

Clara Schumann and Cultural Memory: Using Concert Programmes and Reviews to Understand the Process of Canonisation

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Abstract

Music is often linked to ideas of memory and memorialisation, from funeral masses to the continued evocation of the ‘composer’s intentions’ in works of the long dead music can be used as a bridge to understanding people of the past. How this bridge between the real person of the composer and the version of them that exists in a collective cultural memory is formed has significant implications for who is remembered and viewed as a ‘canonic figure’ and who is forgotten.

The 19th century composer Robert Schumann in many ways embodied the Romantic archetype of a tortured genius, dead long before his time. However, this paper focuses on the career of his wife, Clara Schumann how she shaped the perception of his memory and how others interpreted the memory of Robert Schumann through her performances, even in places he had never been, through her performances of his piano music.

This paper explores the relationship between the Clara Schumann and the cultural memory of the early German Romantic composers in London, as chronicled in the reviews of the concerts she gave. In her earliest concerts in the city (1856) she was viewed as a celebrated pianist, married to a tragically ill composers of contested merit. By the end of her concert activities in the city she was recognised as one of the last living links to a by-gone era of ‘great-masters’. Through the pieces she performed and her interpretations of them, Clara Schumann had a lasting impact on the understanding of the music of her early-nineteenth-century contemporaries in Britain, with her legacy, through her pupils, lasting well into the twentieth century. As the authoritative interpreter of this music for over three decades, Clara Schumann’s role in shaping the cultural memory of composers like her husband and Mendelssohn, and the reception of this provides a new insight into our understanding of the development of musical tastes in London during this period.

Key words: 19th Century Music, Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann

Introduction – Ideas of musical memory and preservation of people through music

Music is often linked to ideas of memory and memorialisation, from funeral masses to the continued evocation of the ‘composer’s intentions’ in works of those who are long dead, it can be used as a bridge to understanding people of the past. How this bridge, between the ‘real person’ of the composer and the version of them that exists in a collective cultural memory, is formed has significant implications for who is remembered and viewed as a ‘canonic figure’ and who is forgotten. Mark Evan Bond has explored the paradigmatic shift in the aesthetic understanding of the music of past composers, that occurred towards the end of Beethoven’s career, towards a biographical interpretation of a composer’s music, in that their compositions were seen to contain individual emotional experiences (Bonds, 2021). In this paradigm, we might understand a composer’s music to be preserving a part of their experiences beyond their lifetime. One composer whose work would have been interpreted by audiences through this paradigm was Robert Schumann, who in many ways embodied the Romantic archetype of a tortured genius, who died at the relatively young age of forty-six. This paper focuses on the career of his wife, Clara Schumann, how she shaped the perception of his memory, and how others interpreted the memory of Robert Schumann through her performances of his piano music in London.

As Colin Eatock has described in ‘The Crystal Palace Concerts: Canon Formation and the English musical Renaissance’, for a composer’s work to be understood as part of ‘the canon’ it must be seen to have passed the ‘test of time’ (Eatock 2010). However, as Eatock acknowledges, this is a somewhat nebulous measurement. It is certainly true that most versions of a canon of Western classical music have, and continue to be populated by, the music of composers who are dead, and often have been for a significant length of time. The necessity of the passage of time for a composer to be considered ‘one of the greats’ suggests that canonic thinking can be understood as a shared cultural memory and consensus on what is desirable in music. Consequently, if we accept a canon as a group of pieces or composers who are considered by society at large to be the ‘best’ at a particular time, then these composers and their music will also define the context in which the value of other music is judged. In *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Marcia Citron argues that the test of time ‘represents the passing down of partial, biased, and socially contingent value systems’ (Citron 1993). The implication of a canon built on the foundations of the tastes of previous generations is that it requires concurrent generations to agree on their positive opinion of a piece for it to be considered canonic.

To establish which composers were considered in canonic terms, how the perception of them progressed to this point and how long this progression took, we must examine accounts of the performance of their music through different stages of history. Therefore, this paper will use the reviews of the concerts of Clara Schumann in London to measure the progress of the critical opinion of her husband, Robert Schumann’s, music. By exploring the history in this way, we see that in the 1850s, ‘poor Robert Schumann’, the man languishing in a sanatorium, near death, was the main perception of this composer in the London critical press. However, by the 1880s, we find discussions of ‘the great Composer, Schumann’ the equal of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schubert, at the end of Clara Schumann’s performing career in London. By understanding the intellectual journey from one conception to the other we can see how the perception of his music developed in London and how the cultural

memory of Robert Schumann changed in order to suit the prevailing critical opinion of his music, and how it stood up to ‘the test of time’.

