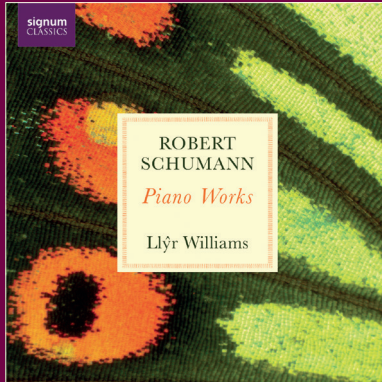


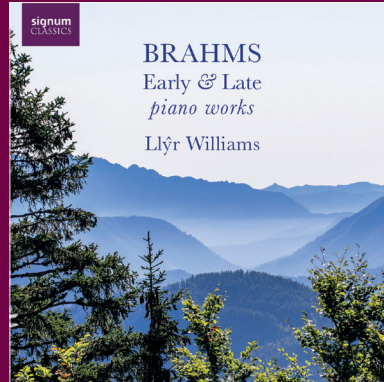
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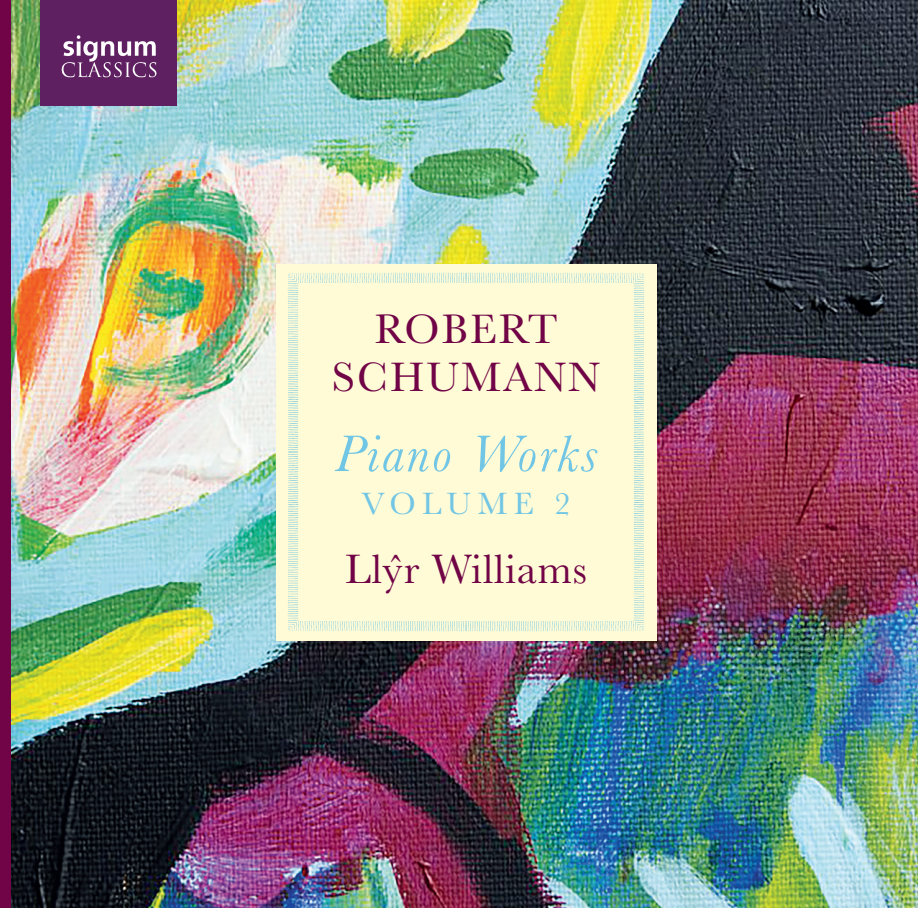
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BBC Music Magazine



ROBERT
SCHUMANN
Piano Works
VOLUME 2
Llŷr Williams

CD1

Piano Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor, Op.11

1	Introduzione: Un poco adagio - Allegro vivace	[13.25]
2	Aria	[03.09]
3	Scherzo: Allegrissimo - Intermezzo - Tempo 1	[05.11]
4	Finale: Allegro maestoso - Più allegro	[12.24]

Kreisleriana, Op.16 (8 Fantasies for piano)

