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CLARA SCHUMANN (1819-1896): THE UNSUNG HEROINE OF ROMANTICISM

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Image: Clara Schumann Aged 15 Years

“I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose — there has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?” Clara’s despondent words would surely pierce the heart of every modern female artist. How can it be that such a thought ever came into the mind of one as talented as Clara Schumann? What enabled her to get beyond this cruel and accepted opinion of the society in which she blossomed as a virtuoso pianist? Or did she accept her fate. To whom should we attribute Clara’s phenomenal rise to fame as one of the most sought after and celebrated pianists of her generation? Perhaps there is not any one person that can be credited with giving Clara the faith in her creative talents. Was it her determination to succeed or her need to live her life through music that secured her a place in history as a much-admired concert pianist, composer and educator? This lecture-recital will explore Clara Schumann’s life through her music and surroundings, her achievements and influencers. Deservedly revered by all who knew her, a pioneering female concert pianist, composer, musical editor and educator.

It is both an honour and a privilege to give this lecture-recital this evening. I hope you will become enthralled by the life and legacy of Clara Schumann both as an artist and as a woman. As a concert pianist, chamber musician and educator myself, I cannot help but admire Clara and her ability to succeed in her musical career whilst overcoming relentless trials and tribulations throughout her life. Some of life’s battles she won, some she did not. Sometimes she faced problems directly others she swept under the carpet in the hopes they would disappear. At times her heart ruled her head, but on some occasions her sense of survival and determination stamped out sentimental thoughts with one decisive step. The more I learnt about Clara Schumann the closer I felt to her music. The more I could picture her life and get to know her character the more questions arose in my mind. Some I have found the answers to, to other questions I believe they will be forever locked up in Clara’s heart, mind and soul.

Do I admire Clara as an artist, composer and educator? Yes, I do. Do I admire Clara’s actions as a wife and mother, colleague and friend? I do. Do I feel her musical life was affected greatly by those she chose to love and trust? I do. Do I feel those people, namely her father Friedrich Wieck and her husband Robert Schumann, had her best interests at heart and acted unselfishly? No, I do not. Do I feel she was, at times used selfishly by the two most influential men in her life? Yes, I do. Clara was, like us all, human. She had a special talent and with that talent came pressure, expectations, highs and lows, peace and anxiety. The laws of human nature conspired to bring her success and they also conspired to bring her tragic and difficult times to endure.

Image: Marianne Tromlitz, Clara’s Mother.

Clara and Friedrich Wieck

The daughter of a self-made, determined, controlling, successful and talented businessman and music teacher Clara was the golden child in whom Friedrich Wieck pinned his hopes for the successes he himself had never accomplished as a performer. Despite Wieck’s numerous failings in his actions as both a husband to Clara’s mother, the celebrated singer Marianne Tromlitz, and father to his children there is one aspect to Wieck’s

character that, as a female artist, I truly admire. In the 1800s women were seen primarily as wives and mothers. If they had the good fortune to be introduced to music and music lessons it was to enhance their skills as hostesses and dutiful wives. Wieck did not accept this view and knew Clara could reach the same artistic heights as any male. Clara's mother was an exceptional artist (a soprano soloist) and continued to be a professional throughout the course of her life. However, Wieck's admirable belief in equality was tainted with his arrogance, selfish and dictatorial behaviour. Marianne had an unhappy marriage to Wieck and the unending stream of pregnancies she had to endure in a short space of time never cultivated an ounce of sympathy in Wieck to lessen her workload in the family-run music business or household duties. Wieck's profile as businessman and piano teacher rose with every triumph of Marianne's performances in the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Their divorce was granted on January 22nd, 1825. Marianne remarried within a few months to an old colleague of Wieck's, Adolph Bargiel. Wieck had exploited his wife and she could not tolerate her life with him any longer. Wieck ultimately banished her from the lives of their children. Clara grew up without her mother and never lost the sense of abandonment and vulnerability this departure created within her. It was not until years later that Clara would become close to her mother again. She became a close friend and confidante to Clara.

