Welcome Back!

Hayes Piano Artist

TIFFANY POON

SUN, DEC 12, 2pm
KENNEDY CENTER
TERRACE THEATER
R. SCHUMANN

*Kinderszenen, Opus 15*

- Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (From Foreign Lands and Peoples)
- Curiose Geschichte (Curious Story)
- Hasche-Mann (Blind Man’s Bluff)
- Bittendes Kind (Pleading Child)
- Glückes genug (Happiness)
- Wichtige Begenbenheit (An Important Event)
- Träumerei (Dreaming)
- Am Camin (At the Fireside)
- Ritter vom Steckenpferd (Knight of the Hobbyhorse)
- Fast zu ernst (Almost Too Serious)
- Fürchtenmachen (Frightening)
- Kind im Einschlummern (Child Falling Asleep)
- Der Dichter spricht (The Poet Speaks)

R. SCHUMANN

*Arabeske, Opus 18*

C. SCHUMANN

**Piano Sonata in G Minor**

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo
- IV. Rondo

C. SCHUMANN

*Soirées Musicales, Opus 6*

- No. 2 Notturno
- No. 3 Mazurka
- No. 5 Mazurka

R. SCHUMANN

*Davidsbündlertänze, Opus 6*

- Lebhaft
- Innig
- Mit Humor
- Ungeduldig
- Einfach
- Sehr rasch
- Nicht schnell
- Frisch
- Lebhaft
- Balladenmässig. Sehr rasch
- Einfach
- Mit Humor
- Wild und lustig
- Zart und singend
- Frisch
- Mit gutem Humor
- Wie aus der Ferne
- Nicht schnell
What does it mean to play classical music in the 21st century? What does it mean to be a classical musician today?

Existential questions started running in my mind, as the world stood still in fear, concerts canceled. Sirens sounded the only consistent music last year. In times of turmoil, I turn to German Romantic literature, philosophy, and music to inspire me outside the box of reality. So naturally, I began rediscovering and deepening my love for Robert Schumann’s music in the past year and began dreaming of a hypothetical program that I could one day present, one that represents who I am today as a musician. Little did I know then that the day would be on the Washington Performing Arts season at the Kennedy Center one year later...what an honor.

To reflect on one’s existence and purpose, one often looks back at past times and forward to the future. The program is therefore a journey through time, from reflecting on the age of innocence through Kinderszenen (1838) to dancing beyond the present reality in the imaginative, ambitious Davidsbündlertänze. Through my journey of studying Schumann, I grew to understand how important Clara was to Robert from his own words, how integral she was as his muse not only in their letters, but in their music. Robert even admitted that Kinderszenen might have been inspired by Clara’s remark to him—that he seemed to her like a child. Therefore, I decided to interweave Clara’s works with Robert Schumann’s.

The program is also a journey through the relationship between Robert and Clara Schumann, though chronologically re-arranged to illustrate the influence of Clara on Robert and to have a more open, optimistic, philosophical ending. Beginning with pieces that Robert wrote while they were forcibly separated by Clara’s father Friedrich Wieck, unable to marry each other during the melancholy meandering of Arabeske, Clara Schumann’s Sonata invites you to ponder on the musical personality that Robert had been yearning for. After intermission, we once again begin with looking back through a selection of her teenage pieces from Soirées Musicales, the fifth of which directly inspired the opening of Robert’s Davidsbündlertänze, a set of dances dedicated to her, while he was dreaming in 1837 of their eventual wedding in 1840... “If ever I was happy at the piano it was when I was composing these...”

I have been fascinated by Schumann’s dual personalities in his music—Eusebius and Florestan—ever since I first encountered them ten years ago. I could see myself as both being the introspective, emotional, idealistic Eusebius and the extroverted, impatient, lively Florestan—and I love exploring both through Schumann’s music. During the pandemic, I wanted to learn something new and stumbled upon the duo again in Davidsbündlertänze. What has been even more fascinating as I dive deeper into Schumann’s world is discovering Eusebius and Florestan’s philosophy on music in the Davidsbund—an imaginary music society Schumann founded in 1833, in a coffeehouse in Leipzig with his artist friends including Clara Wieck and Mendelssohn. The Davidsbund wrote critical reviews on compositions, concerts, and up-and-coming young composers, published under pseudonyms in Schumann’s music journal Neue Zeitschrift für Musik—with an aim to fight against philistinism and provoke a thoughtful dialectic on music.

