

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 11 July 2025
7.30pm

Classiche *Forme* at Wigmore Hall

Beatrice Rana piano
Alexandra Conunova violin
Chiara Sannicandro violin
Georgy Kovalev viola
Brannon Cho cello

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Trio No. 2 in F Op. 80 (1847)

*I. Sehr lebhaft • II. Mit innigem Ausdruck - Lebhaft •
III. In mässiger Bewegung • IV. Nicht zu rasch*

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

3 Romances Op. 22 (1853)

*Romance in D flat. Andante molto •
Romance in G minor. Allegretto •
Romance in B flat. Leidenschaftlich schnell*

Interval

Robert Schumann

Piano Quintet in E flat Op. 44 (1842)

*I. Allegro brillante • II. In modo d'una marcia. Un poco
largamente – Agitato • III. Scherzo. Molto vivace •
IV. Allegro ma non troppo*



UNDER 35S

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Tonight Wigmore Hall treats UK audiences to a selection of artists, and works, appearing next month as part of Beatrice Rana's *Classiche Forme* chamber music festival in southern Italy. These concerts will take place in a Carmelite convent and a 15th-century *masseria* (fortified farmhouse) in Lecce, situated in the 'heel' of Italy, only a few miles from the Adriatic Sea.

Having dedicated his 20s to composing a series of Romantic, often literary-inspired piano works, **Robert Schumann** turned in 1840 to song, his passions perhaps stirred by the now more promising likelihood of his marriage to Clara Wieck. The next year, Schumann concerned himself mainly with orchestral music, completing two of his four symphonies, and the year after that, 1842, was to become his so-called 'year of chamber music'. In June 1842 he completed his three string quartets. The Piano Quintet, which we hear in tonight's second half, followed in the autumn, and from this point on, all of Robert's chamber music would feature his own instrument, the piano.

The first two of Robert's three piano trios belong to 1847. Clara had recently produced her own Piano Trio in G minor, and she and Robert had together made a study of counterpoint, especially Bach, the impact of which can be heard in the displays of counterpoint (writing for multiple simultaneous voices) in this trio. The first movement opens with a forthright but good-natured theme in 6/8; its successor, first heard *pianissimo* on the piano, is rhythmically related to it, making for a seamless transfer, but this new theme is now also touched by Schumann's fondness for obscuring the position of the 'strong' beat. The songful third idea, first heard in the violin, quotes 'Dein Bildnis wunderselig' a song from Schumann's Op. 39 *Liederkreis* cycle. In both the reposeful second (slow) movement and the gently skipping third movement, the three players converse in canon (close repetition). The finale returns to the good humour and animation of the first movement.

As well as holding down a career as pianist, composer, teacher and editor, **Clara Schumann** spent six years of her life in pregnancy. Her 3 *Romances* were dedicated to the violinist Joseph Joachim, with whom she gave more than 200 concerts over a period of 40 years. The first Romance is a longing, nocturnal song marked by a warm interweaving of the instruments. In the gently animated central section, Clara fashioned a passing motto from the opening five notes of Robert's first Violin Sonata (1851). The second Romance has the distinctive mix of innocence and eloquence characteristic of Robert's *Kinderszenen* ('Scenes from Childhood', 1838), not least in the fresh-as-spring trilling and skipping of its central section. The final Romance is a more urgent song than the first, underpinned by fast-rushing ripples in the piano, attesting to Clara's pianistic ability. She and Joachim performed the 3 *Romances* together often, including

for George V of Hanover, who apparently declared himself to be 'completely ecstatic' with them.

Clara was the pianist in the first, private, performance of Robert's Piano Quintet in October 1842. This was the first important work scored for piano quintet (piano plus standard string quartet) and its success led to several notable contributions to the genre, from Brahms, Dvořák, Franck, Fauré and Elgar, among others. The first movement opens with a unanimous, strident theme, characterised by a pair of leaping intervals, which alternates with a more lyrical continuation led by the piano with convivial support from the other instruments. This conviviality continues into the second theme, seamlessly introduced by the piano, then taken up as a warm duet by cello and viola. The development section introduces a note of tragedy in a falling recitative-like cello line, a sentiment that seems to be overturned by the reintroduction of the main theme. But the piano immediately runs off with a rapid, nervous obsession based on the theme's second half, supported by a disturbed escalating chorus from the strings. After the standard recapping of themes the movement bears out the first theme's triumphant nature – the subject of the piano's earlier obsession is now firmly in control and is pulled ever upwards to glory. The haunting march of the second movement emerges unnervingly from what seems at first to be a lyrical piano introduction. Respite from this dark rhythmic tension arrives in a slow-breathing melodic central section in which a delicate play of rhythms between the piano and inner strings creates a subtly rippling texture. After a return of the march, the falling recitative from the first movement reappears, extending the sombre tone before the *Agitato* section, suffused with off-beat accents. In one of the many instances of thematic cross-fertilisations with which Schumann binds the whole work together, the viola cleverly instigates a *mêlée* by transplanting the march theme into the fabric of the *Agitato* music. The *Scherzo* offers light relief in its heavy, almost ironic, reliance on a rising major-scale figure. There are two trio sections: the first a straightforwardly sunny one, the second more vigorous, reminiscent of the previous movement's accented offbeats. The dance feel continues in the heavily accented main theme of the finale. Here again there are subtle transformations of material within the movement, even a murmuring reminder in the piano of the third movement's rising scales. But none of this is as impressive as the finale's *coup de grâce*: a grandiloquent build-up sets the scene for a defiant return, in the piano, of the first movement's wide-leaping theme, which is crossed skilfully in a double fugue with the finale's main theme. This proved at a stroke that, having suffused his earlier piano works with Romantic abandon, Schumann had now also mastered the rigours of counterpoint after the legacy of Bach.

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