



## **JOHANNES BRAHMS AND THE SCHUMANNS: A STORY OF LOVE AND MUSIC – March/2017**

### **PROGRAM NOTES**

#### **A STORY OF LOVE, MUSIC AND MORE...**

The story forming the basis of our concert, is a fortuitous and fateful crossroads of life paths. Three of Europe's greatest musicians met at a crucial time in their lives: the charming, young and confident concert pianist Johannes Brahms, in the beginnings of his monumental journey as a composer; Robert Schumann, just 43 and suffering from severe and growing mental instabilities, yet already having achieved a magnificent output of musical works, a man considered over time to be truly one of our greatest composers; and Robert's devoted wife Clara, a stunningly capable and musical pianist as well as composer, a child prodigy who retained her stature and depth as a performing artist over the course of her life, and at that time still very much in her prime.

#### **ROBERT and CLARA SCHUMANN**

The friendship of these three musicians was preceded by the separate and equally compelling story about Robert's and Clara's long romance and eventual marriage. Clara Wieck was young when they met, she a rising concert star, and Robert being nine years older. When she was 17, she was becoming completely infatuated with him. Clara's father was stern, controlling, and devoted to Clara's potential career; she had been a stunning talent from about nine years old. Her father was strongly against any furthering of her expanding relationship with Robert; eventually, she and Robert must fight him legally for a court's permission to marry. Over time, Clara and Robert developed a bond of love filled with devotion, commitment, understanding, and admiration that remains one of the most remarkable musical love stories of all time. Breaking painfully with her father was just one of the impediments they had to overcome to marry at the time of her 21st birthday.

They married with some understanding of each other's 'place,' as well. She generally could not practice if he was working at home on his own music (which always came first; and she supported that order). Her continual pregnancies, and near-total responsibility for their full household consumes a great deal of her energy and time. Yet they each loved and revered the 'artist' inside the other, and that was so from the beginning of their long romance.

While living in Dresden, Clara wrote in her diary in the summer of 1847, the middle of a year of concert tours, a festival devoted to the music of her husband, the death of her youngest child of four births, and a new pregnancy. "I am lazy, but I cannot help it because I am always ill and terribly weak. Oh, if I could only work, that is my one sorrow." She required her own artistic activity to be truly content – this was a chief characteristic of hers, and true for her entire life. Her great love, Robert, recognized those needs in her, and genuinely supported her feelings, though he was deeply thankful for her as a wife and mother of his adored children.

Shortly after, in 1847, Robert took an offered position of music director for the Municipal orchestra and Chorus in Düsseldorf. He wrote to his friend, the pianist and composer Ferdinand Hiller: "Would there

be anything for my wife to do? You know her, she cannot be inactive." Those Düsseldorf years, through 1853, were often strained, as Robert's deepening mental anguish grew and affected his work as music director. Clara was however treated with respect there as the great concert pianist she was. She also defended and championed her husband through many criticisms and intrigues negatively contrived against him. Since 1851 she was wanting to leave Düsseldorf, and they did at the end of 1853, with Schumann resigning his post. Shortly thereafter, Johannes Brahms showed up in their lives.

#### ENTER JOHANNES BRAHMS

On the last day of September in 1853, in Hanover, Germany, twenty-year old Johannes Brahms knocked on the door to the Schumanns' home, armed with his own compositions, and a letter of recommendation from the renowned violinist, Joseph Joachim (1831-1907; from mid-1853 onwards a colleague, close friend and major performing partner to Clara). Coincidentally, three years earlier Brahms had left Schumann a package of his compositions, seeking advice; they were returned to him unopened, and without comment. Nonetheless, Schumann's reputation in Brahms' musical circle was quite appealing and held by Brahms and Joachim in the highest esteem. It is interesting to note that, at that time, Schuman was practically unknown as a composer; but Brahms recently had the chance to study Schumann's music, thus being intimately aware of its value.

