Program notes by Peter Roennfeldt – Streicher piano concerts 2009-2021

No.1 - *Mendelssohn and his circle: A Soirée in Leipzig c.1846*, 31 July 2009

Felix Mendelssohn - *Andante and Allegro brilliant in A* for piano four hands Op.92, *Schilflied* Op.71 No.2, *Suleika* Op.57 No.3, *Sonata No.2 for cello and piano in D* Op.58, *Altdeutsches Frühlingslied* Op.86 No.6

Fanny Hensel - *Adagio* - Klavierstück No.10 *Für Felix 1843*, *Allegretto* - No.1 of Four Pieces for piano four hands, *Frühling* Op.7 No.3

Clara Schumann - *Andante espressivo* No.3 from *Quatre pièces fugitives* Op.15, *Lorelei*, *Ich hab' in deinem Auge* Op.13 No.5

Robert Schumann - *Bilder aus Osten* Op.66 for piano four hands, *Tief im Herzen trag im Pein* Op.138 No.2, *Tanzlied* Op.78 No.1, *In der Nacht* Op.74 No.4

Musician extraordinaire: The musical world celebrates in 2009 the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth. Arguably the most versatile musician of his day, his prodigious talent matured early, with several masterworks appearing before his wider exposure at the age of twenty. At the time of his premature death just before his 39th birthday, Mendelssohn was the most famous German speaking musician, and a favourite of England including Queen Victoria. Admired by all the major artistic figures of his day, Mendelssohn was a renowned pianist, organist and conductor – his colleague Schumann famously described him as "the Mozart of the 19th century."

Leipzig in the 1840s: This program focuses on the time and place of Mendelssohn's happiest personal and musical experiences. As director of the famous Gewandhaus since 1835, he presented some of the most memorable musical concerts of the age, with premieres of major works by himself and his contemporaries, and appearances by most of the great performers of the day. His wife and young family were a great source of joy. After various other domiciles they settled in No.3 Königstrasse, his final residence which today is the official Mendelssohn Museum. For several years Leipzig had also been the base for Robert and Clara Schumann, who were both personal friends and close musical colleagues. Mendelssohn was also the founder in 1843 of the distinguished Leipzig Conservatorium which today bears his name.

A Quartet Soirée: Mendelssohn the public figure was equally stimulated by domestic music-making. With his equally gifted elder sister Fanny, the young Felix was a featured composer-performer at the family's fortnightly *Sonntagsmusiken* (Sunday musicales), then a highlight of Berlin's artistic life. Numerous accounts exist of his enthusiastic participation in chamber music evenings with colleagues, in which he appeared as piano soloist, accompanist, quartet or quintet partner, even playing the violin or viola at times. The assemblage of composers on tonight's program recreates a gathering that took place on the January 4th 1846. Recently relocated to Dresden, the Schumanns had returned to Leipzig for the local premiere of Robert's Piano Concerto played by Clara on New Year's Day with Felix conducting. Two days later Fanny (now Frau Hensel) had arrived from Berlin, after which a musicale was arranged at which all four were present, and no doubt featured as performer, composer, or both.

Works for piano four hands: Mendelssohn's piano works are highly idiomatic, both when cast in virtuoso mould or when written for the domestic context. His *Andante and Allegro brilliant in A* Op.92 was composed quickly a few days before a concert on 31st March 1841, at which Clara Schumann (née Wieck) would appear professionally for the first time since her marriage to Robert six months previously. This composition had special significance, as Mendelssohn was clearly demonstrating support of his friends at a difficult time – they were still battling a libel case brought by Clara's estranged father against the new son-in-law of which he did not approve. Although there is evidence Clara chose to perform 'their Duo' repeatedly during her career, its posthumous publication presents a mystery. The slow introduction, so characteristic of the composer, was not published with the work's virtuoso scherzo-like torso in 1851, only appearing for the first time in print in 1994. The tradition of duet-playing was a regular feature of the Mendelssohn siblings' musical relationship, but as is the case with most of Fanny's creative output, little has been published until recent years. Her *Allegretto* most probably dates from the 1840s, and appears not be part of a larger work. It appeared in print for the first time in 1996.

