

## FREIMANN 3 – A Closer Look

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 – History Center

Sunday, March 3, 2024 – Rhinehart Hall

Our third concert will highlight probably the most well-known woman composer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Clara Schumann. Her Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17 is one of her major works and will be paired with Beethoven's String Quartet in F major, Op. 135. The two pieces were written only 20 years apart, Schumann's Trio a product of her youth while Beethoven's Quartet was among his final works. The 20<sup>th</sup> century opening piece will provide a dramatic contrast.

The concerts will begin with Four Outings for Brass by the late American composer André Previn. Born in Berlin in 1929, Previn was a vital part of the American music scene for over seven decades until his death in 2019. Much like Leonard Bernstein, Previn was a "triple threat," equally influential as a pianist, conductor and composer. At home in both the classical and jazz idioms, he accompanied numerous jazz singers from Ella Fitzgerald to Doris Day, also producing many arrangements of songs from the "Great American Songbook." His contributions to the film and recording industries were prolific, earning him four Oscars and three Emmys. Previn's classical compositions are no less impressive and include 14 concerti, various orchestral works, two operas, dozens of songs and much chamber music. He held the music directorship of the principal orchestras of Houston, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, London, and most recently, the Oslo Philharmonic and Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra.

Four Outings for Brass is an imaginative piece that highlights the range and variety of techniques possible on modern brass instruments. The opening movement, "Moderato, with Energy," is in a jaunty, dissonant jazz style and features many solo passages for the tuba. Next follows a "Blues" movement, then a lyrical, muted movement, "Slowly," in which the trombone is given a leading role. The concluding "Vivace" is an outgoing march, high-spirited and filled with tongue-in-cheek gestures.

Clara Schumann was born in 1819 and lived until 1896. She grew up in Leipzig where both her father Friedrich Wieck and her mother Mariane were pianists and piano teachers. Clara was a child prodigy, trained by her father. She began touring at age 11 and was successful in Paris and Vienna, among other cities. Ultimately regarded as one of the most distinguished pianists of the Romantic era, she helped transform piano recitals from displays of sheer virtuosity into more serious music offerings. She also composed many works for piano, songs and choral pieces, and some chamber music.

Clara wrote that "composing gives me great pleasure... there is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation, if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness, when one lives in a world of sound." In 1837 she married Robert Schumann and together they had eight children. All but one lived into adulthood, the last surviving until 1938. She premiered Robert's A minor Piano Concerto in Dresden in 1845 and wrote many transcriptions of his instrumental music and lieder for piano. She frequently performed chamber music with Joseph Joachim (for whom Brahms wrote his Violin Concerto), and over 1,300 of her concert programs have been

preserved. She has been portrayed many times in film, most notably by Katharine Hepburn in “Song of Love” (1947).

After her husband Robert’s mental decline and premature death in 1856, she continued to organize and perform concert tours, becoming the main breadwinner for her family. Her famous friendship with Brahms, attested to by their preserved correspondence, allowed her to travel and perform while he supervised the care of her family and household.

Clara Schumann’s Piano Trio opens with “Allegro moderato.” This movement introduces her highly expressive, mature Romantic style, so close to that of her husband. The thinner texture of the trio allows the two string instruments to become equal partners almost throughout in sharing melodies. Next comes “Scherzo: Tempo di Menuetto,” a delicate and charming dance movement much more reminiscent of a minuet than a scherzo. The third movement “Andante — Più animato” is a beautiful extended song, contrasted with a livelier, almost march-like middle section. The Finale “Allegretto” is filled with quicker, more intense music, but still singing throughout, and at times also delightfully playful.

Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven—the triumvirate of composers that established, matured and transformed the Classical symphony and string quartet, solidifying these two genres as the leading instrumental forms of musical expression. The string quartet can be understood as the intimate microcosm of the symphony, sharing its sense of form on a more personal level. Each of these three masters produced early, middle and late outputs of quartet writing, while these divisions of style are most clearly exhibited by Beethoven, as evidenced by the Opus numbers: 18, 59-95, and 127-135. Over the 28-year span of these quartets, the metamorphosis of the young composer who studied counterpoint with Haydn into the mature master struggling with his deafness is truly remarkable and unparalleled in Western music history.

As with the early quartets, the late ones are in a group of six—both possibly in homage to Mozart’s six quartets dedicated to Haydn. But Beethoven’s late works, ushering in the Romantic era, are much more diverse in their individual personalities. To close this concert we hear the very last, Op. 135 in F major written in 1826, the year before his death. The opening “Allegretto” is rhapsodic, punctuated throughout with hesitant, vocal-like utterances from each of the four players. Next follows “Vivace,” an energetic Scherzo—Beethoven’s transformation of the Classical Minuet. This one is agitated, syncopated, filled with erratic changes of mood. The third movement is marked “Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo,” a calmly singing chorale. Finally, Beethoven once again questions his fate and ours in “Grave ma non troppo tratto – Allegro.” The introductory section asks in a three-note rising motif “Must it be?”—the words written into the manuscript—and then as the “Allegro” takes off, the emphatic “It must be!” signals ultimate acceptance in gratitude.

— Adrian Mann

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Previn – Four Outings for Brass

- One of the more well-known of his many chamber works
- Written in Previn's jazzy, dissonant style for brass quintet
- Explores the many techniques possible on modern brass instruments

Clara Schumann – Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17

- Her only piano trio among hundreds of works
- She toured and performed piano recitals for over 60 years
- A close friend of Brahms, their correspondence is preserved

Beethoven – String quartet in F major, Op. 135

- His final string quartet, written the year before his death
- He transformed the classical quartet model into one of personal expression
- This quartet ends with statements questioning, then affirming our fate