

An interpretation of Schumann's pedal indications in his *Waldszenen*

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As performers of Schumann's music, how are we to apply his pedal indications? Do these markings provide other basic information to help us interpret his works? Inevitably such a plan, namely using pedal indications to facilitate interpretation, may or may not prove helpful. Was the composer consistent in their application of the markings? Does their use of markings vary across pieces, or across the chronology of their very career? Perhaps more importantly, can we trust the source and scores, as pedal markings, like the slur, offered editors a golden opportunity to abuse a composer's initial intent? We believe that Chopin's use of pedal markings went beyond basic objectives of providing color or sustaining a given set of pitches to preserve a harmonic structure. Chopin's pedal markings even went so far as to indicate phrases and/or hypermetrical structure. What about Schumann's use of pedal markings? And what, specifically, might we learn from his application of those markings in one of his mid-career works for the piano, namely his *Waldszenen*, Opus 82, composed in 1848 and 1849?

We begin by proposing a model for Schumann's use of pedal markings in this work:

- (1) To maintain pitches in order to establish and extend a fundamental harmony;
- (2) To indicate a phrase, akin to Chopin's technique;
- (3) To provide a richer sound, an alternative timbre;
- (4) To provide more color or blending of sound;

In this paper we will explore all of the above theories in *Waldszenen*, and will rely specifically on the Urtext published in 1987 by Wolfgang Boetticher via G. Henle Verlag of Munich, Germany (a scan of this full score is attached as an addendum, with excerpts embedded throughout). Ultimately, we will conclude that most of the above theories can be applied to Schumann's piece, with the notable exception of (2), phrase indication. Yet, we will find these theories alone do not seem to fully identify Schumann's intent. As such, we will conclude with an additional alternative theory, drawing heavily upon a seminal piece of the cycle, namely *Vogel als Prophet*. But first, let's simply identify examples for each of the above theories in order to establish and validate the model.



Eintritt mm. 26-27

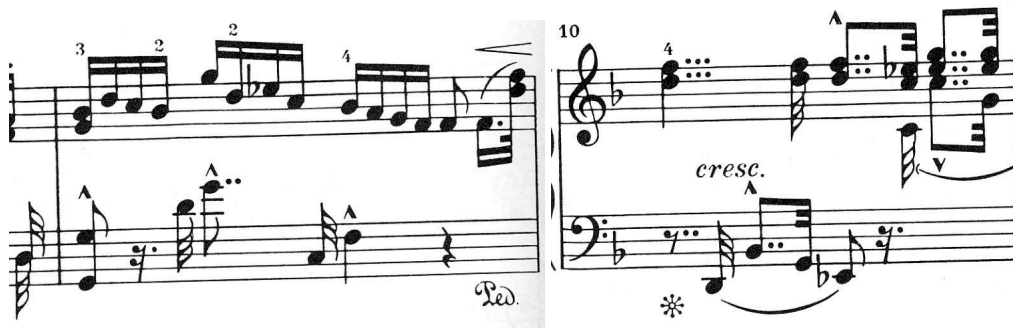
If we begin with the first theory (1), the use of pedal to maintain pitches and extend a harmony, we could explore mm. 26-27 of the first piece in Schumann's cycle, *Eintritt*. In fact, this is the first pedal marking of the entire work; *Eintritt* itself only has three instances of pedal markings. We might conclude in this case that Schumann wants to maintain a pedal point on the dominant harmony, **F major**, allowing the left hand to jump and accompany the right hand in the oscillating gesture of these two measures, rotating between supertonic (**C minor**) and the dominant (**F major**).

Interestingly, this dominant harmony never fully resolves (it is the entrance into the forest after all...), or rather it doesn't resolve as we expect. It lingers on a 6/4 chord until our initial phrase of the piece returns at m. 37. As a result, we hear this phrase more as an extension of the 6/4 chord than we do as an actual resolution to the tonic. In short, this example is somewhat unusual. A better example could be found in *Herberge* m. 20. Clearly we are meant to catch the grace note in the pedal, establishing this dominant (**B-flat**) harmony.



