

Notes from the presentation of Elisabeth Eschwe on Clara Schumann in celebration of the 200th anniversary of Schumann's birth. NEPTA, October 28, 2019.

Ms. Eschwe read dramatically from letters to and from Clara Schumann as well as from Clara's diary, reading sometimes from beside the piano and sometimes from a desk. Performances of piano music by Clara, her husband Robert, and Johannes Brahms were interspersed amongst the readings. Ms. Eschwe has graciously provided us with the complete notes from her program, which are included.

There was a question and answer period after the presentation, during which time Ms. Eschwe shared biographical information about Clara Schumann. What follows are some random notes from the information she shared at this time.

Ms. Eschwe was inspired by reading the correspondence between Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann to research Clara's life, searching libraries for Clara's works. There were 350 letters between Brahms and Clara. Clara destroyed only the early letters, to 1858, but kept 7 copies from this time. Clara and Brahms likely did not marry because of Brahms' aversion to commitments. Brahms sent every manuscript he wrote to Clara for her approval before he would permit publication. We learned about her eight children, four of whom preceded her in death. One daughter, Elise, has descendants still living. Brahms composed his Lullaby and the Waltz, Op. 39, No. 15, for Clara's young daughter Julia. Fanny Mendelssohn sponsored many concerts that attracted many in the arts; it was at one of these that Robert and Clara Schumann met Fryderyk Chopin. Clara Schumann was an admirer of Fanny Mendelssohn as a composer. Mendelssohn was not permitted to publish because it was not seen as proper for a female to earn money, but Clara's works were published by her father. Clara's father taught her future husband Robert piano for 7 years, before their estrangement due to his engagement to Clara. As an adult concert pianist, Clara organized her own concerts. Clara was the first female instructor at the Conservatory in Frankfurt. She and Franz Liszt were the first to perform solo piano recitals from memory.

On the Occasion of Clara Schumann's Bicentennial (1819-1896)

Texts and music abridged and compiled by Elisabeth Eschwé (copyright 2019)

Papillons Op. 2: 1,2,3,4

Dresden, June 8th 1834

Today, on Sunday, June 8th, the day when the dear Lord let a musical spark fall from heaven and you were born, I sit here and write to you although I was interrupted twice.

First, I am writing to convey my wishes that you won't always try to do the opposite – that you'll drink less Bavarian beer - won't stay when everyone else is leaving - turn day into night and vice versa – that you'll show your lady friends that you are thinking of them, compose diligently make definite plans to come here, etc.

But is it permissible, Mr. Schumann, to pay so little attention to a friend and not even to write to her? Each time, when the mail arrived I hoped to receive a note from a certain Mr. Swoonerer, but alas! I was wrong.

May I ask for a quaint little letter, but not in quaint handwriting (i.e. illegible), o.k., Mr. Schumann? I suggest that you write this inspired, original, and witty letter very leisurely, you don't like haste,

your friend, Clara Wieck

Clara Schumann: Waltz Caprice C major

Leipzig, 14 September 1835.

My dear friend Emily,

This letter will bring proof of my high spirits for never has my birthday been celebrated like this year.

As you will know, my birthday was on Sunday. Well, early in the morning, after half past six, when I had received and admired my presents, I urged my father that we should go out before it got too late. But my father said, "Just you wait a little longer." I thought to myself, what could that possibly mean?

And then, just as I was leaving the room a maid entered. She carried a beautiful wreath on a glass plate. Recognizing her immediately as coming from Schumann I took the plate, looked at it and - hold your breath! - found a basket with a porcelain handle, and in it - a golden pocket watch! You can hardly imagine my feelings of utter astonishment and joy. But you may think, as I did, Schumann cannot have bought the watch alone? - Indeed, it was a present from all of my father's students, but the china basket itself was a gift only from him - Schumann.

At noon the six gentlemen and Felix Mendelsohn joined us for a meal. We kept on dancing until 8 and then we went for a walk.

This was my famous 16th birthday! Oh Emily, how much I had wanted you to be

here. It was just too wonderful. I won't easily forget that day.

Now, as I close this letter, I deeply wish that you will join me as soon as possible, on the stool next to the piano of your faithful friend Clara.

