

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 30 September 2022
7.30pm

Frei aber einsam

Schumann Quartet

Erik Schumann violin Veit Benedikt Hertenstein viola
Ken Schumann violin Mark Schumann cello

Anna Lucia Richter mezzo-soprano

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

String Quartet in A Op. 41 No. 3 (1842)

*I. Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato •
II. Assai agitato • III. Adagio molto •
IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace*

Stefan Heucke (b.1959)

'Frei aber einsam' - Fantasy on Love Songs by Clara and Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms Op. 119 (2021) world première

*Prolog • Wenn um den Holunder (J. Brahms) •
Intermezzo I • Liebst du um Schönheit (C. Schumann) •
Scherzo • Widmung (R. Schumann) • Intermezzo II •
Sandmännchen (J. Brahms) • Epilog*

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ophelia-Lieder WoO. 22 (1873) arranged by Aribert Reimann

*Wie erkenn ich den Treulieb • Sein Leichenhemd weiss
wie Schnee • Auf morgen ist Sankt Valentins Tag •
Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloss • Und kommt er nicht
mehr zurück?*

String Quartet in A minor Op. 51 No. 2 (?1865-73)

*I. Allegro non troppo • II. Andante moderato •
III. Quasi menuetto, moderato - Allegro vivace •
IV. Finale. Allegro non assai*

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In 1853, a brilliant 20-year-old composer and pianist from Hamburg enjoyed his first big break. Offered work by the Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi, he acted as accompanist on a tour of North Germany. Along the way he met Franz Liszt, as well as another distinguished violinist, Joseph Joachim. Through Joachim, he was then encouraged to meet one of the Austro-German musical world's most famous power couples, Clara and Robert Schumann. And so in the course of a few months, Johannes Brahms went from unknown young musician to the dear friend of three exceptional, well-established artists who welcomed him into their homes and hearts.

Robert Schumann was the oldest of this circle, 23 years Brahms's senior. He composed his 3 String Quartets Op. 41 in 1842, just a couple of years after he had married Clara Wieck, and recorded his efforts in their shared diary. 'I have begun two quartets,' he reported to her, 'and they are – I can say this to you – as good as Haydn.' The first movement of this Third Quartet begins with a beautifully bittersweet sigh of a falling fifth in the first violin. This opens a little introduction of a few brief phrases before the falling fifth comes to form the opening gesture of the *Allegro* section which follows. The unsettled – and unsettling – second movement is a theme and variations, the theme consisting of breathless melody which begins on the weak beat of each bar. Subsequent variations take us through varying time signatures, tempi and moods, from the heartbroken to the resolute, reaching a tranquil conclusion before the ravishing *Adagio* third movement. A sprightly *Allegro* closes the work, elegant and full of bounce.

In that happy autumn of 1853 when Brahms joined the Schumanns in Düsseldorf, a plot was hatched to surprise Joachim by writing him a violin sonata. Robert provided the second and fourth movements, Brahms the third, and Robert's student Albert Dietrich the first. Clara Schumann was recruited to accompany the first performance on Joachim's arrival. The connecting device between movements was Joachim's motto, 'Frei aber einsam', 'Free but lonely' – F-A-E. Robert had used musical ciphers of this kind before, and now Brahms also found himself drawn to the idea; indeed, he and Joachim later exchanged counterpoint exercises featuring hidden words and phrases, including F-A-E.

Joachim's motto provides the title for **Stefan Heucke's** new work *Frei aber einsam*, which focuses on Brahms and the Schumanns and their 'highly complex relationship, in which all three loved each other.' Heucke and Anna Lucia Richter selected four songs by this close-knit group of friends: 'Wenn um den Holunder', in which Brahms set a text by the Schumanns' youngest son Felix (Brahms's godson); 'Liebst du um Schönheit', a gift from Clara to Robert; 'Widmung', a gift from Robert to Clara; and 'Sandmännchen', in which Heucke imagines Brahms singing his friends' children to sleep. Heucke's intermezzi are based on musical ciphers; not just the F-A-E of Joachim (which appears throughout),

but also themes derived from the names of the three protagonists. These are then used to sketch musical portraits of Robert, Clara and Johannes, and reflect upon the intricacy and complexity of their relationships.

We come next to the mature **Brahms**, 20 years after his first encounter with the Schumanns. In 1873 he was approached by his friend Josef Lewinsky, one of the leading actors of his generation, who was due to be married to fellow thespian Olga Precheisen. Lewinsky asked if Brahms might compose his fiancée some new musical settings for a role she was due to take over in Prague: that of Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. 'Brahms is a dear chap,' Lewinsky wrote to Precheisen, 'he has kept his promise and composed the songs, and also added a piano accompaniment for rehearsal purposes... He thinks that naïve simplicity often makes the greater effect on the stage.'

