

## Clara and Robert Schumann — a musical journey

Clara Josephine Wieck/Schumann, 13 September 1811 – 20 May 1896

Clara was born to parents who were both pianists – her mother, Marianne, a pianist and singer at the Gewandhaus, and her father Friedrich Wieck a pianist and most particularly, a piano teacher. The couple separated in 1824 when Clara was five years of age. She and her four brothers were brought up in their father's household, his children, his property. He taught Clara piano, religion and languages and organised violin, fugue, harmony, counterpoint, composition and orchestration lessons in building the concert career he envisaged from her. At nine years she first performed at the Gewandhaus, she made her concert pianist debut at age eleven and was performing in Paris by age twelve. She dazzled audiences in Vienna at age eighteen, and there was appointed Kammervirtuosin to the Austrian court. She was at that young age made an honorary member of the Gesellschaft der Musicfreunde. By this time she had met and performed for Goethe, Paganini, Spohr, Chopin, Liszt and Mendelssohn.

Clara's father managed her concert career and its financial benefits and thought he had authority over all aspects of her life, including her emotional development. The secret friendship she had with the little known (at the time) piano pupil of her father, Robert Schumann, was foiled much by her father, but on their instance that they marry his actions and damaging court cases were delaying and degrading. When Clara and Robert gained the right to marry through the courts in 1840 (she being under 21 years, so her father being her guardian) they married the day before her 21<sup>st</sup>!

Theirs was a marriage of hearts and minds – two outstanding musicians who studied scores together, challenged one another in writing, read poetry together and each turned it into song. Clara arranged many of Robert's orchestral compositions for piano and presented them in her recitals, introducing them to a wide public, and she was accompanist for groups he conducted. Through her concerts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Switzerland, Russia and England (she visited the UK 19 times on her tours) his music and name spread. Somehow, she managed to bear eight children as well! She was, alongside Liszt, Thalberg, and Rubenstein known as one of the four of Europe's finest pianists. She was famed for performing from memory – little done at the time, and for giving piano performances without supporting artists. The family was resident at various times in Leipzig, Dresden and Dusseldorf. Robert's bouts of depression, and then his attempted suicide in 1854 caused him to admit himself into a mental institution, in which he stayed until his death in 1856.

After his death Clara resumed her concert career, providing for her family (and later gathering in the two children of one of her daughters when their mother died). For her recitals, she from then on wore only black. She modelled a new form of concert program, setting aside the rage for virtuoso spectacle, and providing a balanced set of works including D Scarlatti, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin and Mendelssohn. A portion of her concerts was music of Robert Schumann (including the Piano Concerto in A Minor written for her). Her faithfulness to the scores without the addition of embellishments and improvisations focussed her recitals on the composer rather than on the extravagance of the performer. Among her concerts were 238 in Germany – Dresden and Leipzig, and Britain – London, Edinburgh and Glasgow, with the violinist Joachim; and recitals with singers Pauline Viardot and Jenny Lind.

With Brahms and others, she prepared a complete edition of Robert's compositions; and instructive editions with fingering when it came to his piano and piano-vocal works. She also edited twenty D Scarlatti sonatas for publication and also edited Robert Schumann's writings and letters.

From 1878 onward she became the principal teacher of piano at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, attracting students from across the world to the Conservatory. She made her last concert appearance in 1891, aged 72 years, and continued teaching until her death in 1896. Four of her children pre-

deceased her. A memoir of her tells that during the internal uprising in Dresden in 1849 she and Robert got some of the children out of the city, and then she went back through the lines to collect the others.

From the time of the split with her father Clara was agent for her own concerts, the programs of 1,300 of which are extant. Her closest musical associates across the years were Pauline Viardot, Jenny Lind, Felix Mendelssohn, Joseph Joachim and latterly Johannes Brahms.

## Compositions and arrangements for piano

Her father, modelling her on Mozart, had her composing from an early age, and inserting her own works into her concerts. Fourteen juvenile works are mentioned in programs but lost.

Her *Piano Concerto No 1* was written between her 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> year and performed, with Mendelssohn as conductor, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

Orchestral / chamber: *Piano Concerto No 1* in A Minor, *Piano Trio*, *Three Romances*, *Piano Concerto No 2* in F Minor first movement published as *Konzertsatz*

Piano: *Four Polonaises*; *Etude*, *Caprice in the form of a Waltz*, *Romance*, *Valses Romantiques*, *Four Characteristic Pieces*, *Soirées Musicales 1 & 2*, (No 2 has four pieces), *Variations on an Aria of Bellini*, *Souvenir of Vienna*, *Scherzo*, *Three Romances*, *Deuxième Scherzo*, *Four Pieces Fugitives*, *Sonata in G Minor*, *Impromptu*, *Three Fugues on Themes of J S Bach*, *Preludium und Fuga*, *Preludium*, *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*, *Three Romances*, *Romanze in A Minor*, *Romanze in B Major*, *March*, *Prelude on a Folksong*.

Cadenzas to piano concertos: *Beethoven in G* (two versions), *Beethoven in C Minor*, *Mozart in D Minor* (two versions)

41+ piano versions of Robert Schumann instrumental works

Choral: *Drei Gemischte Chore* 1848

Songs: twenty-four songs. Some of these have been arranged for choral performance.