In an age permeated with sensationalism in all walks of life, it has been refreshing to contemplate Robert and Clara Schumann’s values as composers and music critics. Exploring their music has challenged me to rethink not only how I play the piano, but also what my responsibilities are as an artist—to communicate classical music to an audience today while paying respects to the classical composers and their tradition.

Robert Schumann’s imaginative music has always soothed and opened my mind, while spurring on my creativity, which I hope, together with Clara Schumann’s music, will do the same for you today in your return to the concert hall.

—Tiffany Poon
Robert Schumann’s *Kinderszenen* originated in a remark that the teenaged Clara Wieck made to her future husband: she told him one day that he sometimes seemed like a child to her (this was apparently meant as an incidental observation rather than a furious denunciation). Schumann was struck by this remark, and in February 1838—while Wieck was absent on a seven-month concert tour—he composed about thirty very short piano pieces that he regarded as “reminiscences of an older person” about memories of childhood (Schumann was 27 at the time). From these, he chose thirteen and published them under the title *Kinderszenen*: “Scenes from Childhood.” To Wieck he wrote: “You will like them, but you must forget that you are a virtuoso. They make a great impression—especially on myself!—when I play them.”

Schumann was very much attracted to the world of the child (Clara Wieck’s remark contained a large measure of truth), and he composed a good deal of music for children. Schumann was quite right that one need not be a virtuoso to play the *Kinderszenen*, though some of them are certainly difficult enough: he intended these “adult” reminiscences to be play-able by children, and everyone who has had at least a couple of years of piano lessons has performed some of them. It should be noted that, despite the specific titles, Schumann was not aiming for exact pictorial representation in these pieces: as was often the case with this composer, he wrote the music first and then went back later and decided what they were “about.” Schumann commented that “the titles were given afterward and these titles are, in fact, nothing but directions for the performance of the music.”

In any case, listeners will discover that they already know many of these charming pieces. They are all brief (the shortest lasts about half a minute), each conveys one specific impression, and there is an endearing innocence about all thirteen. The longest of them, *Träumerei*, has become almost the archetypal of the dreamy romantic piano piece, but all listeners will discover old favorites along the way as this music—nicely calculated to charm both children and adults—unfolds.

Schumann moved to Vienna in the fall of 1838, thinking that he and Clara Wieck might establish their home in that fabled city after their marriage. But the visit was not a success. Unlike so many other composers, Schumann did not like Vienna and remained only until the end of March 1839, when the death of his brother called him back to Leipzig.

While in Vienna, Schumann composed several pieces for piano. To his publisher he wrote, “I am composing very intensely at the moment and hoping to elevate myself to the rank of favorite composer of all women in Vienna.” His intending this music for women pianists was not meant as disparagement (Clara Wieck was one of the finest pianists on the planet) but as a statement about the music’s marketability: he was aware of the growing number of young amateur women pianists, the daughters of the growing middle class.

Yet this lovely music should not be written off as a relatively easy piece intended for domestic consumption. Schumann’s use of the title *Arabeske* may seem open to question. An arabeske is not a specific musical form but rather a composition full of florid atmosphere and decoration (as in Debussy’s two *Arabesques*). Schumann’s *Arabeske* is in a classical form: it is a rondo based on a flowing—almost impulsive—main subject, heard immediately. Along the way, Schumann offers two contrasting episodes, both full of dark and expressive shading, then rounds things off with a slow coda derived from the rondo tune. Whatever its original purpose, Schumann’s *Arabeske* continues to bring pleasure to audiences and performers—female *and* male—long after it was written.

Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann were married in September 1840 after a vicious three-year battle with her father. Friedrich Wieck had taught his daughter to play the piano and helped turn her into one of the finest pianists of the nineteenth century. Now he wanted to continue that control, and he bitterly opposed the match of his daughter and the young Schumann. The matter finally ended up in court, where the young couple prevailed—they were
married on September 12, 1840, the day before Clara’s 21st birthday.

