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**The Manoel Theatre**

presents

**Anne Borg**

in a

**Piano Recital**

of works by

**Johannes Brahms**

**Claude Debussy**

**Robert Schumann**



**Saturday 26 March 1988**

## PROGRAMME

### Johannes Brahms

(1833 - 1897)

#### Fantasien, Op. 116

1. *Capriccio in D minor*
2. *Intermezzo in A minor*
3. *Capriccio in G minor*
4. *Intermezzo in E major*
5. *Intermezzo in E minor*
6. *Intermezzo in E major*
7. *Capriccio in D minor*

Brahms started his career as a concert pianist, one of the greatest of his time, though with him the musician was always more apparent than the virtuoso. He gave the first performances of most of his piano pieces and remained a famed interpreter till late in life, even presenting his gigantic Second Concerto himself to the public in 1881.

His pianistic production spreads across his whole career and affords a good insight into his evolution as a composer. Purely pianistic were the very first works that he published at the age of nineteen, when he was greeted by Schumann as the “young eagle”, “the one who had to come”. These early works are the most ambitious in scale and the most exorbitant in their demands on the instrument. The later compositions are generally on a smaller scale and they are also among the most perfectly finished works ever written for the piano. The essential Brahms, however, is just as present in the early sonatas as in the late intermezzi, for during his long creative life he remained faithful to his artistic ideal. Having found his style at the earliest stage of his career, he deepened rather than broadened his outlook during the years of maturity. Like the whole of his output, his piano works are romantic inspirations set in strictly classical forms.

The **Fantasien, Op. 116** were composed in 1892 and are the first of the four cycles of piano works written at Bad Ischl where the ageing Brahms spent several months every year. The four cycles are a kind of pianistic testament, and Brahms himself called them “cradle songs of my sadness”.

The collective title of *fantasies* is curious, since the cycle consists of three *capricci* and four *intermezzi*. Brahms's Op. 76, made up of *capricci* and *intermezzi* had been called just “*Pieces*”. It has been suggested that “fantasy” was a favourite term of Schumann's. Brahms was currently involved in the preparation of a new Schumann edition and had also agreed to help Clara

Schumann over a volume of her husband's ‘posthumous’ works. Could it be a form of tribute to a loved and respected master?

The *capricci* are more rapid, more energetic and more tersely expressed than the *intermezzi* which are slower, quieter and more intimate.

**No. 1 Capriccio in D minor** (*presto energico*) is typically “Nordic” in its dark ruggedness. It is dramatic but spare in material, with flashes of virtuosity kept in check until the climatic last page. “It is still a ‘private piece’ in spite of its athleticism. It reflects rather than displays a virtuoso manner, and in so doing accords with Richard Specht's ear-witness account of the later Brahms: ‘He always played as if he were alone; he forgot his public entirely.’” (Denis Matthews)

**No. 2 Intermezzo in A minor** (*andante*) introduces the truly introspective Brahms. It is a sweet and gently resigned song of which Clara Schumann compared the celestial middle section (slightly faster than the main *andante*) to the song of the nightingale.

**No. 3 Capriccio in G minor** (*allegro appassionato*) is a kind of ballad, fantastic and vehement in character. It begins and ends passionately, but it has a majestic interlude in between written in the heroic style which recalls a much younger Brahms.

**No. 4 Intermezzo in E major** (*adagio*) was originally entitled “nocturne”. It is a piece of great beauty and great melancholy, akin in spirit to many a romantic Lied by Brahms. It is written in an unusually free, almost improvisatory form, with the composer adopting a favourite plan of his — that of developing a piece of fragrant enchantment out of two trifling scraps.

**No. 5 Intermezzo in E minor** (*andante con grazia ed intimissimo sentimento*) is a short, imaginative and rather elusive little piece, shadowy but full of harmonic invention. “Brahms did not aim here at charm or ease, and there may have been a deliberate irony in his indication ‘*con grazia ed intimissimo sentimento*’. Intimate sentiments are not always idyllic — a knowledge of Brahms's life and outward character would bear this out — but the middle section and coda resolve the tensions with a warmth of heart that goes beyond mere compositional needs and philosophical detachment.” (Denis Matthews)

**No. 6 Intermezzo in E major** (*andantino teneramente*) is probably the crown of Op. 116. One of the composer's most touching melodies, it is both the simplest of all the intermezzi and one of the most deeply felt. Enhanced by hauntingly beautiful and sad harmonies, its gentle sentiment gives it an almost Schubertian flavour.

**No. 7 Capriccio in D minor** (*allegro agitato*), sombre, fast and restless, dispels all intimate thoughts with its characteristic cross-rhythms, and closes the cycle tumultuously as it had begun.