Image: Friedrich Wieck

In Clara, Wieck saw immense talent and his goal was to create a virtuosa. He believed she could and should be as good as, if not better than, any male concert pianist and composer. Wieck was a truly talented piano teacher and nurtured Clara's pianistic skills daily. By age eleven she was also taking lessons in score reading and instrumentation, violin lessons, counterpoint and singing lessons. Did Clara's father give her a thorough musical education second to none? Yes, he did. Did he put everything into her career by making the correct connections and forming friendships with colleagues of the highest musical intellect? Yes, he did. Did she feel indebted to him throughout the course of her life for his care of her as a child prodigy? Yes, she did. Did she earn her father's love through her musical successes? Yes, she did. Even in later years Clara always attributed her success as performer and teacher to her father. Her meticulous attention to every detail in performing, concert organising, music editing, and teaching mirrored the actions of her father.

Image: Gewandhaus Piano

Before she was nine years old Clara was a member of the musical circle that met regularly at the home of Wieck. She made her debut at the Gewandhaus when she was also just nine years old. Through the diaries of Clara, we can clearly see her adoration for her father but also her fear. At times she was forbidden to practice if she had not performed well enough. This terrified her as she saw it as the ultimate punishment her father could bestow upon her. Wieck insisted on scheduling every moment of her day and from an early age and also insisted on a two-hour walk every day to keep her in peak physical and mental condition. What about his other four children you might ask? They had to slot into place, they received harsher and colder treatment than Clara. She was the star, his reputation rested upon the successes of Clara. Her performances also earned money for the family. In 1831 Clara and her father departed Leipzig for her first European tour focusing on the music salons and aristocracy of Paris. An already avid fan of the compositions by Chopin, Clara would meet and perform for him privately in Paris. Chopin's admiration for her playing continued throughout his life. Clara performed works by Chopin with great regularity throughout her concert career. The final concerto she performed was Chopin's piano concerto in F minor at the age of seventy-one. This was the beginning of many tours organised and controlled by Wieck. He kept all payment, no opportunity for Clara to perform and earn money was refused. Clara impressed wherever she performed, undoubtedly her career was taking flight and deservedly so. Her playing would be loved and celebrated throughout Europe and Wieck was determined to be the guardian of it. The arrival of Robert Schumann into Clara's life and her wish to be an independent artist did not sit well with Wieck. Many years of heartache and legal battles would torture the soul of Clara and forever scar her emotionally.

Image: Robert Schumann

Clara and Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann entered the lives of the Wiecks in 1828 to study with Friedrich, the celebrated piano teacher. Clara was nine years old and Schumann was eighteen. That same year Friedrich Wieck married his second wife Clementine Fechner on July 3rd. Clara never respected or formed a bond with her stepmother. In such a strict and regimented household Schumann brought imagination, fun and laughter to the Wieck children when their father was absent or there was a little period of free time. Even during the childhood years, to Clara, Schumann represented kindness, creativity, friendship, trust and love, albeit in a childish way. It was not until Clara was almost twenty-one years old that their marriage took place, exactly one day before her twenty-first birthday. Despite her father's aggressive attempts, both emotionally and by law, to keep the young lovers separated Clara married the one man she had truly been in love with all her life. On December 5th, 1840 she wrote, "We have been married a quarter of a year today, and it is the happiest quarter of a year of my life".

The bond with her father was severed and she had to make her career choices herself. Though a reconciliation of sorts did occur the bitterness between the Schumanns and Wieck was too deep-rooted to ever recover. Their move to Dresden in 1844 was partly due to their erroneous beliefs that Clara's father would be of help to them in Robert's ill health, but Wieck would forever spread rumours about both his daughter's career and the quality of compositions by Schumann.

