Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall
Friday, February 24, 2017 at 8:00 PM

KEYS TO ROMANCE
Christina Kobb, Piano

SCHUBERT
SCHUMANN
GRIEG
LISZT

DISTINGUISHED CONCERTS INTERNATIONAL NEW YORK
Iris Derke, Co-Founder and General Director
Jonathan Griffith, Co-Founder and Artistic Director
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Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall

Distinguished Concerts International New York (DCINY)

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Presents

KEYS TO ROMANCE
CHRISTINA KOBBI PIANIST

Program

Franz Liszt / Robert Schumann
Liebeslied, S566/R53, “Widmung” (1848)
(1811-1886) (1810-1856)

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)
Sonata in a minor, D. 537 (1817)
Allegro ma non troppo
Allegretto quasi andantino
Allegro vivace

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)
Drei Phantasiestücke (1861)
Allegro con leggerezza
Non allegro e molto espressivo
Allegretto con moto

Clara Schumann
(1819-1896)
op. 5, Quatre Pièces caractéristiques (1833-36)
III Romance
IV Scene Fantastique: Le Ballet des Revenants

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)
Sonata nr. 1, op. 11, f-sharp minor (1833-35)
Introduzione: Un poco Adagio
Aria
Scherzo e Intermezzo: Allegro maestoso
Finale: Allegro un poco maestoso

Program Notes

Intensity of feeling, expressed in music
Forget about When Harry met Sally. When Robert met Clara would beat most romantic movies! Yet, it is a real story, and their music testifies of their lives and love. When Robert first met Clara it was the beginning of a long, painful, and joyful love story. Needless to say, none of them yet knew this in 1828. Robert had just moved to Leipzig to study law when he was introduced to the renowned music teacher Friedrich Wieck at a private concert – and his talented daughter.

Clara Josephine Schumann
(13 September, 1819 – 20 May, 1896)

At least among pianists, she usually goes by her first name only: Clara! Her father, the piano teacher Friedrich Wieck, had made it clear even prior to her birth that if he should have a daughter, she should be called Clara – meaning bright, shining – because he would make her a bright and shining star of the piano sky. When his wife, the brilliant singer Marianne Tromlitz, divorced him in 1824, he was, as any man would at that time, awarded sole custody over Clara, and from this point, the daily piano lessons commenced. Clara’s rapid progress made her an excellent emblem of her father’s authority as a pedagogue. He also made sure that she studied counterpoint, harmony, composition, music theory, violin, singing and French with the best private teachers in Leipzig. In a time when women should obtain piano skills mainly to secure marital status, Mr. Wieck endowed Clara with an education equaling that of the greatest composers. Whereas most other girls would learn a few tunes to entertain and attract handsome wooers, Clara was a professional musician in every sense of the word. At 9, she made her public debut in her hometown Leipzig, and at 11, she made her first performance tour to Paris.

Robert Schumann (8 June, 1810 – 29 July, 1856)

Robert must have been both fascinated by and perhaps somewhat jealous of this little girl who understood music so well at such a young age. He felt inferior and complained that his own music education began much too late. Not until 1830 did he take the final decision to pursue music as his future profession. Mr. Wieck had written to Schumann’s mother, pledging “within three
years” to make him into “one of the greatest pianists now living.”

As it was customary at the time, the young Schumann moved in with his teacher’s family. A friendship and a musical bond began to form between him and Clara. Whenever they were apart, they wrote letters. In January of 1832, Robert sends a letter to Clara in Paris. On the bottom of the page, he concludes: “The paper is coming to an end – Everything is coming to an end, except the friendship which makes me Miss C. W.’s warmest admirer”.

On September 17, 1832, Clara – who has just turned 13 – writes this letter:

*My dear Mr. Schumann!*

*Ha, ha!, I can hear You think, there we go! A letter from the girl who forgot what she promised. Oh no, she does remember. Read on and see why I did not write any earlier.*

*On the same day as the concert at Molique’s I got ill with scarlet fever. Until a few days ago, I could do nothing but stay in the boring bed. Yet, it turned out to be a rather light attack, meaning that I now can stay up for a few hours per day and play the piano again. But I had to cancel the concert at the Concert house.*

*Everyone is afraid of being infected by me now, but You, dear Mr. Schumann, should not refrain from coming [to Leipzig] – as I will surely be well by New Year. On 8th January, I have to play at the Concert house again.*

*Please greet everyone from me and write back soon. But, please, do write clearly!*

In addition to the letters, communication in the form of motifs and themes becomes clear from this point; Schumann uses Clara’s theme from op. 3 in his op. 5. Perhaps this habit of developing shared associations and joyful moments was what would hold the couple together despite the difficulties ahead?