Robert Schumann's *Bilder aus Osten* Op.66 was ostensibly inspired by Rückert's translation of the *Magamat*, an 11th century Arab chronicle. The title may also have been inspired also by the *Bilder des Orients* poems of Stieglitz, about which he corresponded with Clara in 1841. The set's character is but vaguely 'orientalist', with only the slightest hint of Turkish Janissary music in No.1, but sufficiently so for Liszt to wax lyrical in an 1855 review article. Overall the set speaks unmistakably in a German accent. Published in 1848 and dedicated to the Schumanns' friend Livia Bendemann, godmother to their son Emil, the opus was obviously a family favourite. Clara once reported on playing it with Moscheles, Mendelssohn's lifelong friend, mentor and later colleague at the Conservatorium. The elder Schumann daughters Marie and Elise, both of whom were born in Leipzig, performed it on their father's birthday in 1854, by which time he was already consigned to the Endenich sanatorium.

Works for piano solo: The two short solo works featured tonight are but single examples of a significant body of piano works written by the two female composers. Fanny Hensel's set of 12 pieces *Für Felix 1843* is most probably a chronological compilation, including several composed during her family's trip to Italy in 1839-40. The *Klavierstück No.10 Allegro* most likely dates from 1840-43. It is a virtual 'Song without Words,' with the mellow key of E flat tempered with interesting modulations and turns of phrase. Clara Schumann's more restrained *Andante espressivo* from her *Quatre pièces fugitives* Op.15**.** Dedicated to her half-sister Marie Wieck, Robert Schumann commented: "Clara has written a group of smaller pieces that are more tenderly and musically conceived than any she has succeeded in doing before." In typical ternary form, the D major piece alternates between chordal lyricism in the middle range, and flowing episodes that explore more extreme registers.

The piano in chamber ensemble: Although 1842 is designated as Schumann's 'Chamber music year', the decade is not particularly noted for major ensemble works. Already in 1838 Mendelssohn had commented to his friend Hiller that there was a need for more chamber music with piano, a genre which is "neglected now." The period up to early 1843 was particularly busy for Mendelssohn, with the opening of the Leipzig Conservatorium, a series of 'historical' concerts, and the unveiling of the Bach memorial outside the Thomaskirche (in the presence of the composer's grandson), all amidst the tension associated with his being summoned by the Prussian King to Berlin for official duties. Despite this, the *Cello Sonata No.2 in D* Op.58 exudes a sunny radiance and virtuosity in the outer movements, and light-footed charm in the uncharacteristically 'slow' scherzo. The slow movement is however the sonata's core, with a chordal chorale-like theme announced in the piano, and recitative passages in both instruments. A baroque influence is suggested, possibly inspired by Leipzig's most famous church musician, whose works Mendelssohn had done so much to revive. While the sonata was probably composed for Mendelssohn's brother Paul, as were two other cello works, the official dedicatee was Count Mateusz Wielhorski. The Russian amateur cellist and a patron of music was based mainly in St Petersburg, where the Schumanns would meet him in early 1844. Also a great collector, his prize possession was a Stradivarius cello that would later be used by the renowned cellist Jacqueline Du Pré, and currently is in the possession of Yo-Yo Ma.

The piano and voice partnership: From the vast 19th century repertoire for voice and piano, the Lieder of Schumann stand as a pinnacle. Features in common with tonight's composers include a strong affinity with the poets and texts they selected, careful but unaffected vocal writing, distinctive piano parts, and a directness of emotional expression. Less well known are Schumann's vocal ensembles, but here also the main features of Lieder writing can be heard. The Four Duets Op.74 and the *Spanisches Liederspiel* Op.138 are both settings of Spanish texts translated by Emanuel von Giebel, and date from 1849. *In der Nacht* is a broad nocturne with the soprano singing a solo melody, and then a countermelody as the tenor joins. The concept of multi-movement works for piano and vocal quartet, a format that Brahms would further develop, possibly finds its first high point in Schumann's *Liederspiel* (literally 'song-play'). *Tief im Herzen trag im Pein*, which uses the unusual texture of piano duet and a solo voice, is a rather dark setting of poem that has been described as a "frighteningly accurate depiction of depression." In stark contrast, the *Tanzlied* from Op.78 to a text by Rückert, is a mock-innocent setting where the vocal partners ('she' and 'he') converse and collide over a self-contained piano waltz.

