



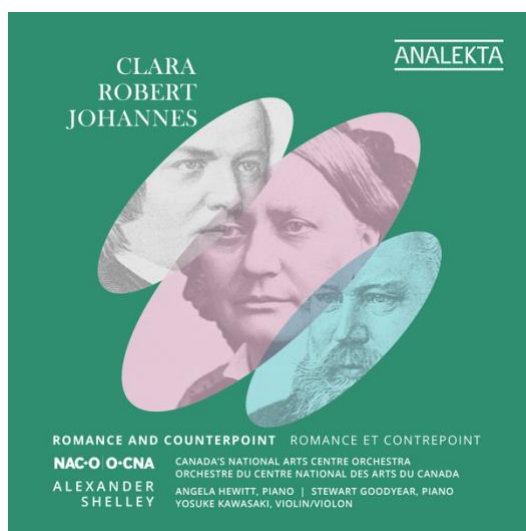
## Journey's End

**Alexander Shelley and Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra conclude critically acclaimed four-album series with a rich mix of music by Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms**

***Clara, Robert, Johannes: Romance and Counterpoint* unites performances by Angela Hewitt and other guest artists of Clara's *Romances* for violin and piano Op.22 and rarely heard solo piano pieces alongside the Fourth Symphonies of Robert Schumann and Brahms**

'[The album] has the air of a festival, with music in a variety of formats. What's more, it demonstrates palpably the impact of their human relationships on their compositions.'

*BBC Music Magazine*, five-star review of *Clara, Robert, Johannes: Atmosphere and Mastery*, April 2023



Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra and its Music Director Alexander Shelley have deepened their creative partnership in recent years with help from the works of three closely linked composers. The point is handsomely underscored by the fourth and final title in their pioneering *Clara, Robert, Johannes* series. The double disc album, set for release on 22 September 2023 on the Analekta label, offers the compelling combination of the fourth symphonies of Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms. These towering landmarks of the orchestral repertoire are presented in company with Clara Schumann's sublime *Romances* for violin and piano Op.22, performed by the NAC Orchestra's Concertmaster, Yosuke Kawasaki, and Angela Hewitt.

*Clara, Robert, Johannes: Romance and Counterpoint* also includes Canadian pianist Stewart Goodyear's interpretations of Clara's *Romance* in B minor for piano and *Trois Romances* for piano Op.11. Goodyear also highlights Clara's deep knowledge

of Bach's counterpoint with readings of her *Three Fugues on Themes by J.S. Bach*, the spellbinding Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp minor and Three Preludes and Fugues Op.16, and contributes an engaging personal reflection on Clara Schumann's art entitled *Can I call you Clara?*

Each of the *Clara, Robert, Johannes* volumes, soon to be available as a limited edition boxed set as well, invites listeners to explore the symphonies of Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms from fresh and enlightening perspectives. The first album, released in 2020, established the project's programme pattern by presenting both composers' first symphonies in company with Clara Schumann's music. Gabriela Montero, one of the NAC Orchestra's Creative Partners, was soloist in Clara's Piano Concerto in A minor, and also contributed four improvisations inspired by the romantic spirit of Clara's compositions. Other series highlights include Montero's seductive account of Clara's Piano Sonata in G minor, a representative selection of the composer's Lieder, brought to life by soprano Adrienne Pieczonka and pianist Liz Upchurch, and her yearning Piano Trio in G minor Op.17.

"With this volume we reach the conclusion of a multi-year, multi-disc exploration of the music and, through that music, of the lives of Clara, Robert and Johannes," comments Alexander Shelley. "Their creative output reflects not only their individual brilliance and characters, but also the role of the creative artist both in their time and across the centuries. In grappling with the abstract symphonic form at a moment in music history when storytelling was in vogue, Robert and Johannes carried forward a vital mantle, moulding it into their own shape. Clara, a musician of breathtaking skill and breadth, juggling the pressures of a solo career and motherhood, gifted us intimately touching and brilliantly crafted songs and chamber music."

“It is my hope that across the span of these recordings you have been able to enjoy the mutual inspiration and admiration that is evident between these three friends. It is my hope also that through the prism of these programs and the brilliance of our guests - from the interpretations and improvisations of Gabriela Montero and Stewart Goodyear, to the joyous chamber music of Yosuke Kawasaki, Angela Hewitt, Rachel Mercer, Adrienne Pieczonka and Liz Upchurch - you have garnered a sense of how music was presented and consumed in their time. Fluid, improvisational, tautly constructed, intimate and deeply personal, they speak to us across the ages.”

Nelson McDougall, Managing Director of the NAC Orchestra, pays tribute to all involved in the creation of *Clara, Robert, Johannes*. “I am excited about the culmination of this series and proud of what it represents,” he notes. “I believe diving into the music of Clara Schumann has been a wonderful opportunity to explore her work in the context of these three composers as a group. It’s also contributed to the overall growth of the Orchestra. And of course the recordings have featured Clara’s chamber compositions performed by such fantastic musicians as Gabriela Montero, Angela Hewitt, Liz Upchurch and Stewart Goodyear and some fabulous principal players from the Orchestra. Much of the music was recorded during challenging pandemic times, when the NAC Orchestra and Alexander Shelley were the epitome of class, collaboration and strong mutual support. It has been a truly rewarding project for us.”