5	Äusserst bewegt	[02.39]
6	Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch	[09.16]
7	Sehr aufgeregt	[04.47]
8	Sehr langsam	[04.13]
9	Sehr lebhaft	[03.27]
10	Sehr langsam	[04.30]
11	Sehr rasch	[02.20]
12	Schnell und spielend	[03.46]
13	Arabesque in C Major, Op.18	[06.48]

Total timings 1.15.57

CD2

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op.14

1	Allegro brillante	[07.46]
2	Scherzo: Molto commodo	[06.07]
3	Quasi variazioni. Andantino de Clara Wieck	[08.20]
4	Prestissimo possibile	[07.02]

Etudes Symphoniques, Op.13

5	Thème: Andante	[01.39]
6	Etude 1 Un poco più vivo	[01.17]
7	Etude 2	[03.30]
8	Etude 3 Vivace	[01.18]
9	Etude 4	[00.57]
10	Etude 5	[01.16]
11	Posthumous variation 3	[01.35]
12	Posthumous variation 2	[02.16]
13	Etude 6 Agitato	[00.55]
14	Etude 7 Allegro molto	[01.20]
15	Posthumous variation 4	[02.05]
16	Posthumous variation 5	[03.00]
17	Posthumous variation 1	[01.39]
18	Etude 8	[02.45]
19	Etude 9 Presto possibile	[00.41]
20	Etude 10	[01.26]
21	Etude 11	[02.59]
22	Finale: Allegro brillante (1837 version)	[06.30]

23 **Blumenstück in D flat Major, Op.19** [07.46]

Total timings 1.17.46

While several of Schumann's piano works exist in different versions, the Etudes Symphoniques (Album 2 Tracks 5-22) present the most obvious challenge for the player: deciding which to choose from, as five variations were withdrawn before the 1837 first edition and only published posthumously by Brahms in 1873. Further changes were made by Schumann for an 1852 publication. As the five variations contain some of the most expressive music in the set, pianists often insert them midway through as a chunk of music. I have here devised my own sequence with the aim of trying to ensure maximum contrast between successive variations. I have also taken the opportunity to restore some bars from the original 1837 edition of the Finale.

I have performed versions of Sonata no.3, a much underrated work, in either three and four movements. Listeners who are interested in hearing the 1836 version of the piece, titled *Concert sans Orchestre* with all its movements in a sombre F minor, can do so by programming IDs 1, 3 and 4 on Album 2. The second movement Scherzo was not published until 1852 and is much more cheerful in nature, the only bit of light relief in the piece but still unified with the other movements by its descending scale motifs. The fact that multiple versions exist suggests that the modern idea of the Urtext edition is not very important in Romantic piano music. Furthermore as a performer, I believe one is justified in amalgamating elements from different readings within what must often sound like an improvisatory genre.

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ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Notes by Geraint Lewis

*'If Florestan storms,
Nestle close to Eusebius.
Florestan the wild,
Eusebius the mild,
Tears and flames,
Take them together,
Both are within me,
The pain and the joy'.*

These lines were written by Robert Schumann shortly after arriving in Vienna in October 1838 and sent to his beloved fiancée Clara Wieck back in Leipzig. She would have understood exactly what Florestan and Eusebius meant to him: the dual sides of his divided personality who were often invoked to characterise the music he was writing. When the Piano Sonata No.1 in F sharp minor, Op.11 was first published in 1836 the title page explained that it was a 'Pianoforte Sonata dedicated to Clara by Florestan and Eusebius' - the name of Robert Schumann was nowhere present! Only when a revised edition was published in 1840 did the composer reveal himself, and this in the year of his eventual marriage to Clara herself. Behind this subterfuge may indeed lie the traumatic story of Schumann's prolonged engagement to Clara from 1836 and the implacable opposition of her father Friedrich Wieck, who had been Schumann's mentor and teacher. This tangled story of passionate devotion, thwarted love and family bitterness thus has its origins as far back as 1828 and resonates throughout the music on this album, which was composed between 1832 and 1839.

The story of Robert and Clara's heroic love for each other is frequently narrated from his perspective as the older member of the couple and as one of Western music's greatest composers. But her side of the affair is just as intriguing. When they were in the first flush of a deeper realisation that they were actually in love - just after her 16th birthday in September 1835 - he told her "My earliest memory of you goes back to the summer of 1828: you were painting letters and trying to write, while I was studying Hummel's A minor Piano Concerto and I often looked around at you. I remember it as though it were today". We should remember that he was then an 18-year old student and that he was probably both shocked (if also possibly gratified) by her reaction to his recollection, considering that she was but a girl of nine at the time: "How clearly I remember that first afternoon after we got back from Hamburg, when you came into the room and scarcely even said hello; so I went off to Auguste, who was with us then, and said through my tears, 'Oh, I don't love anyone the way I do him and he wouldn't even look at me!'"

