

ROBERT SCHUMANN
1810-1856

Sketches, Op. 58

I. Nicht schnell und sehr markiert (Not fast, and very marked)

II. Nicht schnell und sehr markiert

III. Lebhaft (Lively)

IV. Allegretto (Moderately fast)

The great German Romantic composers are best known for their symphonies and chamber music, but many of them were also organists. Although after Bach's death organ music did not have as much of a seller's market as orchestral music did, subsequent composers found the instrument fascinating and worthy of some compositional attention. Practicing on the organ was always a challenge before electricity; it usually necessitated a trip to a church, plus the hiring of someone (or several) to pump the bellows for it. It was also often very cold or very hot in the church. A most ingenious solution for this was to fit keyboard instruments such as the clavichord and harpsichord with a pedalboard for the feet, just like the organ. It was on such a modified instrument that many organists could now practice organ music at home – a much more convenient, affordable and comfortable practice option. The pedalboard modification was later applied to the newest keyboard instrument – the piano. Although the pedal-piano was still used as a practice instrument, Robert Schumann was among the very first to treat it as a “real” instrument, composing new music specifically for it, including his *Sketches*. The first two movements sound somewhat hesitant or rhythmically misaligned, due to their beginning on the second beat rather than the first. The third movement is more dramatic and straightforward in its rhythm, and the fourth exhibits a sort of pompous yet calming resignation. Schumann's title “Sketches” is a telling one, for it remained to be seen if the pedal-piano would “catch on” as a concert instrument. It did not; these works are played nearly exclusively on the organ now, and pedal-pianos are fascinating artifacts.