

À la Clara:
Recapturing Clara Wieck-Schumann's Transitional Pianism

by
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To Michael Loftus,

my Abba.

(How's this for a footnote?)

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Abstract

Clara Schumann was a highly creative and entrepreneurial musician, a performer who from an early age learned how to assume control of her performing image, be it through the choice of her instrument, the choice of performance venue, or her choice of repertoire and how to present it.

This paper explores the multiple ways in which Clara Schumann engaged with the act of interpreting musical works: be it through creative use of improvisation in concert settings, or through technical and musical ‘acts of translation’ from earlier instruments with a particular mechanism to later instruments with drastically different ones. Three Artistic-practice based explorations stemming from this research are presented throughout the paper.

Abrégé

Clara Schumann était une musicienne douée d'une grande imagination hautement créatrice et animée d'un esprit entrepreneur; une interprète qui, dès son plus jeune âge a réussi à être en contrôle de son image lors de ses concerts, par le choix de son instrument ou de l'endroit choisi pour ses performances, et par son choix de répertoire et sa façon unique de l'interpréter.

Ce document présente les différentes méthodes selon lesquelles Clara Schumann s'engageait dans l'interprétation d'oeuvres musicales en improvisant de façon créative et recherchée lors de ses concerts traduisant pour d'anciens instruments à mécanismes particuliers d'époque jusqu'aux instruments plus nouveaux totalement évolués.

Les ramifications artistiques provenant de cette recherche sont présentées dans ce document.

Preface

“Clara’s interpretation makes one forget the composer.”

-Goethe¹

My curiosity about Clara Schumann was initially ignited by a small collection of preludes that she wrote down in the last year of her life, at the request of her eldest daughter, Marie Schumann. These were introduced to me by Prof. Giorgio Sanguinetti, at the time a visiting professor from the University of Rome, who was leading a seminar about the Neapolitan tradition of *partimento*, which I sat in on.

Since that time, my interest in Clara Schumann as a historical and musical figure has only deepened, leading me to investigate further and wishing to re-evaluate both the impact that she had on her immediate nineteenth-century surroundings, as well as the kind of influence she still exerts on our twenty-first century ones. At the crux of my investigation lies the question of the performer, as I tried to comprehend Clara’s relationship with her (ever-evolving) instrument(s) and the ways in which she assumed control of her ever-changing performance environments. This paper, which constitutes an expansion of my doctoral lecture-recital² aims to provide one possible narrative as to what the act of interpretation signified for Clara Schumann, and how, for Clara, the process of re-creating musical works was tied to the characteristics of the instruments on which they were studied and executed.

¹ From a diary entry, quoted in Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life, based on materials found in diaries and letters*, trans. Grace E. Hadow (London: Macmillan, 1913), 1:25.

² Presented on January 14, 2016 at the Schulich School of Music at McGill University, Montreal.

Introduction

Clara Schumann's biography is rife with conflicting desires: composing versus interpreting, the traditional roles of wife and mother versus the ever-present need to support a large family "through her art", the eagerness to promote a culture of serious listening, yet needing to take into account concerns of marketability and accessibility. Working with an instrument that never "stayed put" for very long and having to adapt to the ever-changing technological advancements in the piano itself must have required constant compromise and flexibility. Excluding the writing of cadenzas for Beethoven and Mozart concertos, Clara ceased her compositional activities after Robert Schumann's death, her last composition dating to 1856.³ To Josef Joachim she wrote the following in a letter: "Even if I am not a producing artist, still I am re-producing."⁴ Arguably the first to identify herself as an interpreter, Clara's approach to musicking has affected generations of aspiring performer-interpreters since.

The paper will be divided into two. Part I will explore Clara 'the daughter.' It will lay out the foundations of Clara's early musical education and explain what it was that set her fate apart from that of other young professional women performers and placed her on equal footing with the most prominent male virtuosi of the day. The main influence on the pianistic development of the young Clara was undoubtedly Clara's father and only piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck.

³ Romance with no opus number in B minor. This work can be found in Clara-Wieck Schumann, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke* (Munich: G. Henle, 1987)

⁴ "Bin ich auch nicht producierend, so doch reproducierend". Quoted and translated in Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 320. Reich translates "producierend" as "creating".

Part II will explore Clara ‘the pianist’. As she grew older, Clara’s musical identity became intertwined with that of Robert Schumann to the point that, after Robert’s debilitating hand injury, one could only hear Robert’s musical voice at the piano through the fingers of Clara.⁵ As Clara’s technique was shaped by decades of experience on a variety of pianos, I will argue that her directives (outlined in an annotated edition of 1887) for the execution of Robert Schumann’s music are paramount to understanding his work, and their usefulness for teaching, as well as performance on a modern instrument, should be emphasized in conservatory and university teaching no less than any urtext-driven Complete Works edition or any facsimile of a manuscript. In order to understand Clara’s annotations, one must first get acquainted with the pianos that accompanied her throughout her life, and how they influenced her pianistic approach.

In defining some of the various influences that had an impact on the shaping of Clara Schumann’s artistic persona, this paper will reveal possible ways in which we, as modern-day musicians, can interact with this historical example, and how we can generate meaning and artistic significance in our twenty-first century musicking.

⁵ During his lifetime, Robert’s works were at times performed by other pianists, although these were rare occasions. It was predominantly Clara who actively (and at times, even jealously) sought to be the main promoter of Robert’s compositions.

Part I

Thinking Through

Clara Schumann's Hands

The reality of a life dominated by performance on a constantly changing instrument could be a challenging affair, as Clara's diaries and letters suggest. This is, however, exactly what makes these sources so compelling.⁶ One is hard-pressed to find a performer so sensitive to the machinery of her craft and yet so able to adapt to rapidly changing technologies. Unlike figures such as Hummel, Chopin, Mozart, or Liszt, it is exceedingly difficult to tie Clara Schumann down to the use of any particular instrument or school of playing. Adjusting to different pianos was a fact of life for her, and it is perhaps this flexibility and ingenuity of approach both as pianist and woman that secured her enduring prestige on the concert stage.

In this chapter, I will focus on Clara's pianistic approach, which makes use of a broad and eclectic sonic palette, and examine two factors that I believe would have had a direct bearing on

⁶ For example: "I played much on my Schiedmeyer instrument, which did not appeal to me at all. He makes English action mechanisms, but although his instruments have the disadvantage of an English mechanism, but not the advantages, except for a strong sound. The instruments are dry in the descant; they knock horribly, and the descant is too weak in comparison to the bass. I will make myself several enemies if I do not take his instrument for the concert, but I cannot do this." Diary entry from January 1839. Quoted in Thomas Synofzik, "'...den ich kaum erdrücken konnte' Clara Schumann-Wieck in der Auseinandersetzung mit Wiener, Englischer und Französischer Mechanik 1826 bis 1853," ['....which I could barely press down' Clara Schumann-Wieck in her Struggle With Viennese, English, and French Mechanisms From 1826 to 1853,] in *Von Mozart bis Chopin: das Fortepiano 1770-1850. Symposium I'm Rahmen der 32. Tagung der Alter Musik in Herne 2007*, ed. Christian Ahrens et al. (München: Musikverlag Katzbichler, 2010), 159. I am grateful for Dr. Synofzik for sharing his research with me.

the formation of Clara's pianistic credo: Friedrich Wieck's approach to teaching and the instruments she came into contact with throughout her long career. Under her father's tutelage, the young Clara's musical upbringing centred around the cultivation of a singing touch at the piano as well as the acquisition of improvisational skill.

Chapter One

Touch

1. A Singing Tone

Friedrich Wieck, Clara's father and mentor, published *Piano and Song (Didactic and Polemical)* in 1853.⁷ This book is, in essence, a summary of Wieck's piano teaching philosophy, crafted and refined over forty years of experience. In at times anecdotal fashion, Wieck offers advice on elementary piano instruction, correct use of the damper pedal and soft pedal, and thoughts on touch and the acquisition of a singing tone, as well as issues to do with the construction and maintenance of instruments. Paramount to Wieck is the idea of cultivating a singing tone:

I shall undertake to speak about singing, too! A piano teacher endowed with both intelligence and heart - whether he be concerned with "elementary" or "advanced" teaching - if he is so constituted as I picture him, must understand the art of singing, or at least demonstrate an intense interest in it and have a warm place for it in his heart. Whenever I speak of singing, moreover, I refer only to "beautiful song" [schönen Gesang], the basis of the finest and most perfect musical representation. And above all, and again, I think of "a beautiful shaping of tone" [schöne Tonbildung] as the foundation of the loveliest possible touch on the piano. In many matters song and piano must be mutually complementary and mutually

⁷ Friedrich Wieck, *Piano and Song (Didactic and Polemical): The Collected Writings of Clara Schumann's Father and Only Teacher*, trans. and ed. Henry Pleasants (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1988).

enlightening. They must work together to bring to light the noblest
and finest in untroubled beauty.⁸

Throughout the book, Wieck equates good touch on the piano with a singing voice, its melody line beautifully shaped and inflected. But how would the prospective student achieve this touch? Wieck writes: “We must take special care to play it as beautifully as possible,⁹ and to sing it on the piano as the singer does in the theater [..] The theme itself offers no technical difficulties, but demands a relaxed, broad, robust but at the same time soft touch, a good Portamento¹⁰ and a clean, finely shaded performance [*Darstellung*].”¹¹

In another chapter, Wieck depicts a number of mock teaching scenarios in the form of a dialogue between teacher and student. While discussing the correct rendition of a particular theme, the teacher instructs the hypothetical student as follows: “You see, I place the fingers softly into the keys, and don’t raise them too high, in order not to spoil the legato, and to produce the loveliest possible ‘singing tone’.”¹²

As early as the second piano lesson, Wieck tells his hypothetical student that “you will learn to move your fingers lightly and loosely, and quite independently of the arm [...]; and you will raise them and let them fall properly. Besides that, we will contrive a few exercises to teach you to make the wrist loose, for that must be learned in the beginning in order to acquire a fine

⁸ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 10.

⁹ Wieck is referring here to a theme and variations set. The theme is of an unspecified popular Italian song.

¹⁰ With “portamento”, I understand Wieck to be alluding to a “portato” touch (neither legato nor staccato), rather than the vocal/string “portamento”.

¹¹ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 130.

¹² Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 132.

touch on the piano; that is, to make the tones sound as beautiful as possible.”¹³ This was all to be taught by rote, before learning to read musical notation which Wieck gladly delayed until one year into the study of the instrument. This left ample time to concentrate on these first fundamental principals of playing, as well as fostering a sense of enjoyment and spontaneity in the study of music itself.

Broad, robust, relaxed, yet soft, light, and finely shaded, loose fingers, legato and ‘singing tone’; all give an impression of a highly sensitive, finger-based technique, where the attack of a note and the speed of its release are initially controlled by the fingers and hand alone, and a set of very sensitive ears. Rather than rely on notational devices, such as slurs and other articulative indications, as indicative of when and how one ought to “use” a singing tone, Wieck’s approach suggests that one must first be taught to produce a piano tone whose *fundamental* attributes are modeled after those of the singing voice, regardless of notational directions. Any manipulations of this touch in further playing could then be simply considered a modification of this original approach.

Touch being such a critical aspect of his method, Wieck strongly believed that to foster proper touch, children must also study on the best of instruments. In one of the final chapters of his book, Wieck describes in great detail what one should look for when selecting an keyboard instrument. He calls for a piano whose hammers were properly leathered, its mechanism flexible and responsive, and its regulation equal. It is noteworthy that Wieck links technical know-how with the cultivation of healthy playing habits: “The leathering should not be too soft, nor too sharp, not too tight, nor too hard. A sharp acute tone, with a very strong touch, becomes raw,

¹³ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 16.

disagreeable and offensive. [...] Too soft a tone, one with which the player has to struggle, does the same, damaging definition and clarity. [...] It is conducive to a bad touch. A proper and lovely leathering is a piano's most precious asset."¹⁴ This relationship goes both ways however, as Wieck makes clear:

Just as a player with stiff arm and wrist will never draw a large and lovely tone from the piano, so, too, will stiff striking and crazy banging destroy any mechanism within a short time, no matter how carefully and skillfully crafted and assembled. For this reason alone the player should see to the cultivation of a good and correct touch.¹⁵

Wieck, who owned a small music lending library and piano dealership in Leipzig, was ideally placed to provide good instruments at the disposal of his daughter, and regularly brought in pianos especially from Vienna. For his daughter, no “out-of-tune squares or grands with thin legs”¹⁶ would do. In preparation for Clara's debut appearance at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in October 1828, her father ordered a piano for her from the Viennese builder, Matthäus Andreas Stein, which she also used in the concert.

A finger-led kind of touch is remarkably effective on this type of piano. Sporting a “Viennese action”, these instruments are typically light in touch, due to a shallow key dip and relatively thin leather-covered wooden hammers. Their tone is clear and bell-like, and the timbre of each register is distinct, partly due to the straight-stringing of the piano wires across the

¹⁴ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 174.

¹⁵ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 177.

¹⁶ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 65.

soundboard. These elements together create a malleable tone that is highly responsive to the smallest gradations in touch, and where the various registers do not overpower each other, allowing one to play even relatively dense musical textures with clarity and distinctness.¹⁷ In terms of one's technique, playing on such instruments encourages every finger to be an equal participant in the shaping of a musical phrase, whether it be in the bass, treble or middle ranges of the keyboard, with no voice needing to be significantly highlighted at the expense of another. Regarding the pedal, its employment is easily detected in the resulting sound of the piano, making its use a much more conscious affair.

¹⁷ For some general literature on the characteristics of pianos with Viennese actions, see Edwin M. Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos: A Technological History from Cristofori to the Modern Concert Grand*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1-91, Richard Maunder, "Viennese Keyboard-Instrument Makers," in *Keyboard Instruments in Eighteenth-Century Vienna*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Alfons Huber, "Was the 'Viennese Action' Originally a Stossmechanik?," *The Galpin Society Journal* 55 (2002): 167-182.



Figure 1.1. Clara's Stein piano, Robert-Schumann-Haus, Zwickau.

© by Kulturred der Stadt Zwickau

I have performed Clara Wieck's Romance Variée' Op. 3 on a piano that may be considered a distant sister to the Stein piano that Clara received from her father in 1828. Built by Tom and Barbara Wolf in 1995, it is a replica of a Streicher-type piano. Nannette Streicher (née Stein) was the sister of Matthäus Andreas (the provider of Clara's piano) and operated a joint piano workshop together with her husband, Johann Andreas Streicher. The outline and action of the Wolf instrument are a faithful copy of a Streicher piano, but the soundboard and ribbing are modeled after slightly later Viennese-type instruments. As Tom Wolf communicated to me, he places the sound profile of this piano as "typical for around 1825 or so."¹⁸ I had the opportunity to play on Clara's Matthäus Stein piano (reproduced in Figure 1.1.), currently kept at the Robert-Schumann-Haus in Zwickau, Germany,¹⁹ and I can attest that both instruments are indeed similar in their sweet sound and light touch.