Clara Schumann’s concerts in London provide a particularly pertinent case study for this endeavour for a number of reasons. Firstly, she was Robert Schumann’s wife and then widow, giving her a direct familial connection to him, and as such had a symbolic connection to his music in the mind of the public. This connection to Robert Schumann’s music would endow her performances of it with greater prestige in a socially contingent value system, as they were the closest available source to the music’s original creator. Secondly, her aim as a performer was the promotion of her husband’s work, therefore we find that she performed this music consistently, instead of turning to the work of a different composer when Robert Schumann’s music was not immediately warmly embraced by the London public. Thirdly, the regularity of her concertising in London provides a comprehensive view of the time in which it took Robert Schumann to be firmly cemented into London’s musical canon, and so the ‘test of time’ can be understood in significant detail. Through her own efforts to maintain the memory of her husband, she brought his music to a wider public and allowed it to become a part of the broader cultural memory of the ‘glorious Chopin-Mendelssohn-Schumann era of musical life’ (1887).

Who was Clara Schumann? – A brief biography

The life of Clara Schumann, one of the 19th century’s greatest piano virtuosos, has been the locus of interest in the fields of historical musicology and women in music since the 1980s, with a particular surge in interest arising around her bicentenary in 2019. The biographical details of her life have been extensively explored, most notably by Berthold Litzmann, Nancy Reich and Beatrix Borchard (Litzmann 1913) (Reich 1985) (Borchard 1991). Most recently, *Clara Schumann Studies* has advanced scholarship around this extraordinary musician (Davies 2022). She was born Clara Wieck in Leipzig, on the 13th of May 1819 to Friedrich Wieck, a piano seller, who also taught the instrument, and Mariane Wieck, née Tromlitz (later Bargiel), a soprano and pianist. The Wiecks divorced early in their daughter’s life, but Clara Schumann’s piano instruction continued with her father, giving her daily lessons until she was eighteen. Another pupil of Wieck’s was Robert Schumann, who lived with his teacher for a time in the 1830s. This is where Clara Wieck met the man who would become her husband. An important note from this period is that Robert Schumann permanently damaged his hand, whilst using a machine to allow his fingers to stretch further to benefit his piano playing. Consequently, from early in his career as a composer, Clara Schumann performed her husband’s music, offering authoritative interpretations of his works.

As a young child star in Leipzig, and into her adult professional life, Clara Schumann worked closely with many of the greatest musicians of the nineteenth century, performing with Franz Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn and Friedrich Chopin as well as on one occasion performing for Niccolò Paganini. She also played alongside many others whose names are less recognised today but who were influential figures at the time, such as Sigismund Thalberg, Ignaz Moscheles and Friedrich Kalkbrenner. In her later career, she would go on to perform significant amounts of music by Mendelssohn, Chopin, Beethoven and Robert Schumann. Importantly for the arguments in this paper, she outlived all these composers by between four and seven decades. In a conversation reported by Adelina de Lara, a student of Clara Schumann’s, in her biography *Finale*, she is told by another student, Fanny Davies, that

‘[s]ince his [Robert Schumann’s] death she has devoted her life to making his works better known’ (Lara 1955). It was this work, carried out after the death of her husband that, in large part, enabled his music to be subjected to, and be deemed to have passed, the ‘test of time’, and make its way into the wider cultural memory.

Throughout her career Clara Schumann concertised across northern Europe, conducting tours most often to Austria and France in the 1830s, 40s and 50s, as well as venturing as far as Russia in the 1840s. She only began performing in London in the months before her husband’s death, at which point he was housed in the Enderich Sanatorium and was therefore unable to undertake the journey with her. Clara Schumann’s subsequent tours to London would prove to be a vital part of the second half of her career, representing the largest number of public performances she gave in a single city. Although John Ella had introduced Robert Schumann’s compositions in his Musical Union concerts during the 1840s, the impact was not felt particularly widely, and his music was not generally known or appreciated in London before the arrival of Clara Schumann in 1856. Therefore, by examining the reactions to Clara Schumann’s concerts in London, we can follow the reception of her husband’s music from uncertainty to acceptance. In effect, in London, Robert Schumann was never a ‘living’ entity, but always the name of a composer, whose music had to be interpreted by others. This paper tracks the reaction to this music when performed by his wife throughout her tours in London, the change in its reception, and examines the way in which this can inform our understanding of the process of a composer’s canonisation in a certain place.

