

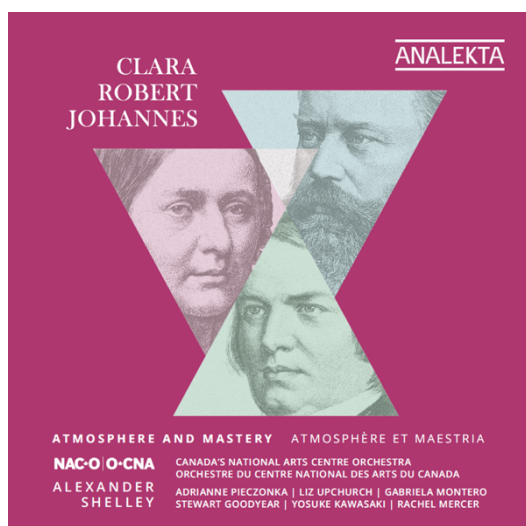


Three's Company

Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra under Music Director Alexander Shelley release the third volume in their critically-acclaimed *Clara – Robert – Johannes* series

Double-disc album sets chamber works by Clara Schumann, the Piano Sonata in G minor, and Piano Trio in G minor among them, in company with her husband Robert Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony and Brahms's Symphony No.3

"Shelley has the strings create a perfectly smooth surface in the slow introduction to Schumann's Second – a beautiful effect... so the shifting harmonies are like shadows passing over a cathedral's marble floor..." – Gramophone, March 2022



An exquisite stream of romantic melody flows through the third and penultimate *Clara – Robert – Johannes* album. The revelatory recording project from Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra and its Music Director Alexander Shelley opens with Robert Schumann's Symphony No.3 'Rhenish', written after a joyful trip through the Rhineland with his wife Clara. The double-disc set, scheduled for release on 3 March 2023 on Analekta, continues with an irresistible sequence of Clara's chamber compositions, featuring pianists Gabriela Montero and Stewart Goodyear, and soprano Adrienne Pieczonka, and turns to Brahms's Symphony No.3 before concluding with Clara Schumann's sublime Piano Trio in G minor, Op.17.

"Our continuing exploration of this, one of music's most beguiling triangles of artistic and personal admiration, inspiration and love, remains a great joy," comments Music Director Alexander Shelley. "It showcases the wonderful pedigree of our NAC

orchestra as well as the brilliance of our players and guest artists as chamber musicians. I hope that the cycle reaffirms our collective passion for the symphonies of Robert and Johannes while shining a bright light on the genius that was Clara."

Clara – Robert – Johannes invites listeners to consider the bonds of love and friendship that connected three of the 19th century's most remarkable musicians. The NAC Orchestra's tetralogy of recordings, set for completion with the fourth volume's release next autumn, explores the breadth of their creative genius and contextualizes Clara's influence over the music of her husband and that of their protégé Brahms. It was Clara who convinced Robert to add symphonic works to his existing catalogue of songs, piano pieces and chamber music; she also supported and encouraged Brahms long after her husband's suicide in 1856. Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, one of the world's leading Clara Schumann scholars, and Alexander Shelley have shaped the programme for each album, creating a narrative thread that connects the music and biographies of the three composers, while Brahms biographer Jan Swafford contributed to the recording's liner notes.

Although Schumann's 'Rhenish' was published as his Third Symphony, it was written a decade after the original version of what was eventually published as his Fourth Symphony. He began work on the piece after moving with Clara from Dresden to Düsseldorf in September 1851. Its radiant themes were inspired by a train journey the couple took along the Rhine to visit Cologne and its majestic medieval cathedral. Clara Schumann's song *Am Strande*, a haunting setting of verse by the Scottish poet Robert Burns in translation, is hallmarked by its heart-melting melody and virtuoso piano part. It is performed on the recording alongside *Am einem lichten Morgen* and *Lorelei* by the same composer, by the renowned Canadian soprano Adrienne Pieczonka and her regular pianist Liz Upchurch.

Gabriela Montero, an integral contributor to the first *Clara – Robert – Johannes* release, continues her exploration of Clara Schumann's music with the Piano Sonata in G minor, a four-movement work of tremendous substance and expressive variety that remained unpublished until 1991. Canadian pianist Stewart Goodyear performs Clara Schumann's *Quatre pièces fugitives*, Op.15, coruscating miniatures first published in 1845 that project their composer's distinctive voice, and also her Piano Trio in G minor, alongside Yosuke Kawasaki and Rachel Mercer. The latter work, composed in 1846, dates from a time of personal difficulty for the Schumanns, marked by Robert's auditory hallucinations and dizziness and the miscarriage that Clara suffered while on a holiday intended to improve her husband's poor health.

Brahms opens his Symphony No.3 in F major, Op.90 with a three-note motif on F-A flat-F, supposedly an allusion to the fifty-year-old composer's motto *Frei aber froh* ('Free but happy'). The work, written and first performed in 1883, unfolds with an impassioned theme clearly influenced by music from Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony and sustains great lyrical warmth and charm over the course of its four movements.

"These recordings celebrate the achievements of one of the most intriguing group of composers in classical music history," notes Nelson McDougall, Managing Director of the NAC Orchestra. "In particular they shine light on Clara Schumann who has been overshadowed by her husband. While she wrote a magnificent Piano Concerto, which is performed on the first volume by Gabriela Montero, she composed almost nothing else for orchestra. But we do have a rich body of piano pieces, songs and chamber music. We were delighted to include some of these in every album because they give us the chance to collaborate with a larger network of artists with fascinating insights into Clara's music."

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Atmosphere and Mastery (Release on Analekta, 3 March 2023)

Alexander Shelley conductor | **Adriane Pieczonka** soprano | **Liz Upchurch** piano | **Stewart Goodyear** piano | **Gabriela Montero** piano | **Yosuke Kawasaki** violin | **Rachel Mercer** cello | **NAC Orchestra**

R. Schumann Symphony No.3 in E flat major, Op.97 'Rhenish'

C. Schumann 'Am Strande', 'An einem lichten Morgen' Op.23 No.2, 'Lorelei' (performed by Adriane Pieczonka, Liz Upchurch)

C. Schumann *Quatre pièces fugitives* Op.15 (performed by Stewart Goodyear)

C. Schumann Piano Sonata in G minor (performed by Gabriela Montero)

Brahms Symphony No.3 in F major, Op.90

C. Schumann Piano Trio Op.17 (performed by Stewart Goodyear, Yosuke Kawasaki & Rachel Mercer)

Previous recordings in the *Clara – Robert – Johannes* series:

Lyrical Echoes (released on 3 December 2021)

Alexander Shelley conductor | **Adriane Pieczonka** soprano | **Liz Upchurch** piano | **NAC Orchestra**

R. Schumann Symphony No.2 in C major, Op.61

C. Schumann Selected Lieder: 'Er ist gekommen', 'Liebst du um Schönheit', 'Warum willst du and're fragen', 'Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen', 'Sie liebten sich beide', 'Liebeszauber', 'Ich hab' in deinem Auge'

Brahms Symphony No.2 in D major, Op.73

C. Schumann Selected Lieder: 'Der Mond kommt still gegangen', 'Die stille Lotosblume', 'Beim Abschied', 'Mein Stern', 'Die gute Nacht, die ich dir sage'

Darlings of the Muses, (released on 28 August 2020)

Alexander Shelley conductor | **Gabriela Montero** piano | **NAC Orchestra**

Brahms Symphony No.1 in C minor, Op.68

C. Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.7

R. Schumann Symphony No.1 in B flat major, Op.38 'Spring'

Gabriela Montero Improvisations inspired by the music of Clara Schumann