隱喻與對立 --- 舒曼《狂歡節》的另類剖析

楊閔貴
台南應用科技大學助理教授

摘要

綜觀西方歷史發展，十九世紀歐洲社會為法國大革命所啟發，於政治經濟、社會結構經歷了一次劇變，各式文化思潮、藝術形式百家爭鳴；而在音樂創作表現上，作曲家間亦反映出舊傳統及新思維的衝擊與激盪；本文將藉由十九世紀代表性作曲家舒曼的鋼琴作品《狂歡節》，一窺其如何藉由題材選擇、創作手法等，隱晦地表達出對舊思維的顛覆與反動。

關鍵詞：舒曼、狂歡節、浪漫主義、假面舞會
Subversion in Disguise --- A review on Schumann’s “Carnaval” Op.9

Min-Kuei Yang

Tainan University of Technology

Abstract

In light of nineteenth century western history, mankind has made tremendous progress in the areas of philosophy, aesthetics, in developing theories of anthropology and psychology, alongside with social and ideological reconstruction. Many of these developments resulted from the French Revolution in 1789. In the realm of musical arts, collision between the traditions and novelties could also be traced during the turbulent time. Robert Schumann (1810-1856), as one of the leading figures of the 19th century, has been regarded as the avant-garde among the contemporaries. The article will discuss how the composer deals with the “conflicts” through musical metaphors and implications. The choice of subjects, motivic variations, and the construction of form will be reviewed.

Keyword: Robert Schumann, Carnaval, Romanticism, Masquerade
In light of nineteenth century western history, mankind has made tremendous progress in the areas of philosophy, aesthetics, in developing theories of anthropology and psychology, and establishing social and cultural ideology. Many of these developments resulted from the French Revolution 1789. Among these emerging ideological trends was the development of awareness of gender issues. For the first time, these issues were raised albeit controversially when people started to notice discrepancies of gender identities in Western social and cultural situations. Female author Mary Wollstonecraft’s (1759-1797) work “The Vindication of Rights of Women” in 1792 amply demonstrated the consciousness of differences and inequalities between genders and also pioneered the trend as so-called feminism.¹

In music field, the gendered controversy also evoked people’s attention. As Susan McClary pointed out in her book “Feminine Endings” published in 1991, Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795-1866), the most prestigious German music critic and theorist in 19th century, can be thought of as the inaugurator of the association of musical form (specifically, two contrasting themes in sonata form) with gender identities.² The two examples (Wollstonecraft and Marx) demonstrate how deeply the nineteenth century western people were susceptible to the so-called “masculinity” and “femininity.” Robert Schumann (1810-1856), one of the leading figures in 19th century German music society, can be regarded as the most conspicuous instance showing the interests in exploring and interpreting “femininity” constructed by man-dominating cultural traditions. (In Schumann’s actual life, he was also historically noted for the indulgence of sexual pleasure.) He had been an extraordinary figure who did not hold on to the so-called normative/masculine style in compositions which were more generally accepted by the majority of German composers and audiences from long-existed man-dominating cultures. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate how Schumann interpreted the differentiated identities of genders, delineated their interrelationship, and even secretly acknowledged the feminine powers rooted inside his nature and the piece “Carnaval”, based on the cultural and social contexts in the 19th century.

According to the social ideology of 19th century in Germanic areas, masculinity was related to the German nationalistic spirits and rationality originated from the Enlightenment in previous century. After the humiliating invasion of led by Napoleon, German people were enthusiastically occupied with recalling the sense of superiority and passed glory in German cultural traditions. These revival movements can be thought of as psychological compensation. With the anti-Napoleon movements, such conservative forces represented as masculinity and rationality pervaded through the area and welcomed by the public.

