

Schumann, Cristiani, and Lind



Robert Schumann
Portrait by Krichuber, 1839¹

At an evening gathering at Mendelssohn's, Mendelssohn and Joachim had played Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata. After the music, the guests were served a casual supper at small tables. Joachim found a place at a little table where Schumann sat. It was summertime, and, through the wide-open windows, the night sky appeared, sown with numberless stars. Eventually, Schumann, who had sat for a long time without saying anything, gently touched the knee of his little companion, and, gesturing with his hand to the starry sky, asked in his inimitably kind-hearted way: "whether out there, there might exist beings

who know how beautifully, here on earth, a little boy had played the Kreutzer Sonata with Mendelssohn?” ²

The tale varies somewhat from telling to telling — Edith Sichel recalled the event as following a performance of the Beethoven Concerto. Be that as it may, for Joachim this encounter was of seminal significance: “Fifty years afterwards he loved to tell the story, in his vivid way, acting the gesture, recalling the tones which the years had not dulled for him,” Sichel writes. ³

The kindly smile, the warmth of Schumann’s voice — these were among Joachim’s earliest, indelible, impressions of his future mentor. The hand on his knee, the gesture toward heaven and the poetic reference to otherworldly beings would have come as an unfamiliar — though not unwelcome — gesture of intimacy to a boy who, for the last five years, had been raised under the rigid regime of a succession of strict taskmasters. Joseph’s father, uncles and brothers were merchants, and they viewed his occupation primarily from their own accustomed perspective, as the business of giving concerts — his education, a preparation for that business. The profession of buying and selling commodities had not always been kind to Julius Joachim, and his letters make clear that he viewed his son’s extraordinary gift for music as a preferred alternative to a life spent in the wool-room and the counting-house. But with this unfamiliar path came new uncertainties, and for many years the concern of the extended family, often anxiously expressed, seemed to center on how their prodigy might achieve security and renown as a performer and composer.

Amidst these worldly concerns and family pressures, the taciturn Schumann’s gesture to the heavens, ⁴ his quiet reference to the success of a little boy, not in terms of careerist ambitions, parental approval, the pride of a teacher or the applause of an audience, but rather in terms of beauty achieved, sufficient to please celestial beings — was something rare, and perhaps unique, in Joseph’s experience. In Schumann, as in Mendelssohn, Joseph encountered what must have been, to him, a novel and unfamiliar conception of childhood — one that was grounded in the writings of Rousseau, Jean Paul Richter, Pestalozzi and Fröbel, and in the practical educational experiments of the *Kindergarten* movement. In this Biedermeier sensibility, childhood was no longer viewed as a stage to be passed through as quickly as possible on the way to a responsible adulthood, but as a sacred time — a time of innocence and wonder, learning and creativity, with its own particular insights into the meaning and value of human existence. Here, for the first time, children were looked upon not merely as unformed adults, but as creatures deserving of their own culture, to be brought up in nurseries replete with age-appropriate toys, pets, clothing, books — and music. ⁵ Childhood was a time to be prolonged and savored, and ultimately a time to be looked back upon with nostalgia as the purest and best years of one’s life. “The child was held to be the better human being,” writes Bernhard R. Appel in his study of Schumann’s *Jugendalbum*. “Through its unspoiled nature, it is distant from civilizing deformations. The child is *eo ipso* good in the moral sense. According to this romanticized ideology of childhood, it still

lives in Arcadian bliss, unencumbered by troubles and far from the prosaic workaday world of the adult.”⁶ Schumann shared this attitude toward childhood. “In every child there lies a marvelous depth,”⁷ he once wrote, and indeed, Schumann possessed a childlike depth of his own.

Schumann always made a distinction between the poetry of art and the prose of practical or pecuniary arrangements. This evidence of his idealistic (or impractical) nature, and of his solicitousness toward the young, was Joachim’s first real personal contact with a man who, upon their first introduction, had managed merely to smile and to stare. In the end, the ability of this gentle, taciturn man to draw a connection between a child’s performance of a mature work and an imagined reception in the celestial realm — ideal, timeless, disinterested and otherworldly — marked him permanently in Joachim’s mind as a man who had himself somehow managed to retain those moral and spiritual characteristics that the Biedermeier ascribed to childhood.



