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1842

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023 @ 3 p.m.

Orli Shaham, piano
 Dennis Kim, violin
 Yoomin Seo, violin
 Meredith Crawford, viola
 Warren Hagerty, cello
 Doug Basye, bass

Enjoy chamber music with principal musicians of Pacific Symphony in the coffee-house atmosphere of the Samueli Theater. While you sip coffee and savor decadent desserts, your gifted host, curator, and pianist Orli Shaham guides you on a journey exploring how composers influenced each other and changed the course of chamber music.



Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
 Samueli Theater

PROGRAM

C. SCHUMANN Three Romances for Piano, Op. 21
Andante
Allegretto
Agitato
 Orli Shaham

FARRENC Quintet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 30
Allegro
Adagio non troppo
Presto
Allegro
 Dennis Kim
 Meredith Crawford
 Warren Hagerty
 Douglas Basye
 Orli Shaham

—INTERMISSION—

R. SCHUMANN Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major, Op. 44
Allegro brillante
In modo d'una marcia -
Un poco largamente
Scherzo: Molto vivace
Allegro ma non troppo
 Dennis Kim
 Yoomin Seo
 Meredith Crawford
 Warren Hagerty
 Orli Shaham

PROGRAM NOTES

Why 1842?

Known among musicologists as Robert Schumann's "Year of Chamber Music," 1842 was a year of high Romanticism, drought, food insecurity, and growing unrest in Europe. Fifteen years had passed since Beethoven's death, and the philosophical concerns he poured into his music now cast their shadow across national boundaries, gathering into a storm front that swept across Europe. In 1848, republican revolts against European monarchies began in Sicily and spread to France, Germany, Italy, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, leading only to more political oppression and to disillusionment among reformers. We can hear these forces in the music of the time—in melancholy darkness of tone, in the elevation of nature, and in the very idea of music as a way of expressing, transcending, and triumphing over pain.

PROGRAM NOTES

Clara Wieck Schumann (1819 – 1896) **Three Romances for Piano, Op. 21**

Clara Schumann was still in her 30s when her husband died tragically young. She had long since established herself as one of the most important pianists of her generation and as a composer whose music drew praise from critics and colleagues. She had concertized since the age of 11, making the difficult transition from child prodigy to mature artist with unusual success. But while she continued to tour and perform after Robert's death, she focused more on ensuring the permanence of her husband's music than on composing her own. Why did she not compose more? From her extensive writings and correspondence, we know that the weight of her professional and domestic partnership with Robert was enormous. Both artists were fiercely disciplined, but Clara bore the burden of finances and family alone—caring for her sick husband until his final hospitalization, bearing and raising eight children (seven of whom survived into adulthood and one of whom suffered the same illness as his father), and touring and teaching to sustain the family. A housekeeper kept the household afloat while Clara toured.

Many of the pieces Clara Schumann composed were scored for solo piano or for violin and piano—works she could perform on her many concert tours with the celebrated violinist and composer Joseph Joachim. Her two sets of romances composed for this purpose, the Op. 21 for solo piano and Op. 22 for piano and violin, were part of a musical conversation that engaged Clara, her husband Robert, Joachim, and Brahms. The chamber works that formed this creative exchange contain through-lines and recurrent motifs much like the threads in modern online correspondence among friends.

Both the Op. 21 and Op. 22 romances date from 1853, the year Clara moved her family to Düsseldorf. In that fateful year her eighth child, Felix, was born, and her husband was admitted to the hospital where he spent the last two years of his life. The suite has the graceful lyricism characteristic of Clara's style, tinged with a contemplative, wistful quality we also hear in Robert's solo piano works. But interestingly, the opening allegretto also gives us a strong taste of Magyar flava—a tip of the hat to Joachim, who was of Hungarian-Jewish heritage and favored Magyar flash in his playing. The final agitato movement incorporates virtuosic, rapid scales into flowing melodic lines.

Louise Farrenc (1804 – 1875) **Piano Quintet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 30**

In a *New York Times* article dated Oct. 8, 2021, the music critic David Allen chronicles the backhanded praise and grudging compliments accorded to the enormously gifted French musician Louise Farrenc during her lifetime. Though she achieved fame both as a teacher and composer, she was and is under-appreciated, a story no less shocking for its familiarity. Contemporary critics used coded language to praise her three symphonies, calling them surprising, masculine, and seductive, rather than acknowledging their superb construction, expressive power, or harmonic boldness. Even Hector Berlioz called one of her symphonies “well written and orchestrated with a talent rare among women.” A more modern observation comes from Yannick

Nezet-Seguin, the esteemed orchestral conductor and artistic director of the Metropolitan Opera, who has noted that “[Her] symphonies and the overtures should hold a similar place as [those of] Schumann and Mendelssohn.”

Farrenc was born in Paris to an artistic family. Her father, Jacques-Edme Dumont, and her uncle, Auguste Dumont, were both successful sculptors. Her musical gifts were evident from an early age, and she received piano instruction with renowned composer-pianists of the day: first with Cecile Soria, a student Muzio Clementi, and then with Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. She later studied composition with Anton Reicha, a Czech-born composer living in France who was a pioneer of the most advanced compositional techniques of the era.

Farrenc composed her Piano Quintet No. 1 in 1839, when she was 35. Compelling and vigorous, it balances virtuoso solo lines with deftly woven ensemble. Combining poetic lines with bold development, its style reminds many listeners of Robert Schumann—especially in the Adagio movement, with its singing cello line. The piano is brilliantly showcased throughout.

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856) **Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44**

Born in the Saxon town of Zwickau (now Germany), Schumann began his musical studies at age six. After customary studies at the Zwickau Gymnasium and facing intense family pressure, he matriculated at the University of Leipzig to study law, but music continued to preoccupy him, and he soon began exploring song composition to the detriment of his law studies. He then turned to one of the most celebrated German piano teachers of the day, Friedrich Wieck, for intensive piano studies.

When he began his lessons in 1828, Schumann was 18 and Wieck's daughter Clara, who was only 9, was a piano prodigy who had already performed publicly. Two years later, Schumann finally won his own family's approval to prepare for a career in music, and he moved into the Wieck household. Abandoning his law studies hardly ended Schumann's troubles; his friendship with young Clara seems to have been one of the few bright spots in a life marked by dark moods made worse by deaths in his family, and by injuries to his right hand that hindered his playing. As mental illness overtook him, he self-medicated with alcohol yet somehow managed to compose prolifically, especially for the piano.

When Clara and Robert finally married, in 1840, Clara, at age twenty, was already a renowned soloist. Robert composed the Piano Quintet in E-flat Major two years later. Before 1842, his sole chamber work was an 1829 piano quartet; in 1842 he composed the three string quartets, Op. 41, the piano quintet, Op. 44; the piano quartet, Op. 47; and the *Phantasiestücke* for piano trio, Op. 88. This quintet, like all his chamber compositions of 1842, is melodically rich and light-filled—the most consistently buoyant and energetic writing of his career. While his earlier compositions focused mainly on introspective works for solo piano, 1842 brought new interest in the foundational expression afforded by the string quartet form, and—with this quintet—a synthesis that some musicologists have called a “reunion” with the piano. We still can't know whether Robert's inspired productivity during 1842 was a year of a respite from his illness, or a symptom of bipolar mania.