This situation was also reflected in musical domain. A. B. Marx, as a leader of revival movements in music, strived at promoting the German musical legacy, such as absolute music and symphony (sonata form) originated from Classic period and esteemed L.V. Beethoven as a German musical hero. He elevated absolute music and sonata form (the form with balance, rationality and coherence) as the “high art,” and exclusively declared their superiority to any other musical genres from any other cultures. This music tradition, thus, had been labeled as normative laws of composition and standardized as the representation of masculinity by German cultural ideology. Supported by such a historical and cultural background, this German musical tradition advocated by A.B. Marx obtained its dominance and popularity.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), for example, was referred as the representative figure to stand on the “masculine” side, corresponding to the aforementioned situation (when Germanic people strived to regain the sense of superiority and glory.) From the 1820’s on, such German national identity has been largely advocated by nationalistic festivities. These purposeful festivities largely applied the German folk tunes particularly sung by “male” choruses. There is no evidence more distinguishing than the finale of Mendelssohn’s “Scottish” symphony. After descriptions of Scottish gloominess, the orchestrated Germanic tune “Gutenberg Festgesang” (sung by a men-chorus) was abruptly played at the last page as the declaration of final triumph (m.m.396-407). Such symphonic chorale-like versions of traditional folk tunes,

---

4 Peter Mercer-Taylor. “Mendelssohn’s Scottish Symphony and the Music of German Memory,” 19th
symbolizing as masculinity, gained much prominence and popularity throughout the Germanic areas. As historical evidence shows, at the first half of the nineteenth century, this favorable musical style of highlighting German spirits pervaded the formal and public concert lives of Germans.

Opposing to those normative styles of composition, marked as the masculine by cultural tradition, any compositional transgression in the 19th century (now has been regarded as creativity and avant-garde) was taken and even “devalued” as the presentation of femininity, according to the man-dominated social ideology. Schumann, instead of expressing masculine majesty in his music writings, showed his inner tendency to stand on the more “intimate” side and combine so-called “feminine” elements in compositions. One can notice that most of his works are noted for boundless imaginations and formal innovations, such as programmed music for piano solo and lieder cycles which were contradictory to those traditional compositional laws. Moreover, it is even more striking that Schumann himself even privately identified his creativity with a “feminine” principle that he acknowledged or desired within himself. As Lawrence Kramer’s historical researches shows, there leaves no doubt when consulting with some of Schumann’s own remarks on the subject:5

It’s amazing that there are no female composers...Women could perhaps be regarded as the frozen, firm embodiments of music. (1828)

Music is the feminine friend who can best communicate everything that we feel internally. (1838)6

Schumann’s “Carnaval” Op.9 (1834-1835), a very non-traditional composition comparing, displays many of the composer’s “transgressive” designs as performances of femininity. All of the creative ways of composition reflected Schumann’s inner nature inclined to the feminine side and his pursuit of sexual pleasure. First of all, Schumann utilized the common practice of carnival festivity, “masked ball,” as a license to exceed and destabilize socially constructed gendered self. Based on the socially approved rules of masquerade game, guises and impersonations of the other


gender thus can be elaborated freely. Moreover, in this piece, both the extra-musical materials and actual compositional devices Schumann secretly combined with gender connotations will be discussed as following to demonstrate his intention of acknowledging femininity and how the composer himself disguised by cross-dressing to join the game.

However, such Schumann’s transgression marked as femininity was actually controlled and based on man-constructed social culture. Obviously, he sensed it was still risky to reveal his inner femininity to the public without any protection or pretension outside, while the man-constructed disciplines were still overwhelming and the manhood of German spirits was drastically recalled. In the piece, he provided a traditional/ masculine frame to highlight the huge contrasts between genders and also restrain himself from excessive closure of his secret feminine personality. In order to avoid the assault as a real transgressor by social ideologies, Schumann finally used traditional structural designs and quotation of folk tune as a masculine disguise/ frame to save himself from the danger.

Firstly, entitled “Carnaval” (the French term of Carnival), the piece presents a traditional festive celebration that allows people free themselves from physical and emotional coherence in accordance with socially constructed orders. The position of Carnival in the piece is mixed with so-called masculinity and femininity. Both the convention and transgression coexist in such an event. Originally, carnival denotes a festive season that usually takes place before “Lent,” one of the most solemn moments for Christians. Thus, during the periods of carnival, public carousals, such as circuses, street parties, masquerades, and parades, are permitted in order to release people’s pent-up energies and emotions. Especially in German-speaking areas, “Karneval” is considered to be the “fifth season,” implying absurdity and transgression. Parades and costume balls which Schumann has combined in this piece were the main types of celebration in this region. Moreover, it is striking that the Carnival Thursday, the climax of the entire celebration, is also called "Altweiber" (old women) or "Wieverfastelovend" (the women's day) particularly in Rhineland area where Schumann resided for most of his life. Here, the equating of crazy festivities and female sexuality can not be clearer. By choosing this subject and corresponding to
those cultural contexts, Schumann has successfully provided the piece as a valid space in which challenges sexual and psychological boundaries without collapsing socially constructed orders.