This time, he was welcomed by both Clara and Robert whole-heartedly, who upon meeting and hearing the young musician, instantly became his tireless champions. Brahms spent that month with the Schumanns. Robert, as the writer for *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik (New Journal for Music)*, was so impressed and impassioned about Johannes, that he immediately published an article nominating Brahms as one who was "fated to give expression to the times in the highest and most ideal manner." Johannes wrote to Schumann in November 1853, that his praise "will arouse such extraordinary expectations by the public that I don't know how I can begin to fulfil them." This was the continual tone taken, one filled with sincere feelings of love, admiration and gratitude shared by these remarkable men, and participated in by Clara with equal fervor, and her own very personal passion and resolve. Soon after, Schumann successfully urged Breitkopf & Hartel to publish some of Brahms' works (his first to be published).

Then, just over four months later, on February 27 of 1854, Robert had a devastating mental breakdown. He ran from his house and leapt into the nearby river; after being rescued alive, he was immediately institutionalized. The source of his mental anguish remains unclear; it is generally attributed to an advanced syphilis, acquired in his youth. On July 29, 1856, Schumann died at the age of 46, in the sanatorium he could never leave, nearly two and a half years after his suicide attempt. Due to commandingly strong advice from the doctor in charge, Clara was kept from seeing him for those years, until two days before his death. They had six living children, and she was pregnant with their seventh. Brahms rushed back to Hanover at the news of Schumann's sudden turn to offer help and personal support, and particularly served Clara and the family by taking on the urgently needed attention to the family bookkeeping of their income and expenses. From this began a deep, life-long love that was to form between her and Johannes. For the next two years, Brahms oriented his life for their sake, taking on residence nearby (and living in the same house with them in 1855) and becoming a member of the family. He remained a go-between for Clara and Robert to the end, with never-lessening, genuine care and mutual esteem constant in the two men's expression for one another.

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CLARA WIECK-SCHUMANN (1819-1896) was born into a musical family. Her father, the deeply conservative Friedrich Wieck, had settled in Leipzig to pursue musical enterprises. He soon gained a reputation as a first-rate piano teacher; he taught his future wife Marianne, whom he married in 1816, and his future son-in-law, Robert Schumann. When Clara was five, Wieck and Marianne divorced, and Clara became the legal property of her father. He recognized her musical gifts, and applied a concentrated musical education upon her. She studied piano with her father, and violin, theory, and various areas of composition with the best teachers in Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. She introduced the public to works by composers ranging from J S Bach and Domenico Scarlatti right through to piano compositions by Robert Schumann (she performed music of his for the first time when she was twelve).

Ultimately, her performing career in Europe was legendary, with hundreds of concerts throughout Europe at a time when few women pursued so public a life. She was considered one of the best pianists of the times, from childhood through adulthood. She was the first pianist to publicly perform works from memory, establishing that which became tradition.

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ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856) at the age of seven, was exposed to general musical education in school, and developed a deep love and passion for music, working at creating musical compositions himself. Destined to become a highly-charged, emotional and romantic young man, Schumann would have a knack for creating characterizations, with which his music could abound. This is neatly captured in a biographical story related about him: "... as a child, he possessed rare taste and talent for portraying feelings and characteristic traits in melody; he could sketch the different dispositions of his intimate friends by certain figures and passages on the piano so exactly and comically that everyone burst into loud laughter at the similitude of the portrait."

When he was 16, his father, who had encouraged Robert's musical aspirations, died, leaving stipulations that Robert must spend three years in a course of study at the university level. Further, his mother and guardian wanted him to be a lawyer, and they had no interest in music as a profession. He tried law studies through the University of Leipzig, but over time, neglecting them instead, and began studying piano in Leipzig with Friedrich Wieck, whose daughter, Clara was nine. After two years in Leipzig, Schumann persuaded his mother to allow him to continue his studies at Heidelberg University. Again, he neglected his law studies, and in the summer of 1830 wrote to his mother begging her to allow him to take up music full-time. After consulting Wieck, a man whose judgment Robert's mother felt she could trust, it was agreed that Schumann should move into the Wiecks' house and submit himself to a year of Wieck's rigorous teaching methods. Though the intention of the teacher was to transform Schumann into a concert pianist, Robert had a hand and finger condition that became a permanently debilitating injury, most likely due to his fierce piano practicing. It decided his fate, turning him instead towards composition as his serious musical pursuit. Within five years, he began a courtship with Clara; five years after that, she and Robert would marry, in 1840.

