

## Inside the Concert with Albert Combrink Daniel Ciobanu – 22 November 2022

### Robert Schumann (1810-1856): Kreisleriana Op.16

Central to this famous work, rumbles the turbulent love-affair of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck. Signs of Robert's mental illness were quickly picked up by Friedrich Wieck, who was both Clara and Robert's piano teacher in addition to being her father. He had refused to bless their engagement and was doing everything legal to forbid the two from pursuing a romance, and what followed was a flood of passionate letters, music, suicide threats, feverish study of the Bach 48 Preludes and Fugues, and a masterpiece called *Kreisleriana*.



E.T.A. Hoffman chronicled the adventures and misadventures of a fictional conductor Johannes Kreisler in a novel "Kreisleriana". Robert fell under the spell of this eccentric, wild and witty man who was obsessed by J.S. Bach but forced to play frivolous dance music for his employer. Hoffman paints a colourful portrait of a man capable of ecstasy when playing the Bach Goldberg Variations, followed by suicidal despair resulting from a hopeless infatuation with his employer's niece.

Schumann feverishly wrote short pieces and ideas in a notebook, and then would write a loveletter to Clara explaining how the sections reflected her nature and mannerisms and his love for her. Incredibly composed in just 4 days in April 1838, the *Phantasien für das Pianoforte* as it was subtitled, was Schumann's favourite of his own works. Like the kaleidoscopic fictional artist Kreisler, each number has multiple contrasting sections, resembling the imaginary musician's manic-depression, and recalling Schumann's own Florestan and Eusebius, the bipolar duo of mood entities Schumann used to indicate his own contrasting impulsive and dreamy sides.

Schumann's inventiveness in creating this series of mood-swing pieces is astonishing. Each is a psychologically compelling portrait of a distinct temperamental state, enriched and made whole by embracing its opposite.

He wanted to dedicate the work to Clara but she refused, fearing that it would only incur the ire of her father more, and make it difficult to programme the work in her own concerts. She immediately knew this would be one of Schumann's most important piano compositions and she suggested a loftier dedicatee: Frederic Chopin. When Chopin received his copy, however, he merely remarked that the cover illustration was "rather nice".

Robert said it best himself, in a letter to Clara "It is a very wild love, in a few movements".

### Keith Jarrett (1945 -): Tokyo Encore



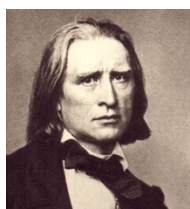
Keith Jarrett is a classical and jazz pianist who started his career with Art Blakey and went on to play with such important names as Miles Davis. His 1975 album, *The Köln Concert*, became the best-selling piano recording in history. The *Sun Bear Concerts* is a multi-concert album compilation of performances by Jarrett during his 1976 tour of Japan. Each programme would contain two main improvised pieces of 30 to 45 minutes in length, and depending on Jarrett's state of mind, a shorter encore.

In a 1979 interview, Jarrett stated: "I was involved in a very searching period of time when we recorded that, and the music itself was almost a release for the search. I've been thinking - *Sun Bear* is the only thing I've recorded that runs the gamut of human emotion. I think that if you got to know it well enough, you'd find it all

in there someplace." Jarrett explained the origins of the title as follows: "On a Japanese tour I saw a sun bear in the zoo, a small bear which really looked friendly and doesn't exist anywhere outside Japan. The next day I asked our Japanese sound engineer about this animal because I remembered its face, a really friendly small face, and he replied, 'Yes, it's a beautiful bear but if you get near enough to him he will knock you three blocks down the road'. I simply liked the idea of an animal that looks as if it would be nice to get near to and which, when you do so, shakes your whole conception of life."

Since these improvisations are such an important peek into the mind of a creative genius such as Jarrett, a veritable transcription-factory exists globally: pianists and transcribers attempt to write down live concert improvisations, and swap or sell, editing and re-editing. There is no "Jarrett-Edition" as such, but KeithJarrett.org – the self-proclaimed unofficial website of the pianist – list a large number of Keith Jarrett PDFs which feature transcriptions of a wide variety of material. In February 2018, Jarrett suffered a stroke and has been unable to perform since. Since a second stroke, in May 2018, left him partially paralyzed and unable to play with his left hand, we have to rejoice in the documents we do have that chronicle this extraordinary man's work.

### **Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Hungarian Rhapsody no.12 S.244/12 in C-Sharp Minor**



The largest and best-known portion of Liszt's music is his original piano work. During the Weimar period, he composed 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies, themselves revisions of his own works which pay tribute to the gypsy music (*Magyar Dalok* and *Rhapsódiák*) of his native Hungary. They are like museum-exhibits where modern audiences are allowed to eavesdrop on the dramatic, improvisatory performance style of the migrant "Romani" musicians whom Liszt heard as a boy growing up in the small village of Raiding. It is to these campfire music-evenings which Liszt returned first, 18 years later, having become in the meantime Europe's most celebrated concert-pianist.

There are 19 rhapsodies in all, the first 15 composed in the period between 1846 and 1853. Fundamental to the form of each rhapsody is a two-part division into a slow, introductory *lassan* followed by a quick, dancelike *friss*. In the soulful and brooding *lassan*, a handful of folk melodies are repeated over and over, trancelike, in varied forms, blooming from time to time into dazzling cadenza-like flourishes of keyboard sparkle and colour. The *friss* is sectional, presenting a series of impish dance tunes that in an accelerating pattern of frenetic activity inevitably drive the work to a barn-storming conclusion.

Liszt's genius lies in how he manages to reproduce the "sonic surface" of the gypsy band. In these works we hear the highly ornamented "will-o'-the-wisp" ornamentation style of the gypsy violin, the contralto richness of the low clarinet (when Liszt places the tune in the mid-register, played by the thumbs) and the heartbeat-racing thrum of the *cimbalom* (Hungarian dulcimer) in textures bristling with repeated notes.

Dedicated to violinist Joseph Joachim, the 12<sup>th</sup> Rhapsody opens with a dramatic declaration as an old gypsy starts to spin a dark and dramatic fireside tale under the stars. Free Cadenzas alternate with thunderous chords to create a rousing and dramatic scene. Five melodies form the basis of a complex structure: Sources for the tunes used in this rhapsody include a *csárdás* by Márk Rózsavölgyi, a melody from the manuscript collection *Nagy potpourri*, Beni Egressy's *Fantázia*, and a portion of *A Csikós*.

Like its 18 counterparts, No.12 is filled with acrobatics and melancholy and ends in a rousing dance with flying dulcimers before the work ends in a dramatic full-circle, with the opening melody wrapping up the storytelling of the evening in a dramatic twirl of the cape.