

# Aimard, Zimmermann & Fröst

Pre-performance talk at 2pm: composer Marco Stroppa presents the programme

**Martin Fröst** clarinet  
**Tabea Zimmermann** viola  
**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** piano

## Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Fantasiestücke, Op.73 (1849),

for clarinet and piano

*Zart und mit Ausdruck*

*Lebhaft, leicht*

*Rasch und mit Feuer*

Märchenbilder Op.113 (1851),

for viola and piano

*Nicht schnell*

*Lebhaft*

*Rasch*

*Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck*

Märchenerzählungen Op.132 (1853),

for clarinet, viola and piano

*Lebhaft, nicht zu schnell*

*Lebhaft und sehr markiert*

*Ruhiges Tempo, mit zartem Ausdruck*

*Lebhaft, sehr markiert*

INTERVAL

## György Kurtág (b.1926)

Hommage à R.Sch., Op.15d (1990),

for clarinet, viola and piano

1. (Merkwürdige Pirouetten des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler)

*Vivo*

2. (E. : der begrenzte Kreis ...)

*Molto semplice, piano e legato*

3. (... und wieder zuckt es schmerzlich F. um die Lippen ...)

*Feroce, agitato*

4. (Felhö valék, már süt a nap ...) (töredék-töredék)

*Calmò, scorrevole*

5. In der Nacht

*Presto*

6. Abschied (Meister Raro entdeckt Guillaume de Machaut)

*Adagio, poco andante*

## Marco Stroppa (b.1959)

Hommage à Gy. K. (2003–4),

for clarinet/bass clarinet, viola and piano

1. Sehr flüssig

2. Schwerfällig, drohend

3. Sinuoso, semplice

4. Ravvivato

5. Prestissimo volatile e intransigente

6. Inerme, ingenuo, incauto

7. Lento silente e febbrile

This concert is being recorded by  
 BBC Radio 3 and broadcast on  
 2 July as a Lunchtime Concert

BBC  
 RADIO  
 90–93FM



Supported by Paul and Sybella Zisman

Please keep all extraneous noise to a minimum



Robert Schumann

Two strands run throughout this afternoon's concert, from beginning to end: German legends peopled by fairies and sprites – one of the favourite subjects of Schumann's Romanticism; and space, at once human and musical, and which in a tribute or *hommage* is defined as being between the person who pays it and the person to whom it is addressed.

Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* and *Märchenbilder*, composed in 1849 and 1851 respectively, focus the attention on the poetics of 'Hausmusik' ('music to be played in the home'), which occupied Schumann intermittently after 1849. Schumann's *Hausmusik* took the form of works for piano with various other instruments and was intended to be played by his friends. Both these works are made up of a sequence of short pieces, each with its own well-defined character and often in a simple ternary form. They explore the expressive and timbral capabilities of the piano in combination with a small number of other instruments.

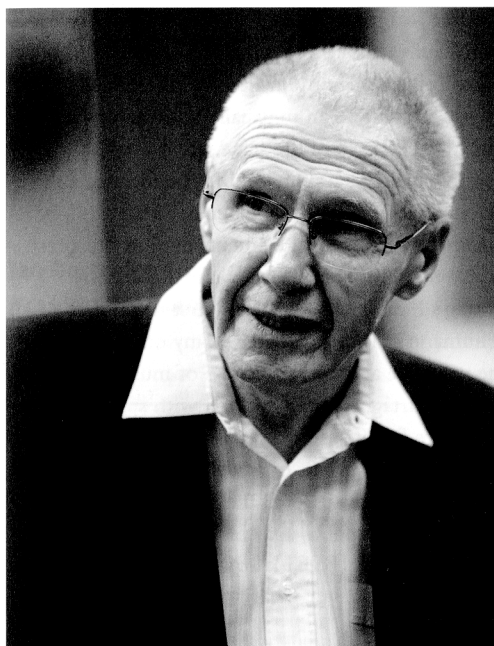
*Fantasiestücke* demonstrates a remarkable unity of style. The three movements follow each other

without interruption, in a crescendo of intensity and excitement, and are crisscrossed by a network of thematic references – lyrical calls made up of mere traces, fleeting allusions to a faint recollection.

In *Märchenbilder* Schumann gives us four 'fairy-tale scenes'. In this case there is no story, but rather a set of two fast and restless pictures framed by two others, which are slower and more melancholy. Linked by a common tonality (D minor, or its relative major, F), they conclude in an atmosphere of heart-breaking tenderness, like a cradle-song, in D major, a key previously reserved for bugle calls. There is an anticipation here of the poetic world of Brahms, whom Schumann supported throughout his life and regarded as his direct musical heir.

*Märchenerzählungen* ('Stories from fairy tales') experiments with an unusual combination of instruments – that of clarinet and viola, with piano – first used by Mozart in his 'Kegelstatt' ('Skittle Alley') trio. In Schumann's work the timbre and register of the clarinet and viola blend in a most remarkable way, to the point where they almost fuse together to form a single instrument. This was Schumann's final chamber music composition, and in it he reaches a quite different level: no longer is one contemplating a picture – the music is itself telling a tale, through the use of time and form. The style is more rhapsodical and nervous; the instrumental texture becomes denser; motifs, which are fleeting and almost impossible to grasp, combine with harmonies that are constantly renewed in particular details, allowing a different light to break through each time. This is particularly true of the first movement, which Rémy Stricker has called 'a dance of elves enclosed in a frozen prism', and of the third – a constant dialogue between the viola and the clarinet in search of a melody, which never quite succeeds in expressing itself in full, supported by a *moto perpetuo* of quavers and semiquavers in the piano.

