

# Rules For Young Musicians Robert Schumann

Introduction by Sylvia Rabinof



ROBERT SCHUMANN

*Reproduction of an etching by L. Otto, after a Danish photograph. This portrait is preferred by Schumann's family as the most faithful and characteristic.*

Robert Schumann was the most romantic composer in an age of Romanticism. He was also a gifted literary writer. As editor of one of Europe's most important journals, "The New Magazine for Music", he wrote brilliant essays, dialogues, poems and letters which were widely read and respected.

Here is the complete collection of Schumann's "Rules For Young Musicians", published one-hundred years ago by Oliver Ditson and Company, Boston. Once you have read them, you will find yourself reading them again and again, finding the wisdom they contain more absorbing and rewarding each time.

## I

The most important thing is to cultivate the sense of Hearing. Take pains early to distinguish Tones and Keys by the ear. The bell, the windowpane, the cuckoo — seek to find what tones they each give out.

## II

You must sedulously practice scales and other finger exercises. But there are many persons who imagine all will be accomplished if they keep on spending many hours each day, until they grow old, in mere technical practice. It is about as if one should busy himself daily with repeating the A-B-C as fast as possible, and always faster and faster. Use your time better.

## III

"Dumb piano-fortes," so called, or key-boards without sound, have been invented. Try them long enough to see that they are good for nothing. You cannot learn to speak from the dumb.

## IV

Play in time! The playing of many virtuosos is like the gait of a drunkard. Make not such your models.

## V

Learn be times the fundamental laws of Harmony.

## VI

Be not frightened by the words — **Theory, Thorough Bass, Counterpoint, etc.**, They will meet you friendly if you meet them so.

## VII

Never dilly-dally over a piece of music, but attack it briskly; and never play it only half through!

## VIII

Dragging and hurrying are equally great faults.

## IX

Strive to play easy pieces well and beautifully; it is better than to render harder pieces only indifferently well.

## X

Always insist on having your instrument purely tuned.

## XI

You must not only be able to play your little pieces with the fingers; you must be able to hum them over without a piano. Sharpen your imagination so that you may fix in your mind not only the Melody of a composition, but also the Harmony belonging to it.

## XII

Accustom yourself, even though you have but little voice, to sing at sight without the aid of an instrument. The sharpness of your hearing will continually improve by that means. But if you are the possessor of a rich voice, lose not a moment's time, but cultivate it, and consider it the fairest gift which heaven has lent you.

## XIII

You must carry it so far that you can understand a piece of music upon paper.

## XIV

When you are playing, never trouble yourself about who is listening.

## XV

Play always as if a master heard you.

## XVI

If anyone lays a composition before you for the first time, for you to play, first read it over.

## XVII

Have you done your musical day's work, and do you feel exhausted? Then do not constrain yourself to further labor. Better rest than work without joy or freshness.

## XVIII

Play nothing, as you grow older, which is merely **fashionable**. Time is precious. One must have a hundred lives, if he would acquaint himself with all that is good.

## XIX

Children cannot be brought up on sweetmeats and confectionery to be sound and healthy men. As the physical, so must the mental food be simple and nourishing. The masters have pro-

vided amply for the latter; keep to that.

XX

A player may be very glib with finger-passages; they all in time grow common-place and must be changed. Only where such facility serves higher ends, is it of any worth.

XXI

You must not give currency to poor compositions; on the contrary you must do all you can to suppress them.

XXII

You should neither play poor compositions, nor even listen to them, if you are not obliged to.

XXIII

Never try to acquire facility in what is called **Bravura**. Try in a composition to bring out the impression which the composer had in his mind; more than this attempt not; more than this is caricature.

XXIV

Consider it a monstrosity to alter, or leave out anything, or to introduce any new-fangled ornaments in pieces by a good composer. That is the greatest outrage you can do to Art.

XXV

In the selection of your pieces for study, ask advice of older players; that will save you much time.

XXVI

You must gradually make acquaintance with all the more important works of all the important masters.

XXVII

Be not led astray by the brilliant popularity of the so-called virtuosi. Think more of the applause of artists, than that of the multitude.

XXVIII

Every fashion grows **unfashionable** again; if you persist in it for years, you find yourself ridiculous coxcomb in the eyes of everybody.

XXIX

It is more injury than profit to you to play a great deal before company. Have a regard to other people; but never play anything which, in your inmost soul, you are ashamed of.

XXX

Omit no opportunity, however, to play **with** others, in Duos, Trios, Etc. It makes your playing fluent, spirited, and easy, accompany a singer when you can.

XXXI

If all would play first violin, we could get no orchestra together. Respect each musician, therefore, in his place.

XXXII

Love your instrument, but do not have the vanity to think it the highest and only one. Consider that there are others quite as fine. Remember, too, that there are singers, that the highest manifestations in Music are through chorus and orchestra combined.

XXXIII

As you progress, have more to do with scores, than with **virtuosi**.

XXXIV

Practice industriously the Fugues of good **masters**, above all those of John Sebastian Bach. Make the "Well-tempered Clavichord" your daily **bread**. Then you will surely be a **thorough** musician.

XXXV

Seek among your associates those who know more than you.

XXXVI

For recreation from your musical studies, read the poets frequently. Walk also in the open air.

XXXVII

Much may be learned from singers, male and female; but do not believe in them for everything.

XXXVIII

Behind the mountains there live people, too. Be modest; as yet you have discovered and thought nothing which others have not thought and discovered before you. And even if you have done so, regard it as a gift from above, which you have got to share with others.

XXXIX

The study of the history of Music, supported by the actual hearing of the master compositions of the different epochs, is the shortest way to cure you of self-esteem and vanity.