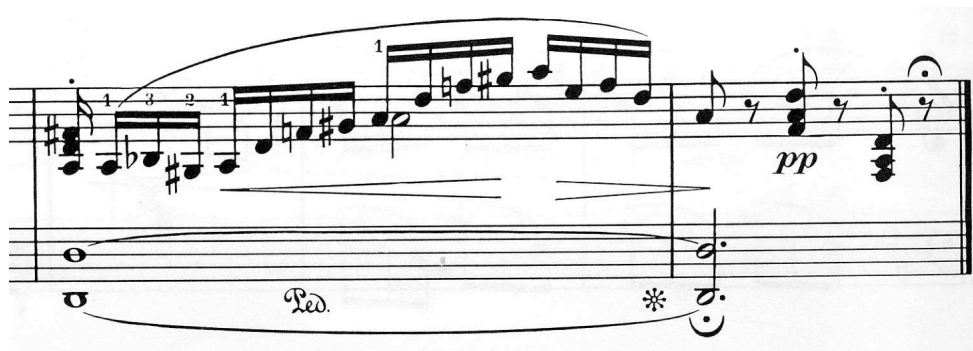
Herberge m. 20

If we scan the work for examples of theory (2), namely the Chopin technique of using the pedal markings additionally to indicate phrase or even hypermetrical structure, unfortunately no obvious examples emerge. Hence (2) is abandoned.



Verrufene Stelle mm. 9-10

Applications of theory (3), namely the use of pedal to vary the timbre, by contrast to (2), seem to exist in the work. Perhaps the best example of (3) could be found in *Verrufene Stelle* at mm. 9-10. While it's possible the composer used the pedal as notational convenience, it seems unlikely given the simplicity for a pianist to hold the lower **F**. Moreover, the sustain here would more likely apply to the root harmony (**D** of the **D minor** vs. **F**, its mediant). And so we dismiss (1) as an option. Given all pitches are in the same harmony (**D minor**), (4) or coloring also does not seem to apply. We note the pedal use, as indicated, is brief, only extending a 16th note across the bar. We are left to speculate that Schumann sought a different timbre for these pitches, and for the second minor-third (**D** and **F**) to be struck on open, resonating strings, at which point the pedal is released prior to the left hand gesture on **B-flat**.



Verrufene Stelle mm. 34-35

If we remain within *Verrufene Stelle*, the markings at m. 34 are interesting to consider in relation to (4), namely coloring. Here, the pedal is indicated partway into the bar, while the bass **D** harmony is sustained, but only after the right hand has released the **D major** harmony (notable the **F#**). Yet, we notice the inclusion in the arpeggiated gesture of non-diatonic (in **D minor**) pitches, namely **F-natural** and **G-sharp**. These two pitches together sound somewhat dissonant, but ultimately seem to color the sustained **D** in the bass and the held half note **A** in the treble, which itself comes on a strong beat (third beat). Theory (1) doesn't apply – the left hand simply sustains the **D**, and moreover, the right hand could also sustain the **A**. It seems Schumann wants to capture the colors of the **F-natural** and **G-sharp** until we

finally achieve clarity on the **D minor** harmony in the final bar, m. 35. We conclude that the pedal markings here provide color, or (4).

Vogel als Prophet

Langsam, sehr zart M.M. ♩ = 63

The musical score for 'Vogel als Prophet' (mm. 1-8) is presented in three systems. The tempo is 'Langsam, sehr zart' (Slow, very soft) with a metronome marking of 63. The key signature is G minor (three flats). The score is written for piano (pp). The right hand (RH) features complex melodic passages with numerous slurs and fingerings (1-5). The left hand (LH) has a simpler bass line with several 'Ped.' markings and asterisks, indicating sustained pedal points. A handwritten note 'follow pedal' is circled in the first system. The score is divided into three systems of two measures each.