Image: Clara and Robert Schumann

Though Robert Schumann respected and adored Clara's talent as a concert pianist and composer it was her ability to be a wife, mother and manager of the household that he valued most of all. His belief that she, as one of the greatest living pianists, could be fulfilled by the mundane domestic tasks was sadly mistaken. Clara could never be happy away from her art though she did refrain from practicing when Robert was composing to facilitate him. This alone frustrated her beyond belief. "My piano playing is falling behind. This always happens when Robert is composing. There is not even one little hour to be found in the whole day for myself! If only I don't fall too far behind. Score reading has also been given up once again, but I hope that it won't be for too long this time".

However, Clara was relentless and dutiful in her support for Robert as composer, teacher, writer and conductor. Though the Schumanns enjoyed much success in debuting the works of Robert there were also many difficult times when Robert's failings as a conductor put them in uncomfortable and financially uncomfortable situations. One example of this was his discharge from the position of music director of the Dusseldorf orchestra. Clara had already been enlisted to help him as rehearsal pianist, a position that was far beneath her talents. Robert's lack of control in rehearsals and the resulting disquiet among the orchestral musicians and chorus ultimately led to the termination of his position.

Throughout their marriage Clara played and performed whenever possible and despite Robert's protests did undertake several notable and lucrative concert tours of Russia, Copenhagen, Germany and Austria to name a few. Her concert fees proved to be lucrative sources of income for the household. Her work proved to be much more financially beneficial than the work of Robert.

Though it is my belief that her activities as a concert virtuosa (the title 'Royal and Imperial Virtuosa' was actually bestowed upon her in Vienna in 1838) were certainly curtailed by her marriage and children her compositional creativity was, on the contrary, actually enhanced by living in such an artistic world with Robert and their associates. At every turn Clara was surrounded by creativity be it in a literary or musical sense. I have to admit that I feel and hear many similarities between the piano works of Clara and Robert. Perhaps she was attempting to learn from his compositional skill. His compositional talent was superior to her own. Perhaps his style of writing for the piano came from his respect for her style of melodic playing and the pianistic style that they both had learned from her father. The truest conclusion I feel is that both Robert and Clara's creativity and talents fed off their proximity to one another. Their love for one another spurred them to greater heights. Their melancholy moments brought out their deepest feelings for one another. These feelings were then transported into their musical creations and activities. Were they competitive with one another's careers? No. Did they feed off one

another and learn from one another? Yes. They consumed each other in every aspect of their lives. Essentially, they were one. Robert's entry to the Enderich hospital after his failed suicide attempt in February 1854 was heart breaking for Clara. It would be the beginning of her quest to survive as a concert virtuosa, educator and single mother of seven children (Emil had died in 1847 aged just 16 months old). Clara would live her life a widow for forty years from Robert's death in July 1856. We will speak of her relationship with Johannes Brahms later, but it is true to say that Clara and Robert Schumann were soul mates. The highs and lows of both their careers were supported by each other and their creativity was a direct result of their entwined lives.

I would now like to turn our attention to three of Clara's works for solo piano. I am looking forward to sharing a few excerpts from these three beautifully crafted compositions which I enjoy performing very much. It must be said that Clara's diary entries share fascinating insights into her state of mind at the time of each composition. The large amount of research carried out by Berthold Litzmann in his three-volume biography of Clara is incredibly valuable. His thoughts are even more meaningful as he knew Clara from his childhood. The published book by Nancy Reich, 'Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman' is also incredibly insightful. As an interpreter of Clara Schumann's music, it is vital to have background knowledge into her life, her emotional state and her character.

Sonata in G minor

Sonata in G minor was composed in December 1841 with its closing two movements to follow in January 1842. Clara composed the first two movements as a Christmas present for Robert. Her diary entry belies her fervent wish to please and surprise her beloved Robert. "I tried to compose something for Robert and amazingly, it worked! I was delighted to be able to complete a first and second sonata movement, and I don't suppose that it failed in its purpose – namely to prepare a little surprise for my dear husband".