Moreover, according to the western tradition of carnival festivities, masquerade, is the most typical form of carnival celebration. The rule of the game is to disguise and hide from recognition by wearing characteristic costumes and masks. By means of cross-dressing and character impersonations, people depart from rationality and realities, thus achieving psychological disunity and gender mobility. Schumann followed the traditional practices of masked ball in his compositions (“Papillon” Op.2 and its expanded version, “Carnaval” Op.9) and did musical sketches of various characters. With such a clever and well defended set-up, Schumann thus can freely pursue the femininity hidden in his mind and even participated in such a dressing party as a character whose gender identity was ambiguous.

As Schumann himself pointed out, the ideas of masked ball and cross-dressing in his works actually derived from the last chapter “Larventanz” (Masked Ball) of Jean-Paul’s (1863-1825) novel “Flegeljahre” (Years of Indiscretion):

You may remember the last scenes in the “Flegeljahre,” with the “Larventanz,” “Walt,” “Vult,” “Masks,” “Wina,” “Vult’s Dances,” “The exchange of Masks,” “Confession,” “Anger,” “Recognition,” the hurrying away, the concluding scene, and the departing brother. I often turned to the last page, for the end seemed like a fresh beginning, and almost unconsciously I found myself at the piano, and thus one “Papillon” after the other came into existence.7

In the book, the twin brother Walt (with femininity, originally dressed as coachman) and Vult (with masculinity, dressed as Spes, the goddess of Hope) exchanged costumes, respectively danced with Walt’s lover, Wina, and fled away after being recognized. Schumann implicitly paralleled Jean-Paul plots into his Carnaval by inserting his contrasting alter egos, Eusebius (the dreamer) and Florestan (the man of action). Thus, incarnated as the counterparts of Walt and Vult, such Schumann’s inner double (with two different sexual tendencies) was explicitly juxtaposed in the piece and evoked the effect of cross-dressing. In this way, Schumann successfully

---

followed the rules of game, “disguise,” and became a guest of masquerade with ambiguous and split gender identities. Based on such start point of obscured gender identities, Schumann boldly further his feminine ideas following these two originate characters.

Apart from the participation of Schumann’s dual personalities aforementioned, the other characters that Schumann has chosen are also endowed with gender implications. Obviously, the sketches about women are abundant, such as the image of “Chiarina” (nickname of Clara) and “Estrella” (Schumann’s fiancée whom the piece was dedicated to). It is noticeable that Schumann endowed his two female intimates with strikingly vigorous and virile textures (dotted rhythm, violent dynamics, strong accents, and striding paces). These two pieces also suggest a transvestite fantasy in which masculine vitality serves as the hidden essence of enhanced femininity. Moreover, the other female sketch “Coquette” also implies the desire of sexual pleasure. Literally, Coquette denotes a flirtatious female who always shows off coquetry. In Schumann’s actual life, Coquette is the nickname of Clara’s maidservant who infected him with syphilis. It is extraordinary that Schumann selected such a character with extremely strong femininity, so-called predatory woman, in the piece when none of his German colleague did the same way.

One can also find traits of gender connotations in other characters that Schumann borrowed from Italian *commedia dell’arte*. Here, Schumann chose four stock characters associated with disguise and courtship to suggest abundance of femininity in the piece and acknowledge its power:8

- **Pierrot**: a pale-faced, sad, introverted clown often dressed with white tunic, pining for love of Columbine, who inevitably breaks his heart and leaves him for Arlequin.
- **Arlequin**: a comic servant clown dressed with spangled clothes a mask, featuring on his physical agility and gluttonous personality in search of food and female companionship.
- **Pantaloon**: a gullible, old merchant who advertised his virility along with a mask and a long hooked nose and always attempted to disguise his age in order to attract maids by wearing tight-fitting Turkish clothes.
- **Columbine**: a flirtatious maidservant that these three figures tried to chase after, demonstrated wit and feminine allure in a world of stupidity, greed, and constant misunderstanding.