Literature review

At its core, the idea of a musical canon is founded on the cultural memories of composers and their pieces. The formation of the canon has been thoroughly explored by William Weber, notably in *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* (Weber 2008). In this volume, Weber outlines the transition from concerts at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which were based largely on contemporaneous music, towards concerts in the second half of the century, which instead comprised of music of the past. A significant amount of this ‘past’ music came from the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the ‘ancient music’ portions of these concerts could date from the time of Bach, and sometimes earlier. Weber has also argued that canonic thinking can be broken down into three main categories: performance, critical and pedagogical. The canon of performed works is a ‘standard repertoire’ of pieces most often played in concerts; the critical canon consists of those works deemed to be ‘the greats’ by the musical intelligentsia; and the pedagogical canon are the works used as ‘exemplar models’ for teaching. Crucially, canonic status may be assumed by a composer in one of these three categories, without it necessitating the same status for them in the other two.

Joseph Kerman, in ‘A Few Canonic Variations’, stated that:

Repertoires are determined by performers, canons by critics — who are by preference musicians, but by definition literary men or at least effective writers about music (Kerman 1983).

Kerman argues that the impulse behind the current form of the musical canon is the objectification of ‘the work’, in the score, replicating the literary canon. However, he acknowledges that this situation is not entirely suitable for the activity of music, as performers are necessary for the realisation of a score. His above statement delineates the

work of performers and critics, in a hierarchical fashion, the canons created by critics are longer lasting and the Performers' repertoires must be continually updated in order to satisfy the appetites of the public. For a work to have stood the 'test of time', and be designated as canonic by critics, it must first remain in the repertoires of performers. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the continued performances of Robert Schumann's compositions by Clara Schumann in London kept her husband's music in the critical conversation and therefore lead to it being considered to have withstood the 'test of time', and consequently, part of the canon.

The reviews of Clara Schumann are complicated by her gender. She was widely regarded as one of the best pianists in Europe at the time, and often considered to be above gender. However, even being afforded this consideration implies that although she was understood to have surpassed the gendered aspect of musical criticism, the reaction to her abilities was still an attempt to comprehend her activities through a gendered lens. One example of this comes from a letter written by Joachim Raff, the director of the Frankfurt Conservatoire, at which Clara Schumann taught. When approached by another woman about a teaching position, he wrote:

With the exception of Madame Schumann, no (female) teacher is or will be employed at the Conservatory. Madame Schumann herself I can probably count as a man. So if you wanted to give lessons here, you could only do it privately (Borchard 1991).¹

Despite Clara Schumann being considered the equal of her male colleagues, the politics of the time still impacted upon her entirely male, critical audience's interaction with her performances. In 'Female Pianists and their Male Critics in 19th Century Paris' (Ellis 1997) Katherine Ellis argues that because of women's status primarily as interpreters, instead of composers, who specialised in particular types of music, they challenged the notion of what it was to be a piano virtuoso, and also developed much of the modern performing repertoire. She also acknowledges that significant barriers existed in terms of social expectations for women, dictating which repertoire was appropriately performable on stage. Furthermore, Ellis argues that the repertoires, performed by women at this time, themselves became gendered, as pieces more commonly played by female performers became associated with the feminine. As Ellis argues all of these aspects contributed to the reception of women's performances by critics.

As Ellis delineates, and as was often the case in the critical response to Clara Schumann:

For critics who tried to raise the profile of particular women pianists, a common tactic was to minimize the impact of their femaleness or, indeed, to elevate them to the status of honorary men as a mark of professional respect (Ellis 1997).

¹ „Mit Ausnahme von Madame Schumann ist und wird im Conservatorium keine Lehrerin angestellt. Madame Schumann selbst kann ich eben wohl als Mann rechnen. Wenn Sie daher hier Unterricht geben wollten, so könnte dies nur privatim geschehen“ (Original text, translated above by R. Pattie)

Two sides of the gendered understanding of female musicians can be seen in the first two reviews of her performances in London. In the first her performance is described as ‘masterly and intellectual’ (1856), both masculine coded traits, whereas in the second she is described as ‘the unfortunate composer’s gifted and amiable wife’ (1856), casting her in a traditional feminine role. Although the gendered aspect of the reception of Clara Schumann’s concerts is not specifically at issue in this paper, it is an important context for understanding and interpreting the reviews of her concerts.