The Romance Variée was composed and published in 1833, Clara then being a mere 13 years old. The writing in this theme with variations is perfectly suited to the qualities of a Viennese-style instrument, exploring the almost infinite varieties of possible note lengths that can be achieved on these kinds of pianos, from a heavy *pesante* execution, employing the use of both wrist and arm, to crisp staccato passages requiring no more than the weight of a single finger, to short groups of slurred notes ("Viennese slurs"), to the aforementioned legato "singing tone" that was so prized by Wieck, requiring a soft and flexible wrist and nuanced finger-work. The right-hand figures create a particularly interesting texture. The middle voice is marked *tenuto*, encouraging the short sixteenth-note intervals to be shaped within the decay of the middle

¹⁸ Tom Wolf, e-mail message to author, March 18, 2014.

¹⁹ I would like to thank Thomas Synofzik, the director of the Robert-Schumann-Haus, for this unique opportunity.

voice. All these are interspersed with the occasional improvisatory flourish, as would be expected of a professional virtuosa in the nineteenth century. A particularly inventive example can be found in variation three, where at least five distinct kinds of ‘short’ notes are called for, a veritable “study in staccato” (see Figure 1.2.).

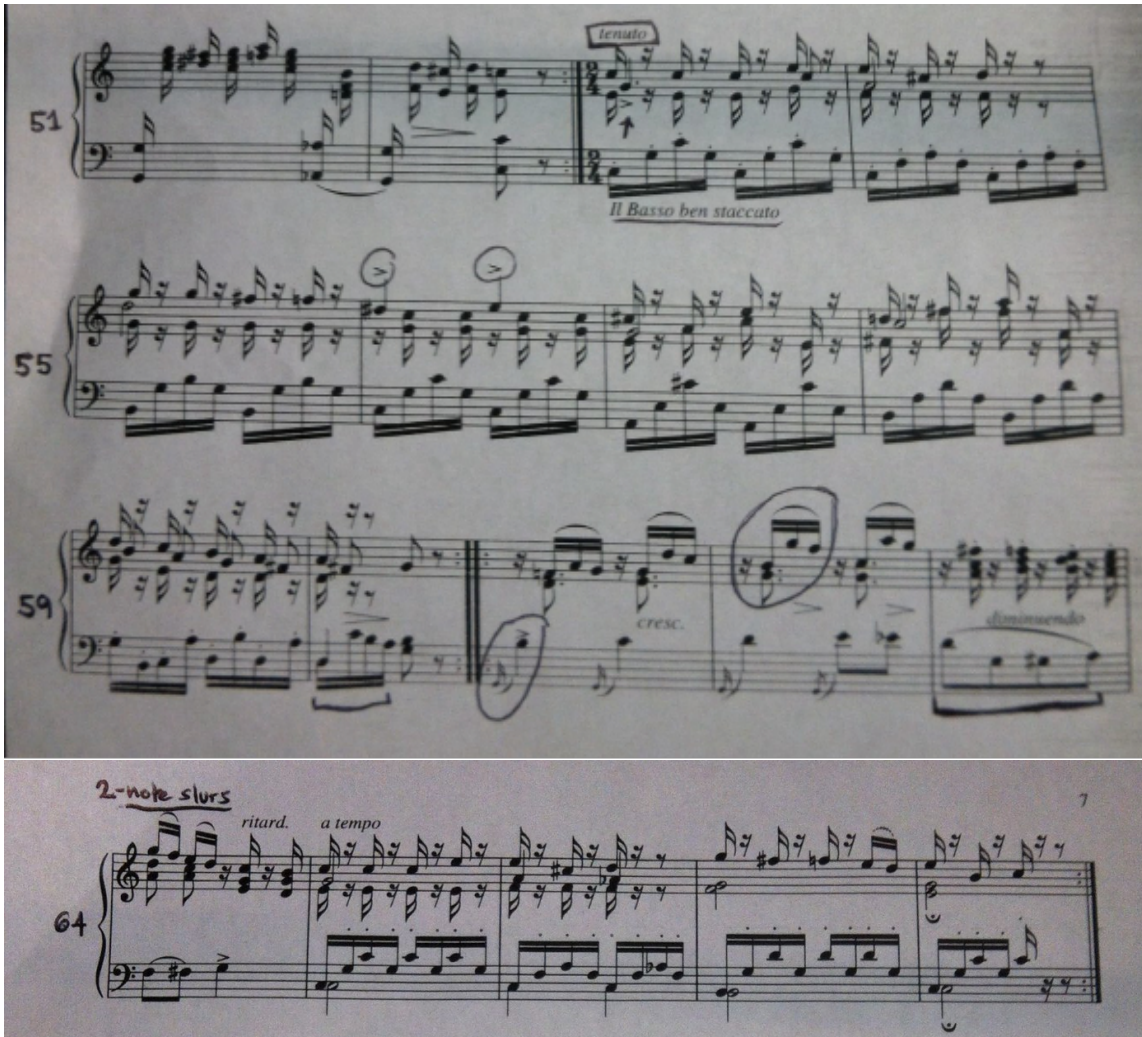


Figure 1.2. Clara Wieck, *Romance Variée* Op. 3 (1833). Variation III, mm. 53-68

Jacob Sagrans, in his evaluation of virtuosity in Clara Schumann’s piano compositions, describes this work as a “theme followed by a set of highly ornamented variations, the

composition appeals to the aesthetics of *grand opéra* and singability, with the added clichés of extended cadenzas full of impressive sounding yet overly repetitive ornamental figures, simple arpeggiation, parallel rolled chords, [...] frequent playing of the melody in octaves, and a *tour de force* presto finale.”²⁰ Similarly highlighting the virtuosic sensibilities of the piece, Nancy Reich writes: “The variations are replete with the musical clichés of the day, and it is precisely the kind of shallow work Robert Schumann was to hold up to ridicule in the *Neue Zeitschrift*.”²¹

Rather than treat such a piece as lacking in certain more mature qualities, found in Clara’s later works, I would suggest that the *Romance Variée* is in fact an opportunity in disguise, in which one can very directly experience Clara Wieck’s physicality at her instrument. The variation set is indeed teeming with virtuosic showmanship,²² but it also provides a roadmap of Clara’s gestural habits at her instrument. The *Romance* displays particular textures and passages that Clara must have felt comfortable enough to exhibit in front of a critical audience, highlighting the instrument’s - as well as her own - strengths. It is interesting in this regard to note that Wieck strongly advocates the playing of such salon music, claiming that it is in this kind of music, more so than with a piece by Beethoven, that the student can develop her sense of nuance and colour:

Should the teacher choose only Beethoven as material for study, then
good technique, a reasonably sound manner of playing, intelligence
and awareness will suffice to achieve a largely satisfactory

²⁰ Jacob Sgrans, “Virtuosity in Clara Schumann’s Piano Compositions,” *Musicological Explorations* 11 (2010): 57.

²¹ Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 235.

²² From a purely practical stand-point, the inclusion of this piece in the young Clara’s concerts would have been absolutely necessary to insure her continued appeal to an early nineteenth-century audience.

performance. The music itself goes a long way toward compensating [...] for dry or crudely shaded playing, for a mediocre or negligent touch and other shortcomings. [...] Elegance and smoothness, certain coqueties, delicacies, cleanliness, shadings of every sort, including very special kinds - in short, the art of nuance - one should not seek to cultivate in a Beethoven sonata. Quite other opportunities for that are offered by pieces of the kind I have just mentioned. [In an earlier paragraph, Wieck lists several works by Chopin, Heller and Herselt, among others.] The variety is much more amusing for the player. It heightens his attentiveness, tires him less, protects him from negligence, furthers his artistic awareness and, in the end, surprises him agreeably when he can play, one after another, three pieces so different from one another in character.²³

²³ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 99-100.

A Short Discussion of the Pedal

In Wieck's *Piano and Song*, an entire chapter is devoted to the question of the pedal and its correct use. Wieck's advice on this matter, which is really more of a diatribe, is worth quoting at some length:

The foot-piece to the right on the piano-forte raises the dampers, and in that way makes the tones resound and sing, and takes from them the dryness, shortness, and want of fulness, which is always the objection to the piano-forte, especially to those of the earlier construction [in an earlier passage, he refers specifically to instruments of Stein and Conrad Graf as part of this 'earlier' category]. This is certainly an advantage; the more the tone of the piano-forte resembles singing, the more beautiful it is. But, in order not to injure the distinctness and detract from the clear phrasing of the performance, a very skillful and prudent use of the pedal is necessary in rapid changes of harmony, particularly in the middle and lower portion of the instrument.

Wieck continues, now directly addressing his reader:

You all use the pedal too much and too often, especially on large, fine concert pianos of the new construction [more robust and resonant pianos, like Erard, Broadwood, Baptist Streicher, Klems and so on], which, with their heavy stringing having in themselves a fuller, more vibrating tone [...] You must listen to what you are

playing. You do not play for yourselves alone; frequently you play to hearers who are listening for the first time to the pieces you are performing²⁴. Try a few passages without pedal, -- for instance, those in which the changes of the harmony succeed each other rapidly, even in the highest treble, -- and see what repose, what serene enjoyment, what refreshment is afforded, what delicate shading is brought out [...] for your habit is so deeply rooted that you no longer know when and how often you use the pedal. Chopin, that highly gifted, elegant, sensitive composer and performer, may serve as a model for you here. [...] If you examine and observe the minute, critical directions in his compositions, you can obtain from him a complete instruction for the nice and correct use of the pedal.²⁵

Robert Schumann also expressed his opinions in regard to the expressive virtues of the pedal: “The older I grow, the more convinced I am that the piano expresses itself mainly in the following three styles: (1) richness of sound and varied harmony progressions (made use of by Beethoven and Franz Schubert); (2) *pedal effect* (as with Field); (3) volubility (Czerny, Herz, and others). In the first category we find the expansive players; in the second, *the fanciful ones*; and in the third, those distinguished by their pearly technique. Many-sided, cultured composer-performers [...] combine all three, and are consequently the most beloved by players.”²⁶

²⁴ It is meaningful that the pedal is here considered as an impediment to intelligibility.

²⁵ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 54-55.

²⁶ Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*. Quoted in Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique* (Washington: R.B. Luce, 1976), 206. Italics mine.

Published in 1854, it is noteworthy that Schumann associates the pedal with a particular effect, suggesting that it is to be used as a tool for specific expressive means.²⁷ With this in mind, as well as Wieck's persistent warnings against the overuse of the pedal, I try to be judicious in my pedal use as I play the *Romance Variée*. When I opt to employ the pedal, I do so if I wish to enhance an improvisational nature of a particular passage or section, or if I would like to bring out a particular sonic effect (see Figures 1.3. and 1.4. for examples of places where I consider using pedal).

²⁷ This resonates strongly with C.P.E. Bach: "The undamped register of the pianoforte is the most pleasing and, once the performer learns to observe the necessary precautions in the face of its reverberations, the most delightful for improvisation." C.P.E. Bach, "Improvisation," in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing the Clavier*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), 430-431.

32 Cadenza

The musical score for measure 32 of Clara Wieck's *Romance Variée Op. 3* (1833) is presented in five systems. The first system is labeled '32 Cadenza' and shows a piano introduction with a treble and bass staff. The second system continues the piano part with a treble staff and a bass staff. The third system features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a supporting line. The fourth system shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a supporting line, with the instruction 'poco a poco' above the treble staff. The fifth system is labeled 'Presto' and shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a supporting line, with the instruction 'a tempo' above the treble staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

calando *pp* *ff* *diminuendo* *f*

Figure 1.3. Clara Wieck, *Romance Variée Op. 3* (1833). Cadenza, measure 32



Figure 1.4. Clara Wieck, *Romance Variée Op. 3* (1833). Second half of Variation IV, mm. 90-96

2. The Pianos

At some of her earliest performances Clara Wieck occasionally performed on instruments that were even ‘older’ in their construction and mechanism. In a diary entry from October 1828, Clara writes after having just played in front of the violinist Paganini: “I had to play to him, on a wretched old piano with black keys which had been left behind by a student.”²⁸ The reference to “black keys” suggests that Clara was referring to a five-octave piano, an instrument at the height of German and Viennese piano building only twenty years earlier. By the late 1820s, such “black” instruments would have been considered outdated as Europe’s musical centres were well on their way to using larger and more resonating instruments. If we recall Wieck’s earlier remark, in which he reprimands piano teachers who allow their students to learn to play on “grands with thin legs [...] on which a proper touch is impossible to teach or acquire,”²⁹ it may be that he is here, too, referring to a five-octave type piano. However, as “wretched” as this piano may have been deemed to be by Clara and her father, Paganini still enjoyed the young Clara’s playing very much, and complimented her on her musical feeling.³⁰ Evidently, the old instrument proved a challenge, but one she overcame.

The kaleidoscopic range of pianos Clara met with only grew as she began to tour and perform throughout Europe. When in 1839 Clara Wieck embarked on an unaccompanied tour to Paris, she found the pianos of local builders, Pleyel and Erard, “stiff” and “dreadful.”³¹ She wrote to Robert that she dared not play in public before she’d had a good few weeks to practice on the

²⁸ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life*, 1:14.

²⁹ Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 65.

³⁰ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life*, 1:14.