---

From the listed descriptions, it is conceivable that Schumann used these interrelated characters to construct an amorous atmosphere in which the femininity has been elevated to control male characters’ personalities and behavior. Moreover, echoing with Vult’s words in Jean-Paul’s *Flegeljahre*: “seriously, love is a bird of paradise and a joker….it belongs to the female race,” these personas occupied with courtship, flirtation and establishing sexual attractions also amply reflected the emphasis on femininity in the piece. To this point, Schumann’s deliberate quotations and metaphors from *commedia dell’arte* indeed are very effective.

On the other hand, besides these aforementioned extra-musical ideas that provide a playground of disguise and suggesting involvement of sexualities in *Carnaval*, Schumann’s compositional devices took part in the game as well. Through idiosyncratic motivic disguises and reoccurrences, designs of key relationships and formal structure, one can witness the way Schumann displayed his mastery of compositional metaphors of emerging feminine powers under the so-called male-constructed “frames.” First of all, the well-known motivic uses in the piece undoubtedly were endowed with gender implications. As the subtitle Schumann himself gave, “*Scenes Mignonnes sur Quatre Notes*” (tiny scenes on four notes), the four-note motives function as a tread through all of the twenty character-sketch musical episodes and disguise in various appearances. Some of the four-note motives can immediately be identified in the beginning of pieces (*Arlequin, Florestan, Papillons*, etc.), while some of them faintly wind through the course of pieces (*Eusebius, Replique, Chopin*, etc.) These famous motives, Schumann called as “*Sphinxes,*” (cipher) are presented in three forms, each of which contains four German musical letters related to the composer (Example 1):

**Sphinx No.1:**  
**S.C.H.A.** (Eb-C-B-A, Schumann’s signature motive)

**Sphinx No.2:**  
**A.S.C.H.** (A-Eb-C-B, “Asch” refers to the hometown of Schumann’s Fiancée, Ernestine von Fricken)

**Sphinx No.3:**  
**As. C. H.** (Ab-C-B, the variant of Sphinx)
Interestingly, after identifying all of the motivic ciphers hidden in these pieces, one may notice that only Sphinx No.2 and No.3 are actually employed in the cycle—Schumann’s signature motive is absent through the entire piece. (Table 1) Here, one may notice that “Asch” motive, the symbol of the feminine entirely dominates the piece. Metaphorically, the women powers once again have seized the dominance and superiority. Schumann’s the signature motive, the symbol of composer’s masculinity, now becomes only as a lost or perhaps imaginary origin. One can even conceive that Schumann the composer himself actually participated the masked ball as the hidden impersonator. The two feminine “Asch” motives, which can be perceived as anagrammatical “masks” of primary motive, have replaced Schumann to participate the masked ball. With the motivic devices, Schumann again infused the notion of “gender in disguise” into the cycle and acknowledged the feminine powers again rooted in his minds and the piece.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Use of Sphinx</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>Ab Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot</td>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlequin</td>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valse noble</td>
<td>Reorder of No.3</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusebius</td>
<td>(ambiguous No.1?)</td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florestan</td>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>G minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coquette</td>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replique</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>G minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papillons</td>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettres dansantes</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiarina</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>C minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Retrograde of No.2</td>
<td>Ab Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrella</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>Ab Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantalon et Colombine</td>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moreover, the harmonic languages also suggest the diminishing movements of masculinity in the “Florestan,” as a result of prevalence of women’s powers. \( Florestan \), the counterpart of Jean-Paul’s Vult and the embodiment of Schumann’s virile self, is the most conspicuous evidence of the participation of manhood. Along with \( Eusebius \), \( Florestan \) plays the core of Schumann’s originality of the entire cycle. It is also the first time that Schumann described masculinity with a suitable textural setting (“Passionato” as marked, big chords with striking sforzando.) However, one can by no means neglect the lack of strong cadences at the end of the episode. Instead, it ends on the dominant ninth chord of G minor. More ironically, the final cadence (modulating from g minor to the authentic cadence of B-flat major) is nevertheless situated at the first three measures of next number, “Coquette,” a piece with absolute femininity. (Example 2) This coincidentally echoes with Susan McClary’s interpretation of “feminine” or “masculine” endings. With such a big contrast with one’s expectation of virility, this passage once again displayed Schumann’s intentional device of enhancing femininity rooted in his nature.

