

Queen's University
Performing Arts Office

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THE ALDEBURGH CONNECTION

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Robert and Clara at Home
with a visit from Johannes

9 November 1987

8 PM

Grant Hall

ROBERT & CLARA AT HOME

with a visit from Johannes

Theresa Lee Ryan, soprano

Tony Boutté, tenor

Monica Zerbe, mezzo-soprano

Daniel Neff, baritone

Stephen Ralls and Bruce Ubukata

piano

The courtship and marriage of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck is one of the best-documented love stories of the nineteenth century, and is particularly important in the history of music by reason of its union of a great composer and a great performer. Friedrich Wieck, Clara's father, having raised his favourite daughter with a view to her being the greatest pianist in the world, was violently opposed to the match. He did all in his power to prevent the marriage, so that Robert and Clara had to resort to the courts in order to achieve their purpose. Meanwhile, the two were prevented from seeing one another, to the great benefit of musical posterity – Schumann, hitherto a composer of piano music, was seized with a powerful lyrical impulse which caused him to produce an almost incredible 105 songs over a period of seven months, including five of the world's greatest song-cycles.

The songs were sent to Clara as soon as they were composed and contain all kinds of messages, some overt and some hidden from all eyes but hers (and ours, after the event). Code phrases abound – *Mit Myrthen und Rosen* is riddled with different versions of the name CLARA spelled out in musical notation (Schumann used a system of encoding those letters, like L and R which do not appear in the scale). The poem of this song speaks of 'the pale letters' which will 'look up and whisper to you' – literally, the letters of her name. In other songs, Schumann uses (musically) the word EHE – marriage (in German notation, E B E). The code phrases combine with both text and subtext of the poems to create a complex web of meaning and emotion.

Friedrich Wieck eventually relaxed his hostility and became reconciled with his daughter and son-in-law. But his worst fears about the marriage proved well-founded. Clara's concert career did virtually end as a result of her marriage, and Robert's always precarious psychological state gradually worsened until a catastrophic depression overtook him in February, 1854. He attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine, was rescued but immediately taken

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to an asylum in Eendenich, where he died two years later. At the time, the doctors attributed his breakdown to overwork; recent researchers, however, tend to believe that Schumann very probably contracted syphilis in his youth, which culminated in mental collapse.

On the doctors' recommendation, Clara did not visit her husband until two days before his death. She was sustained during this period by the youthful Johannes Brahms, who organised her household during the darkest days and put her on the road to a resumption of her career. Their friendship has always been the cause of much speculation, even to the extent of a pamphlet published in 1926 entitled *Johannes Brahms, the father of Felix Schumann* (Clara's youngest son). The rumours contained therein seem without foundation. What is certain is that Clara became like a second mother to Brahms, and her death in 1896 was followed only a few months later by his own.

Characters in the Letters and Diaries

Clara Schumann, née Wieck	Theresa Lee Ryan
Robert Schumann	Daniel Neff
Marie Schumann, their eldest daughter	Monica Zerbe
Ruppert Becker, concert-master of the Düsseldorf orchestra	Tony Boutté
Johannes Brahms	Stephen Ralls
Narrator, and an American Journalist	Bruce Ubukata

Since this programme is planned as a narrative sequence, and since many of the items are of brief duration, we would suggest that you reserve your applause for the end of each half of the concert.

Prologue: CLARA

Quartet: So wahr die Sonne scheint (*Rückert*)

Op. 101/8

Schumann

As surely as the sun shines, or the cloud weeps, so surely do I know that you love me, as I love you.

Er ist gekommen (*Rückert*) Op. 12/2

Clara Schumann

He came in storm and rain; my heart, oppressed, fought against him. How could I know that his path would become mine? Now is come Spring's blessing. He goes on his way rejoicing, since he is always mine.

Courtship

- Mit Myrthen und Rosen (Heine) Op. 24/9 Schumann
With myrtles and roses I would adorn this book like a shrine for my songs. They once flowed as fierce as lava from Etna; now they lie silent, as if dead. But when you open the book, the magic that binds them will break, as they whisper to you in sad longing.
- Der Nussbaum (Mosen) Op. 25/3 Schumann
The walnut tree is covered with blossoms which whisper in the wind of a girl who dreamed all night and knew not why. They whisper of a bridegroom and the coming year, and she smiles as she dreams.
- Ständchen (Reinick) Op. 36/2 Schumann
Serenade: Come to me in the silent night, why delay? Hear the nightingale mingling with my voice and come to me.
- Duet: Unterm Fenster (Burns) Op. 34/3 Schumann
Beneath the window: She: Who is that at my door? What are you looking for? He: Something sweet. She: Do you love me a little? He: With all my heart — may I come in? She: So long as you don't tell a soul. He: Certainly not!
- Mondnacht (Eichendorff) Op. 39/5 Schumann
Moonlight: It was as if the sky had softly kissed the sleeping earth, so that she could now dream only of that kiss. My soul spread its wings as if to fly home.
- Schöne Fremde (Eichendorff) Op. 39/6 Schumann
Beautiful far-off land: The branches stir and sigh as if the old gods had returned to their temple. All the stars look down with love; the whole horizon cries out in ecstasy at some great joy in store.

Marriage

- Geburtstagsmarsch (Birthday march) Op. 85/1 Schumann
Robert and Clara were married on September 12th, 1840, the day before her twenty-first birthday.
- Spanische Liebeslieder (Spanish lovesongs)
(Spanish, trans. Geibel) Op. 138 Schumann
'I believe' he told his publisher optimistically, 'that these will be the songs which will become my best known.' Now they are very seldom heard. But, with the piano-duet scoring, they gave Brahms the idea for his Liebeslieder Walzer.

