

**West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021**  
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presents

**Bantry and Beyond**

*The Romantics*

**7. Romantic Triangle**

Filmed at Studio 150 Bethlehemkerk, Amsterdam

**Dana Zemtsov** [viola]  
**Anna Fedorova** [piano]

**Robert Schumann**  
*Adagio and Allegro Op.70*

*Märchenbilder for viola and piano*

**Clara Schumann**  
*Three Romances Op.22*

**Brahms**  
*Viola Sonata No.2 in E flat Op.120/2*

**Robert Schumann [1810-1856]**

***Adagio and Allegro in A flat Op.70* [1849]**

1. *Adagio - Langsam mit innigem Ausdruck* [attacca]
2. *Allegro - rasch und feurig*

The year 1849 saw Schumann write a bewildering series of multi-purpose chamber works and works for children. As a result of spending so much time on his opera *Genoveva*, Schuman was in financial difficulties in 1848. Clara had four children during their time in Dresden from 1845-1850, so she was not in a position to rescue the family finances with regular concert tours. Worse still his publisher, Breitkopf and Härtel, refused to accept his *Album für die Jugend* for publishing, though he soon changed his tune when it became a runaway success under another imprint.

Buoyed by this success, Schumann wrote forty works during 1849, mostly choral works for the legions of amateur choirs and so-called *Hausmusik* for domestic performance both of which sold well and more than doubled his composition income. To increase demand for his *Hausmusik* compositions, Schumann made sure that any one work could be played by several different instruments. This, along with his infuriating habit of giving two works the same or similar titles, makes negotiating a path through Schumann's chamber music far from straightforward.

*Adagio and Allegro* can be played by a cellist or even a violinist, but it was in fact written for the horn. It was written on 14 February, so appropriately the *Adagio* began life as a *Romanze*. Also the Romantics associated the key of A flat major with expressions of love. The *Adagio* is dreamy and nocturnal leading straight into the fiery *Allegro*. This is in ABACABA form, with the second episode acting as the still centre.  
*Francis Humphrys*

**Robert Schumann [1810-1856]**

***Märchenbilder Op.113* [1851]**

1. *Nicht Schnell*
2. *Lebhaft*
3. *Rasch*
4. *Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck*

"Childish pranks...there's not much to it". This is apparently how Schumann described these four delightful pieces for viola and piano. He was talking to William Joseph von Wasielewski to whom Schumann had dedicated the four *Märchenbilder* in 1851. One hopes von Wasielewski did not take this remark too seriously.

The Schumanns (Clara, Robert and five children) had moved to Düsseldorf from Dresden the previous year. Schumann had taken up the music directorship of the Düsseldorf opera and orchestra. Von Wasielewski was the leader of the orchestra and it was clearly in

Schumann's interests to establish good relations with him. For the first season things went very well. Only later did Schumann's mental health and his relations with the orchestra begin to deteriorate; eventually leading to his painful death in a mental hospital five years later.

The four Märchenbilder for viola and piano are among a number of lighter chamber works for "unusual" combinations of instruments, which Schumann had begun to compose while in Dresden. Others include pieces for clarinet and piano, oboe and piano and horn and piano. In the score of the Märchenbilder or "Fairy Tale Images" there is no mention of which fairy tales or images Schumann was referring to. However in his Journal he mentions that the first two refer to Rapunzel, the third to a sinister dance between Rumpelstiltskin and the fairies and the fourth to Sleeping Beauty.

The four pieces form a convincing whole. As one critic put it, there are "thematic correlations" between them. The key structure; D minor – F major – D minor – D major also serves to hold them together. The opening piece (nicht schnell or not fast) begins with a charming, slightly stately theme on the cello. This is taken up by the piano and the two instruments pass phrases between each other as equals for the remainder of the piece. The opening theme is developed; there are a couple of climaxes and some lovely minor key modulations. The music remains calm even serene. The brief coda is decorated with trills.

