WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 11 January 2023 7.30pm

Mother Clara A *Liederspiel* by Graham Johnson

Janet Suzman Clara Alexandra Gilbreath Eugenie Sophie Rennert mezzo-soprano Roderick Williams baritone Graham Johnson piano

Mother Clara will include the following songs and extracts:

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer Op. 105 No. 2 (1886)

In stiller Nacht WoO. 33 No. 42 (by 1893-4)

Blinde Kuh Op. 58 No. 1 (1871)

Nachtigallen schwingen lustig Op. 6 No. 6 (1853)

Wir wandelten Op. 96 No. 2 (1884)

In Waldeseinsamkeit Op. 85 No. 6 (1878)

Bei dir sind meine Gedanken Op. 95 No. 2 (by 1884)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Der Abendstern from Lieder-Album für die Jugend Op. 79

(1849)

Johannes Brahms Vergangen ist mir Glück und Heil Op. 48 No. 6 (by 1859-60)

Beim Abschied Op. 95 No. 3 (?1883-4)

Robert Schumann Der Dichter spricht from *Kinderszenen* Op. 15 (1838)

Interval

Robert Schumann Sommerruh (1849)

Johannes Brahms Dornröschen WoO. 31 No. 1 (1857)

Sandmännchen WoO. 31 No. 4 (1857) Meine Liebe ist grün Op. 63 No. 5 (1873)

Edward Op. 75 No. 1 (1877-8)

Robert Schumann Du bist wie eine Blume from *Myrthen* Op. 25 (1840)

Extract from Romance in F sharp Op. 28 No. 2 (1839)

Johannes Brahms O Tod from *Vier ernste Gesänge* Op. 121 (1896)

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Aimez-vous Brahms? is the title of a French novel written in the 1950s, but 'Aimez-vous Clara?' is a far more recent question. A negative answer still seems unthinkable for most music lovers. The beautiful and noble Clara Wieck had inspired the composing of masterpiece after masterpiece, and Robert Schumann's reverence for his bride-to-be has been gratefully echoed by music lovers through the ages. In older age Clara became a legendary matriarch of unimpeachable seriousness and dignity, a pioneer who made playing the piano in public a respectable profession for younger women, even for those with affluent parents. In the closing quarter of the 20th Century her talents as a composer came to the fore, adding to the lustre of her name.

There have always been a few dissenting voices: if she and her supporters found Liszt unbearably flashy and insincere, his acolytes found Clara prim and limited in imagination and virtuosity, particularly later in her career when photographs often show her stony-faced and burdened with the cares of the world. She and Cosima Wagner were living proof that being a great composer's widow was no laughing matter. Both were enthroned at different ends of a musical spectrum as far apart, say, as Baker Street and South Kensington: the Wagner-inebriated Royal Academy of Music was unofficially at war for years with the Brahms-besotted Royal College. Over the years there have been several brickbats aimed in Clara's direction: in the 1920s a privately published polemic accused Brahms of the fatherhood of Felix Schumann, the youngest Schumann child, something easily disproved by the fact that Robert Schumann in his diary marked the days of sexual congress with Clara with an asterisk (it was his taking a different kind of risk in 1828 that eventually killed him in 1856). More recently (2010) the psychiatrist Uwe Henrik Peters in his *Gefangen im Irrenhaus* ('Imprisoned in the asylum') makes a painstakingly documented case for Robert having been well enough to return from Endenich to be cared for in his own home; Peters believes that it was Clara's deliberate decision to keep him institutionalised until his death so she could get on at last with her playing career which had been on ice for 13 child-bearing years (apart from a visit to Russia in 1844).

It seems clear to me that Clara, for all her famed *Innigkeit* as a pianist, was a tough cookie, self-centred in that self-protective way not uncommon among great performing artists. She was unsurprisingly challenged by the demands of motherhood and (especially in her case, with seven children and nine grandchildren) its formidable obligations.

These younger Schumanns are the invisible participants (apart from the very present Eugenie) in *Mother Clara*:

Marie Schumann (1841-1929) was her mother's lifelong secretary and selfless carer.