Female nineteenth-century composers were usually stereotyped as being only suited to smaller genres such as songs, but not necessarily being fit for concert performance and publication. However, Lieder by both Fanny and Clara appeared alongside their male counterparts in unattributed publications, a deception which continued for some time. Both were encouraged by their mentors to persist with composition, though in Fanny's case the approval she craved from Felix to proceed to independent publication took longer than expected. She however protested that she was no *femme libre*, which suggests her compositions were personal rather than public statements. Her *Frühling* to a text by Eichendorff dates from c.1841, but was only published posthumously in 1847 within Op.7. The key of F sharp major is rather unusual, but surprisingly well suited to the images of spring, night and love.

Heine and Rückert are well known through Robert Schumann's settings, but less so through Clara's Lieder. *Lorelei* and *Ich hab' in deinem Auge* are on texts by these poets respectively, and were both completed in time for the birthday of "my beloved husband" on 8th June 1843. *Ich hab' in deinem Auge* appeared within Op.13, which is dedicated with gratitude to Queen Caroline of Denmark, at whose court Clara had appeared the previous year. The concise miniature was later arranged for solo piano by Liszt, who had become friends with the Mendelssohns and the Schumanns during his concert seasons in Leipzig during 1840-41. *Lorelei* however remained in manuscript until 1992. Its pulsating chords create unrelenting tension, and its dramatic gestures make it worthy of comparison with other famed settings. It is little known that Mendelssohn had planned to compose an opera on the Lorelei legend, which unfortunately remained only in fragments at the time of his death. The intended star was the 'Swedish nightingale' Jenny Lind, who had become his close friend in the mid-1840s.

Mendelssohn's songs: Except for a few favourite songs, his numerous Lieder are today quite neglected, and rather misunderstood as not being Mendelssohn's most convincing genre. While mostly intended for salon performance rather than the stage, he obviously cared greatly text choices and the ordering within collections. *Suleika* from Op.57 evinces the aromatic fragrances and sensuality of the Orient with throbbing chords in a bright E major. Taken from the *West-östlicher Divan* published by Goethe in 1819, this text is now known to be his associate Marianne von Willemer. Of biographical interest is the fact that the young Mendelssohn first visited the great writer in Weimar just two years later in 1821, in the company of Zelter his composition teacher.

The first and last songs on the program have special significance for Mendelssohn's final months. *Schilflied* is dated 3rd November 1842, about two weeks after he met Jenny Lind, whose singing and friendship he came to value highly. While still in manuscript, it was sent in a personally bound songbook in time for Christmas 1845. The penultimate line "sweet remembrance of you" was possibly co-opted as a reference to their friendship, supported poignantly by a change of mood and tonality from a mournful barcarolle in F sharp minor to the major key. Their paths crossed again several times, notably in an Easter concert on 12th April 1846. In retrospect this was to be Mendelssohn's last pianistic performance at the Gewandhaus, as accompanist to Jenny Lind's rendition of some Swedish folksongs. *Schilflied* was eventually publication-ready in late 1847, but appeared posthumously as Op.71. To confirm the ordering of the songs, which are linked by the theme of loss of a loved one, Mendelssohn visited the local singer Madame Frege on October 9th. However the reading session ended abruptly when his hands turned cold, a sign of the first of three strokes that would cause his death on November 4th.

Altdeutsches Frühlingslied was possibly intended for the same collection, but instead appeared within Op.86 a few years laterAccording to Moscheles, it was composed during Mendelssohn's final summer, but was not written out until October 7th. It is thus his final completed composition. Based on an early 17th century sacred poem from the early 17th century, Mendelssohn reworked the text of the second stanza to remove the mystical references to marriage with Christ. His version instead ends with the words "without end will I suffer, ever since you and I, my darling, had to part." This is obviously a direct reference to his unending grief over the loss of Fanny, his sibling and musical soulmate. Having already composed a number of vocal and pianistic 'spring songs', this setting is quite sombre and softly coloured with aquatic imagery that is almost baroque in texture.

The visual artist: Mendelssohn is admired for his inspired evocations of landscape and literature through his instrumental music. His visual imaginings also took the form of sketches and watercolour paintings, an activity to which he repeatedly returned throughout his career, as a form of relaxation and rejuvenation. In a letter to his younger sister Rebecka in 1836 he stated "such is my mood now the whole day: I can neither compose nor write letters, nor play the piano; the utmost I can do is sketch a little". Never more did he feel the need to retreat into his artwork than in the final summer of 1847 while on a family holiday to Switzerland, reminiscent of similar trips during his childhood. The various scenes of towns, mountains, waterways and forests were captured over two months, all precisely dated. These images are being used as backdrops during tonight's program.