Clara was already - despite being a child - a prodigious pianist and budding composer with her career assiduously developed and promoted by her father. In that very year of 1828 she made her public debut at the Leipzig Gewandhaus just when Schumann came to be a pupil of her father's and who characteristically took him in as a lodger in the family home. Robert had lost his father as a teenager and soon promised the rest of his family that he would study Law at Leipzig University - but instead, he was drawn into Wieck's musical circle and changed course, with his new mentor telling his mother that within three years he could mould her son into one of Europe's leading pianists. Living thus cheek-by-jowl for a formative period with Wieck and Clara was undoubtedly stimulating, even if Robert didn't initially realise what thoughts the young girl harboured in her heart. But disaster struck when he sustained an injury to his right hand

which effectively damaged and paralysed his middle fingers. His dream of a career as a virtuoso pianist was shattered and this was the path that led to his new concentration upon composition. This might have seemed, initially, even more illusory but he remained in close contact with the Wiecks throughout and with Clara he developed a friendly sense of compositional collaboration - and herein lay the origins of the First Piano Sonata in 1831-2 when Robert wrote a memorable little Fandango and then promptly lost it!

These earliest years of Schumann's serious attempts at composition were exclusively focused on the piano, even though he had made earlier forays into song, chamber and orchestral writing. But he started to publish works in 1831-32 including the 'Aebers' Variations Op.1 and the perennially-popular *Papillons* Op.2, which is a kaleidoscopic collection of miniatures pulled together magically to create a seemingly natural cycle. The Fandango from this same period was another little squib like dozens of others, many of which found themselves published years later within the collections *Bunte Blätter*, Op.99 and *Albumblätter*, Op.124. Although Robert mislaid it the Fandango soon turned up again and fascinated Clara who quoted its rhythm in the last of her Four Characteristic Pieces, Op.5 - *Le ballet des revenants* or 'Ballet of the Ghosts' - written in 1835 (but probably sketched earlier) and published the following year. The set was a deliberate compliment dedicated to Robert following from the dedication to her of his Impromptu on a theme by Clara Wieck, written in 1833 and published the same year. These early years of intertwined piano composition - almost like a little creative laboratory between them, must have intoxicated Clara - but what happened next must have been pure torture for her young innocent heart.

In April 1834 another piano pupil came to live with the Wiecks (Robert having moved out) and she was the supposed daughter of Baron Ferdinand von Fricken

from Asch. Ernestine was three years older than Clara and immediately caught Schumann's eye. Right under Clara's nose the older pair fell instantly in love and by August 1834 they were secretly engaged. The musical effects were pretty immediate - the Baron came to Leipzig to see if the young composer was a suitable fiancée and in taking Ernestine back to Asch for the summer holiday gave Schumann a little work of his own for flute and piano as a parting gift to show his satisfaction. Casting aside various other works-in-progress (including the First Sonata) and taking the tune from this 'Theme and variations' as a basis, Schumann set to work on his own collection of elaborate variations. This music represented Schumann's largest and most ambitious work to date and encapsulates his uniquely spirited and idiosyncratic style of keyboard writing: that he happily entrusted Ernestine with their performance for her father shows too that she was a formidable pianist and no slouch as compared to Clara herself.

For a long time the music was known in a revision from 1852 entitled *Etudes en forme de variations* and consisted of an elaboration of Baron von Fricken's theme starting with sonorously descending C sharp minor chords; then came Nine contrasting Variations with an extended Finale in D flat major to round off what feels to be a genuinely symphonic structure. This would, then, have appeared to be the definitive version of the work - but in fact it actually represented just the tip of an iceberg. The first published version had come out in 1837 as XII *Etudes Symphoniques* and bore a dedication to the young English pianist and composer William Sterndale Bennett - he'd first come over to Germany in 1836, been enthusiastically acclaimed by Mendelssohn and in 1837 met Schumann when they became firm friends - but this version contained two extra movements later cut on the grounds that they were more studies than variations. Furthermore, it seems that Schumann had also composed another five variations originally but had never published them as part of any official set. These however were

known to Brahms, who published them in 1873 as a supplement and again in 1893 as part of a 'Collected Works' in partnership with Clara where the two missing Etudes are also restored to their original places. Each hitherto suppressed variation is clearly based on Fricken's theme and so it seems highly appropriate to include them in performance even though their exact positioning remains a matter for any pianist to decide: Llyr positions them here at CD 2 Tracks 11-12 and 15-17.

