




# Schumann's Eusebius: His Beethovenian Origins in the Christian Liturgical Year

Theodore Albrecht

Theodore Albrecht is professor of musicology at Kent State University. From 1980 to 1992, he was professor of music at Park College and music director of the Philharmonia of Greater Kansas City. His translation/edition of Felix Weingartner's *On the Performance of the Symphonies of Schubert und Schumann* (1918) was serialized in the *Journal of the Conductors Guild* in 1986. His three-volume *Letters to Beethoven and Other Correspondence* (Nebraska, 1996) won an ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award in 1997. [talbrech@kent.edu](mailto:talbrech@kent.edu).



The first issue of the *Neue (Leipziger) Zeitschrift für Musik*, appeared on April 3, 1834, “published by a society of artists and friends of art” that included the twenty-three-year-old Robert Schumann and his teacher Friedrich Wieck (1785–1873).<sup>1</sup> Schumann often signed his articles as Florestan, Eusebius, and Raro—“the impulsive, impatient, decisive and effusive Florestan, the moderate, cautious, slower, sometimes skeptical Eusebius, and the mature, detached, paternal Master Raro.”<sup>2</sup> These names had already emerged in June and July, 1831, as Schumann’s imaginary friends.<sup>3</sup> While Florestan derived from a character in Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, and Meister Raro was Wieck, the origins of Eusebius—not much more of a household name in the 1830s than it is today—

have always seemed unclear.

Most early authors writing about Schumann and his works simply avoided the topic, but in 1985, psycho-biographer Peter Ostwald noted that Schumann modeled the pairing of Florestan and Eusebius after the twins Vult and Walt in Jean Paul Richter’s *Flegeljahre*. He further theorized that when Schumann was researching materials for an unfinished play on the tragic twelfth-century romance of Abélard and Héloïse, he encountered the name of a Christian saint Eusebius. Ostwald mentioned that the names “Florestan and Eusebius” occur in “a treatise on music by the neo-Platonist writer Aristides Quintilianus.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, Quintilianus’s treatise *Peri musikes* (*On Music*) addresses his friends Eusebius and Florentius—not

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Florestan.<sup>5</sup> Ostwald then seemed to theorize that Schumann may have found the name Eusebius in the liturgical calendar on August 14, only two days after the feast of St. Clara on August 12, with "Aurora" on the 13th.<sup>6</sup> In his *Robert Schumann* (1997), John Daverio agreed with Ostwald on several points and indicated that these entries appear in Schumann's *Haushaltbücher* (household account books),<sup>7</sup> rather than in any formal liturgical context. In his article for the second edition of *New Grove* (2001), Daverio clarified that "Schumann noted these namedays ... as late as 1853."<sup>8</sup> Daverio's parting observation on the subject at hand, however, was that it is difficult to know what precise connotations the name "Eusebius" might have had for Schumann in 1831.<sup>9</sup>

## Friedrich Wieck's Visit to Beethoven in 1823

By naming the first of his literary trio "Florestan," Schumann may have reflected an almost personal relationship with Beethoven, as seen through the eyes of his teacher Friedrich Wieck.

In the late morning or early afternoon of Tuesday, July 8, 1823, in the company of piano maker (Matthäus) Andreas Stein (1776–1842), Wieck had visited Beethoven at his summer apartment in Hetzendorf, a mile south of Schönbrunn palace.<sup>10</sup> Stein had long been acquainted with the composer and had repaired his Broadwood piano as recently as spring, 1820.<sup>11</sup> Wieck later admitted that without Stein to introduce him, Beethoven probably would not have received him.<sup>12</sup> Stein began the conversation and reported to Beethoven that the fee for a manuscript copy of the composer's *Missa solemnis* had arrived from the Russian Czar.

Wieck was every bit as charming as history credits him;

his first entry in Beethoven's conversation book asks for a glass of water. He noted that Beethoven's symphonies were heard every winter in Leipzig, and "the public would take it very badly if the direction were negligent in them." Stein and Beethoven turned to his piano: "How heavily must you play in order to hear it?" Wieck chimed in with gratuitous advice concerning a cure for Beethoven's increasing deafness—by doctors in Leipzig, of course. Beethoven probably mentioned his stomach cramps as supposedly associated with his deafness, and the *Besserwisser* (know-it-all) Wieck replied, "My wife suffered from the severest cramps, and was completely cured within four weeks."

