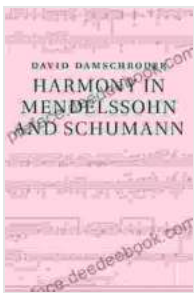


Harmony in Mendelssohn and Schumann: A Detailed Analysis of Their Musical Techniques

In the Romantic era of classical music, two composers emerged as masters of harmony: Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. Their innovative approaches and distinct harmonic styles continue to captivate listeners and inspire musicians to this day.



Harmony in Mendelssohn and Schumann

by David Damschroder

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

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Felix Mendelssohn: Elegance and Refinement

Felix Mendelssohn, born in 1809, was a child prodigy who displayed an extraordinary talent for music. His harmonic language is characterized by its elegance, clarity, and sense of balance.

Key Characteristics

- **Use of Chromaticism:** Mendelssohn seamlessly incorporates chromatic passing notes and altered chords into his compositions,

adding expressive depth and a hint of unpredictability.

- **Extended Chords:** He frequently uses extended chords, such as seventh chords and ninth chords, to create rich and complex harmonies.
- **Cadential Progression:** Mendelssohn's cadences typically follow a classical pattern of I-V-I, but he often embellishes them with chromatic alterations or secondary dominants.
- **Harmonic Progression:** His harmonic progressions are generally smooth and logical, with a sense of inevitability that guides the listener through the music.

Examples

In his overture to the opera "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Mendelssohn employs a series of chromatic chords to create a sense of mystery and enchantment. In his "Piano Concerto No. 1," the extended chords in the development section provide a lush and romantic backdrop for the solo piano.

Robert Schumann: Emotional Intensity and Romantic Expression

Robert Schumann, born in 1810, was a romantic at heart whose music is known for its emotional intensity and expressive power.

Key Characteristics

- **Frequent Modulation:** Schumann often modulates to distant keys, creating dramatic harmonic shifts that reflect the emotional turmoil of his music.

- **Enharmonic Changes:** He frequently uses enharmonic changes, in which the same notes are written differently with respect to the key, to create dissonant and surprising effects.
- **Suspension and Dissonance:** Schumann suspends chords and introduces dissonances with great dramatic impact, adding tension and excitement to his compositions.
- **Harmonic Ambiguity:** His harmonies can often be ambiguous, leaving the listener unsure of the tonal center or key.

Examples

In his "Piano Concerto in A minor," Schumann's rapid modulations and enharmonic changes create a sense of emotional instability and turmoil. In his "Liederkreis" song cycle, the dissonant harmonies and suspensions add a layer of emotional depth and intensity to the love poems.

Comparative Analysis: Mendelssohn vs. Schumann

While both Mendelssohn and Schumann are masters of harmony, their approaches are distinct.

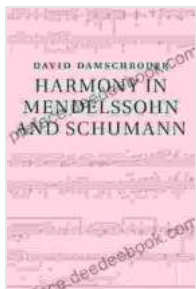
Mendelssohn's harmonies are characterized by their elegance, clarity, and sense of balance. He primarily uses chromaticism and extended chords to add depth and complexity, while maintaining a traditional harmonic structure.

Schumann's harmonies, on the other hand, are more emotional and expressive. He frequently employs modulation, enharmonic changes, and dissonance to create dramatic effects and reflect the emotional content of

his music. His harmonic progressions can be more ambiguous and unpredictable, leaving the listener with a sense of uncertainty.

Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann were two of the most innovative and influential composers of the Romantic era. Their mastery of harmony allowed them to create music that is both technically brilliant and emotionally evocative.

Mendelssohn's elegant and refined harmonies provide a sense of balance and order, while Schumann's emotional and expressive harmonies reflect the turbulent and unpredictable nature of the human heart. Both composers left an enduring legacy that continues to inspire musicians and audiences alike.



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