

NICOLAS
VAN POUCKE
THE SCHUMANN
COLLECTION
VOL. 1

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Carnaval, Op. 9

33:56

1	Préambule	2:29
2	Pierrot	2:49
3	Arlequin	1:04
4	Valse noble	2:18
5	Eusebius	1:38
6	Florestan	0:56
7	Coquette	2:01
8	Réplique	1:40
9	Papillons	0:45
10	Lettres dansantes	1:01
11	Chiarina	1:38
12	Chopin	1:10
13	Estrella	0:34
14	Reconnaissance	1:54
15	Pantalon et Colombine	0:58
16	Valse allemande	0:59
17	Paganini	1:28
18	Aveu	1:12
19	Promenade	2:49
20	Pause	0:18
21	Marche des "Davidsbündler" contre les Philistins	4:04

Fantasiestücke, Op. 12

31:02

22	Des Abends	3:42
23	Aufschwung	3:45
24	Warum?	3:07
25	Grillen	3:47
26	In der Nacht	4:25
27	Fabel	3:09
28	Traum des Wirren	2:31
29	Ende vom Lied	6:34

Arabeske, Op. 18

7:54

TRPTK Studios, Utrecht. Thursday, September 3rd 2020. A video call between pianist Nicolas van Poucke in Amsterdam, drinking an Ethiopian drip coffee, and producer Brendon Heinst in Utrecht (about 50km from Amsterdam), with a shot of Burundi (about 2.700km from Ethiopia) espresso. Near neighbours in the grand scheme of things, now in a much smaller world thanks to a period of social distancing.

Brendon: “So, it’s finally done. You’ve just recorded, edited and mastered The Schumann Collection, Vol. 1. Let’s talk about how you got there. Why Schumann? Why now?”

Nicolas: “When the whole country went into lockdown, I thought, well, this can be fun. Finally, some time to do things I could otherwise just not do: spend time with my family and kids, cook, relax... But you also quickly get these doomsday scenarios in your head, thinking the music world I grew up in will never be the same again, you know? Maybe we’ll never get to spend an evening at the Concertgebouw altogether, who knows. But slowly but surely, we learn more about this virus and the doomsday thinking fades a bit more into the background.”

Brendon: “But music and art have been in existence for centuries, millennia even. So, it’s already seen its fair share of pandemics and doomsday scenarios.”

Nicolas: “That’s true, yeah. Art and music have been there since the dawn of humanity. It’s the first thing people express themselves in as soon as they’re not hungry anymore; people need to sublimate something into this world, in whichever form. It’s just that you have these panic thoughts, the what-if thinking, right? This whole period was kind of crazy, but also yielded a much higher dose of creativity than I had before, an urge to create things. Life in its most condensed form.”

Then somewhere around the third or fourth week of the lockdown, I got this phone call from [executive producer] Gilles, who follows a couple of artists and goes to their concerts. He told me he wanted to help out artists during these tough times and got in touch with you about setting something up. He came up with the idea to produce albums with them, to help make it so that you have something, an album, when this whole period comes to an end. So, during that one phone call, everything started to gravitate towards Robert Schumann and his music. Suddenly, this massive Schumann project was initiated, clearly marking out this kind of pre-phone call world and a post-phone call world. But how was it for you, going back and making recordings during – or after – this lockdown?”

Brendon: “Yeah, it was strange, to be honest. The last recording before yours was actually at the same church, the Westvest church in Schiedam, just two weeks before the whole lockdown thing happened. I was even reading some news articles during one of the breaks, about the situation in China and in northern Italy. I never could’ve guessed it turned out the way it did. But we made it the best we could; we finished editing what we recorded until then, and I started doing a lot of research, actually. I mean, I still am an engineer most of all. I wanted to do more research as to how to improve what we had already been doing for so many years since the start of TRPTK, recording digital audio. There’s so much to explore in that regard, so many little details you just never think about because, well, who’s got the time. And also, you tend to take your equipment and procedures for granted, you know? So I learned a lot about how to optimize our recording and mastering strategies, in order to be come out of this lockdown situation with a completely fresh look on the subject, ready for whenever we got back to recording. Which was funny, because the first thing we recorded again was at the same church, on the same piano.”