This sonata was composed during a period of great happiness in their marriage. The arrival of their first child Marie on September 1st was a source of great joy to both. They were both fully creatively active in Leipzig, known to be a vibrant cultural town. The sonata shows a complete understanding of compositional structure, a creative use of harmonic language and an in-depth knowledge into writing for the piano's capabilities. The second movement 'Adagio' really captures the soul of Clara. One can almost sense her happiness to be with her love in contrast to the melancholy for all she had lost in her relationship with her father. Both the first and fourth movements in their virtuosity and intricacy best display Clara's technical talent as a pianist. The third movement shows us a glimpse into Clara's humorous nature. She was not known for her humour but for her seriousness and diligence. A simply, yet effectively, composed Scherzo which captures a sense of cheekiness and freeness in its staccato touch and implied rubato. I would like to perform the Scherzo for you now.

PERFORMANCE OF SCHERZO (3rd movement. Three minutes)

Variations on a theme by Robert Schumann op.20:

Composed in Dusseldorf between May and June in 1853 and dedicated to the increasingly mentally ill Robert Schumann this work embodies Clara's character to perfection with its outbursts of passion and strength against an endless background of melancholy. It displays her virtuosity as a pianist of the highest calibre through its demands for sensitivity in colour, nuance and intricate finger work. This work requires the technique to perform relentless octave staccatos, intelligently crafted *leggiero* and *forte* runs. Clara had to be both mother and father, both lady and gentleman of the household at this point in her life. She was taking on ever more responsibilities of Robert's both in their musical life and in their home life. Clara's playing from an early age was never characterized as being feminine in nature, quite the opposite in fact. Her father set out to prove that she could be both masculine and feminine when piano playing required it. Clara grew up with this self-belief and confidence and this undoubtedly spilled over into her daily life and her compositions. I performed this piece in the Great Music in Irish Houses Festival for the first time in June 2019 and was asked by an audience member who loved the work, was I sure it was not Robert who wrote this piece? He thought there were many similarities between Clara and Robert's style of compositions evident in this work. Personally, I can understand his reason

for asking this question. I have to admit that all three compositions I am discussing here this evening bear some resemblance to Robert Schumann's works. Then how could they not? From an early age Robert was in her life and from as early as twelve years old she was giving debut performances of his works. Schumann's works were both masculine and sensitive. To me, their compositions show more clearly than any document can how intertwined their lives were. They were kindred spirits who both fed off each other's genius and needed one another's affirmation. They were one, in the truest sense of the word, an inseparable whole.

In Clara's diary entry of May 29th she wrote: "Today I began to compose again for the first time in several years; I want to work on variations on a theme from his Bunte Blutter for Robert's birthday; it is very hard for me, however – I have paused for too long" (Litzmann, 2:273).

And on June 3rd her diary entry was as follows: "It seems to me that I have not been unsuccessful" (Litzmann, 2:273 – 74)

With her daily duties Clara's composing and practicing often had to take a back seat. Her desire to give Schumann a birthday gift that was precious clearly shows her devotion to him. However, no amount of time could erase the genius of Clara's understanding of the piano and her ability to compose. Evident here in her Variations op.20 Clara's ability to bring to life a simple yet beautifully crafted theme is beyond doubt. She explores an F-sharp minor theme by Robert in this work. I would like to perform for you shortly the final reappearance of the theme and coda. These final pages bring this evocative and stunningly crafted work to a close. One can feel the heartfelt pain in the delicacy and sparseness of the closing phrases, a stabbing at the heart so to speak. It almost feels like Clara knew what was about to come: the agonising loss of her soul mate and the beginning of forty years as a widow. Clara performed this composition on several occasions including concerts in Rotterdam, Leipzig, Vienna and London.

Brahms op.9 Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann is based on this very same theme. Composed in June – August 1854 and dedicated to Clara Schumann one can almost feel the respect, love and gratefulness Brahms held in his heart for both Robert and Clara. He asked Robert's permission to make this dedication to his wife. The theme from Clara's op.3 was woven into the 10th variation. Both Clara's and Brahms' variations were published by Breitkopf & Hartel in 1854. To a large extent Brahms had by this stage intertwined his personal and professional life with that of the Schumann's. They had begun an enduring friendship which was to last some forty-three years (1853-1896). It was no surprise that Brahms immersed himself in Schumann's works and bounced musical ideas off both Clara and Robert. The relationship between Clara and Brahms has been a contentious debate for many years. But let us not forget the mutual infatuation, dedication, love and respect Robert and Brahms held for one another. Even in Eindhoven hospital Schumann asked for the works of Brahms and studied them. His praise of the young composer and pianist was almost embarrassing in its gushing adoration.