The Mendelssohns' and Schumanns' choice of pianos: This program is being performed on an original Johann Baptist Streicher piano from 1843, which is perfectly suited to mid-19th century repertoire. Mendelssohn was very familiar a similar piano owned by Goethe, which was built in c.1820 by Nanette Streicher née Stein. Clara Schumann also played it in 1831, and again towards the end of her life in 1888, when the passage of time "affected her strangely". When purchasing pianos for family members and friends, Mendelssohn once indicated that if a Graf piano was not available, a Streicher would be acceptable. Mendelssohn had met J.B. Streicher in Vienna in 1830, renewing the acquaintance in Berlin in 1841. Clara's first piano was built by Johann Andreas Stein, Nanette's brother. It was the topic of her very first letter penned in 1827, and was featured in her first Gewandhaus appearance the following year. She also had contact with J.B. Streicher in Vienna during a concert tour of 1838, and commented positively on his instruments whenever she encountered them. As late as 1870, just before Streicher's death, Clara played one of his pianos at the opening of the Brahms Hall of the Musikverein building. That instrument remained in the Streicher family until being donated to the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1957. Both Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann also had a strong predilection for Graf's pianos, the other major early 19th century Viennese builder. Clara's ownership of one of his pianos was the subject of much distraught correspondence with Robert in the late 1830s. The couple were then battling with her father Friedrich Wieck, and she feared they would lose the piano entirely due to the familial dispute. As for Mendelssohn, when ordering a Graf piano he was insistent that the range should extend to a low C and a high F (6½ octaves) as both were "indispensible to me" – this is the exact range of the Streicher piano being played tonight!

About the piano: Johann Baptist Streicher (1796-1871) was a third generation piano builder of distinguished lineage. His grandfather Johann Andreas Stein was at the forefront of the early piano in the late 1700s, his mantle passing to his children, particularly Nanette who established a major business in Vienna in the 1790s. The brass inscription above the

keyboard announces the maker's recent award of medals at two prestigious exhibitions in Vienna in 1835 and 1839. He was later to win similar awards at the great Exhibitions in London in 1851 and Paris in 1867. Although Viennese in overall design, this is probably the earliest extant Streicher instrument with English action. This is an important point of difference from the Viennese mechanism, whereby the hammers strike the strings 'backwards', close to the keyboard. With a 6.5 octave keyboard (ivory naturals), the case is pyramid mahogany. The wooden frame is partly reinforced with metal crossbars, and houses an optional dampening device – a large piece of light wood which can be placed within the case above the soundboard. Acquired from a private owner in Österskär near Stockholm Sweden, the restoration was completed in 2008 by Dr Edward Swensen of Ithaca New York USA. The piano was purchased by Peter Roennfeldt as a result of a bequest from his late aunt Frieda Reuther, a Queensland Conservatorium graduate from 1970, and who taught for many years at St Peters Lutheran College Indooroopilly. Together with another instrument built by Daniel Dörr in c.1820, it is now on permanent loan to the institution and thus available for staff and students to investigate the wonderful heritage of earlier pianos and their repertoire, and also to be able to present performances such as tonight's concert.

No.2 – *Schumann and his circle*, 17 September 2010

Schumann - 3 Fantasiestücke Op.111, 3 Lieder Op.119, *Requiem* Op.90 No.7, *Schön Hedwig* Op.106, *Er und sie* Op.78 No.2, *Die tausend Grüße, die wir dir senden* Op.101 No.7

Clara Schumann - *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann* Op.20

