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Six Studies in Canonic Form for Pedal Piano, Op.56 are a fascinating confluence of Baroque and Romantic sensibilities, and were written by German Romantic composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856). Schumann is renowned particularly for his piano music, orchestral compositions, and lieder, though he was also a champion of J.S. Bach. Gerhard Weinberg wrote, "It had long been [Schumann's] goal to obtain complete command of the polyphonic style, and he pursued this goal tirelessly. His demand to apply the highest artistic standards in the creation of contrapuntal forms arose from a deep, lifelong veneration of Johann Sebastian Bach."¹ Schumann's music education included intense study of Bach's works, wherein he studied F.W. Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge*, a treatise in which seven of Bach's organ chorales are analyzed to illustrate various contrapuntal techniques. Schumann owned the most comprehensive collection of Bach's organ chorales in print at the time, and some of his personal scores show hand-written brackets identifying every instance of canon. A musical canon is created by having two or more voices sing the same melody with staggered entrances, creating harmonies from the manner in which they overlap, and "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" is the classic example from childhood. Weinberg quotes Schumann, who wrote, "With regard to composition for organ and piano, obviously no one of [Bach's] century can measure up to him. Indeed, to me, everything else appears in comparison to the development of this giant figure as something conceived in childhood." Schumann founded and edited the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Journal of Music) from 1834-1844, which was a music magazine seeking to promote previously unpublished works, including those from the Baroque era. In 1850, he founded the Bach-Gesellschaft (Bach Society) to mark the centenary of Bach's death, with a mission to publish a complete edition of Bach's works.

Schumann suffered throughout his lifetime from a mental illness that manifested as severe depressive episodes followed by manic periods of productivity. In 1845, Schumann emerged from an extended illness and depression with a renewed passion for canons and fugues. Together with his wife Clara, he engaged in an intensive study of contrapuntal techniques that he called his "fugenpassion." Schumann wrote a letter to Clara in which he wrote about the "canonic spirit" that encompassed his "fantasizing" and how he thought of "almost everything canonically."² Also in 1845, the Schumanns rented a pedal piano. This was a piano that included an organ-like pedalboard, enabling bass register notes to be played with the feet, and was mostly used to practice organ music at home.

Schumann channeled his "fugenpassion" into composing *Six Studies in Canonic Form for Pedal Piano, Op.56*. He specified that they could be performed on either the pedal piano or the organ, though there is something intriguing about the confluence of Baroque style with the 19th century sound of the piano. The disciplined canonic imitation in Schumann's Etudes bears a strong resemblance to Bach's Inventions. Schumann simultaneously incorporates Romantic harmonic underpinnings to this tight structure through sustained pedal tones and chromaticism, giving the works an undeniably 19th-century sound.

While several famous composers played on pedal pianos (including Mozart and Mendelssohn), it never became popular in the 1900s and today is an obscure instrument that is largely lost to history. As a result of the pedal piano's obscurity, Schumann's Op.56 Etudes were arranged several times, including for piano four hands (Bizet 1872), piano trio (Kirchner 1885), and two pianos (Debussy 1891). This arrangement for two harps is largely based on

¹ Weinberger, Gerhard, Preface to *Robert Schumann: Werke für Orgel oder Klavier*, G. Henle Verlag, 1986

² Eismann, Georg. *Robert Schumann, A Biography in Word and Picture*, (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig, 1964) p. 11

Debussy's two piano arrangement, wherein both parts use the full treble and bass range of the instrument and divide canonic entrances and material in a conversational way. This two-harp arrangement makes a few significant changes from Debussy's two piano arrangement, in addition to frequent enharmonic respellings. The 5th movement has been freely arranged from Schumann's original score in order to consolidate bass material in one part and treble material in the other, thereby allowing one hand to play all of the part's notes while the other hand muffles for staccato effect. The 6th movement has been transposed from the original key of B-major to the key of C flat-major, in order to play in a more resonant key on the harp and have more manageable pedal changes.

Performers of these etudes are challenged to bring together diverse musical impulses, including the mathematical structure and imitation of canons, and the emotion and rubato of a Romantic piano work. They are fascinating short pieces in which the ingenuity of Bach and Schumann can come together to create a wholly unique work.

Six Etudes En Forme De Canon Op.56

Pour Piano À Pedales - No.2

Robert Schumann
arr. Erin Freund

Avec beaucoup d'expression (♩. = 60)

Harp

Hp.

Hp.

Hp.

p

rit. *a tempo*

G# F# D# G# Bb G# Db