Brahms' arrival at the Schumann household was later described by one of the Schumann children, the eldest daughter Marie: "The young man sat down at the piano. He had played barely a few measures when my father interrupted and ran out saying, "Please wait a moment, I must call my wife". The midday meal that followed was unforgettable. Both parents were in the most joyful excitement – again and again they began and could not speak of anything but the gifted young morning visitor, whose name was Johannes Brahms".

PERFORMANCE OF THEME AND CODA (Three minutes)

Romanzen op.21

Romanzen op.21 were composed in Dusseldorf. Romanzen no.2 and no.3 were composed in 1853. No.1 was composed in April 1855 and it was then substituted in for an earlier Romanze composed in 1853. Clara dedicated this set of compositions to Johannes Brahms for the occasion of his 22nd birthday on May 7th, 1855.

'Composing gives me great pleasure... There is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation, if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness, when one lives in a world of sound'.

These words of Clara Schumann echo strongly in this virtuosic set of three pieces. Each one illustrates her determination to explore the pianistic sound world to the full and to push the boundaries of composition in an intellectual and emotional way. Her fervent belief that technique should serve the music and its meaning is fully evident in these beautifully crafted set of pieces. Clara Schumann had to earn the respect of her peers, music critics and colleagues with every composition she wrote. Being a female concert pianist during the 1800s was not an easy road.

Clara wrote: 'The mood of the Romanzen is really sad: I myself was so sad as I wrote it'. (Litzmann 2:370)

There are no records of performances by Clara, but Brahms did perform no .1 in Cologne on May 29th, 1856. The love they shared for one another, the trials their relationship faced, and its inevitable unhappy ending is encapsulated, in this work.

Romanze no.1 (Andante) follows the classic ternary structure. The agitated middle section is encased in two outer sections which are melancholy in nature and romantic in harmonic language.

Romanze no.2 (Allegretto) with its' staccato touch is somewhat more optimistic in mood. Its' delicate pianistic qualities draw the listener into an intimate, and at times, humorous love story.

Romanze no.3 (Agitato) is a whirlwind of passionate emotions. This movement is full of cascading pianistic runs and insatiable energy. (38.00)

Image: Johannes Brahms

Clara and Brahms

On July 7th, 1896 Brahms sent a copy of his Vier ernste Gesunge, to Clara Schumann's daughter Marie with the following inscription:

"I wrote them in the first week of May Deep inside a human being there is often something that speaks to us and germinates almost unknown to us, and occasionally may ring out as poetry or music. You cannot play through the songs, because the texts would affect you too deeply now. But I ask you to consider them quite literally a funeral offering to your beloved mother".

The relationship between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms deserves another lecture-recital in its' own right. It was complex, lengthy, obsessive, dependant, passionate and fulfilling. I do not use these words lightly and I do not imply that they had a physical relationship. Who knows? We have an abundance of letters documenting their relationship and there is evidence both thought about taking their relationship further directly after Robert's death. However, a short trip to Switzerland after Robert's passing seems to have settled any question of future marriage. What is obvious to every person who has researched this topic is that the bond between Clara and Brahms would last for eternity. Their relationship was based on a need for one another both musically and practically. They were the closest of friends who told one another the truth. This often caused hurt and quarrels. From the moment Brahms walked through the door of the Schumann household as a young, talented and naïve pianist-composer Clara fell in love with him. She loved him as a musician, as a person, as an artist and as a kindred spirit. Throughout her lifetime she would champion his works to festivals, concert promoters, publishing houses and colleagues. At times Brahms found the praise embarrassing but his need for Clara's support and belief in him always over came any quarrel or uncomfortable issue they may have encountered. Until her death Brahms would send her many of his compositions before their publication. He wanted her opinion on every element of their creation and structure. She loved receiving his manuscripts and at times was jealous when other colleagues received a manuscript before her. Their letters to one another were constant. At times romantic but mostly direct, honest and loving in the fullest sense of the word. Clara relied on Brahms for financial advice, musical advice and health advice. His concerns for her were sincere and as those of