Dietrich, Brahms and Schumann - 'F.A.E.' sonata for violin and piano

Schumann's bicentennial anniversary this year gives the musical world an opportunity to re-assess some areas of his output which seem to have received little attention. The solo piano works which are best known were all composed before 1840, though admittedly his later efforts seemed to concentrate on contrapuntal studies and pedagogical compositions. Similarly, while the Lieder composed in 1840, the 'Year of Song' are frequently performed, he continued to write for solo voice(s) and piano throughout his life, though the later works are less known and understood. Finally, the later chamber works which are best known have tended to be those involving a wind instrument or viola, whose early 19th century repertoire is otherwise rather limited. This program features repertoire that was composed mostly in Düsseldorf between 1849 and 1853, after which Schumann virtually ceased composing due to ill health. The genres which are represented were all very dear to him throughout his career, solo piano music, songs and chamber music. In different ways, these genres featured from his early days, when he held aspirations to become a solo pianist, after which he married his life partner who was known as a virtuoso and ensemble musician. As a literary-minded musician, Schumann's interest in text is also quite pervasive, making his writing for the voice a particular focus of his output. The 'Schumann circle' also includes his beloved wife Clara, whose creative output comes mainly from the years up their marriage, and also his young student Dietrich and colleague Brahms, both of whom were being mentored by the older composer during this period.

Schumann's Op.111 uses the term 'Fantasy pieces' which figures in several other works for solo piano or for small chamber combinations. The term Fantasy sits particularly well with Schumann's aesthetic approach, as it implies either a fleeting glimpse when used for shorter works, or can create a wider canvas where ideas can develop rather freely. In this set, composed in 1851, the forms are quite succinct in a fairly clear ABA structure, and melodic gestures extremely direct and endearing. Both the rhapsodic side of Schumann evident in the short phrases of the first piece, his more lyrical voice as seen in the second, and also the more clipped march-like gestures as used in the finale, are all present in this rather neglected set.

The cross-fertilisation of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck whom he married in 1840 is well documented. They not only co-published some sets of works, but studied repertoire and technique together, and also shared themes in each other's original compositions. The use of this particular theme is interesting in that it was also used by Brahms for his first set of published variations, Op.9, which appeared at the same time as Clara's work in 1854. The theme has inherent interest in that is has a number of harmonic pointers and hints of countermelody that are used with great effect. In fact, the transferral of interest between the various voice parts, and the used of secondary voices as well as imitations between voice parts, are some of the most intriguing aspects of Clara's work. The theme itself derives from Schumann's *Bunte Blätter* Op.99.

The later songs of Schumann are rarely performed, and the seeming 'unvirtuous cycle' which only keeps them on the shelves rather than on the music stand only reinforces this pattern. The pianist Graham Johnson, who has recorded the complete songs of Schumann for the Hyperion label, examines this phenomenon while simultaneously working against it by focussing on the later songs as Volume I on his CD series. Suggestions that Schumann was in fact reacting against current trends in the Liszt-Wagner galaxy, while feeling his own generation was disappearing all too fast, as seen in the deaths of Mendelssohn in 1847 and Chopin two years later.

The three Lieder of Op.119 are 'forest songs' in which scenes of rustic simplicity and loneliness are conjured up. The first has a strong dotted note marching pattern which appears in many of his works, and also perhaps a slight reference to the loneliness of Beethoven in his later years. The middle song is quite bleak, with images of fading light merging into darkness and death, while the last is much more enigmatic. Its references to the possible uses of the birch tree, culminating in its destruction for firewood, is indeed a strange poem which possibly draws attention to the delicate balance between nature and human needs.

The two vocal works both have medieval connections. *Requiem* is based on Héloïse's lament for Abelard, and is set in the style of a *scena* that is supported by harp-like figurations in the piano part which also delivers a vocally-inspired countermelody. The 'beautiful Hedwig' of the 'declamation for voice and piano' is similarly inspired by legend, with the lord or the manor becoming quite taken with the charms of his servant, leading to their impromptu marriage. The form of *melodrama*, whereby text and instrumental music are juxtaposed, was still in favour though its heyday had passed – Schumann's three works in this genre were all composed as late additions to a medium that is rarely performed today.