XL

\* A fine book on Music is Thibaut **Ueber Reinheit der Tonkunst, (On Purity in the Musical Art)** Read it often as you grow older.

\*(Schumann's teacher. . . .out of print)

XLI

If you pass a church and hear the organ playing, go in and listen. If it happens that you have to occupy the organist's seat yourself, try your little fingers, and be amazed before this omnipotence of Music.

XLII

Improve every opportunity of practicing upon the organ; there is no instrument which takes such speedy revenge on the impure and the slovenly in composition, or in playing, as the organ.

XLIII

Sing frequently in choruses, especially on the middle parts. This makes you **musical**.

XLIV

What is it to be **musical**? You are not so, if, with eyes fastened anxiously upon the notes, you play a piece through painfully to the end. You are not so, if, when some one turns over two pages at once, you stick and cannot go on. But you are musical if, in a new piece, you anticipate pretty nearly what is coming, and in an old piece, know it by heart; in a word, if you have Music, not in your fingers only, but in your head and heart.

XLV

But how does one become **musical**? Dear child, the main thing, a sharp ear, and a quick power of comprehension, comes, as in all things, from above. But the talent may be improved and elevated. You will become so, not by shutting yourself up all day like a hermit, practising mechanical studies; but by living, many-sided musical intercourse; and especially by constant familiarity with orchestra and chorus.

XLVI

Acquire in season a clear notion of the compass of the human voice in its principal classes; listen to it particularly in the chorus; ascertain in what interval its highest power lies, and in what other intervals it is best adapted to the expression of what is soft and tender.

XLVII

Listen **attentively** to all Songs of the People; they are a mine of

the most beautiful melodies, and open for you glimpses into the character of different nations.

XLVIII

Exercise yourself early in reading music in the old clefs. Otherwise, many treasures of the past will remain locked against you.

XLIX

Reflect early on the tone and character of different instruments; try to impress the peculiar **coloring** of each upon your ear.

L

Do not neglect to hear good Operas.

LI

Reverence the Old, but meet the New also with a warm heart. Cherish no prejudice against names unknown to you.

LII

Do not judge of a composition on a first hearing; what pleases you in the first moment is not always the best. Masters would be studied. Much would become clear to you for the first time in your old age.

LIII

In judging of compositions, distinguish whether they belong to the artistic category, or only aim at dilettantish entertainment. Stand up for those of the first sort, but do not worry yourself about the others!

LIV

**Melody** is the watchword of the Dilettanti, and certainly there is no music without melody. But understand well what they mean by it; nothing passes for a melody with them, but one that is easily comprehended, or rhythmically pleasing. But there are other melodies of a different stamp; open a volume of Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven, and you see them in a thousand various styles. It is to be hoped that you will soon be weary of the poverty and monotony of the modern\* Italian opera melodies. (\* Rossini, Bellini, etc. R.S. called them **these canaries**)

LV

If you can find out little melodies for yourself on the piano, it is all very well. But if they come of themselves, when you are not at the piano, then you have still greater reason to rejoice, for then the inner sense of music is astir in you. The fingers must make what the head wills, not **vice versa**.

LVI

If you begin to compose, make it all in your head. When you have got a piece all ready, then try it on the instrument. If your music came from your inmost soul, if you have felt it, then it will take effect on others.

LVII

If Heaven has bestowed on you a lively imagination, you will often sit in solitary hours spellbound to your piano, seeking expression for your inmost soul in harmonies; and all the more mysteriously will you feel drawn into magic circles as it were, the more unclear the realm of harmony as yet may be to you. The happiest hours of youth are these. Beware, however, of abandoning yourself too often to a talent which may tempt you to waste power and time on phantoms. Mastery of form, the power of clearly moulding your productions, you will only gain through the sure token of writing. Write, then, more than you improvise.

LVIII

Acquire an early knowledge of **directing**, watch good directors

closely; and form a habit of directing **with** them, silently, and to yourself. This brings clearness to you.

LIX

Look about you well in life, as also in the other arts and sciences.

LX

The Moral Laws are also those of Art.

LXI

By industry and perseverance you will always carry it higher.

LXII

From a pound of iron, bought for a few pence, many thousand watch-springs may be made, whereby the value is increased a hundred thousand fold. The pound which God has given you, improve it faithfully.

LXIII

Without enthusiasm nothing real comes of Art.

LXIV

Art is not for the end of getting riches. Only become a greater and greater Artist; the rest will come of itself.

LXV

Only when the form is entirely clear to you, will the spirit become clear.

LXVI

Perhaps only genius understands genius fully.

LXVII

Some one maintained that a perfect musician must be able, on the first hearing of a complicated orchestral work, to see it as in bodily score before him. That is the highest that can be conceived of.

LXVIII

There is no end of learning.

• Finis •



Footnote: All his life, Robert Schumann was dedicated to the highest and noblest principles of musical and literary art. He wrote: "Music is to me the perfect expression of the soul."

## ANSWERS TO PUZZLES IN "DON'T LOOK NOW"

### Nutcracker Puzzle:

1. Arabian Dance; 2. Waltz of the Flowers; 3. Hopak (Russian Dance); 4. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy; 5. Chinese Dance; 6. Dance of the Reed-Pipe.

### MUSICIANS AND SCRAMBLED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Schubert — f. Ave Maria
2. Stradivari — i. Violin
3. Tchaikovsky — a. Pathetique Symphony
4. Debussy — i. Clair de Lune
5. Handel — g. Messiah
6. Beethoven — j. Ninth Symphony
7. Mozart — e. Marriage of Figaro
8. Wagner — b. Lohengrin
9. Bach — d. Goldberg Variations
10. Verdi — c. Aida
11. Stravinsky — k. Petrouchka
12. Ravel — h. Bolero