Elise Schumann (1843 -1928) married and went to America for a number of years. The most unbiddable of the clan, she was the only one of the children who largely escaped her mother's influence as an adult. Julie Schumann (1845-1872) was perhaps the most beautiful of the Schumann children; she died of consumption leaving two young Italian-speaking children in Clara's care.

Emil Schumann (1846-1847) died at the age of 16 months

Ludwig Schumann (1848-1899) was a inmate of Colditz mental hospital for 30 years; he was placed there by his mother when he was 20.

Ferdinand Schumann (1849-1891) became addicted to narcotics after serving as a soldier in the Franco-Prussian war; this led to Clara taking over the custody and support of his seven children.

Eugenie Schumann (1851-1938) was a piano teacher who lived for 20 years in England with her partner, the mezzo-soprano Marie Fillunger, an interpreter and friend of Brahms.

Felix Schumann (1854-1879) was a gifted young poet; he died of tuberculosis in his mother's home in Frankfurt, aged 25.

Each of them had a variously constrained, curtailed, exiled or unfulfilled life; they seem to have delighted their erratically solicitous father, but were lifelong disappointments to Clara who perhaps expected genius to manifest itself in children of such parentage. In terms of veracity Mother Clara is probably *The Crown* of my work: there is a regal figure at the heart of it, but in the absence of knowing everything that truly happened, invention and conjecture stand side-by-side with research. I have worked on the premise that Eugenie Schumann had returned to Frankfurt from England to spend time with her ailing mother who died on 20 May 1896. There had been an estrangement between them after Clara, a few years earlier, had ejected Eugenie's lover Marie Fillunger from the house in Frankfurt, accusing her of theft, clearly a trumped-up charge. There is no evidence that a reconciliation or meeting of this kind between mother and daughter took place, but also no evidence that it did not. Many of the details are taken from Eugenie's own informative but anodyne book about life in the Schumann family, something of a whitewash, and written only after her mother's death. The tone of the book leaves posterity with no hint of a rift.

I am most grateful to Janet Suzman who has contributed to this project both sage advice and multiple revisions – the stilted English of books translated from the German more than a hundred years ago had to be loosened and reworked, and total faithfulness to the sources would have made for a lifeless theatrical experience. The mixing of songs with the spoken word has been my lifelong preoccupation, but the creation of stage dialogue has been a learning experience of another order.

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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer Op. 105

My sleep grows ever quieter

No. 2 (1886-8) Hermann Lingg

My sleep grows ever quieter, only my grief, like a veil, lies trembling over me.
I often hear you in my dreams calling outside my door, no one keeps watch and lets you in, I awake and weep bitterly.

Yes, I shall have to die,
you will kiss another
when I am pale and cold.
Before May breezes blow,
before the thrush sings in the wood;
if you would see me once again,
come soon, come soon!

In stiller Nacht WoO. **33 No. 42** (by 1893-4)

Traditional

In stiller Nacht, zur ersten Wacht,

Ein Stimm' begunnt zu klagen, Der nächt'ge Wind hat süss und lind

Zu mir den Klang getragen. Von herben Leid und Traurigkeit

Ist mir das Herz zerflossen, Die Blümelein, mit Tränen rein

Hab' ich sie all' begossen.

Der schöne Mond will untergahn,

Für Leid nicht mehr mag scheinen,

Die Sterne lan ihr Glitzen stahn,

Mit mir sie wollen weinen. Kein Vogelsang noch Freudenklang

Man höret in den Lüften, Die wilden Tier' trauern auch

In Steinen und in Klüften.

In silent night

In silent night, at first watch,
a voice begins to lament.
The night wind has sweetly and gently carried the sound to me.
With bitter pain and sorrow
my heart is melted.
With simple tears I have watered
all the little flowers.

The lovely moon will now set,
for sorrow it no longer wants to shine,
the stars stop their gleaming,
they want to weep with me.
No birdsong nor joyous sounds
can be heard in the air.
Even the wild beasts grieve with me
in rocks and ravines.

Blinde Kuh Op. 58 No. 1 Blind man's buff

Anonymous trans. August Kopisch

Im Finstern geh' ich suchen, Mein Kind, wo steckst du wohl? Ach, sie versteckt sich immer, Dass ich verschmachten soll!