'Composed in anticipation of the arrival of our admirable and beloved friend Joseph Joachim' composed by Schumann with his student Dietrich and young friend Brahms, and probably first performed on 28 October. The work appears to have been written quickly during the previous two weeks in Düsseldorf, when it was known that Joachim would be there. The FAE motive is derived from the phrase '*Frei aber einsam* – free but lonely' as a reference to Joachim's own motive that was used in one of his own compositions, *Malinconia*, where the motive is used towards the end. It was intended as a comment to the composer-violinist's own marital state, but apparently its explicit meaning was not conveyed to Schumann until a month after the FAE sonata's composition. It is also not known when the work was performed for the first time, but quite possibly it was read through by Joachim and Clara Schumann in October 1853, though some evidence suggests the premiere was much later. The work itself was forgotten after Schumann's death, only being published in 1935. Schumann however used the movements that he had contributed as the basis for his own Violin Sonata No.3 in A minor, which was also completed around that time in late 1853. The work's four movements all use the FAE motive, some more thoroughly than others. Dietrich's large opening movement is probably the most obvious and intense use of the motive, and its structure is also the most expansive. Brahms' scherzo is often played as a single item, and frequently included in recordings of his violin sonatas, but is probably the least obvious usage of the motive. Schumann's slow movement Intermezzo is again more explicit in its use of the theme, but the Finale cleverly disguises it within the bass notes of the opening harmonies. Overall, it is not the references to the FAE motive which sustain the work's interest, but the idea of a collaborative composition, of which there are surprisingly few in the current repertoire. The coincidence of the 'elder' composer at age 43 with his 'younger' protégés, then in their early 20s, is of greater interest, particularly since this was to be one of the final works to be penned by Schumann, and one of the earliest by Brahms to have survived.

The vocal duets which conclude the program are examples of a genre he developed quite extensively, using the higher registers of female and male voices in combination. *Er und Sie* is an amorous dialogue, while the uplifting gestures of *Die tausend Grüße* are more extrovert, reinforced by rolling chordal patterns in the piano part.

Schumann virtually ceased composing after 1853, succumbing to his final illness three years later. His protégés Clara and Brahms maintained a lifelong personal and musical relationship, themselves dying within a year of each other in the 1890s. The two younger male composers also maintained a close friendship over many years, with Dietrich being responsible for many north German premieres of works such as the *German Requiem,* and also writing an important biographical account of Brahms. Thus the 'Schumann circle' continued for many decades – such are the longterm effects of musical collaborations that come from an earlier acquaintance.

No.3 - ***A Trip Down Brisbane's (Chamber Music) Memory Lane*****, 12 May 2012**

Gade - Novelletten for piano trio Op.29
Brier - Sonata for violin and piano in G minor
Rheinberger - Quartet in Eb Op.38

This program has been carefully selected after reviewing the chamber music repertoire that was popular amongst Brisbane performers and audiences up to the 1920s. Each work is clearly worthy of greater exposure, and hopefully today's performance will be an interesting first step in that direction.

Neils Gade (1817-1890) is sometimes described as the 'Danish Mendelssohn' and is generally considered to be that country's greatest composer of the 19th century. After several years studying and working in Leipzig alongside Mendelssohn, he returned to Copenhagen in 1848 where he composed in all major genres including chamber music. His *Novelleten* Opus 29 (1853) are in the style of some of Schumann's short cycles of character pieces for solo piano or small ensemble.

The following local musicians performed this work in Brisbane between 1904 and 1915:

- Mr. J.L. Philips, Herr Rosendorff, Mr. A.H. Sleath – Albert Hall, 1904
- Dr. W.S. Byrne, Miss Vada Jefferies, Mr. Sleath – School of Arts, 1908
- Mr. Percy Brier, Misses Vada and Mary Jefferies – Albert Hall, 1909
- Mr. Brier, Herr Rosendorf, Mr. Sleath – London Bank Chambers, 1911
- Miss Jean McTaggart, Miss Jeanie A. Neil, Mr. Sleath – St Thomas Toowoong, 1915

Percy Brier (1885-1970) is one of Queensland's most prominent locally-born musicians in the first half of the 20th century. After four years' study at the Trinity College of Music London he returned in 1906 to commence a career that included much solo and ensemble performance, teaching and examining, and a large output of original compositions. His *Sonata for Violin and Piano in G minor* is in three movements, respectively in sonata, variations and rondo form. It was composed for the first concert of the re-established Brisbane Chamber Music Society in 1921, and performed with eminent local violinist Eric Hayne who had recently returned after studies in Berlin and several years in the USA where he was a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The sonata was performed twice for the Chamber Music Society, in 1921 and 1924, both times by Brier and Hayne, and again in 1952 in a concert of members' works presented by the Queensland branch of the Guild of Australian composers, on that occasion with violinist Martha Clement.

Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901) was the leading composer based in Munich during the latter half of the 19th century. His *Piano Quartet* Opus 38 (1870) was one of the most popular works during his lifetime, being programmed annually in the London Popular Concerts throughout the 1870s and 80s. Composed in the standard 4-movement plan it is full of harmonic richness, sweeping melodies and occasional counterpoint.