³¹ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life*, 1:212.

pianos beforehand. Instruments of French design during this time were rather heavier to operate than the Viennese ones that Clara was used to until this point. A report written about one of Clara's Parisian performances demonstrates the realistic nature of her concerns regarding this matter. Following a *matinée* in which Clara participated on March 20th 1839 at Erard's salon, Heinrich Probst, the Parisian agent for the Leipzig music publishing firm, Breitkopf und Härtel reported:

“Clara Wieck has still not created a great sensation and has not made the romantic style fashionable. On Thursday she played 5 pieces!! At Schlesinger's Concert de la Gazette [the French publisher, Maurice Schlesinger, was the sponsor of this event] and met with - [sic] very moderate applause. Her playing is rough and her scales certainly do not have the Clementi smoothness that Herz and Kalkbrenner demand.”³²

In his analysis of Clara's private performances, David Ferris provides this review as evidence of Clara's struggles to find a satisfactory balance between *composer's music*, which required a sense of fidelity in the realization of a composed work from both performer and audience (which the reviewer here calls “romantic style”), and *performer's music*, the musical theatrics expected of touring artists. In other words, the failure of this particular performance was contingent on the musical content of the concert. I suggest that the reaction of the Parisian agent had just as much to do, if not more so, with the piano itself as with the choice of repertoire, and that ultimately, it may have been simply a matter of an unsuccessful attempt by Clara at adjusting to an instrument with which she had no previous experience. The stronger string tension, heavier

³² Quoted and translated in David Ferris, “Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck's Concerts in Berlin,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56/2 (2003): 363.

hammers and action of the French instrument would have required a stronger attack at the keyboard to be able to control an even execution of scales or passages, as well as learning to work with the much more resonant sound these types of instruments produce. Litzmann's account of a letter written by Friedrich Wieck provides a telling example of how accustoming oneself to unfamiliar piano actions was a real consideration for performing pianists (and no less so for their hosts) as they travelled through the various musical centres of Europe. "He wrote [...] to one of his friends in Berlin and asked him to go at once to Behrens and to warn him not to trust his piano to Clara; she was now accustomed to the stiff English mechanism and broke all other instruments."³³ Written in the midst of his falling-out with Clara over her desire to marry Robert Schumann against Wieck's will, this statement may be nothing more than an exaggeration, a lie conjured up by a desperate Wieck. Even so, it is reflective of a wider musical context, one in which pianists were traveling greater distances and, as piano builders increasingly experimented with piano design and action, having to play on instruments with very different mechanisms. As Thomas Synofzik has demonstrated, transitioning back and forth between playing on Viennese and English-style actions during the 1840s did not always come easily to Clara.³⁴

³³ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 1:257.

³⁴ Synofzik, "'....which I could barely press down'", 2010.

By the 1850s and 60s however, Clara did often play on instruments built according to French and English design.³⁵ English Broadwood pianos were the instrument of choice for Clara when she crossed the channel to tour in England, and by the time a young pianist named Adelina de Lara had come to study with Clara in Frankfurt in the 1880s, she describes the Steinway pianos that Clara had at her house and on which she taught all her lessons. According to a list compiled by Synofzik of instruments known to have been used by Clara in her various concerts from 1862 to 1891,³⁶ Clara almost exclusively played on instruments that were equipped with English-style actions. Both Streicher and Breitkopf und Härtel pianos used throughout the 1850s and 60s, had a combined English-German mechanism. Streicher patented such a mechanism in 1831, and starting in the 1840s, Breitkopf und Härtel began to incorporate the Victoria Patent Action that was developed by the Broadwood piano firm in London. This included a double-escapement. Instruments by the Düsseldorf builder, Johann Bernhard Klems,³⁷ were very much inspired by Erard's double-escapement.³⁸ Steinway/Steinweg Nachf. pianos are listed 120 times

³⁵ Synofzik, “...which I could barely press down”, 2010, “Von Stein zu Steinweg - Clara Schumann und ihre Klavierbauer” [From Stein to Steinweg: Clara Schumann and Her Piano Builders] (paper presented at Michaelstein, November 7th, 2013) and n.d., “Clara Schumann und der St. Petersburger Klavierbauer Karl Wirth” [Clara Schumann and the St. Petersburg Piano Constructor Karl Wirth], Zwickau.

³⁶ Synofzik, “From Stein to Steinway,” 2013. This list is compiled on the basis of the collection of Clara Schumann's concert programmes housed at the Robert-Schumann-Haus, spanning from 1828-1891.

³⁷ Instruments by Klems are listed to have been used on 38 occasions between 1853-1878. Clara also owned two Klems pianos. One was given to her as a gift by Robert Schumann in 1853. Another was purchased in 1866. Synofzik has also compiled a list of the instruments owned by Clara Schumann or gifted to her. Synofzik, “From Stein to Steinweg,” 2013.

³⁸ Synofzik, “...which I could barely press down”, 2010.

between 1871-1891.³⁹ What effect the gradual transition from playing on Viennese action pianos to English/French ones may have had on Clara's approach to her instrument over the span of her career, will be examined in the following chapter.

³⁹ Clara owned five Grotrian-Helfferich-Schulz/Th. Steinweg Nachf. [Grotrian-Helfferich-Schulz/ Successors to Th. Steinweg] pianos that she kept in her Frankfurt house starting from 1871, and on which she taught her piano students. Synofizk, "From Stein to Steinway," 2013.

The Steinweg company was eventually sold to Friedrich Grotrian, a partner in the firm, who together with his two associates, Adolph Helfferich and H.D.W. Schulz, bought out Theodor Steinweg, the eldest son of H.E. Steinway (who had left for New York in 1850 to found the Steinway & Sons company). Theodor had stayed behind after his father and took ownership of the old Steinweg factory together with Wilhlem Grotrian, until he too left in 1865 and joined the rest of the family in the United-States. These instruments were still advertised as being built according to the design of Theodor Steinweg until 1886. Grove Music Online. Margaret Cranmer. "Grotrian-Steinweg." Accessed March 14, 2016. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11837>.

Chapter Two

Improvisation

1. A Daughters' Request

In 1895, Clara Schumann put to paper notated versions for eleven improvisations in the form of introductory preludes. This was done at the urging of two of her daughters: Marie, the eldest, and Eugenie, the youngest. In a note attached to the Berlin autograph of this collection, Marie Schumann writes:

In the last year of her life, our mother, at our request, wrote out the exercises she played before her scales, with which she began her practice daily, as well as a few preludes of the kind she was in the habit of improvising before pieces, quite freely on the spur of the moment; she also did this publicly, and one could get an idea of her frame of mind from the way in which the harmonies flowed to her. Now, of course, she maintained that it was not possible for her to capture this type of free improvisation on paper, but she finally gave in to our requests, and these small preludes came into being.⁴⁰

These evocative preludes offer a glimmer of Clara Schumann at the piano. These short improvisations (of the eleven, four were intended as introductions to specific Robert Schumann

⁴⁰ Quoted in Valerie Woodring Goertzen, "Setting the Stage: Clara Schumann's Preludes," in *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 237.

movements) encapsulate a lifetime's worth of performance on the concert stage, and provide the most direct links to a player and her instrument.

Out of all the things a daughter might ask of her mother to remember her by, it was the preluding that Marie and Eugenie insisted on. In the memoirs of Eugenie Schumann, we read how improvisation constituted a regular routine in Clara's daily practice. The replenishing effect it had on Eugenie is clearly reflected in her choice of adjectives:

But the most wonderful of them was the day on which Mamma began to practice again after a fair interval of rest. Directly after breakfast the grand piano was opened and the house flooded with sound. Scales rolled and swelled like a tidal sea [...]; in octaves, thirds, sixths, tenths and double thirds [...] then arpeggios of all kinds, octaves, shakes, everything prestissimo and without the slightest break, exquisite modulations from key to key. [...] We often pressed Mamma to write down the sequence of an hour's exercises, but she always said it was impossible to retain exactly this kind of free fantasia.⁴¹

The idea that these preludes constituted self-reflective, and highly personal, musical thoughts is strengthened by the fact that the two copies that were made of the original Berlin autograph were most likely meant only for the use of the two Schumann daughters, with no intention to disseminate them.⁴²

⁴¹ Eugenie Schumann, *Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann*, 1927. Trans. Marie Busch, (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1986), 192.

⁴² Goertzen, "Setting the Stage," 243.

2. The “Clara Schumann Suite”

Valerie Woodring Goertzen, in her invaluable research on Clara Schumann,⁴³ has identified a lifelong habit of including self-contained suites of short works into Clara’s concert programs. These “mosaics of small forms,” as Goertzen calls them, consisted of two to four individual and contrasting works, with introductory preludes acting as a kind of connective tissue before and between the pieces.⁴⁴ These suites would be listed as one item on the concert program. Reproduced in Figure 2.1. is a program from a concert on March 5, 1843, in Hamburg. Item number 6 on the program includes a prelude and fugue by Bach, a Mendelssohn “song without words”, and finally Liszt’s *Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor*.

The choice of pieces in this suite might at first glance seem to be a random selection arbitrarily ordered, but on closer look, the rationale behind Clara’s selections becomes clear, and the particular care given to the placement of each piece within the suite becomes evident. Although which prelude and fugue of Bach’s is being played is not mentioned, an educated guess would be either the C-sharp, D, or F-sharp major preludes and fugues from Book I of the WTC,

⁴³ Goertzen, “By Way of Introduction: Preluding by 18th- and Early 19th-Century Pianists”, *The Journal of Musicology*, 14/3 (1996), “Setting the Stage: Clara Schumann’s Preludes,” in *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), *Preludes, Exercises and Fugues for Piano*, ed. Valerie Woodring Goertzen (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Hildegard Pub., 2001), and in particular, “Clara Wieck Schumann’s Improvisations and Her ‘Mosaics’ of Small Forms,” in *Beyond Notes: Improvisation in Western Music of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Rudolph Rasch (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

⁴⁴ Goertzen, “Setting the Stage” and “Clara Wieck Schumann’s Improvisations.”

all first performed by Clara starting from 1835.⁴⁵ In accessible major keys, all three are very much on the short side, and so would not be too taxing for the average amateur listener. Possibly, depending on which “song without words” was being performed, an improvised prelude might now be included in preparation for the Mendelssohn piece. Finally, with a nod to the standard bravura variation set on a well-known operatic tune, Liszt’s *Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor*, an assured crowd pleaser, would end the set. Following David Ferris’s distinction between *performer’s music* and *composer’s music*,⁴⁶ this suite becomes a carefully balanced and unified whole, palatable and enjoyable to an average concertgoer. The Bach prelude, if delivered with a certain brilliance, could be presented as a heightened, artistic form of *performer’s music* (of the three possibilities, the D-major prelude then seems the most plausible and the F-sharp major prelude the least plausible candidate). The Mendelssohn “song without words” would be representative of *composer’s music* but introduced by a preparatory prelude, and the Liszt performer’s music *par excellence*, replete with the requisite vocally inspired lyricism and musical theatrics.

⁴⁵ “Clara Wieck-Schumann’s study and concert repertoire”, Schumann-Portal, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.schumann-portal.de/alphabetical.html>. (Preludes and fugues in minor keys started to be included as part of Clara’s regular concert repertoire only about a decade later.)

⁴⁶ Ferris, “Public Performance and Private Understanding,” 354.

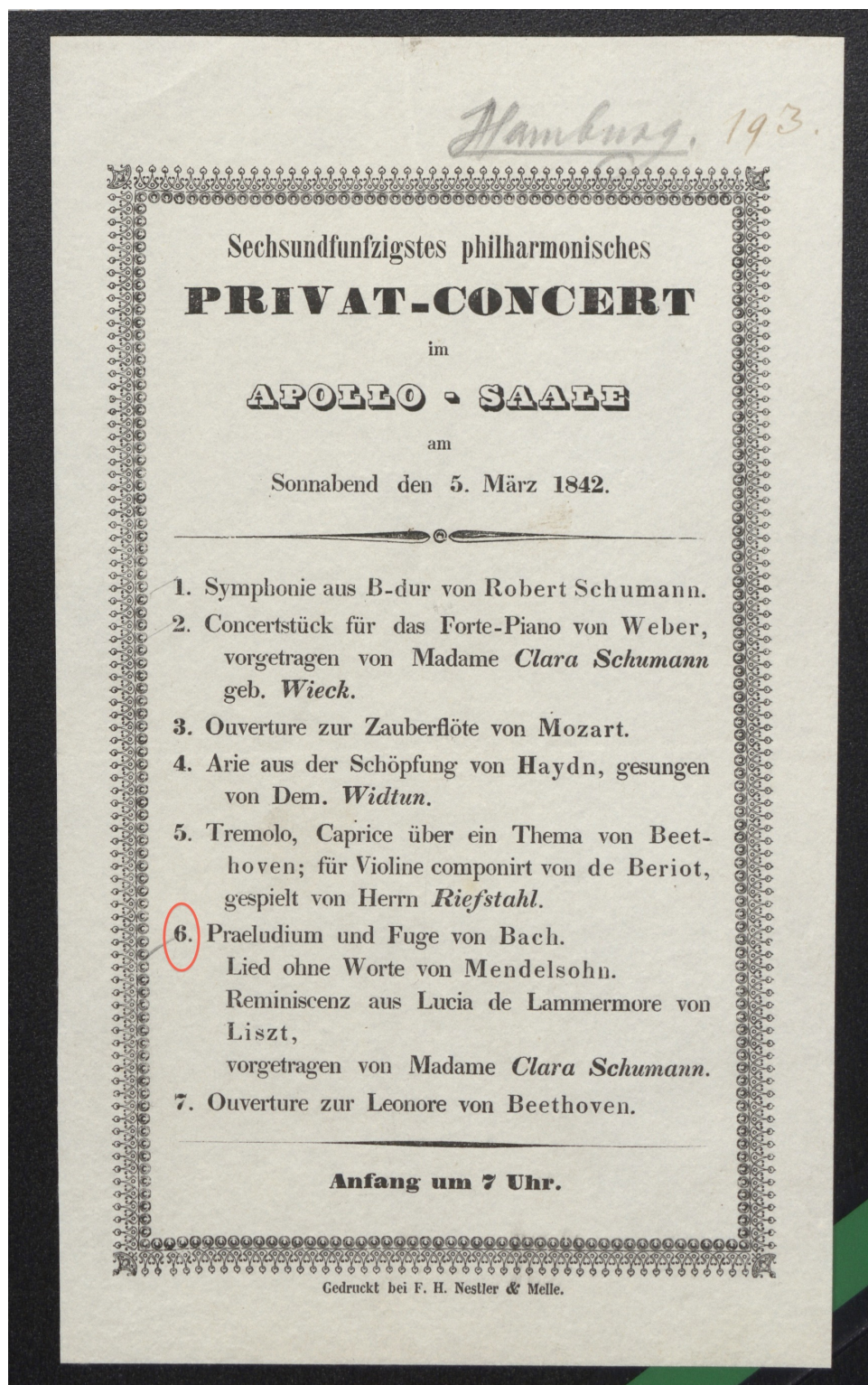


Figure 2.1. Clara Schumann, Program 5 March 1843

Robert-Schumann-Haus Zwickau; Archiv-Nr.: 1853. 10463, 193-C3; reproduced with permission of Robert-Schumann-Haus, Zwickau.