Nicolas: "It was for me too; both of my previous albums were recorded in that same church, on that very same piano. In this stage of the process, I need to feel that kind of control, to know what I'm working with. It's a huge advantage to play on a familiar instrument. But I also had this sense of huge responsibility... You see, if you play some kind of contemporary work that's never recorded before, you really become part of the catalogue for that piece, much more than if you choose to record something like Schumann. If you do, and you don't want to end up being the one out of many, you really need to add something to it. I felt an enormous pressure; just look at who recorded these pieces before... Rachmaninoff, Cortot, Michelangeli, Rubinstein, just to name a few. I realized very quickly it was up to me to really add on to that catalogue, that legacy."

Brendon: "In what way was choosing to record Schumann a product of this time, this situation you were in?"

Nicolas: "Because I didn't have any concerts on my short-term agenda, nor leads for anything more longer-term, I unanticipatedly had months on end to absorb music, to prepare for a recording. This means you'll have to choose music you think is fantastic, in every sense of the word; music you find fascinating, music that's very close to you as a player. But I also realized a bit later, that most of Schumann's music was set or staged in his own fantasy world. People often say you can hear in Schumann's early works that he would go on to lose his mind later in his life, but this is absolute nonsense. Alright, to write this kind of music, maybe you'll have to be a little bit eccentric. But perhaps what it is, though, is sort of an escape from reality. He had this sort of clique of friends in his mind, his alter egos Florestan and Eusebius, which he then connected to all sorts of people, alive, dead, and non-existent, who were all there at that imaginary *Carnaval*. It's this kind of fantasy world you can easily lose yourself into during a lockdown like this. Maybe it's some kind of escapism..."

Brendon: "Well, eccentric, yeah. But he was also known for being incredibly intelligent, very well-read, and much of a poet himself. Do you feel parallels with him personally, or, in what way do you identify with him?"

Nicolas: "Hmm... It's a bit of a duality, you know? Because on one hand, my credo is a bit like it's the art that speaks for itself, not the artist. Maybe even in a certain way, I try to see the art and the artist as two separate entities. Because also not every composer is cut from the same wood, and some of them could be somewhat less-than-pleasant or even morally dubious as people. But as for Schumann: you can only feel respect for someone like him. That being said, I wouldn't really compare myself to him, but I can identify with him. But that's also something you have to do as a performer, you have to be able to identify with the composer whose work you're playing. What I identify with is Schumann's way of obsessing with fantasy, yet also with melancholy. You might not always notice it at first sight, but there's always this fascination with evenings, nights, the supernatural, fairytale-esque things. Although his music might sound accessible at first sight, there's always a dark undertone in it, at least for me. *Carnaval* is a great example of this, actually. It's a very upbeat piece, but there's also some kind of insanity to it, you know? It's also really fantastic, but in the other sense of the word, giving it that dark undertone I mentioned. Of course, *Carnaval* doesn't aim to be a perfect image of what a carnival is, but rather what it could be. It's symbolic; as though you're taking the term carnival and showing it through different lenses. Or the fact that people wear masks at these carnivals, that also makes it kind of spooky, right? This is something that people in the Romantic era were so fascinated with. I actually played around with the idea of organizing a masked ball myself as well, for the longest of times. So yeah, maybe I can identify myself with him.

Brendon: "After *Carnaval*, we proceeded to record his *Fantasiestücke*, so *fantasy pieces* in English. What kind of fantasies are going on there? And what do you see, or imagine, when playing them?"

