

*Structural revisions in the String Quartets Opus 41
of Robert Schumann*

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The study of sketches affords many insights into the compositional process. Schumann's sketches for the three *String Quartets* Op. 41 are particularly noteworthy because they represent an attempt to solve problems that the large, abstract forms presented to composers of the second quarter of the 19th century. A comparison of the sketches with the printed editions of these quartets immediately reveals Schumann's concern with elements of structure. The present study attempts to illustrate this structural concern within the framework provided by Schumann's sketching techniques in general.

The manuscript material drawn upon constitutes two sets of Schumann autographs—the sketches¹ and the fair copy.² However, the quartets appear to be the subject of several entries in Schumann's *Haushaltbücher*,³ and it is probable that a set of preliminary sketches also exists.⁴

Schumann wrote the Op. 41 quartets in June and July of 1842. According to entries in the *Haushaltbuch*,⁵ in April and May of that year Schumann studied quartets by Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn. On June 2 he began "quartet essays,"⁶ and on June 4 he began composition of Op 41/1. Gerald Abraham states that the *Haushaltbuch* indicates simultaneous composition of the first two quartets.⁷

The autograph fair copies bear the following dates: Op. 41/1, June 24, 1842; Op. 41/2, July 5, 1842; Op. 41/3, July 22, 1842. The sketches are not dated systematically, but when dates are present they serve to suggest that Schumann sketched at a rapid pace, apparently with well defined goals. For example, the first two movements of Op. 41/1 were finished on June 5. In all likelihood the first two quartets were completely sketched before Schumann began the fair copy of Op. 41/1. The date of July 4 at the end of the first-movement sketch of Op. 41/3 shows the composition of that quartet to be concurrent with the preparation of the fair copy of Op. 41/2. The overlap implied by this chronology, coupled with the fact that multiple drafts of passages are rare, supports the assumption that the present sketches are not first drafts, but represent a somewhat later stage of composition.⁸

Schumann's sure grasp of the large formal outlines of the individual movements is indicated in the methods of musical shorthand that he employed. Details are seldom crystallized, but each movement is fully mapped out. The sketches are written predominantly in piano score, often with just melody and bass notated. In many instances only the melody is sketched (in whatever voice it may happen to occur). The plans for the general length of sections within movements often contain empty bars that were left to be filled in later. The material that consequently fills these bars is usually of a transitional, developmental, or modulatory nature; thus Schumann post-

pones many harmonic decisions. Occasionally bars are numbered and the numbers are then written over empty bars later in the sketch to minimize the task of writing out repeated passages. Repetitions are also indicated, especially in sonata-form movements, by the use of capital letters. These occur at both ends of the principal key area of the exposition, and the recapitulation merely indicates that the material *von A-B* should be inserted. In the first movement of Op. 41/1, the recapitulation constitutes such a close parallel to the exposition, that after the transitional passage a second set of capital letters directs that the secondary material should be repeated a fourth higher (*quadro höher*). In one instance (Op. 41/3, finale) Schumann writes memoranda for successive tonal areas quite far in advance of their actual entries, presumably as an aid in tonal planning and modulation.

The above methods are used throughout the sketches for Op. 41. However, quartets 1 and 2 illustrate them in a more orderly fashion. Quartet 3, evidently sketched more hastily, is less consistent in method, and the sketches for it are more fragmentary. The result is a greater number of structural changes from the sketch to the printed edition.

The available sketches for Op. 41 illustrate Schumann's preoccupation with matters of form. This is not to suggest that the composer was not concerned with refinements in the content of the music. On the contrary, modifications in detail are numerous. However, a study of preliminary sketches would appear to be prerequisite to a meaningful evaluation of the growth and subsequent modification of thematic ideas. Formal considerations, on the other hand, usually receive a later emphasis, and the present sketches clearly document this stage of the compositional process. For these reasons, in the following discussion alterations in detail are summarized and a more comprehensive approach applied to various types and stages of structural revision.

The sketches to Op. 41, in the true character of a working draft, often differ from the printed editions in matters of melodic detail, rhythmic patterns, and scoring. In fact, the slight changes that were later made, usually by the time of the fair copy, involve the vast majority of measures. The various musical elements appear to share equally in these revisions; alterations in rhythm are just as common as alterations in pitch, while scoring and register changes abound.