Im Finstern geh' ich suchen, Mein Kind, wo steckst du wohl? Ich, der den Ort nicht finde,

Ich irr' im Kreis umher!
Wer um dich stirbt,

Kindchen, erbarm dich, Und komm herzu! Ja, komm herzu, Herzu, herzu!

Der hat keine Ruh'!

I'm searching in the dark, where are you hiding, my child?

Alas, she always hides – to make me pine for her!

I'm searching in the dark, where are you hiding, my child? I can't find the place, I'm running round in circles!

He who's dying for you can find no peace!
Child, take pity,
and come out here!
Yes, come out here,
out here, out here!

Nachtigallen schwingen lustig Op. 6 No. 6

August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben

Nachtigallen schwingen Lustig ihr Gefieder, Nachtigallen singen Ihre alten Lieder, Und die Blumen alle, Sie erwachen wieder Bei dem Klang und Schalle Aller dieser Lieder.

Und meine Sehnsucht wird zur Nachtigall Und fliegt in die blühende Welt hinein, Und fragt bei den Blumen überall,

Wo mag doch mein, mein Blümchen sein?

Und die Nachtigallen Schwingen ihren Reigen Unter Laubeshallen Zwischen Blütenzweigen, Von den Blumen allen Aber ich muss schweigen. Unter ihnen steh ich Traurig sinnend still: Eine Blume seh ich, Die nicht blühen will.

Nightingales joyfully flutter

Nightingales joyfully flutter their feathers, nightingales sing their old songs, and the flowers wake again at the tones and sounds of all these songs.

And my longing becomes a nightingale and flies out into the blossoming world, and asks everywhere of every flower, where might my own floweret be?

And the nightingales flutter their dances beneath leafy arbours among blossoming boughs, but I must keep silent about all the flowers. I stand among them sadly lost in silent thought; I see a flower that does not wish to bloom.

Wir wandelten Op. 96 No. 2 (1884)

Georg Friedrich Daumer, after Sándor Petőfi

We were walking

Wir wandelten, wir zwei zusammen.

Ich war so still und du so stille:

Ich gäbe viel, um zu erfahren,

Was du gedacht in jenem Fall.

Was ich gedacht unausgesprochen Verbleibe das! Nur Eines sag'

So schön war Alles, was ich dachte.

So himmlisch heiter war es all!

In meinem Haupte die Gedanken

Sie läuteten, wie goldne Glöckchen;

So wundersüss, so wunderlieblich

Ist in der Welt kein andrer Hall.

We were walking, we two together:

I so silent and you so silent;

I would give much to

what you were thinking then.

What I was thinking – let it remain

unspoken! One thing only I shall say:

all my thoughts were so beautiful,

so heavenly and serene!

The thoughts in my mind

chimed like golden bells:

so wondrously sweet and lovely

is no other sound on earth.

In Waldeseinsamkeit Op. 85 No. 6 (1878-82) Karl Lemcke

Ich sass zu deinen Füssen In Waldeseinsamkeit; Windesatmen, Sehnen Ging durch die Wipfel breit.

In stummen Ringen senkt' Das Haupt in deinen Schoss

Und meine bebenden Hände

Um deine Knie ich schloss.

Die Sonne ging hinunter, Der Tag verglühte all, Ferne, ferne, ferne Sang eine Nachtigall.

In woodland solitude

I sat at your feet in woodland solitude; a breath of wind, a yearning, moved through the broad tree-tops.

I lowered in silent struggle my head into your lap, and clasped my trembling hands around your knees.

The sun went down, all daylight faded, far, far, far away a nightingale sang.

Bei dir sind meine Gedanken Op. 95 No. 2

Friedrich Halm

Bei dir sind meine Gedanken Und flattern um dich her; Sie sagen, sie hätten Heimweh. Hier litt' es sie nicht

mehr.

Bei dir sind meine Gedanken Und wollen von dir nicht fort:

Sie sagen, das wär' auf Erden

Der allerschönste Ort.