Turning to another subject that always irritated Beethoven, Wieck flatteringly asked the composer if he would soon give his admirers another symphony. Of course, Beethoven had already made significant headway in sketching the *Ninth Symphony*, but seldom spoke about the compositional process itself. Pushing his luck further, Wieck asked Beethoven if he wouldn't give one of his "immortal works" to Peters in Leipzig, "one of the finest publishers I know."<sup>13</sup> Beethoven had been corresponding with Peters for over a year. After Peters made an anti-Semitic remark about the Berlin publisher Adolf Martin Schlesinger in a letter of June 15, 1822, the composer silently retaliated by padding his shipment to Leipzig with several old or trifling pieces, at which Peters had recently balked in indignation.<sup>14</sup>

At any rate, Beethoven must have behaved hospitably to Wieck, who concluded, "This day is one of the finest in my life," and eventually "May Heaven protect you!"<sup>15</sup>

**Not only was Beethoven a hero to Schumann and his generation in general, but Wieck's reminiscences of his meeting with the composer (which ultimately lasted three hours) must have provided Schumann himself with an unimaginable sense of proximity to the titan.**<sup>16</sup> Thus his naming of Florestan after Beethoven's imprisoned hero in *Fidelio* now appears all the more logical.

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## A Century of Eusebiuses

Eusebius, however, is a much more difficult association to make, especially given the number of historical personages by that name in the early Christian era, and especially (though not exclusively) in the fourth century A.D. Previous authors have cited one or two of them, often confusing and conflating them

through no particular fault of their own,<sup>17</sup> and so a longer list probably full of its own errors might be appropriate here.

(1) Eusebius of Laodicea, bishop of Laodicea (today Latakia, Syria) from ca. 264 to ca. 269, was a defender of Christians in his native Alexandria in 250 and 257, and saved his fellow citizens from starvation in 261.<sup>18</sup>

(2) Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260/263-340), called "Pamphili" after his teacher Pamphilus, was bishop of Caesarea and an advisor to the Emperor Constantine, and is considered the first historian of the Church.<sup>19</sup>

(3) Eusebius of Myndus (4th C.), neoplatonist philosopher, was a pupil of Aedesius of Pergamum, but exercised comparative sobriety, rationality, and contempt for religious magic to which other members of the Pergamene school were addicted.<sup>20</sup>

(4) Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. ca. 342), a Greek bishop, supporter of Arius and leader of an Arian group called "Eusebians." He had been Bishop of Beirut, but in ca. 318 became Bishop of Nicomedia (today Izmit, Turkey). He shared many philosophical views with Eusebius of Caesarea and was promoted to the see of Constantinople in 339.<sup>21</sup>

(5) Eusebius of Emesa (died ca. 359), a writer on doctrinal subjects and student of Eusebius of Caesarea. He often accompanied the Emperor Constantine on campaigns and was appointed to the see of Emesa (today Homs, Syria) in ca. 339. St. Jerome criticized him for his rhetorical exhibitionism.<sup>22</sup>

(6) Eusebius of Dorylaeum, the bishop of that city (today Eskisehir, Turkey) in the fifth century. In 429, while still a layman, he entered the controversy concerning whether Mary should be called Mother of Christ or Mother of God. He was bishop by 448, deposed in 449, and rehabilitated in 451.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the six aforementioned Eusebii, there are no fewer than three (or even four) *Saints* Eusebius, all of them from the fourth century!

(7) The earliest St. Eusebius was pope for four months, from April 18 to August 17, 309, when politics between the Church and the Roman Empire

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demanded that he abdicate. He died in exile in Sicily shortly thereafter, and is commemorated as a martyr on August 17.<sup>24</sup>

(8) The second St. Eusebius, chronologically, was a priest in Rome. His efforts centered on the battle against Arianism and, according to legend, the Arian emperor Constantius II had him murdered in ca. 350. A church in his name dates back to 474, and stands in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele in Rome. His feast day is August 14.<sup>25</sup>

(9) The third is St. Eusebius of Samosata, who became bishop of the ancient city of Samosata (modern Samsat, Turkey) in 361. In that year, the Arian emperor Constantius threatened Eusebius with the loss of his right hand if he refused to surrender the official record of St. Melitius's election to the see of Antioch. Eusebius took the

threat in stride and, in disguise, went about his churchly business. In 374, he was banished to Thrace, remaining there until 378, when his greatest adversary died, and he was welcomed back by his flock. He died in ca. 379 from a head wound inflicted by an Arian woman who still viewed him as an enemy, though he forgave her on his deathbed. His feast day is June 21 in the west and June 22 in the east.<sup>26</sup>