In those passages where rhythmic changes occur, the final version almost always substitutes more rhythmic uniformity for a tendency toward rhythmic variety in the sketch. This inclination toward a monorhythmic approach is particularly characteristic of Schumann's later works, and to find its conscious application in 1842 is noteworthy. Alterations in the melodic lines sometimes confirm this aspect of uniform rhythm. A particularly subtle example occurs in the third movement of Op. 41/1 (Example 1). With the exception of the third measure, the sketch and the printed edition are

identical. However, the presence of the suspension in the final version is consistent with the rhythmic feeling of first-beat suspensions so important for the entire passage.

Ex. 1 Op. 41/1, 3rd mvt., mm. 4-11.

Sketch:

Print:

Changes in instrumentation seem to have been postponed until the time of the fair copy. Although most of the sketches are written in piano score, several appear in full score, and often this scoring differs considerably from that of the fair copy. Incidentally, most of the alterations made by Schumann on the fair copy itself are concerned with matters of scoring.

Structural changes on the small scale are plentiful. They include many modifications in phrase lengths. Single bars are inserted or omitted frequently in the sketches (changing irregular phrase lengths to regular, or vice versa). In several instances changes in phrase structure coincide with modifications of the melodic lines and serve to alter the effect of sequential passages.

With respect to over-all structure, two general trends may be observed by comparing the sketches for Op. 41 with the completed compositions:

1. Most of the extensive alterations occur in transitional passages.
2. There are, with several exceptions, many more deletions from than additions to the final versions.

Large-scale formal modifications were made in the finales of Op. 41/1 and Op. 41/2. Both were originally planned and designated as rondos in the sketches; both were evidently changed to sonata forms when the actual writing of these sketches began. The result in Op. 41/1 is a rather unconventional sonata form in which the recapitulation (bars 152ff) begins with secondary material stated in the submediant (F major).⁹ The principal theme does not recur in the tonic (A minor) until bar 214, shortly before the coda. With this procedure the formal unity of the entire quartet is strengthened since the beginning of the recapitulation features synthesis, and at times, juxtaposition of the keys of F major and A minor/major—a most appropriate parallel to the beginning of the quartet where the intro-

duction, in A minor, leads to the allegro portion of the first movement in F major. Thus the type of tonal duality that allows an F-major first movement in this "A-minor" quartet is confirmed in the recapitulation of the finale.

The finale of Op. 41/2 is a more conventional sonata form, and the only indication (other than its designation) that it was planned as a rondo is the greater length of the original *A* period in the sketch. (This passage was crossed out in the sketch and evidently modified in the course of the composition.)

Occasionally in the final versions of the quartets the structural balance within a movement is significantly altered as a result of extensive reductions in the lengths of transitional passages. This has the effect of tightening the

Ex. 2 Op. 41/1, 4th mvt., mm. 148-151.

Print:

Ex. 3 Op. 41/1, 4th mvt., mm. 148ff, 1st version. [b]

Sketch:

* These brackets are present in the sketch. Perhaps they indicate that Schumann intended to delete the passage immediately.

Ex. 4 Op. 41/3, 1st mvt., mm. 36ff, 1st version.

Sketch:

The first system of the sketch shows a treble staff with a melodic line starting on a half note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter note G5 marked with an asterisk. The bass staff contains a single half note G3.

The second system of the sketch features a treble staff with a melodic line starting on a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter note G5. A box containing a sharp sign is placed above the first measure. The bass staff has a half note G3. The marking 'rit.' is placed below the first measure, and 'a tempo' is placed below the fifth measure.

The third system of the sketch shows a treble staff with a melodic line starting on a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter note G5. The bass staff contains a half note G3.

The fourth system of the sketch shows a treble staff with a melodic line starting on a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter note G5 marked with an asterisk. A box containing a sharp sign is placed above the last measure. The bass staff contains a half note G3.

The fifth system of the sketch shows a treble staff with a melodic line starting on a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a quarter note G5. A box containing a sharp sign is placed above the last measure. The bass staff contains a half note G3. The marking '(mm. 46)' is placed to the right of the system.