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JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897) was born in Hamburg, Germany; his father, Jakob, played horn and the double bass. Johannes showed early promise as a pianist, at first heading towards a career as a concert pianist, and then growing into a monumental composer who wrote symphonies, concertos, chamber music, piano works, choral compositions, and more than 200 songs. Brahms is the great master of symphonic and sonata style in the second half of the 19th century.

In 1850 Brahms met Eduard Reményi, a Jewish Hungarian violinist, with whom he gave concerts and learned much about Roma (gypsy) music. This musical influence remained with him throughout his life. In 1853, he met the violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim, who immediately appreciated the great talent in

Brahms. They would develop a lifelong friendship and performing partnership together. This of course, led to Johannes connecting with the Schumanns.

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CLARA, AS COMPOSER

### **PIANO TRIO, by Clara Schumann**

One of her few chamber works, and her only piano trio, it was written in Dresden, during 1846. A mature, major work of four movements, Brahms honored her by programming it in a Hamburg concert at the end of 1854. She had intended with her publisher to dedicate it to Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (Felix Mendelssohn's sister) whom Clara greatly admired as a highly-accomplished musician and congenial woman. But Fanny died suddenly at that time, affecting both Clara and Robert strongly. Subsequently, there was no dedication.

A composer of many musical works over about 20 years, Clara often awaited judgment from Robert on her pieces with apprehension; it was not always forthcoming either. He mostly was very kind and supporting; but occasionally, he could be hard on her, nearing the point of cruelty (she expressed strong thoughts to him about this). In 1839, she wrote, "I have a peculiar fear of showing you my compositions; I am always ashamed." She also struggled with belief in herself concerning her compositions, and vacillated over it frequently.

"I once believed that I had creative talent, but I have given up on this idea; a woman must not wish to compose – there never was one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one? It would be arrogant to believe that... May Robert always create; that must always make me happy."

After completing a set of songs in 1853 (during some very trying times) Clara wrote, "There is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation, if only for those hours of self-forgetfulness in which one breathes solely in the realm of tones." When she finished her Trio, she noted in her diary, "There is really no greater pleasure than having composed something and then to hear it." At the time, she expressed confidence in its success. Curiously, Robert had not composed in this exact form yet (as he was to do very successfully), and it seems that her Trio may have inspired his thinking about composing one of his own. In any case, something appeared to have changed for her, and she later expressed self-deprecating, lingering doubts about its quality and power, saying things like, "it was women's work, which always lacks force, and occasionally invention." Her husband apparently offered some criticisms, and it may have passed that Robert found it lacking in ways, possibly labeling it as somewhat academic. This presumably could have severely weakened her convictions about it; or conversely, opened her as well to similar, honest feelings about it for herself. However, Joachim tells of Mendelssohn strongly admiring it, and laughing at him when he comments that he could not believe that a woman could have composed something so sound and serious as the *fugato* in the final movement.

Other facts about it remain. Not since her work on her Piano Concerto (written when she was an adolescent, between 13 and 16 years old) did she work on carrying out musical ideas on so large a scale. She accomplished this artistic endeavor a few months after the death of her fourth child, when she (and Robert) were depressed and ill. She completed it during a busy summer, in the middle of an attempt to cure Robert; she had a miscarriage during that time. Though she at one time described her own trio as "effeminate and sentimental," it truly is far from that, and is generally considered to be her masterpiece. It was performed with some frequency, and was acclaimed by audiences and critics,

though the praise was invariably slanted with the surprise of it being the work of a woman composer showing such skill. One critic wrote, "Women rarely attempt the more mature forms because such works assume a certain abstract strength that is overwhelmingly given to men." [this is a belief that history has certainly embraced]. He ends with, "Clara Schumann, however, is truly one of the few women who has mastered this strength."