Various pianists performed this work with Jefferies Quartet members Between 1891 and 1922:

- Mrs Henrietta Willmore – Protestant Hall, 1891 and Qld Art Society Rooms, 1902
- Mrs Ohmann – Centennial Hall, 1895
- Miss May Marshall – Trades Hall, 1902
- Mr. Percy Brier – Albert Hall, 1909
- Mr. E.R.B. Jordan – Albert Hall, 1922

No.4 - *Schumann and Friends*, 13 September 2013

Mendelssohn – Cello sonata in Bb major Op. 45
Gade - Volkedanse Op.62
Schumann - Trio in D minor Op 63

This program features chamber music by a trio of composers who became close friends while living in Leipzig at various times during the 1830s and 1840s. Schumann was already resident there before 1830, and was making his mark as composer and music critic before Mendelssohn arrived to take up the directorship of the Gewandhaus concerts in 1835.

Several years later in 1843, the Danish musician Neils Gade benefitted from an enthusiastic reception at the Gewandhaus, when Mendelssohn championed his first symphony. Soon after relocating himself to Leipzig, Gade conducted the premiere of Mendelssohn's Violin concerto, and subsequently took over the conductorship upon his colleague's sudden death in 1847. However, when hostilities broke out between Prussia and Denmark in 148, that position had to be relinquished, so Gade's later career was focused on Copenhagen.

In the meantime, an equally strong bond had formed between Gade and the Schumann family. This was recognised in the inclusion of a piece called "Northern song - salute to G" within Schumann's *Album for the Young*, based on the musical cryptogram G-A-D-E. Another point of connection is through the violinist Joseph Joachim, who was a protégé of Mendelssohn and later a colleague of the Schumanns' mutual friend, Johannes Brahms. Joachim was also the dedicatee of the violin work by Gade featured on tonight's program.

It is only natural that such a close knit group of musicians would share musical ideas and stylistic traits, and would be mutually supportive of each other's creative work. They collectively fostered a romantic style which was imbued with classical principles of form and structure, at least in their larger works. When not composing multi-movement sonatas or chamber works, the short form of the character piece, most often grouped together into sets or cycles, was pursued with equal enthusiasm.

Mendelssohn's first sonata for cello and piano was intended for his brother Paul, a respected amateur cellist. Fully aware of the problem of textural balance, the composer closely studied the cello sonatas of Beethoven, resulting in a soundscape that never overwhelms the cello with thick piano textures, but where each instrument is allowed to equally share centre stage. The brilliant piano part is heard to advantage on the Streicher piano being used tonight, whose comparatively lighter construction allows each register to speak clearly and independently. Of particular interest is the middle movement, which has elements of a scherzo, particularly in the piano's 'quasi-pizzicato' effect. Otherwise the sonata is in classical form, though somewhat surprising is the finale's quiet conclusion.

Niels Gade did not wholeheartedly pursue a nationalistic direction in his compositions, though it occasionally surfaces in works such as the *Folkedanse*. It was dedicated to Joachim, who had helped Gade with final touches to an earlier violin sonata which was dedicated to Schumann. The brilliant virtuosity of these short pieces probably has more to do with its first performer rather than any hint of a Scandinavian 'fiddling' tradition, to which others such as Grieg would make occasional reference.

The D minor piano trio by Schumann is the first of a set of three such works which appeared within a five-year period from 1847 onwards, after the family had left Leipzig. Although it was first heard at private performances in their Dresden home, the concert premiere in Leipzig and its publication there confirmed the composer's abiding connections with the city where he first gained public attention. It begins with a brooding theme that takes some time to settle, and which leads to a number of lyrical ideas in turn. The scherzo movement harks back to some of Schumann's earlier piano works with their persistent dotted rhythms, while the slow movement is surely one of his bleakest and most enigmatic creations. The unresolved tension simply dissolves into a joyous D major theme of triumph which makes the finale one of Schumann's most uplifting creations.

