

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 30 June 2025
1.00pm

Mischa Maisky cello
Lily Maisky piano
Sascha Maisky violin

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

3 Romances Op. 22 (1853)

No. 1 in D flat. Andante molto

No. 2 in G minor. Allegretto

No. 3 in B flat. Leidenschaftlich schnell

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

From *Dichterliebe* Op. 48 (1840) transcribed by Mischa Maisky

Im wunderschönen Monat Mai

Ich will meine Seele tauchen

Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen

Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen

Widmung from *Myrthen* Op. 25 (1840) transcribed by Mischa Maisky

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Trio No. 1 in B Op. 8 (1853-4 rev. 1889)

I. Allegro con brio • II. Scherzo. Allegro molto •

III. Adagio • IV. Finale. Allegro



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In 1850, Robert and **Clara Schumann** and their ever-expanding family moved from Dresden to Düsseldorf, where Robert had been appointed the city's director of music. By 1853 they had acquired a large flat with separate music rooms far enough apart that Clara could practise the piano without disturbing Robert's composing. Not only did this revitalise her playing, it also inspired her to compose again, after several years in which she had produced little of substance.

The 3 *Romances* were dedicated to the Schumanns' long-standing friend, violinist Joseph Joachim. Joseph and Clara took them on tour, and the *Romances* were well received – including by George V of Hanover, who called them 'marvellous, heavenly'. The freely flowing third *Romance* is by some way the longest. It follows a poignant *Andante* and a sprightly *Allegretto* with a more serious central section. Reflective of a relatively settled time, the 3 *Romances* in effect bring down the curtain on Clara Schumann's composing career; Robert's mental health went into terminal decline soon after they were completed, and Clara's creative voice was silenced for the rest of her long life.

Heinrich Heine wrote his *Lyrisches Intermezzo* in 1822 and 1823 as a consequence of his unreciprocated love for first one, then another of his cousins. In the poems he recalls the elation and despair of unrequited passion, while at the same time dismissing these emotions from a standpoint of disillusionment.

Robert Schumann selected 20 poems from *Lyrisches Intermezzo* to form the cycle *Dichterliebe* ('A Poet's Love'), completing his settings in a matter of days in May 1840, his so-called 'year of song'. In a letter to his fiancée, Clara Wieck, early in that year he described how 'easy' it seemed to be to write songs, the music flowing through him from the words into the score without the intervention of his pianist's fingers.

At the time there was no guarantee that his betrothal to Clara would have the desired outcome, since her father was opposing the marriage through a court action. Not knowing whether all this would end in union or separation, Robert ended the cycle with one of the most bitter poems (not included in tonight's selection). But he then recalled music from an earlier song and fashioned from it a watchful epilogue. All hope was not lost.

We now know that the couple were married on 12 September 1840, and as a wedding gift Robert presented her with another song cycle, *Myrthen* (Myrtles). 'Widmung' ('Dedication'), with a text by Friedrich Rückert, is the opening song and was especially treasured by Clara. In these transcriptions for cello and piano, Mischa Maisky has been careful to make only minimal and necessary alterations to the original music. By adding 'Widmung' to the selection from *Dichterliebe* he is able to supply the resolution that the composer had hoped for.

In September 1853, **Brahms** visited Robert and Clara Schumann, carrying a letter of introduction from

Joseph Joachim. They were bowled over by the young genius. 'This is one who arrives as if sent straight from God,' is how Clara described Brahms in her diary. Brahms, for his part, was filled with admiration for Robert and developed something of an infatuation with Clara. In normal circumstances this passion of a 20-year-old man for a married woman 14 years older would probably have burnt out quite soon, but fate intervened cruelly.

In February 1854, Robert Schumann, beset by a bipolar condition, attempted to drown himself in the Rhine. Brahms hurried to the Schumanns' home in Düsseldorf to help in any way he could. On doctor's orders, Robert was placed in an asylum, which he never left. He died in 1856. Meanwhile, there was no one other than Brahms available to help Clara maintain the household and recover her own performing career in order to make money and feed the children. Here he was acting as the head of the family alongside a woman for whom he had a repressed passion, while her husband, a man Brahms revered, was undergoing intense suffering.

The situation resolved itself over time and Clara became a lifelong, trusted friend for Brahms. But the crisis had changed him completely, as a musician as well as a man. His first compositions had overflowed with Romantic ardour, almost to excess; he now became instead a consummate craftsman, working and reworking his material until it was intellectually rigorous despite its emotional sweep or inherent tenderness.

Shortly after his first meeting with the Schumanns, Brahms began work on his B major Piano Trio. It was passionate in the extreme, while expansive enough to allow for digressional passages. On Clara's recommendation it was published in November 1854. The timespan of its creation thus straddles Robert Schumann's suicide attempt and incarceration. 35 years later, Brahms set about a thorough revision. Many passages were recomposed or simply cut. Yet, most untypically for a composer who would usually burn the manuscripts that failed to satisfy him, he did not suppress the 1854 edition, allowing both versions to circulate simultaneously.

Even in the later, shorter version, the wide-ranging first movement is symphonic in character and proportion. It is followed by a *Scherzo* that begins with a nervous, subdued first idea that gives way to a warm-hearted trio. The *Adagio* creates a meditative, otherworldly atmosphere, becoming more animated in its middle section. The powerful finale expresses agitation and anxiety, and there is no triumphant change to the major at the end. In either the 1854 or the 1899 version, this closing movement above all would seem to give us a clear picture of Brahms's inner turmoil in those dark times.

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