Robert Schumann Chiarina – Aveu

Clara's diary is silent for two years...her father forbids any contact between the two lovers.

..later to Robert Clara writes about the 13th August 1837

On that day I was inexpressibly unhappy, as if fallen apart with the world; we went for a walk, but I did not see any trees, any flowers or fields, I only saw you – and yet did not see you, was not allowed to see you.

Hasn't the idea struck you that I played the sonata in public because I had no other means of showing my feelings? I was not allowed to show them in private, that is why I did it in public. Can you imagine how my soul was trembling?

Robert Schumann fis moll Sonata – Introduction

Leipzig, 15th August 1837

Dear Robert,

A simple “yes” is all that you ask for? Such a little word – so important! Still – shouldn't a heart so full of indescribable love like mine be able to say this little word with all my heart? I'll say it, and my soul will whisper it to you *forever*.

Perhaps fate will let us speak soon and then – Your plan seems risky to me, but a heart that is in love is not very mindful of danger.

So I'll say “y e s “ once again.

Would the Lord turn my eighteenth birthday into a day of sorrow? Oh no, that would be too cruel. I've also felt for a long time that “*it has to work out*”, that nothing in the world will deter me, and I will show Father that even someone as young as I remains steadfast.

Forever, your Clara

June 9th, 1839

Dear Father,

I received your last letter but cannot answer much, because it would be useless to try to change your mind. Our views are in harsh opposition to each other. You are firmly convinced that Schumann has a bad character and I believe the opposite.

But let me respond to one point. I have not signed your conditions, and I am telling you that I will never sign them as they are incompatible with my sense of honour; besides, how could you believe that I would sign a document that maligns the man I love? You could not have been serious, but if you were, I must tell you that I will never give in.

You say that my character is bad and that I am ungrateful – oh Father, how unjust you are!

You scolded me in Leipzig that I was never good tempered; that I even made you increasingly angry; I was not allowed anything! On the contrary, I had to hide my love and had to face that the object of my love was denunciated.

I do love Schumann passionately though, because I think that no man will be able to love me in such a pure and noble way and understand me as much as he does. You would not find him ungrateful and you would surely come to respect him.

Oh Father, why can't you be his friend?

Robert Schumann Fantasiestück Op. 12 "Why?"

Diary, August 1st, 1840

The judicial consent has arrived at last.

What follows is a short concert tour through the cities of Thuringian, for the last time as Clara Wieck.

September 12th, 1840

The wedding took place at Schönefeld at 10 o'clock; my soul was overwhelmed with gratitude to Him, Who has finally guided our roads to union over so many rocks and cliffs. I prayed from the bottom of my heart that the Lord may allow Robert to stay with me for many, many years to come – Ah! The thought of losing him one day confuses my senses completely – Heaven protect me from such misery, I could not bear it.

It was a beautiful day as we drove to our wedding and even the sun, which had been hiding on the previous days, shone gently down on us, as if to bless our pledges from on high. On this day there was nothing to disturb us, and so let it be recorded here as the most beautiful and the most important day in my life.

Clara Schumann: Waltz A flat major

Leipzig, June 10th, 1844

My dear Emily,

At the end of January we departed for Russia and arrived at St. Petersburg at the end of February. I gave four public recitals with mounting success; also performed privately for the Czarina; and the Royal family attended all my concerts of which the last, in the theatre, was the most brilliant.

Robert and I have brought home many beautiful presents, among them even some diamonds; but, furthermore, I bought a wonderful Petersburg Grand; it excels even our German pianos - to the great surprise of our musical world.

I had left my dear children and the wet nurse for Elise with Robert's brother at Schneeberg; and a fortnight ago we fetched them again from there. Marie recognized us immediately and seemed really happy to have us back - Elise is just about getting to know us again. She can run on her own now and is learning to talk.

Embracing you in old friendship, Clara

Robert Schumann: Novelette, Op 21/1

Dresden, May 13th, 1848

Dear friend,

Oh, how difficult it is to have an hour to myself to chat with my darling Emily!
Believe me, it is hard, for my day is scheduled minute by minute.

