

Shoe Man



Robert Schumann was a composer of prodigious talent, widely regarded as one of the greatest tunesmiths of the Romantic era. But few people knew that he led a secret double life, one that traded on the original spelling of his family name. For while he was dashing off the *Kreisleriana* and the *Fantasie in C*, he simultaneously served as chief “shoeman” for Pringler Footwear of Düsseldorf, and did so admirably. And while he tried hard to set boundaries between his careers, shoes did sometimes intrude into his music. The tempo marking for the first movement of the Piano Quintet in E-flat, Op. 44, for example, is *Allegro brillante*, a type of German hiking boot popular at the time. And “*Träumerei*,” the seventh movement of his well-loved piano suite, *Kinderszenen*, is actually the area of a shoe’s heel counter that runs vertically down its center. One time when a music critic pointed out these and other unconventional compositional titles, Schumann jauntily replied, “Ach du lieber, das ist Schuhgeschäft.” (Well, that’s shoe business.)