PART I

Prelude (in Bolero tempo)

Solo: Tief im Herzen

Deep in my heart I hide my grief from the world.

Solo: O wie lieblich ist das Mädchen

What a sweet girl she is! How beautiful and charming! Neither the sea nor the stars, nor horses in battle, nor the meadows nor the mountains can be as lovely.

Duet: Bedeckt mich mit Blumen

Cover me with flowers, I die of love, through the sweet pangs of love. Jasmine and white lilies shall deck my grave.

Romance: Flutenreicher Ebro

Billowing river Ebro, with your banks all in flower, ask my beloved as she rests there whether in her happiness she thinks of me.

PART 2

Intermezzo: National Dance

Solo: Weh, wie zornig ist das Mädchen

Alas, how angry she is. She walks the hills with her flocks, as beautiful as the flowers but as angry as the sea.

Solo: Hoch, hoch sind die Berge

High are the mountains and steep are their paths. Oh mother, it was there my lover went this morning. I called and waved to him, but only the stream rushing down answered me.

Duet: Blaue Augen hat das Mädchen

She has blue eyes that none can resist. All thoughts of peace vanish before their gleam, none can escape the trap.

Quartet: Dunkler Lichtglanz, blinder Blick

Darkness in light, blindness of sight, death in life, sad laughter, happy weeping: this can only be love, with its joy bought through pain.

— Intermission —

At Home in Düsseldorf

Duet: Herbstlied (Mahlmann) Op. 43/2

Schumann

Autumn song: The leaves fall from the trees, the birds fall silent, life's dreams crumble into dust. But love will return with the new year, so welcome, winter, with your new, clean mantle. You will guard our treasures safely.

Quartet: Bei Schenkung eines Flügels words & music by Schumann
On the gift of a piano: Surrounded by orange-blossom and myrtles stands a fine piano, surely the gift of my beloved. The flowers will fade; but our art will always enrich our souls. May we bear all suffering and joy together!

Frühlingsnacht (Eichendorff) Op. 39/12 Schumann
Spring night: Over the garden I heard birds returning, spring starts to bloom. I feel joy and tears together as everything whispers 'She is yours; yours!'

Mein Schöner Stern! (Rückert) Op. 101/4 Schumann
My lovely star! Do not let your radiance be dimmed by my dark clouds. Rather help my darkness to shine with your light.

Heimkehr (Uhland) Op. 7/6 Brahms
Homecoming: Do not break, shuddering bridge; do not fall, threatening cliffs. Let me come safely to my beloved.

Darkness

Zwielicht (Eichendorff) Op. 39/10 Schumann
Twilight: Darkness spreads over the earth. What does it mean? If you have a pet deer, beware of the huntsmen. If you have a friend, trust not his smiling eyes. Many things are lost in the night for ever, so be on guard!

Im Walde (Eichendorff) Op. 39/11 Schumann
In the forest: A wedding procession passed by, then the gay sound of a hunt. But the echoes died away, darkness fell. Deep in my heart I feel afraid.

Phantasie, Op. 17 Schumann

Gebet (attrib. to Mary, Queen of Scots) Op. 135/5 Schumann
*Prayer: O God, in thee I trust, O Jesu, deliver me! In cruel prison, in fearful affliction I cry aloud, I implore thee to save me.
This is the last song Schumann composed*

Finale - Molto moderato, alla marcia Brahms
(Variations on a theme of Robert Schumann, Op. 23)
Schumann wrote a few variations on his 'Schubert' theme; Brahms a few years later took up the theme and wrote a complete set of his own, as an act of homage.

Epilogue: Johannes

- Quartet: Der Gang zum Liebchen (*Slavonic folk-song*) Op. 31/3 Brahms
On the way to my sweetheart: The moon shines down as I hurry along, hoping that no one will take her away.
- Duet: Es rauschet das Wasser (*Goethe*) Op. 28/3 Brahms
Water is never still, stars wend their way through the sky. So, too, love is always in motion; but if it be true, it does not alter.
- Quartet: Zum Schluss (*Goethe*) Brahms
(*Neue Libeslieder*, Op. 65)
In conclusion: Cease now, you Muses — you cannot cure the wounds of love. Healing comes only from those who cause them.
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Theresa Lee Ryan, a native of Toronto and graduate of its university's Opera Division, has studied also at Aldeburgh and at Salzburg. Her opera and concert appearances range from Courtenay, British Columbia, to Hamilton and Toronto, with several CBC broadcasts to her credit.

Monica Zerbe is also from Toronto and also, after her university years, studied in Austria — at Graz, where she gave several recitals. Last year, she was a member of the Opera Hamilton Young Company, appearing with them as Hansel in Humperdinck's opera.

Tony Boutté studied at the Eastman School of Music, where he won the Jessie Kneisel Lieder Prize. Recent appearances on the concert platform include engagements with Rochester Philharmonic and Aspen Chamber Symphony. He is currently studying and performing in New York.

Daniel Neff studied at the University of Toronto, finishing with two years in its Opera School. He was a member of the Canadian Opera company for several seasons and has also made solo appearances with Opera Piccola, Calgary Opera and Vancouver Opera. He returns this season to Opera in Concert in Chabrier's *Le roi malgré lui*.

Stephen Ralls and Bruce Ubukata, Toronto accompanists, formed *The Aldeburgh Connection* in 1982 in order to increase opportunities for young singers to perform the enormous repertoire of music composed for voice and piano.

COMING EVENTS

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STRINGENDO

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