

Introduction

Clara Schumann, Creator

On June 10, 1853, having just finished two songs based on poems from Hermann Rollett's novel *Jucunde*, Clara Schumann opened her diary and wrote about the feeling of exhilaration that overwhelmed her. "Composing gives me great pleasure," she said, adding with astonishment, "I wrote my last song in 1846, seven years ago!"¹ Buoyed by that sense of exhilaration, she kept composing. Less than two weeks later she had completed an entire collection of songs on Rollett's poems. The June 22 entry from her diary reads, "Today I set the sixth song by Rollett, and thus I have collected a volume of songs, which give me pleasure, and have given me many happy hours. . . . There is nothing which surpasses the joy of creation, if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness, when one lives in a world of sound."² These six songs, published two years later as her op. 23, were some of the last she ever composed; fifteen days later, on July 7, 1853, she finished her Goethe setting "Das Veilchen" and never wrote another song.

The diary entry describing the composition of op. 23, especially its line about the "joy of creation," has been quoted often – in scholarly works and in the popular press. Nancy Reich, in her groundbreaking biography of Schumann, highlights the passage in a section dealing with the ambivalence she felt about her creative work.³ The lines are quoted in a 2012 article from *The Guardian*, about a Google doodle celebrating her 194th birthday (alas, Google did not celebrate her 200th).⁴ There is even a biography of Schumann for young adults, called *The Joy of Creation*.⁵

¹ Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*, vol. 2, trans. Grace E. Hadow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 36–37.

² *Ibid.*, 37.

³ Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Women*, revised ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 215.

⁴ Imogen Tilden, "Clara Schumann: Google doodle celebrates life of piano prodigy," *The Guardian* (September 13, 2012).

⁵ Sandra H. Schichtman, *The Joy of Creation: The Story of Clara Schumann* (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds, 2010).

For all the airplay that these words have received, however, and for all that they underscore how much Schumann enjoyed composing and longed to do it more, her activities as a performer and the details of her life are better understood than the music she wrote. The past few decades have seen an outpouring of scholarship on Schumann, but the bulk of it is historical and editorial, not analytical. On the historical side, there are important biographies and studies of her career as a performer.⁶ On the editorial side, there are valuable editions of her letters, diaries, and compositions.⁷ Still, despite these strides, her music remains relatively understudied. In 1990, the German musicologist Janina Klassen published a pathbreaking book containing analyses of Schumann's piano works,⁸ and since then a number of scholars have written articles on various aspects of her music.⁹ But to date there is no scholarly monograph devoted to her

⁶ For three important biographical studies, see Reich, *Clara Schumann*; Janina Klassen, *Clara Schumann: Musik und Öffentlichkeit* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2009); and Beatrix Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Ihr Leben* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2015). For some recent studies of her performance activities, see David Ferris, "Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck's Concerts in Berlin," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56/2 (2003): 351–408; April Prince, "(Re)Considering the Priestess: Clara Schumann, Historiography, and the Visual," *Women and Music* 21 (2017): 107–40; and Alexander Stefaniak, "Clara Schumann's Interiorities and the Cutting Edge of Popular Pianism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70/3 (2017): 697–765, "Clara Schumann and the Imagined Revelation of Musical Works," *Music & Letters* 99/2 (2018): 194–223, and *Becoming Clara Schumann: Performance Strategies and Aesthetics in the Culture of the Musical Canon* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021).

⁷ See, for example, Clara and Robert Schumann, *The Complete Correspondence of Clara and Robert Schumann*, 3 vols., ed. Eva Weissweiler, trans. Hildegard Fritsch and Ronald L. Crawford (New York: Peter Lang, 1994, 1995, 2002); Clara Schumann, *Piano Music*, selected by Nancy B. Reich (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000); Clara and Robert Schumann, *Robert und Clara Schumann Ehejahre 1840–1844*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus and Ingrid Bodsch (Bonn: Stroemfeld, 2007); Clara and Robert Schumann, *The Marriage Diaries of Robert & Clara Schumann: From Their Wedding Day through the Russia Trip*, ed. Gerd Nauhaus, trans. Peter Ostwald (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1993); Clara Schumann, *Tagebücher*, ed. Georg Eismann and Gerd Nauhaus, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971–1982); Elisabeth Schmiedel and Joachim Draheim, *Eine Musikerfamilie im 19. Jahrhundert: Mariane Bargiel, Clara Schumann, Woldemar Bargiel in Briefen und Dokumenten* (Wiesenfelder: Katzschler, 2007); Clara Schumann, *Das Berliner Blumentagebuch der Clara Schumann*, ed. Renate Hoffmann and Harry Schmidt (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2019); and Clara Schumann and Robert Schumann, *Schumann Briefedition*, ed. Michael Heinemann and Thomas Synofzik, 50 vols. (Cologne: Dohr, 2008–[25]).