Sie sagen, unlösbar hielte Dein Zauber sie festgebannt; Sie hätten an deinen

Die Flügel sich verbrannt.

Blicken

My thoughts are with you

My thoughts are with you and flutter around you; they say they are homesick, they are no longer wanted here.

My thoughts are with you and do not wish to leave vou:

they say that this is the loveliest place on earth.

They say that your magic holds them inescapably in thrall;

that they have scorched their

wings on your glances.

The evening star

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Der Abendstern from Lieder-Album für die **Jugend Op. 79** (1849)

August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben

Du lieblicher Stern, Du leuchtest so fern. Doch hab' ich dich dennoch Von Herzen so gern.

Wie lieb' ich doch dich So herzinniglich! Dein funkelndes Äuglein Blickt immer auf mich.

You lovely star, you shine from afar. Yet I love you dearly with all my heart.

How fervently I love you! Your twinkling eye watches over me always.

Johannes Brahms

Vergangen ist mir Glück und Heil Op. 48

No. 6 (1853-68)

Traditional

Vergangen ist mir Glück und Heil

Und alle Freud' auf Erden; Elend bin ich verloren gar, Mir mag nit besser werden. Bis in den Tod Leid' ich gross Not,

My happiness and health are gone

My happiness and health are gone and all terrestrial joy; I am wretched, utterly lost, I shall never recover. Until death I shall suffer great hardship, So ich dich, Lieb, muss meiden, Geschieht mir, ach, O weh der Sach'! Muss ich mich dein verjehen, Gross Leid wird mir geschehen.

Um Hilf' ich ruf', mein höchster Hort. Erhör mein sehnlich Klagen! Schaff mir, Herzlieb, dein' Botschaft schier, Ich muss sonst vor Leid verzagen! Mein traurig's Herz, Leid't grossen Schmerz, Wie soll ich's überwinden? Ich sorg', dass schier Der Tod mit mir Will ringen um das Leben,

if I must lose you, my love,

I shall be in torment -O woeful fate! If I must do without you. great sorrow shall befall

I cry for help, my most lofty refuge, hear my passionate lament! Send me, my dearest, your message at once, else I shall despair in sorrow. My sad heart suffers great pain, how shall I surmount it? I fear that death will suddenly dispute with me my life, grant me your comfort.

Beim Abschied Op. 95 No. 3

Tu mir dein Troste geben.

Friedrich Halm

Ich müh' mich ab und kann's nicht verschmerzen Und kann's nicht verwinden in meinem Herzen, Dass ich den und jenen soll sehen, Im Kreis um mich herum sich drehen. Der mich nicht machte froh noch trübe, Ob er nun ging' oder bliebe, Und nur die Eine soll von mir wandern. Für die ich ertragen all die andern.

At parting

For all my efforts, I cannot overcome it, cannot bear it in my heart that I should see people I know surrounding who were unable to make me happy or sad, whether they left or stayed, while only she should walk away for whose sake I endured all the others.

Robert Schumann

Der Dichter spricht from Kinderszenen Op. 15 (1838)

Interval

Robert Schumann

Sommerruh (1849)

Christian Schad

du! Nachtigallenseelen tragen Ihre weichen, süssen Klagen Sich aus dunkeln Lauben zu, Sommerruh, wie schön bist

Sommerruh, wie schön bist

du!

Sommerruh, wie schön bist Klare Glockenklänge klingen Auf der Lüfte lauen Schwingen Von der mondumblitzten Fluh,

Sommerruh, wie schön bist du!

Sommerruh, wie schön bist

Welch' ein Leben, himmlisch Weben!

Engel durch die Lüfte schweben

Ihrer blauen Heimat 711

Sommerruh, wie schön bist du!

Summer peace

Summer peace, how lovely you are! The souls of nightingales send each other from dark bowers their sweet and soft laments.

Summer peace, how lovely you are!

Summer peace, how lovely you are! The clear sound of bells rings out on the breezes' warm wings from the moonbespangled precipice. Summer peace, how lovely you are!

Summer peace, how lovely you are! What vitality, what celestial weaving! Angels hover through the towards their blue homeland. Summer peace, how lovely you are!