György Kurtág, a masterly teacher of chamber music who has initiated generations of performers from all over the world into his unique way of embodying musical experience, returns to the instrumental combinations of Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen* in his *Hommage à R. Sch.* The work is based on sketches made in the 1970s, and was completed in 1990. It consists of five very brief



György Kurtág

Machaut)' – all recall members of the *Dauidsbüandler* (League of David), the imaginary society created by Schumann in his writings, though they have roots in other works too – No.2, for example, expands on one of Kurtág's own *Kafka-Fragmente* for violin and voice (1985–7). The subtitle of No.4: 'I was a cloud, now the sun is already shining . . . (fragment-fragment)' derives from a poem by Attila József, one of the great Hungarian poets of the early 20th century, whose texts have inspired several works by Kurtág. No.5: 'At Night' recreates the nocturnal atmosphere of nightmares, so typically Schumannesque, with its incessant ostinato of rapid notes. In the last movement, No.6: 'Meister Raro' ('exceptional master': Schumann's name for Friedrich Wieck, Clara's father), the point of equilibrium between the visionary Eusebius and the impetuous Florestan, reveals the 14th-century composer Guillaume de Machaut. It takes the form of a passacaglia presented by the piano, punctuated by rarefied sonorities from the other instruments, and ends in a silence underlined by the running-out of the clarinetist's breath – after putting down his instrument, the player strikes a scarcely perceptible blow on a bass drum.

When Péter Eötvös invited Pierre-Laurent Aimard and me to give a concert in the Bartók Festival at Szombathely in western Hungary in 1986, I could hardly have imagined that that concert would be the beginning of an adventure that lasted 15 years. Over those years, for two weeks every July, I had the good fortune not just to teach there but also to meet some of the greatest Hungarian musicians, to listen to their classes, be introduced to the folk-music of that country, so rich in traditions, and discover the work of many poets. My *Hommage à Gy. K.* thus pays tribute to a great composer, whose chamber music courses I attended remain unforgettable music lessons – lessons of extraordinary intensity and originality.

In each section of my Trio the players station themselves in particular places. In this way they create a different 'space' that, by interacting with the basic elements of the music, defines the possible formal development of the work.

For example, the first movement ('Very flowing') is made up of two parallel 'musics', which develop at independent speeds – one entrusted to the piano, the

pieces (it lasts 3 minutes in total) – lightning intuitions inhabited by a network of literary allusions – followed by a final section twice as long as the rest, whose title (*Abschied*: 'Farewell') recalls, among others, both the final piece in Schumann's *Waldszenen* Op.82 and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1910). In its 'raw material' this *hommage* demonstrates a remarkable unity of style: everything is based on a chromatic scale of eight notes (F sharp to C sharp). However, the scale never appears in its own right but is always 'split up' into little cells or two- or three-note chords, and the space that separates them allows them to be seen in a different light every time.

Each movement bears a carefully chosen subtitle: No.1: 'Kappellmeister Johannes Kreisler's Curious Pirouettes' refers to the character created by E.T.A. Hoffmann (in fact his *alter ego*, here represented by the clarinet), an inspired composer whose creativity was impeded by too much sensitivity; No.2: 'Eusebius: the Delimited Circle'; No.3: '... and again Florestan's lips tremble in anguish...'; and No.6: 'Parting (Meister Raro discovers Guillaume de

other to the clarinet and the viola. The latter two instruments, placed in front of the piano and as close to each other as possible, thus create a single body of sound. In the second movement ('Clumsy, heavyhanded, blustering, menacing') the bass clarinet attempts to clear a path for itself behind the piano, both physically and musically. The third movement ('Sinuous, simple') offers a trio 'on the diagonal', from the back left (clarinet) to the front right (viola); its musical form is also a diagonal built on the effects of echo and multiple distancings. No.4: 'Revivified' is a duet for clarinet and viola, with the performers playing with their backs turned to the public, while the piano is used as a resonance box. No.5: 'Volatile and intransigent prestissimo' finds the bass clarinet standing in the same position as did the clarinet at the beginning of the work. No.6: 'Defenceless, incautious, ingenuous (like an old hurdy-gurdy)' is a viola solo using

*scordatura* and mute. Finally, No.7: 'Silent and feverish lento' builds a kind of spatial and psychological mirror of the opening movement: the 'mobile' players, playing in an unusually high tessitura, are placed at the back of the stage, as far away as possible from each other and in the form of an inverted triangle with the piano as its apex.

Most of the essential elements used in this piece derive in a more or less cryptic manner from Kurtág's *Hommage à R.Sch.* or the first movement of Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen*. Many other aspects of the work are also reminiscences of musical attitudes dear to Kurtág, such as working with space, miniature forms, using an 'alien' instrument at the end of a work (in this case a plate bell played by the pianist) – a homage to all the *hommages* spread through his output as a whole.

Marco Stroppa © 2008

Translated by Stuart Campbell