a close family member would be. Brahms refused to be drawn into the supervision and educational planning of her children in later life though he did help on many occasions. During the years of Robert Schumann's illness, he played an important role in the daily running of the Schumann household.

Brahms owed the beginning of his career largely to the Schumanns. They welcomed him into their home and introduced him to their influential colleagues and friends. Brahms was a vital support to Clara when Schumann became mentally ill. He and her daughter Marie were arguably the closest people to Clara after Robert's death. Clara and Brahms were undoubtedly attracted to each other, but it would be their spiritual and musical love for one another that would endure. Brahms died eleven months after Clara. Perhaps this proves more than their correspondence and dedicated compositions the respect and love they shared. One can die of a broken heart. Perhaps this, coupled with Brahms own suspected pancreatic cancer, is one such case or a complete coincidence? The romantic in me says he could not live without her.

PERFORMANCE OF ROMANCE NO.1 (Five minutes)

Image: Clara Schumann Aged 59 Years

Colleagues and life-long friends

Clara met a great deal of influential people, worked with several colleagues, befriended many acquaintances and of course forged relationships with many musicians, colleagues and students during the course of her life. It is documented that she devoted time each day to writing letters and did not like to fall behind in her correspondence. Clara enjoyed close relationships with women to whom she could speak about practical matters and family issues. By all accounts Clara never led a carefree life, not even as a teenager. She is often described as always being serious, solemn, soulful and melancholy. Her appeal to others was her sincerity, her intelligence, her determination and her sense of survival.

I spoke earlier of Chopin's admiration for her performances. Franz Liszt also held the most profound respect for both her and Robert Schumann. He dedicated works to both of them, they met on several occasions, performed together and grew quite close friends. However, Liszt's style of bravura playing often annoyed Clara. Robert's delight at Liszt's performances of his own compositions sowed a jealous seed in Clara from the very beginning. Clara detested Liszt's showmanship, his altering of compositions to suit his virtuosic style and his lack of preparation for each concert. He was known to read a concerto in the morning and perform it that very evening in concert. To such a devoted and regimented musician as Clara this type of conduct was unforgivable. Clara was known as 'The Priestess' among her colleagues and friends. This pet name aptly describes her reverence for and devotion to her art and career.

Felix Mendelssohn held a special place in the hearts of Clara and Robert. His early death at the age of 38 was incredibly painful for them. They named their youngest child after him. He was not just an esteemed colleague with whom they had many joint musical ventures and evening soirees he was also a true friend from whom they sought advice on many occasions. Mendelssohn had a glittering career as a conductor and pianist and his praise of both Robert and Clara must have meant a great deal to them both. Clara continued to be friends with his family after the composer's death. This is just another example of her need to keep in touch with those she held dear.

It is clear that Clara did not rate musicians in terms of their maturity or experience but purely on their musical abilities. If she could connect with them at the highest level, they were worthy of her musical partnership. Clara performed with the violinist Joseph Joachim and toured with him for much of her career despite their age gap of twelve years and her introduction to him when he was just a boy of twelve years. They were celebrated for their interpretations of Beethoven's sonatas for violin and piano. Joachim also became one of Clara's close friends with whom she corresponded with consistently. It is recorded that they performed some two-hundred-and-thirty-eight concerts together. Clara also performed with his wife, mezzo-soprano Amelie and with baritone

Julius Stockhausen. Stockhausen was the first great nineteenth-century lieder singer and premiered lieder cycles by Schubert and Schumann. They also taught together in Frankfurt at the Hoch Conservatory.

