

Robert Schumann
And Mascot Ziff
By
Opal Wheeler



Illustrated by Christine Price

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Robert Schumann
AND MASCOT ZIFF



CHAPTER ONE

A WATCHFUL OLD moon was still riding the skies when the rambling, red-roofed little town of Zwickau shook itself awake.

And not a moment too soon, to be ready for such a day as there never had been — not in all the years that it had lain there so peacefully beside the swiftly flowing Mulde.

Every rough street of the town was swarming with bustling housewives.

“Good morning to you, Frau!” echoed their neighborly greetings, “God grant us fair weather this day! Ah, yes, this day of all days!”

How their nightcaps bobbed in the candlelight as they flew in and out of their simple homes to polish the last windows and tidy the smiling pots of flowers, winking so cheerily through shining panes.

My, what a day it was to be!

Over on the edge of the market square, the household of August Schumann was the busiest of all. Such a scurrying and racing about as there was, with five lively children running upstairs and down, hanging garlands of ribbon and paper flowers from every door and window.

“See that the roses are on the river side! And drape the doorway in blue!” rang their brisk commands.

The skies were paling now, and small hands worked faster than ever to make their house the prettiest in the town.

“Robert! Robert!” called Mother Schumann, searching the house for the youngest of her brood. Now where could he have vanished so quickly?

But the littlest of the five had slipped away in the noisy excitement to explore the shadowy streets just outside.

What fun it was to watch the men throw buckets of water over the gray cobblestones and sweep it along with their tall scraggly brooms. Robert laughed as he poked the bubbling whirlpools that swished by his feet.

Just as the last river of water raced by, his sharp ears caught the sound of marching feet. Off he sped to the house as fast as he could go, calling out his news.

“The soldiers! The soldiers are coming!”

The next moment he found himself buttoned into his



best coat by his mother's trembling fingers.

"Stay close, Robert — no running away!" she cautioned as she hurried the others into their clothing.

"The soldiers! The soldiers!" rang the call from house to house as the Schumanns, big and little, ran into the street with their neighbors.

Robert felt himself racing through the air, to be planted firmly on the shoulders of his tall father. Now he could see everything in the whole world, he thought joyfully, and peered intently down the road with bright blue eyes sparkling.

"The soldiers! The soldiers are coming!" he shouted, his hands closing tightly on Father Schumann's thick black hair.



Yes, there were the French soldiers, marching over the Bridge Mount and the lovely River Mulde with banners flying and drums beating in fine style.

Nearer and nearer they came, the band making the most beautiful music that Robert had ever heard.

On down the street and right in front of the Schumanns marched the army on its way to Russia. And then a new cry rang through the village.

“The Emperor! The Empress! Make way!”

When the spirited Napoleon and his proud Empress and noble followers of the court in their glittering robes of state rode by in gaily decked carriages, the excitement was almost



too much for Robert. His heart beat faster and his sturdy heels thumped hard against his father's chest in time to the music.

For days the sound of marching feet echoed through the little Saxony town as the army, fifty-thousand strong, passed by.

Each night, long after darkness had settled over the housetops, Robert lay in his bed, listening wide-eyed to the stirring music, now near, now passing off into the distance, only to be followed by a fresh burst of drums outside his very window.

“No selling or printing of books these days,” sighed August Schumann as he looked longingly at the volumes piled high in the downstairs room of his bookstore.

“Have no fear, good husband,” comforted his wife cheerily. “An Emperor and Empress do not pass through Zwickau every day.”

One afternoon the marching came to an end and when the last soldier had left the little town, how glad everyone was to go back to his simple chores again.

All but Robert. The martial sounds were too deeply buried in his heart and mind to be so easily forgotten, and the next morning he was off to one of his favorite playing grounds, the Bridge Mount, a long dark coat and his pet kitten, Ziff, under his arm.

“Into line! Face — left!” he regimented his forces, big boys and little boys pushed into place by his commands.

In his father’s coat, with tails dragging behind, he was Napoleon, with mascot Ziff settled calmly on his shoulder.

“At-ten-shun!” shouted the spirited young commander. With fair hair blowing and blue eyes flashing, Robert kept the boys steadily at their drill, rapping them soundly for the least disobedience.

Suddenly the stage coach rumbled over the bridge and with coat tails flying, Napoleon raced after the lumbering vehicle, Ziff clinging desperately to the stuffed shoulders of Father Schumann's coat.

Just as the wheels stopped turning, Robert was at the steps, red-faced and panting.

He would martial the passengers to his command! Up went his stick, his eyes flashing power as a stocky traveler from a nearby village alighted.

"At-ten-shun!" barked the tiny commander crisply, frowning hard and drawing himself to his full height.