Almost exactly one year later, Clara gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Marie. Two weeks after Marie’s birth on September 1, 1841, Robert gave Clara the manuscript of a *Symphony in D Minor* as a present for her 22nd birthday. And three months after that, Clara returned the gesture by presenting her husband with two movements of a piano sonata. In her diary, she wrote: “I tried to compose something for Robert, and lo and behold, it worked! I was blissful at having really completed a first and a second sonata movement, which did not fail to produce an effect—namely, they took my dear husband quite by surprise.” In January, between concert tours, Clara added two more movements, an *Adagio* and a rondo, to complete the sonata.

But then progress on the sonata came to a stop. Clara never performed it in public, and she never published it. In 1845 she published its third movement as one of her *Pièces fugitives*, but her *Piano Sonata in G Minor* was not published until 1991, a century and a half after it was written. Perhaps this sonata was meant to be a private expression of love, perhaps its composer felt that she was not ready to take on full-scale sonata form, but this sonata did not become widely known until a century after Clara’s death.

The opening *Allegro* is in sonata form. Its first theme, marked *Mit tiefer Empfindung* (“with deep feeling”) is terse and declarative, while the second is more flowing. The brief development section is turbulent, and a spirited coda brings the movement to its firm close. Shortest of the movements, the *Adagio* consists of three lyric episodes. The *Scherzo* is played staccato (the marking here is *Leggiерamente*: “lightly”); this is a very attractive movement, and one understands why the composer would later lift it out of this sonata and publish it separately. The finale, a rondo in 2/4, is the most brilliant and difficult of the four movements. Its steady rush of sixteenth-notes continues virtually throughout, right through the powerful close.

**Soirées Musicales, Opus 6**

No. 2 Notturno
No. 3 Mazurka
No. 5 Mazurka

CLARA SCHUMANN

Clara Schumann was one of the great pianists of the nineteenth century, and her playing was admired by Liszt, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Brahms (and by everyone else who heard her). Like virtually all other nineteenth-century virtuoso performers, she composed, though she was always ambivalent about the act of composing—in the middle of the nineteenth century it was fine for a woman to perform music, but composing was not thought a proper occupation for women. In a famous diary entry at age 19, Clara Schumann wrote, “I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to? It would be arrogance, although, indeed, my father led me into it in earlier days.”

Yet she felt the lure of composing for many years. She had begun composing as a girl (she began her *Piano Concerto* at age 13), and she continued to compose throughout her marriage to Robert Schumann, but she stopped abruptly about the time of her husband’s death in a mental asylum in 1856. Thereafter, her energies went to performing, teaching, and raising the couple’s seven surviving children, and the remaining four decades of her life saw no new works from her pen.

Clara Schumann composed her set of *Soirées Musicales* in 1835-36 and published it in 1836, when she was 17. Listeners may detect the influence of Chopin on these six short pieces. In 1835 Chopin visited the Leipzig home of Friedrich Wieck, Clara’s father, and he heard the sixteen-year-old Clara play his own music during that visit. Impressed, Chopin said that Clara Wieck was “the only woman in Germany who can play my music.” Clara Wieck appears to have been just as impressed with Chopin—of the six pieces in the *Soirées Musicales*, most are in forms that Chopin himself employed, including the three pieces on this program: a nocturne and two mazurkas. These pieces require little introduction. They are, generally, in ternary form, and they give some indication of how fine a pianist Clara Wieck was at 16. They also give some sense of her promise as a composer, a promise that would never be realized.
Davidsbündlertänze, Opus 6
ROBERT SCHUMANN

In 1834 the young Robert Schumann helped found a newspaper dedicated to praising new music and attacking the conservative and entrenched musical opinions of the day. He soon became editor of the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik and used that position to publish a number of witty and insightful reviews. Because he and his friends felt that they were doing battle with musical Philistines, they referred to themselves as “the band of David” (in German, Davidsbund). Schumann loved games and hidden messages, and there were a number of in-jokes among the writers. One of the in-jokes was Schumann’s invention of two editorial personalities, which he believed were the two sides of his nature: Florestan was the hotheaded and impetuous side, Eusebius the dreamer.