She wrestled with the value of this composition, and with other works of her own. She wrote numerous piano pieces (such as her lovely 'Romances'), a set of powerful variations on a theme by her husband, many fine songs, an operatic concert-piece for piano, a set of duets for violin and piano, the piano trio, and a piano concerto. A substantial list of pieces, that we are grateful to have. But not a major work list. And in all fairness to this hardest-working of 19<sup>th</sup> century female musicians, with her large family and beloved composer-husband lost to her in mid-life, the times, circumstances and attitudes of her social world did not lend itself to her being able to devote a much greater life-effort to her composing, which other men may have had. All we can do is listen and let the music itself speak, and decide for ourselves about that which we thankfully have passed down to us.

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#### THE SCHUMANNS AS ARTISTS TOGETHER

Schumann once underlined the following in a preserved article about himself, and wife, Clara: "*The greater influence on his profession was his marriage to one of the greatest artists of our century, the admirable Clara Wieck.*" It went on to say that, unlike other virtuosos, "she avoided playing her own compositions, although she composed better and more solidly than many of the most famous artists of that time." His pure respect for her is unmistakable.

Though he encouraged her efforts, took pride in her work and talents, and doggedly pursued the publishing of nearly every piece she wrote, he had mixed feelings about her creative activities. To some degree, Robert's beliefs were revealed in their essence, with this entry in their 'marriage diary', dated February of 1843:

"Clara has written several small pieces that show a musical and tender invention that she has never attended before. But to have children and a husband who is always living in the realms of imagination, do not go together with composing. She cannot work at it regularly, and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out. But Clara herself knows her main occupation is as a mother, and I believe she is happy in the circumstances and would not want them changed."

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#### **TRÄUMEREI (REVERIE - from KINDERSCENEN) 1838 by Robert Schumann**

In a letter from 1840, Schumann describes his *Kinderscenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*) as 'mere bagatelles,' and not to be compared with works in the larger forms. Yet, these delightful and poetical 'childhood reminiscences for adults,' as he once commented about them, are today considered amongst his most mature and inspired small piano pieces, beloved and admired for their genius and artistry, amongst a host of major works of great longevity that he wrote in fits of drive and inspiration during his twenties. He made many references to thoughts of Clara being personally inspiring to him for much of his music.

Within the myriad letters back and forth between Robert and Clara, of intimate conversation, longings, troubles with her father, separations, self-doubts and reaffirmations, is interspersed frequent displays of passion concerning their musical endeavors - his writing and her performing. In 1838, right at the time of his completing the piano masterwork, *Kreisleriana*, he writes:

“Oh! Clara, there is such music in me now, and such beautiful melodies always. Just think! Since my last letter, I have finished another whole volume of new things. *Kreisleriana* I shall call it; you, and thought of you, play the chief part; and I will dedicate it to you – yes, to you, and to no-one else – then you will smile so sweetly when you find yourself in it again.”

(They shared some secret language in his music...) - he continues with keen insight into his own artistic abilities:

“My music seems to me, just now so extraordinarily intricate with all its simplicity, it speaks so entirely from the heart and affects everybody for whom I play it, as I now often like to do.”

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### **CAPRICCIO in F# minor from op.76, by Johannes Brahms (1871 and 1878)**

This first piece of eight in this first grouping of small piano pieces written during his later, mature years (of which he created about a half-dozen sets, of opus numbers between 76 and 119, written over the last few decades of his life). Brahms composed most of the Eight Piano Pieces, op. 76, in the summer of 1878, while staying in the summer resort of Pörschach at Lake Wörth. A close friend commented: “These are magnificent pieces, beautiful and interesting to play. They lie so well under the hand for those who are a little used to Schumann’s and Chopin’s technique, that it is a pleasure to practice them.” It is an evocative opening to his irreplaceable outpouring of these small gems of deeply expressive piano music.