These years 1834-5 must then have been extremely painful for Clara, with work proceeding not only on the multifarious movements of these Etudes and Variations but also on the more colourfully varied set of pieces composed in 1835 as *Carnaval*, Op.9. Clara had one fleeting appearance in this dazzling gallery of varied characters, but Ernestine and the town of Asch were the dominating factors. Clara's love for Robert seems to have been undaunted throughout his engagement - but she was soon to be rewarded. It transpired that the seemingly aristocratic and financially-endowed Ernestine was in fact the illegitimate daughter of Baroness von Fricken's sister and a wire manufacturer from Asch - Schumann was shocked at the deceit (and also possibly the evaporation of her money) and the engagement was abandoned. And so Fate played its part in removing this unwanted obstacle from the path of True Love and Clara found that Robert now looked upon her not as a kind of childhood companion but as the 'Immortal Beloved' who would form his life-companion and passionate soulmate. And so, against this background the First Piano Sonata having been started in 1833 now finally came to fruition as a work in which Clara was at the heart of the matter.

The composers of Schumann's generation came to maturity after the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert in 1827 and 1828 respectively. When he heard of

Schubert's passing at the frighteningly early age of 31 the student Schumann reportedly wept all night, by his own admission. Beethoven, however, dominated all musical discourse by intelligent successors in a spirit of both reverence and awe, with an acceptance that the musical landscape had now been changed beyond recognition. The composition of works in sonata and symphonic mould became especially problematic. Mendelssohn in his two piano sonatas of 1825 and 1827 (Op.6 and Op.posth 106 respectively) openly paid homage to Beethoven's Op.101 and Op.106 Sonatas - and then never touched the form again. Schumann in his Op.11 has a freer sense of inheriting the classical forms and bends them with a natural spontaneity. After the lyrically fluid opening section - not quite a slow introduction - a pause leads to ...yes - the Fandango. It finally achieves immortality and Schumann's musical conversation with Clara proceeds apace whilst simultaneously representing a dialogue between Florestan and Eusebius. The slow movement is based upon a song Schumann composed in 1828 (coincidentally the year when he first met Clara?) to a poem by Justinus Kerner (whom he would set again in 1840) - this was *An Anna*:

'Not in the vale of the sweet homeland, by the murmur of the silver spring,
Do I think of thee, sweet life, but when carried, pallid from the field of battle'.
Little perhaps did he appreciate - as 1835 and Ernestine turned into 1836 and Clara - that his future happiness with Clara would be fiercely opposed and contested by none other than his former teacher and supporter - her father!

The Second Sonata (a much simpler affair than the First) had also been on the stocks from as early as 1830 to 1834 but wasn't published until 1839. The Third Sonata, however, came out in a wild burst in 1836 and was published immediately. Its definitive shape, nevertheless, remains almost, if not quite, as complicated as the *Etudes Symphoniques*. It would appear that Schumann initially

conceived it as having five movements - with two scherzi either side of the central slow movement, described as 'Andantino de Clara Wieck'. When first published it had only three movements and for some reason was described as a 'Concerto without Orchestra' which seems only to have added to the confusion - it has none of the broader design of a concerto and is obviously a full-blooded sonata in design and spirit. This could just have been the publisher Haslinger's ploy in promoting a three-movement piece - and concertos traditionally had three and not four (or more) movements. But in 1853 Schumann revised the work and restored the first of the scherzi to its original place where it provides a nice sense of tonal contrast - D flat as against the F minor of the other three.