A much earlier concert given in the Walter Salon in Vienna in March 1838 has as its seventh item on the program a Chopin nocturne followed by two Adolph Henselt pieces, an etude followed by an Andante and Allegro.⁴⁷ Here, one might consider the Chopin nocturne as *composer's music*, compensated by the two following lighter Henselt pieces. In this instance, an introductory improvisation might be inserted at the beginning of the set to introduce the 'serious' Chopin nocturne. With this kind of give-and-take, Clara Schumann could gradually introduce new and unfamiliar works in a monitored fashion, judging audience reaction and taste (which would have been different from city to city) and matching her choice of repertoire accordingly.

This approach would have extended to the programming of works by Robert Schumann. As Clara began to include more of Robert's pieces in her public performances, sensitive programming was needed to secure a good reception of his compositions. As the following oft-quoted passage suggests, Clara was acutely aware of her audience and their particular tastes, and as a performing artist dependent on a supporting public, she knew that it was necessary to first introduce Schumann's compositions in a calculated and conscious way:

Listen Robert! Will you compose something brilliant, easy to be understood, something that has no directions written on it, but is a piece which hangs together as a whole, not too long, and not too short? I should so much like to have something of yours to play at

⁴⁷ Presented in April Prince, "Der anmutreichen, unschuldsvollen Herrin: Clara Schumann's Public Personas" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2009), 305.

concerts, something suited to the general public. It is indeed humiliating for a genius, but policy sometimes demands it.⁴⁸

In a concert in Dresden, on January 30, 1849, Clara Schumann incorporated one of her husband's small pieces into such a suite (Figure 2.2.). The suite began with an unspecified Chopin nocturne, then continued with a Schumann *Romanze* (probably from the *4 Klavierstücke*, Op. 32) and finished with a Mendelssohn "song without words."

Another example from a concert in Cologne in 1853 (Figure 2.3.) features, again, as item number six, a Schumann *Romanze*, this time sandwiched in between two Mendelssohn "song without words". A song in F major (possibly from the Op. 53) starts the set and one in A major concludes it (the A major song may be from either the Op. 53, Op. 62 or Op. 102 collections). When mixing and matching various movements, preluding could come in handy, as it helped transition from movement to movement, and assisted the audience in making sense of the contrasting musical material. Even with the growing popularity of Robert Schumann's music, Clara rarely played his complete sets, such as the *Carnaval*, Op. 9, or the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, in public. Excerpts from the complete works would be included however, and for example, in a concert played in the North German city of Rostock, in the winter of 1855, Clara began such a suite with *Jagdlied* from the *Waldszenen*, Op. 82 then continued with *Schlummerlied* from the *Albumblätter*, Op. 124, and finished with *Traumes Wirren* from *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 1:215

⁴⁹ Presented in Prince, "Der anmutreichen, unschuldsvollen Herrin," 359.

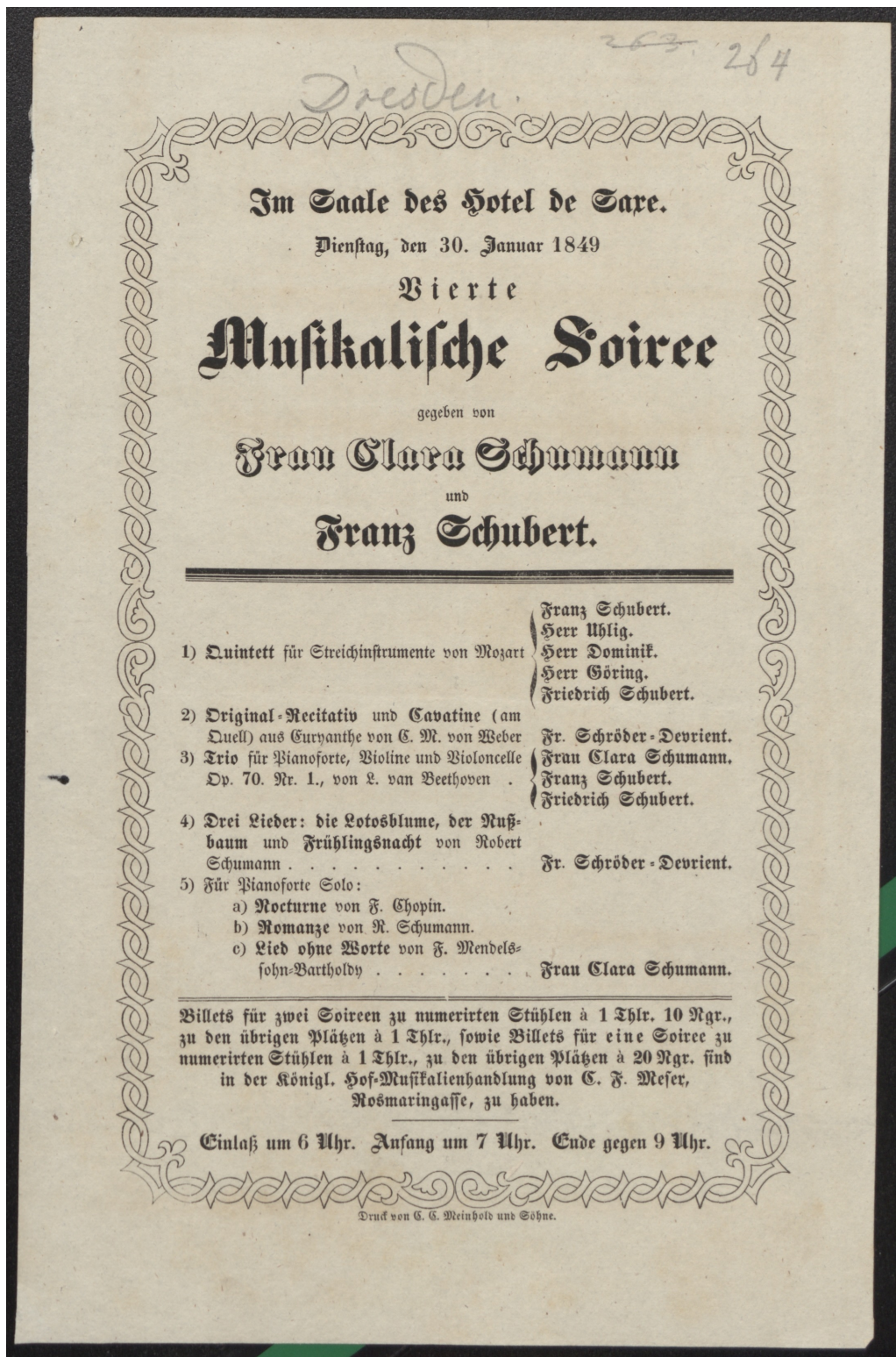


Figure 2.2. Clara Schumann, Program 30 January 1849 Robert-Schumann-Haus Zwickau; Archiv-Nr.: 10463,

264-C3

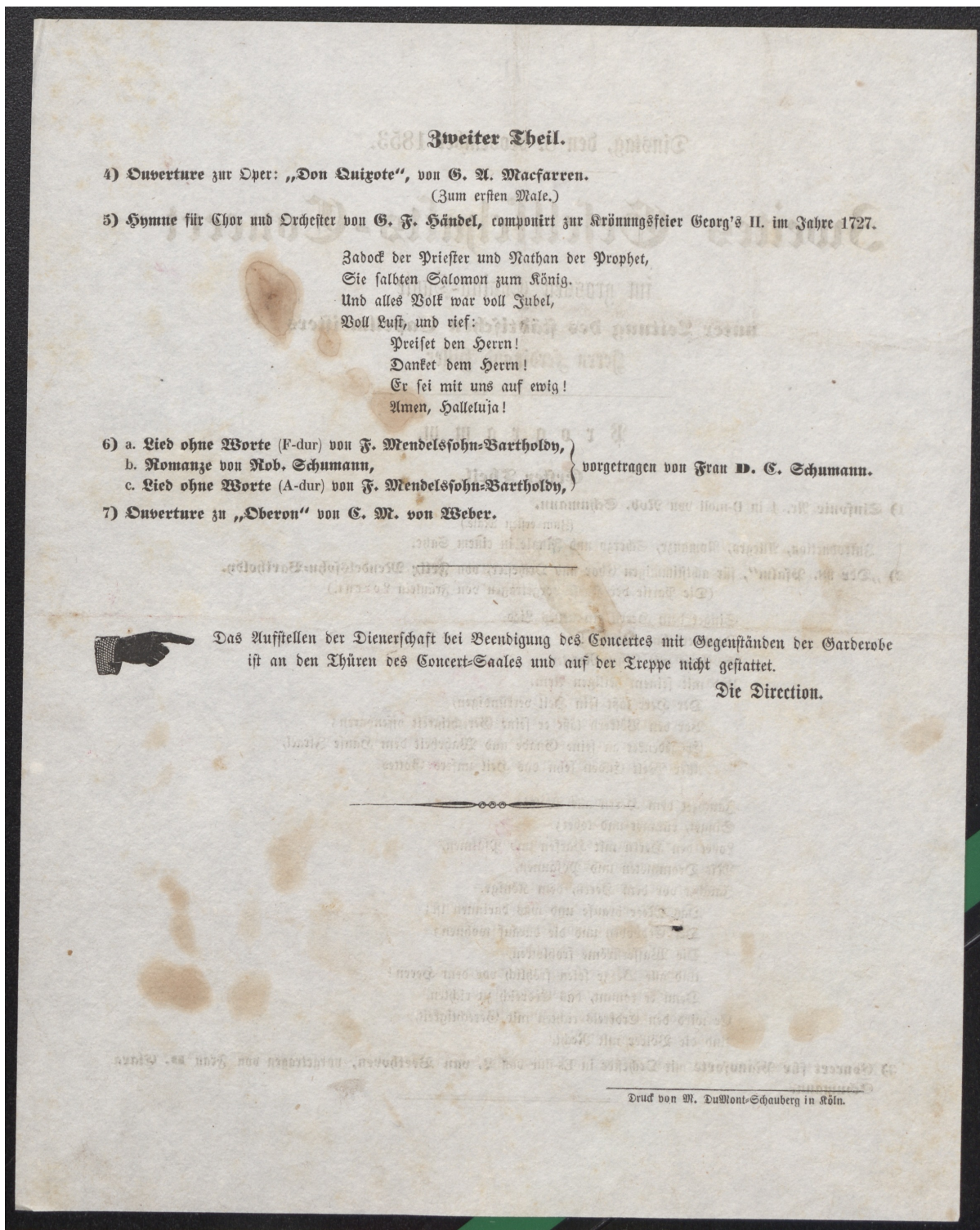


Figure 2.3. Clara Schumann, Program 8 November 1853

Robert-Schumann-Haus Zwickau; Archiv-Nr.:10463,308-C3

As Clara transitioned from being a highly successful child prodigy under the guiding and controlling hand of her father, to a confident, independent, and female concert artist in charge of her own concert management, Clara began to include increasingly more works by composers of the “New Romantic School,” whose music was considered a challenge to conventional notions of what was considered suitable as concert fare. By playing such preludes, Clara could prepare her audience for new and challenging music and secure their goodwill and receptivity to compositions they might otherwise find unintelligible or arduous to listen to. Seeing herself as an authoritative link between the musical ideals of her husband and the general public, Clara, by so doing, was able to delicately maneuver between her desire to promote the music of her choice and the taste of a more mainstream musical public.

These suites, held together by these preludes, offered a way to gently guide a concert going public through unfamiliar harmonic language and musical material. Furthermore, this offered ‘Clara Schumann the performer’ almost infinite ways in which to make use of her creative powers. Improvising her way through the set, Clara could continually challenge herself anew by finding imaginative ways with which to modulate from piece to piece. She could presumably even tailor a particular performance to a certain individual, event, or target audience, by playing with the length of a set and the degree of contrast between the novel and the familiar.

3. The Early Years

That Clara was a formidable improviser, we know from the various contemporary reviews in which her extemporization is explicitly mentioned. For example, in December of 1837, Robert Schumann wrote a report for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* of one of Clara's concerts in Vienna in which he writes:

Clara's short improvised preludes, which introduced each piece in ingenious fashion, and which combined tender, melodious playing with the most brilliant bravura [...] - were received enthusiastically by a public belonging to the most distinguished society and who attended in large numbers, despite the fact that it was a weekday and thus not an ideal day for a concert. [...] Chopin's compositions, performed in such a way, must finally succeed with the masses.⁵⁰

By preluding and playing introductory improvisations and interspersing them in the ways that she did, Clara succeeded in creating opportunities for unique interaction between performer and public. At a time when combating aesthetic ideologies competed for dominance and influence within the public, as well as the private, spheres of music making,⁵¹ this gentle handling of conservative and demanding audiences on the one hand, and unfamiliar and new music on the other, becomes particularly noteworthy, especially when keeping in mind that at the time of this

⁵⁰ Quoted in Goertzen, "Clara Wieck Schumann's Improvisations," 156.

⁵¹ On the various powers that played a part in the shaping of the musical climate of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, see William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

review, Clara Wieck was still a young *virtuosa* at the very start of her career with still much to prove.

In “By Way of Introduction,” Goertzen points out that whereas “Free Fantasies” would have constituted a separate number on a concert program and would have been listed as such, “improvised preludes were not indicated in printed programs as a rule; they were mentioned in reviews only in an occasional passing remark or where something truly worthy of comment was done.”⁵² Thus, Robert Schumann takes the trouble to make sure that the reader understands that it is Clara’s improvisations that help make the case for the music of the young Chopin.

Friedrich Wieck had intended from the very start to groom Clara for a career as a famous artist, and devoted himself entirely to this cause. Cultivating pedagogical skills was important, but to qualify as a professional pianist to begin with, Clara Wieck had to be able to “improvise freely.”⁵³ From Hummel to Czerny, the sources show us that musical audiences in the early decades of the nineteenth century expected improvised variation sets and free fantasias as part of their musical entertainment. That the ability to improvise preludes was considered an important skill in any young musician’s musical upbringing is clear from the many collections of exercise books and models published throughout the mid-eighteenth century and the nineteenth century.

⁵² Goertzen, “By Way of Introduction,” 300.

⁵³ From Wieck’s letter to Johanna Christianne Schumann (Robert Schumann’s mother), in Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life*, 1:19.

Instructive manuals for amateurs were published as early as the late 1760s, providing models for constructing preludes or schemes that one could memorize and then use at opportune moments.⁵⁴

Clara's early musical education included many exercises intended to develop her improvisational abilities. In his 1853 *Piano and Song (Didactic and Polemical)*, Wieck writes that such exercises were assigned to Clara for an entire year before learning to read musical notation. She was encouraged to play everything by ear as well as given small pieces to transpose and small themes (some of which were her own) on which to improvise. She was also required to study scales and cadential progressions in all inversions and keys, and then to improvise and write small compositions based on them. Thus, Clara could develop and internalize her knowledge of harmony and rhythm, simultaneously improving her touch and tone on the piano, without being distracted by the written note.

