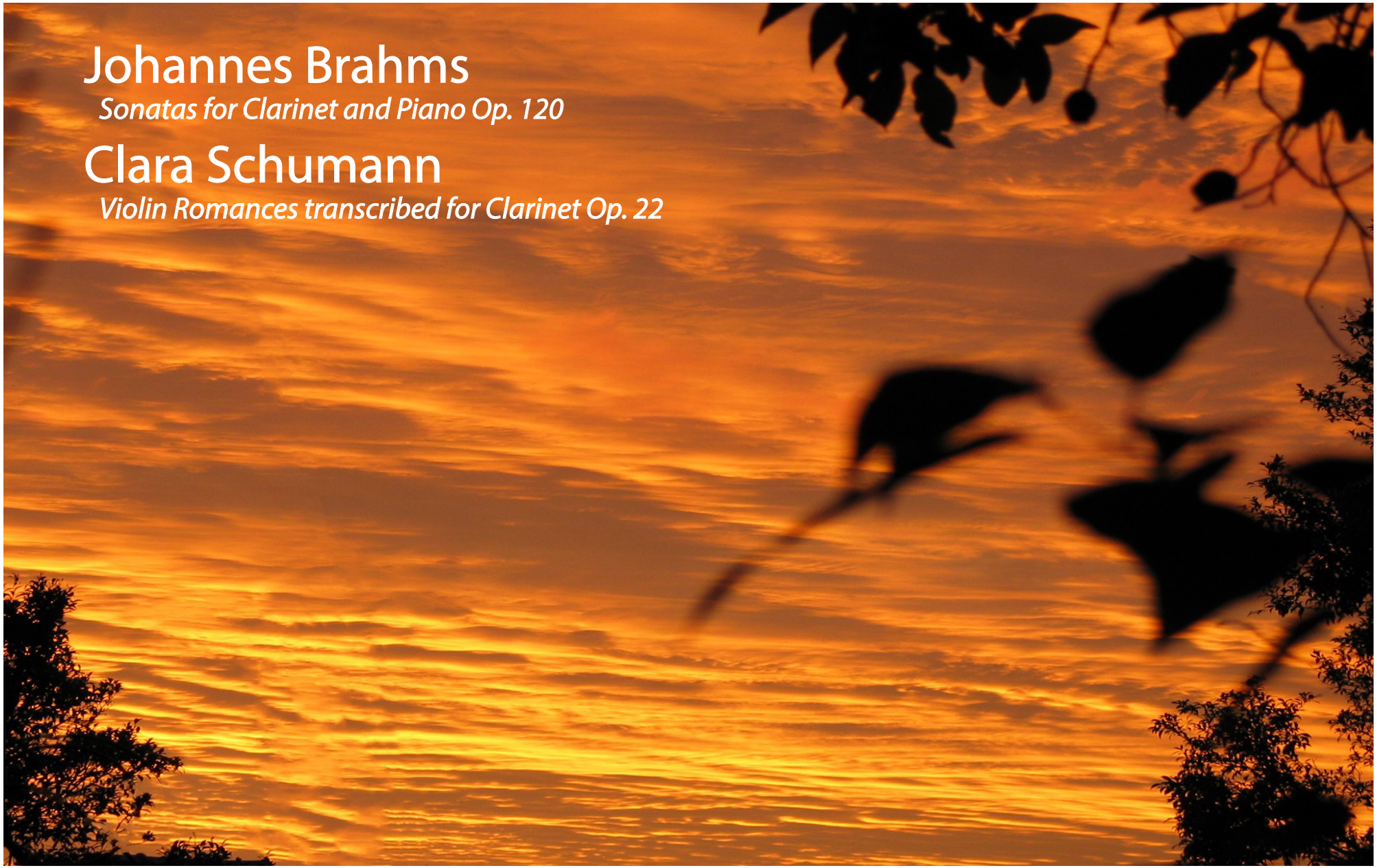
True Romantics

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Philip Arkinstall | *clarinet* **Kristian Chong** | *piano*



True Romantics

Philip Arkinstall
Kristian Chong

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)
Romances Op. 22

1 I. Andante molto 3'01"
2 II. Allegretto 2'55"
3 III. Leiden schaftlich schnell 4'06"

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Sonata Op.120, No.1 in F minor