The anguish of the five years before Schumann could finally marry Clara on her 21st birthday in September 1840 is poured out in a series of extraordinary piano works, which virtually became a form of private correspondence between them when Herr Pater Wieck strenuously kept them apart. One of the most astonishing of these works is the *Kreisleriana*, Op.16 which Schumann composed in a white-heat of inspiration over a mere four nights in May 1838. This kind of sustained, almost manic, flow was something which Schumann often experienced as part of his bi-polar character - the First Symphony was similarly sketched over four days in 1841. The character of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler 'was drawn constantly to and fro by his inner dreams as if floating on an eternally undulating sea, searching in vain for the haven which would grant him the peace and serenity needed for his work' and Schumann clearly identified with him. He was created by the German Romantic writer E.T.A.Hoffmann (1776-1822) when writing for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (with which Schumann was later associated) and in his collection *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* of 1814 there appears a story entitled *Kreisleriana*. Robert wrote to Clara 'I'm overflowing with music and beautiful melodies now - imagine, since my last letter I've finished another whole

notebook of new pieces. I intend to call it *Kreisleriana*. You and one of your ideas play the main role in it, and I want to dedicate it to you - yes, to you and nobody else - and then you will smile so sweetly when you discover yourself in it'.

But Clara begged Robert *not* to dedicate it to her, sensing that such a public declaration (so conspicuously avoided with the Sonata No.1) would further enrage her furious father. So it was soon published with a dedication instead 'To my friend Herrn F. Chopin': having met him twice, in 1835 and 1836 and written about his music with enthusiasm as early as 1831 in the AMZ - "Hats off, gentlemen! A Genius" - Schumann obviously felt this friendship keenly. Chopin was by nature reserved, however, and when he published his Second Ballade, Op.38 in 1840 the reciprocal dedication read simply 'To Mr. Robert Schumann'. Clara herself was almost alarmed by the music and wrote back 'Sometimes your music actually frightens me and I wonder: is it really true that the creator of such things is going to be my husband?' She did play *Kreisleriana*, but not often complete as the set of Eight Fantasies Schumann intended and which was his favourite amongst his works. He and she often commented that his big cycles - like the *Etudes Symphoniques*, *Carnaval* and *Kreisleriana* weren't really suited to general audiences and in 1838 she'd written, asking him to write some shorter and lighter pieces which she could play more suitably in public. From Vienna early in 1839 he responded with the *Arabesque*, Op.18 and *Blumenstück*, Op.19 which fitted the bill perfectly. They finally married in 1840 and Schumann never wrote with such passion or regularity for the piano again: they were now together and Clara spurred her husband to write for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus and opera. But these earlier works for solo piano encapsulate some of Schumann's deepest feelings for her and live on with heartbreaking power and eloquence.

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"To my ears, Llŷr Williams is one of the great pianists of our age."

John Gilhooly, CBE.



LLŶR WILLIAMS

Welsh pianist Llŷr Williams is widely admired for his profound musical intelligence, and for the expressive and communicative nature of his interpretations. He has performed with all the major UK orchestras under conductors including Michael Tilson Thomas, Jiří Bělohlávek, Carlo Rizzi, Vasily Petrenko, Jaime Martín, Osmo Vanska, Joseph Swensen, Grant Llewellyn and Jac Van Steen, and he has a particularly longstanding relationship with the BBC National Orchestra

of Wales, with whom he has in recent seasons performed concertos ranging from Mozart and Beethoven to Bartók and Mathias.

As a recitalist, Llŷr Williams regularly performs at venues and festivals including Wigmore Hall, Perth Concert Hall, the St David's and Dora Stoutzker Halls in Cardiff, and the Edinburgh and East Neuk Festivals in the UK, Salle Bourgie in Montreal and the Capital Region Classical series in Schenectady, USA. He has a long association with the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, where he has, among others, given multi-recital cycles of the music of Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. As a chamber musician he has performed with artists including Bryn Terfel, Natalie Clein, Tim Hugh, Katarina Nazarova, Jamie Barton and Andrei Kymach. His particular interest in song repertoire is reflected in his 20-year association as one of the two official pianists of the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition.

Llŷr Williams' long and successful collaboration with Signum Records includes Brahms Early and Late Piano Works and the first volume of Schumann piano works (2024), the 8-disc box-set 'A Schubert Journey' (2020), the 12-volume 'Beethoven Unbound' (2018), a 'Wagner Without Words' double album (2014) and highlights from Liszt's 'Années de pèlerinage' (2012).

A former BBC New Generation Artist and Borletti-Buitoni Trust award recipient, Llŷr Williams was born in Pentrebychan, North Wales, and read music at The Queen's College, Oxford before taking up a postgraduate scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and in 2017 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Wales. He is also currently Artist-in-Association at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, a patron of the Gower Festival, and Associate Artist at the Cowbridge Festival.

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