Every day I give two to three lessons, practise one hour myself, write in my diary, arrange all sorts of music for the piano, go for a walk with Robert for at least one hour, look after my children, learn English (with a pupil from Plymouth) - all this, regardless of the visits one has to make or receive - you will see that there is little time left for correspondence.

All of my children are well, only Julchen remains delicate and small, though she is perfectly healthy. Marie and Elise are attending school and are keen pupils, and very conscientious about their piano lessons; Elise shows a special talent for music, Robert works hard and, despite the political turmoil around us, we continue, as ever, living and striving for our art!

Clara Schumann: Agitato Op.21/3

Düsseldorf, March 15th, 1854

My dear Emily,

How much I would have longed to write to you earlier, but I did not have the strength, and I do not know whether I will have it today.

Imagine, my dear Mila, Robert has felt so well this winter as hardly ever before; on the whole, there has hardly been a time when I was LESS concerned for his health. Then suddenly, it was four weeks ago, he heard strange sounds in his ears, first one tone, then entire harmonies, and in the end, whole orchestras, but in such wonderous ways as has never been experienced on earth; he kept on saying angels were playing for him.

One night, all of a sudden, he got up from his bed and said he must write down a beautiful theme which the angels had sung for him, and he did so; The following morning the angels' voices became those of demons, accompanied by frightful music, so that my poor husband fell into despair and paroxysms. During all this, part of his mind was completely clear: he composed beautiful variations on that very touching and solemn theme and wrote them down for me!

As his excitement grew he frequently said, "Clara, please leave me, I am a bad man and I am afraid that in this state I could do you some harm!"

Finally, his confusion was such that the doctors had to order ME and the children to leave and remove everything that was dear to him. Day after day I was promised I

could see him, until the doctors disclosed the terrible news: he refused to stay at home and held them responsible for not bringing him to an asylum; he felt it was his only chance of recovery.

The doctors then consulted a specialist who is renowned for his successful treatments and who runs a private mental hospital near Bonn, and there he was taken on the fourth of March!

That was the last time I saw him!

Oh my dear friend, how can I describe my return to our home!
I wanted to bury myself in his room and just stare at all the things that were dear to him and cry floods of tears.

I do it often. That I am still alive is a miracle, for my heart is torn apart, life has drained out of me. And imagine, my confinement is due in three months ...what a dim future lies ahead!

Clara Schumann: Romance in b minor “Loving Remembrance”

June 18th, 1854

Dear and honoured Herr Brahms,

Your delicate attention has given me very great pleasure. I cannot tell you what I felt when I read your dedication “Short Variations on a theme by him, dedicated to her”, but you knew it already when you were writing it. And so please for today accept the very hearty thanks in writing, which I hope to give you in person when we meet again very soon.

I have read through the variations: but reading music affects my head so much that I have not got to know them as well as I should like. I hope however, to be able to hear them played by yourself in the near future. I know they are genuine Brahms, serious and humorous.

I expect to get up from childbed on Tuesday and if you will call on me that afternoon at four, I should be very glad to see you.

These are very hard days indeed that I am going through, for when I look at the darling baby at my side, and think of his dear father who, far removed from everything that he loves and, moreover, ill as he is, does not even know of this boy’s existence, I feel as if my heart must break with grief and pain. But I am distressing you, and that is the last thing I wish to do.

So with my kindest morning greetings, I am,
Your Clara Schumann

***Johannes Brahms: Variations on a theme by Robert Schumann, Op.9
Theme, 1,4,14,15***

**Johannes Brahms to Clara Schumann
Düsseldorf, August 21st, 1854**

I hesitate telling you that I have seen your beloved husband. It seems to me so hard that we, who stand so much further away from him than you do, are allowed to see him.

I cannot describe what my feelings were during this visit. I trembled violently and had to exercise the greatest control not to call out to him or hasten after him. I could not wish that you might have been in my place at that moment, for you could not have borne it. I could hardly do so.

Düsseldorf, January 24th, 1855

The children and Berta are all looking splendid, and welcomed me most warmly.

This evening I have had your room made comfortable for me and am writing there now. Tomorrow I shall have to get up early to receive the girls. What they will have to do! I shall give them three pages of pictures to cut out, and a book in two parts to take with them.

