire book. Especially striking is MacAuslan's suggestion that Schumann's musical encounter with Hoffmann's tales prefigures Freud's "discovery" of the uncanny within them.[5] Viewing both Schumann's *Nachtstücke* and Hoffmann's nightmarish stories in a Freudian light may indeed be the keystone for understanding the resonance between these works. The very characteristics that Freud ascribes to the uncanny apply equally well to both; each exhibits, MacAuslan notes, compulsive repetition, a blurring of the lines between imagination and reality, "a mechanical mimicry of life" (210), and "associations of the dealthy" (214).[6]

The five analytical studies, in addition to their contribution to scholarship (both within and beyond Schumann studies), are also of great utility for the pedagogues among us. Any passage from these chapters could be assigned as course reading (Chapter 9 is most strongly recommended for this purpose), but Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7 are perhaps of more value to instructors seeking pieces to challenge students' understanding of typical formal procedures; those who teach about the form or hypermeter of tonal music will delight in (re)discovering challenging yet accessible examples to present in their classes.[7] Although it was presum-

[4] MacAuslan cites Deahl (1988), Daverio (1993 and 1997), and Tunbridge (2007) as examples of scholars who explore the parallels between *Kreisleriana* and Hoffmann's *Kater Murr* in the greatest depth.

[5] MacAuslan argues that "the mention of Freud here is neither a mere anachronism, nor is it to claim Schumann's work as a startling—or uncanny—pre-echo of Freud's description. Instead the ways in which Schumann foreshadows Freud reflect both the capacity of each for diagnosing common fears, and role played in the cultural hinterland of each by 'Der Sandmann,' the opening tale of Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke*" (207).

[6] See Freud 2003 (originally published in 1919) for a more comprehensive explanation of what defines the uncanny in literature and in lived experience.

[7] In regard to teaching hypermeter, MacAuslan's discussion of the possible influence of Jean Paul on the irregular phrase rhythm in the fourth Intermezzo (21–24) is likely of particular interest to readers of this journal. Examples of perplexing formal types are presented in every analysis chapter.

ably not the intention of the author to demonstrate this, these analyses make a case for the didactic merits of using Schumann's music in the theory classroom. While the music of Haydn, Mozart, or (early) Beethoven remains the default corpus to introduce common forms of the common-practice era, the music of Robert Schumann is uniquely well equipped to display how far these templates can be pushed while still retaining their integrity.

The "abstract" (even-numbered) chapters, though plenty rigorous, are also engaging and accessible enough to assign to students at a variety of levels. Each of these essays is, to an extent, *about* Schumann and his aesthetic worldview, yet most of the arguments advanced are applicable to a wide range of repertoires—not merely that of Schumann and his contemporaries.[8] These essays are written with an admirable level of theoretical and bibliographic depth. Consequently, their contents are unusually difficult to encapsulate in short form, and the brief overviews I provide here should not be viewed as comprehensive summaries. No reader is likely to agree with every argument in these essays—there are many—but this is part of their appeal; each chapter is relentlessly thought-provoking, and most readers will likely be intrigued by the matters on which they disagree with the author.

Each of these contributions is within reach of advanced undergraduate students, though the former three (Chapters 2, 4, and 6) stand out as the most suitable for assignment at this level. Chapter 4 explores (among other things) the difficult question of what it means to call a work programmatic, problematizing the distinction between "absolute" and "program" music that one might be tempted to view as a neat binary.[9] A new discussion of this matter was long overdue; as the late Peter Kivy made clear in his canonical *Music Alone* (1990)—a book devoted entirely to the subject of "meaning" in non-programmatic music—developing a rigorous definition of "absolute music" is more difficult than it may first appear. MacAuslan demonstrates that, ever since the polemics of Eduard Hanslick led to an ideological "polarization between 'program' and 'absolute music'" (90), observers have chronically misunderstood what Schumann meant in calling a work programmatic.[10] Schumann's conception, MacAuslan argues, involved neither imagistic "scene-painting" (78) nor narrative schemata (as in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*); instead, his understanding of program music was more nuanced and less literal, focused not on depiction but upon capturing the *Geist* of another cultural artifact.[11]

The two final abstract essays (Chapters 8 and 10), though still clearly written, are somewhat less forgiving to students below the graduate level. Both essays ask more questions than they answer, making them ideal reading for discussion in a seminar. The former explores the complex matter of musical expression and reference, and how it relates (or, more precisely, differs) from linguistic meaning. In the latter, MacAuslan defends the necessity of "interpretive pluralism" (226) and reflects upon the practicality of a historically informed understanding of music composed nearly two centuries ago.