I speak only of a few acquaintances this evening, but it is worth knowing that Clara earned the respect of many great musicians, composers, writers and artists of the day. If she felt a connection with someone, she held them close and always kept in contact. Her life had many tragedies and her friends were the ones to whom she turned when in need.

Clara as Educator

As an educator Clara Schumann had a lengthy career. Her respect for her father's method of teaching is evident in many of her letters and diary entries. Though Clara was Wieck's most celebrated success he did have many students whom he was very proud of. He rightly takes his place in history as being one of the most sought after and celebrated piano teachers of his day. He believed that it was important for performers to teach also and from a very early age had Clara teach her brother under his supervision. Teaching was in her blood and she taught not only privately and in Conservatoires but also gave masterclasses when on tour. The young musicians would flock to study with her. It was not until she was fifty-nine years old that she accepted her first and only full-time teaching position at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt. This position she kept until the age of seventy-two. Clara attracted students from all over the world: Vienna, London and the U.S.A. to mention a few. She expected her students to commit fully to their study. She was concerned, not only with the development of their piano studies, but with their all-round musical education, general health, fitness and behaviour. It was not easy to be accepted into her class and some had to go through the procedure of being coached by her teaching assistants for several months or years until they were up to the standard Clara demanded. Like her father before her, Clara held musical soirees in her home and invited both her students and colleagues to these special occasions. Clara was a dedicated teacher and was greatly loved and respected.

Closing Paragraph

On a personal note, I adore the compositions we have discussed this evening and many more of her solo and chamber music works. Her compositions are sensitively crafted and meaningful. I find them challenging both musically and technically. Clara, though clearly a gifted composer, never had total faith in her own compositions. It is as though she composed to please her father and Robert Schumann. Once Robert died, she never composed again, and she never programmed her own works in her own concert programmes. At the time of Robert's death, she was thirty-seven years old with many responsibilities as a performing artist, mother and sole provider to her large family. Personally, I believe a pianist as fine as Clara knew that performing was her true calling. I believe she knew her efforts were best used in championing the works of her predecessors and peers whose works still echo through the concert halls of the world today: Bach, Scarlatti, Beethoven, Chopin, Field, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms.

I admire Clara Schumann. I am inspired by her ability to perform, teach and compose despite the numerous tragic events that befell her during her lifetime. I am amazed that despite all the obstacles she had to face she held a unique position as the most sought-after female concert pianist of her time. She commanded the respect of her colleagues both younger and older. She overcame the restrictions placed upon her by her female gender through her sheer talent, intelligence and determination. She was fully immersed in all aspects of the music world. How many of us realise she was involved in Breitkopf & Hartel's editions of several of Chopin's works? She was meticulous in her editing of Schumann's works.

I feel there is much we may never know about Clara Schumann. What we do know should inspire every artist, male or female. For me she is the unsung heroine of the Romantic era. She is a pianist who earned her place among the greats and a human being whose talent and determination paved the way for future generations to come. One can speculate that she may have performed and composed more should she have existed in a more fair and equal society but perhaps the soul of Clara Schumann's playing and compositions blossomed partly because of her hardships. Concert reviews of the day and accounts from those who heard her describe her

performances as musical, effortless, meaningful and intelligent. They compliment the beauty and strength of her tone. She bears her soul to us now through her compositions. Surely this is the definition of a successful musical life lived to the full. Clara Schumann is surely the unsung heroine of Romanticism.

I would like to end this evening with a performance of Clara's beautiful Adagio from her sonata in G minor. Thank you for your attention and I hope you enjoyed this lecture-recital.

SONATA IN G MINOR (Second movement three minutes)

Further Reading:

'Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman' by Nancy B. Reich. Published by Cornell University Press.

'Clara' by Janice Galloway. Published by Vintage Publishing.

'Sounds and Sweet Airs' by Anna Beer. Published by Oneworld Publications.

'Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Vol.1'. Published by Vienna House.

'Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Vol.2'. Published by Vienna House.

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