



Robert Schumann: Fantasie C-Dur, Waldszenen, 3 Fantasiestücke

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[Fanfare](#) (Steven E. Ritter - 01.11.2007)

I am considered somewhat strange among my musical friends for my predilection for Schumann's music over that of Brahms. While I love Brahms's symphonies, each and every one of them, I could not live without Schumann's. And while I marvel at the consummate mastery of each of Brahms's piano pieces, especially the late ones, it is Schumann who time and time again proves himself the master composer in this realm, the true romantic, the passionate composer who shows himself as a true child of the Romantic age, not like the pseudo-Romantic, Classically oriented Brahms.

We seem to be living in something of a golden age for Schumann. Almost every new pianist on the horizon is releasing albums of his music, and there are almost more riches to be mined than you can keep up with. Andsnes, Lupu, and Hamelin are just a few who have created significant recordings in the last few years that set very high standards that easily compete with the likes of past masters, such as Horowitz, Wild, Kempff, and Richter. Now Audite, already becoming widely known for stunning SACD recordings, has released this all-Schumann disc by a pianist I have never encountered, 27-year-old Nice native Nicolas Bringuier, in that same format that features some stunningly great surround sound. There are some who believe that a piano recording doesn't benefit by surround sound. I would point them to this recording to prove them absolutely wrong.

Schumann composed the vast bulk of his piano music between the years 1830 and 1839, not surprising for a young man who still was intent on a career as a concert pianist. Only one work on this disc hails from that time period, the great (some would say his greatest) Fantasy. The work is reflective of the turbulent and upside down life he was living in 1838–1839, desperately trying to win Clara's hand despite the machinations and fervent opposition of her father. Schumann considered this work the most passionate thing he had ever written, and its beauties are many and sublime, hinting at the last remains of sonata form, yet a full-flown fantasy in every sense of the word. The third movement is now legendary for its magnificent and moving passion, and Mr. Bringuier displays an aptness for this music far beyond his young years. But then again, it was written by a young man experiencing the same thing, so why should this astound us?

The Waldszenen is not played or recorded as much as the other music, and I for one have never understood this, as it is one of my personal favorites. Perhaps it has something to do with Schumann's return to a simpler, more direct and literary style present in the Kinderszenen. These miniatures are simpler in design and concentrated in emotional content, and some might view this as a backward step after the chaotic world of the Fantasy. But that would be a great mistake, as some of Schumann's most poetic and intimate thoughts are poured into this work, one that

replays according to the attention given. Bringuier is able to shift gears easily, and enter fully into this dream world with a delicate and easy touch.

The three quirky op. 111 Fantasy Pieces are the latest works here, originally conceived as romances. They are supercharged cells of ardent strength, Chopinesque in flavor, and rhapsodic in nature. Bringuier again shifts gears to accommodate this most virtuosic of playing, never once sacrificing integrity of concept and beauty of tone. As mentioned, the sound is fantastic, and I find myself challenged once again by a late comer to Want List consideration. This is a great disc.