(10) The fourth and slightly latest St. Eusebius, however, is probably of the greatest importance for our purposes. St. Eusebius of Vercelli was born on Sardinia, the larger of the two large islands to the west of Italy. Educated and ordained in Rome, he was appointed Bishop of Vercelli in northern Italy (ca. 40 miles west of Milan) in 345, and became the first western bishop to unite monastic life with the priestly ministry. In 355, he was

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a representative at the council of Milan, from which he was sent into exile because of his beliefs. Attending the council of Alexandria in 362, he returned to his post in Vercelli during the last years of his life, dying in 370 or 371. His feast is celebrated on December 16.<sup>27</sup>

And December 16, 1770, was Beethoven's birthday!<sup>28</sup>

### Schumann's Knowledge of Beethoven's Birth Date in 1831

While it is difficult to determine what Schumann may have known about St. Eusebius of Vercelli in 1831, even Beethoven's actual birth date was (and to some extent still is) open to question. Most of the standard lexica and biographical sketches Choron & Fayolle, Gerber, Schlosser, etc.—had given Beethoven's birth year as 1772, but no birth date. The Viennese conductor Ignaz von Seyfried (1776–1841), however, had followed Beethoven's baptismal record and asserted that he had been born on December 17, 1770.

When compiling his *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens* in the 1830s, François-Joseph Fétis contacted the publisher Nikolaus Simrock in Bonn. Simrock (1751–1832) had been first horn in the Electoral orchestra at Bonn in Beethoven's youth and gave the young composer lessons on the instrument. Simrock supplied Fétis with a copy of Beethoven's baptismal certificate on December 17, 1770,<sup>29</sup> but somebody (presumably Simrock, but possibly Seyfried) wrote to Fétis, that Beethoven always said that he had been born on December 16, 1772, and attributed the baptismal record of December 17, 1770, to an older brother who died at an early age and who was also named Louis [or Ludwig].<sup>30</sup> When Beethoven died in 1827, an assistant in Simrock's music publishing house in Bonn made a note on the back of a newspaper obituary "Ludwig van Beethoven was born on December 16, 1770."<sup>31</sup> This information almost surely came from Nikolaus Simrock himself.

Similarly, on December 15, 1796, Georg

Albrechtsberger (1736–1809), organist at St. Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna and Beethoven's sometime teacher, wrote him

the following, "My dear Beethoven! I wish you all the best on your name-day tomorrow. God give you health and happiness,

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and grant you good luck."<sup>32</sup> The Feast of St. Louis [Ludwig], Beethoven's actual name-day, was August 25, and so Albrechtsberger meant a birthday in the modern sense, and indeed either Beethoven or one of his brothers (also resident in Vienna by this time) must have informed him of the date.

When and how Schumann might have learned that Beethoven's birth date was probably December 16 remains a mystery. Unless it was reflected in the periodical literature of the time, it may have been transmitted orally or through letters. Simrock may have communicated the date to any number of students and business acquaintances, especially in North Germany. The date (or approximate date) was not unknown in the north: in 1819, the musical Müller family in Bremen sent Beethoven birthday greetings.<sup>33</sup> In Vienna, Albrechtsberger may have told his many students, who in turn may have told others. During his visit to Vienna in July, 1823, Friedrich Wieck may have learned it from Andreas Stein or even from Beethoven himself,<sup>34</sup> and passed it on to Schumann. The networking might be complex, and we may never know the answer.

## Conclusion

Thus, while John Daverio's decade-old observation that

"it is difficult to know what precise connotations the name Eusebius might have had for Schumann in 1831,"<sup>35</sup> remains valid today, perhaps—in identifying at least one Feast of Saint Eusebius on December 16 with Beethoven's birthday on the same date—we have advanced another step toward an explanation that both Florestan and Eusebius had Beethovenian connotations in Schumann's creative mind.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A fine survey of the journal's history during Schumann's lifetime is Leon Plantinga, "Schumann and the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik," in Alan Walker, ed., *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music*, 2nd edition (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1976), 162–78, especially 170–71.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Pleasants, "Schumann as Critic," in Walker, *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music*, 181.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Abraham, "Schumann, Robert," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London and Washington, D.C.: Macmillan, 1980), Vol. 16, 832–34; and Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 74–79. Abraham's survey is comfortably factual; Ostwald's psycho-biography, like so many in its genre, often slants factual material selectively to suit its purpose.

