

PROGRAM NOTES

Fantasy Pieces for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 73

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Among the four duos for piano and solo instruments that Schumann wrote in Dresden in 1849 were the Fantasy Pieces, Op. 73, originally composed for clarinet and piano and published with versions for violin and cello. Schumann had just finished his opera *Genoveva*, and some large choral works, and was emotionally exhausted. An additional stress was caused by the burden of the Schumann's growing family, which prevented his wife Clara from going on concert tours. The Schumanns stayed in Dresden and found particular solace in making music with friends including musicians from the Dresden Court Orchestra.

The Opus 73 Fantasy Pieces were conceived as a cycle of poetic miniatures unified harmonically. The moods range from delicate and expressive in the first piece to lively in the second and fiery and urgent in the third piece. As in Schumann's piano pieces written a decade earlier, his strong affinity with literature is displayed in the clear story-telling quality of the composition.

Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet

Jean Françaix (1912-1997)

Françaix's Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet was written in 1977 and dedicated to the Belgian clarinetist, Eduard Brunner. Françaix's music is clear and easy to listen to, yet challenging to the performers. He integrated the elements that he admired in the music of Stravinsky, Ravel and Poulenc and created his own style that is very French; elegant, witty, light and transparent.

Françaix was born into a musical family and taught by Nadia Boulanger. Ravel wrote about the young Françaix: "Among this child's gifts, I notice above all the most creative gift an artist can possess: curiosity. These precious gifts must not be stifled. We must not risk allowing this youthful sensitivity to wither in the bud." Judging from this late work, it is apparent that Ravel's advice was well taken.

Piano Trio No. 1 in F Major, Op. 18

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

As a young composer, Camille Saint-Saëns was regarded by the mid-nineteenth century French musical establishment as a dangerous innovator. He chose to champion Schumann's and Wagner's music at a time when their works were arousing great controversy. He was a close friend of Berlioz and Liszt who were both deeply impressed by his music.

The Trio No. 1 in F Major, Op. 18 was written in the Summer of 1864 and was often performed with Saint-Saëns at the piano. The work is a natural link to the trios by Schumann and Mendelssohn. The first movement is dance-like and its sonorities range from delicate to nearly orchestral in richness in the development section. The beautiful, austere slow movement includes a musical souvenir from his trip to the Auvergne region: a melody which is played three times throughout the movement. The Scherzo reminds the listener of similar titles by Beethoven and is humorous and rhythmically playful. The last movement is beautifully crafted in form and in its varied compositional techniques (such as fugal writing); this movement is imbued with a truly noble character, and its balanced use of all three instruments is notable.

When Maurice Ravel wrote his own piano trio in 1915, he expressed admiration for the beauty of form and balance of Saint-Saëns' earlier trio.

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