⁸ Janina Klassen, *Clara Wieck-Schumann: Die Virtuosa als Komponisten* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1990).

⁹ Recent analytical studies (of Clara Schumann's songs and instrumental music) include David Lewin, "Clara Schumann's Setting of 'Ich stand,'" in *Studies in Music with Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53–60; L. Poundie Burstein, "Their Paths, Her Ways: Comparisons of Text Settings by Clara Schumann and Other Composers," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 6 (2002): 11–26; Susan Wollenberg, "Clara Schumann's 'Liebst du um Schönheit' and the Integrity of a Composer's Vision," in *Women and the*

music aside from Klassen's, and none that focuses on her songs. (Indeed, the number of monographs devoted to music by women composers is fairly small, and most of those books deal with twentieth-century composers.)¹⁰ Schumann's music, in short, is known but not known very well, or at least not well enough. That she was a gifted composer is widely acknowledged. But why she was such a gifted composer, what defined her musical aesthetic, and what made her music uniquely and unmistakably her own – this is less understood.

Why have studies of Schumann's life and career as a performer overshadowed studies of her music? One reason is that she spent far more of her life performing than composing. She plainly regarded herself as more of a performer-composer than a composer-performer, so it is no surprise that critics and scholars have done likewise. Nancy Reich has written that Schumann "genuinely believed her primary field of competence was as a performer: an interpretive rather than a creative artist," citing as evidence

Nineteenth-Century Lied, ed. Aisling Kenny and Susan Wollenberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 123–39; Harald Krebs, "The Influence of Clara Schumann's Lieder on Declamation in Robert Schumann's Late Songs," *SMT-V* 2/1 (2016); Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, "Bass-Line Melodies and Form in Four Piano and Chamber Works by Clara Wieck-Schumann," *Music Theory Spectrum* 38/2 (2016): 133–54 and "Beyond *Vierhebigkeit*: Phrase Structure and Poetic Meaning in Three Lieder by Clara Schumann," *Music Theory & Analysis* 8/11 (2021): 54–73; Michael Weinstein-Reiman, "'Inside' Voices and Coupling Dynamics: An Analysis of Clara Wieck-Schumann's Notturmo from *Soirées Musicales*, Op. 6 No. 2," *Theory and Practice* 42 (2017): 1–28; Michael Baker, "Multiply-Interrupted Structure in Clara Schumann's 'Liebst du um Schönheit,'" in *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Secular & Sacred Music to 1900*, ed. Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 210–27; and Benedict Taylor, "Clara Wieck's A Minor Piano Concerto: Formal Innovation and the Problem of Parametric Disconnect in Early Romantic Music," *Music Theory & Analysis* 8/2 (2021): 215–43. The essay collection *Clara Schumann Studies*, ed. Joe Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), also contains several analytical chapters; see especially those by Susan Youens, Stephen Rodgers, Harald Krebs, Joe Davies, Susan Wollenberg, Nicole Grimes, and Katharina Uhde and R. Larry Todd.

¹⁰ For music-analytical books on twentieth-century women composers, see Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Judy Lochhead, *Reconceiving Structure in Contemporary Music* (New York: Routledge, 2015). Harald Krebs and Sharon Krebs's *Josephine Lang: Her Life and Songs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) is analytical in focus, though it of course weaves its analytical commentary into an account of Lang's life. Two forthcoming books in Cambridge University Press's new series of Cambridge Music Handbooks focus on nineteenth-century women composers and promise to include in-depth analysis: Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers is working on a handbook about Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 7, and Benedict Taylor is writing a handbook on Fanny Hensel's String Quartet in E-flat major.