Amy Fay, at the time a young pianist newly arrived from America to study with Liszt, describes an evening spent at the Wieck's Dresden household in 1872. According to Fay's memoirs, the elderly Wieck (then eighty-seven) was still instructing a daily class of young girls:

⁵⁴ Foremost among these manuals are Muzio Clementi, *Musical Characteristics or A Collection of Preludes and Cadences for the Harpsichord or Piano Forte Composed in the Style of Haydn, Kozeluch, Mozart, Sterkel, Vanhal and the Author, Op. 19* (London: Longman and Broderip, 1787), as well as Carl Czerny, *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte: Opus 200*, 1829, trans and ed. Alice L. Mitchell (New York: Longman, 1983) and III: XVIII and XIX in a *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School: from the first rudiments piano playing, to the highest and most refined state of cultivation; with the requisite numerous examples, newly and expressly composed for the occasion, Op. 500*. Translated by J. A. Hamilton. London: R. Cocks & Co., 1830. Goertzen provides an exhaustive list of such sources in "By Way of Introduction: Preluding by 18th- and Early 19th-Century Pianists."

The old Herr then said, ‘Now we’ll have something else;’ and got up and went to the piano, and called the young girls. He made three of them sing, one after the other, and they sang very charmingly indeed. One of them he made improvise a *cadenza*, and a second sang the alto to it without accompaniment. He was very proud of that. He exercises the pupils in all sorts of ways, trains them to sing and given tone, and ‘to skip up and down the ladder,’ as they call the scale.⁵⁵

Contrary to what Litzmann has asserted,⁵⁶ there is no evidence that connects the use of Johann Bernhard Logier’s Chiroplast⁵⁷ and Wieck’s teaching philosophy. In fact, in *Piano and Song*, Wieck clearly denounces the use of any mechanical aid in the study of keyboard playing.⁵⁸ I would argue that Wieck’s admiration of Logier lay more in the interactive benefits of group instruction: having students improvise and play off of each other, all the while internalizing fundamental principles of harmony and voice-leading as well as developing essential

⁵⁵ Amy Fay, *Music-study in Germany, from the home correspondence of Amy Fay* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1896), 166. also cited in Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Techniques* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 210.

⁵⁶ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist’s life*, 1:4.

⁵⁷ The Chiroplast consisted of a movable frame fitted onto the keyboard and into which a student would insert her hands while playing so as to insure proper placement of the hands and wrists.

⁵⁸ “With pianists, I permit no cutting of the web between the fingers, no wrist guide, no finger springs and no stretching machine, and certainly not the finger torturer thought up by a famous pupil of mine, which he fashioned against my wishes and used behind my back.” Wieck, *Piano and Song*, 71-72.

musicianship skills, such as listening and keeping time.⁵⁹ Litzmann, further describes how the study of Carl Czerny's *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*⁶⁰ constituted an integral part of Clara's habitual daily practice as a young child. By this alone, one can observe how important and basic a skill improvisation was considered to be, not just for Clara, but for any young pianist who entertained professional ambitions.

The eleven-year old Clara Wieck could not only "improvise freely." According to her father, she had also proven herself superior to all other *women* pianists.⁶¹ This gendered distinction is meaningful, both in its persistent presence throughout Clara's professional career (in varied and not always explicit guises) and in what it portrays of the ambitious father. One can sense that this was not the final frontier as far as Friedrich Wieck's ambitions were concerned and that he had no intention to allow his daughter's abilities and talent to exist in only one exclusive performance sphere,⁶² regardless of what was generally deemed appropriate otherwise.

⁵⁹ This view is also supported by Reich in *Clara Schumann*, 289-291. For further information on Logier's method (beyond the infamous Chiroplast), Bernarr Rainbow, "Johann Bernhard Logier and the Chiroplast Controversy", *The Musical Times* 131/1766 (1990).

⁶⁰ Carl Czerny, *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte op.200*, (Vienna: 1829). In Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 1:22-23. Litzmann quotes an early diary entry in which Clara writes how angry her father was with her, after she had failed to improvise an ornamented repeat for a set of Franz Hüntten variations during one of their lessons. Her 'punishment' was "to play nothing but scales, Cramer's *Études* Bk. 1, and Cherny's trilling-exercises [...] until I had faithfully promised to improve," 1:13.

⁶¹ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 1:19.

⁶² In this case, this would mean the private sphere. For the further significance that performing in private settings held for Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann, see Ferris, "Public Performance and Private Understanding," 2003.

4. Performing *à la Clara*

As my curiosity was ignited by the possibilities that preluding *à la Clara* had to offer, I have since experimented with this idea in a number of past performances and present one such option as an accompanying video [<https://youtu.be/jqev8eq2WuE>]. The two programs reproduced as Figures 4 and 6 are examples of two concerts in which I experimented with creating programs on the basis of Clara's own play bills.⁶³ For the doctoral recital at McGill (Figure 2.4.), I opted for a more "complete works" approach, playing multi-movement pieces in their entirety, while interspersing the "Clara Schumann Suite" in between them. For the concert at the Jerusalem Music Center, the clarinetist Ido Azrad and I opted to create a more intimate and informal atmosphere, along the lines of the musical soirées that Clara hosted in her Frankfurt home (in which the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld and Johannes Brahms were often in attendance). In this case, we included complete opuses alongside single movements excerpts (such as the Mendelssohn movement).

Concerning the "Clara Schumann Suite" itself, in both concerts I tried to base myself quite strictly on the model that is suggested by perusing through many of the extant concert programs of Clara Schumann. The pattern that emerges when looking through these playbills is one that artfully combines both *performer's* and *composer's music*, as it contrasts works of differing lengths and characters. In analogy to the trio of works we find in Clara's programs in Figures 2.1.-2.3., I selected the three following pieces for the construction of my own Clara Schumann Suite.

⁶³ I am grateful to the Robert-Schumann-Haus for sharing digital copies of these programs with me.

The video begins with an excerpt from the D-minor *Romanze* (from the Op. 32). *Schlummerlied*, prefaced by Clara's notated improvisation to it (2:33 on the video), follows. The introspective *Schlummerlied* provides a rather marked contrast with the energetic *Romanze*.⁶⁴ The Chopin *Nocturne in B major*, Op. 62, which Clara first performed as a German premiere in Düsseldorf in January of 1851,⁶⁵ ends the set. For me, a novice improviser, particularly this nocturne seemed a good entry point into the world of improvising, as its very beginning is introductory in nature (Figure 2.5.). It's almost as if the arpeggiated chords at the opening of the nocturne are intended by Chopin as a short demonstration on how one can meander one's way into the piece. Taking Chopin's lead, I extend this improvisatory moment just a little longer before delving into the lyrical right hand melody, and preface it with some preluding of my own (5:02). When improvising, I prefer to mentally sketch out a road-map of sorts, outlining various points of arrival, and experimenting with different ways to journey from point A to point B. Crucially, I never write down the improvisations if I prepare them in advance (not yet having summoned the nerve to attempt to completely improvise "live"), as I prefer to maintain the notion of discovery and surprise for myself as I perform them in front of an audience.

⁶⁴ In many programs, The *Romanze* was played second in a suite of three, and not first. Since the filming of this video, I have changed the order, and now perform this set starting with the *Schlummerlied*, the *Romanze* following.

⁶⁵ Prince, "Der anmutreichen, unschuldsvollen Herrin," 342.

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Le samedi 24 mai 2014
à 17h

Saturday, May 24, 2014
5:00 p.m.

Récital de doctorat

Doctoral Recital

Gili Loftus

fortepiano

classe de / class of

Tom Beghin

Sonate en fa mineur, opus 57 / Sonata in F minor, Op. 57

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro assai

Andante con moto

Allegro ma non troppo - Presto

Romanze (4 Klavierstücke, opus 32)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Vorspiel zu Schlummerlied

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Schlummerlied (Albumblätter, opus 124)

R. Schumann

Nocturne en si majeur / in B major, Op. 62 No. 1

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

Rondo Brillant pour piano à quatre mains en la majeur, opus 30 /

Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870)

Rondo Brillant for piano four hands in A major, Op. 30

Michael Pecak, fortépiano

-entracte-

Prélude et Fugue en do dièse majeur (CBT I), BWV 848 /

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Prelude and Fugue in C sharp Major (WTC I), BWV 848

Vorspiel zu Des Abends

C. Schumann

Des Abends (Fantasiestücke, opus 12)

R. Schumann

An Die Ferne Geliebte, opus 98

L. v. Beethoven

Auf dem Hügel sitz ich spähend

Wo die Berge so blau

Leichte Segler in den Höhen

Diese Wolken in den Höhen

Es kehret der Maien, es blühet die Au

Nimm sie hin den, diese Lieder

Brent Calis, baryton / baritone

Ce concert fait partie des épreuves imposées à Gili Loftus pour l'obtention d'un doctorat en interprétation.
This recital is presented by Gili Loftus in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Music in Performance.

Figure 2.4. Doctoral recital at the Schulich School of Music, McGill University, Montréal



Figure 2.5. Introductory opening of the Chopin Nocturne in B Major, Op. 62.⁶⁶

For the concert given in Jerusalem (Figure 2.6.), I decided to pair the *Des Abends* with the third movement of Beethoven's *sonata in F minor*, Op. 57 ("Appassionata"), enjoying that moment of uncertainty shared by both myself and the audience as I turn the dreamy D-flat major harmony of the Schumann into the unsettling diminished arpeggios of the Beethoven as they hurtle head-on into the *presto*. Preluding before the Beethoven lent an attitude of spontaneity to both the written works that preceded and followed it (might the whole Schumann piece have in fact been an extended improvisation?), so much so that I recall being swept away (and almost dangerously so, as the radio broadcast of this concert would attest) by the atmosphere that I myself created. The irksome presence of microphones hovering over the piano would not have been a consideration for Clara as she performed, and her audience would not have been able to

⁶⁶ The example is taken from the first French edition of these nocturnes, published by Brandus & Co in Paris in 1846. This edition is available on IMSLP.

relive the experience of listening to her by turning on the radio at a later date. The performance itself would have been the single chance, for both pianist and public, to present and experience those particular pieces (at least as played by Clara during that year's concert season). Although I might strive for a more note-perfect rendition the next time around, I would by no means trade in the excitement of live improvisation in performance.

Youth at the Centre | 26th Season, Concert no. 6
Monday, 23 March 2015 at 5:00 pm

**A Musical afternoon
inspired by Clara Schumann**

Ido Azrad clarinet
Gili Loftus piano

Recorded for *The Voice of Music*
(Broadcast on Fri, 10 April 2015, noon)

Host: **Tal-Haim Samnon**

The next concert will take place on Tuesday,
14 April 2015 at 5:00 pm
Folk Songs
Adaya Peled soprano **Achinoam Keisar** piano
Cesare Zanfini violin **Emunah Keleman** cello
Works by **Ravel, Ben-Haim, Lavri,**
Bartók, Beethoven and others

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R. Schumann (1810-1856)	Fantasiestücke, op. 73 <i>Zart und mit Ausdruck</i> <i>Lebhaft, leicht</i> <i>Rasch und mit Feuer</i>
F. Mendelssohn (1809-1847)	from Sonata for clarinet and piano in E flat major <i>Andante</i>
R. Schumann	Klavierstücke, op. 32: <i>Romance</i>
C. Schumann (1819-1896)	Vorspiel zu <i>Schlummerlied</i>
R. Schumann	Albumblätter, op. 124: <i>Schlummerlied</i>
F. Chopin (1810-1849)	Nocturne in B major, op. 62 no. 1
Intermission	
C. Schumann	Vorspiel zu <i>Des Abends</i>
R. Schumann	Fantasiestücke, op. 12: <i>Des Abends</i>
L.V. Beethoven (1770-1827)	Piano Sonata no. 23 in F minor, op. 57, Appassionata: III. <i>Allegro ma non troppo – Presto</i>
J. Brahms (1833-1897)	Sonata for viola and piano in E flat major, op. 120 no. 2 <i>Allegro amabile</i> <i>Allegro appassionato</i> <i>Andante con moto – Allegro</i>

Figure 2.6. Recital with clarinetist Ido Azrad, recorded live at the Jerusalem Music Centre, Jerusalem, Israel

5. A Mother's Reply

The Berlin autograph of this collection is arranged in two main groups: exercises to be played before scales, and eleven preludes of an introductory nature, played before particular pieces “quite freely in the spur of the moment.” At the end are *Simple Preludes for Students* (Einfache Praeludien für Schüler), which include two harmonic progressions, consisting of fifteen chords each.⁶⁷ These exercises are presumably meant to serve as simplified harmonic schemes which then can be fleshed out in various ways, echoing Wieck’s approach of teaching harmonic fluency through improvisation, with which Clara would have been intimately familiar with (Figures 2.7. and 2.8.).

Als gute Uebung kann empfohlen werden, zu kleinen Melodien verschiedene Harmonien zu suchen, z. B.:	As good practice it is recommended to try writing different harmonies to short melodies; for instance:
Melodie mit 3 verschiedenen Harmonieunterlagen.	Melody with 3 different harmonic arrangements.



The musical notation shows a short melody in G major (one sharp) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of the notes G4, A4, B4, and G4, beamed together. Below the staff, three different harmonic arrangements are shown, labeled 1, 2, and 3. Each arrangement consists of a bass line and a right-hand accompaniment. Arrangement 1 uses a simple triad. Arrangement 2 uses a more complex chord structure. Arrangement 3 uses a different harmonic structure, including a chromatic movement in the bass line.

Figure 2.7. Friedrich Wieck, *Piano Studies*, 1875. Edited by Marie Wieck. Melville, N.Y.: Belwin Mills, 1980

⁶⁷ Goertzen, “Setting the Stage,” 242-244. These are also published in Goertzen, *Preludes, Exercises and Fugues for Piano*.

