

**South Bay Chamber Music Society**  
January 17 & 19, 2020

*The Thies Consort:*  
Robert Thies, piano  
Jessica Guideri, violin  
John Walz, cello  
Phoebe Jevtovic Rosquist, soprano

Program Notes by Boglárka Kiss, D.M.A.



*A Tribute to Clara Schumann on her Bicentenary*

Until the 1980s, Clara Schumann (1819-1896) was known mostly as the loyal wife of pianist and composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856), championing her husband's music throughout her life, and raising their eight children. She was also spoken of as a friend and love interest of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897). Only recent scholarship has begun to give her full professional credit: She is remembered today as one of the most distinguished pianists of the Romantic era with a six-decade long career as a performer. She was also her own manager, a music educator and mentor to young artists, and a first-rate composer.

She was the daughter of musician parents and was a child prodigy who began to tour at age 11. In her adult career, she changed the format and repertoire of the piano recital from displays of virtuosity to programs of serious works, and was one of the first musicians to perform entire recitals from memory. After marrying Robert Schumann, she raised the couple's eight children and mentored Johannes Brahms as well as other young artists. After her husband's early death, she continued her career as a pianist, often performing with the violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). She also taught piano at a conservatory in Frankfurt, attracting international students, and edited and published her late husband's works. Her personal life was not an easy one: She married Schumann against her father's wishes, losing him when he was just 46. She survived several of her children, and raised some of her own grandchildren. She suffered from deafness and other illnesses late in life.

Her compositional output includes art songs, choral works, chamber music, solo piano pieces, and a piano concerto. Today's program pays tribute to her through her instrumental chamber music and art songs as well as a piano trio by Johannes Brahms.

### **Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22 (1853)**

Clara Schumann



Joseph Joachim and Clara Schumann  
Pastel drawing by Adolph von Menzel (1815-1915)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *romance* usually referred to a short piece for one or two instruments. Clara Schumann dedicated her *Three Romances* to violinist Joseph Joachim, with whom she often concertized.

All three movements in the set follow a similar structure: Each opens and ends with lyrical material, contrasted in the middle by a different mood. Schumann shows her mastery as a composer in these pieces: She provides structural clarity through melodic organization, writes idiomatically for the violin, and demonstrates her mastery of the piano through intricate writing for the instrument.

Listen to a rendition of the work here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3XMAWnkvWk>

### **Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17 (1846)**

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Clara Schumann's *Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17* is considered one of her finest and best-known works. It directly influenced Robert Schumann's *Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 63*, written in 1846.

The overall sound of the work, which is in four movements, is quite thick, due to each instrument having a relatively equal role. The first movement is in sonata form, with the middle section featuring a lot of counterpoint, a technique Clara learned from studying Bach's works. The playful Scherzo follows, with a lyrical middle section. The Andante is a tender romance, while the finale is yet again in sonata form, shifting between major and minor modes and also using a Baroque technique, that of the fugue.

The following video provides an elegant introduction to the composer, and a detailed analysis and performance of the first movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmU2F3U3tbY>

The following link provides a rendition of the work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo20gWDJ5Ls>

## **Selected Songs for Voice and Piano**

Clara Schumann

An *art song* is a composition usually written for one voice and piano. Art songs often provide a musical setting of an independent poem or text, in which the message of the poetry is delivered by the voice and the pianist as equal collaborators. Art songs are generally performed as part of recitals or other non-staged performance settings.

Usually, program notes provide the text in its original language, sometimes supplemented by its translation. Today's art songs include the following titles, with links guiding the reader to translations of the poems:

Warum willst du and're fragen, Op. 12 no. 11

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/628>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIOonfoa0Jo>

Lorelei

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/652>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoZOIPh4BpY>

Liebst du um Schönheit, Op. 12 no. 4

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/627>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KleocjaCuKI>

Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen, Op. 12 no. 2

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/626>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXdgIA-fSNE>

Sie liebten sich beide, Op. 13 no. 2

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/770>

Performance: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5jGaKIY7\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5jGaKIY7_A)

Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen, Op. 13 no. 1

Text: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/691>

Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyI0MIY8I24>

## **Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101**

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

The Schumanns met the then-unknown 20-year-old Johannes Brahms in 1853. Impressed by his talent as a composer and pianist, they became his mentors. Brahms became a strong presence in the Schumann family, particularly during Robert Schumann's last years when he was confined to an asylum, which left Clara to support and raise their seven surviving children. The personal relationship between Brahms and Clara has been interpreted as somewhere between friendship and love, and their written correspondence has served as a source of intrigue and speculation. What is for certain is that they maintained a lifelong friendship, and Clara provided compositional guidance to Brahms and even premiered many of his solo piano works.



Clara was very enthusiastic about the *Piano Trio No. 3, in C minor, Op. 101*, written when Brahms was 53. She found it “wonderfully gripping...No previous work of Johannes has so completely carried me away,” she wrote in her diary. “What a work it is, inspired throughout in its passion, its power of thought, its gracefulness, its poetry.”

The opening movement is one of Brahms's most intense sonata form movements; even his generally calm second theme is forward-driving in a way that offers little release in the tension.

The Scherzo is understated with the strings muted throughout, and the music remains largely quiet. “I am happier tonight than I have been for a long time,” Clara Schumann wrote after hearing this movement.

The slow movement is a brief, wistful dialogue between the two strings and the piano, with the three instruments only infrequently playing together. The determined finale, with its complex rhythms, remains in the minor key until the coda brings the work to a triumphant conclusion.

Please click here for a rendition of the piece: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dI84ZMUHjhE>

## References

Horner, Keith. Program Notes.

<https://live.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/events/program-notes/Ax%2C%20Kavakos%2C%20Ma%204-page%20%203118.pdf> (accessed January 6, 2020).

Palmer, John. Three Romances for violin and piano, Op. 22.

<https://www.allmusic.com/composition/romances-3-for-violin-piano-op-22-mc0002364104> (accessed January 6, 2020).

Reel, James. Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17.

<https://www.allmusic.com/composition/piano-trio-in-g-minor-op-17-mc0002367485> (accessed January 6, 2020).