"Attention, indeed!" laughed the stranger heartily, and patting the blue eyed Napoleon on the head, he turned toward the square.

But the small commander was not in the habit of being disobeyed, and raising his stick swiftly, he brought it down sharply between the man's thick shoulders.

"Zounds!" cried the traveler, rubbing his stinging back with one hand while he reached for the young commander with the other.



“Ah —, young whippersnapper, such a lesson I will teach you, and not soon will you forget it, I promise you!” he cried in a rage.

But there was no need, for at that very instant who should appear but August Schumann, himself, angrier than Robert had ever seen him. Taking firm hold of the collar of his son, he faced the stranger.

“At this moment I am ashamed, sir, to claim this boy for my own,” he declared. “He shall be soundly punished for his dreadful behavior, I assure you.”

In disgrace Robert was led indoors, his father looking aghast at his best black coat, covered from top to bottom with dust and mud.

“Time for the sitting stool, my son,” said he severely, leading the way to the high oaken bench in the punishing corner.

But the children could not bear to see their younger brother unhappy and when meal time arrived, they crowded around him tenderly, helping him down with great care.

“Sit next to me, Robert,” they begged, and onto his plate they slipped their choicest pieces of meat and bright red berries.

And now that evening had come, Robert was all smiles again, for of all the day this was the time that he loved best. When the house had been tidied and the hearth fire burning brightly with a fresh supply of logs, the children raced to their favorite spots while Mother Schumann took her knitting to one corner of the wide fireplace.

With one accord, a cry rang out laughingly.

“Verses, Robert!”

Without a word of coaxing, the young actor, with mischievous Ziff at his heels, walked proudly to the center of the room. With the firelight glowing softly behind him,

he recited long poems that his father had taught him, never forgetting a single line.

He loved the music of the rhyming words and the gentle or quick flow of the lines that held his audience spellbound until the last verse was uttered.

“It is beautiful, Robert! More, more!” called the children.

A round of hand clapping and loving cries greeted him as he bounded to Father Schumann, to curl up under his arm for the reading aloud that always came just before bedtime.

August Schumann was very proud of his young son and taught him many things: bits of other languages, how to tell time by the sun, and to make a collection of old coins.

But there was all too little time to give the boy after writing books and printing his own, as well as many others, for sale in his store. “Perhaps you will grow up to be a great writer some day, my little Robert,” he would say gently to the beautiful child, happy beyond words at the boy’s growing love for good books.

One day, busily exploring a dark room behind his father’s store, Robert came upon a dusty broken piano, half hidden by piles of old furniture.



In an instant he had cleared off the top, and opening the lid, he looked curiously inside. Rows of black and white keys stared back at him, and soon he was picking out bugle calls and the cries of peddlers hawking their wares in the market outside.

“So, young Robert, what fine music you are making,” said Hans, a young student who lived at the Schumann home. “But there is still more that the piano can say to you. Watch carefully, little man, and I will show you the secret.”

His short legs swinging from the bench, Robert listened with all his might, and so quickly did he learn to play simple pieces from printed notes, that Hans was astonished.

“You have been fooling me, little one,” he declared. “All this time you have known what I have been working so hard to teach you!”

The small pianist laughed happily.

“You will see how much more I shall fool you, Hans,” he cried. “Tomorrow I will play every single one of the pieces in the book!”

To the amazement of everyone in the household, Robert kept his promise, and with all of the family there to watch him, he read the compositions perfectly and in good time.





Father Schumann could not believe his ears.

“Child, child!” he exclaimed, patting the joyous little face. “We must ask the organist if he can spare a bit of time to work with you.”

At once he called in Herr Kuntsch, and soon the small boy was having his first lessons with the severe teacher.

Lovingly his brothers and sister hung over the small musician, watching the plump fingers as they struck the keys so exactly, the small earnest face beaming when the tones sounded right.

“Tell me truthfully, boy,” said the town organist when the last piece was finished, “have you ever played the piano before Hans taught you the notes?”

“Oh, no, Herr Kuntsch,” answered Robert quietly, “but now I will play every day!”

Robert’s love for music grew with the weeks and soon he was spending so much time at the instrument that Mother Schumann became worried.

“Our youngest son troubles me,” she began one evening after the children were in bed. “He is forever at the piano, and nothing worse could happen to the boy than to grow up to be a musician.”

August Schumann closed the book that he was reading and smiled.

“Come now, Johanna,” said he gently, “what could be wrong with such a life?”

“Wrong?” echoed Mother Schumann, “it is that musicians have always been a poor lot, and spend their lives in cold garrets, with never enough food or fuel to keep them together.”

“Surely we have no need for worry,” answered her husband calmly as he opened his book again, “especially when the little one has only just begun his schooling.”

But that very night a strange happening took place in the home of the Schumanns.