

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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“You, my soul, you, my heart”

Johannes Brahms and his early works for piano cannot be considered in isolation from his close relationship with Robert and Clara Schumann. This “friendship triangle” (Mari Kodama) unfolded its power over many years. Brahms’s works recorded here are all from his early creative period.

On his first visit to Düsseldorf on 30 September 1853, Brahms, who was only twenty years old, appeared to his host Schumann as a pianistic and compositional Messiah. Schumann then gave enthusiastic expression to his almost prophetic enthusiasm in the famous essay ‘Neue Bahnen [New Paths]’ in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*: “I believe that someone would and must [...] suddenly appear [...] whose mastery would not gradually unfold, but, like Minerva, would spring fully armed from the head of Jupiter. And now he has arrived, a young blood, at whose cradle graces and heroes kept watch. [...] He actually

carried, also outwardly, all the signs that announce to us: he has been called upon. Sitting at the piano, he transported us to wondrous regions. We were drawn into ever more enchanting realms by his playing, full of genius, which turned the piano into an orchestra of lamenting and jubilant voices. The pieces were sonatas, but sounded more like veiled symphonies.”

“So joyful, so fiery”

Schumann was particularly taken with the *Piano Sonata Op. 1 in C Major*. His admiration for the young pianist and composer was actually also shared by other artistic heavyweights. The violinist Joseph Joachim, for example, described Brahms’s piano playing as “so delicate, so imaginative, so free, so fiery” and Schumann saw him as able to capture in his compositions “the highest expression of the time in an ideal way.” As early as December 1853, Op. 1 was published in print

by Breitkopf & Härtel — on Schumann’s recommendation, for which Brahms in turn thanked him.

We know that Brahms had already composed a sonata movement alongside his F-sharp Minor Sonata before the journey to Düsseldorf, which is presumed to be part of another sonata he had destroyed. Brahms’s decision to give the C Major work, which was not composed until 1852/53, the significant opus number 1 must therefore have had other reasons connected with the work concept of the sonata as such. Brahms expert Christian Martin Schmidt sees this in the “interweaving of classical balance and technical rigour on the one hand with Romantic expressiveness and immersion in musical detail on the other”.

How does this manifest itself in the work itself? In form and disposition, the C Major sonata follows the model that Beethoven had raised to an unheard-of level in his 32 contributions to the genre. The opening

sonata movement is followed by a slow variation movement, a scherzo and a fast final movement that incorporates both rondo and sonata-like elements.

In the first movement, Brahms not even attempts to conceal that Beethoven serves as his model. On the contrary, there is a quotation-like reminiscence of Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier Sonata* Op. 106, but also echoes of the *Waldstein Sonata* Op. 53 (which the 16-year-old Brahms had already added to his pianistic repertoire). The Romantic expression of the work, on the other hand, is clearly evident in the weighty use of a folk song in the slow movement (the old German Minnelied *Verstohlen geht der Mond auf, blau, blau Blümelein* was the model here) and in the “lyrical rhapsodic character” (Schmidt) of the opening movement. It starts with an alternation of single and four-part scoring, as a call and response between a preceptor and a choir, after which the theme gains in expressive intensity and also expands pianistically.



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! Cécilie 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

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producer **Renaud Loranger**
 A&R coordinator **Miljana Parcetic**
 Recording producer, balance engineer & editor **Erdo Groot** (Polyhymnia International B.V.)
 Musical assistant **Ientje Mooij**
 Piano technician **Shunsuke Yokoyama**
 Concert piano **CFX#6540800** provided by **Yamaha Music Europe**

Liner notes **Jörg Peter Urbach**
 English translation **Calvin B. Cooper**
 Cover photography **Lyodoh Kaneko**
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 Product management & Design **Francesca Mariani & Kasper van Kooten**

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PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Sean Hickey**
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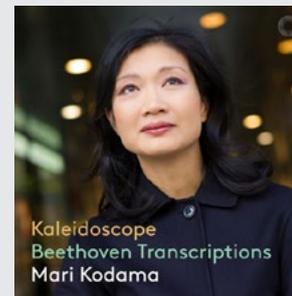
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