(among other things) a passage from a letter to the violinist Joseph Joachim, in which she wrote, “Bin ich auch nicht producierend, so doch reproducierend” (I’m not so much a producer as a reproducer).¹¹

Another reason is that she wrote relatively few works of music – precisely because she devoted so much of her time to performing, and also because, as a woman, she faced more impediments to a career as a composer than did her male contemporaries. Her solo piano works number fewer than thirty; so do her songs. She wrote almost all her songs between the year she was married (1840) and the year Robert died (1856),¹² and basically stopped composing after his death. (She wrote her Romance in B minor in 1856, a few months after Robert died, and twenty-three years later she wrote a march for piano four hands, in celebration of the wedding anniversary of two friends. But that is it: two works in the forty years separating his death and her own, in 1896.) There is simply less music to analyze than with many other composers. One might even conclude – believing that lower levels of productivity correlate with lower levels of quality – that there is less music worth analyzing. If Schumann had been a man, this might not have been such an obstacle to recognition (Henri Duparc wrote only seventeen *mélodies*, and they are regarded as pinnacles of the genre). Yet if a female composer has written only a modest number of works, they are more likely to be overlooked.

A third factor that has contributed to the neglect of Clara Schumann’s music is that she expressed doubt about it, reflecting the “anxiety of authorship” that plagued so many female creators in the nineteenth century.¹³ In November 1839, she wrote in her diary, “I once believed that I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not wish to compose – there never was one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one? I would be arrogant to believe that.”¹⁴ And the dedications on the

¹¹ Joseph Joachim, *Briefe von und an Joseph Joachim*, vol. 2, ed. Johannes Joachim and Andreas Meyer (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1911–13), 186. Quoted in Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 354, note 27.

¹² Schumann composed four songs before her marriage: “Walzer,” which was published in 1834 in a collection of songs based on poems by Johann Peter Lyser; “Der Abendstern,” which likely dates from around the same time; and “Der Wanderer” and “Der Wanderer in der Sägemühle,” which were published in 1875 under her father’s name but which are now generally believed to be by her. For more on the background and sources of these songs, see Clara Schumann, *Sämtliche Lieder für Singstimme und Klavier*, vol. 2, ed. Joachim Draheim and Brigitte Höft (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1992), 5, 56–58.

¹³ See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979). See also Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 55–78.

¹⁴ Quoted and translated in Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 216.

pieces she gave to Robert as birthday and Christmas gifts are laced with self-deprecating comments: “Composed and dedicated to her ardently beloved Robert *with the deepest modesty*,” her own italics emphasizing her hesitancy; “To my beloved husband, . . . this renewed feeble attempt from his old Clara”; and so on.

All of this, however, needs to be understood in context. In focusing on performance over composition, in writing relatively few works, and in expressing doubt about the works she wrote, she was abiding by prevailing societal expectations that a woman should be modest and humble and leave the creation of artworks to men.¹⁵ (One senses both her acceptance of these expectations and her desire to overcome them – a tug between ambition and resignation – in her words “I once believed that I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea. . . . It would be arrogant to believe that.”) She was also, as Reich notes, in the habit of comparing herself (unfavorably) with her husband, whom she revered as a composer. “Any musician married to such a figure,” Reich writes, “would find his stature intimidating; as the younger of the two, she asked for his criticism, but feared and resented it at the same time. She accepted fully the dictum that the husband was the dominating figure in a marriage.”¹⁶

In any case, whatever doubts Clara Schumann may have expressed about her work, they are belied by its quality. One of the most important things we can do, therefore, to celebrate her achievements and reveal the stunning artistry of her compositional craft is to look closely at the music she wrote.

My book places Clara Schumann’s music front and center, focusing on her small but extraordinary output of songs. One of my goals is to illuminate her underexamined songs, to explore what makes them so distinctive, so affecting, and so lasting. Yet the book is not only about her songs. An equally important goal is to use her songs to raise several broader questions about the analysis of music by women composers and the analysis of nineteenth-century song. The book treats Clara Schumann’s songs as a prism, casting light not just *on* them but also *through* them, using this small body of music to make several claims that extend beyond it. I spell out these claims in detail in the pages that follow, but a rough sketch of them here can give a feeling for the various contexts into which I place her music.

The first claim has to do with the relationship between Clara Schumann’s and Robert Schumann’s musical styles – and, more broadly,

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 218. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 217–18.

with the common tendency to tie female composers to the dominant male figures in their lives. Historically, Clara Schumann's music has been placed in the shadow of her husband's and discussed mainly in relation to his. Comparisons of Clara's music with Robert's have yielded valuable insights, but they have also tended to treat his music as a center of gravity that exerts a constant influence on hers. Her music has generally been treated as merely more or less like his (and, all too often, as less successful than his); the rules of engagement have been determined by his musical aims and predilections rather than her own. My book is guided by the conviction that Clara Schumann's music ought to be taken on its own terms, so that we can get a complete and accurate picture of *her* style and *her* achievements as a song composer – and also by the belief that this is a useful way to study music by other women composers, particularly those who stand directly in the shadow of a more famous male composer.¹⁷ Doing so need not mean removing Robert from the picture entirely, or arguing that Clara's songs are in no way related to his. This would be as much of a distortion as arguing that their songs are identical. But it should, as a general rule, mean letting her music dictate the kinds of analytical approaches we take to it and the kinds of things we find in it.