4 I. Allegro appassionato 7'58"
5 II. Andante un poco adagio 4'53"
6 III. Allegretto grazioso 3'59"
7 IV. Vivace 5'05"

Johannes Brahms
Sonata Op.120, No.2 in E flat

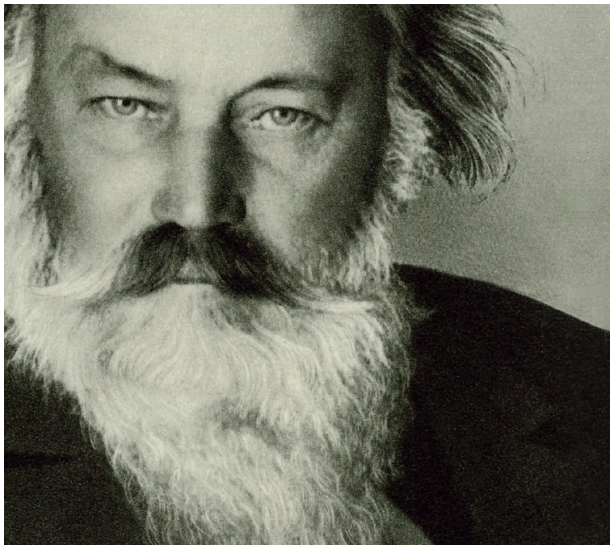
8 I. Allegro amabile 7'39"
9 II. Allegro appasionata 4'51"
10 III. Andante con mot 6'53"



Clara Schumann recording: Haig Burnell
Brahms recording: Philip Rowlands
Layout: Martin Wright

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Plans change. Or, if you prefer, life intervenes. Pat phrases we use all the time to explain situations as mundane as running late for a meeting, or as significant as deciding to move to another country. For Brahms, though, they signified the difference between a planned end to his composing life and an unexpected rebirth.

In 1890 Brahms, then 57, told a friend that he was probably too old to continue composing. He had just completed his second string quintet, and declared that it would be his last work, so that he could enjoy 'a little time in glorious idleness between life and death'. He also drew up his will. But the muse kept calling.

In March 1891 he returned to the ducal court of Meiningen. This had been the scene of one of Brahms' great public triumphs, the premiere of his Fourth Symphony in 1885, for which he had conducted Meiningen's fine Court Orchestra, put at the composer's disposal by its Music Director Hans von Bülow. Now, on this second visit, Brahms became entranced by the clarinet playing of Richard Mühlfeld (1856–1907), who had been the orchestra's principal clarinettist since 1879; although Brahms had already encountered his playing on that 1885 visit, this time Mühlfeld played for Brahms privately, and the two became friends. And suddenly Brahms was inspired to compose again.

The result is a group of pieces which, collectively, comprise some of the most enduring works written for the clarinet: the Trio for piano, clarinet and cello and the Clarinet Quintet, both of which Brahms composed with months of that second Meiningen visit; then finally, some three years later, these two sonatas.

Brahms had featured clarinet soloistically in his orchestral music, but had never written any chamber or solo works for it, so there must have been something in Mühlfeld's playing that made him see in it a reflection of his artistic needs. And those needs had become increasingly internalised and meditative. In 1892, for example (between the two sets of clarinet pieces), while holidaying in the Austrian resort of Bad Ischl, Brahms began creating the 20 pieces we now call his 'late piano works', published as Opp.116-119. It's hard to think of any keyboard music which conveys so deeply the sense that you are eavesdropping on a creator's private thoughts. As pianist Stephen Hough has written of this music: 'I don't see anyone in the room with Brahms.'

Although the clarinet sonatas are not as deeply internalised as those solo piano pieces, they are suffused with – if I may put it this way – a feeling for late afternoon light, and even when a movement begins assertively, as often as not the mood soon becomes wistful. By this time Brahms had lost some of his closest friends and, as writer Joan Chissell put it: '[in these late works] there was an undercurrent of deep nostalgia occasioned by growing awareness of life's transience.'

Brahms gave these two sonatas the same opus number, suggesting a wholeness of spirit and structure, but the sonatas differ from one another in subtle but telling ways. The first is in F minor, a key which, in Brahms' world, usually means passion and torment (as in his Op.5 piano sonata and his Op.34 piano quintet). And Brahms, keenly aware of his place in the musical continuum, would have known that it was also the key of Beethoven's Appassionata sonata – which does make you wonder about the performance direction for this sonata's opening movements.

Yet the stormy Allegro appassionato comes to rest on a calm F major chord, and the mood of the central two movements (both in A flat) suggest a more tranquil state of mind. The Andante un poco adagio is achingly vocal, almost a song without words; perhaps this is the movement which tells you how moving Mühlfeld's playing must have been. The Allegretto grazioso, suggesting a kind of elevated Viennese dance music, precedes a literally vivacious finale, over

which passing clouds occasionally gather. But by the end any memories of F minor anxieties are banished entirely.

Where the first sonata, for all its compactness, can feel like quite a big work, in which light and shadow intermingle, the second feels more homogenous. That could be because it's in three movements rather than four, and because all three movements are in the tonic key. The central scherzo – in E flat minor – does take you over some rocky emotional terrain, but for the most part this is a work which rarely reaches for the grand gesture; the first movement is even marked Allegro amabile. The heart-easing opening of this movement recalls the remark by Brahms' friend, musicologist Eusebius Mandyczewski, that 'it is as though the instruments were in love with each other.' There is a tenderness to this music, a gentle reciprocity, buoyed aloft by an almost seamless songfulness. Following that darker journey through the central movement – which ends, after all, in a mood of reflection rather than anger – Brahms says farewell to the world of chamber music with a set of variations that conclude with something rare in these works, overtly virtuosic flourishes for both players.