Vogel als Prophet mm. 1-8

It is at this point that we begin to voice confidence that theories (1), (3), and (4) can readily explain the pedal markings throughout the *Waldszenen*. But then we turn the page to *Vogel als Prophet*, a piece where Schumann has completely abandoned his parsimonious use of pedal markings, and our confidence is tested. We start with the markings in the first bar. Initially (1) seems promising, as capturing the **G** in the bass would seem to establish and preserve a **G minor** harmony. We encounter a similar example in m. 2. Perhaps in m. 4 we have a **B-flat** major harmony, then in m. 5 a **D minor** harmony. In all cases, it would seem the pedal preserves the root pitch, allowing the left hand to jump to subsequent pitches with this fundamental bass harmony sustained. And in all cases, we can easily identify an harmonic structure.

Yet two issues reduce the clarity on the application of this theory to this piece. The *first*: we notice the prominent and dissonant **C-sharp** in the right hand on m. 1. This **C-sharp** has been given some emphasis: the duration is extended relative to the coloring arpeggiated gesture which follows, namely it receives a full dotted eighth (vs 32^{nds}); this pitch lands squarely on the strong beat; and finally, as in the upbeat to this measure, the dissonance of the **C-sharp** is unprepared – we begin with the dissonant pitch, a tri-tone away from the tonic. Given the prominent dissonance, how do we then reconcile the notion of our initial proposal for theory (1), namely that a given fundamental harmony is established and maintained? Given the pedal, we don't have one harmony here, we have two: **G minor** and **G diminished**.

At this juncture we contemplate extending the initial definition of theory (1), and consider introducing a limited corollary definition (1b), namely we are simply sustaining a significant pitch, and not establishing or preserving a harmony. Such a corollary allows the model to survive, but at the cost of reducing the model to providing really no useful insight; instead this revised model would simply articulate a set of special cases. An alternative approach (as it is premature to abandon the model!) would be to argue that the underlying harmonic structure is simply more complex in this piece, and doesn't follow strict tonal rules. More specifically, one might propose that the fundamental harmony is a complex one, a blend of a common tone diminished chord (with the tri-tone) and the resolution of that tri-tone to the fifth, yielding the G-minor triad. In other words, given both harmonies are clearly indicated through the notation and sustained through the pedal, there is no resolution from one to the other. As such, perhaps the most satisfactory application of the above theories would be to combine (1) with (4), or in other words, we are extending and coloring a fundamental harmony.



Vogel als Prophet mm. 9-11

We now move on with less confidence regarding our model to address the *second* issue that impairs the application of our model to *Vogel als Prophet*. Consider m. 11. The dissonant pitch, the **F-sharp**, once again lands within the pedal, has extended duration (a dotted eighth), arrives on the strong beat, and, as before with the **C-sharp** in m. 2, is entirely unprepared. Yet here we notice that there is no root or fundamental pitch to be sustained by the pedal across a gesture or jump – the bass pitch to follow the previous example would need to be a **C**, indicating a colored

harmony of **C minor** blended with **C diminished**. The bass pitch captured in the pedal this time, however, is **F-sharp**, like before the very tri-tone of that **C minor** harmony. Moreover, Schumann has placed an accent on the **F-sharp** this time. It seems Schumann has indicated pedal specifically to preserve the dissonant pitch, not the fundamental harmony.

Given these two issues which challenge our model, namely the absence of a clearly defined harmony to sustain with the pedal, and m. 11, the example where it would seem that it is the dissonant pitch itself that Schumann seems to capture (versus focusing on the root of the harmony as you would expect a typical pedal to capture), we contemplate abandoning the application of (1) and instead propose, quite simply, Schumann is looking for color with the pedal. Yet the emphasis on the dissonance suggests something more than color. In the *Verrufene Stelle* example of (4), recall the **D minor** open fifth was emphasized while the pedal sustained arpeggiated pitches **F natural** and **G sharp**. In short, this example suggests sustained dissonance as color – not sustained dissonance as emphasis. By contrast, in the of *Vogel als Prophet* at m. 11, it seems we have the ambiguity of the collision of the tri-tone with the fifth of a fundamental, and this very collision is the new harmony.

