LUDWIG
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PIANO

Schumann
KREISLERIANA, Op. 16

Brahms
3 INTERMEZZI
from Op. 119
ROBERT SCHUMANN: KREISLERIANA, Op. 16

More than any other composer of his times, Schumann's works bear the distinct mark of his most intimate personal history. Coming late to the field of music, after having been sent to Heidelberg to study law, he was for many years under the pressure of having to prove himself, economically and artistically, not only to his family but to the musical circles in which he travelled. This pressure, particularly as it unfolded in his pursuit of Clara Wieck, whose father demanded that he show proof of earning over 2000 thaler a year, took its toll on his pride and played no small part in the tragedy of his early mental breakdown and death. It was only at the age of twenty, after making an Easter journey to hear Paganini, that he had made the final decision to risk everything for music. To convince his mother he wrote: "My whole life has been a twenty years war between poetry and prose, or, let us say, music and law... Now I stand at the parting of the roads. If I follow my own bent, it points, as I believe, correctly, to music. We always called it an uncertain future and a precarious livelihood. The man to whom his mother appealed for advice was Friedrich Wieck, a well-known piano teacher of Leipzig with whom Schumann wished to study. "All rests on your decision," she wrote to Wieck, 'the whole happiness for life of a young inexperienced man who lives but in a higher sphere and will have nothing to do with practical life.'

Wieck agreed to take Schumann on as a pupil and lodged him in his house, but those last words of the mother's letter were to have haunted Schumann for years to come. When, at age twenty-five, Schumann fell in love with Wieck's beautiful and gifted sixteen-year-old daughter, Clara. The war between father and lover, ultimately to end in a courtroom drama, was fought not only externally, but internally in the fragile nature of Schumann who felt strongly that both his manhood and his genius were under attack. From 1836, when he first began courting Clara, up to the date of their marriage in 1840, he underwent a series of emotional upheavals which had studied composition and had begun seriously to compose. Schumann on meeting him in 1853 at once saw his genius, and with that same largeness of spirit in which he had championed so many other talents, wrote in his magazine Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, "He has come, a young man over whose cradle Graces and Heroes stood watch. His name is Johannes Brahms." The now famous article was an eventful moment for Brahms, launching him overnight into fame. It was significant for other reasons as well: to the end of his life he became intimately tied to the Schumann family, befriending and helping Clara and her children throughout her husband's hospitalization and death in 1856, and remaining Clara's closest intimate friend until her own death in 1896. It was Schumann who had persuaded Breitkopf and Härtel to publish Brahms' works, many of which he dedicated to Clara and which she introduced to the public in concert.

The works Brahms composed for piano fall into three groups: the first, early works, consist of the sonatas and sets of variations, including the Paganini, or "Studies" as Brahms titled them. There then followed a gap of twelve years before he wrote for piano again. In this second period came Klauserstücke, Op. 76 and the two Rhapsodies of Op. 79. In the last period, coming again, after a lapse of twelve years, Brahms wrote some of the most extraordinary pieces in all of his piano music. These are short works entitled Intermezzo or Capriccio in which the art of musical economy is almost unsurpassed. Among them is Op. 119, composed in 1893 when Brahms was 60 years old. It consists of three Intermezzi and a Rhapsody (only the Intermezzo are performed on this record). Of Intermezzo No. 1, the adagio in B minor, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann, "The little piece is unwontedly melancholy... every bar and every note must sound as if played retarding, as though one were trying to draw melancholy out of every single one, as though one were luxuriating and enjoying the dissonances..." Intermezzo No. 2 (E minor) reveals the influence on Brahms of his Austrian summers at Ischl where he met and became friends with Johann Strauss. A devotee of the Strauss waltz, Brahms here pays homage, introducing in the middle section a break from the earlier agitated rhythm in order to glide in E major into an enchanting Viennese waltz. The Intermezzo in C major displays a lighthearted mood in which Brahms allots the melody to the middle voice. It contains remarkable subtlety, both rhythmic and harmonic. As a whole these pieces return to the exuberant power of Brahms' early sonatas but are now combined with all those degrees of invention and color characteristic of his later years.

Notes by Arthur White

"Olshansky's Schumann is romantic piano playing at its best, and Monitor has given him an excellent recording, with almost eerily noiseless surfaces!"

Martin Mayer in Esquire Magazine

"Olshansky's Fantasia (Schumann) is a beauty. His performance is one of nobility and total commitment."

S.L. in High Fidelity Magazine

"Ludwig Olshansky is an elegant and poetic Chopin player... He does beautiful things with the Ballades..."

R.F. in Stereo Review

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BRAHMS Sonata No. 1 in F Sharp Minor, Op. 2...
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CHOPIN 4 Ballades; Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 17 No. 4; Nocturne in C Sharp Minor, Op. 27 No. 1......MCS 2157

(Also on cassette: 55003)

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