**Romantic thoughts, musical thoughts**

In addition to studying works by Schumann, Herz, Mendelssohn and other contemporary composers, Clara’s concert schedule demanded music from her own hand; novel pieces to impress her audience and to submit to print. Op. 5 was written over a longer period of time during her teenage years, and Clara would probably have played these works long before they were published in 1836. A significant part of Robert and Clara’s relationship was the romantic idea of referring and alluding to musical thoughts (musikalische Gedanken) as one would literary thoughts. Including worthy works from the past in this “conversation” was natural for a lover of serious music. Beethoven was, of course, still the leading “pillar of fire” leading the way to the Promised Land, as Franz Liszt put it. For Schumann, however, Schubert might have been just as important. We know from Schumann’s friend and roommate Emil Flechsig that when Schumann learned of Schubert’s death in 1828, he wept all night.

Schumann’s admiration for Schubert is also evident from the fact that he later travelled to Vienna and met with Ferdinand Schubert (Franz’s brother). He discovered the score of Schubert’s *The Great C Major Symphony*, which had neither been printed nor performed. Schumann brought it to Leipzig, where it was published by Breitkopf & Härtel and premiered by Mendelssohn and the Gewandhaus orchestra in 1839. Schumann also took the opportunity to praise the symphony in his Neue Zeitschrift für Musik (NZfM). This incident, along with other entries in NZfM and Clara’s frequent performances of Schubert’s piano music, must have contributed significantly to the canonization of Schubert’s works.

![Franz Schubert's Sonata in a minor (D. 537)](image)

Franz Schubert’s Sonata in a minor (D. 537) was written in March 1817, at a time when the composer finally had access to a decent piano. Just having turned 20, he set out to write several sonatas. They were not published during his lifetime, but we can well imagine that the most frequent criticism against him – that he modulated too frequently and too abruptly – would have been repeated for D. 537. In the outer movements, his habit of “sliding” a motif down subsequent half-steps or jerking a motif into the key of either the flat supertonic or the upper mediant is typically employed. (Schumann does the same – the first movement of his op. 11 (Allegro) is largely constructed on the somewhat odd harmonic scheme I (V) ii IV iv V, creating the impression of parallel sliding chords and motives). The second movement is a beautifully flowing theme of Schubertian naïvité, interrupted by a restless minor part. The final movement is rushing from angst one moment to calming comfort in the next.

I can only hope to one day find proof that Clara actually played this particular work in her concerts! At least we know that the key of a minor featured prominently in her husband’s works – for instance in his piano concerto. The young composer-pianist Edvard Grieg had come from Norway to study with Moscheles in Leipzig in 1858. In that year, he heard Clara perform Schumann’s piano concerto, which made an unforgettable impression! At the Leipziger conservatoire, the best students were allowed to perform some of their works for their exam. Thus, Edvard Grieg – 18 years old – premiered his *Drei Phantasiestücke* at his piano exam on 12 April, 1862. In the following year, a Mazurka was added and Peters published the pieces as *Vier Stücke*, op. 1. I do not find it too far-fetched to suggest that Grieg’s original op. 1 is modelled on
Schumann’s op. 111 from 1851, bearing the same title, *Drei Phantasiestücke*. In these works, the young Grieg certainly shows himself an accomplished pianist of virtuoso disposition.

**“I taught you to kiss”**

Clara’s Op. 5 and Op. 6 were written at an even younger age than Grieg’s op. 1. In a letter to Robert (Leipzig, September 1st, 1835), Clara gives an account on her recent activities and disciplined approach:

*I have been very diligent. You may well laugh, but it is true! I have finished my manuscript [Partitur]; I have written out all the parts myself, in just two days; I have made a fair copy of my variations in F major and also Une nuit de Sabbat (Hexenchor). I have also commenced the task of orchestrating my piano concerto.*

Clara’s op. 5, of which Une nuit de Sabbat is the first piece, was composed over a period of several years and finally published when she turned 17. Composing his sonata in F-sharp minor was an equally longsome process, dating back to 1832 or 1833. In the letter just referred to, we learn that Clara has just played this sonata (op. 11) as well. The first movement of this work and Clara’s Le ballet des Revenants of op. 5 are perfect examples of how their musikalische Gedanken were intertwined.