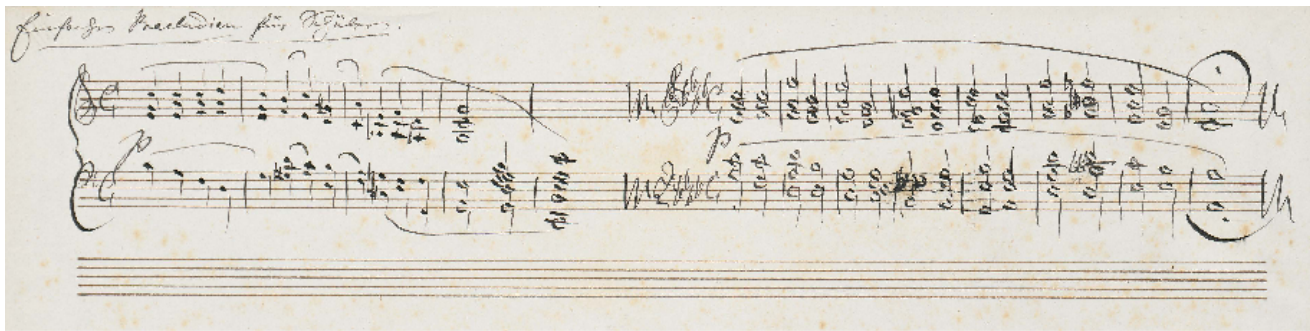


Figure 2.8. Clara's *Einfache Praeludien für Schüler*; Berlin autograph

Of the eleven introductory preludes in the collection, the titles of four of them expressly link them with specific Robert Schumann pieces: an introduction for *des Abends* and *Aufschwung* from *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, an introduction to *Schlummerlied* from the *Albumblätter*, Op. 124, and an F-minor prelude intended as an introduction to the slow movement of Robert Schumann's *Sonata No. 4 in F minor* (composed between 1836-1837, of which no traces survive).⁶⁸

Interspersing sequential progressions and creative modulations with various passage work, the seven 'undesigned' preludes are more generic in nature, although the dynamic and tempo indications in them are rather meticulous and seem too specific to be off-hand. It is evident that Clara took great care in notating them.⁶⁹

Clara played *Des Abends* and *Aufschwung* from the *Fantasiestücke* quite often, and in a letter to Robert Schumann dated March 3, 1838, she names these pieces among her favourites of

⁶⁸ Grove Music Online. John Daverio and Eric Sams. "The Davidsbündler comes of age: Leipzig, 1834–8."

Accessed March 8, 2016. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40704pg6#S40704.6>

⁶⁹ Goertzen suggests that two of the 'undesigned' preludes, one in C-major and the other in D-minor, would be suitable as introductions to Beethoven's "Waldstein" sonata and to the Bach Chaconne (from BWV 1004). "Setting the Stage," 257.

the set.⁷⁰ Generally, both Clara and Robert considered the Op. 12 to be especially suited for public display. Between 1844 and 1880, Clara performed this opus in recital approximately sixty-five times.⁷¹

The opening descending line of the prelude for *Des Abends* (Figure 2.9.) borrows directly from the opening statement of *Des Abends* (Figure 2.10.), although the 6/8 time signature of the prelude serves to regulate the more intricate notation of the 2/8 in the Robert Schumann piece.

The gently flowing theme is reproduced in a straightforward fashion in the prelude, the left hand reduced to minimal harmonic support. The statement of the theme is thus rendered in a clearer fashion, allowing it to be more easily recognizable (and hence, understood) once Clara would have continued to play Robert's composition. The delicate transitions that follow in mm. 4 to 9 serve a double purpose. They elaborate on the D-flat-major scale while gently infusing it with colourful harmonies, and also expose a sense of dreaminess and sweet tenderness. In this particular prelude, Clara chose to concentrate on the dreamy quality of Robert's piece, and anticipated this character in her preceding improvisation. As in Marie's prefatory note, these improvisations were played "on the spur of the moment," and thus could have been different every time, according to Clara's frame of mind while playing and her changing relationship to the piece over time.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 1:137.

⁷¹ Goertzen, "Setting the Stage," 247.

[No. 6] Vorspiel zu "des Abends" v. R.S.
 [Prelude to "des Abends" by R[obert] S[chumann]]

The image displays a musical score for a piano prelude, consisting of four systems of music. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system continues the melodic line in the treble clef, with a measure number of 5 in a box. The third system features a more complex texture, with a measure number of 9 in a box, and includes markings for *ff* (fortissimo), *p* (piano), and *l.h.* (left hand). The fourth system concludes the piece with a measure number of 13 in a box, a *rit.* (ritardando) marking, and a final *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The score is written for a single piano instrument, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) used throughout.

Figure 2.9. Clara's introductory prelude to Robert Schumann's "Des Abends" from the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12⁷²

⁷² From *Preludes, Exercises and Fugues for Piano*, 46.



Figure 2.10. Opening statement of Robert Schumann's "Des Abends" from the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12.⁷³

One may wonder at Clara Schumann's choice of including preludes for these particular four pieces over any of the others in her large repertoire. The texts of Marie and Eugenie Schumann both reveal that a certain amount of persuasion was necessary until their mother relented to notate the improvisations. In her diary, Clara writes that she found the task difficult: "I would like to write out the preludes that I play before the scales, but it is so difficult because I do it differently every time, just as it occurs to me at the pianos."⁷⁴ There seems to be no express desire from the part of the daughters for any *specific* type of improvisation or for any *particular* piece, at least according to the known sources, and as we've already seen, only four of the eleven notated preludes are labeled as belonging to known compositions. Why would Clara have been compelled to include any of these to begin with? And why these four pieces in particular?

I could imagine a following scenario in which Clara, in her old age, finally sitting down to complete this task, places herself at the piano and lets her fingers wander. She tries out some

⁷³ This example is taken from the first edition published with Breitkopf & Härtel in 1838.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Goertzen, "Setting the Stage," 242-243.

formulas, thinking of what may be the clearest way to represent her manner of improvising preludes. Then perhaps she begins to improvise her way through some pieces that spontaneously come to mind. She may feel drawn to pieces that hold nostalgic significance for her (and/or her daughters), or simply to those pieces that she especially loved. *Des Abends* and *Aufschwung* were both named favorites of Clara's and featured in her programs well into the later decades of her performing career. *Schlummerlied* was a Christmas gift from Robert to Clara and their young daughter, Marie, in 1841, and was also considered an "old favourite."⁷⁵

Incorporating something based on the model of a "Clara Schumann Suite" into our contemporary concert life allows for a great variety of creative programming and musical diversity. It can inspire one to highlight musical connections in various ways, embolden one through improvisation to connect with an audience on a direct level. Clara and her original contribution to concert life serve to remind us that a concert can be a creative and collaborative act on many levels, merging the private with the public.

From C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* to François-Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles's *Méthode des méthodes de piano*,⁷⁶ almost every nineteenth-century keyboard method situates the chapter on extemporization at the very end of the volume. In many cases, this is also the briefest chapter, and this should come as no surprise, as the art of improvisation was primarily an oral tradition. Although all extemporization manuals agree that harmonic fluency as well as a thoroughly grounded technique are indispensable to embarking on any improvisatory endeavor, it is also clear that it is only that puzzling and unquantifiable quality

⁷⁵ Goertzen, "Setting the Stage," 247.

⁷⁶ C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing the Clavier* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949) and F.J. Fétis and J. Moscheles, *Méthode des méthodes de piano* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1973).

of a “full soul”⁷⁷ that can lend an improvisation what Carl Czerny calls, “that peculiar charm.”⁷⁸

Although the basics of improvisation could be learned by studying instructional manuals alone, it is in the acquisition of individual expressivity where method books showed their limitations. It is in these moments of seeming artlessness and spontaneity that one’s personality can reach beyond the boundaries of instrument, repertoire, or concert stage, creating a tangible, if fleeting, sense of connection between performer and auditor. Through her eleven preludes, written down at her daughters’ insistence, Clara Schumann reaches beyond the passing of the years and dares us, her twenty-first century counterparts, to keep these traditions alive.

⁷⁷ I am here borrowing the words of A Viennese reviewer in 1837 who describes suites of small pieces which Clara played, and in which she was able to “show the individuality of each master, to represent him, his innermost being with understanding and feeling, and from a full soul.” Quoted in Goertzen, “Setting the Stage,” 1998, 241.

⁷⁸ Carl Czerny, *Czerny’s Letters to Young Ladies on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* (Boston: O.Ditson & Co., 187-), 53.

Part II

Interpreting an Interpreter: Three Artistic-Practice Based Sketches

In her performing, Clara Schumann would have aspired first and foremost to establish authenticity in a piece of music, in the sense of attaining and presenting to an audience a ‘genuine’ understanding of the musical meaning while being attuned to the individual characteristics of the instruments she was playing on. For Clara, the act of “interpretation” meant an active interaction between the representation of musical intentions as they were recorded on the written page, and their performance, using a rich repository of sound production choices she had at her disposal. One may then ask: what were the ways in which Clara Schumann managed to match her interpretative decisions and ideas with the mechanical reactions of her ever-changing pianos? How did particular instruments, in various musical centres in Europe, affect the process of interpreting a composition? Is the issue one of complete transformation from one medium to another, or rather of the translation and modification of certain aspects of one’s approach so that they are more compatible with the new instrument at hand?

Initially, I set out hoping to find evidence of distinctly different ways with which Clara approached her different instruments, which I could then emulate as I began to construct my own interpretation of particular musical works. This was informed by my own experiences throughout my studies, which have brought me into contact with a growing range of different keyboards. Over time, I have become well acquainted with the various trials, tribulations and ultimate satisfaction in finding ways to crisscross history, translating musical meaning from one medium to another. (With “medium” I do not only mean a specific keyboard, but also the historical

performance practice associated with it.) My focus has always been on demarcating the attributes and individual characteristics of each instrument, highlighting where they are different, rather than similar. However, Clara's path was more one of organic metamorphosis, she having gradually interacted with the piano as it changed and developed over the span of a long career; more than I am encouraged to do in the present *Zeitgeist*, Clara's playing would have retained a strong core while gradually modifying and translating it to suit her evolving surroundings.⁷⁹ To illustrate the relevance of historically engaging with these questions, I will present three different explorations of the notion of 'translation'.

⁷⁹ See Synofizk. "'...which I could barely press down'" and "From Stein to Steinweg," as well as Anna Scott, "Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity" (Doctoral thesis, Leiden University, 2014), 118-130.

Sketch One: An Exercise in “Reverse Translation”

Domenico Scarlatti’s “Tempo di Ballo” K. 430 and “The Harmonious Blacksmith” air and variations from G.F. Handel’s Suite in E Major, HWV 430

Domenico Scarlatti’s D major sonata K. 430 (referred to in some of Clara’s concert programmes simply as “Tempo di Ballo”) and Handel’s “The Harmonious Blacksmith” air and variations from the Suite in E major, HWV 430 were a mainstay of Clara’s repertoire. She began regularly including these two pieces in her recitals beginning in 1857 and 1859 respectively.⁸⁰ Clara, whether meaning to or not, was translating from an earlier medium, the harpsichord, to a fortepiano. There is no explicit evidence to suggest that Clara would have played these pieces on a harpsichord and, in any case, by the time she began her tutelage under her father, the fortepiano had already for a number of years eclipsed the harpsichord in its popularity and public demand.⁸¹

In playing these two pieces, rather than highlight the differences between playing them

⁸⁰ Schumann-Portal. “Studies and Concert Repertoire.” Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.schumann-portal.de/alphabetical.html>

⁸¹ The pianist, Ignaz Moscheles, is one plausible link that might connect Clara Schumann to playing on a harpsichord. Beginning in 1837 and continuing intermittently until 1846, Moscheles held a series of “historical soirées” in London to great public acclaim. During these concerts, he was known to have played Scarlatti and Handel pieces on a 1771 Shudi-Broadwood harpsichord which had a Venetian Swell and two keyboards. See Edward L. Kottick, *A History of the Harpsichord* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 398, and Mark Kroll, *Ignaz Moscheles and the Changing World of Musical Europe* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 287. Clara Schumann and Moscheles were well-acquainted and occasionally played together in concert (notable is a performance of Bach’s triple keyboard concerto, BWV 1063, that Schumann, Moscheles and Mendelssohn performed together at a private party in Leipzig in 1835. See Kroll, *Ignaz Moscheles*, 264.) Clara would have undoubtedly heard of Moscheles’ historical concerts, and she and Robert certainly shared his musical interests in the repertoire of the ‘older masters’, but there is no evidence to suggest that she extended this interest further to the playing of harpsichords, either publicly or privately.

on a piano rather than on a harpsichord, I decided to adopt an approach of transfiguration, but in the opposite direction of Clara Schumann's, that is, back, rather than forward, in time. I found that thinking of the trajectory from a modern piano to a harpsichord as a progression, rather than devolution, pushed me to experiment with registral timbres that I would not have considered otherwise. To aid this thought process for the preparation of both the Scarlatti sonata and the Handel air and variations, I worked simultaneously with a number of different editions.

For the Scarlatti, I used a facsimile of the 1755 Parma Manuscript (Figure 3.1.) as well as the collection of 200 sonatas edited by Carl Czerny, and published by Haslinger in Vienna, in 1839/40 (Figure 3.2.). Robert Schumann owned a copy of this edition in his private library, giving Clara easy access to this collection.⁸² Full to the brim with editorial slurs and dynamic markings, this edition, clearly meant for a piano rather than a harpsichord, offered a rich source of ideas with which I could experiment in my playing. My goal, however, was not to recreate on the harpsichord every single dynamic and articulation indication present in the Czerny edition. Rather, I treated the nineteenth-century edition as a model for one recommended performance option (out of many other possible ones). Encouraged by the Czerny edition, I began to experiment with registration and articulation on the harpsichord, mining the instrument for all the sonic capacities, both conventional and unfamiliar, that it had to offer. In so doing, I found that my reading of the Parma manuscript (outwardly void of any expressive indications) had also changed. Apparently, working “in reverse” had an effect on more than just my tactile approach when playing the harpsichord, as I realized that I was applying the same methodology to the

⁸² Synofzik, “Domenico Scarlatti - Clara Schumann - Johannes Brahms. Neues zu einer Dreiecksbeziehung [Domenico Scarlatti - Clara Schumann - Johannes Brahms - New Information Concerning a three-way relationship],” in *Brahms Studies*, ed. Beatrix Borchard and Kerstin Schussler, vol. 17 (Bach Tutzing, 2014), 19.

reading of the written scores as well. Working my way forward as I progressed from the nineteenth- to the eighteenth-century, I began to view the Czerny as a possible realization of the sparse Parma manuscript.