Texts continue overleaf

Johannes Brahms

Dornröschen WoO. 31 No. 1

Traditional

Im tiefen Wald im
Dornenhag,
Da schläft die Jungfrau
hundert Jahr,
Es schläft die Flieg' an der
Wand,
In dem Schloss
Hund und Ross,
Es schläft wohl auf dem Herd
der Brand.

Der Ritter zog sein Schwert da frisch Und hieb sich ab das Dorngebüsch, Und ging hinein ins Königshaus, Ins Kämmerlein Zum Bettelein, Küsst auf den Mund die schlafende Braut.

Da wacht das schöne Mägdelein, Schenkt ihm ihr feines Ringelein ...

Sandmännchen WoO. 31 No. 4

Traditional

Die Blümelein sie schlafen
Schon längst im Mondenschein,
Sie nicken mit den Köpfen Auf ihren Stengelein.
Es rüttelt sich der Blütenbaum,
Es säuselt wie im Traum:
Schlafe, schlafe, schlaf du, meine Kindelein!

Sleeping beauty

In the thorny thicket deep in the forest
a maiden sleeps for a hundred years,
the fly on the wall is sleeping,
in the castle too hound and horse sleep,
even the fire sleeps in the hearth.

The knight then drew his keen sword, and hacked through the thorny undergrowth and went into the palace to the little bed in the little room and kissed the sleeping bride on her lips.

The beautiful maiden awoke and gave him her fine little ring ...

The little sandman

The little flowers have long been sleeping in the moonlight,

they nod their heads
on their little stems.
The blossom quivers on
the tree,
rustling as though in a
dream:
sleep now, sleep, my little
child!

Meine Liebe ist grün Op. 63 No. 5 (1873-4)

Felix Schumann

Fliederbusch
Und mein Lieb ist schön wie die Sonne;
Die glänzt wohl herab auf den Fliederbusch
Und füllt ihn mit Duft und mit Wonne.

Meine Seele hat Schwingen

der Nachtigall

Meine Liebe ist grün wie der

Und wiegt sich in blühendem Flieder, Und jauchzet und singet vom Duft berauscht Viel liebestrunkene Lieder.

My love's as green

My love's as green as the lilac bush, and my sweetheart's as fair as the sun; the sun shines down on the lilac bush, fills it with delight and fragrance.

My soul has a
nightingale's wings
and sways in the
blossoming lilac,
and, drunk with fragrance,
exults and sings
many a love-drunk song.

Edward Op. 75 No. 1

Traditional trans. Johann Gottfried Herder

Dein Schwert, wie ists von Blut so rot? Edward, Edward! Dein Schwert, wie ists von Blut so rot, Und gehst so traurig her? -O! O, ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot, Mutter, Mutter! O, ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot, Und keinen hab ich wie er. O!

Deins Geiers Blut ist nicht so rot,
Edward, Edward!
Deins Geiers Blut ist nicht so rot,
Mein Sohn, bekenn mir frei!
O!
O, ich hab geschlagen mein Rotross tot,
Mutter, Mutter!
O, ich hab geschlagen mein Rotross tot.
Und 's war so stolz und treu.

Dein Ross war alt und hasts nicht not, Edward, Edward! Dein Ross war alt und hasts nicht not,

O!

Edward

Why is your sword so red with blood?
Edward, Edward!
Why is your sword so red with blood,
and why do you approach so sadly? - O!
O, I have struck my falcon dead,
mother, mother!
O, I have struck my falcon dead,
and I had none like it. O!

Your falcon's blood is not

so red,
Edward, Edward!
Your falcon's blood is not so red,
my son, confess the truth!
O!
O, I have struck my red roan dead,
mother, mother!
O, I have struck my red roan dead,
and it was so proud and true. O!

Your steed was old and you need it not, Edward, Edward! Your steed was old and you need it not, Dich drückt ein andrer Schmerz. O! O, ich hab geschlagen meinen Vater tot, Mutter, Mutter! O, ich hab geschlagen meinen Vater tot, Und weh, weh ist mein Herz! 0!