All this information is part of the background to the Davidsbündlertänze. In 1834, the same year he helped found the Neue Zeitschrift, Schumann began composing a set of short pieces to be grouped under that title, which means “Dances of the Band of David,” but these were not completed until 1837. Schumann subtitled this work “Eighteen Character Pieces,” and he apparently intended the music to represent the varying responses of Florestan and Eusebius to the world of the Philistines: at the end of each piece he wrote the initial E or F to indicate which character had been speaking. He further added two cryptic sentences in the score: after No. 8 he wrote, “Herewith Florestan made an end, and his lips quivered painfully,” and before No. 18, “Quite superfluously Eusebius remarked as follows; but all the time great bliss spoke from his eyes.” As if this were not complex enough, Schumann marked the first two measures of No. 1 “Motto de C.W.,” which he had taken from the Opus 6 of Clara Wieck, whom he would marry in 1840. The Davidsbündlertänze were written during the time when Clara Wieck and Schumann were struggling to get free of her repressive father and marry, and some of that struggle appears to have made its way into Schumann’s composition of this music. To Clara Wieck he wrote, “In the Dances there are many marriage thoughts. They originated in the most joyful excitement that I can ever recall . . . If ever I was happy at the piano, it was while composing these.” At the very end of the last piece, the pianist’s left hand strikes a deep C twelve consecutive times: are these the strokes of midnight—or an evocation of Clara’s name?

Now—having said all this—it should be noted that one need not know any of it to enjoy the music. In fact, it may be better not to know it and just to take these eighteen concise pieces as they come (one doesn’t have to look at the score to know which comes from Florestan, which from Eusebius). As many have noted, these are in any case not dances but brief character pieces that strike a mood or evoke an atmosphere. Perhaps it is wisest to take them for that, to enjoy the verve of the young composer’s writing for the piano, and to sense the vastly-differing moods these short pieces evoke.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger
Hong Kong–born pianist Tiffany Poon has appeared with orchestras and in recital throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and China since she was first accepted to the Juilliard pre-college program at the age of eight.

In addition to live performances, she is dedicated to building an online community on her YouTube and social media channels, where she shares insights of her life as a musician with the goal of demystifying classical music.

This season, Tiffany Poon will perform debut recitals in Munich’s Herkulessaal presented by Concerto Winderstein’s Klassik vor Acht series, as a Washington Performing Arts “Hayes Piano Artist” at the Kennedy Center, and in a recital debut at the Dresden Music Festival. She has recently debuted in Salzburg with the Philharmonie Salzburg and conductor Elisabeth Fuchs and joined acclaimed cellist Jan Vogler for a series of chamber music recitals celebrating Beethoven, including joining him for a performance of Beethoven’s cello sonatas at the Rheingau Music Festival.

Recent seasons have seen Tiffany perform celebrated solo recitals as part of the Klavierfestival Ruhr, the Rheingau Musikfestival’s KlassikMarathon, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zurich’s series, and the NeueNamen series in Münster and Bielefeld. She was a fellow of the Bohème 2020 program at the Dresden Music Festival, and in the autumn of 2019, Tiffany made her debut on the Gilmore Keyboard Festival’s Rising Star Series. Tiffany has performed in online concerts on both her own social media channels as well as on the cutting-edge Dreamstage platform.

Her social media following of over 300,000 subscribers has led to unique online opportunities, including having a drink named after her as part of Minnesota Public Radio’s 2018 Holiday Insta-Drinks Series for Performance Today, performing on Jan Vogler’s 2020 Music Never Sleeps live stream, collaborating with the New York Philharmonic’s ‘Practice 30’ campaign and with Teen Vogue for their web series “The Lead Up.” Through her “Get Ready with Me” videos and her practice vlogs, she has created an online community to inspire all generations to appreciate classical music and to “Be Kind and Keep Striving.” In 2020, Tiffany founded the charity Together with Classical, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting musicians and music education, while bringing together people and communities from around the world in their shared love for classical music.

Tiffany received a full scholarship from the Columbia University/Juilliard School exchange program and studied piano with Emanuel Ax and Joseph Kalichstein. She was named a John Jay Scholar by Columbia University for her outstanding academic and artistic achievements, and in May 2018, she graduated from Columbia University with a degree in philosophy.

Tiffany was named the second-place winner in the 2019 KlavierOlymp of the Kissinger Sommer Festival and in 2014, a National YoungArts Winner in the United States. Her awards include first prize and Best Performance of Concerto Award at the 8th Moscow International Frederic Chopin Competition for Young Pianists in 2012, and more recently, she won second prize at the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation International Competition. Tiffany was awarded a 2019 Young Artist Award from the Hessen Agency at the Rheingau Music Festival.

Tiffany Poon is a Fellow of the Young Artists Foundation gGmbH in Germany.
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