



LINN

Jenner, Schumann, Weber
Works for clarinet and piano

JEAN JOHNSON
STEVEN OSBORNE

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JEAN JOHNSON clarinet

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For Gram

Gustav Jenner (1865–1920)**Clarinet Sonata in G major, Op. 5**

1. Allegro moderato e grazioso 7:37
2. Adagio espressivo 9:39
3. Allegretto grazioso – Vivace 4:15
4. Allegro energico 5:26

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)**Three Romances, Op. 94**

5. Nicht schnell 3:26
6. Einfach, innig 3:44
7. Nicht schnell 4:23

Clara Schumann (1819–1896)**Three Romances, Op. 22**

arr. for clarinet and piano by Mark Thiel (b. 1949)

8. Andante molto 3:23
9. Allegretto: Mit zartem vortrage 2:47
10. Leidenschaftlich schnell 3:34

Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826)**Grand Duo Concertant, Op. 48**

11. Allegro con fuoco 9:06
12. Andante con moto 6:17
13. Rondo: Allegro 6:43

Total Running Time 70:46

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Works for clarinet and piano

The name of Johannes Brahms may not appear on the works list for this album, but it is he who links all four composers here. By far the least known figure is Gustav Jenner, Brahms's only formal pupil.

Jenner was born in 1865 on the north German island of Sylt to a father of Scottish descent. While still at school he began to teach himself music before going on to study in Hamburg with Eduard Marxsen, Brahms's own teacher. When Marxsen died in 1887 it was Brahms who took over his tuition, Jenner spending the next seven years studying with him. While Brahms was hardly a natural teacher, being overly critical of Jenner's talents, he *did* help Jenner get a foot on the ladder, career-wise, much as Robert and Clara Schumann had done for him years earlier. Jenner duly took up the position of musical director at Marburg University, where he remained for the rest of his career. Perhaps not surprisingly, within his modest works list, Brahms casts a long stylistic shadow.

Jenner's sole Clarinet Sonata was published in 1900 and dedicated to Richard Mühlfeld, the very figure who had brought Brahms out of a threatened retirement a decade or so earlier. It's not short of ambition in terms of scale, and the composer is alive to the instrument's innate mellifluousness, evident from the very beginning, in which the clarinet offers the warmest of melodic lines, the piano accompanying. As the movement progresses there's a sense of equality between the two instruments, and there are some very effective moments where the clarinet sinks into its lower register, the piano singing above. The *Adagio espressivo* might initially seem an essay in song but Jenner isn't afraid to introduce more assertive

moments that explode briefly into anger (introduced by a dotted rhythm in the piano, the key now minor), with the mood remaining restless until we're firmly back in the major.

The tempo indication for the third movement is *Allegretto grazioso*, and it is perhaps the most directly Brahmsian of the four in its playful disguising of where the barlines fall, but he springs a surprise in the Trio section, a darting catch-me-if-you-can *Vivace*. The finale is less reminiscent of Brahms than Schumann in its forthright rhythmic drive and sharp accentuation. But within that, Jenner offers a shock as the piano introduces a *pianissimo* chordal section that stops the music in its tracks, before it comes yawningly back to life, with a wonderfully assertive chase to the close.

Robert Schumann's Three Romances, Op. 94, were originally designed for oboe but once swapped for the clarinet they become a much mellower affair. They were written in December 1849, the end of another manically productive year which also yielded the *Fantasy Pieces* for clarinet, Op. 73. This trio of romances, aptly, was a Christmas present for Clara. None of them is technically challenging, but, as so often with this composer, what might appear simple enough on the page needs the greatest artistry to realize it fully (just think of the piano cycle *Kinderszenen*). They are very much songs without words, with lyricism to the fore, which makes the occasional darker moments, such as the turbulent F sharp minor middle section of the second Romance, all the more potent. And the A minor third is striking for its bare-octave opening, leaving us uncertain as to key, and the sense of questioning within its phrasing. Also noteworthy is the way Schumann beautifully slides into the major in a rapt coda.

By the time Clara Schumann wrote her Three Romances in 1853, her husband's mental stability had reached crisis point; for some time, she had been

the breadwinner of the family. They were designed as violin-and-piano pieces for Joseph Joachim, longtime friend of the family and another of those figures whose name forms a connective tissue through this programme (for without Joachim there would have been no Brahms Violin Concerto or Double Concerto).

