

Eric Sams

A Schumann Primer?

The Musical Times, Nov., 1970 (pp. 1096-1097) © The Estate of Eric Sams, 1970

*Und dies geheimnisvolle Buch...
Ist dir es nicht Geleit genug?*
GOETHE

This is the last of a series of articles¹ which began by inferring, solely from Schumann's music, a complete new cipher-system with some unusual features. That system, and those features, were later traced to Johann Klüber's *Kryptographik*. Here are some further clues to the conclusion that Schumann knew his Klüber.

In what follows each speaks for himself, in literal translation. The phrases in parentheses have been added in order to summarize or explain; similarly, the asterisks mark off passages from the same letter or chapter, and the dots indicate omissions from those passages. All the Schumann references are to be found in the usual main sources² except the Heidelberg notebook.³

JOHANN KLÜBER (1763-1837) from <i>Kryptographik</i>	ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856) from letters, reviews, etc. 1827-54
---	--

The student (1827-30)

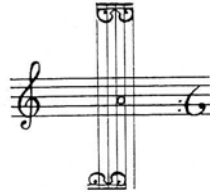
(published at the) Tübingen branch of J.G.Cotta (a branch which supplied Schumann's father's bookshop)	I have had to rummage all through (my father's) library
(written in) Heidelberg, 1809 (where Klüber the famous German jurist was then a famous professor)	*
Hieroglyph-writing, in the decipherment of which little progress has been made	I would rather go to Heidelberg, to hear the most famous German jurists . . . because the most famous professors are in Heidelberg
So for every four letters you have 4x6 or 4.3.2 permutations... and in general for n letters (factorial n) permutations...	I am writing you hieroglyphs; I shall hardly be able to decipher them
Total of numbers in each combination ... 2,6,12,20,30,42	(A Heidelberg notebook contains permutations written out in four groups of six; calculations of factorial 60; and multiplications of successive integers by 2,6,12, 20, 30 and 42)
Draw lines for music-notes round in a circle	(In a friend's album-the ABEGG theme written out on a staff drawn round in a circle)

¹ MT Aug 1965, May 1966, Dec 1966, Feb 1967, Jan 1968

² *Jugendbriefe*, Jansen, Kreisig, Bötticher

³ in the possession of the Schumann-Haus, Zwickau; I am obliged to its Director, Dr Martin Schoppe, for the courtesy of a photocopy

The critic (1831-44)

<p>The old Cabbalists are said to be the inventors of this method:</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td>abc</td> <td>de</td> <td>fgh</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ilm</td> <td>no</td> <td>pqr</td> </tr> <tr> <td>st</td> <td>ux</td> <td>yz</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>...the art of so arranging a basket of flowers that their order expresses a whole sequence of ideas, see Section IV (about the language of flowers) ... (Similarly) one can speak to the initiated by means of musical tones...</p> <p>(eg) at an Institute for the Blind ... words were written in any language, translated into notes, and played ... a similar boon for the deaf</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>(The meaning of wreaths) poppy-flower, night . . . night-violet, evening</p> <p>narcissus, I, me</p>	abc	de	fgh	ilm	no	pqr	st	ux	yz	<p>Gade's name can be spelt with four clefs and one note, in a way which Cabbalists can easily find out:</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>A present of two or three flowers often says more than a whole basket of them</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>A musical language of flowers was one of my earliest ideas</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>(Some) music is itself a language, rather as flowers speak to us</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>(Perhaps) the scent of a flower is to the deaf as the sound of music is to the blind. The language to be translated here</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>I would make (John Field) a wreath of poppy-flowers and evening violets, for he is the darling of the twilight hours</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>The narcissus says, think of me</p>
abc	de	fgh								
ilm	no	pqr								
st	ux	yz								

The lover (1831-40)

<p>myrtles, marrying ... (a gift of myrtles means I want to marry you)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>The main use of this dumb language is for secret affairs... In it a girl receives and replies to her first declaration of love. From her gestures the lucky lover can tell the day, the time, and the place where he can find his beloved</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>(Some believe) that two people can establish a secret rapport such that they can exchange secrets though far apart</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>...weave the words of a secret message one by one through the text of what is ostensibly an ordinary letter ... this is then continued in a codicil or postscript, which contains the agreed key</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Beda (<i>ie</i> the Venerable Bede) wrote a treatise on expression by gestures of the fingers ...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Garrick was also famed (for the eloquence of his gestures)</p>	<p>Myrthen (op 25) is to be a wedding present . . . to my beloved bride</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Eyes can exchange the most secret of stories</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>As I was playing the declaration of love, in she came; guardian spirit, bring me close to her soon</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Tomorrow morning at 11 O' clock I shall be playing the Adagio and thinking of you ... do the same, so that we may meet in spirit. The place will be where our ghostly doubles met</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>as kindred spirits can meet though miles away</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Dear Clara. You must read the end first (which is) a sort of lexicon of illegibly-written words. Thus the letter can become very striking and piquant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>Beda (<i>ie</i> Clara) sat at the piano to show me (<i>ie</i> by her playing) the picture of her beloved</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <p>(John Field) like Garrick declaiming can so express the simplest musical ABC that it makes one feel sad</p>
---	--

The psychotic (1854)

<p>Invisible or so-called sympathetic writing... written between the lines... later the letters stand out</p>	<p>But I have often written to you with sympathetic ink, and between these lines there is secret writing, which will later stand out</p>
---	--

There are many other detailed correspondences: including several between the cipher-system first inferred from Schumann's music and later found in Klüber's book, making nearly 50 points in all. Not all have equal force; but many are striking. Even so, each could no doubt be explained singly as coincidence. But can they collectively be so explained?

If not, then Schumann not only knew Klüber's book, but knew it well. He presumably had a copy in his possession for over 25 years. Its images and ideas can be seen simmering on or near the surface of his prose throughout his life; secrets, keys, letters, alphabets, lexicons, mysteries, veils, initiations, all in thrall to the arcane and inexplicable power of music. Schumann habitually described musical composition in general, and his own in particular, as if it were a special and strange form of written or uttered communication. As Klüber says, a code - or cipher- system for that purpose may be constructed from any signs capable of conveying a hidden meaning, whether numbers, letters, chemical or mathematical symbols, or notes of music. *Ex hypothesi*, Schumann would have read that book in the very year in which he began to write music in earnest. Perhaps it served as a primer in every sense?