Having explored the strengths of *Schumann's Music* and how it might be read by professionals and students alike, three minor critiques are nevertheless in order. Let it be emphasized that these are mere niggles, perhaps revealing more about the perspective of the reviewer than the missteps of the author. First, despite providing an impressive array of interpretive insights about Schumann's Hoffmann works, the author at times disparages viewpoints (especially aesthesic observations) that he finds disagreeable.[12] This is found most frequently in his discussion of the apparent program of *Papillons*.[13] While no individual interpretation about what a passage of music evokes should be considered definitive, and room for multiple interpretations should always be allowed—a point the author himself makes in the book's final chapter—it is quite another matter to say that a piece does *not* evoke, recall, or represent a certain image or resonate with a literary fragment. MacAuslan cautions against (and studiously eschews) simplistic, pictorial readings of Schumann's music, but his rejection of specific interpretations is perhaps inconsistent

[8] Chapter 6 is a possible exception, which is an account of Schumann's "stylistic evolution" (125) between 1836 and 1838; this entry stands out as perhaps the most essential reading for Schumann scholars and the least essential for those without a specific interest in the composer's life and works. Those who teach undergraduate music history, however, may wish to assign Chapter 6 for the account of how Schumann viewed the music of the burgeoning Germanic canon (Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven), which bears remarkable similarity to common contemporary perspectives.

[9] MacAuslan likewise examines Schumann's views on the precarious (if not wholly artificial) binary between (musical) form and (poetic) content (80–90).

[10] In his words, "[t]he understanding of Schumann's music seems to have altered as the meaning of 'program' evolved and ideology moved on" (89).

[11] *Geist*, MacAuslan notes, is an untranslatable concept, perhaps most closely analogized to "spirit" in English (80). See pp. 80–84 especially for a detailed cultural history of the concept of *Geist* in German Romantic thought.

[12] The most extreme example is his assertion that it "would be *insane*" (81, emphasis mine) to ignore authorial intent when crafting an interpretation.

[13] Specifically, he argues that certain features of this program are more plausible than others. He likewise goes out of his way to criticize *Papillons*, suggesting not fewer than three times (18–21, 80, 139–140) that this cycle compares unfavorably to the four Hoffmann works.

with his argument that multiple "hermeneutic approaches can coexist" (228).

Second, the author at times overstates the perceptual value of tonal trajectories and of "home" or "final" keys in Schumann's Hoffmann works, entertaining different interpretations for each before arriving at a conclusion. One wonders why he goes to such trouble rather than simply stating that none of these cycles have an unambiguous global tonic. Although the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert often present an "organic" coherence in relation to a single tonic, not all composers hold this compositional criterion in high esteem; for Schumann, as Kopp (2011) has argued, even the key of a single movement can be vexingly unclear.[14] Fortunately, as MacAuslan's analyses are not based upon the presumption of tonal unity, the off-hand discussion of governing tonics does not detract from the many keen analytical observations. Further, the author can hardly be blamed for taking an interest in this matter, as the presumption of functional monotonality as a default is still remarkably common in the academy.

Lastly, many of MacAuslan's most intriguing arguments are left underexplored. In concluding his discussion of *Kreisleriana*, he suggests the possibility of resonance between Hoffmann's *Kater Murr* and Schumann's op. 21 *Novelletten*—a provocative, unprecedented claim. The author's discomfort in pursing this reading is clear, as he belittles his own idea by deeming it "admittedly baseless speculation" (172). Despite his apparent reluctance to depart from interpretations supported by documentary evidence (the balance of his observations are—admirably—so grounded), this is one of the most appealing arguments in the entire book—one that will shape my hearing of *Novelletten* henceforth. Other ideas that would seem to merit more discussion are relegated to footnotes, like his suggestion that Schumann and Offenbach pursued similar musical strategies (independently of one another) while engaging with the same Hoffmann texts.[15] Here especially, an additional graphic example would be welcome to make this comparison somewhat more concrete. Although I wish the author had done more to flesh out these ideas, the brevity and lack of unnecessary detours are strengths of the analysis chapters. Moreover, he has done a great service to other scholars by planting the seeds for future study.

In short, *Schumann's Music and E. T. A. Hoffmann's Fiction* is valuable to virtually any reader of this journal. While the impressive breadth of the project entails that few will read every chapter with rapture, most music theorists will find something that piques their interest and relates to their research or pedagogy. The insights about form, harmony, motive, and hypermeter found in the odd-numbered chapters will appeal to those who study the structural properties of tonal music. The depth of knowledge of 19th-century aesthetics displayed in even-numbered chapters is likely to please anyone with an interest in philosophical approaches. Finally, those with a passion for musical hermeneutics (regardless of preferred repertoire) will appreciate the care with which MacAuslan makes his interpretive observations in both the "practical" and "abstract" paths.

[14] MacAuslan is undoubtedly aware of this tension, noting that "the aesthetic impact of the final keys . . . may be inseparable from persisting ambiguity as to each work's tonic," likewise citing Kopp (2011) to acknowledge that "locally, states of key may be clouded, 'intermediate' or 'directional' " (235).

[15] Namely, MacAuslan argues that "Offenbach's setting of Olimpia's song . . . from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* likewise begins on the tonic, and ascends and descends the scale by step, in even quavers and a mechanical staccato matching Schumann's regular accents," further suggesting that "both composers expressed the idea of an automaton's music in similar ways" (215n45).

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