The artistic concept underlying *Clara, Robert, Johannes* was informed by the work of Clara Schumann scholar Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers and Brahms biographer Jan Swafford and refined in consultation with Alexander Shelley. Their insightful programming trains the spotlight on the close relationship that developed between Brahms and the Schumanns and the influence over Brahms and creative energy that stemmed from it.

“People are so often drawn to music by the stories behind it,” comments Nelson McDougall. “The relationship between Clara and Robert Schumann and Brahms is one of the most enthralling narratives in classical music history. We’re also interested in the fact that the young Clara was, for a time, much more famous than Robert and in how that shifted after their marriage so that his career could take precedence over hers. The exceptional quality of her music begs questions about neglected works by other female composers from the past and what we might be missing.”

The NAC Orchestra and Alexander Shelley are set to celebrate the final album’s release by launching their 2023-24 season with a five-concert festival devoted to the music of the three composers. The series begins on Wednesday 13 September with a sequence of Clara Schumann’s songs, followed by Robert’s Symphony No.1 ‘Spring’ and Brahms’s Piano Concerto No.1, with Emanuel Ax as soloist. Soprano Midori Marsh opens the second concert on Thursday 14 September with another selection of Clara’s songs, before Nicolas Altstaedt takes the solo part in Robert’s Cello Concerto and Alexander Shelley directs the NAC Orchestra in Brahms’s Symphony No.1. On 17 September Creative Partner James Ehnes joins forces with Stewart Goodyear and string players from the Orchestra for an afternoon of chamber works by the three composers.

The festival continues on Wednesday 20 September when James Ehnes appears as soloist in Brahms’s Violin Concerto, which will be followed by a trio of Clara’s songs and Schumann’s Symphony No.3 ‘Rhenish’. Altstaedt and Ehnes return to the National Arts Centre stage on Thursday 21 September as the soloists in Brahms’s Double Concerto. The final concert of the series also contains a miscellany of Clara’s songs, freshly orchestrated by Canadian composers Sarah Slean and Cecilia Livingston, and Clara’s Piano Concerto, with Isata Kanneh-Mason as soloist. Each evening will include pre- and post-concert discussions led by Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers and Jan Swafford, allowing audiences to discover more about three of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest musicians.

[www.nac-cna.ca/en/orchestra](http://www.nac-cna.ca/en/orchestra)

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***Clara, Robert, Johannes: Romance and Counterpoint* (release on Analekta 22 September 2023)**

**Alexander Shelley** conductor | **Stewart Goodyear** piano | **Yosuke Kawasaki** violin | **Angela Hewitt** piano | **NAC Orchestra**

**R. Schumann** Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op.120

**C. Schumann** Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op.22 (performed by Yosuke Kawasaki & Angela Hewitt)

**C. Schumann** Three Romances for Piano, Op.11 (performed by Stewart Goodyear)

**C. Schumann** Romance in B minor (performed by Stewart Goodyear)

**Brahms** Symphony No.4 in E minor, Op.98

**C. Schumann** Three Fugues on Themes of Sebastian Bach, Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp minor, Three Preludes and Fugues, Op.16 (performed by Stewart Goodyear)

**Goodyear** Improvisations on themes of Clara Schumann (performed by Stewart Goodyear)

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**National Arts Centre Orchestra**

Since its debut in 1969, Ottawa-based National Arts Centre (NAC) Orchestra has been praised for the passion and clarity of its performances, its visionary educational programs, and its prominent role in nurturing Canadian creativity. Under the leadership of Music Director Alexander Shelley, the NAC Orchestra reflects the fabric and values of Canada, reaching and representing the diverse communities we live in with daring programming, powerful storytelling, inspiring artistry, and innovative partnerships.

Since its inception, the NAC Orchestra has recorded for radio and more than 40 commercial recordings many of the over 80 new works it has commissioned, primarily from Canadian composers. These include:

- Angela Hewitt's 2015 JUNO Award-winning album of Mozart Piano concertos;
- The ground-breaking *Life Reflected*, which includes *My Name is Amanda Todd* by the late Jocelyn Morlock (winner of the 2018 JUNO for Classical Composition of the Year);
- Ana Sokolović's *Golden Slumbers Kiss Your Eyes*, 2019 JUNO Winner for Classical Composition of the Year (from the 2019 JUNO-nominated *New Worlds*);
- The 2020 JUNO-nominated *The Bounds of Our Dreams*, featuring pianist Alain Lefèvre;
- *Clara - Robert - Johannes: Lyrical Echoes*, nominated for Classical Album of the Year at the 2023 JUNO Awards.

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

***Atmosphere and Mastery* (released on 24 March 2023)**

**Alexander Shelley** conductor | **Adrienne 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 Adrienne 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)

***Lyrical Echoes* (released on 3 December 2021)**

**Alexander Shelley** conductor | **Adrienne 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