

F.A.M.E. October 2005  
Robert Schumann  
June 8, 1810 – July 29, 1856

## Music

**“Endeavor to play easy pieces well and beautifully, that is better than to play difficult pieces indifferently”**

Suggested costume: Farmer: overalls, blue jeans, plaid shirt, straw hat. (Either you can wear it or you can have child dress up in the costume).

Where do you think you'd find someone dressed like this? (at a farm).  
Do you think the work is easy or hard? (hopefully they will say hard)  
Suppose your parents asked to do a chore, like clean your room, and you knew it was going to take a long time. What could you do to make it more pleasant? (Listen to music). Last year we learned about the music of John Phillip Souza. His marching music helped to lift spirits, and when most of you heard it, you probably started to march. That music created a feeling, a mood.

Our composer today, Robert Schumann liked to write music that told a story through the melody. What is a melody? (A melody is a series of notes, arranged in a pattern that forms a pleasant arrangement). Another word for melody is “tune”.

**“*The Happy Farmer*” CD 1 (Schroeder’s Greatest Hits). Play track 18.** This song is about 48 seconds long.

Is this a sad song or a happy song? (happy). The story Robert Schumann is telling in this song is about a happy farmer. The farmer is returning home, dragging a pitchfork, stomping on his heavy boots. You can also hear the sound of barnyard chicks (the chords in the song) and you hear the lighter sounds of the voice of the farmer’s wife.

Robert Schumann wanted to teach his children to play the piano, but he found the music available at the time either too hard or too long for children. He composed pieces, with each one teaching a new skill; and none so long that the pianist would have problems practicing the song. The resulting effort is known as “Album for the Young”. Part 1 of Album for the Young consists of 18 songs, which are geared for younger pianists and includes the piece we just heard, with Part 2 comprised of 24 songs geared for young adults.

Schumann was very happy when he wrote these songs. He told a friend that Album of the Young brought him (Robert) unspeakable joy. “I can’t remember that I was ever in such a good musical mood as when I wrote these pieces. These pieces are taken right out of the family life”. In fact, the first few pieces of Album for the Young were written for Schumann’s seven-year old daughter Marie. Schumann would write instructional comments on each piece, from “play rhythmically” to “should you succeed in combining little melodies on the piano, that is already something; but if they come spontaneously,

not on the piano, then rejoice still more, then stirs within you the instinctive sense of music”.

I have two tracks of *The Happy Farmer*. Have the students listen to the song again, asking them to listen for the farmer, the chicks and the farmer’s wife. Ask them if they notice anything different between the first track and the second track.

**“*The Happy Farmer*” CD 1 (Schroeder’s Greatest Hits). Play track 18.  
CD 2 (Album for the Young) Play track 10.**

For those discerning students, they will notice that the tempo (speed) in the second track is much faster. Time on the first song is 48 seconds, time on the second song is about 38 seconds.

The next song is from Part 2 of *Album for the Young*. ***Harvest Song*” CD 3 Track 6**  
Ask the students to compare this song to “*The Happy Farmer*” (*Harvest Song* is more complicated and slightly longer than “*The Happy Farmer*”).

CD 1, *Schroeder’s Greatest Hits* has excerpts from “*Album for the Young*” on tracks 18 – 24. If students are enjoying listening to Schumann, feel free to continue to play the tracks (I personally like track 22).

Track 18	Happy Farmer	0:48	Track 19	Melody	1:03
Track 20	Wild Horseman	0:33	Track 21	Siciliana	2:09
Track 22	Knight Rupper	1:48	Track 23	Little Hunting Song	1:01
Track 24	Little Study	1:49			

## **Biography**

The composer this month is Robert Schumann. However when discussing the life of Robert Schumann, we must also include his wife Clara, as she was an integral part of his musical success.

Robert Schumann was born in 1810 in Germany. His father was an author and a book dealer who encouraged and nurtured Robert’s love of books, writing and music. As a young boy, Robert studied piano, cello and flute and began composing music. He also wrote poems and essays. As a teenager, Robert still wasn’t sure whether he was going to be a composer or a writer. Unfortunately, his father died when Robert was a teenager, and his mother encouraged Robert to study law at the University of Leipzig. Robert quickly realized he lacked the passion for law that he had in music and writing. It was during this time that he began to study piano from Friedrich Wieck. Schumann would practice for many hours each day, and while studying under Wieck, Schumann believed he needed to strengthen his third finger. He developed a mechanical device that Schumann believed would strengthen his finger; unfortunately, it ended up crippling the finger, ending any possible career as a concert pianist. Schumann concentrated on composing and also combined his love of music with his love of writing, becoming editor

and lead writer of a music journal when he was 24 years old. The journal would become one of the most important journals of the time, with Schumann promoting newer composers such as Brahms and Chopin.

While studying with Wieck, Robert met his future wife Clara, who happened to be Wieck's daughter. Clara's father had decided before she was born (she was born in 1819) that she would become a concert pianist. She proved to be a musical prodigy; performing her first concert at 9 years old and by 11 years old she was traveling and performing throughout Europe. The Austrian Emperor named her the Queen of the Piano and the Royal Imperial Chamber Virtuoso. She also composed music, but female composers did not receive much acclaim in the 1800's.

Clara and Robert fell in love. On her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Robert proposed but Clara's father was adamantly opposed to her relationship with Robert. They wed several years later and their marriage was a true partnership. They studied music and poetry together. Robert composed the music, Clara performed.

During the first few years of their marriage, Robert composed prolifically. He tended to be obsessive and concentrate on one type of music at a time. For example, in 1840, the year the Schumann's wed, is also known as the "Great Song Cycle" with Schumann composing over 130 songs. The next year, Robert concentrated on symphonies, composing four; 1842 was the "year of chamber music", with 1843 the "year of chorale music". Clara Schumann almost always gave the first performance of Robert Schumann's pieces.

Robert tried his hand at other professions; he tried conducting, but failed as he did not like to provide criticism and was a professor of music at a conservatory in Germany, but realized he did not have a flair for teaching. He was subject to bouts of depression; becoming extremely depressed after touring with Clara in 1844. Robert would have long periods where he didn't compose, most likely due to his mental illness. Clara became the primary financial support for their family (Robert and their eight children), touring throughout Europe. Robert suffered with mental illness for the remainder of his life. He was institutionalized in the mid 1854; where he remained until his death at age 46 in 1856. Clara continued to tour, promoting Schumann's works, dying in 1896.