**Example 2**
The fragmented episodes of two male figures “Chopin” and “Paganini,” also produce the same image of taming masculine powers. As the music shows, the “Chopin” episode features on the lack of clear tonicization, ideologically interpreted as lack of masculinity. The piece displays an unstable tonality through continuously changing basses and harmonies. Although the piece at last returns to A-flat major chord, the short passage of tonicization is still acoustically obscured after twelve measures of harmonic fluctuation. Moreover, this piece ends on an incomplete measure (three beats left unfinished) when surrounded by two enhanced-female episodes “Chiarina” and “Estrella.” (Example 3) Wrapped with such intensified and vigorous feminine sketch pieces (as aforementioned), Chopin, a prominent, virtuosic male pianist at 19th century seems to be in the danger of being devoured. “Paganini” also confronts with the same situation. Lacking of strong cadences (the piece ends on dominant seventh chords with pianissimo dynamic marking), the episode is also covered by another piece “Valse Allemande.” In this way, Paganini thus sounds as the trio part of A-B-A Minuet. (Example 4) Similarly, this dazzling male violinist can not obtain its substantiality either.

Example 3
The End of *Paganini* followed by the reprise of *Valse Allemande*:
On the other hand, the key relationships and structural design of arch form are the elements that correspond to the “normal” ways of composition according to the western musical conventions. Outside of the fantasized masked ball, Schumann did not forget to provide the piece with a structural scheme with a traditional concept, responding to the man-constructed social contexts. Male’s rationality now is used as a frame to achieve the formal coherence in this piece. Also, the use of traditional forms functions as a disguise for the piece to pretend its possession of masculinity when the piece actually is to explore the feminine powers. Here, Schumann pulled himself back from the excessive femininity to the socially-constructed reality / masculinity.

Looking through the pieces, one can easily discover the key relationship is established by the circle of fifth, creating a sense of formal unity. Centering on “flat” side of tonal system, the employment of keys never exceeds the range of B-flat major to A-flat major and their relative minors, with only one exception (“Promenade” on D-flat major). (Table 1) This traditional manipulation of tonal system (circle of fifths) was inherited from sonata form, as aforementioned, a German musical tradition. By using traditional, rational, coherent devices of overall tonal scheme, the piece has disguised as an “orthodox” one.

Moreover, in the final march piece, the recapitulation of the opening piece “Preambule” constructs the sense of arch form, which was largely employed in sonata form. According to the contemporary socially-constructed concept, sonata form (symphony) was perceived as the most traditional and typical presentation of masculinity and rationality. By manipulation of rationality and coherence as a cover or frame of the whole cycle, the piece again successfully disguised as a “man-like” one. Moreover, it is noticeable that Schumann deliberately inserted “Grossvatertanz” to the ending march. (Example 5) This melody was originally a German folk tune used in the seventeenth century to herald the ends of festivities. Strikingly, the quotation of national folk tune just echoed with the German cultural contexts in the nineteenth century (as the aforementioned). Similar to what Mendelssohn did in his Scottish symphony, Schumann, at the end of the piece, joined the socially-constructed conventions. Through inserting such a theme that Schumann personally often typified as old, dry-as-dust, and formalistic, the composer brought the audience back to the
realities, the men’s world, from the fantasy of masquerade.⁹

**Example 5**

![Musical notation]

**Conclusion**

Disguise, in essence, is a tool to avoid the attack of transgression under the pressure constructed by ideologies. In other words, it serves as the lubricator of the conflict between social frame and excess. On the other hand, disguise also provides a license to do something extraordinary in a private and unnoticed occasion. In *Carnaval*, Schumann identified the dual functions of disguise and manipulated it both inside and outside the piece. On the one hand (inside the piece), the use of feminine “Asch” motive and two altered ego (Eusebius/Florestan) as a disguise allows the composer to get himself crossing dressed, dance with all the music characters, and obtain sexual pleasure. On the other hand (outside the piece), the rational and coherent structural unity as a disguise persuades people to believe its

---

masculine-oriented authority. Moreover, on top of this, Schumann used the masquerade event to bestow these disguise with validity. With the legitimated license, people thus can do anything unusual and absurd, such as transvesting, which is not permitted in a conservative, restrained social circumstance.
References


