

Brahms and the Schumanns

The Year 1853 brought about the meeting of three of the greatest musical geniuses throughout history: Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann, and Johannes Brahms. A 20-year old Brahms knocked on the door of the Schumanns in 1853, not knowing that he would then spend the entire afternoon playing through his compositions (Sonatas no.1 and 2, and Scherzo op.4). Robert and Clara were captivated by the young genius, being left literally speechless (Brahms was terribly worried at first they were not interested in his music at all!)

Robert wrote in the newspaper that Brahms was the second coming of Beethoven, and Clara became a huge champion of performing Brahms' new works. Despite their happiness, Robert would succumb to his mental troubles, eventually passing away several years later in an asylum, in 1856. He was diagnosed with a bipolar disorder, in fact having two different sides to himself that he named Eusebius (the calm one) and Florestan (the fiery one). We see very clearly these two personalities in his early work: Arabeske Op.18.

Upon the deterioration of her husband's health and being unable to visit him due to doctor's orders, Clara was beside herself with grief. As a result, she wrote the Romanze Op.21 no.1 in the autumn of 1853 when she was feeling "just so sad" as she wrote in her diary. It is a piece of intensive nostalgia, loneliness and despair.

The influence of Robert Schumann on the young Brahms was undeniable, particularly in Brahms' last piece he would work with the master on: his Piano Sonata no.3. This is a monumental work, symphonic in nature. We see the influence of Beethoven (the fate motive from Symphony no.5) throughout. Brahms bares his emotions in this piece as he share the sadness and anger he had toward Robert's untimely death, in addition to a budding love for Clara.

In contrast, we advance 50 years into the future, to 1893 where Brahms writes some of his most personal works: the op.118 set of intermezzi. Originally dedicated to Clara Schumann, these are pieces that show a mature display of love, spirituality, and dedication between two people who supported one another during the most difficult of times.

Program:

Robert Schumann: Arabeske Op.18
Clara Schumann: Romanze Op.21 No.1
Brahms: 6 Piano Pieces Op.118

Intermission

Brahms: Piano Sonata No.3 in F minor op.5