A side note on a subtlety of Brahms’s character: he seems to have contrived through Clara’s daughter, Eugenie, the showing of bits of writings from this set of eight pieces, while pretending to both women that they were some old scraps of manuscript from the Schumann household. This demonstrates Brahms’ penchant for some sly trickery with Clara, to learn her reactions to his music, while trying to avoid her knowing that it *was* his music. She wasn’t fooled.

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### **ROMANCE in A minor, from op.21, by Clara Schumann**

The *Three Romances* known as op.21 are some of her last written pieces, composed in 1853. Their publication was not completed until 1855, by which time Brahms had become a devoted and trusted friend; she makes her dedication of them, as “written for her dear friend Johannes Brahms.”

However, the first one in A minor, was replaced by Clara with the piece played in this concert. She had written it in 1855, on a day when Brahms was visiting Robert at the sanatorium, and she (as she writes in her diary) was “feeling so sad.” She originally intended it simply “for her beloved husband.”

This *Romance* is the last piece she ever composed; it shows more influence of Brahms style and texture, and is more developed and tragic in tone than the original one (which was ultimately published alone, as *Romanze in A minor*). A thought is that Clara's style influenced Brahms, and what is perceived as a more Brahmsian style in this *Romance* could be because Brahms was influenced by Clara in *his* later piano works. By 1855 he had only composed up to his opus 10.

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### **FANTASIESTÜCKE, op.73 - Robert Schumann**

Originally written for clarinet and piano, these 'Fantasy Pieces' were written in two days, during February of 1849 – Schumann had first called them 'Night Pieces.' Schumann said they could be performed with cello or violin as well. In our program, we play them in an equally satisfying transcription for viola. The composer links each piece harmonically, but goes even further by directing players to continue with little delay from movement to movement, indicating that they were intended as a whole. With full-blooded Romanticism, the three sections move within changing moods, from delicate expression, through eloquence and fiery urgency. Playing it is a musical joy.

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#### JOHANNES and CLARA

After Robert died, Clara wrote her children an explanation of what Johannes meant to her during the two years between Robert's breakdown and his passing.

"Like a true friend, Johannes came to share all my grief; he strengthened the heart that threatened to break, he uplifted my spirit; brightened my soul any way he could. He was, in short, my nature, consolation, passionate admiration, and above all, the opportunity to share the thinking and work of a creative genius."

In that time, Brahms offered her non-possessive devotion, holding up her happiness as its object; she was perpetually tormented by her husband's seclusion and thus, his fate. In their early letters, Brahms was enamored with the Schumanns as a unit that embodies what he perceived to be the loftiest qualities of the human spirit.

"Even I, before I knew you, imagined that such people as you and such marriages as yours could only exist in the imagination of the rarest people... People do not deserve that you two, Robert and Clara, should be on earth at all, and I feel uplifted when I think that I may see the time when people will idolize you — two such wholly poetical natures..."

The appreciation and support of a woman like Clara Schumann would have been overwhelming to any sensitive 21-year-old musician, but for Brahms it was all but shattering. Much later, Brahms referred to that time in Düsseldorf as his 'Werther years.' What parallels may be imagined between young Brahms and Goethe's sensitive, young hero and his unrequited love for the beautiful and maternal Lotte, (the betrothed of another man). Brahms wrote his confidante, Joachim, in the middle of it all, in June, 1854:

"I often have to restrain myself forcibly from just quietly putting my arm around her... it seems to me so natural that she could not misunderstand. I think I can no longer love an unmarried girl... they but promise heaven, while Clara shows it to us revealed."

They became more intimate and less formal in their communications as time goes by, Clara insisting he drop the formal 'you,' and use 'thou' with her. This was considered a serious and special thing to do in that time, and only with the closest of friendships, particularly between a man and woman. Johannes visited Robert with regularity; nothing ever appeared to change in the genuineness between them. Yet, his heated love for Clara was openly apparent, shown in 1855:

"Clara, dear Clara... I feel ever more happy and peaceful in my love for you. Every time I miss you more but I long for you almost with joy. That is how it is. And I knew the feeling already but never quite so warm as it is now."