* illegible

formal design and also reflects Schumann's predilection for abrupt tonal changes. The four-bar transition (bars 148-51) that occurs before the recapitulation in the last movement of Op. 41/1 is a case in point. The final version (Example 2) features an ambiguity between, or perhaps a synthesis of, C minor and F minor (C minor had been prepared in the eight preceding bars of the development). As a result, the resolution to F major at the beginning of the recapitulation is particularly effective. The additional sixteen bars of transition in the sketch (Example 3) tend to weaken the tonal novelty of the recapitulation by placing premature emphasis upon the minor form of the submediant. F minor is implied for the entire twenty-bar length of the original transition (with the exception of the sequential tonicization of its flat-submediant, D \flat major). The arrival at F major merely seems to substitute the major mode for the minor.

A similar situation, this time involving changes in the modulatory scheme, appears during the transition between the principal tonal areas of the first movement of Op. 41/3 (bars 36-46 of the printed edition). Here a substitu-

Ex. 5 Op. 41/3, 1st mvt., mm. 36-45.

print

The musical score for Example 5, Op. 41/3, 1st movement, measures 36-45, is presented in two systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and Violin II) and two bass clefs (Viola and Cello/Double Bass). The first system (measures 36-41) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. In measure 37, there is a dynamic shift to sforzando (*sf*). The second system (measures 42-45) continues with the *sf* dynamic. The music features complex harmonic textures with frequent chromaticism and a focus on the submediant (F) area.

tion of material took place, evidently at the time of the fair copy, since the entire passage is crossed out in the sketch but no alternative version provided. In the fair copy the passage is pasted over a section of the score. Conceivably, Schumann had at least one additional thought before achieving the final form. The ten bars in question were originally twenty-three in the sketch (Example 4), and these constituted a more traditional continuation of the transition than that which appears in the final version. The theme is stated twice in the tonic (A major), then the final measure of the four-bar phrase is treated motivically and modulates through F# minor, eventually to arrive at the secondary tonal area, E major (bar 46 of the printed edition). The final version displays Schumann's affinity for tonal juxtaposition (Example 5). Instead of a conventional modulation, C major enters immediately at bar 36 of the printed score (a Neapolitan tonal relationship to the previous key in the transition—B major), and the final four bars of the transition (bars 42–45) modulate swiftly to the secondary area, E major.

Schumann's concern for conciseness is reflected in the passages cited above. It is significant to note that the deletions and substitutions were made in transitions, whereas additions and expansions seem, with one notable exception, to be confined to introductions and codas. One may surmise that the composer allowed himself to be more expansive primarily in those sections that did not affect fundamental formal design.

The coda to the third movement of Op. 41/2 appears to have been originally only four bars long (Example 6).

Ex. 6 Op. 41/2, 3rd mvt., original coda.

Sketch:

* illegible

Schumann apparently sketched the coda in a version close to its final form at another time, since the page in the sketch that contains the coda is separated by several pages from its proper place. This second sketch recalls the theme of the *Trio*, as does the coda of the printed edition, but lacks the cadential pizzicato of the final version. Similarly, the introduction to the first movement of Op. 41/3 must have occurred to Schumann after he was well into the exposition, since it appears at the bottom of page 1 of the sketch. This introduction was originally eight bars long instead of the seven bars of the final version. The first bar (four additional beats of the opening chord) was crossed out in the fair copy.

An interesting question arises concerning the proposed introduction to the first movement of Op. 41/2. Dickinson states that the last four bars (bars

30-33) of the introduction to Op. 41/1 were originally intended as the introduction to Op. 41/2.¹⁰ However, in the sketch to Op. 41/2 there is no hint of this proposed introduction. The passage occurs only in the sketch to Op. 41/1 with the last two bars compressed into one. Oddly enough, expanded to the four-bar length, it appears in the fair copy of Op. 41/2 but is crossed out. It seems as if Schumann considered establishing a melodic relationship between the two quartets. Both quartets, incidentally, feature opening *allegros* in F major.

In only one instance does an addition of musical material occur in the main body of a movement. At bars 113-23 in the finale of Op. 41/3 the principal theme occurs in F major (the tonic of the movement is A major). There is no evidence of this passage in the sketch. While the tonal succession is not altered by the additional passage in F major, there is little doubt that the presence of this material adds considerably more weight to the region of the flat submediant major. F major, at this point, reinforces the tonal area of the immediately preceding *Quasi trio*. Consequently, this tonal area is firmly established as a distant structural goal from which later statements of the principal theme (beginning in G major and A minor respectively) progress back toward the tonic. As a result, the traditional rondo procedure—that of presenting the principal theme in the tonic—already undermined in the preceding sections of the movement, seems from this point to be unequivocally abandoned. It is interesting to note that the sketch was closer to the rondo prototype, not only in the omission of this statement of the principal theme in F major, but also in the presentation of the theme in the A-major tonic at bars 65ff (in the final version the theme appears in F# minor at this point). The rondo-like character of the printed edition results primarily from the compartmentalization of the thematic material.