<sup>4</sup> Ostwald, *Schumann: Inner Voices*, 78.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Mathiesen, "Aristides Quintilianus," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition, 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie, latterly by John Tyrrell (London and New York: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 1, 905–07. Mathiesen noted that these are typical Christian names of the time, as we shall see below in the case of Eusebius.

<sup>6</sup> Ostwald, *Schumann: Inner Voices*, 79. "Aurora" (Dawn) is the Roman goddess of the morning, and does not appear in any of the Christian liturgical literature at my disposal. Ostwald failed to clarify the word's meaning. August 14 is the feast day of St. Eusebius, the Roman priest (No. 8 in the list below).

<sup>7</sup> John Daverio, *Robert Schumann, Herald of a New Poetic Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37–41, 73–75, 509–10, and 514. Like Ostwald, Daverio failed to explain the significance of the word or name "Aurora" on August 13.

<sup>8</sup> John Daverio, "Schumann,



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Robert," *New Grove*, 2nd ed., Vol. 22, 763. In this article, however, Daverio treated "Aurora" as if she were a Christian saint. *New Grove* 2's many editorial problems are exemplified at this point, when it divides the word *Haushaltbücher* as "*Haush-altbücher*," making hash of musical scholarship. Similarly, Felix Weingartner's manual *Ratschläge für die Aufführungen klassischer Symphonien: Schubert und Schumann* is conflated with another item in *New Grove* 2 and rendered as "On the Performance of the Symphonies of Mozart"! See Ronald Crichton and José Bowen, "Weingartner, Felix," *New Grove*, 2nd ed., Vol. 27, 241.

<sup>9</sup> Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Karl-Heinz Köhler et al., eds., *Beethovens Konversationshefte*, 11 vols. (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1968–2001), Vol. 3 (1983), 365–68 and 466 (Heft 35, Blätter 31r–35v). Beethoven's list of errands on Blatt 31r probably signals the initial entries on the morning of July 8. Stein and Wieck probably arrived shortly thereafter.

<sup>11</sup> *Beethovens Konversationshefte*, Vol. 1 (1972), 324–25 and 360–62, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Wieck's reminiscence was published posthumously in the *Dresdener Nachrichten* (December 6, 1873) and the *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 31 (1873), 897–98. It was reprinted in Albert Leitzmann, ed., *Ludwig van Beethoven. Berichte der Zeitgenossen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1921), I, 338–40; and Oscar Sonneck, ed., *Beethoven, Impressions by His Contemporaries* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1926; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 207–09. In his old age, Wieck recalled the place as Hietzing rather than Hetzendorf (an understandable confusion) and the time as May, 1826 (an easy mistake, five decades later); otherwise, his account accurately reflects the entries in the conversation books.

<sup>13</sup> *Beethovens Konversationshefte*, Vol. 3 (1983), 365–67 and 466 (Heft 35, Blätter 31r–35v).

<sup>14</sup> Theodore Albrecht, ed., *Letters to Beethoven and Other Correspondence*, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), especially No. 290 (June 15, 1822) and No. 313 (March 4, 1823).

<sup>15</sup> *Beethovens Konversationshefte*, Vol. 3, 368. This last phrase (or a variant) was a fairly common element of parting gestures in 1823. Even today, it is spoken among family and intimate acquaintances.

<sup>16</sup> Wieck, reminiscence, in *Beethoven, Impressions by His Contemporaries*, 207–09.

<sup>17</sup> Conflations of historical figures were common in earlier times. We need only recall that, when Wagner was composing his *Tannhäuser* in the early 1840s, the historical Minnesinger Tannhäuser (ca.1205–ca.1270) was still confused with his contemporary Heinrich von Ofterdingen. See Burkhard Kippenberg, "Tannhäuser," *New Grove*, Vol. 18, 565–66, and his "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," *New Grove*, Vol. 8, 444.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Valentine Bermingham, "Eusebius of Laodicea," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 24 vols. (Chicago and London, 1965), Vol. 8, 893.

<sup>19</sup> James Stevenson, "Eusebius of Caesarea," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 892–93. Augustine Rock, "Eusebius of Caesarea," *Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home*, 10 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), Vol. 4, 158–59. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* used here coincidentally appeared in the same year.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Hilary Armstrong, "Eusebius of Mindus," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 893.