The beautifully curled, sonorous opening to the first of the Romances is suggestive of song, especially when played on the clarinet. And Clara knows exactly how to make her partner shine, the accompaniment unobtrusive but supportive. What links all three of these Romances is an unerring sense of rubato. After the predominantly lyrical first piece, the skittishness of the second is a delightful surprise; the third then sweeps in, its quietly driving agitation reminiscent of Robert, before the mood lightens, the opening idea now underpinned by detached piano writing. When Clara and Joachim toured the Romances, one critic from the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* damned them with faint praise: 'All three pieces display an individual character conceived in a truly sincere manner and written in a delicate and fragrant hand'. Ouch!

Finally, we turn to Carl Maria von Weber, and here too there's a Brahmsian link for it was after hearing Richard Mühlfeld performing, among other things, Weber's First Clarinet Concerto that he decided to delay his retirement. For Weber it was the playing of Heinrich Baermann (1784–1847) that inspired his clarinet works – the Concertino, two clarinet concertos, the Clarinet Quintet and the *Grand Duo Concertant*. The two men met in 1811 and quickly became friends and duo partners. The title of the *Grand Duo Concertant* is interesting, for Weber originally described it as a sonata, before swapping it for one that more fully acknowledges the remarkable virtuosity of both players. The *Andante* and *Allegro* were written first, with Weber and Baerman unveiling them at a concert in 1815. In November of 1816 he added a first movement. It's a showcase in the best sense of the word, with

Baermann's beautiful tone, song-like phrasing and confident agility shown off to their finest. The opening movement's themes are deliberately chosen to work equally well on both clarinet and piano, and the whole thrillingly buoyed along with energetic scale passages and a sense of irrepressible energy. That equality is evident in the remaining movements, too, for instance in the way the clarinet introduces the most soulful of melodies in the *Andante* before the piano takes the limelight with an intricate interlude which then colours the harmonies as the clarinet returns. And in the rondo finale the brilliance is very much to the fore, the mood dramatically shifting mid-movement as the clarinet intones a *Der Freischütz*-like theme against piano tremolos, reminding us that here was the man responsible for the invention of German opera.

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JEAN JOHNSON

British-American clarinetist Jean Johnson is an internationally acclaimed chamber musician whose collaborations have taken her to many of the world's leading concert halls, including the Concertgebouw, Konzerthaus Berlin, Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall and Palais des Beaux-Arts. She is a founding member of the critically acclaimed trio *Metamorphoses* and performs regularly with pianist Steven Osborne, forming a duo praised for its expressive range and sensitivity.

A passionate chamber musician, Johnson has appeared at major international festivals including *Mostly Mozart*, Southbank Centre, *Spannungen*, Seattle Chamber Music Society, *Lammermuir*, Bath, *Hindsgavl*, *Schwetzingen*, *Prussia Cove*, *St Magnus* and *Peregrinos Musicales*.

Born in Orange, Massachusetts, Johnson studied with Michael Sussman at the University of Massachusetts, with Theodore Oien at the Aspen Music Festival and School, and with Eli Eban and Alfred Prinz at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. She began her career as Associate and Acting Principal Clarinet of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

Since moving to Scotland, she has been a regular guest artist with leading orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout the UK and further afield. Her recordings include the Brahms and Rózsa sonatas with Steven Osborne, and *Metamorphoses'* debut album – both albums have received widespread enthusiastic critical acclaim.

STEVEN OSBORNE

Steven Osborne's musical insight and integrity underpin idiomatic interpretations of varied repertoire that have won him fans around the world. The extent of his range is demonstrated by his 35 recordings for Hyperion, which have earned numerous awards, and he was made OBE for his services to music in the Queen's New Year Honours in 2022. A thoughtful and curious musician, he has served as Artist-in-Residence at Wigmore Hall and Bath Music Festival, and is often invited to curate festivals, including at Antwerp's DeSingel, and for Antwerp Symphony Orchestra. *The Observer* described him as 'a player in absolute service to the composer'.

Osborne is a regular visitor to the BBC Proms, having performed there 15 times. In 2024 he gave two concerts in the same week, the first in Messiaen's *Turangalîla-Symphonie* with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra under Nicholas Collon, with whom he performed it later in the season with Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. He then performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Sinfonia of London.

Osborne has a lifelong interest in jazz and often improvises in concerts, bringing this spontaneity and freedom to all his interpretations, and performing his own transcriptions as encores. He has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including the Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Suntory Hall and Kennedy Center Washington, and is a regular guest at both Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall.

Osborne was born in Scotland and studied at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and the Royal Northern College of Music. He is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Patron of both the Scottish International Piano Competition and the Lammermuir Festival, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2014.

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