

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 23 April 2023  
7.30pm

## Crossroads

Javier Perianes piano

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann in F sharp minor  
Op. 20 (1853)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Quasi variazioni. Andantino de Clara Wieck from Piano Sonata  
in F minor Op. 14 (1835-6 rev. 1853)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann in F sharp minor  
Op. 9 (1854)

### Interval

Enrique Granados (1867-1916)

Goyescas (1909-12)

*Los requiebros • Coloquio en la reja •*

*El fandango de candil • Quejas, o La maja y el ruiseñor •*

*El Amor y la muerte • Epílogo: Serenata del Espectro*

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Our soloist explains his title: 'Like Brahms, Clara and Robert taking inspiration from each other, Granados took inspiration from Spanish painter Francisco Goya. So the *Crossroads* title reflects that some of the pieces are inspired by specific paintings by Goya and representing the overlapping worlds between music and art in this instance.'

1853 was the last year of happiness for **Robert and Clara Schumann**. Robert revised and polished the enormous five-movement F minor Piano Sonata he had composed in 1837, probably at about the same time that, forbidden by Clara's father to press his suit, he was contracting the syphilis that eventually robbed him of his reason – unless that was due to the mercury-based medicine that was used to treat the illness. The sonata had been published that same year (as 'Concerto without Orchestra') without its two scherzos, and Robert now took the opportunity to put one of them back in. Meanwhile, Clara lovingly crafted a set of variations on an album-leaf from Robert's recently published collection of little pieces composed over many years, *Bunte Blätter* Op. 99. The title-page dedicates them to 'HIM'.

How much of the subsequent trouble was due to the eruption into their lives of the young **Johannes Brahms** on 30 September 1853 cannot be decided. By the end of October, after some bungled rehearsals and his choir going on strike, Robert had effectively been sacked from his municipal job in Düsseldorf. On 28 October he published a laudatory article on Brahms – *New Paths* – in the musical magazine he edited. Brahms was overwhelmed, and not wholly in a good way. He wrote to Robert: 'The public praise that you have deigned to bestow upon me will have so greatly increased the expectations of the musical world regarding my work that I do not know how I shall manage to do even approximate justice to it.'

The following February, Brahms was visiting his friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, in Hanover (and meeting Hans von Bülow) when Robert threw himself into the Rhein, subsequently entering the asylum at Enderich where he died two and a half years later. Brahms hurried back to Düsseldorf to help. It was a complicated situation. Brahms wrote to 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.' He set about composing a set of variations on the same tune Clara had used the year before, taking each variation to show her as he composed it. He made reference to the theme composed by Clara upon which Robert had based his Impromptu Op. 5; he recomposed the very next piece from Op. 99, cleverly twisting it to incorporate the melody; and many details of the piano writing show that he had been studying great swathes of Robert's compositions. But above all he wrote counterpoint: canons (rounds) at the octave, at the second, at the sixth below – Clara had written a

canonic variation – and simultaneous inversion between treble and bass in the variation (Number 10) where he quoted that theme by Clara. Simultaneous inversion between treble and bass became a feature of Brahms's music throughout his life. Variation 10 begins with a clear reference to the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and Brahms's further command of historical perspective was already such that his final variation (Number 16) can present the bass almost as a Renaissance ground-bass, with just shreds of faintly discordant melody remaining.

Robert's melody, with its enigmatic modulations, certainly forms a stimulating topic of variation – but it seems almost churlish of Brahms to take the piece that had so recently expressed the love between Clara & Robert, and use it to express, with surpassing technical skill, something of his own feelings in the matter. That's not how Clara saw it, though. She wrote in her diary: 'he sought to comfort me, he composed variations on that wonderfully heart-felt theme that means so much to me, just as last year when I composed variations for my beloved Robert, and moved me deeply through his sweet concern.' After this, Brahms experienced writer's block until he moved away from Düsseldorf to a Court appointment at Detmold in late 1857.

Clara's own edition of Robert's Op. 14 omits the reinstated scherzo, and contains only three movements. The F minor melody of her own on which Robert based his variations has some affinities with the F# minor theme of her Op. 20, though it lacks its enigmatic modulation.

Born in Spain, **Granados** studied in Barcelona and, like many Spanish composers including Joaquín Turina and Manuel de Falla, in Paris. In 1903, in his mid-thirties, he won a competition for 'concert allegros' with his now very famous *Allegro de Concierto* Op. 46, which brought him national fame. In 1911, he premièred the first book of his *Goyescas* in Barcelona. He premièred the second book in Paris in 1914. The pieces – subtitled *The Gallants in Love* – take their inspiration from the great Spanish painter of a hundred years before, Francisco Goya. Their success led him to compose an opera of the same title, but the Great War meant that he had to go to New York to have it put on. The opening scene of the opera is often played as a seventh *Goyesca* – *El pelele*, 'The puppet'.

He played for President Wilson, and became so busy in America that he missed his liner back to Spain, later sailing instead to England. On the final cross-channel leg of his journey, his boat was torpedoed by a German submarine. Granados drowned trying to save his wife.

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