

## PROGRAM NOTES

Clara Josephine Wieck (not yet Schumann), who later became known as the “Queen of the Piano,” was born on September 13, 1819 in Leipzig, Germany. In birth order, she was the second of five children born to Friedrich Wieck and his wife Marianne Tromlitz. They were married on June 23, 1816.

Her father, Friedrich (1785–1873), in his early years had earned his theology credentials and preached his first sermon, but quickly left the profession. Because he was keenly intelligent, he became a *Hauslehrer*, a tutor, and worked for many aristocratic families. From their contacts, he learned to play the piano, then became a successful piano teacher.

Later, Friedrich acquired a Leipzig company selling and lending music, and then managing a piano rental/repair company. He had read the works of Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), a radical Swiss educational reformer and mastered the theories of individualized teaching.

When Clara became ready for formal piano lessons in 1824, he became her piano teacher. It is unclear from the research literature where and from whom Friedrich learned his pedagogical and excellent piano teaching skills. He had now become a superb piano teacher. Her mother, Marianne (1797–1872), was a well-known concert singer and pianist, who sung often at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

Although Clara was born into a financially comfortable home, it was not always a happy one. Friedrich's authoritarian personality greatly displeased his wife Marianne. So much so, that after eight years of their marriage, and having mothered his five children, she left Friedrich in 1824, taking with her their fifth infant child, Victor.

At that time by German law, Clara was considered the property of her father, so she and her younger brothers went to live with Friedrich.

Very little is known about Clara's first five years of life. She could not hear or talk for four years. However, despite Clara's “deafness,” by October 27 (1824), she began formal lessons with her father in piano. As her hearing and speech abilities improved, and she grew older, the best teachers in Leipzig, Berlin, and Dresden began to teach her singing, theory, harmony, composition, violin, counterpoint, and languages.

However, her general non-musical education was meager. Soon, she gained a sterling reputation as a child prodigy, after her full recovery from her earlier hearing/speech difficulties.

Her parent's divorce was granted in January of 1825. In August of that same year Marianne remarried Adolph (August) Bargiel, a more loving and gentler piano teacher.

Friedrich remarried in 1828. His second wife was Clementine Fechner, who was the twenty-three-year-old daughter of Pastor Samuel Fraugott Fechner. Little else is known of her life. That same year, Robert Schumann (1810–1856), a struggling composer, essayist, and music student, arrived in Leipzig to study piano with Friedrich.

The Wieck home soon became a mecca for writers, publishers (because of Robert's influence), and musicians. Clara performed her first public appearance as an assisting artist at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, and completed her Opus 1, *Quatre Polonaise* in 1831 (all in the same year).

Clara's early years were managed, if not dominated, by her father. He chose her name, Clara (meaning brilliance, or light), and regarded her as an extension of himself. Clara (and Friedrich) wrote long diary entries, which documented their life and proved invaluable to later musicologists.

By 1830, at the age of eleven, Clara was giving private piano concerts in Dresden, and Robert became a boarder in the Schumann household as he continued his piano studies with her father.

Clara's own piano studies advanced greatly, and in 1830 she gave her first solo artist performance at the Gewandhaus. Then, in 1831, Clara started a long series of concert tours with her father in Paris, Leipzig, Karlsbad, and Schneeberg. In 1834, Robert became the Editor and Publisher of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Periodical for Music*).

Throughout all that time, Clara and Robert had become friends and, without Friedrich's knowledge, their friendship soon blossomed, leading to their secret courtship in 1835. Clara and her father continued touring more German towns. Then, Clara was acclaimed by the press as a gifted child prodigy by admirers such as Berlioz, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Liszt, among others.

Next, Clara and Robert made a secret engagement on August 14, 1837, between her tours in Berlin and other larger German towns. Then, on September 13, Robert made known to her father their marriage proposal, which Friedrich angrily rejected as being unsuitable. It was then that all of Clara and Robert's possible marriage plans became a horrendous legal nightmare!

Friedrich became furious by this news. He gave as his reasons for the dismissal of the proposed marriage the fact that Clara was only eighteen years of age, and that Robert had no future as a financially struggling composer and editor. However, despite the dilemma, father and daughter continued their well-received tour in Vienna.

Many musicologists have depicted Friedrich's rejection of Clara's marriage to Robert as being one-sided. They saw that the stark reality of Friedrich's rejection was the fact that, at that time, Clara was a great pianist and had an international reputation, while Robert had little to bring to the marriage.

Why should Friedrich allow his daughter to risk having the musical world at her feet in exchange for a marriage to an unknown composer and pianist who had just injured a crucial piano finger?

Also, Friedrich put several marriage barriers in-place to separate them. He demanded proof of Robert's financial ability to maintain a wife and froze Clara's concert earnings. At one point, he threatened to deprive Clara of her inheritance, and started unfounded, negative rumors about Robert.

Reluctantly, daughter and father resumed their concert touring. Then, in 1838, at age nineteen, Clara was named Royal and Imperial Virtuosa, which was a rare honor bestowed by the Austrian Court on a performer who was still so young.

Nevertheless, on June 15, 1839, without her father or his consent, Clara petitioned the Leipzig Court of Appeals asking their permission to make her own decision to marry Robert. Clara was then twenty years old, and Robert was then twenty-nine.

