

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 97, “Rhenish” (1850)
Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

- I. *Lebhaft* (Lively)
- II. *Scherzo: Sehr mässig* (Very moderate)
- III. *Nicht schnell* (Not fast)
- IV. *Feierlich* (Solemnly)
- V. *Lebhaft* (Lively)

Schumann’s father encouraged Robert’s musical abilities but unfortunately died when Schumann was 16. His mother insisted that Robert become a lawyer. At Leipzig University, he neglected his studies and studied the piano with Friedrich Wieck. Abandoning law, he wrote to his mother that he could become one of Germany’s finest pianists. An enthusiastic testimonial to his mother from Wieck followed. After Schumann’s mother capitulated, Schumann moved into Wieck’s house and resumed his studies.

To become a virtuoso pianist, he practiced indefatigably and devised a mechanical device for strengthening the fourth finger of his right hand, which was a little weak. Unfortunately, the machine damaged his finger irreparably, which destroyed Schumann’s chances of a career as a virtuoso pianist. He turned to composition and also organized the “*Davidsbündler*,” a musical society whose objective was to attack Philistinism in music. To spread the society’s ideas, Schumann founded a magazine, the “*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*” (New Musical Journal).

At age 18, Schumann met Wieck’s nine-year-old daughter Clara, then aged nine. As Clara developed both in pianistic skill and as a person, Schumann’s interest in her grew. By the time he was 25 and she was 16 they realized that they were in love. Determined that Clara should become a concert pianist, Wieck became enraged and did everything he could to separate them. The psychological battle dragged on for over four years. Despite their separation, Clara and Robert remained mutually devoted. Finally Schumann sued Wieck to compel him legally to permit their marriage. Robert won his case and they married on September 12, 1840.

The early years of their marriage were the happiest of Schumann’s life, and their union was blessed with eight children (one died in infancy). Between 1840 and 1844, Schumann wrote over 30 major works and more than 100 songs. The year 1844 saw the onset of a nervous disorder (commonly attributed to syphilis). By 1850, he had recovered sufficiently to accept a conductorship in Düsseldorf. The appointment was a failure, and he resigned in 1853.

Schumann's mental condition now steadily declined. He frequently heard voices or "wonderful music" in his head and became increasingly depressed. One November evening he tried to commit suicide in the Rhine. He was institutionalized in an asylum near Bonn, where he died. He was buried in Bonn on July 31, 1856.

The "Rhenish" Symphony is Schumann's fourth and last. The so-called Fourth Symphony (in D minor) is actually a reworking of his Second Symphony, while the so-called Second Symphony (in C major) is chronologically this Third. There are five movements instead of the usual four. Schumann intended it as a picture of Rhenish life, hence its sobriquet. The first movement's joyous opening theme is heard in the full orchestra, and oboe and clarinet then introduce a second, more reflective subject. The main idea of the second movement, heard in cellos and violas, is derived from an old German song: the trio introduces a tune in horns and other winds. The third movement is a Romanza in which a graceful melody is played by clarinets and bassoons with viola accompaniment. This leads to a pleasant theme in the first violins and flutes. The fourth movement, known as the "cathedral scene," begins with a solemn idea in trombones and horns. This idea, a fragment rather than a complete theme, becomes the starting point for an elaborate and dignified contrapuntal structure. The finale is a musical setting of a Rhenish Festival and the overall mood is one of gaiety. Earlier themes reappear and the stately music of the "cathedral scene" is recalled near the end of the symphony.

After having discovered the Ph.D. thesis of Asher G. Zlotnik (1915-1997) entitled: "Orchestration revisions in the symphonies of Robert Schumann," Maestro Gunzenhauser selected Gustav Mahler's version of the "Rhenish" Symphony, which enhanced the instrumental balance over Schumann's original scoring. Maestro Gunzenhauser presented the Mahler version in Rome, to great acclaim, and this concert series presents this version's U. S. première.

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