

## Friends of Wigmore Hall 30th Anniversary Celebration Concert

Wigmore Hall is very grateful to the Friends of Wigmore Hall for their unwavering and generous support over the last 30 years. It is because of your encouragement and your ongoing annual contributions that we have been able to build the artistic programme that we enjoy today. Your friendship is important to us, and this concert is dedicated to you. Thank you all.

Igor Levit piano

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Fantasia in C Op. 17 (1836-8)

*I. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen - Im Legendenton*

*II. Mässig. Durchaus energisch*

*III. Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

7 Fantasien Op. 116 (by 1892)

*Capriccio in D minor • Intermezzo in A minor •*

*Capriccio in G minor • Intermezzo in E •*

*Intermezzo in E minor • Intermezzo in E •*

*Capriccio in D minor*

After the performance, please join us downstairs for a glass of champagne.

For those who are seated in rows AA-G, please make your way to the Learning Room. If you are seated in rows H-X, please make your way to the Restaurant.



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.

To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us/wigmore-hall-audience-fund>

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In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

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Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

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Words and music were very closely linked in **Schumann's** mind – he, of all composers of the Romantic period, is the one most likely to give a piece a title, beyond a genre description like 'Mazurka' or 'Song without Words'. Schumann's father was a publisher, and young Robert was inspired to write stories, poems and plays. He always remained a literary man, an editor and a critic. So, reading a romantic novel could lead to a piano suite, while a poem might not confine itself to becoming a song – it could start a symphony: the motto theme of the First Symphony, for instance, perfectly fits the poetic line that inspired it.

The C major *Fantasie* began life as a single movement, a lament for the forced removal of his beloved Clara Wieck to Dresden, far out of Schumann's reach, by her father, the composer's piano teacher. 'Ruins' was Schumann's title, and towards the end he wove in a little tune from the end of Beethoven's aptly titled song-cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* - 'To the distant beloved'. Beethoven thus in his mind, it was a natural thing for Schumann to enlarge his lament into a fund-raising sonata for the proposed Beethoven memorial in Bonn. He wrote a bouncy march, seemingly inspired by the one in Beethoven's Sonata Op. 101, which he called 'Trophies', and a final slow movement, 'Palms'. The whole thing was rather paradoxically entitled 'Obolen auf Beethovens Monument' (an obol was a Greek coin of little value, so one could translate that as 'a few pence for Beethoven'), but also as 'a Grand Sonata by Florestan and Eusebius'. (Schumann's literary imagination led him to people his music with characters, many of them simply Schumann in disguise. He could be Eusebius or Florestan or David, always fighting the Philistines, a personification of artistic ignorance that seems to have originated with Schumann. And if you notice that Clara, David, Eusebius and Florestan form an alphabetical sequence, you'll start to get some idea of how Schumann's mind worked.)

Schumann had to kiss several frogs before he found a publisher for his piece – but even then, the handsome prince that was Breitkopf & Hrtel was not quite fairy-tale material. They were not interested in raising money for Beethoven, nor in fancy titles (the latest version was 'Ruins, Triumphal Arch, Constellation'), but they were interested in sales. And so the Grand Sonata by Florestan and Eusebius became a *Fantasie* by Robert Schumann, and was dedicated to Liszt.

For all its Beethoven references (there are some obscure links to the Seventh Symphony in the finale, most noticeably the trochaic rhythm of the second movement, much slowed down in the bass), in Robert's mind the *Fantasie* was all about Clara. The very words of his song-cycle tag are addressed to the 'distant beloved': 'Take these songs, then, that I wrote for you out of a full heart'. He later told Clara that he had dated a theme used in the finale '30.11.36 and wallowed

blissfully in it when I was ill' – and another '29 April 38, since no letter came from you'. The secret autobiographical element in Schumann's music caused the almost exasperated musicologist Gerald Abraham to exclaim: 'his music meant more to him than it can ever mean to anyone else'. But we can share Clara's uncomplicated pleasure when the postman arrived one day: 'Yesterday I received your wonderful Fantasie - today I am still half ill with rapture; as I played through it, I was drawn involuntarily towards the window, and there I felt like leaping out to the beautiful spring flowers and embracing them. The March is enchanting, and bars 8-16 make me quite beside myself; just tell me what you were thinking of in them? I have never had such a feeling, I heard a full orchestra, I can't tell you how I felt.'

Cheated of his titles, Schumann did persuade Breitkopf & Härtel to preface the work with a verse by Schlegel: 'Through all the notes of the earth's bright dream, one light, long drawn out note sounds for the secret listener'. Since the piece begins and ends in the key of C, Clara's initial, Schumann's meaning is clear, for once.

After such difficulties of courtship under parental disapproval, the eventual tolerably happy interval of Clara's married life was not of long duration. Robert entered an asylum some months after the 20-year-old **Brahms** visited for the first time in 1853. Brahms was his only permitted visitor. Schumann kept a sketch of the beardless boy by his bed. At home, the young man helped out with the children, and confessed to his friend, the violinist Joachim: 'I believe I do not respect and admire [Clara] so much as I love her and am under her spell. Often I must forcibly restrain myself from just quietly putting my arms around her and even – I don't know, it seems to me so natural that she would not take it ill. I think I can no longer love a young girl. At least I have quite forgotten about them. They but promise heaven while Clara reveals it to us.' When Schumann died, Brahms removed himself to Vienna, keeping in touch with Clara mainly by post, consulting her on musical matters.

His *Fantasien* Op. 116 belong to the last period of his life, when he had more or less given up composition. In the summer of 1890, he sent his publishers a piano duet version of his G major String Quintet Op. 111 with a note: 'The time has come for you to say goodbye to any further compositions of mine.' And yet his mind continued to evolve new solutions to musical conundrums that had occupied him all his life. Op. 116 is a particularly tight-knit structure, underneath its guise of fantasy, caprice and liminality (to tease extra meaning from Brahms's chosen Italian genre-words). I like to think of Brahms demonstrating hard-won perfect integration in the Vienna of Sigmund Freud.

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