Nicolas: "Well, you see... I just try to step into the fantasy world of the piece, as it were. In essence, you have a very basic task as a performer: just take these pieces off the shelf, dust them off, and breathe new life into them. But it's not the notes that make the piece, it's what's being communicated. But this is what I love so much about Schumann's music; if I play Mozart, for example, you make up your own story connecting the pieces and stimulate your fantasy around them. You have to create a narrative you play the program within. And maybe that's totally the opposite of what the composer originally meant with it, but it gives you some kind of structure in the fantasy around the piece. With Schumann, though, it's a wholly different kind of story; he clearly tells you what he means, or envisions, with his music. You just need to get as close to what he meant as possible. I try to get myself into that sphere – which is an enormous task in itself – and then you still have to be able to communicate that by converting all of this into the technical and mechanical side of things. In the end, it's about pressing keys on a keyboard. You can think of it as artistic big deal and all, but it's just as much simply a craft. It's all in translating what's written on paper into playing the instrument, materializing this fantasy world into the mechanicals of it all."

Brendon: "After *Fantasiestücke* and *Carnaval*, these two gigantic blocks of music, you end your album with *Arabeske*. What made you choose that specific piece?"

Nicolas: "To be completely honest: I didn't choose it myself; Gilles did. I told him I'd love to record *Carnaval* and *Fantasiestücke* for the album, and he replied with something along the lines of sounds great, but can you include *Arabeske* too? *Arabeske*, to me, is all about homecoming. Whenever I was away from my piano for a week or so, I would come back and play it. The great thing about it is that Schumann doesn't impose a program like in *Carnaval* or *Fantasiestücke* for that matter. I think it points to these beautiful curly figurations, and maybe it's also a metaphor for the fluid way the rondo form is treated? Anyway, the piece is immaculate, and the ending could very well be the most beautiful page of music Schumann's ever written."

Brendon: "It might well be, yeah. I remember we went on a walk through the forest near my studio, later at night, and working on *Arabeske*. It felt magical somehow. But what was also interesting was that we had gone on these long walks throughout the whole editing and mastering process, and only later found out through a book of yours that Schumann thought it was an important part of the creative process, to regularly go on a nice long walk. During one of these walks, we talked a bit about your future plans, and what else you'd like to record still. This prompted us to make this album a Volume 1, and to create another like Schumann album sometime next year. Do you feel like you're not done yet with Schumann?"

Nicolas: "You can never be done with Schumann. There's so much to be discovered there, and I feel so personally connected to his music. I'd love to work more on his works in the future and extend my repertoire with more of it. For a next album, I'd love to record *Gesänge der Frühe*, which he wrote way later in his career. But I would also want to record *Bunte Blätter*, I think. It's such a beautiful cycle: I was listening to that piece a lot when I went through a difficult period earlier this year, and it sort-of became a soundtrack to this shitty time... So maybe I would want to record the entire cycle, but man, there's so much more to record: *Kreisleriana*, *Davidsbündlertanze*, and so much more..."






STEINWAY & SONS









A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

My love story with classical music starts in the year 2012. After hearing a recording of Beethoven's violin concerto performed by Jascha Heifetz, I knew it would become an integral part of my life. Ever since, I found joy in attending several live concerts a month, but also immediately thought about how I could share this newfound love with others.

Starting an energy flow, touching people and supporting their process to bring the best out of themselves: it was something I knew profoundly from my profession as an acupuncturist. It was my aim to bring this same creating of energy to artists whose work I admired. I realised that by collaborating with them and supporting their dreams, they could create new works and recordings which in turn could touch and inspire audiences.

Aside from creating a platform at my home where I organised house concerts, I wanted something more. As a classical music lover as well as audiophile, I had heard of the label TRPTK before and followed their work with avid interest. It was after an inspiring meeting with Brendon that I realised a future collaboration should be a possibility. The final push however was the deafening silence of the lockdown in 2020. It was at this moment when all the dots were connected: as in my work as an acupuncturist, I wanted to create a movement of energy. This time by supporting musicians spreading their music that's close to their hearts. By creating a foundation that would support them financially so they could focus on the artistic side and leave the recording process in the more than capable hands of TRPTK. The albums would then be shared again with as many music enthusiasts as possible – old and young. TRPTK was looking forward to this collaboration, now it was time to find which of the musicians I followed closely were eager to record. Nicolas was the first – but not the last – to respond enthusiastically and pioneer this new collaboration.