On Sunday, November 9, 1845, Schumann sent an urgent message to Mendelssohn in Leipzig, requesting help with an orchestra concert that was to take place the following Tuesday night in Dresden: “My poor wife is ill, not critically, but such that she cannot play in the first subscription concert the day after tomorrow. The management is now in a great quandary. I thought, therefore, of Joachim — whether he couldn’t come — and of your always readily supportive kindness — whether you couldn’t help encourage Joachim to do it. Naturally, time is of the essence. My stepfather has thus immediately gotten underway. If you would be so kind as to help him in his efforts this very evening by writing a few lines to Joachim, or by personally accompanying him to visit Joachim, we would be greatly obliged and thankful to you. My stepfather will deal with everything else.”⁸

This letter was never received: at the time, Mendelssohn was not in Leipzig, but in Berlin. Wieck went next to David, and then tried his luck with Wittgenstein. At 9:00 o’clock that evening he wrote back to Schumann: “It is impossible to converse with Joachim’s uncle [sic] — Herr Wittgenstein.” Joseph was “nothing but his uncle’s slave,” he continued, “and, since I was forewarned by David, I saw that there was nothing to be accomplished by pressing; I operated differently, and apparently well, since he didn’t say ‘no,’ but wanted to think it over and give me his answer before noon tomorrow. When I made him aware — with angelic meekness — that I might *perhaps* get a message to you on the freight wagon by 10 o’clock, so that a notice might be put in the gazette, he said he would give me an answer *around 10 o’clock* [...]”⁹

Wieck's diplomatic efforts were successful in the end. The following evening, Joseph joined Schumann in Dresden, bringing with him Mendelssohn's violin concerto and David's *Variations on Schubert's Lob der Thränen for Violin and Orchestra*, op. 15.¹⁰ In addition to Joseph's solos, the program consisted of Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* Overture, Beethoven's 5th Symphony, and several arias, sung by Leopoldine Tuczek from Berlin.¹¹ The subscription series, attended mostly by the nobility, took place in the ballroom of the Hôtel de Saxe, with the orchestra — in Schumann's opinion "very competent, the winds excellent"¹² — under the direction of Ferdinand Hiller.

This Dresden premiere would be Joseph's first performance of the Mendelssohn Concerto, and the third public performance of the work outright.¹³ The work would remain a cherished part of Joachim's repertoire throughout his career.

The rehearsal took place on the morning of the concert, after which Joseph and Hiller joined the Schumanns at home. Clara was unable to attend the concert, but wrote that evening in her diary: "Little Joachim had a good success. Joachim played a new violin concerto by Mendelssohn, that is supposed to be wonderful."¹⁴ A week later, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* reported:

Frau Dr. Clara Schumann *had wished to gratify the public with the performance of Henselt's new pianoforte concerto, which she played in the first Gewandhaus concert. She was unfortunately frustrated in this intention by an illness, and the young violinist J. Joachim from Vienna (we should now properly say: from Leipzig) stood in for her, presenting the beautiful violin concerto in E by Mendelssohn Bartholdy and David's Grand Variations on Schubert's "Lob der Thränen."* The young virtuoso — and he is more than that — has already been recognized for his merits in these pages, and we, too, must declare ourselves in agreement, that he is on the path of attaining the highest artistic perfection. More than his proficiency and security, which is equal to every technical difficulty — more than his pure-as-gold intonation and his outstandingly beautiful tone — his characteristically true, deeply felt presentation — the intellect — the poetic spirit — and that at his youthful age, surprised us doubly. In any case, one can predict for him an important career, especially since he appears to have entirely retained his modesty in spite of all the recognition that has come his way. . . . Wise.
[*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol., 24, No. 9 (January 29, 1846), p. 36.]

The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* reported, simply: "Young Joachim astounded the audience with his performance of Mendelssohn's beautiful violin concerto and David's Variations." [*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol., 24, No. 9 (January 29, 1846), p. 36.]¹⁵



A month earlier, Joseph had joined David, Niels Gade and Andreas Grabau in a performance of a Beethoven quartet — his first public quartet performance in Leipzig. The quartet led a mixed program in the *Gewandhaus* given by the 17-year old Parisian ‘cellist Lisa B. Cristiani.¹⁷ In those days, playing the ‘cello was considered particularly unfeminine, and professional female ‘cellists were unknown. Cristiani, making her first German tour, was therefore a great curiosity, as much for her appearance (how would she hold the ‘cello?) as for her musicianship. On this occasion, Mendelssohn accompanied her on the piano. Mendelssohn was apparently pleased with her playing: he later dedicated to her his *Song without Words* op. 109 no. 38. Cristiani enjoyed a brilliant but short career, during which she traveled extensively. She died of cholera in Siberia in 1853, while touring Russia in the footsteps of her renowned countryman, François Servais.