This brings me to my second broader claim: detailed musical analysis has a crucial role to play in demonstrating Clara Schumann's importance to the history of the nineteenth-century Lied and, by extension, in developing a deeper understanding of the achievements of women composers, whose music is still woefully under-analyzed compared with the music of their male counterparts. In this I echo Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft, editors of the ongoing four-volume series *Analytical Essays on Music by*

¹⁷ I have made this argument elsewhere, with respect to the songs of Fanny Hensel. In an article about her Lied aesthetic, I write, "My main goal is to characterize her Lied aesthetic as a thing in itself, to turn an eye and an ear to the subtleties and wonders of her unique expressive language. Therefore, I will not undertake an exhaustive comparison of her songs with her brother's – although I do hope that my article may inspire others to head in that direction. If anything, Hensel will become more credible as an independent artist if we start with her rather than with her brother, and if we take her music on its own terms" ("Fanny Hensel's Lied Aesthetic," *Journal of Musicological Research* 30/3 [2011]: 177–78). In the introduction to his edited volume, *Clara Schumann Studies*, Joe Davies makes a case for integrating Clara Schumann (and other women composers) into discussions of the life and music of their male counterparts: "In the current climate, with its unprecedented level of exposure to women in music, the time would seem ripe for continuing to move in the direction of an integrated approach, whereby the lives and musical activities of women are studied as part of a larger dialogue with those of their contemporaries" ("Introduction," *Clara Schumann Studies*, 7). I see the value in this as well, but at the same time I see the benefit of taking Clara Schumann's songs on their own terms (at least in the present study), so that we can move forward with a complete understanding of her craft. My hope, then, is that my book can provide a kind of starting point for that move.

Women Composers. In the introduction to the first volume they note that while the amount of research into music by women has grown enormously in the past twenty years, detailed discussions of that music are still relatively uncommon; music analysis, they argue, can “supply something that has hitherto been lacking in the discourse surrounding music by women composers: evidence from the works themselves.”¹⁸ Gathering this kind of evidence, engaging in this kind of close reading, need not mean rejecting traditional analytical tools. Nor, however, should it mean hewing doggedly with tools that place a premium on the very qualities – large-scale “coherence,” structural “unity,” and so on – that are often absent (which is not to say “lacking”) from works, like Clara Schumann’s songs, that are smaller in scale and more modest in their ambitions. The most productive approach, and the best way to reveal the marvels of her songs, is to use the most powerful tools available as sensitively and musically as possible, attuned to the various contexts that gave rise to the music and open to adapting those tools as we encounter new repertoires.

My third main claim has to do with the need for more analysis of form in Romantic song. The main tools that I employ in this book are inspired by recent work in the “new *Formenlehre*,” a subdiscipline of music theory that explores the formal strategies, processes, and types that define common-practice-era music. Indeed, my book is the first to apply these tools exclusively to texted music.¹⁹ In recent years, scholars of the new *Formenlehre* have turned their sights on Romantic music, in an effort to understand how nineteenth-century composers modified the formal conventions of their eighteenth-century predecessors. (I discuss some of this work in the next chapter.) As they have done this, however, they have focused mainly on instrumental genres. In our ongoing exploration of Romantic form, it is vital that we bring these theories to vocal music as well. Doing so affords us a richer view of Romantic practice as a whole and reveals the many ways that the formal strategies of nineteenth-century song composers are dependent upon their reading strategies. As I have suggested elsewhere, song composers’ decisions about such things as theme-types, phrase lengths, melodic contours, cadences, and key areas are intertwined with their understanding of such things as poetic rhythm and meter, rhyme

¹⁸ *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960–2000*, ed. Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.

