

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

The Wild Horseman from "Album for the Young"

Op. 68

A GUIDE TO INTERPRETATION

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Schumann's ambition was to be a concert pianist, but a hand injury early in his career ended that possibility. Fortunately, his great talent for composition led him to concentrate on composing. He knew the instrument extremely well and wrote a series of wonderful pieces such as "Album for the Young" which served to teach students various aspects of technique and interpretation. He wrote this work in 1848 for his own children. "The Wild Horseman" is a splendid example for students to learn about the intricacies of phrasing and creating a musical picture.

As we do with any piece, learn the hands separately at the start. Be sure to develop good fingering and use it consistently, as it will help make a passage easier and secure your finger memory of it. The score below has a very good fingering. Basically, this is a study in staccato playing. As you play slowly, notice the feel of the releases for the staccatos. This will help you when you bring it up to speed.

In the second full measure (and similar places), there is a 2-8 note legato phrase at the start of the measure. Be very careful to learn this correctly right from the beginning of your practice and remember how it feels to do it.

A musical score for the piece "The Wild Horseman" from "Album for the Young" by Robert Schumann. The score is written for piano in 6/8 time. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The piece begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The first measure is marked with a red '1' and shows a staccato eighth-note pattern. The second measure is marked with a red '2' and shows a legato eighth-note pattern. The third measure is marked with a red '3' and shows a staccato eighth-note pattern. The fourth measure is marked with a red '4' and shows a staccato eighth-note pattern. The score includes various fingering numbers (1-4) and dynamic markings (mf, sf) to guide the performer.

In the second part of the piece, Schumann reverses the technique and the staccatos now lie in the left hand. Practice them as you did in the right hand of the first section. Be sure the chords that accompany in the left hand of the first part, and the right hand on the second are precise and are released right at the rest.

This piece is beautifully engineered to give the impression of a wild ride. The staccatos give it energy and a feeling of great movement. The theme in both the first and second section is repeated twice. Schumann indicates *mf* at the beginning, but you can decide how and if that will change on the repetitions. This is up to you and it will make your interpretation different from anyone else's. I think one of the most exciting things about playing an instrument is that you get to decide how certain things will sound and the dynamics is one of them.

Even when there is a repetition, for instance in measure 17, where Schumann again writes *mf*, you can make it different. Remember a dynamic marking is a range of sound, so it can be louder or softer when it is repeated in another part of a piece.

The image shows a musical score for five measures, numbered 15 to 19. The score is written for piano, with a treble clef on the right and a bass clef on the left. Measure 15 starts with a forte (*sf*) dynamic marking. Measures 16 and 17 are marked with mezzo-forte (*mf*). Measures 18 and 19 are marked with forte (*sf*). The music consists of staccato chords in the bass and staccato eighth notes in the treble. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. A repeat sign is present at the end of measure 19.

For the *sfz* or sforzando, this is the strongest accent a composer can give. You must decide how loud it is going to be. And not all of them have to be the same. I think they are there to enhance the feeling of movement and energy. Once you have learned the piece and it is up to the tempo that you want it to be, then develop an idea in your mind of a galloping horse and the picture you want the listener to imagine as you play. Use your imagination, because this is another way that your interpretation of the piece will be different from other pianists.