...and further...

“My Beloved Clara, I wish I could write to you as tenderly as I love you and tell you all the good things that I wish you. You are so infinitely dear to me, dearer than I can say. I should like to spend the whole day calling you endearing names and paying you compliments without ever being satisfied...

With heartiest wishes for your welfare, and begging you to kiss me, Your Johannes.”

Soon after Robert's end in July of 1856, Clara invited Johannes and his sister Elise to join her and two of her sons for a month's vacation in the Rhine Valley and Switzerland from mid-August to mid-September. It will never be known all that occurred between them during that month; they certainly could have discussed their future, even marriage. It appears, though, that some sort of decision was reached that they should part, perhaps with greater ruthlessness on his part. By mid-October, Brahms had left Düsseldorf. The correspondence continued between them, still infused with longing and a nearly desperate passion to see each other; yet Brahms' letters changed in tone from an impatient passion to a warm, resigned love. They seem to have slowly reconciled the pursuit of separated careers.

Eugenie Schumann later provided other insights:

“It was inevitable that he should recognize that the destiny he had to fulfill was irreconcilable with single-minded devotion to a friendship. To recognize this and immediately to seek a way out was the natural outcome of his virile nature... Without doubt, he had had a hard struggle with himself before he had steered his craft in a fresh direction. He never got over the self-reproach of having wounded my mother's feelings at the time, and felt that this could never be undone.”

As four months pass since Robert's death, it was apparent that, though Clara witnessed his deterioration, his death delivered a shock of grief for her. Brahms's affectionate devotion became her only comfort. She threw herself into promoting and organizing her late husband's compositions, which she performed unwearingly around Europe, while managing controls over her seven children. But she was equally enchanted by Brahms's own genius — she praised his work privately, and extolled it publicly. This mutuality of artistic admiration was central to their complex love, and akin (but not just the same, and tempered by life and age) to the nature of what her shared artistic relationship had been with Robert. Clara wrote in 1858,

“That I am often mightily captivated by the wealth of your genius, that you always seem to be one on whom heaven has showered its fairest gifts and that I love you and honor you for so many magnificent qualities... I have always considered myself so fortunate to be to you a friend who understands you, and who is able to recognize your value as a musician and as a man.”

What at first appeared as his one-sided infatuation of her, was deepening in time, within her own affections. At the end of her lengthy letter, Clara added,

“I am waiting for another letter, my Johannes. If only I could find longing as sweet as you do. It only gives me pain and fills my heart with unspeakable woe. Farewell! Think kindly of Your Clara. Write me as often as you can... and whence would good cheer come to me if not from you?”

In a letter from February of 1861 (the year Brahms finished his *Piano Quartet in G minor*), Clara touched on another essential element — their shared artistic integrity coupled into bonds of extreme closeness:

“You cannot imagine how sad I am when I feel I have not put my heart into my playing. To me it is as if I had done an injury not only to myself but also to art. I have been talking as if you had been patiently sitting listening at my side all the while. If only it were so! Oh, write to me often, my beloved friend! You know how you can show your love in this way, particularly when I can feel that you do it willingly and from your heart. Greet your dear ones for me and for yourself a thousand greetings from, Your devoted Clara.”

For whatever reasons, Brahms avoided matrimony, and Clara never re-married. The exceptional quality of their friendship was recognized by everyone who knew them. They remained, for the rest of their lives, ‘best friends’, in the deepest meaning of that phrase. They sustained it through myriad jealousies, reproaches, and personal tiffs.

He also dedicated numerous compositions to Clara, with sincere gratitude and a great trust in her personal sensitivity for his music, which she championed frequently over his entire career.

Brahms was personally reserved, and thought to be secretive; yet he had many close friends. Over time, however, disagreements often arose and intimacies faded. Though friends never doubted his genius and integrity, his personal gruffness alienated many associates. His relationship with Clara, however, was unique, implying a faith and trust to a degree of which he had nowhere else. It was truly a foundation of his life.

