Midori

Schumann Violin Concerto

& WORKS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO BY CLARA AND ROBERT SCHUMANN

FESTIVAL STRINGS LUCERNE · DANIEL DODDS · ÖZGÜR AYDIN

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Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

	Violin Concerto in D Minor WoO. 23	
1	I. In kräftigem, nicht zu schnellem Tempo	15. 53
2	II. Langsam	6. 21
3	III. Lebhaft, doch nicht schnell	9. 49

Midori, violin
Festival Strings Lucerne
Daniel Dodds, director

	5 Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102	
4	I. Mit Humor	3. 37
5	II. Langsam	3. 14
6	III. Nicht schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen	4. 16
7	IV. Nicht zu rasch	2. 03
8	V. Stark und markiert	3. 13

	3 Romances, Op. 94	
9	I. Nicht schnell	3. 12
10	II. Einfach innig	4. 24
11	III. Nicht schnell	4. 15

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

	3 Romances, Op. 22	
12	I. Andante molto	3. 01
13	II. Allegretto: Mit zartem Vortrage	2. 56
14	III. Leidenschaftlich schnell	3. 44

Midori, violin
Özgür Aydin, piano

Total playing time: 70. 07

As a young violinist making my way through the repertoire for my instrument, I encountered a healthy portion of Romantic concertos — Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, Bruch, Dvořák, Brahms, and others. But the Schumann Violin Concerto? It is missing from the list without that being overly noticed.

Perhaps this is because the Schumann Violin Concerto is a work that one falls in love with — but maybe not immediately. It is a composition that particularly rewards mature listeners, who respond to its depth and its intimations of torment. My own encounter with it came only well into adulthood. By contrast, I knew Schumann's Piano Concerto from childhood. The Piano Concerto led me to more of Schumann's piano works, then on to the string quartets, and to the symphonies — especially his third, the *Rhenish*.

It was, in fact, in hearing a performance of the *Rhenish Symphony* conducted by Christoph Eschenbach, that my interest for Schumann took a decisive step. That performance awakened in me just how deeply personal a piece of music can be, and how much a composer's inner world can be laid bare in sound. When I later came to the Violin Concerto, I decided to reach out to Eschenbach for inspiration. I studied the score under his direction, breathed the music with him on the podium, and through his vision found a way to make Schumann's concerto my own.

Schumann's substantial violin works all date to his late period: his three violin sonatas, the *Fantasy*, and the concerto. In all of them — especially in the concerto — there is a sense of tragedy and of yearning, both for better days past and for a fragile hope that still flickered for the future. Clara Schumann herself responded to this glimmer. In a diary entry, she wrote of

Robert's rapid progress on an "interesting" and energetic violin concerto, written with great enthusiasm and vitality. Yet after Robert's collapse, Clara, together with Joseph Joachim, decided to not publish the work, believing it unfit to represent his legacy. Given that decision, Schumann's final large-scale orchestral work, the 1853 Violin Concerto, written at the threshold of the silence that was part of his tragic decline in early 1854, was long withheld from the public.

In that same period, Clara Schumann composed her *Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22* (1853), dedicated to Joachim. These pieces radiate tenderness and intimacy; and even where shadows appear, their character is direct, balanced, and hopeful. Robert's concerto, by contrast, is suffused with doubt, frustration, and despondency – emotions of great complexity, glimpses into his soul which he could only explore through sounds. We see — in his music hope always comes at the cost of pain. In Clara's, hope shines as a light pointing toward a brighter future. Clara places hope in the future; Robert's hope lies in the past.

Besides the concerto, the other Robert Schumann compositions included on this recording were not originally written for the violin. The vocal-like line of the *Three Romances, Op. 94* (1849), originally for oboe and piano, translates beautifully to this version for violin and piano. *Five Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102* (1849), first for cello and piano, also find new life on the violin, revealing rustic humor, folk-like rhythms, and playful textures. Both works reflect his turn toward intimate, personal, and expressive chamber music in the years before his final decline. Placing these pieces alongside the concerto and Clara's Romances creates a rich spectrum of emotional eloquence, and dialogue. Clara's Romances offer tenderness and clearly delineated hopefulness.

Robert's Op. 94 *Romances* extend this lyricism with his searching harmonic voice, while the Op. 102 pieces introduce folk-inspired energy, all of which are combined and re-presented, in the concerto's deep yearning.

In preparing this album, I sought not only to honor the historical and musical context of these works, but also to share with listeners the deeply human aspects of Schumann's late music: the intimacy, the struggle, and the moments of fragile hope. From Clara's uncomplicated lyricism to Robert's lyrical introspection and folk-inspired humor, alongside the profound emotional sweep, this repertoire offers a journey through both personal and musical longing. With deep listening one falls in love with each of these pieces, welcoming us into an exploration of the multitude of reasons of our existence: to love, to suffer, to create and live in a cruel world, to absorb and sometime inflict harm, to love music for its solace, while recognizing that it does not cure all our ills — and yet to hope; to overcome, to give in to the beauties and the ugliness of living a life.

Midori

Midori and Özgür Aydin
Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León © Photogenic

To send light into the darkness of men's hearts - such is the duty of the artist!
Robert Schumann

In the autumn of 1853, less than three years before his death, Robert Schumann composed his final orchestral work, the ***Violin Concerto in D Minor*** (WoO 1). It would take no less than eighty-four years before the work finally received its premiere in 1937. Even then, it was not until the 1970s that Schumann's late works as a whole gradually began to gain the recognition they enjoy today.

What had happened?
The violinist Joseph Joachim, a close friend of Robert and Clara Schumann and the one who had inspired the work, was originally meant to give the premiere of the concerto in Düsseldorf at the end of October 1853. However, the concert committee in charge instead requested a performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, a decision likely connected to the rupture between Schumann and the Düsseldorf Music Society, which had occurred earlier that month.