It has not been the purpose of this study to attempt a critical appraisal of the Op. 41 quartets. Rather, analytical procedures have been employed in an effort to illustrate some of the methods that Schumann used in achieving his structural objectives. It is evident that some movements, for example, the *Adagio* of Op. 41/1, required few changes. At the opposite pole is the hasty sketch of the finale of Op. 41/3, where even the over-all form of the movement appeared in a tentative version.

The literature on the composer is quite consistent in stating that Schumann's talent was lyric rather than dramatic, and that his most inspired works were the early pianoforte pieces. Even though Boetticher's study of the manuscripts has shown that Schumann made a considerable number of revisions in his early works,¹¹ the fact that many of these works consist of a series of short pieces has served to perpetuate the older view that spontaneous, improvisatory composition was characteristic of Schumann's early style. The extended works that originated during and after 1841 are often discussed from the standpoint of the composer's inability to cope adequately with the larger forms. It is this writer's opinion that such generalized criticism is not

completely fair to Schumann, and that it cannot, with any degree of accuracy, apply in equal measure to the large number of works completed during these years.

Schumann's literary writings show that he thought a great deal about large-scale formal continuity.¹² The Op. 41 revisions provide evidence that these thoughts were not confined to prose essays; in almost every instance the revised version represents the better reading. From the purely objective standpoint, however, the revisions have great value in that they illustrate the approach of an important 19th-century composer to the structural demands of the abstract forms.

NOTES

¹ Forty-seven handwritten pages plus a title page dated Leipzig, June 1842. The sketches were signed over at a later date by Schumann to Johannes Brahms. They ultimately formed a portion of Brahms's *Nachlass* that was acquired in 1907 by the *Preussische Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin. Today they are in the *Musikabteilung* of the *Deutsche Staatsbibliothek* in East Berlin.

² Originally in the collection of Oscar Bondy, now in the possession of Rudolf F. Kallir of New York City. Dr. Kallir has given permission to the Toscanini Archive division of the New York Public Library to microfilm his collection and for the present writer to study the microfilm.

³ According to Wolfgang Boetticher, *Robert Schumann. Einführung in Persönlichkeit und Werk* (Berlin, 1941), p. 626, the *Haushaltbücher* were in the *Preussische Staatsbibliothek*, Berlin, in 1941. Presumably they are still there (*Deutsche Staatsbibliothek*).

⁴ Since neither preliminary sketches nor the *Haushaltbücher* could be consulted by the present writer, secondary sources have had to be relied upon for information that these manuscripts may contain. In some instances the secondary sources specifically cite their sources of information, in others they are not so precise and it must be presumed that they borrowed information either from each other or from the Schumann documents referred to above.

⁵ As quoted by Gerald Abraham in an editorial footnote to A. E. F. Dickinson's essay "The Chamber Music," in *Schumann: A Symposium* (London, 1952), p. 139, footnote 1.

⁶ Presumably these are preliminary sketches.

⁷ Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 139, footnote 1.

⁸ Preliminary sketches, including those of the thematic-working-out type, undoubtedly exist. If this is not the case, Boetticher (*op. cit.*, pp. 568ff) is in error in calling bars 148–51 of the fourth movement of Op. 41/1 the theme of the rondo (the movement was originally entitled rondo in the sketch). Abraham follows Boetticher in referring to these bars as the rondo theme, and calls attention to the fact that this theme is stated only once in the final form of the movement (Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 146, footnote 1). The passage, slightly expanded, occurs only once in the sketch also, and at approximately the same place in the movement; thus, the fact that both writers call this the original theme suggests the existence of earlier sketches.

⁹ The tonic of the movement is A minor. In the exposition the secondary tonal area was the relative major, C major.

¹⁰ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹¹ Boetticher, *op. cit.*, pp. 521ff. An entire section of the book is devoted to the sketches.

¹² References to Schumann's views of musical form are contained throughout Leon B. Plantinga's *Schumann As Critic* (New Haven and London, 1967).