Und was für Busse willt du nun tun? Edward, Edward! Und was für Busse willt du nun tun? Mein Sohn, bekenn mir mehr! O! Auf Erden soll mein Fuss nicht ruhn. Mutter, Mutter! Auf Erden soll mein Fuss nicht ruhn, Will gehn fern übers Meer. O!

Und was soll werden dein Hof und Hall? Edward, Edward! Und was soll werden dein Hof und Hall? So herrlich sonst und schön? OI Ich lass es stehn, bis es sink und fall. Mutter. Mutter! Ich lass es stehn, bis es sink und fall. Mag nie es wiedersehn. O!

Und was soll werden dein Weib und Kind? Edward, Edward! Und was soll werden dein Weib und Kind, Wann du gehst über Meer? Die Welt ist gross, lass sie betteln drin, Mutter! Mutter! Die Welt ist gross, lass sie betteln drin, Ich seh sie nimmermehr! \bigcirc I

Und was willt du lassen deiner Mutter teur? Edward, Edward! Und was willt du lassen deiner Mutter teur? Mein Sohn, das sage mir! O! Fluch will ich euch lassen und höllisch Feur, Mutter, Mutter!

some other grief afflicts you. O! O, I have struck my father dead, mother, mother! O, I have struck my father dead. and woeful, woeful is my

heart! O!

And what penance will you now do? Edward, Edward! And what penance will you now do? Tell me that, my son! O! My feet will never rest on earth. mother, mother! My feel will never rest on earth, I'll go far across the sea. O!

And what shall become of your house and home? Edward, Edward! And what shall become of your house and home? Till now so lordly and fair? O! I'll let them stand till down they fall, mother, mother! I'll let them stand till down they fall, may I see them nevermore. O!

And what shall become of your wife and child? Edward, Edward! And what shall become of your wife and child, when you go across the sea? O! The world is wide, let them beg through life, mother, mother! The world is wide, let them beg through life, I shall see them nevermore. O!

And what will you leave your mother dear, Edward, Edward? And what will you leave your mother dear, tell me that, my son! O! I'll leave you a curse and the fires of hell, mother, mother!

Fluch will ich euch lassen und höllisch Feur, Denn ihr, ihr rietets mir! OI

I'll leave you a curse and the fires of hell, for it was you who counselled me! O!

Robert Schumann

Du bist wie eine Blume from Myrthen Op. 25 (1840)

Heinrich Heine

Du bist wie eine Blume. So hold und schön und rein; Ich schau' dich an, und Wehmut Schleicht mir in's Herz hinein.

Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände Auf's Haupt dir legen sollt', Betend, dass Gott dich erhalte So rein und schön und hold. You are like a flower,

You are like a flower

so sweet and fair and pure; I look at you, and sadness steals into my heart. I feel as if I should lay

my hands upon your head, praying that God preserve you so pure and fair and sweet.

Extract from Romance in F sharp Op. 28 No. 2

Johannes Brahms

O Tod from 4 Serious Songs Op. 121 (1896)

Liturgical text

O Tod, wie bitter bist wenn an dich gedenket ein Mensch, der gute Tage genug hat und ohne Sorge lebet; und dem es wohl geht in allen Dingen und noch wohl essen mag! O Tod, wie wohl tust du dem Dürftigen, der da schwach und alt ist, der in allen

Sorgen steckt, und

Bessers zu hoffen, noch

nichts

zu

Erwarten

hat!

O death

O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things; yea, unto him that is yet able to receive meat! O death, acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy and unto him whose strength faileth, that is now in the last age, and is vexed with all things, and to him that despaireth, and hath lost patience!

Translations of 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer', 'Nachtigallen schwingen lustig', 'Wir wandelten', 'In Waldeseinsamkeit', 'Der Abendstern', 'Meine Liebe ist grün', 'Edward', 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and 'O Tod' by Richard Stokes from The Book of Lieder published by Faber & Faber, with thanks to George Bird, co-author of The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder, published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. 'In stiller Nacht', 'Blinde Kuh', 'Bei dir sind meine Gedanken', 'Vergangen ist mir Glück und Heil', 'Beim Abschied', 'Sommerruh', 'Dornröschen' and 'Sandmännchen' by Richard Stokes.