In every way, by selecting and setting the present Rückert poem to music, Clara Schumann fully matched her entire life. Superficial gifts such as *beauty*, *youth*, and *treasure*, were wonderful, but did not match "true love"—the quality Clara most adored. She found this perfect ideal in the personality of her beloved Robert Schumann and in his music. Indeed, to Clara no human activity could be greater than giving and receiving "true love." It is as if Rückert had written this poem especially for her!

Born in Schweinfurt, Germany, the intellectual literary giant, Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), was a prolific poet who wrote nearly ten thousand poems. He was also a polyglot, translator, dramatist, and orientalist.

Educated at the Universities of Würzburg and Heidelberg, he became a Professor of Oriental Languages and Culture, who was greatly gifted, and much admired during his lifetime. *Liebesfrühling* (*Love's Springtime*), which was the literary source for the present work, is among his best-known collections, one that Clara and Robert often used as a source for lyrics in their songs.

His poems were set by many major composers including Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms, Hugo Wolf, Paul Hindemith, and Alban Berg. Perhaps the most famous other setting of this poem is by Gustav Mahler (1860–1911). He used it as the fourth song in his cycle *Fünf Lieder nach Rückert*.

Clara's musical setting of this text is most inspired. In the original key of D-flat Major, and with a tempo marking of **Nicht au langsam**, the score opens with two measures of introduction before the voice enters. However, the first measure is repeated four times, giving the listener a comforting motion of what "true love" could feel and sound like.

Chromatic harmony is used very effectively, especially at the lines *Love always sunlight* (m. 7), and in *Love the wise mermaid* (m. 24). In storytelling, the plus elements (*beauty*, *youth*, *treasure*), and minus elements (*O do **not** love me*) are contrasted to great effect.

The consistent strophes are at mm. 3–6, 11–14, 19–22, and 27–30. All the intervening measures comprise the modification elements in this song. Therefore, in musical structure, it is in a modified strophic form.

The range of the *tessitura* is a fourth and is quite reasonable to sing for amateur choral voices. Still, the accompaniment, while not as virtuosic as Clara the performer could have made it, is stunning, lush, and beautifully pianistic.

In the eleventh and twelfth lines of this poem, *Love the wise mermaid / who comes with sparkling pearls*, Rückert is reminding the reader/listener of the legend where the sad tears of a beautiful mermaid produce natural, sparkling pearls.

Of course, this is not true! Natural pearls occur not from tears, but through nature, when sand or a small coral chip slips inside an oyster (bivalve), and acts as an irritant. The oyster then smooths over the irritant with self-producing nacre from its shell, producing a pearl.

To produce a cultured pearl, harvesters pry open oysters and artificially insert an irritant under the mantle to stimulate the nacre coverage. Natural pearls are rare, and are, of course, costly and more desirable, like "true love."

According to the two most authoritative sources on the works of Clara Schumann (Nancy B. Reich: *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*. [2001] and Grove), this title, Opus 12, No. 4, was composed in 1841. Yet, even despite the Robert Schumann Opus 37/12 metrics which his publisher gave to the work that contained this title, I cannot accept and am confused by the fact that her Opus 13, No.1 gets the composition date of 1840, while her Opus 12, No. 4 is given the date 1841, Leipzig!

The original manuscript (pp. 11–15) is contained within a bound copy of twenty pages, with three other songs of hers. The score bears the inscription “... for my beloved husband composed on June 8, 1841, by his Clara.” The manuscript is housed in the Robert-Schumann-Haus, in Zwickau. The location number is RSH 5985-A1. (Provenance: Medium: pen and ink on paper, 25.5x32.5cm.)

The climax of this work is very exciting, chromatic, and includes a reminder of the first measure of the piece. The cadenza-like closing bars bring a satisfying ending to this superbly written composition.

It truly deserves many more vocal performances as a solo work than it has had in the world’s recital halls. Now, with the publication of this new choral arrangement, it is to be hoped that many more performances will occur on the concert stage. *Brava, Clara! Such love I give to you!*

—James McCullough  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
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#### Selected Sources:

James Briscoe, Elaine Brody, John Burk, Jean Cabral, Joan Chissell, Clara ‘96 at Clara Schumann.net/Lieder, Eugenie Schumann (daughter), Joachim Draheim, Brigitte Höft, Berthold Litzmann, Nancy B. Reich, and Monica Steegmann.

### TEXT

Love what has beauty:  
Oh, do not love me!  
Love always sunlight,  
So like your golden hair!

*Liebst du um Schönheit,  
O nicht mich liebe!  
Liebe die Sonne,  
Sie trägt ein gold’nes Haar!*

Love what is childlike:  
Oh, do not love me!  
Love always Springtime,  
It comes back every year!

*Liebst du um Jugend,  
O nicht mich liebe!  
Liebe den Frühling,  
Der jung ist jedes Jahr!*

Love what you treasure:  
Oh, do not love me!  
Love the wise mermaid,  
Who comes with sparkling pearls.

*Liebst du um Schätze,  
O nicht mich liebe.  
Liebe die Meerfrau,  
Sie hat viel Perlen klar.*

Love what is true love:  
Oh, yes, do love me! [Love that is true love,]  
Love me forever,  
Such love I give to you!

*Liebst du um Liebe,  
O ja, mich liebe!  
Liebe mich immer,  
Dich lieb ich immerdar.*

English Free Verse text by  
James McCullough

Friederich Rückert  
(1788–1866) (1830)