Presumably the intention was that in the full production, a chamber ensemble (or even orchestra) would accompany Precheisen's performances. This, however, Brahms left to other hands; and tonight we hear a string quartet accompaniment by **Aribert Reimann** – one of a number of arrangements Reimann has made of songs by Brahms, Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn. These are tiny pieces (only the last is longer than a minute) and in Brahms's best folk-style. But the gently leaning chords of the fourth, 'Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloss', are pure Brahms in their heart-tugging harmonies. And the fragmentary nature of the vocal line in several of the pieces, including 'Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück?', perhaps points to the disintegrating mind of Ophelia, here singing her last words in the play.

The following year, Brahms finally completed two string quartets that he deemed worthy of publication. Fiercely self-critical, he frequently destroyed completed pieces, and it seems that he had previously written and then rejected around 20 similar works before he was finally content with these two. The second Quartet in A minor is an ambiguous piece in mood and tone. The opening theme should, by rights, be in the home key – but it isn't, or at least not entirely, and the music tips constantly between major and minor as the movement progresses. The second movement is warmly lyrical, though the rich sustained textures feature several unexpected chromatic twists and turns along the way. A 'quasi menuetto' in A minor follows, its earnest character leavened by a cheerier trio; and the final movement has a stamping folk-like quality that pits its minor key against the exhilaration of its energetic forward momentum.

The A minor Quartet was premièred in October 1873 by Joseph Joachim's quartet – and surely Brahms's old friend would have smiled to see the first phrase he had to play at the piece's opening... which features only the notes F-A-E.

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Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

String Quartet in A Op. 41 No. 3 (1842)

I. Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato

II. Assai agitato

III. Adagio molto

IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace

Stefan Heucke (b.1959)

**'Frei aber einsam' - Fantasy on Love Songs by
Clara and Robert Schumann and Johannes
Brahms Op. 119** (2021)

Prolog

**Wenn um den
Holunder (J. Brahms)**

Felix Schumann

**When around the
lilac tree**

Wenn um den Holunder der
Abendwind kost
Und der Falter um den
Jasminenstrauch,
Dann kos' ich mit meinem
Liebchen auch
Auf der Steinbank schattig
und weich bemoost.

When around the lilac tree
the evening wind blows
and the moth flutters round
the jasmine bush,
that is when my love and I
caress
on the shaded, soft and
mossy stone bench.

Und wenn vom Dorfe die
Glocke erschallt
Und der Lerche jubelndes
Abendgebet,
Dann schweigen wir
auch, und die Seele
zergeht
Vor der Liebe heiliger
Gottesgewalt.

And when the bell sounds
from the village
and the lark's exultant
evening prayer,
that is when we too are
silent, and our souls
dissolve
with love's sacred and
divine power.

Und blickt dann vom Himmel
der Sterne Schar
Und das Glühwürmchen in
der Lilie Schoss,
Dann lasse ich sie aus den
Armen los
Und küsse ihr scheidend das
Augenpaar.

And when the host of stars
looks down from heaven,
and the glow-worm peers
into the lily's chalice,
that is when I release her
from my arms,
and kiss her eyes in
farewell.

Intermezzo I

**Liebst du um
Schönheit
(C. Schumann)**

Friedrich Rückert

**Liebst du um
Schönheit**

Liebst du um Schönheit,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Sonne,
Sie trägt ein goldnes Haar.

If you love for beauty,
O love not me!
Love the sun,
she has golden hair.

Liebst du um Jugend,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe den Frühling,
Der jung ist jedes Jahr.

If you love for youth,
O love not me!
Love the spring
which is young each year.

Liebst du um Schätze,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Meerfrau,
Sie hat viel Perlen
klar.

If you love for riches,
O love not me!
Love the mermaid
who has many shining
pearls.

Liebst du um Liebe,
O ja mich liebe!
Liebe mich immer,
Dich lieb' ich immerdar.

If you love for love,
ah yes, love me!
Love me always,
I shall love you ever more.

Scherzo

Texts continue overleaf

Widmung (R. Schumann)

Friedrich Rückert

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn', o du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab!
Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden,
Du bist vom Himmel mir beschieden.
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,
Dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,
Mein guter Geist, mein bess'res Ich!

Dedication

You my soul, you my heart,
you my rapture, O you my pain,
you my world in which I live,
my heaven you, in which I float,
O you my grave, into which
my grief forever I've consigned!
You are repose, you are peace,
you are bestowed on me from heaven.
Your love for me gives me my worth,
your eyes transfigure me in mine,
you raise me lovingly above myself,
my guardian angel, my better self!

Intermezzo II

Sandmännchen (J. Brahms)

Anton Wilhelm Florentin von Zuccalmaglio

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!

