

TRACK INFORMATION

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New Paths

Mari Kodama



NEW PATHS

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1

1	I. Allegro	10. 42
2	II. Andante	5. 19
3	III. Allegro molto e con fuoco - Più mosso	5. 28
4	IV. Allegro con fuoco - Presto non troppo ed agitato	7. 03

Variations on a Theme by Schumann, Op. 9

5	Thema. Ziemlich langsam	1. 15
6	Variation 1. L'istesso tempo	1. 18
7	Variation 2. Poco più moto	0. 25
8	Variation 3. Tempo di tema	1. 20
9	Variation 4. Poco più moto	0. 39
10	Variation 5. Allegro capriccioso	0. 47
11	Variation 6. Allegro	0. 52
12	Variation 7. Andante	0. 56
13	Variation 8. Andante (non troppo lento)	1. 27
14	Variation 9. Schnell	0. 36
15	Variation 10. Poco Adagio	1. 46
16	Variation 11. Un poco più animato	0. 50
17	Variation 12. Allegretto, poco scherzando - Presto	0. 46
18	Variation 13. Non troppo Presto	0. 40

19	Variation 14. Andante	0. 54
20	Variation 15. Poco Adagio	1. 40
21	Variation 16. [Adagio]	2. 09

22 Theme and Variations, Op. 18B

11. 09

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Myrthen, Op. 25, No. 1

23	Widmung (arr. Clara Schumann 1819-1896)	2. 30
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Total playing time: 60. 45

Mari Kodama, piano



Brahms's first piano work, which begins so energetically in the style of Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata only to soon take a different turn, is a highly complex, refined sonata — of course also the show piece of a 20-year-old on the move and full of hope of conquering the music world with his ground-breaking talent. Then Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Schumann*, which he wrote in 1854 while staying at the Schumanns' in Düsseldorf and dedicated to Clara, as well as his *Variations for Piano* on his String Sextet and finally *Widmung* from the song cycle *Myrthen*, which Schumann gave to his wife for their wedding: "Du meine Seele, Du mein Herz ... Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe" (You, my soul, you my heart... you, my world, in which I live) — the piano arrangement was again by Clara herself.

Life did not necessarily treat Clara and Robert Schumann well. His fate is well known.

Not only Clara, but also Brahms suffered. As he grew older, he changed.

The late Brahms is more sombre, melancholic, sometimes fearsome in his brusqueness towards others, his music more melancholic.

In this recording, I am interested in the young Brahms. When I play his early works, the three piano sonatas for example, I see him in front of me, at home with the

Schumanns, sitting at Clara's piano in his early twenties, full of energetic self-confidence. Hopeful, resilient and yet so sensitive and dreamy, in deep affection for an extraordinary pair of artists, without whose friendship his musical career would certainly have been different.




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Even though Brahms basically follows the sonata form in the opening movement, he repeatedly softens its basic harmonic rules. Be it through the harmonic shift of the secondary theme from the dominant to the tonic parallel A Minor or through the dominant entry of the recapitulation via the seventh B-flat. The motivic-thematic work now comes to the fore.

All these are signs of an individual expansion and interpretation of the genre norm by a young innovator. And Brahms also stages the *Scherzo* as a stormy innovation, here with staccato double octaves, with metric and rhythmic conflicts and jams as well as performance indications such as *feroce* (wild) and *strepitoso* (noisy). The chromatic trio then appears enchanted, even yearning, with echo imitations. In the final movement, Brahms emphasises the inner relationship of almost all the themes — in the first theme, for example, there is a rhythmically modified variant of the opening of the first

movement. And in the coda, we understand Schumann's reference to the "veiled symphonies", when truly symphonic sounds arise.

"I sometimes make observations about the variation forms". [The package of three sonatas was followed until 1863 by a phase of intensive study of a new form of composition. Now the variation moved into Brahms's focus. The theoretical foundation for his own concept of composing variations was laid in a letter to Joseph Joachim in June 1856: "I sometimes make observations about the variation forms and find that they should be kept stricter, purer. The ancients strictly retained the bass of the theme, their actual theme, throughout. But I sometimes find that new composers (both of us!) [meaning Brahms and Joachim themselves] rummage about the theme. We all anxiously retain the melody, but do not treat it freely, do not actually create anything new from it, but only burden it, making the melody not recognisable at all."