Jenny Lind, 1850 ¹⁸

On December 4, Joseph appeared for the first time in the Gewandhaus as a composer, playing his own *Adagio and Rondo* for violin and orchestra, ¹⁹ together with Ernst's *Introduction, Caprices and Final on a Theme from Opera "Il Pirata" by V. Bellini*. ²⁰ The critic for *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* wrote that "the promising young violinist's" performances — "of great interest" — were greeted with vigorous applause. "He played... with such security, endurance and taste, that, without looking, one would have imagined him to be an artist of a more mature age. If we find the young Joachim once more to have advanced since we heard him last, and discover a talent for composition in him, then we do not speak falsely when we maintain that he will someday become an important violin-artist, for whom, if he continues his studies, one can predict a happy future." ²¹ After the concert, Ferdinand David paid a collegial compliment to Joseph Böhm in Vienna: "While here, your pupil Joachim has given us much pleasure and you the greatest honor through his outstanding talent, his good, modest behavior and his passion for art; and if your name in the art world were not already well founded, the accomplishments of your two students Ernst and Joachim would suffice to assign it one of the first places." ²²

Though Joseph performed with distinction, the audience had gathered to hear the other soloist of the evening: the 25-year-old singing sensation Jenny Lind, with whom Joseph would later establish a long-lasting friendship and artistic partnership. ²³ Elise Polko, present at the occasion, wrote unforgettably about the young soprano:

...the concert public were in a state of feverish excitement; and when at length she came forward on the raised platform, a slender girlish form with luxuriant fair hair, dressed in pink silk, and white and pink camelias on her breast and in her hair, in all the chaste grace of her deportment, and so utterly devoid of all pretension, the spell was dissolved, and the most joyous acclamations ensued. Jenny Lind only looked beautiful when she sang... Music alone, and nothing else, transfigured her countenance so wonderfully; it then became actually transparent, the soul within shining brightly through the earthly vail in the most enchanting manner.

And it was thus she sang, on that evening in the Gewandhaus, Bellini's "Casta Diva," the Duett from the "Montecchi e Capuletti," "Se fuggire," with [Miss Dolby](#), the letter Aria from Mozart's "Don Juan," [sic] and two of Mendelssohn's songs, "Auf Flügeln des Gesanges," and "Leise zieht durch mein Gemüth." I cannot remember how I got home after that concert; I only know that I trembled and wept, and never closed my eyes all night. It was not, however, the "Casta Diva," with all its pearly adornment and florid graces, not the lovely Giulietta, nor the stately Donna Anna who haunted my thoughts, and whom I seemed ever to hear; it was exclusively the ineffably sweet, ethereal, almost unearthly, "By the first rose thou hap'st to meet." And what must Mendelssohn have felt, who was seated at the piano, accompanying the singer, and from whose soul this lovely flower of a song had sprung. ²⁴

The next evening, Lind appeared again in the alarmingly overcrowded *Gewandhaus*, this time performing a benefit concert for the Orchestral Widows' Fund. After the concert, she was serenaded by torchlight — by 300 singers and instrumentalists — in the courtyard of the Brockhaus family mansion, where she was residing. ²⁵ The tongue-tied Lind enlisted Mendelssohn to descend with her into the courtyard, to speak for her. "Gentlemen!" he said, "You must not think that I am Mendelssohn, for at this moment I am Jenny Lind, and as such I thank you from my heart for your delightful surprise. Having now, however, fulfilled my honorable commission, I am again transformed into the Leipzig Music-Director, and in that capacity, I say, 'Long live Jenny Lind!'" ²⁶

"The singers dispersed to the strains of Mendelssohn's 'Waldlied,'" wrote Elise Polko. "Jenny Lind, so different in her personality from all other artists, soon became, in her girlish modesty, and spotless purity and disinterestedness, a kind of mythical form to the public at large. Fable after fable was related about her, and at length it would scarcely have seemed marvelous

had she dissolved into the mist before all eyes, or floated away like her own *piano-pianissimo*. ...Her *piano* was a *breath*, such as angelic lips might breathe. Those who listened to her felt as if there was something holy in the art of singing, and that this ‘Mädchen aus der Fremde’ had only come among us to proclaim the truth to the children of this world.” ²⁷



“Dear Mendelssohn,” wrote Schumann on December 12, “Are you back to normal life — completely at home after your unsettled time in Berlin and the Lind-fever, so that one can knock and be cordially received? I thought of you most affectionately as Joachim played the violin concerto; I cannot criticize such a piece after the first hearing — but completely indulge myself [...].” ²⁸