If we continue on with m. 11 in *Vogel als Prophet*, we notice that the pedal is proposed again for the final two beats of the measure. We see the emphasis once more on the **F-sharp**. Yet we notice a grace note **G** in the low bass, and a clearly articulated **G major** dominant seven chord, proposing resolution to **C minor**, which in fact occurs at m 12. And so here in m. 11 third beat, the **F-sharp** colors the fundamental harmony, but this time as the dissonant leading tone of the **G major** dominant seven chord. Similarly, we see a dissonant leading tone associated with an **F major** harmony via the **E-natural** in m. 8. If we juxtapose several examples, a pattern emerges:

Measure	Fundamental Harmony	Dissonant Pitch	Relation to Harmony
m. 1	G minor	C-sharp	Tri-tone
m. 2	G minor	C-sharp	Tri-tone
m. 4	B-flat major	C-sharp	Minor third
m. 5	D minor	G-sharp	Tri-tone
m. 6	D minor	G-sharp	Tri-tone
m. 8	F major	E-natural	Leading tone
m. 9-10	F V7	D	Major sixth

m. 11	C minor	F-sharp	Tri-tone
m. 11 3 rd beat	G V7	F-sharp	Leading tone

Pedal markings and dissonance in Vogel als Prophet

In all instances we encounter pedaling coincides with emphasized dissonance, and in most cases, acute dissonance by maintaining the tri-tone or leading tone of a fundamental harmony. Of course the piece itself is characterized by dissonance, a leading tone or tri-tone serving as an appoggiatura, coloring the harmonies throughout. Yet importantly, the pedal markings sustain this dissonance, preventing the potential resolution of these pitches (leading tones or tri-tones or otherwise) to the root or the fifth of those implied harmonies. Throughout the piece, we see that the pedal markings consistently seem to coincide with the strong dissonance.

Freundliche Landschaft m. 35

If we move outside of *Vogel als Prophet*, we see other examples of this same technique. Consider *Freundliche Landschaft* m. 35. One might argue that this is nothing more than coloring, yet we note the similarity to the above table: Schumann has both emphasized and captured the **E-natural** in the pedal (the leading tone of the dominant **F**/tri-tone of the tonic **B-flat**). Subsequent pedal indications typically coincide with the presence of these pitches: **E-natural** and **F** (the dominant and the tri-tone), namely m. 37, m. 51, and mm. 54-55. There is never an instance where the pedal is indicated in *Freundliche Landschaft* where the **E-natural** does not also occur. Coincidence?

It would seem that Schumann is clearly exploring the use of dissonance in his *Waldszenen*. The pedal markings sustain congruent consonant and dissonant harmonies. In the process, this sustained dissonance denies an obvious resolution. Yet ironically, the use of pedal also softens this conflict, as the sustain opens the

sound, allowing multiple and diverse overtones as additional pitches combine and resonate with open strings. The initial surprise of the unprepared dissonance, through the sustain of the pedal, soon blends into complex and more subtle harmonies.

In short, Schumann's pedal markings in *Waldszenen* go behind simply preserving a fundamental harmony, or even providing color. The pedal markings, if we may be so bold, also sometimes indicate Schumann's creation of new harmonies, new sound. We therefore amend our model, dropping the previous proposed Chopin technique, and appending a new technique (4)' that we will attribute to Schumann.

- (1)' To maintain pitches in order to establish and extend a fundamental harmony;
- (2)' To provide a richer sound, an alternative timbre;
- (3)' To provide more color or blending of sound;
- (4)' To create new complex harmonies.