Almost all of her works were published in her lifetime.

## References

The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers ed. Julie Anne Sadie & Rhian Samuel New York: WW Norton & Company 1995

The New Grove Dictionary of Music ed Stanley Sadie second edition Vol 22 2002 Macmillan, London pp 754–758

## Robert Schumann 8 June 1810 – 29 July 1856

German composer, writer, music critic, translator. Dual involvement in music and literature throughout his life. A leading proponent of Romanticism.

Fifth and youngest child of August and Christine Schumann – father an author and book dealer. Theirs was a home of literary culture and activity. Schumann sang in a church choir as a child and began piano lessons at 7; at school learnt Latin, Greek and French. He was composing from 7 years, and he and a brother organised theatrical productions at home. Added to his learning were flute and cello. He was soon writing poems and composer biographies. At 15 he established his first literature club for readings and critiques; and he translated Greek and Latin verse and drama into German. His father died of a mental disorder when Robert was 17. He decided to study law in Leipzig but spent his time instead on literature and music, including having intense piano tuition from Friedrich Weick, (Clara's father, Clara then being 9 years). An experimental finger-strengthening device caused numbness in the middle finger of his right hand and destroyed his developing piano virtuoso career.

He studied chorale harmonization, canon, and double counterpoint – analysis of Bach works – in the shift of career to composer and music critic. Set up the publication *Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Musik* at 24 years and, with others maintained this influential journal for 10 years. Meeting both Chopin and Mendelssohn. From age 25 secret relationship with Clara (foiled across years by her father but preserved in 275 letters between them as Weick intended his daughter to marry for wealth). Depression is noted from age 27. The death of father and brother, both from mental disorders is shadow over his future. The marriage achieved, 1840 was an active composition year – the year of song – including *Liederkreise*, *Myrthen*, *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und leben* major song cycles.

Early composition – symphonic movements, much piano music, songs – a natural expression of the depth of his skills in music and literature. From the early works onward, there is a marriage of music and text, and in the vocal works the keyboard is partner, not accompaniment. 1841 much symphonic music; 1842 chamber music emphasis; 1843 oratorio year with a new form established by Schumann – secular oratorio/cantata with reward in conclusion. *Das Paradies und der Peri* is first of several beautiful and significant choral-and-solo works. 1844 commencement on *Faust* – perhaps to be an opera, but after long gestation emerged as an oratorio whose conclusion is a spectacular fusion of the sacred and secular. (*Scenes from Goethe's Faust*). Much composition across the next years, works-in-progress, during bouts of melancholy. 1847 Schumann's opera *Genoveva* completed and performed but success not achieved.

Choral works occur across Schumann's life, and he established 2 choirs, conducting them (with Clara as accompanist). Recommended works to perform – *Adventlied*, *Romances and Ballads*, *Spanischer Liebeslieden*, *Romanze* for women's voices, *Requiem für Mignon*, *Vier doppelchorige Gesänge*, *Requiem*, *Missa sacre* (Mass,) *Zigeunerleben* among them. There are works from two parts to double choir. *Scenes from Faust* is a pinnacle of the Romantic era.

In summary, Schumann's piano, symphonic, chamber, song, oratorio, and choral music provide repertoire for varied ensemble sizes. Songs can be choral unison works. His vocal works are deeply felt poetry translated into lyric music. There is pictorial enhancement, emotional heightening and in sacred works lofty dignity. 368 vocal works including songs and large or small choral works that are a gifted repertoire for us.

## A representative list:

### *Part songs for men's voices TTBB*

- Op 33 (6)
- Op 62 (3)
- Op 65 (8)
- Op 93 – double chorus
- Op 137 (5) & four late works

### *Choral piece within a song publication:*

- Op 29 3 works, being 2 songs and *Zigeunerleben* (SATB)
- Op 101 5 works, 2 being for SATB
- Op 138 *Spanish Liebeslieder* – various voicings from solo to 2 part, 4 part SATB

### *Choral with orchestra*

- *Psalm 1822*
- *Overture and Chorus 1822*
- *Tragedie 1841*
- *Das Paradis und der Peri 1893*
- *Scenes from Goethe's Faust 1844-53*
- *Adventlied 1848*
- *Beim Abschied zu zingen 1847*
- *Verrweifle nicht im schmerzenstal 1852*
- *Requiem fur Mignon 1849*
- *Nachtlied 1849*
- *Der Rose Pilgerfahrt 1853*
- *Der Konigsohn 1853*
- *Fest Overture 1853*
- *Des Sangers Fluch 1852*
- *Vom Pagen und der Konigstochter 1852*
- *Das Gluck von Edenhall 1853*
- *Neujahslied 1849-50*
- *Missa sacra 1852-52*
- *Requiem 1852*

### *Part songs for mixed voices SATB:*

- Most in sets of 4 or 5 per opus. 37 pieces in all
- Opus 55, 59, 67, 75, 141, 145,
- 3 late pieces not organised into a set

### *Part songs for women SSAA*

- Op 69 *Romanzen* – 6 pieces (includes Die Kapelle)
- Op 91 *Romanzen* – 6 pieces (including Der Wassermann)

## Reference

The New Grove Dictionary ed. Stanley Sadie second edition Vol 22 MacMillan London pp 760–816