Clara Schumann’s performances in London

Clara Schumann first travelled to London in the spring of 1856. Significantly for the London audiences’ understanding of the music of Robert Schumann, which Clara Schumann championed on her tour, he was still alive, although gravely ill. For the previous year and a half, he had been held in the Emden sanatorium. As it would transpire, this tour to London would be the last Clara Schumann undertook during her husband’s lifetime, as he died shortly after her return to Germany. In a review of her first concert on this tour, and indeed in England, in *The Musical World*, published on the 19th of April, the critic wrote that:

The audience were enchanted both with [the] concerto and variations [which Clara Schumann had performed that evening], and never was a warmer tribute of applause bestowed upon the efforts of an artist. If poor Robert Schumann could but hear his wife’s success, who knows but some good might come of it (1856).

The description of Robert Schumann as ‘poor’ would suggest he was regarded with more sympathy than respect at this juncture. This is the last line of the review, in which Clara Schumann’s playing had been discussed with great excitement. Given this is a review of a concert in which she did not play any of her husband’s music, it is not altogether surprising that he should occupy such a relatively insignificant position. However, I would suggest that such a lowly placement of the comment on Robert Schumann seems to indicate he was regarded as an afterthought when discussing the performances of his wife. Nevertheless, the fact that he is included at all, does suggest that the public were aware of his musical activities, either as a journalist or a composer. Furthermore, his situation is only alluded to. This would imply that his plight was already understood in London, and that even though his music was not yet universally accepted, there was a pre-existing degree of public awareness around the Schumann couple prior to Clara Schumann’s first visit to London.

The relative regard in which Robert Schumann was held by the English musical establishment in the middle of 1856 is highlighted by the way in which two other composers, whose music Clara Schumann did perform in this concert, are described in this review. Firstly: ‘Her performance of Beethoven’s superb concerto was masterly and intellectual (1856)’. Secondly: ‘The 17 variations of Mendelssohn were equally well played – very much, by the way, in the manner of the great composer himself (1856)’. The first contrast to note here is that both Mendelssohn and Beethoven are referred to by their last names only. If we are to take a charitable view, the specification of ‘Robert’ Schumann was included in order to differentiate him from his wife. However, common practice at the time would have been to refer to the husband by the family name, and the wife either as ‘Mrs’ or in the case of non-British women *Mdme* or *Fr*, this therefore seems unlikely. Instead, this signifies that knowledge of Beethoven and Mendelssohn’s music is ubiquitous enough throughout English musical society that their name alone suffices to specify the composer. They are the person

from whom all others bearing that name must be differentiated. In contrast, the Schumanns both still require their first names in order to differentiate them from the crowd.

Furthermore, Clara Schumann's performance of Mendelssohn's variations is judged against the composer's own style of playing, which had been heard in London during the early 1840s. In part, this is to lend the reviewer's opinions some weight, as the reader is to presume that they were able to hear Mendelssohn's performances. There is already a sense that the composer's interpretation is the correct one, and that for her close replication of this style, she is to be admired. This is consistent with Clara Schumann's commitment to the ideal of 'Werktreue', or 'truth to the work', in which the intentions of the composer are held above the individual preferences of the performer. Lydia Goehr has discussed this concept in depth, delineating the way in which the 'Work concept' dictated hierarchies between the composer, with whom the 'original' work lay, and performers whose duty it became to faithfully reproduce the work, in a position of subservience to the composer (Goehr, 1994). This ideal of 'Werktreue' also introduced ideas of ownership over pieces of music, with the composer given ultimate authority. Lalonde has previously discussed how Clara Schumann's commitment to Werktreue contributed to the image of her as a 'priestess of art', and how the subservience of her own performance style to the intentions of the composer became a particular hallmark of Clara Schumann's playing (Lalonde 2021). At the beginning of her career in Leipzig, Felix Mendelssohn had been the director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, and the pair had played together on many occasions, Mendelssohn often offering advice to the young virtuosa. Even at this early stage in her London tour, Clara Schumann's authoritative connection to the past 'great composer' was being used by critics to demonstrate to their readership her exceptional position among performers.