Plans were made for a performance in Hanover in January 1854, which progressed as far as a failed rehearsal. Joachim, who was also to conduct, took responsibility for the setback in a letter. Two months later, at his own request, Schumann was admitted to the Endenich asylum, where he would remain until his death in the summer of 1856.

Without any concrete reasons having been recorded, Clara Schumann, supported by Joseph Joachim, decided shortly afterward not to publish the work. It appears that Clara in particular had come to the conviction that the concerto was not suitable to present her husband's legacy in the best light.

The question of the extent to which Johannes Brahms, who advised Clara on her husband's musical estate, was involved in this decision remains unresolved. In the following years of their joint work on Schumann's estate, Brahms and Clara were concerned with producing editions that were as correct as possible, based on original manuscripts and the earliest prints. However, Clara wanted to include only works she considered masterful, while Brahms pursued a more historically complete approach.

Ultimately, neither the Violin Concerto, nor the Violin Sonata in A Minor, nor Schumann's contributions to the F-A-E Sonata were included. Although Clara Schumann and Brahms eventually overcame these differences, disagreements continued into the 1890s and at times nearly caused a rupture in their lifelong friendship.

The concerto was not published until 1936, but its premiere the following year, with Georg Kulenkampff as soloist and Karl Böhm conducting, was ill-fated from the start. The performance took place at a Nazi propaganda event, where Goebbels himself was among the speakers.

Occasional performances after 1945 did little to dispel the prejudices that long surrounded the work. Critics often questioned not only the musical substance of the final movement, but also to what extent Schumann's developing mental illness might have affected his late style in general.

Midori, who holds a Master of Arts in Psychology from New York University, considers this line of questioning irrelevant. A composer's unique artistic voice, she argues, derives from the totality of their inner being, including any potential shadows.

From around the 1990s, the concerto began to experience a genuine renaissance. Today, virtually every violinist of stature with an interest in Romantic repertoire counts it among their works of choice.

Both Schumann's *Five Pieces in Folk Style* and his *Three Romances* date from 1849 - perhaps his most productive year as a composer - and neither was originally written for the violin. However, in the original scores, Schumann marked both the cello part of the *Five Pieces* and the oboe part of the *Romances* with the note "ad libitum violin", indicating that they may also be performed on the violin.

Schumann presented the ***Three Romances, Op. 94*** to his wife Clara as a Christmas gift in 1849. He composed the three miniatures in just five days, between 7 and 12 December of that year.

In Schumann's later chamber music, one repeatedly encounters so-called "small forms", particularly numerous romances, but also fantasy pieces, marches, duets, and ballads. For a long time, this was interpreted as a retreat into the bourgeois, even Biedermeier, style. In fact, these works reveal not only Schumann's desire to give expression to the inner life and intimacy of his emotions, but also his intention to create music that reflected the spirit of the time. In his own words: "One can very well satisfy certain demands and wishes of the time without thereby forfeiting any of one's artistic dignity."

This approach responded to the contemporary, widely felt desire among a democratically minded public for art that was simple and easily understood.

Robert Schumann's ***Five Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102***, are stand-alone compositions that are not directly derived from any particular folk music. Yet, true

to Schumann's often-quoted maxim - "Listen diligently to all folk songs! They are a treasure trove of the most beautiful melodies and open your eyes to the character of different nations." — the pieces clearly imitate the style and spirit of the folk music familiar in Schumann's time.

The five miniatures were composed at the beginning of a period of intense engagement with chamber music for two instruments. It was not until about two years later that Schumann composed his first sonata, the Violin Sonata No. 1, which, like the later Violin Concerto, was created for and at the suggestion of Joseph Joachim.

As a composition originally intended for the cello, the *Five Pieces* belong to a rare category in Schumann's output. Apart from them, the only other surviving work for cello is the Cello Concerto of 1850.

"You may look forward to what follows without restraint!", wrote Clara Schumann in 1855 to the violinist Joseph Joachim on the occasion of the first publication of her ***Three Romances, Op. 22***, a work she had also dedicated to him in 1853. It was only in March of that same year that Clara and Robert Schumann became acquainted with this important violinist, who, alongside Johannes Brahms, would soon become one of the most significant artistic influences in her life.

Even after Robert Schumann's death, Clara Schumann and Joachim repeatedly performed the *Romances* successfully during their joint concert tours, as documented by numerous contemporary reviews. Nevertheless, like practically all of Clara Schumann's compositional output, the work fell into obscurity after she ended her performing career.

It was not until 1983 that a new edition of the original publication appeared, allowing

the *Romances* to gradually find their way into the international chamber music repertoire. Today, both Clara Schumann herself and this particular work are firmly established on the world's concert stages, representing a true renaissance of her music.

Harald Reiter

From a concert at KKL Lucern, Switzerland

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Recording session at KKL Lucern, Switzerland

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Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

Recordings producer **Wolfram Nehls** | Balance engineer (Concerto) **Max Molling**
Balance engineer (Romances / Pieces in Folk Style) **Thomas Bößl**
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ARTWORK

Liner notes **Harald Reiter**
Cover & booklet cover photo **Timothy Greenfield-Sanders**
Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady** (PENTATONE)
Booklet coordination & design **Karolina Szymanik** (PENTATONE)

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PENTATONE TEAM

Managing Director **Sean Hickey** | Label Director **Silvia Pietrosanti** | A&R **Alice Lombardo**
Product Management **Ana Milovanović** | Press **Allie Summers** | Distribution **Camilla Vickerage** | Audio **Wirre de Vries** | Finance **Adrie Engels** | Admin **Lineke Steffers**

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