When Clara Schumann died at the age of 76, Johannes Brahms survived her by just eleven months.

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### **PIANO QUARTET IN G MINOR, by Johannes Brahms**

Written between 1856 and 1861, it was premiered in Hamburg during 1861, with Clara Schumann at the piano. Brahms, in his characteristic fashion, started in his twenties where his predecessors had left off after years of experience (Beethoven with his development of deep, masterful string quartets; Schumann and his expanding chamber works). Brahms wrote a large-scale piano trio (Op. 8) when only 21 (much later, he substantially revised this work, but allowed both versions to circulate, and even the first version is remarkably mature), and was only 28 when he finished this first piano quartet, soon to be followed by a second, in A major. In his excellent Brahms monograph, Malcolm MacDonald called this group of works “symphonic in their formal ambitions and range of contrast.” Of this piano quartet, MacDonald said: “In fact, the work seems continually to strive beyond its chosen medium, towards an orchestral sense of color, scope of expression and developmental range.” According to MacDonald, the first movement of Brahms's *Piano Quartet in G minor* was the most searching sonata movement Brahms had yet written. It is also perhaps his darkest, most tragic instrumental movement to date.

The ‘scherzo & trio’ type movement was placed second. It was originally titled *Scherzo*, but Brahms re-titled it “Intermezzo” because of its large layout and subdued character. Although the main theme of the slow third movement is intensely lyrical, the piece is most notable for its extended and brilliant central triple-time march. The finale, a virtuoso showpiece, is an early example of his explicitly gypsy-inspired music, a style that would serve him well throughout his career. Titled *Rondo alla Zingarese*, which means ‘Rondo in the gypsy style’, it is thus nicknamed the *Gypsy Rondo*. It was highly praised by

his Hungarian violinist friend Joseph Joachim (who thought the first movement ‘undisciplined’) as an accurate imitation of Hungarian idioms. Its sectionalized nature balances the organically developmental first movement. Rarely did Brahms write anything as viscerally exciting as the last two pages of this piece.

The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer, Arnold Schoenberg had a special connection to Brahms, whom he had met in person in the 1890s. His early works had been profoundly influenced by Brahms, whose music he continued to study and analyze all his life. He was especially fond of this quartet using it as an example of Brahms’s early approach to what he called ‘developing variation.’ He arranged the piece for full orchestra, skillfully coloring such passages as the slow movement’s march section. This orchestrated version was made into the ballet *Brahms–Schoenberg Quartet* by George Balanchine. The Hungarian-born composer Ernő Dohnányi, from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, transcribed the fourth movement as a bravura showpiece for solo piano.

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#### *FINE!* - A CONTEMPORARY NOTE

In a final note, there is an Australian film right now in development called *The Variations*, all about this exact musical love story involving the three composers. And in a final tribute here, the Pulitzer-winning poet Lisel Mueller devoted a lovely poem to the remarkable love formed between Clara and Johannes, one that also continually generates a heated and modern controversy over the extent of their full relationship. Worth pondering, it is to be found in her 1996 collection, *Alive Together: New and Selected Poems*.

#### *ROMANTICS - Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann*

The modern biographers worry  
“how far it went,” their tender friendship.  
They wonder just what it means  
when he writes he thinks of her constantly,  
his guardian angel, beloved friend.  
The modern biographers ask  
the rude, irrelevant question  
of our age, as if the event  
of two bodies meshing together  
establishes the degree of love,  
forgetting how softly Eros walked  
in the nineteenth-century, how a hand  
held overlong or a gaze anchored  
in someone’s eyes could unseat a heart,

and nuances of address not known  
in our egalitarian language  
could make the redolent air  
tremble and shimmer with the heat  
of possibility. Each time I hear  
the *Intermezzi*, sad  
and lavish in their tenderness,  
I imagine the two of them  
sitting in a garden  
among late-blooming roses  
and dark cascades of leaves,  
letting the landscape speak for them,  
leaving us nothing to overhear.

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