**Sonata no. 1 op. 11: To Clara from Florestan and Eusebius.** Through much of 1835 and the beginning of 1836, Clara had performed this yet unpublished sonata in f-sharp minor “constantly.” She had played it for Mendelssohn, for Moscheles, for two “gentlemen from Hannover” and during her trip to Dresden-Breslau with her father. For a long time before this most unwelcome communication break, they had been exchanging musical ideas and sending each other their works. The striking opening of Clara’s Le Ballet des Reventants from op. 5 is perhaps alluding to Berlioz’ Symphonie Fantastique in its grotesque sphere. It consists of drumming diminished fifths, which later are structured into motives of fifths:

*Her inventiveness inspires Robert to unite the two thoughts in one theme – of which the main part of the first movement is saturated:*

Every time Clara plays this, it must have been as though she hears Robert thinking of her, through the music he wrote with her in mind! But when the sonata appeared in print for Robert’s birthday in June 1836 and he sent her a copy, Mr. Wieck “refused to allow her to acknowledge receipt of it.” He also insisted that Clara returned to Schumann all the letters she had received. Yet, he cannot take away the music from her fingers, heart or memory! Imagine the feelings contained in their works – feelings which had only one expression: sound. Sound, modelled for piano, with the purpose of reaching the heart of the other through tones and chords and phrases.

Liszt reviewed the work for the Paris Gazette musicale and commented that the...

*...the first allegro is written in a vigorous style; the logic of ideas being well-grounded and stringent. (…) The aria of the pages 14 and 15 is one of the most accomplished pieces we know. (…) The scherzo is an exceedingly remarkable piece, owing to its rhythm and harmonic effects. (…) The Intermezzo in d, Lento alla burla, followed by a recitative for the left hand surprises and astounds: It is a stroke of artistic mastery how the arrangement of the preceding parts lends new meaning to a thought which in itself is ordinary and trivial.*

In the fourth movement, the rhythmic scale idea from Clara’s piece is shiftet from “short – short – long” (in the sonata’s first movement) to “short – long – short” in the second theme. This is yet another way of lifting the material from the trivial (as Liszt says) to touchingly beautiful.

Another review appeared – on Schumann’s request – by Ignaz Moscheles, the
leader of the piano department at the Leipzig conservatoire. His own Sonate Mélancolique, also in f-sharp minor, was probably another inspiration for Schumann’s op. 11. Yet, Moscheles writes the review in a hesitant voice. He is especially concerned about the sudden, frequent modulations. But then he reads the dedication: “To Clara from Florestan and Eusebius,” and he softens up (remember, he had heard Clara perform this piece when she was 16!). He writes:

This work is a true sign of the Romanticism that has awakened and spread in our day. ... [It] requires a mature player, I would like to say a man’s hand if I did not see that it is dedicated to Clara. And among the Claras, I know only one who entirely will do justice to such a composition by means of dapper, soulful execution [gediegenen geistvollen Vortrag]: - Clara Wieck.

1835 proved decisive for the future of Robert and Clara. In the fall of that year, Schumann writes in his diary “Clara’s eyes and her love…the first kiss.” Clara later recalled that “when you first kissed me, I thought I was going to faint. Everything turned black before my eyes.” Schumann later wrote to Clara that “I taught you how to kiss.” During the Christmas week of that year, Schumann enjoyed “blissful hours in her arms,” dancing and fun. But the joy lasted only a few days – until Clara’s father discovered what was happening! Alas, he forbade Robert to see Clara! This reaction was only the first in a long row of increasingly severe attempts at bringing the relationship to a halt. For long periods of time, ever letter writing was forbidden. Clara, now 16, and Robert, now 25, knew that they loved each other. However, there was no evidence for this – no meetings, no letters, no kisses, no pictures, no updated relationship status on facebook… but music only.