Clara Schumann would return to England three more times in the next five years, in 1857, 59 and 60. However, although the reception for her performances were extremely warm, the London public did not yet fully appreciate her husband's music, which was her particular aim. The critical opinion of her husband's music and his status within the London musical canon did not alter much during this period. She therefore decided to tour elsewhere, only returning in 1865. On that occasion, she wrote in her diary:

I find a marked change, since five years ago, in the attitude towards Robert. To my great surprise I now find a large number of Schumann devotees – one of the most zealous is Grove, whom, apart from that, I like more and more, and with whom I feel quite at home (Litzmann 1913).

Grove, mentioned her by Clara Schumann, was George Grove. Initially trained as a civil engineer, he became a musical administrator at the Crystal Palace, where he wrote a series of programme notes for the concerts, which would later be turned into the *Grove Dictionary of Music*. These programme notes were designed to aid the audience in their understanding of a piece of music. Eatock argues that Grove and his contemporaries would not have viewed themselves as 'creating' a canon per se, but instead engaging in a process of musical discernment, highlighting those composers' music which had stood the 'test of time' (Eatock 2010). These endeavours were self-consciously intellectual, positioning the music they found to be desirable as 'serious', in opposition to 'trivial' virtuoso show pieces. Part of the reason for their championing of Robert Schumann's music was that he had espoused similar views in his Leipzig journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, in the 1830s and 40s. By designating Robert Schumann's music as 'serious', Grove was encouraging his audience to engage with it

as an intellectual exercise, and to consider the music as lasting art compared to a display of ephemeral virtuosity which could be enjoyed only on a superficial level.

The first concert in which Clara Schumann appeared during her 1865 tour was at the St James's Hall as part of their Monday Popular Concerts, and was entirely made up her husband's music, a gesture intended to honour both halves of the couple. To have a programme entirely constructed from the music of one composer was highly unusual in this concert series, which had been set up in opposition to the concerts of the Beethoven Quartet Society precisely because they only programmed the music of a single composer. The Popular Concerts tended to follow a style of programming known as 'miscellany' in which a variety of music, both instrumental and vocal, is played by many different performers throughout the night. In this particular concert, they maintained the mixture of vocal and instrumental pieces, in keeping with this style of programming, but selected only works by Robert Schumann. The beginnings of a change can be seen in that the reviewer of this concert in *The Musical World* describes Clara Schumann as first 'the widow of the composer, Robert Schumann' and secondly as 'the celebrated pianist'. This would suggest that of the Schumann couple, the husband's reputation was beginning to overtake that of his wife. However, the reviewer goes on to show that Grove's opinion of the music of Robert Schumann was not yet universal, writing:

Space will not permit, at this busy time, of our discussing the merits of so many works of importance from the pen of a composer, the question of whose claims to consideration still divides the opinions of thinkers on music. But the reception awarded to every effort of Madame Schumann, who stood valiantly forward as the champion of her regretted husband, and played from beginning to end with an enthusiasm that never flagged, was according to her deserts (1865).

The music of Robert Schumann is often significantly less bound by the constraints of Classical form, compared to his contemporaries, especially that of Mendelssohn, and often utilises more outlandish modulations. This perceived lack of adherence to musical structure was interpreted as innovative by some and wild or unrefined by others, and this was often the source of the disagreement. Notwithstanding Grove's efforts in his programme notes, Clara Schumann was viewed as the foremost champion of her husband's music, and it was her presence in London that was the impetus for the performance of such a wide range of his music. However, Grove's intervention through his programme notes should not be overlooked as a crucial step in the canonisation of Robert Schumann.

During the same tour, Clara Schumann was invited to perform her husband's piano concerto, Op. 54 in A minor, in a concert at the Crystal Palace. The concerto is both a tour de force for the pianist and adheres to audience expectations of a piano concerto. This inclusion in their programming would have signalled somewhat of a vindication of Grove's efforts to explain the music of Robert Schumann. By having the music demonstrated by his closest living relative and most significant artistic collaborator, the audience at this concert would be given the greatest opportunity to understand and appreciate this work, thereby increasing the number of devotees to Robert Schumann's music, in that this was the closest they could get to the original composers' conception of the piece.