¹⁹ One example of a book that applies these tools to instrumental music and texted song (though more the former than the latter) is Janet Schmalfeldt, *In the Process of Becoming: Analytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

schemes, punctuation, and syntax, not to mention the images, ideas, and affects conveyed by a poem.²⁰ This is no truer than in Clara Schumann's songs. For example, as I discuss in the coming chapters, she shows a remarkable sensitivity to the flow of poetic syntax and the effect of different strategies of poetic closure. Her songs exhibit a strange and wonderful mixture of regularity and fluidity – regularity because they tend to move in four-bar chunks, and fluidity because those chunks somehow do not feel like chunks; they feel like undulating arcs of motion, like the crests of a gentle sine wave. This sine wave quality, this long-breathed continuity, is, I believe, a direct result of her keen awareness of the continuity of poetic texts – the way ideas, feelings, word repetitions, and structures of syntax flow across line and stanza breaks, pushing onward toward the poem's final, decisive full stop.

As a whole, the book moves from the general to the specific. Part I (“Context and Style”) contains two chapters. Chapter 1 (“Three Assumptions”) spells out the three claims that I outlined earlier, having to do with the importance of treating Clara Schumann as her own song composer, analyzing her songs closely, and bringing the new *Formenlehre* to Romantic song. Chapter 2 (“Three Hallmarks”) discusses three stylistic fingerprints of Schumann's songs: a fascination with expansive themes that unfold in long-breathed arcs, a tendency to undermine cadences so that each arc pushes onward to the next and decisive closure arrives only at the end of songs, and an inventive use of piano texture.

With this framework in place, I move, in Part II (“Analyses”), to more detailed discussions of Schumann's songs. This part of the book is divided into two chapters. Chapter 3 (“Songs without Opus Numbers”) explores her songs that were not published in separate opuses, including her earliest songs, composed in the 1830s, before her marriage, as well as several songs from the 1840s. The main goal of this chapter is to highlight some of the stylistic hallmarks that are present even in compositions from her youth, and that become even more pronounced in her later songs. Chapter 4 (“Songs with Opus Numbers”) concentrates on Schumann's three published song opuses: the three songs from op. 12 (a collaborative song cycle that she produced with Robert), the six songs of her op. 13 collection, and the *Sechs Lieder aus Jucunde*, op. 23, the songs that filled her with a sense of

²⁰ See Stephen Rodgers, “Sentences with Words: Text and Theme-Type in *Die schöne Müllerin*,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 36/1 (2014): 58–85 and “Schubert's Idyllic Periods,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 39/2 (2017): 223–46.

joy and self-forgetfulness when she wrote them in the summer of 1853. As with my discussion of the songs without opus numbers, here, too, I show how the songs of opp. 12, 13, and 23 bear the telltale signs of her songwriting style. At the same time, I make a broader argument about a feature that binds these three opuses together and distinguishes them from Schumann's other songs: they show a preoccupation with strophic form, deploying this commonplace song form in ways that are at once subtle and novel.

I have structured Chapters 3 and 4 in such a way that readers can either dive into individual analyses, turning to a favorite song by Schumann and immersing themselves in its wonders and then flipping to another song and doing the same, or read the analyses in succession, tracing recurring compositional strategies through groups of songs and seeing how Schumann's style changes over time. Treating each song as its own analytical vignette will also, I hope, make the book more amenable to use in the classroom, where students can use these analyses as models for their own.

Finally, in an epilogue, I reflect on what the study of Schumann's songs reveals about the seemingly fathomless depths of the nineteenth-century Lied and the staggering number of little-known songs by underrepresented composers whose names may be less familiar than Schumann's but whose music is no less deserving of being published, performed, recorded, analyzed, and celebrated.

My wife, Lindsey Henriksen Rodgers – a musicologist and keyboardist – recently rediscovered a piano method book for young children, which includes a short exercise called “The Schumanns.”²¹ Beneath a simple melody, in quarter and half notes, are these words, meant to be sung by children as they play: “Clara played, all day long, all of Robert's finest songs.” Seeing that the book was originally published in 1955, it is remarkable that it would mention Clara Schumann at all. What is less surprising is that it would present an image of Robert as composer and Clara as interpreter – as someone who, as she herself put it to Joseph Joachim, “reproduces” rather than “produces.” That the 2000 edition of the book is identical to the 1955 edition shows how deeply ingrained this image is. Thanks to the pioneering work of scholars who are finally taking Clara Schumann seriously as a reproducer *and* a producer, we are in a position to offer a revision: “Clara played, all day long, all of *her* finest songs.” I hope my book might prompt others to do the same.

²¹ Frances Clark, Louise Gross, and Sam Holland, *The Music Tree Student's Book: Time to Begin – A Plan for Musical Growth at the Piano* (New York: Alfred Music, 2000), 28.