Ferdinand is too lazy, Ludwig is too self-willed, and Felix even more so. Genchen is for the moment just a little bit too passionate. But they are all very good and charming. Yesterday Ferdinand received a number of smacks because he would not read. There was considerable discussion as to what each should give to the girls tomorrow. Frl. Leser is giving oranges and chocolates, Frl. Agnes apples, Bertha sandwiches, and I, without saying a word, books.

Thus I often sit before a blank sheet of paper and long to be able to write comfortingly and even beautifully to you – but I have never yet succeeded, for I am not such a good hand at words as I am at music. My music is more eloquent than my words.

4th variation

14th variation

Dearest Clara, what have you done to me? Can't you remove the spell you have cast over me? I wish I could write to you as tenderly as I love you and tell you all the good things that I wish you. You are so infinitely dear to me, dearer than I can say. I should like to spend the whole day calling you endearing names and paying you compliments. If this goes on much longer, I shall have put you under glass some day, or save money and have you set in gold. Farewell, my beloved, your Johannes

15th variation

Dear Johannes, July 1st 1858

If only I could express what I feel in my heart! Yet I sense increasingly the need for suppressing it altogether. That I may not say what I feel about your music either, hurts me terribly; you certainly will and must know that it is not blind enthusiasm which makes me talk.

My dear Johannes, you do not see and hear me when I talk of you to others. But that your genius often overpowers me that I see you as a man who is blessed with heaven's greatest gifts, that I love you and revere you for so many wonderful reasons; that all this is deeply rooted in my soul - I cannot deny.

I will depart tomorrow, stay one night at Dresden, one at Prague, and with God's help, will arrive in Vienna Thursday evening. Write to me as often as you can. One requires to be cheerful during a cure and whence would good cheer come to me if not from you?

If only I could find longing as sweet as you do. It only gives me pain and fills my heart with unspeakable woe.

Farewell! Think kindly of Your Clara

Clara Schumann: Intermezzo to Brahms Op.21/1, a minor

Baden-Baden, May 5th 1863

Congratulations on your new post as conductor of the Viennese Academic Choir!

In your recent letter you wrote that you are planning to settle down in Vienna? I envy you as I would also love to live there. I am also hoping to spend some time in Vienna from November to April – there is no other town which suits me so much and, moreover, there is no town as musical as Vienna.

Enclosing a programme of my last concert in Vienna,
I'm embracing you in old friendship, Clara.

Johannes Brahms: Two Waltzes Op. 39

Frankfurt, February 1879

Things are far from well with us. Felix is visibly fading away. Surely this illness is the cruellest one can possibly imagine, for one can do nothing to give relief and can only stand by silently. It seems to me extraordinary that at my concerts I can play with so much freedom and power, when all the time I am so miserable that I never forget my grief for one moment.

I am suffering as in the most distressing days of my life. Being old and healthy myself, I have to watch the life of my sons and of Julie wither away in what should be their best years. This is one of the most cruel trials a mother can go through.

I am in distress about my nervous state of mind and often lose all hope. For the past three to four weeks melodies keep ringing in my head, especially at night and I cannot get rid of them.

Johannes Brahms: Intermezzo Op. 116/2 in a minor

Diary, February 10th, 1893

How often the thought recurs to me that I will be forgotten whilst I am still alive. That is what artists who are performers have to face as soon as they have left the arena, only their contemporaries, if any, recall them. - The younger generation no longer knows and has only a sorry smile for what is past.....

Diary, November 1894

Johannes has sent me 11 of his piano pieces (still unprinted) - what a source of pure delight for me; there is everything in them, poetry, passion, devotion, affection, all infused with magnificent tone colours. They again breathe musical life into my soul. I feel uplifted again when, for half an hour, I am enabled to lose my self completely....

Johannes Brahms 119/3 in C major

September 13th, 1895

.....a very enjoyable birthday, my seventy-sixth. My children surprised me with a wonderfully set birthday table - and I felt such happiness as I can possibly now hope to know.

As their main gift, those two have given me a new piano spread which I will find on returning, home! To be honest, I had thought that the old one would do for the remainder of my days, but now I look forward to the new one, which perhaps will cover a new grand piano I ordered from Steinweg in a letter the other day.....

Johannes Brahms: Capriccio Op. 116/7 in d minor