The next review of particular note to the current discussion was published on the 30th of April 1870, again in *The Musical World*, in response to the concert of the Philharmonic

Society on the 25th of April, at which [Robert] Schumann's symphony was performed, as well as Clara Schumann, who played Beethoven's fourth piano concerto. In this review, the critic states that they do not believe the symphony will ever achieve the lofty, canonic status that the advocates of Robert Schumann's music believed it deserved, despite it having been played 'repeatedly at the Crystal Palace and elsewhere'. They argue that:

The fourth and fifth movements stand in the way. At each performance the audience tacitly reject all that follows the slow movement. Their interest, lively up to that point, flags, and the end of the symphony is a visible relief. There is nothing to wonder at in this, even though Mr. MacFarren, the society's analyst, talks of "deeply solemn harmony" and "singular melodiousness." The characteristics he points out are far from plain; indeed, the common eye sees something very like their opposite (1870).

Although this is not directly in relation to a performance of Clara Schumann, but a piece that was performed by others on the same programme as her, it still has a bearing on our understanding of Robert Schumann's journey to canonic status. Firstly, in this review, he is no longer referred to as 'Robert Schumann', but simply by his family name. This suggests that although the audience is yet to be entirely won over by his symphony, there is a greater level of respect afforded to the composer as well as a wider degree of public renown, compared to the 1850s. That this symphony had been performed several times would also suggest a degree of popularity, as it would be against the interest of concert halls to continue to present works that the public did not wish to hear, as this would harm ticket sales. Therefore, it would seem that the popularity of the first three movements was sufficient to outweigh the less favourable reaction to the last two. However, most significantly, what this review shows is that there was still a lively debate over the status of Robert Schumann's music as late as 1870. His advocates, including Clara Schumann, George Grove and Mr. MacFarren who wrote the programme notes on this day, were bringing supporters to their cause, but there was still a significant degree of opposition or apathy towards his music. Nonetheless, to have caused this level of controversy would suggest that Robert Schumann's music was beginning to be more widely performed by the early 1870s, and consequently his reputation was growing, although the status of his music was still under dispute.

The next significant development in the understanding of Robert Schumann, as interpreted through Clara Schumann's performances, is contained in a single sentence in a review of a recital given by Clara Schumann, published in *The Musical World* on the 15th of March 1873, it reads:

Admirable as is her interpretation of the music of other masters, she is never, in our opinion, so entirely herself, so beyond all rivalry, as in that of Schumann, whose spirit seems to breathe through her fingers (1873).

This is the first reference in the musical world to the direct intercession of the 'spirit' of Robert Schumann in the performances of his wife. The image of Clara Schumann as a 'priestess' is one that had a long history through her career, beginning with Liszt, who used the term in reference to her serious character and devotion to her artistic ideals. Brahms also makes reference to this image in a letter to Clara Schumann dated the 27th of August 1854, writing: 'I think of you going to the concert hall like a priestess to the altar' (Litzmann 1927). In more recent scholarly literature Amanda Lalonde has explored the idea that Clara

Schumann stood in more as an ancient Greek ‘sibylline’ priestess in her early career, seeming to enter a state of trance in performance in her chapter ‘The Young Prophetess in Performance’. April Prince, in her article ‘(Re)Considering the Priestess: Clara Schumann, Historiography, and the Visual’, argued that the labelling of Clara Schumann as ‘priestess’ ‘attempted to regulate her sexuality and femininity in seemingly benign terms’ (Prince 2017) The moniker of ‘priestess’ had followed Clara Schumann in the German press from the early 1850s, however, this was the first time in London that she is specifically described as being in communion with a particular composer’s spirit.

The idea that Clara Schumann could stand as an intermediary between the spirit of her husband and the presentation of his compositions can be argued to be analogous to the positioning of a Catholic priest during a service, interceding between the congregation and the saints. The canon of saints also holds close parallels with the musical canon. Individuals are elevated after being judged to have undertaken a work that is worthy of special recognition. This recognition is often many years in forth coming and often requires the concerted efforts of a dedicated devotee or group, but once an individual is deemed to be worthy, they ascend to be venerated by the public at large. That Robert Schumann is now a spirit whose invocation guides the performances of his wife would suggest that, in the public understanding, he has moved beyond the memory of ‘the man’ to ‘the composer’ whose name conjures the sound of his music, instead of the memory of an individual. This quasi-saintlike invocation would suggest that Robert Schumann was beginning to be understood as a canonic composer, and as such was entering the collective memory of the London public, almost a full two decades after his death. This could raise the issue of Clara Schumann’s performances being valued as the proxy for Robert Schumann’s original genius. However, I would argue that given Clara Schumann’s reputation as a performer preceded that of her husband as a composer it was her genius as a player that audiences originally wished to see, not merely her channelling of her husband and other composer’s intentions.