Brahms researcher Schmidt establishes a direct connection between this passage in the letter and the *Variations for Pianoforte on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op. 9*, which were written in the summer of 1854 and appeared in print in November of the same year. According to Schmidt, Op. 9 falls outside the framework of a genuinely Brahmsian notion of form. The theme comes from the first of the five *Albumblätter* from Schumann's *Bunte Blätter Op. 99*, and in some of the 16 variations Brahms cleverly weaves in motivic components from Robert's and Clara's pens (in the 9th and 10th variations, for example).

In general, a close emotional connection to the Schumanns is perceptible not only stylistically in the piano movement (a furtive side glance at Robert's *Symphonic Etudes* helps here). Clara, for her part, had written variations on the same theme in 1853, and now Brahms dedicated his version to her. The tension between Classical

rigour and Romantic freedom, which he had already tried to reconcile in Op. 1, is also evident in Op. 9. Particularly the contrapuntally-oriented variations with the climax of No. 10 in the autograph were marked with "B." for Brahms, while he marked the more virtuosically-expansive movements with "Kr." for Kreisler (in relation to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*).

Variations once again

Brahms completed his *String Sextet Op. 18* in the summer of 1860. It was his first chamber music work without piano and at the same time the first step towards broad public recognition. Brahms took its second movement and arranged it for piano two hands. (In fact, there is also a version of the complete string sextet for piano four hands from 1861/62). The *Andante in D Minor Op. 18b* was written in 1860 and intended as a birthday present for Clara Schumann. Brahms designed the movement as a sequence of variations in which historicising and folkloristic elements predominate. The



melancholy theme itself, in conjunction with the accompanying chordal strokes, represents a stylised baroque dance from the 17th century, a *folia*. In the first three variations, Brahms continuously increases the static accompaniment to stormy demisemiquaver notes. The melody is successively evaporated in the same breath. The fourth variation leads to a serious calm surface in D Major, after which the fifth variation, with its quasi impressionistic treble leaps over a relaxed, dotted melody seems almost enraptured. In the last variation, Brahms returns to D Minor, the theme appears in its original form, and towards the end the music dissolves inward, as well as to D Major with pianissimo final turns.

Clara Schumann: Piano Transcription of Robert Schumann's "Dedication"

Robert Schumann gave his wife a special gift for their wedding anniversary in 1840: the song cycle *Myrthen* Op. 25. In the first song, 'Widmung' (Dedication), on a poem

by Friedrich Rückert, Robert addressed Clara directly — with a wonderfully emphatic, soaring melody, orienting himself entirely to the words "Du meine Seele, du mein Herz" (You, my soul, you, my heart"). Clara wrote in her diary: "Polterabend [referring to the night before the wedding]! My Robert gave me another beautiful bridal gift, *Myrthen* — I was quite moved! Cäcilie handed me the myrtle wreath, and I felt quite holy when I touched it."

Franz Liszt wrote the first virtuosic piano transcription of 'Widmung' in 1848, which still has a permanent place as an indestructible encore on the concert stage. But the Schumanns were not very fond of it, because "fundamentally [...] I am not a friend of song transcriptions — and the Liszt ones are really abominable to me" (Robert Schumann).

Long after Robert's death, Clara Schumann complied with a French publisher's request in 1873 to arrange some of her husband's

songs for piano. Not fully convinced, she wrote to Brahms: "At first I didn't want to do it because I don't like such arrangements, but then they would have given it to someone else who might have done it even less well."

In the same year, "30 *mélodies* de Robert Schumann, transcrites pour Piano par Clara Schumann" appeared — "Dedication" opened the collection. But Schumann took a different approach to Liszt, by no means was virtuosity to take centre stage. Rather, she retained the ductus of the original. There are no extras or additions; the songfulness of the piece is always preserved. The arranger has completely put her own ego aside here and thus demonstrated a deep understanding of the original song.

Jörg Peter Urbach

(English translation: Calvin B. Cooper)



Acknowledgments

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