



Robert at Endenich

“Ghost Variations” 2018

OperaRox Productions, New York, NY

Composer - Tony Manfredonia

Librettist - Aiden K. Feltkamp

Dramaturg – Brenda Huggins

Mental Health Treatment in the 1850's



- ◆ **Insane asylums prior to the 1840's in Europe were notoriously unsanitary, with public institutions operating under horrific conditions.**
- ◆ **The Asylum of Eendenich where Robert Schumann spent the last years of his life (1854-1856) was a privately operated facility, well maintained, and with a good reputation.**
- ◆ **Though new methods of treating mental illness arose during this time, there was still great social taboo surrounding patients and their families.**
- ◆ **Despite newly progressive thinking towards treatment, some still believed that mental illness was the result of "sin" or a direct correlation to the work of the devil.**
- ◆ **Because of Robert's fame as a composer and music critic, it was very difficult to keep his treatment a secret. Time at the facility was also quite costly, causing great strain to his wife, Clara.**
- ◆ **Refusing offers of a benefit concert on Robert's behalf, Clara was determined to remain independent and continued a performance schedule as a concert pianist.**

Dr. Franz Richardz



- ◆ Two years younger than Robert, Dr. Franz Richardz purchased the seven acre estate in Bonn, Germany in 1844.
- ◆ Dr. Richardz official diagnosis of Robert's condition was, "Melancholy and Madness."
- ◆ He did not permit direct communication between Clara and Robert, as such would be a reminder of the incident of attempted suicide that brought Robert to the institution.
- ◆ Dr. Richardz communicated with Clara about Robert's care through his assistant, Dr. Peters.
- ◆ These reports varied from promises of full recovery, to frustrating vague accounts. Robert was permitted a few visitors during his stay, and Clara relied on their personal accounts to understand the treatment of her husband at Endenich.



Image: Dr. Franz Richards (1812-1887)

Robert Schumann



- ◆ Through out his life, Robert experienced many episodes of manic-depressive states, of which would likely be diagnosed as bipolar depression by modern medicine.
- ◆ One example of a dark time during his early years include the beginning of his music studies in Leipzig. In a letter to his mother in 1830, Robert wrote:

“My heart is dead and empty like the future. Of the old warmth and enthusiasm, only cinders remain.”

Image: 1850



Possible Schizophrenia



- ☞ Another possible modern diagnosis is a type of schizophrenia in which a person experiences multiple personalities. Schumann wrote of his “Eusebius” and “Florestan,” and their impact on his work.
- ☞ Schizophrenia is also a thinking disorder where the thought process is effected, manifesting in difficulty with attention and forming coherent concepts. As a result, reality can become severely distorted, and often accompanied by delusions and hallucinations; all symptoms Robert was known to experience in this life.
- ☞ Modern researchers also theorize that these symptoms may be a response to a stressful environment, and in Schumann's case, each one of his three breakdowns (in 1833, 1844, and 1854) was preceded by a period of extreme stress.

Eusebius and Florestan



- ◆ During his time as the editor for a New Music Journal, Robert often wrote under the pen names of Eusebius and Florestan.
- ◆ Each of these alternative personalities had unique characteristics: Eusebius was meek and sensitive, while Florestan was assertive and passionate.
- ◆ These personalities allowed Schumann to express the different aspects of his own personality.
- ◆ He even created names to represent contrasting aspects of Clara's personality; Ambrosia and Beda.

Image: Paul Cézanne, 1888, Mardi gras

(Pierrot et Arlequin)



Possible Neurosyphilis



- ❧ **Another possible modern diagnosis of Robert's symptoms are thought by some researchers to be caused by an untreated case of Syphilis.**
- ❧ **Robert wrote of characteristic sores present during the time of a possible infection when he had a sexual relationship with a women in Leipzig prior to his marriage to Clara.**
- ❧ **Without antibiotic treatment, a Syphilis infection would enter a new stage of development even after skin reactions had cleared. It is during this next stage when the disease attacks the central nervous system over a considerable period of time, even several decades.**
- ❧ **This deterioration leads to mental illness, physical paralysis, and ultimately death. Robert possessed a number of these symptoms including hallucinations, and difficulty enunciating his speech and moving his body.**

Treatment at Eendenich



- ⌘ **Dr. Richardz sought a cure by treating the body through diet, sensory deprivation, and physical restraints as a way of purification to encourage mental healing.**
- ⌘ **Such methods were actually quite barbaric as Dr. Richardz attempted new and untested treatments including cold baths, forced over-feeding and medicine tonics consisting of copper and opium.**
- ⌘ **When patients in desperation refused treatments, staff went to extremes to administer medicines using torturous devices.**
- ⌘ **None of the patients at Eendenich, including Robert, showed any improvement or hope of recovery as a result of these treatments and many patients in fact starved to death due to hunger strike.**

Final Days



- ◆ Roberts friends and family grew skeptical of his treatment at Endenich, and some were able to visit him on occasion. Clara however was disallowed from seeing him, and it was not until his last few days that she was able to make a visit.
- ◆ Joseph Joachim wrote of his last visit with Robert:

“He spoke a great deal and in a hurried manner, asking about friends and events in the musical world. When I wanted to leave, he mysteriously led me into a corner and said that he wanted to leave the place. He had to leave Endenich, because the people there completely misunderstood him.”

Image: Joseph Joachim (1831-1907)





Robert Schumann died in Endenich on July 29, 1856 at the age of 46. Of his passing, Clara wrote:

“He suffered terribly, although the doctor said differently. Ah! I prayed to God to release him, because I loved him so.”