<sup>21</sup> "Eusebius of Nicomedia," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 893–94 (unsigned).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Valentine Bermingham, "Eusebius of Emesa," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 893.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Valentine Bermingham, "Eusebius of Dorylaeum," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 893.

<sup>24</sup> William Martin King, "Eusebius, Saint," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 892; Mary Carol Schroeder, "Eusebius, St.," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, 158. In some areas, possibly northern Germany, his feast may be celebrated on August 14, as it may have been in Schumann's *Haushaltbücher* (Daverio, *Schumann: Herald*, 74 and 514, called him "Saint Eusebius the Confessor" and said that he was "pope from 309 to 310").

<sup>25</sup> Vera Schaubert and Hanns Michael Schindler, *Die Heiligen im Jahreslauf* (Munich: Weltbild—Bücherdienst, 1985), 427. They may have him conflated with the foregoing St. Eusebius (d. 309), or vice versa.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Valentine Bermingham, "Eusebius, Saint, of Samosata," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 892.

<sup>27</sup> Victor Cyril de Clercq, "Eusebius, Saint, of Vercelli," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1965), Vol. 8, 892. The unsigned "Eusebius of Vercelli, St.," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, 159, conflated details concerning Saint Eusebius of Samosata and Saint Eusebius of Vercelli into one person.

The feast date of St. Eusebius of Vercelli is confirmed in *Missale Romanum* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1961), xlix; and *Liber Usualis*, with Introduction in English, ed. Benedictines of Solesmes (Tournai: Desclée, 1952), xlix (coincidentally the same pagination). Neither the New York



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altar-sized Missal nor the *Liber Usualis* includes the other three Sts. Eusebius. None of the four Sts. Eusebius discussed here appears in *Missale* (Venice, 1519; facsimile repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), calendar:

Schauber and Schindler, 399–400, placed St. Eusebius of Vercelli's feast on August 2, gave relatively precise dates for his life (ca. 283–August 1, 371), and said that he became martyred when an Arian woman stoned him, therefore possibly conflating him with St. Eusebius of Samosata.

Ostwald, *Schumann: Inner Voices*, 78–79. In a manner reminiscent of Fétis at his most careless, Ostwald conflated details in the lives of Saints Eusebius of Samosata and Vercelli with those of the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, even referring to "his final execution," proper to St. Eusebius, the priest of Rome. Ostwald did not mention Eusebius's early or intermediate executions, but instead, without differentiating between the nominative and genitive forms, conflated the fates of the martyr Pamphilus (d. 310) and Eusebius of Caesarea (aka "Pamphili").

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Albrecht and Elaine Schwensen, "More Than Just Peanuts: Evidence for December 16 as Beethoven's Birthday," *The Beethoven Newsletter* (later renamed *Beethoven Journal*) 3, No. 3 (Winter, 1988), 49 and 60–63.

<sup>29</sup> In the liturgical year, December 17 is not a feast day.

<sup>30</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, "Beethoven," *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, 8 vols. (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1837), Vol. 2, 100–101. Essentially the same information appears in the 2nd edition, 10 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie., 1889), Vol. 1, 208–09. Fétis has a modern reputation for fabricating "facts" in the absence of documentary evidence, but in the case of Beethoven's birth date, he reviewed the literature up to that point and presented the new documents and accounts that he

had collected, concluding that the composer had been born on December 17, 1770.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Ludwig van Beethovens Leben*, ed. by Hermann Deiters and Hugo Riemann, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1908–17), Vol. I (1917), 122, fn. 1, citing Werner Hesse, "Die Familie van Beethoven in Bonn und ihre Beziehungen," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte Westdeutschlands* 5 (1879), 219. Hesse notes that this same assistant had dealt with Beethoven in 1818.

<sup>32</sup> Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, No. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, No. 266. Dr. Wilhelm Christian Müller (1752–1831), music director of Bremen's cathedral, had contacted the historian-theologian Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860), who had been appointed professor at the University of Bonn in 1818. Arndt, in turn, sent them copies of Beethoven's baptismal record, and so they celebrated the composer's birthday on December 17. Müller and his daughter Elise (d. 1849) occasionally corresponded with and through Nannette Streicher (1769–1833), sister of Andreas Stein, who introduced Wieck to Beethoven.

<sup>34</sup> The conversation books hardly account for every word said in any given conversation, which must also have included a fair amount of loud speech and gesticulation on the part of Beethoven's friends.

<sup>35</sup> Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 75. Daverio's untimely death in 2003 robbed the world of one of its finest Schumann scholars.



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