His album – The Schumann Collection, Vol. 1 – is the first tangible result of this collective flow of optimism and positivity. Even more importantly: this project created a bond. It has been an incredible journey for the three of us: the executive producer, the label, and the artist. A journey that has pushed boundaries for all of us – and which we can now finally share with you to enjoy.

Gilles Stoop, Executive Producer



trptk

Our goal is to create immersive experiences through sound. By creating an acoustic hologram, our recordings give you the illusion of being at the world's most beautiful concert halls and churches – all this, while never leaving your listening room.

No costs or efforts are spared to seize that magical moment in which music is being created, and bring it home to you in the highest quality. Why? Simply because this is how music should be experienced: fresh and alive, not canned and with a stale aftertaste of conservation. To us, music is life, and should be lived to the fullest in an authentic and uncompromising way.

Through these recordings, we bring you closer to the music and the musicians than you've ever imagined. The devil is in the details, and the ability to catch those makes all the difference between good quality and excellent quality. Listening to our recordings, you're able to perceive every breath, every bowing, every movement with an astonishing clarity. Not only do you hear the music, you hear the music as it's being created. This adds a human dimension to your listening experience, connecting you instantly and instinctively to what you're listening to.

The basis for all of our recordings is our Optimised Omnidirectional Array (OOA for short), developed by founder and lead audio engineer Brendon Heinst. With OOA, we aim to create a truly accurate image of the soundstage, while retaining uncoloured transparency in the tonal characteristics of the recording. Unlike many current recording techniques, OOA was developed scientifically through simulation and modelling, as well as through many extensive listening tests with an independent listening panel. But however great any microphone array can be, the signals still have to be converted into the digital domain. Our aim at TRPTK is to do this conversion process completely and utterly uncoloured, preserving all the tiniest little details without the harshness usually attributed to digital recordings. The way we do this is by recording at 352.8 kHz 32 bits DXD, at 16 times higher than CD quality. This means, in musical terms, that everything in the original performance is preserved. From the huge 32-foot pipe of a cathedral organ, to the highest notes on a piccolo flute. From the softest whispers all the way to the searingly loudest orchestral hits.

Speaking of soft whispers and loud orchestral hits; we choose our artists not just by their ability to amaze us. We're eager to collaborate with musicians and composers who walk that fine line between renewing genres and connecting to audiences. Together with them, we can achieve our goal of creating daring recordings that stay loyal to the idea of always aiming for the highest quality possible.

Because at TRPTK, we bring you not just the sound, but the core of music.

Brendon Heinst

recording & mastering engineer at TRPTK

Grimm | AUDIO

DPA
MICROPHONES

JCAT

CREDITS

Executive producer	Gilles Stoop
Recording & mastering	Brendon Heinst
Co-production	Ernst Spycckerelle
Piano technician	Charles Rademaker
Cover photography	Maarten Kools
Behind the scenes photos	Brendon Heinst
Album artwork	Brendon Heinst

This album was recorded on June 26th and 27th 2020, at the Westvest Church in Schiedam (NL) on a Steinway & Sons Model D-274 (#565253) concert grand.

EQUIPMENT

Microphones	DPA d:dicatè 4006A DPA d:dicatè 4015A
AD/DA converters	Merging Technologies Hapi Merging Technologies Anubis
Master clock	Grimm Audio CC2 at 352.8 kHz
Monitoring	KEF Blade Two loudspeakers KEF LS50 loudspeakers Hegel H30 amplifiers Sennheiser HD800S headphones
Power conditioning	Furutech Daytona 303E CAD Ground Control GC1
Cabling	Furutech custom microphone cables Furutech custom power cables Furutech custom loudspeaker cables
Misc.	JCAT NET Card FEMTO JCAT M12 Switch Gold Furutech e-TP609E NCF Furutech NCF Boosters

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