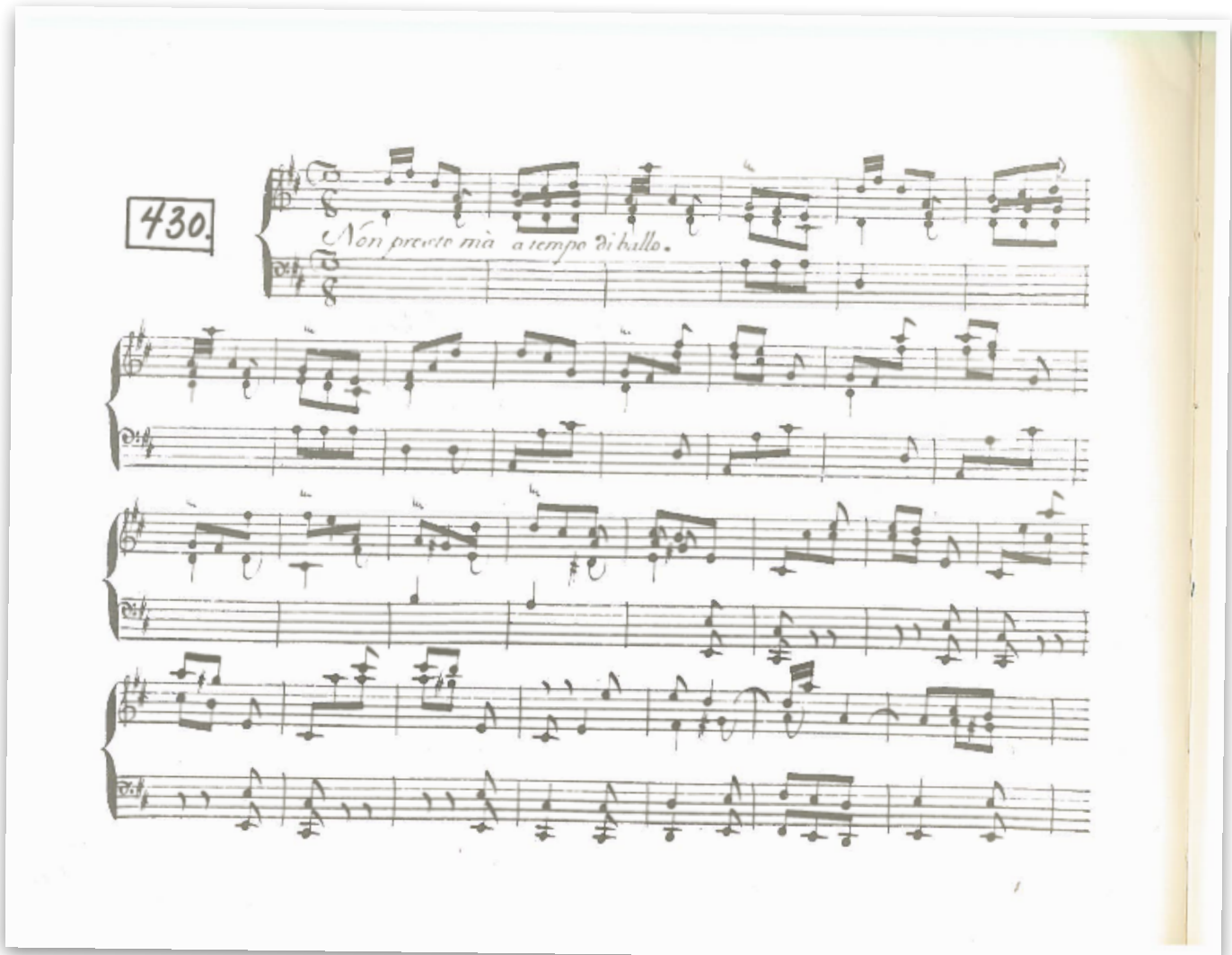


Figure 3.1. Opening page of Scarlatti Sonata "Tempo di Ballo" in the Parma manuscript⁸³

⁸³ Domenico Scarlatti, *Complete Keyboard Works in Facsimile from the Manuscript and Printed Sources*, ed. Ralph Kirkpatrick (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1972).

Nº 50. *Non Presto ma a Tempo di Ballo.* 145

VII
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Figure 3.2. Scarlatti “Tempo di Ballo” sonata in the Carl Czerny edition⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Domenico Scarlatti, *Sämmtliche Werke für Pianoforte. Mit Bezeichnung des Fingersatzes von Carl Czerny*, Wien:

Haslinger, 1839/1840.

For the preparation of the Handel, I consulted three editions: a modern critical edition based primarily on the third impression (1725) of the first John Cluer edition published in 1720,⁸⁵ an annotated edition prepared by Gottlieb Muffat in 1736 which contained much additional ornamentation and some minor notational changes,⁸⁶ and Moscheles's own set of variations on the Handel theme.⁸⁷ In this case, decisions of phrasing and interpretation on the harpsichord were motivated by the intersection of two distinct commentaries on the Handel suite: that of Muffat, being an eighteenth-century contemporary of Handel's, and that of Moscheles, an admirer of Handel's, and whose pianism is representative of early nineteenth-century playing practices. Both formidable keyboard players, it is safe to assume that Muffat and Moscheles's respective versions of the air and variations represent, to some degree, their tactility at their own instruments. For the performance in the lecture-recital, I chose to merge Muffat's ornamentation style with the kind of touch that is suggested by the various musical textures that are found abundantly in the Moscheles rendition (namely, different articulations in the left and right hands and sharp dynamic contrasts). In this sense, when thinking of a future performance, the next step would be to play a Handel theme and variations *à la* Clara: drawing from the examples set forth by Clara Schumann's writing in her own compositions and notated improvisations, and then

⁸⁵ G. F. Handel, *Klavierwerke. I: erste Sammlung von 1720. die acht grossen Suiten: HWV 426-433* [Keyboard Works I: First Set of 1720. The Eight Great Suites: HWV 426-433], (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000).

⁸⁶ G. F. Handel, *8 Suites for Keyboard, 1720, HWV 426-433: mises dans une autre application pour la facilité de la main by Gottlieb Muffat*, ed. Christopher Hogwood (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2007).

⁸⁷ Ignaz Moscheles, *Variations sur un thème de Händel, Op.29* [1814]. Moscheles performed both Handel's and his variations on this theme very often. Kroll, *Ignaz Moscheles*, 277. The only score of this piece I have been able to find is publicly available on IMSLP.

applying these findings in performance.⁸⁸ It was in the meeting place of these two seemingly disparate mediums and their associated playing and writing styles (meaning a harpsichord⁸⁹ and a mid nineteenth-century piano), where I found the most inspiration for the construction of an interpretation scheme, as I prepared for a performance of these two pieces.

⁸⁸ An English instrument of the type that Moscheles used in his 1837 concert series could support this historical exercise quite well, keeping in mind that Clara went on tour to the British isles many times starting in 1856. Furthermore, with the typical mechanical fixings (such as the venetian swell or the machine stop) that are so emblematic of English harpsichord construction, the English instruments have much to offer in terms of acoustic possibilities.

⁸⁹ Or, in the case of the Scarlatti, perhaps an early eighteenth-century Cristofori or Ferrini fortepiano?

Sketch Two: Following in Clara's 'Fingersteps'

Searching for Acts of "Translation" in Clara's 1887 Instructive Edition and Deciphering

Them in *Traumes Wirren* from Robert Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12

Robert Schumann completed the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12 in the summer of 1837, with *Traumes Wirren*, the seventh movement of the cycle, being composed no later than 1832. The collection was consequently published in two volumes in 1838, with Breitkopf und Härtel. The Op. 12 cycle drew its inspiration from the work of the German Romantic author E.T.A Hoffmann, as Schumann's poetic sensibilities were stirred by the characters and stories found in Hoffmann's "Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier" [Fantasy Pieces in the Manner of Callot], a literary opus which consisted of previously published works of Hoffmann's.⁹⁰

Clara was already playing Robert's *Fantasiestücke* in private performances by March of 1838, as she reports to Robert in her letters. Clara continued to program excerpts from op. 12 into her public concerts well into the 1870s. According to the extant collection of her playbills, it would seem that Clara thought *Des Abends*, *Aufschwung*, *Warum?*, and *Traumes Wirren*, particularly suitable as concert fare, as they appear in many of her concert programs. The last German performance of this piece was in Frankfurt's Großer Concert-Saal, in 1878, where Clara performed *Aufschwung* as part of a suite of short character pieces.⁹¹

Op. 12 was one of the earliest Robert Schumann compositions that Clara performed in front of a public (and considering that *Traumes Wirren* was completed much earlier than the rest of the set, it is not improbable for Clara to have practiced a version of this movement well before

⁹⁰ Grove Music Online. John Daverio and Eric Sams. "Works: Keyboard." Accessed March 8, 2016. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article_works/grove/music/40704pg21#S40704.22.10.

⁹¹ Prince, "Der anmutreichen, unschuldsvollen Herrin", 469.

the March 1838 performance mentioned earlier). By 1878 then, the various movements of Op. 12 would have accompanied Clara's performing career for forty years, if not more, taking her all the way from the Viennese instruments she often played on during the 1830s and 40s, to a modern Steinway grand.

In 1887, at the invitation of Breitkopf und Härtel, Clara set out to edit an authoritative instructive edition of all of Robert Schumann's solo piano works. During a time when annotated editions of the 'classics' were very much in vogue, Clara, led by a lifelong sense of duty and commitment to the correct interpretation of the works of her husband, felt that it was up to her to provide definitive directions as to the understanding of Robert's musical aesthetic, for the sake of future generations. In her diary, she writes: "It is clear to me that I must do it, so that at least one correct edition will be available for students."⁹²

This edition is often confused with the *Collected Works of Robert Schumann*, a separate publication encompassing all of Robert Schumann's output, co-authored by Clara and Brahms. Getting a hold of the *Instructive Edition* of 1887⁹³ is a rather tricky affair since, after Clara's death, responsibility for the edition was passed on to Carl Reinecke, who made various revisions and amendments to the first edition. In her 1985 biography of Clara, Reich writes that that in 1901, Marie Schumann, Clara's eldest daughter, requested that Breitkopf und Härtel indicate in the score which changes had been made by her mother, and which by Reinecke. They replied that

⁹² Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 255.

⁹³ The complete title is *Klavierwerke von Robert Schumann. Erste mit Fingersatz und Vortragsbezeichnung versehene Instructive Ausgabe. Nach den Handschriften und persönlicher Überlieferung* [Keyboard Works of Robert Schumann, First Instructive Edition with Fingering and Performance Directions, Based On the Manuscripts and Personal Communications.]

the scores were so thoroughly altered that it was no longer possible to tell which comment originated from whom.⁹⁴

According to a personal communication with the director of the Robert-Schumann-Haus, Thomas Synofzik, extant copies of this edition are extremely rare, and the only copy whose authorship is uncontested is the one that belonged to Clara herself, kept at the Robert Schumann archives. This edition contains meticulous (and sometimes very different) fingerings and pedal markings for pieces that Clara would have performed very early on in her career (and hence, on very different pianos).⁹⁵ If the 1887 edition represents a clear expression of Clara's views of how one should approach this music, one may then safely assume that the means by which one might attain this understanding are reflective of the instrument that she was using at the time, namely, one of her two Steinweg grands.⁹⁶ In comparing the 1838 Breitkopf und Härtel edition published during Robert's lifetime, which is demonstrative of earlier pianos and their particular sound world, and the 1887 *Instructive Edition* annotated by Clara, it is possible to track a trajectory of development deciphering the ways with which Clara modified and translated from one approach to another. *Traumes Wirren*, the seventh movement of the Op. 12 *Fantasiestücke*, exhibits the most sophisticated and creative fingerings and pedal indications in the set. Three distinct ways of utilizing fingering and pedaling (or lack thereof) are portrayed in the following examples.

The first thing one might notice when comparing the two editions is the lack of fingering in the Robert Schumann 1838 edition, as compared to the 1887 *Instructive Edition*, where

⁹⁴ Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 256.

⁹⁵ I am very grateful to Dr. Synofzik for sharing this edition with me. All the following *Traumes Wirren* images from the 1887 edition are taken from pictures I took of this copy while visiting the Robert-Schumann-Haus.

⁹⁶ See "The Pianos" in Part 1.

fingering indications are meticulous. This is especially apparent in the chorale-like middle section (Figures 3.3. and 3.4.), where, in the 1887 *Instructive Edition*, both the left and right hands are directed to use finger substitution to a great degree. Coupled with the conspicuous absence of any pedal indications throughout this section (as opposed to the rest of the movement and contrary to what one hears on many recordings of this piece), one is led to understand that all shaping and inflection as indicated by slurs and dynamic markings are to be played using a highly cultivated finger-led *legatissimo* touch, *with no pedal*.

In her memoirs, Adelina de Lara, one of Clara's most famed students, relates various instances where Clara advocates a sensitive finger-led touch, reminiscent of Wieck's teaching, focused as it was on the independence of the fingers as the main device with which to bring out particular qualities of colour or contours in a phrase. On the topic of Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*, Op. 13, de Lara writes:

"Clara Schumann was not prepared to sacrifice richness of tone to mere clarity [...] The theme is sometimes played with undue stress upon the melody, but she gave it a full range of colour throughout the harmony by pressing all the keys deeply. [of the 6th variation] Her phrasing was so perfect that the cross-rhythm could be heard quite distinctly and it seemed as though each hand belonged to an independent player. The same is true of the eleventh variation, which gave wonderful scope to her exquisite art of part-playing."⁹⁷

Adelina similarly remarks in regards to the first movement of Schumann's *Kreisleriana* Op. 16: "Here Clara Schumann, again referring to the orchestral quality of the music, told us to

⁹⁷ Adelina de Lara, *Finale* (London: Burke, 1955), 54-55.

listen to the violas and ‘cellos in the second subject, to dream it over and remain very calm while bringing out all the notes fully in each hand.”⁹⁸



Figure 3.3. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 63-94, Breitkopf und Härtel edition (1838)

⁹⁸ De Lara, *Finale*, 55.



Figure 3.4. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 63-94, *Instructive Edition* (1887)

In the case of this middle section in the *Traumes Wirren*, by committing to an un-pedaled, fully invested legato finger approach, this being one of the main devices used when playing earlier keyboard instruments, this passage gains an intimate sound quality that draws the listeners inwards, almost to the very fingertips of the player. Playing on a modern piano, with only one's fingers at one's disposal, one becomes acutely aware of lengths of notes and phrases, and the growth and decay of the tone of *this* particular instrument. Interestingly, it is noteworthy that in her 1887 edition, Clara made sure to add two slurs, which are not present in the 1838 edition (mm. 76-78 in Figure 3.3.). This attests to the more literal habit of reading a score in the latter part of the century, and it highlights how the absence of a slur as notational information was

perhaps not as significant in 1838 as it was in 1887. A mid nineteenth-century pianist using the 1838 edition would have understood the two-chord gesture within a context of a string of semi-legato chords, regardless if there was actually a slur in the score itself. By 1887 however, these kinds of explicit indications must have been necessary in order to convey to the pianist how they should approach the phrasing of this section, so much so that Clara felt compelled to add a legato fingering as well (m. 75 in Figure 3.4.).