The next stage of Robert Schumann’s ascent to the canon can be seen in two reviews from the early 1880s, the first on the 16th of April 1881 and the second on the 11th of March 1882. In the first, the reviewer writes that:

With extraordinary power and facility the gifted lady [Clara Schuman] interpreted the thoughts of the great man [Robert Schumann] with whom her fame, as well as her life, is identified, and every phrase stood out sharp and clear (1881).

The use of the term ‘great man’ holds a great deal of weight, as it is often the signifier that a composer has been accepted as a genius, and therefore part of the canon. Furthermore, Robert Schumann is not referred to by name in this review but by implication, as the husband of Clara Schumann. Were this earlier in their respective careers this might have been a sign that Clara Schumann’s fame eclipsed that of her husband, as had been the case on several tours during her lifetime. However, only needing to be referred to by implication and context would suggest that knowledge of Robert Schumann can now be assumed to be ubiquitous, he has become a household name, and can therefore be understood as part of the canon.

The second of the two reviews encapsulates a larger sense, in the critical literature around Clara Schumann’s concerts in the 1880s, that they were witnessing the passing of an age. There is a clear reverence for the pianist as the representation of the age of Robert Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Chopin, all of whom had long since faded from public view

themselves, and to whom living connections were becoming increasingly difficult to find. This reverence can be seen in the following passage:

Mdme Schumann, now a rare visitor to this country, made her first appearance for the season. Robert Schumann's widow, and the great artist who, more than a generation ago, made the name of Clara Wieck famous, will command increasing interest as long as she appears before the public. It is natural that this should be. The period she more particularly represents is rapidly receding towards that point in the past where venerated traditions begin to form, and where a nimbus of heroism akin to that of divinity encircles with a growing radiance illustrious heads (D.T. 1882).

This idea of a past golden age, to which the Schumanns belonged, is the solidification of a canon and the enthronement of both musicians in the collective memory of the London musical public, one for their efforts from the concert stage and the other for their compositions.

Towards the end of the 1880s, the tone of the reviews of Clara Schumann's concerts becomes almost nostalgic. By this point, it was clear that her public career would soon be over, although her powers of performance remained. This invited comment on her place within the history of music, and acknowledgement of her contribution to the appreciation of her husband's music. During her penultimate tour to London, one critic wrote:

When Schumann heard little Clara Wieck for the first time he at once recognized her genius, and his prediction of future greatness for her proved, as in the case of Brahms, prophetic, although at that time he could not foresee [*sic*] how intimately that greatness would become connected with the fortunes of his own music. It was as the interpreter, and for a long time almost solitary champion, of her husband's genius that Madame Schumann gained for herself that permanent place in the history of the art which is denied to the ordinary virtuoso (1887).

A week later, in the same publication, the critic wrote:

If exceptional interest attaches to any public appearance of this great artist as one of the few remaining representatives of the glorious Chopin-Mendelssohn-Schumann era of musical life, this feeling is considerably intensified when the performance is that of a masterpiece which it has been the pianist's privilege to watch in its very inception and development by the composer (1887).

These two passages show that at the end of her performing career, Clara Schumann was considered to be part of the same canon as her male counterparts. However, this underlines the issue of an artistic endeavour's ability to withstand the 'test of time', and the difficulty of understanding the impact of ephemeral performances on the musical canon.

Conclusion

As these extracts from the reviews of his works show, the path to canonic status for Robert Schumann's music in London was not simple. It entailed significant opposition, and required the dedication of several individuals, most notably and consistently Clara Schumann, across several decades. Without these efforts, it is highly likely that Robert Schumann's music would have been consigned to a footnote in history, like many of his contemporary composers. However, given the steadfast efforts of his wife to disseminate his works from the

concert platform, his music continued to be performed. As the decades wore on, it could be said to have passed the 'test of time', and therefore to have entered the canon. In all, this took approximately twenty-five years after the death of the composer for his music to have entered the wider, musical cultural memory. This length of time is not a constant and had this been a study of different musicians in an alternative city, the answer may have been different. However, in this case, we can see how a wife's dedication to the memory of her husband and his music kept it in the public sphere for long enough that it would be considered as a significant part of the musical canon.

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