The exuberant second piece (lebhaft or lively) opens with the viola double stopping with a touch of spiccato. It's a kind of off-beat dance (it's in two time rather than three). There are two brief calmer interludes before the dance like theme returns. Again Schumann adds a brief, witty coda. Dancing with the fairies must have been a fast and furious business according to the opening of the third piece (rasch or quick). Schumann again manages to include two slower interludes in this the briefest of the four pieces. The second interlude is wonderfully woozy. At the end, Schumann interweaves all three ideas together.

In the final piece (langsam or slowly) the theme which has been partly referred to in the three previous pieces receives a full statement. This wonderful tune, again equally shared by the viola and piano, provides a splendidly sumptuous conclusion to these four marvellous pictures.

Von Wasielewski went on to write the first biography of Schumann. In it he argues that Schumann's compositions from his final years are substantially inferior compared to his earlier work. This idea persists, in some quarters, to this day. If only von Wasielewski had listened more carefully to these Märchenbilder, which were, after all, dedicated to him, he might not have made that judgement.

*David Winter*

**Clara Schumann** [1819-1896]

***Three Romances Op.22*** [1853]

*“Clara has composed a series of small pieces, which show a musical and tender ingenuity such as she never attained before. But to have children, and a husband who is always living in the realm of imagination, does 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.”*

– Robert Schumann

With such a tribute one can only wonder what Clara's compositional output might have been if she had more free time. However, given her professional achievements as a musician and the quality of the compositions she did write, she certainly owes no one any apologies that she didn't write more.

Clara did a great deal more than have eight children with a mentally unstable husband – she was one of the most famous virtuoso pianists of her time, toured all over Europe and was the primary breadwinner of the family (much to Robert's dismay). She was a veritable wonder-woman – musician, composer, arranger, wife, mother, muse – an extraordinary personality who possessed not only great talent and energy, but great friendships and relationships with those around her, especially Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim. Brahms of course became the mainstay of the Schumann household after Robert was committed to the asylum, and makes up the third side this programmes Romantic Triangle. But the *Three Romances* is dedicated to Joachim and he and Clara performed it together to great acclaim. They remain among Clara's most popular compositions. They are Romantic in every sense of the word – emblematic of the Romantic era of music, of the music of the Romance form, and of course, romantic in their composition – emotional, charming, truly beautiful melodies. The work is developmental and idiomatic, with themes changing as they progress with dynamics, harmonies and technique. As one critic wrote at the time *“All three pieces display an individual character conceived in a truly sincere manner and written in a delicate and fragrant hand.”*

*Helen Dawson*

**Johannes Brahms** [1833-1897]

***Sonata for Clarinet/Viola No.2 in E flat Op.120/2*** [1894]

1. *Allegro amabile*
2. *Allegro appassionato*
3. *Andante con moto – Allegro non troppo*

Throughout his career Brahms composed music that showed his love of the viola, beginning with the two gorgeous string sextets, which contain what often amounts to solo parts for both violas – as you can hear in the Festival Finale this year. In numerous other places we find Brahms picking out the viola, for instance the two string quintets, the two exquisite viola songs and the third movement of his Third Quartet. So when he was inspired to write the four late clarinet works, it was quite natural for him to provide alternative viola parts. This worked particularly well for the two sonatas.

The E flat Sonata is a fantasia-like conception in three movements, none of them really slow, an unusually relaxed sonata form followed by an unexpectedly powerful scherzo concluding with a glowing set of variations. It opens with a gently undulating melody that immediately sets the mood for this gentle work. Impassioned outbursts are firmly quelled and the flow is not interrupted by any obvious divisions between exposition, development and recapitulation. With the need for lyricism already assuaged, Brahms dispenses with a slow movement and goes straight to the scherzo. This is in the minor mode but sweeps by full of confidence. The Trio is built on a proud but noble *sostenuto* melody first declaimed by the piano and then softening for the entry of the viola. It develops a fine climax before fading out and letting the scherzo sweep back. The *Andante con moto* is a set of five variations on a classically poised and richly harmonic theme of fourteen bars with no repeats. The first four variations seem primarily concerned to simplify, paring the theme down to its smallest note values. Finally Brahms throws his restraint to one side and the fifth variation bursts out passionately before flowing directly into the tranquil coda that returns to the major before a final brief display of virtuosity in both instruments.

*Francis Humphrys*