In following Clara's prescriptive fingerings one is compelled to "bring out all the notes fully in each hand" and to "give a full range of colour throughout the harmony by pressing all the keys deeply." I believe this points to an aspect of Clara's pianistic approach that seems to have accompanied her, fundamentally unchanged, throughout her long career and the changes in her instrument: a singing tone achieved by a finger-led technique, entirely separate to the use of pedal. If one identifies Clara's fundamental piano touch as stemming from her early experiences playing on Viennese type instruments, the question still remains as to the function the pedal may have served. I suggest that it is in Clara's extremely creative use of pedalling, as seen in her 1887 edition, that her adjustments to French and English piano mechanisms (and ultimately, her Steinweg pianos), are revealed.

Sketch Three: *A slightly longer discussion of the pedal*

For Clara, the pedal's objective may have had more to do with notions of colour, shading and texture, much in the way that a composer may go about orchestrating a score. The following three excerpts exemplify the idea of pedal as an architectural agent of colour or acoustic layering.

As we transition out of this middle section and into the return of the main theme, Clara makes extremely versatile use of the pedal, employing it in three completely different ways (Figure 3.5.). In mm. 95-97, Clara presses down the pedal simultaneously with the left-hand chordal utterances, effectively creating very broad, almost lazy-sounding waves of G-flat major. Our attention is drawn to these left-hand gestures rather than to the swift right-hand sixteenth-notes. An abrupt change of texture occurs in m. 98, when the left-hand chords are exchanged for an empty B-flat octave, as the high B-flat in the right hand continues to sound over the pedaled registers below. With a wave of a hand, or, in this case, pressure from the foot, the whole character has changed, and the longer, irregular pedal changes together with the B-flat minor harmony, create a rather ominous atmosphere. In m. 101, the release of the pedal at the very end of the measure throws us immediately into an entirely different texture. The accented B-flat in the right hand is for a moment completely unaccompanied, until the left hand enters again with un-pedaled left-hand octaves in staccato (m. 102). The rhythmical gesture is the same as before, but this time, the pedal is depressed on the last octave of each utterance, rather than the first. Using the pedal in this manner creates an effect that might resemble what one might hear if these left-hand gestures were to be played by a timpani and cymbals, for example: timpani for the dotted eighth-note staccato gesture, and a resonant cymbal crash for each of the pedaled octaves. With the accompanying *sforzandos* and gradual crescendo to what will be the first, and only, *ff*

marking of this movement (measure 115 in Figure 3.6.), the result is a highly charged, incredibly exciting build up as our pseudo-orchestra erupts in triumphant C major leaps across a wide range of the keyboard, only to quickly deflate back on itself, the main theme reappearing almost unnoticeably through a pedaled haze (this is one of the only pedal indications also present in Robert Schumann's 1838 Breitkopf und Härtel edition, see Figure 3.7. and 3.8.).

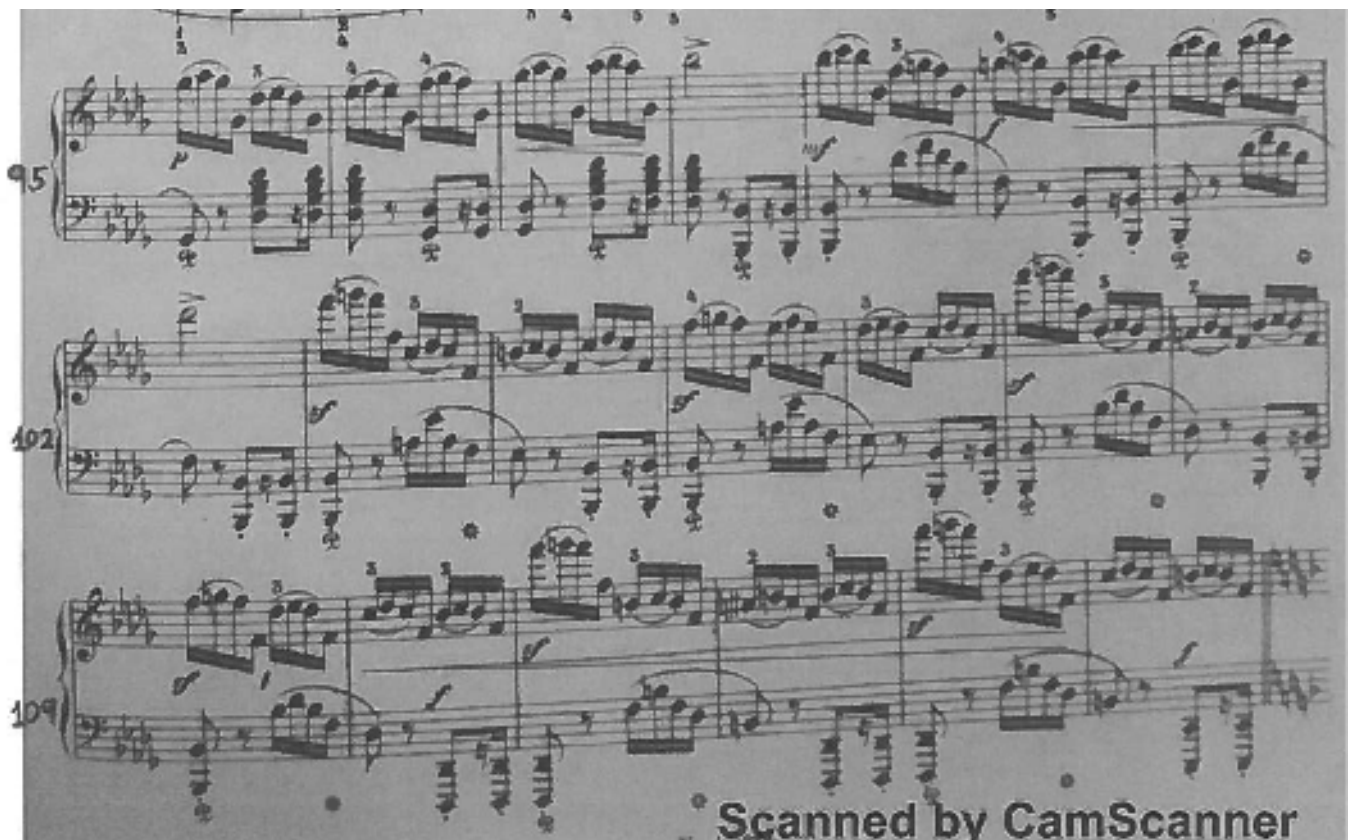


Figure 3.5. Traumes Wirren, mm. 95-114, Instructive Edition (1887)



Figure 3.6. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 115-126, *Instructive Edition* (1887)

Figure 3.7. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 84-107, *Breitkopf und Härtel edition* (1838)



Figure 3.8. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 108-126, Breitkopf und Härtel edition (1838)

In the following example, when used as indicated, the pedal has the capacity to alter one's perception of time and flow. This can be found in mm. 10 and 12, and each time this figure recurs (see Figures 3.9. and 3.10.). One would expect a pedal indication on the accented D in the left hand, as it is also the strong beat in a bar of two. Contrary to expectation, (and this required some practice as, at first, my foot almost automatically depressed the pedal on the D every time), the pedal is indicated on the weak beat of the bar, on the unaccented and tied over D. Trying to make sense of this seemingly peculiar pedal marking, I found that thinking in terms of orchestration was helpful. Using the pedal in the second half of the bar seemed to create an echo effect, as the pianos' strings are for a moment allowed to vibrate and resonate before returning to

a drier sound in the following measure. The sixteenth-note figure in the right hand, which otherwise would not be marked as particularly different to any of the other sixteenth-note figures that preceded it, consequently gains a certain importance, as it is highlighted by the employment of the pedal. Perhaps analogous to a call and response between members of an orchestra, the result is a very charming momentary shift in the stream of, what is otherwise, a constant barrage of fast-paced sixteenth notes. In my opinion, this strengthens the idea that the appeal of this movement is to be found *not* in *prestissimo* technical virtuosity, but rather in colourful and ever-changing contours, in the creation of which the pedal assumes a very active role.



Figure 3.9. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 9-12, Breitkopf und Härtel edition (1838)



Figure 3.10. *Traumes Wirren*, mm. 6-16, *Instructive edition* (1887)

The last example (see Figures 3.11. and 3.12.) is to be found at the very end of this movement. We see another puzzling pedal marking, also not present in the first edition (Figure 3.11.). In this case, the pedal sign is indicated over a rest (Figure 3.12.). One might argue that it is merely an indication to clean up the resonance created by the previous pedal indication, but then, why not indicate it directly beneath the chords themselves? Surely, in such a brisk paced movement, keeping the pedal for that one extra rest would not sound in our ears long enough to make a lasting impression. As I perform this movement, I find that this is another example of a place where my instincts work against me, and I have to apply considerable concentration and effort to make sure I change the pedal in the place indicated. As I depress the pedal at that particular moment, my whole posture and comportment at the piano seems to change. As I press the pedal with my right foot, I find that my whole body leans slightly to the right, triggering my hands to almost instinctually catapult the final chords upwards with great momentum, similar to the effect caused by pulling the string of a party popper as it releases a stream of confetti into the air. As I reach the topmost chords, I've had time to gather my bearings, and can gently descend

downwards, the indicated *ritardando* happening casually on its own by the natural loss of momentum.



Figure 3.11. *Traumes Wirren*, measures 162-177, Breitkopf und Härtel edition (1838)



Figure 3.12. *Traumes Wirren*, measures 163-177, Instructive Edition (1887)

Finally, the annotated edition and the markings contained therein allow us a glimpse into the inner workings of Clara's creative mind as she interpreted the works of her husband. Unlike composer-performers such as Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin or Liszt, who were able to present their own works themselves and assume some control over how they wished their music to sound, Robert Schumann (due to his well-known hand injury) was entirely reliant on performers other than himself. Clara's committed devotion and unshakeable belief in her husband's musical genius is a strong theme in her letters and diaries, and there is no doubt that she considered herself the gatekeeper to her husband's works. As she wrote in their joint diary in March 1853: "for I always feel so keenly conscious of Robert's inspiration and mastery, and certainly I may say that at all events no-one can understand him *better* than I do."⁹⁹

The other side of the coin however is that in being the gatekeeper, she was effectively the most in control of the public presentation of her husband's material, at least that involving his pieces for keyboard. Litzmann, in his seminal biography of Clara, on which all subsequent scholarship has since been based, perhaps said it best: "It was difficult to say [...] whether it was Robert Schumann's music as played by Clara Schumann, or Clara Schumann as the interpreter of Robert Schumann that drew people."¹⁰⁰ It is Clara's role in this alliance of artists that we seem to have been ignoring, and yet I've found that, just as during her lifetime, it is *through* Clara Schumann that one gains a fuller appreciation and understanding of the works of Robert Schumann.

⁹⁹ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 2:37. Italics in text.

¹⁰⁰ Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: an artist's life*, 2:124.

Clara, by translating, interacting, and adapting to different technologies, different approaches to touch, as well as changes in the basic characteristics of the tone of the piano, would have had at her disposal a remarkably versatile technique, based on an equally rich store of sonic and tactile experiences accumulated over time. It is hard to adequately portray the breadth of such versatility by only addressing two ends of Clara's pianistic spectrum. Nonetheless, I also see in the 1887 annotated edition strong evidence of how Clara, all adjustments and innovations withstanding, always retained the principles taught to her by her father, informed by those early Viennese instruments: that the piano must always sing, and it is through the fingers, first and foremost, that this is achieved. This tactile approach, firmly rooted in a thorough understanding of the technology of the instrument, extends from the Stein piano, through to the Grafs, Striechers, and Klems, all the way to the Steinwegs she owned and performed on in her later years.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Jeanne Roudet supports this notion, so much so that she has written of Clara as a representative of a "Singing Piano School." See Roudet, "Frederic Chopin, Clara Schumann, and the Singing Piano School," in *Ohne Worte: Vocality and Instrumentality in 19th-Century Music*, ed. William Brooks et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 65-107. Johannes Brahms also expressed appreciation of Clara's singing abilities at the piano, as exhibited in one of his inscriptions, in which he writes: "To Frau Klara Schumann, the greatest singer." Quoted in Scott, "Romanticizing Brahms," 126.

CONCLUSION

In contemplating Clara's diverse performing persona, one is prompted to consider the dynamic web of influences that coloured so much of Clara's public and private musical actions throughout her lifetime. The prized pupil (and by far the most successful and famous) of her father, the designated musical voice of her aspiring pianist-turned-composer husband (who for a time, also studied with Wieck), an established musical authority to her younger colleagues, as well as a well-respected and admired teacher; Clara was both strongly influenced by the male figures that surrounded her, and herself exercised considerable influence on them in return. Finding the precise kind of impact which each of these connections had on Clara, is not always an easy task. Although illuminating in other ways, an attempt to establish a single "authentic" origin for Clara Schumann's pianism perhaps misses the point, as it is exactly that element of diversity that renders her contribution so unique to present day musicians. This diversity is a consequence of Clara's powers of translation and adaptation over the years, and derives from the combination of Clara's musical connections: the initial training received at the hands of an ambitious and unconventionally-minded father, her relationship with the fanciful and ideological Robert Schumann, and following his death, the remaining 40 years of an active performing career at the side of such artists as Johannes Brahms, Josef Joachim and Julius Stockhausen.¹⁰²

Being in constant dialogue with one's instrument generates a never-ending process of adjustment, which never allows one to simply rest on one's laurels, and simply play as was

¹⁰² Clara's performing schedule was at its busiest in the years following Robert Schumann's death, with a yearly average of 30 concerts a year (at least) until 1873. See Synofzik, "'...which I could barely press down,'" 147-149.

previously rehearsed. Even if played many times before, when playing on a new piano, one must engage anew with a piece of music every time it is played, since a new instrument may offer an entirely new set of sonic possibilities, thus calling forth a distinctly different manipulation of one's touch, which in turn, can alter the interpretational conception.

This distinction is an important one, not only for its performative implications, but also for the historical reality that it reveals. The reality that Clara Schumann was immersed in was one in which diversity of instruments was celebrated, subsequently engendering diversity in performance as well as musical opinions. Beyond a "correct" way to interpret this or that particular Robert Schumann piece, it is how to truly interpret at all, that we learn from Clara Schumann, and that one must strive to *perform* a work, rather than merely *repeating* it.

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