**Asking Mr. Wieck for his daughter’s hand – unsuccessfully…**

In 1837, Clara’s 18th birthday seemed an appropriate occasion for formally asking Mr. Wieck for his daughter’s hand. Despite the former hostility, Schumann now assumed he was on good terms with his former teacher and that he would not deny him his daughter. He and Clara – in writing – planned everything. But to no avail! Mr. Wieck absolutely refused. Robert wrote to Clara after the meeting that the old man had a “new way of thrusting the knife with the handle into one’s heart…” Clara heard her father say to the maid that “if she marries Robert, she is not worthy of being called my daughter.” How painful! The couple now faced their greatest challenge in yet another period of separation. Occasional letters were smuggled through friends and maidens to maintain a minimum of exchange. September 1, 1838, Clara writes to Robert:

Did you pass by our window last night? Alwin [younger brother] claimed to have seen you. Did you perhaps hear that I played your music?

**The heart-breaking answer read:**

Yesterday and the day before yesterday, I passed by your window. I thought that you’d come out. It was thundering and I was standing at your house for half an hour. Did you not feel it?

Adieu. When will we get to talk???

**Widmung: a dedication to his bride – at last!**

The situation was almost unbearable for both Robert and Clara. They realized they would have to go to court to have the issue settled, so they could marry as soon as Clara turned 21. Well, that meant three more years to wait… Robert Schumann endured it. He endured the thunder and the rain and the separation and the longing, which seemed to have no end. He refused to live without the woman he truly loved. He and Clara did not give up, and after having endured threats, lies and court trials against Mr. Wieck, it finally became time for Robert to prepare a wedding present: Robert Schumann – the literary addict – hand-picked the most beautiful love poems and set music these for his wife-to-be. He called the collection Myrthen (op. 25), named after the white, innocent flower dedicated to the goddess of love (Venus) and commonly associated with marriage and perhaps even illegal love. The first one in this set was Widmung by Rückert (Liebeslied, S566/R53, 1848). Franz Liszt, who also loved Schubert, loved poetry and loved embellishing lieder, made a piano solo version which completely dispenses with the singer. Nevertheless, the text deserves to be known – the lines which Robert clearly associated so closely with his beloved Clara:

**WIDMUNG**

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!

Thou art my soul, thou art my heart
Thou both my joy and sadness art
Thou art my world where I am mover,
my heart art thou wherein I hover
thou art my grave, wherein I cast forever
all my sorrow past!

Did you pass by our window last night? Alwin [younger brother] claimed to have seen you. Did you perhaps hear that I played your music?

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Did you pass by our window last night? Alwin [younger brother] claimed to have seen you. Did you perhaps hear that I played your music?
Meet The Artist

For fifteen years, Norwegian pianist Christina Kobb has been specializing in historical pianos and performance practice. During her soon-to-be finished PhD at the Norwegian Academy of Music, she has developed a theory on how to reconstruct 19th-century piano technique from old treatises and manuals. In July 2015, The New York Times published an article presenting her work. Christina Kobb holds degrees (Cand. Mag. in piano teaching, BA fortepiano performance) and MA from the Norwegian Academy of Music (NAM), Royal Conservatoire of The Hague (BA, MA (cum laude) of fortepiano performance), with teachers Bart van Oort and Stanley Hoogland, and was honoured to receive a one-year studentship to the renowned Cornell University to study with prof. Malcolm Bilson (2009/10).

A keen educator, Christina has been teaching classes at the Norwegian Academy of Music and she was appointed Head of Theory at Barratt Due Institute of Music (BDM) in Oslo in 2013. However, she recently left this position to pursue her performance and research career. Over the last years, Christina has presented her research at international venues like the renowned Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies in California (November 2015) and at Harvard University, (May 2016, Quincy House). At the same time, she has developed more informal lecture recitals aimed at the general, music loving audience. As a co-founder of the international online journal Music+Practice (www.musicandpractice.org), she works as a writer and editor.

Christina has appeared at various occasions in Norway, England, The Netherlands and the U.S. with solo recitals and chamber music concerts. She is the proud recipient of Pianist Nils Larsen’s bequest of 2016. Earlier in her career, she won the accompanist prize of ‘The John Kerr Award for English song’ (2006) at Finchcocks Musical Museum in Kent, England, and she received the ‘Muzio Clementi Award’ (2008). In 2007, she was awarded the coveted TICON scholarship. Kobb is the recipient of the Nils Larsen bequest 2016 and has been sponsored by All Classical Portland for this upcoming performance. Christina Kobb wishes to give special thanks to Professor emerita, Liv Glaser, for invaluable help in the final stages of the preparations of this program!

Thank you to supporters:

Music & Mentoring House/Lauren Flanigan
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References:


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<td>I Hear America Singing: The Music of André Thomas and Greg Gilpin</td>
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