## Claude Debussy

(1862 - 1918)

### a) Masques

### b) L'île joyeuse

The two works were composed by Debussy in 1904, and he toyed with the idea of including them in his not yet published *Suite bergamasque*, inspired by the world of the poet Paul Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* — the world of Harlequin and Columbine, of Pierrot and Punchinello, that same world which Jean Antoine Watteau painted in his greatest works.

**Masques** (*très vif et fantasque*), for all its frenzied rhythms and contrasted nuances, is the simpler of the two. "The whole of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte can be found in *Masques*", Alfred Cortot wrote. Debussy seems to open the flood gates of virtuosity as he conceives it, and his exploration of both rhythm and expression is far ranging. The whole piece, however vigorous it is, is also strangely touching — as Pierrot is.

**L'île joyeuse** (*quasi una cadenza, modéré et très souple*) is imbued with a truly Mediterranean spirit of gaiety, and was probably inspired by Watteau's painting, *L'embarquement pour Cythère* (Venus is said to have landed on the island of Cythera after her birth in the sea).

It begins with a cadenza that recalls the flute of the faun in a more wide-awake way, followed by a dance section which brings an exciting exoticism with it. There are then some impressionist splashes of water, before a great surging melody sweeps all before it. That this melody was associated with the sea in the composer's mind is clear from his direction at its outset: *ondoyant et expressif*.

Almost the whole of Debussy is represented in *L'île joyeuse*, which Wilfrid Mellers considers "the most wonderful piece that Debussy ever wrote". It manages indeed to be extrovert without ever being coarse, and everything in it, even the traditional left-hand arpeggios, have a touch of class.

**"Debussy had the power to capture in sound the impressions of the eye, which he had either obtained directly or created by his own imagination from art or literature. In this way, he gave full scope to his art in a world of feelings which had previously been almost completely closed to music. Only rarely did his inspiration have its roots in the feelings which have inspired most composers since Beethoven — that is to say, human passions, sufferings and joys. He did not reject or deny musical sensitivity, but maintained an aristocratic reserve and sought to make an impression by a kind of after-effect rather than directly." (Alfred Cortot)**

## I n t e r v a l

## Robert Schumann

(1810 - 1856)

### Dauidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

The piano was Robert Schumann's own instrument. He found it easier to express himself through the keyboard than any other medium, and was in fact content to publish nothing but piano music for the first ten years of his creative life.

Endowed with a lyrical and reflective imagination of the highest order, he belonged at the same time to that unfortunate type of artist in whom the poetic flame is indissolubly linked with youth. Like many composers of the nineteenth century, he required the stimulus of Romantic poetry to tap the source of his genius. Whether it was the fantastic world of Hoffmann, or the verses of contemporary German poets, or his own love for Clara Wieck, the result was music that was fresh, natural and moving.

His triumphs, however, are in inverse proportion to their actual size. In any other century or country Schumann might have recognized better his true talents, but in Germany the spirit of the age insisted on making sonata the touchstone of greatness. Yielding to this pressure, Schumann tried to bite off more than he could chew, with the result that his essentially lyrical imagination spent itself in large, unwieldy machines (symphonies, cantatas, an opera) with which his technique was unequal to cope. But in the early collections of short piano pieces, and in a great number of his songs, he achieves a combination of formal simplicity and poignant yet delicate sentiment which is equalled only by Chopin and Schubert. As a poet of moods he is unrivalled, and the moods he evokes with exquisite propriety are various, ranging from images of childhood to hunting scenes, to the ardours and despondencies of romantic love, to a sense of kinship with natural beauty.

The **Dauidsbündlertänze** belong to the remarkable decade in Schumann's life between his twentieth and his thirtieth birthdays. The word "**Bund**" means *league*, and "**Bündlers**" would be the *members of the league*, with the whole title reading "*The League of David Dances*". (Many German Romantic writers left no stone unturned to make even the simplest things as complicated as they could, and Schumann's **literary** output, just like Wagner's, was of little, if any, help towards a better understanding or fuller appreciation of the music, at least as far as non-German listeners are concerned.)

The **League of David** was an imaginary society invented by Schumann and brought to life in his articles in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Music Journal*). The members of this league were supposed to be progressive musicians who had chosen King David as their patron in their opposition to the fashionable and conservative composers of the time, appropriately called Philistines. "As King David once upon a time subdued the Philistines, this **Bund** will have a cleansing and liberating influence on music", Schumann said; and he

wrote in a letter to Heinrich Dorn, his theory teacher: "The *Dauidsbund* is only intellectual and romantic, as you perceived long ago. Mozart was as great a *Bündler* as Berlioz is. You, too, are one, although you never received a diploma."

