



R. Schumann: Complete Works for Pedal Piano/Organ

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Organists' Review (Michael Bell - 2010.08.01)

Twenty three years on, this CD suitably marks Schumann's 200th anniversary. Apart from occasional disconcerting instances of final chords being chopped short (in the original or the re-mastering?), this is a highly enjoyable and authoritative 'souvenir'.

Cumbersome titles too, but many readers will know that Schumann envisaged the fascinating Studies and Sketches as being performed upon a piano (grand or otherwise) with pedalboard. Little is lost by performing them, as here, on organ instead! And the Hoffenheim Walcker certainly gives added value! This particular organ (2m/27st) was built in 1846 – only two years after Schumann produced his music – with cone-valve chests and mechanical action, and was restored by Steinmeyer in 1974. Romantic delights abound. The intriguing specification includes a Physharmonika stop (indubitably fizzy), and a Holzharmonika, which has tapering pipes despite being made of, well ... wood; but such a short list can give no hint of such rich sounds.

Is the star of the show the organ or the composer? Or perhaps the inestimably sensitive and persuasive performer, recorded the year after he became organ professor at Saar Hochschule. Certainly Schumann's complete organ works provide a highly entertaining hour – or happily dip in ad lib. Despite the formal discipline involved, there is much poetry here too. The composer himself felt the BACH fugues might outlive all his other works. The sixth is a mighty tour de force. The Sketches are far from 'sketchy', showing Schumann at his obsessive/neurotic but always compulsive best. A veritable celebratory feast.