Die Vögelein sie sangen
So süß im Sonnenschein,
Sie sind zur Ruh gegangen
In ihre Nestchen klein.
Das Heimchen in dem Ährengrund,
Es tut allein sich kund:
Schlafe, schlafe, schlaf du,
meine Kindelein!
Sandmännchen kommt geschlichen

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!

The little birds, who sang so sweetly in the sunshine,
have now gone to rest in their little nests.
The tiny cricket in the cornfield
makes its presence known:
sleep now, sleep, my little child!
The little sandman comes stealing up

Und guckt durchs Fensterlein,
Ob irgend noch ein Liebchen
Nicht mag zu Bette sein.
Und wo es nur ein Kindchen fand,
Streut er ihm in die Augen Sand.
Schlafe, schlafe, schlaf du,
meine Kindelein!

Sandmännchen aus dem Zimmer,
Es schläft mein Herzchen fein,
Es ist gar fest verschlossen
Schon sein Guckäugelein.
Es leuchtet morgen mir Willkomm
Das Äugelein so fromm!
Schlafe, schlafe, schlaf du,
meine Kindelein!

and peers through the window-pane,
to see if there's still a little dear
who won't go to bed.
And wherever he finds such a child,
he scatters sand in its eyes.
Sleep now, sleep, my little child!

The sandman's left the room,
my little darling's fast asleep,
his little eyes are tightly closed.
His little eyes will greet me
fondly in the morning!
Sleep now, sleep, my little child!

Epilog

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ophelia-Lieder WoO. 22 (1873)

arranged by Aribert Reimann

William Shakespeare, trans. August Wilhelm Schlegel

Wie erkenn ich den Treulieb

Ihm zu Fuss ein Stein.
Wie erkenn ich dein Treulieb
Vor den andern nun?
An den Muschelhut und Stab
Und den Sandalschuh'n.

Er ist lange tot und hin,
Tot und hin, Fräulein!
Ihm zu Häupten ein Rasen grün,

How shall I know your true love

at his feet a stone.
How shall I know your true love
from others now?
By his cockle hat and staff
and his sandal shoes.

He is dead and long gone,
dead and gone, lady!
At his head green grass,

**Sein Leichenhemd
weiss wie Schnee**

Sein Leichenhemd weiss wie
Schnee zu sehn,
Geziert mit
Blumensegen,
Das unbetränt zum Grab
musst' gehn
Von Liebesregen.

**His shroud is as
white as snow**

His shroud is as white as
snow,
adorned with blessed
flowers,
which had to go tear-
stained to the grave,
wet with love's showers.

**Auf morgen ist Sankt
Valentins Tag**

Auf morgen ist Sankt
Valentins Tag,
Wohl an der Zeit noch früh,
Und ich, 'ne Maid, am
Fensterschlag
Will sein eu'r Valentin.

**Tomorrow is Saint
Valentine's day**

Tomorrow is Saint
Valentine's day
so early in the day.
And I, a maid at the
window,
shall be your Valentine.

Er war bereit, tät an sein
Kleid,
Tät auf die
Kammertür,
Liess ein die Maid, die als 'ne
Maid
Ging nimmermehr herfür.

The young man was
ready, put trousers on,
opened up the chamber
door,
let in the maid who as a
maid
departed never more.

**Sie trugen ihn auf der
Bahre bloss**

Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre
bloss,
Leider, ach leider!
Und manche Trän' fiel in
Grabes Schoss, –
Ihr müsst singen: 'Nunter!
Und ruft ihr ihn 'nunter.
Denn traut lieb Fränzel ist all
meine Lust.

**They bore him bare-
faced on the bier**

They bore him bare-
faced on the bier,
alas, ah alas!
And many a tear fell into
his grave –
a-down, a-down,
you must call him a-down.
For bonny sweet Robin is
all my joy.

**Und kommt er nicht
mehr zurück?**

Und kommt er nicht mehr
zurück?
Und kommt er nicht mehr
zurück?
Er ist tot, o weh!
In dein Todesbett geh,
Er kommt ja nimmer zurück.

**And will he not
come again?**

And will he not come
again?
And will he not come
again?
He is dead, alas!
Go to thy death-bed,
he never will come again.

Sein Bart war so weiss wie
Schnee,
Sein Haupt dem Flachse gleich:
Er ist hin, ist hin,
Und kein Leid bringt
Gewinn:
Gott helf' ihm ins
Himmelreich!

His beard was as white as
snow,
all flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, is gone,
and nothing comes of
mourning:
may God help him into
the kingdom of heaven!

String Quartet in A minor Op. 51 No. 2 (?1865-73)

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Andante moderato

III. Quasi menuetto, moderato - Allegro vivace

IV. Finale. Allegro non assai

Translations of 'Wenn um den Holunder', 'Sandmännchen' and 'Ophelia-Lieder' by Richard Stokes. 'Liebst du um Schönheit' and 'Widmung' 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.