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1. Wikimedia Commons.
 2. Moser/JOACHIM 1908, p 72.
 3. Edith Sichel: *Joseph Joachim — A Remembrance*, in *The Living Age*, vol. 254 (1907), p. 694.
 4. For Schumann’s interest in the stars at around this time in his life, see: Gerd Nauhaus: *Schumann und die Sterne*, in *Schumann Studien* 3/4, Köln 1994, pp. 174-178.
 5. See: Bernhard R. Appel: *Robert Schumanns »Album für die Jugend,«* Zürich & Mainz 1998, in particular the chapter *»In jedem Kinde liegt eine wunderbare Tiefe. Schumann und die Pädagogik seiner Zeit.«*
 6. Bernhard R. Appel: *Robert Schumanns »Album für die Jugend,«* Zürich & Mainz 1998, p. 19.
 7. *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann*, ed. by Martin Kreisig, Leipzig 1914, p. 20. Quoted in Appel, *Album*, p. 17.
 8. Schumann/BRIEFE, p. 253. m. t.
 9. Schumann/BRIEFEDITION I, p. 244 Schumann, *Briefedition*, vol. 1, p. 244
 10. David must have provided the orchestral parts for both works; the Mendelssohn Concerto was, as yet, unpublished.
 11. At this concert, Joseph earned the admiration of the renowned virtuoso Karol Lipiński. From 1839 the concertmaster of the Dresden *Kapelle*, Lipiński (1790-1861) was renowned as one of the greatest players of the age. The Countess de Merlin once asked Paganini whom he considered the first violinist in the world. “I do not know the first,” Paganini replied tactfully, “but the second is certainly Karol Lipiński.” Indeed, Lipiński had already been known as “the Polish Paganini” when the two virtuosos first met in 1818. Lipiński had traveled to Milan to hear Paganini play, and afterward, he played for Paganini while the Italian master drank champagne and accompanied him on the guitar. The two concertized together briefly in Piacenza, and did

not meet again until 1829, when Paganini visited Poland. Their rivalry eventually ended their friendship. [Czeslaw Raymond Halski, *Paganini and Lipiński*, Music and Letters, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July, 1959), pp. 274-278, *passim*.] Paganini dedicated to Lipiński his Op. 10 *Burlesque Variations on “La Carnaval de Venise”* for unaccompanied violin. Lipiński is also the dedicatee of Robert Schumann’s *Carnaval*. Lipiński had hoped to succeed Matthäi as concertmaster of Leipzig’s Gewandhaus Orchestra, and felt slighted that Mendelssohn gave his friend David the job. Thereafter, when he played in Leipzig he played only in the Euterpe concerts. The management of the *Gewandhaus* reportedly once dispatched David to ask Lipiński why he didn’t play in “first-tier concerts.” “Where I play, it is always a first-tier concert,” Lipiński is said to have replied. [Moser/JOACHIM 1908, pp. 74-76.]

12. The strings were mainly local city players, while the winds were drawn from the military band.
13. David performed it again in the *Gewandhaus* on October 25. Joseph Hellmesberger Sr. gave the Viennese premiere in a concert of the *Musikverein* on December 21.
[Pohl/CONSERVATORIUM, p. 190.]
14. Litzmann/SCHUMANN II, p. 111.
- 15.
16. Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig
17. Cristiani played a 1700 Stradivari, later owned by Hugo Becker. The “ex-Cristiani” Strad is currently preserved in the Museo Stradivariano in Cremona, Italy.
18. Jenny Lind, 1850, Wikimedia Commons.
19. Using this MS as an example, William Smyth Rockstro later noted the similarity of Joachim’s hand to Mendelssohn’s. “We have at this moment in our possession the first sketch of an unpublished Concerto for the Violin, composed by [Joachim] in 1845, and played on the 4th of December, in that year, at the Gewandhaus, which exemplifies the likeness so strongly that many of its passages might very easily be supposed to have been written by Mendelssohn himself. [W. S. Rockstro, *The Life of George Frederick Handel*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1896, p. 226.]
20. Dörffel/GEWANDHAUS, p. 126; Polko/MENDELSSOHN, p. 110; Program, Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Leipzig. Moser/JOACHIM 1908, I, p. 67) incorrectly gives the date of this concert a year earlier, i.e. in 1844.
21. *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, Vol. 3, No 50, (December 1845), p. 394.
22. Letter of December 6, 1845, quoted in Moser/JOACHIM 1908 I, pp.52-53 n.
23. That Joseph was recruited to perform with Lind is a true demonstration of Mendelssohn’s faith in him. Mendelssohn himself was quite head-over-heels for Lind, as numerous accounts attest. As for Lind, it was characteristic of her to share her programs with children — perhaps enhancing her own image as a “chaste diva.” She would do it again in Vienna in January 1847, when she sang “for love” in the debut series given by the young Wilhelmine Norman, later Wilma Norman-Neruda, Lady Hallé.
24. Polko/MENDELSSOHN, pp. 110-111.
25. Heinrich Brockhaus (*1804 — † 1874) inherited his father’s publishing house at the age of twenty, and, over the course of years, made it into one of the most respected in Germany. For

Brockhaus's account of Lind's visit, see Brockhaus/TAGEBÜCHERN II, p. 88 ff. Carl Reinecke also provides an interesting narrative of the events in Reinecke/SCHATTEN, pp. 62 ff.

26. Polko/MENDELSSOHN, p. 113.

27. Polko/MENDELSSOHN, pp. 113-114.

28. Robert Schumann to Felix Mendelssohn, Dresden, December 12, 1845.
Schumann/BRIEFEDITION, vol. I, p. 251.

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