

The Schumann's – Piano music and songs by Clara and Robert Schumann

Clara Josephine Schumann née Wieck; 13 September 1819 – 20 May 1896 was a German pianist, composer, and piano teacher. Regarded as one of the most distinguished pianists of the Romantic era, she exerted her influence over the course of a 61-year concert career, changing the format and repertoire of the piano recital by lessening the importance of purely virtuosic works.

Robert Schumann (8 June 1810 – 29 July 1856) was a German composer, pianist, and influential music critic. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Romantic era. Schumann left the study of law, intending to pursue a career as a pianist. His teacher, Friedrich Wieck a German pianist, had assured him that he could become the finest pianist in Europe, but a hand injury ended this dream. Schumann then focused his musical energies on composing. From 1832 to 1839, Schumann wrote almost exclusively for piano, but in 1840 alone he wrote at least 138 songs.

In 1840, Clara and Robert Schumann married after a long and acrimonious legal battle with Friedrich Robert's father. The couple had eight children. Together, they encouraged Johannes Brahms and maintained a close relationship with him. Clara premiered many works by her husband and by Brahms in public. In 1844, Robert suffered from depression and fear of death, and he "imagined" hearing an A in his head, though this might have been tinnitus. He recovered, but symptoms returned ten years later and led to his suicide attempt, followed by his stay in an asylum for the insane, where he died in 1856.

After Robert Schumann's early death, Clara continued her concert tours in Europe for decades, frequently with the violinist Joseph Joachim and other chamber musicians. Beginning in 1878, she was an influential piano educator at Dr. Hoch's in Frankfurt, where she attracted international students.

Clara Schumann

Liebst du um Schönheit (Rückert) Lov'st Though for Beauty

Should you love me for beauty, because of my youth or my riches – don't!

But if you love me for Love, I'll love you forevermore.

Ich hab' in deinem Auge (Rückert) I have seen in your eye...

I have seen, in your eye, the beam of everlasting love. I have seen the roses of heaven blossom on your cheeks. Now, they can never be extinguished, or wither away.

Robert Schumann

Carnaval

The word is also spelled "carnival" – it is an event where people would dress up as characters, to have fun. "Carne" is Italian for "meat", as the carnival would often precede Lent, the six-week period before Easter, where no meat would be eaten.

We meet a lot of characters, including from the "Commedia dell'arte", a form of theatre with typical personas (see starred names).

These pieces are also featuring the letters of a village called ASCH. In German, we can spell this name musically, in two ways: Ab(AS), C, H(B natural); or: A, S (really Es, Eb) H. There are two wild theories out why we call B natural "H". But whatever the correct reason, I am sure Schumann was grateful for it!

Introduction Pierrot* (funny clown character) Arlequin-Valse noble Eusebius Florestan**-**

Coquette – Repeat Sphinxes (sSCHA; ASCH; ASCH marked as silent) Papillons (Butterflies)

ASCH SCHA Dancing Letters Chirarina (The bright one). Chopin – Estrella (Star, Divine Strength)

Reconnaissance Pantalon and Colombine (a rich man with a saucy servant girl – this piece to me, sounds like a fight with sweet reconciliation, at the end) German Waltz – Paganini – German Waltz

Confession Promenade Pause: curiously named, this is the lead into the final piece:

The March of the Davidsbündler ** against the Philistines - the first March in 3-time I have come across!

****Davidsbündler “David’s League”:** The group was created to defend the cause of contemporary music against its detractors. Its two main members were supposed to be named Florestan and Eusebius, respectively symbolising the extroverted and introspective sides of R. Schumann’s personality.

Robert Schumann

Du bist wie eine Blume (Heine) You are like a flower

You are as a flower – I want to pray to God that you shall always remain as pure and beautiful.

Clara Schumann

Die stille Lotusblume (Geibel) The quiet lotus flower

The lotus flower rises up in the blue lake, lit up by the moon. A swan swims around it, singing beautifully – o flower, do you understand what he is telling you?

This song has a very intriguing ending – which replicates the beginning – it finishes on a seventh chord, which usually needs to be resolved into a final chord. Finishing on this chord is a very powerful way to pose the question musically, as well as in the words.

Robert Schumann

Die Lotusblume (Heine) The Lotus flower

The lotus flower is anxious of the sun and will open their petals only to the moon.

It will blossom and glow – and weep, trembling, for love and pain. (It is in love with the moon, but can’t reach it).

Clara Schumann

Scherzo No 1 in d minor for piano solo

Robert Schumann

Mondnacht (Eichendorff) Moonlit night

It is a beautiful moonlit night – and my soul feels as if on wings, flying home.

Clara Schumann

Der Mond kommt still gegangen (Geibel) The moon appears, quietly

The moon rises, and thoughts of love are in the air, as the earth is asleep.

I can see the lights in my lover’s house, but I sit in the dark and look out, into the world.

Robert Schumann

Der Nussbaum (Mosen)

The whispering leaves of the nut tree outside the house make happy promises to the girl falling asleep inside.

Clara Schumann

Scherzo No 2 in c minor for piano solo

I hope you have enjoyed this little portray of the Schumann family.

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Thank you very much for listening!

Gisela Meyer