Two members of the league represented different aspects of Schumann's own divided nature: **Florestan**, spontaneous and impulsive, is the man of action, always fearless and positive; **Eusebius** is his antithesis, a weak, shy and gentle dreamer. Each of the eighteen dances of Op. 6 (few of which can be properly called *dances*) was initialled by Schumann at the end either with an "F" (Florestan) or with an "E" (Eusebius), according to the nature of the piece. Numbers 1, 13, 15 and 17, which are mixed in character, are marked "F and E".

At the very start of No. 1 the opening two bars are inscribed "*Motto von C.W.*". This motto is in fact the opening of a mazurka from Clara Wieck's *Soirées musicales* which Schumann had reviewed shortly before starting the *Dauidsbündlertänze* in the autumn of 1837. It was a bitter-sweet year for Schumann beginning with almost total estrangement from Clara, but ending with their secret engagement, regardless of parental disapproval. The Dances "were written in happiness", the composer said. "There are many bridal thoughts in the dances", he told Clara, "which were suggested by the most delicious excitement that I ever remember".

Schumann's state of mind when he started composing them is reflected in an old rhyme prefixed to his first edition:

In all' und jeder Zeit,  
Verknüpft sich Lust und Leid,  
Bleibt fromm in Lust und seid  
Beim Leid mit Mut bereit.

*At all times (of our life)  
Joy and Sorrow are mingled,  
Be grave in joy, and be  
Brave when sorrow comes.*

The Dances were divided into two books of nine pieces each, and all the performing directions were given in German (instead of the usual Italian) as follows:

### Heft 1.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Lebhaft [F/E]  | 1. Lively                                   |
| 2. Innig [E]  | 2. Inwardly                                 |
| 3. Mit Humor (etwas hahnbüchen)<br>[F]                    | 3. With humour (rather heavy-handed)        |
| 4. Ungeduldig [F]   | 4. Impatiently                              |
| 5. Einfach [E]  | 5. Simple                                   |
| 6. Sehr rasch (und in sich hinein) [F]                    | 6. Very fast (and introspectively)          |
| 7. Nicht schnell (mit ausserst<br>starker Empfindung) [E] | 7. Not fast (with much stronger<br>feeling) |

### Book 1.

8. Frisch [E]
9. Lebhaft (hierauf schloss  
**Florestan** und es zuckte ihm  
schmerzlich um die Lippen)

### Heft 2.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 10. Balladenmassig. Sehr rasch [F]   | 10. Ballad-like. Very fast   |
| 11. Einfach [E]  | 11. Simple   |
| 12. Mit Humor [F]  | 12. With humour  |
| 13. Wild und lustig [F/E]  | 13. Wild and merry   |
| 14. Zart und singend [E]   | 14. Soft and songlike  |
| 15. Frisch [F/E]   | 15. Fresh  |
| 16. Mit guten Humor [F]  | 16. With good humour   |
| 17. Wie aus der Ferne [F/E]  | 17. As if from afar  |
| 18. Nicht schnell (ganz zum<br>Überfluss meinte <b>Eusebius</b> noch<br>folgendes; dabei sprach aber viel<br>Seligkeit aus seinen Augen) | 18. Not fast (quite superfluously<br>Eusebius remarked as follows, but<br>all the time great joy spoke from<br>his eyes) |

8. Fresh
9. Lively (here Florestan kept silent,  
and his lips were quivering  
with emotion)

### Book 2.

ANNE BORG, born in 1949, studied the piano under the tuition of Miss A. Parnis England and Miss A. Hare.

In 1967 she won the prize in the piano competition organised by the Malta Song Festival Board and, through the German Embassy, was awarded a year's scholarship which enabled her to study under Walter Blankenheim at the Music Academy in Saarbrücken. She next obtained a Scholarship through the German Academic Exchange Service, subsequently extended for a further three years, eventually continuing her studies under Robert Leonard. She gained her Teacher's Diploma in 1974 and the Diploma as a professional concert player in 1976.

She has also attended a Master Course under the Russian Professor Naumov, Master classes under Vitalij Margulis of Leningrad and Freiburg Music Academies, and another master course under Professor Jürgen Uhde of Stuttgart.

She has been teaching piano at the Saarbrücken Academy of Music since 1972. She has given performances on radio, as well as chamber music and orchestral concerts in various parts of Germany, and accompanied the Saarbrücken Radio Orchestra on a concert tour in Russia. During the past few years she has been giving concertante recitals with Walter Blankenheim.



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