What respect and affection Brahms must have had for his clarinettist, for the manuscript of the E flat Sonata is dedicated 'To Herr Richard Mühlfeld, master of his beautiful instrument.' While Mühlfeld was visiting Brahms to play through the sonatas for the first time, the composer wrote to **Clara Schumann**: 'I wish you could be with us for he plays very beautifully.' Then in



typically po-faced fashion, Brahms added: 'If you could extemporise a little in F minor and E flat major you would probably chance on the two sonatas.'

One of the greatest pianists of her age, Clara had been married to one of the greatest composers of her time – Robert Schumann. After he died in 1856, she became an indispensable mentor to Brahms, and many of his important works would not have reached their definitive form without her wisdom and guidance.

Her own work as a composer was curtailed by her pianism, her life as a mother to eight children and a husband whose mental health deteriorated profoundly over time; after she reached her mid-30s she wrote very little original music. In recent decades, thanks to increasing interest from scholars, performers and audiences, we have a rounder picture of her compositional achievements.

The 3 Romances op.22 were virtually the last things she composed. Created for the violinist Joseph Joachim – a great friend to the Schumanns and to Brahms, and subsequently the dedicatee of Brahms' Violin Concerto – he and Clara performed them frequently. They have a haunting, melancholy quality which sounds equally well on clarinet. The transcription you hear on this album was created especially for Philip Arkinstall by Roger Young.

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Philip Arkinstall has appeared as soloist with the Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland, West Australian and Tasmanian, Corpus Medicorum and Zelman symphony orchestras and also with the Malaysian and Royal Melbourne philharmonics in repertoire ranging from Mozart to Heinze. He won the young performer of the year for 2MBSFM in 1996 and won the 1997 Young Performer of the Year prize run by Symphony Australia and the ABC. Queens Trust, Big Brother and various other awards enabled him to pursue intermittent studies in Europe.

Philip has been the associate principal clarinet of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra since 2008. He was Principal of the Malaysian Philaharmonic in KL for 11 years prior to that, and has appeared as guest

principal with every Australian orchestra except Adelaide. Philip has worked with the AWO, ACO, the Camerata Bern, Arcadia and the MCO amongst others and is a founding member of the Plexus Trio with Monica Curro and Stefan Cassomenos. Plexus has comissioned and premiered works from over 100 composers from across the globe since its inception in 2013. He is also a founder of the Melbourne Ensemble septet and has appeared at the Townsville, Coriole, Mackay, Dessert Song, Huntingdon and Port Fairy festivals amongst many others.

Philip studies conducting with Richard Mills and has assistant conducted several new works. He teaches at Melbourne University and has given masterclasses across Asia and South America as well as being a guest teacher in clarinet and chamber music at ANAM, Monash, ANU and NMC. He studied with Peter jenkin at the Sydney Conservatorium, Valentin Sacharov in Strasbourg and earlier with Steven Kenyon and Bernard Wattelet. He is a contracted artist for the German clarinet maker, Arthur F Ubel.

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Leading Australian pianist **Kristian Chong** has performed frequently as soloist, chamber musician and recitalist throughout Australia and the UK, and in China, France, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA, and Zimbabwe.

As concerto soloist he has appeared on numerous occasions with the Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland, Sydney and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras, and orchestras in the UK, New Zealand and China with conductors such as Werner Andreas Albert, Andrey Boreyko, Nicholas Braithwaite, Jessica Cottis, Fabian Russell, Roy Goodman, Sebastian Lang-Lessing, Nicholas Milton, Benjamin Northey, Tuomas Hannikainen, Marcus Stenz, Arvo Volmer and Marco Zuccarini.

Described by The Age as 'a true chamber musician at work', Kristian is highly sought after with extensive collaborations with ensembles such as the Tinalley and Australian String Quartets, cellist Li-Wei Qin, flautist Megan Sterling and baritone Teddy Tahu Rhodes. His other collaborations include violinists Vadim Gluzman, Rebecca Chan, Sophie Rowell, Dale Barltrop, Daniel Dodds, Jack Liebeck and Satu Vänskä, violists Christopher Moore and Wenhong Luo and cellist Richard Narroway amongst many others. A frequent festival performer, his appearances include the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Huntington Estate Music Festival, Mimir Chamber Music Festival and Coriole, Adelaide and Bangalow Festivals.

Kristian studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Piers Lane and Christopher Elton, with Stephen McIntyre at the University of Melbourne where Kristian currently teaches piano and chamber music, and with Noreen Stokes and Stefan Ammer at the Elder Conservatorium of Music in Adelaide. His many competition successes include the Symphony Australia Young Performers Award (keyboard) and the Australian National Piano Award.

Kristian is a YAMAHA Artist.

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The Brahms Sonatas were recorded on 1 October 2017, and the Clara Schumann Romances on 30 June 2021.