No.5 - *Brahms and his ultimate piano*, 23 May 2014

Brahms - Trio in C minor Op.101, Quartet in A Op.26

This program features two works created by Johannes Brahms at critical points in his development as the major chamber music composer of the late nineteenth century. His *Piano Quartet in A major Opus 26* was premiered by him as pianist in 1862, the year he moved to Vienna where he would live for the rest of his life. At the time Vienna was experiencing a revival of interest in chamber music, inspired by the great examples of Beethoven and Schubert of two generations before. The influence of Schubert can be seen in the sunny lyricism of Opus 26, and the predominance of broad melodic ideas which feature in each movement. The instrumental writing is at times almost orchestral in terms of its scale, with the full string range being exploited alongside concerto-like passages for the piano. Of particular interest are the autumnal slow movement with its ominous episodes featuring arpeggios reminiscent of Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio, the highly developed Scherzo movement, and the dynamic finale with its catchy syncopated theme.

The first work on the program, the *Piano Trio in C Minor Opus 101* was composed much later, in 1886, when Brahms was also producing his final sonatas for both violin and cello. Had he not come out of retirement to produce the five works featuring clarinet in the early 1890s, the compositions of 1886-1887 would have been his penultimate word in the field of chamber music. This sense of culmination and distillation is clear in Opus 101, where despite its comparative brevity, all musical ideas are presented and developed in full. The Trio was premiered by Brahms and two of the great virtuosos of the day, the violinist Jenö Hubay and cellist David Popper, and described by Clara Schumann as "wonderfully gripping". The slow movement is a late example of Brahms' interest in irregular meters, with its alternation of duple and triple time signatures, while the outer movements are energetic and brooding, the rhythmically taut finale culminating in the major mode in a brief but cathartic coda.

Brahms and the Streicher piano

The piano writing of Brahms is sometimes criticised for its density and difficulty, where the challenges posed to the pianist are sometimes unrewarding and rather exhausting. In particular, his ensemble works with strings are fraught with issues of balance when performed on a modern piano, with its complex system of overtones produced by cross-stringing. None of these issues are evident when performing Brahms on the piano he knew best, the one built in 1868 by Johann Baptist Streicher. This instrument was given to Brahms in 1873 and remained his domestic piano until his death nearly a quarter of century later. It is therefore the instrument he would have used in composing over half of the sixteen chamber works featuring the piano.

As described below, the features of the piano which enable Brahms to give maximum resonance through his sonorous bass and middle register writing simultaneously allow the partnering instruments to ride a wave of textures as equals, rather than competing voices. The keyboard action is also significantly lighter than a modern piano, which allows Brahms' passage work to take flight rather than the pianist having to compromise their touch to produce the brilliant figurations with the dynamic levels specified in the score. As Richard Good writes in his (1982, p. 201) book *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and other Pianos: A Technological History from Cristofori to the Modern Grand:*

> "to hear Brahms's music on an instrument like the Streicher is to realize that the thick textures we associate with his work, the sometimes muddy chords in the bass and the occasionally woolly sonorities, come cleaner and clearer on a lighter, straight-strung piano. Those textures, then, are not a fault of Brahms's piano composition. To be sure, any sensitive pianist can avoid making Brahms sound murky on a modern piano. The point is that the modern pianist must strive to avoid that effect, must work at lightening the dark colors, where Brahms himself, playing his Streicher, did not have to work at it".

No.6 - *Endings and Beginnings*, 31 July 2015

Schumann - Fantasiestücke Op.88
Schubert - Trio in E-flat D.929

This program features two works for piano trio created within 15 years of each other, but composed by two well-known composers at quite different stages of their lives and careers. Although both men were in their early thirties at the time of composition, 1827 and 1842 respectively, Schubert would have only only one more year to live, while Schumann would enjoy at least another decade of productivity. Schubert had been composing for the combination of piano, violin and cello for at least 15 years, commencing with a youthful *Sonatensatz* in 1812. In contrast, Schumann had only recently begun his chamber music journey, which would continue until the end of his composing career and produce nearly 20 works. Ultimately, both composers produced only four works for this ensemble type. The differences in their lifespans and cultural contexts, as well as the varying degrees of significance that chamber music plays within their respective output, explains the concert's title. Neither composer specialised in piano-based chamber music to the same extent as Beethoven or Brahms, but each contributed a handful of masterpieces which continue to be admired by performers and audiences.

Schubert's relationship with the piano is both extensive and problematic. Unlike most of his 19th century German-speaking composer colleagues, he was not known initially or primarily as a pianist. In spite of this, the instrument features in all of his 600-plus *Lieder*, and the instrument would have formed the basis of any domestic music-making he enjoyed with friends. While it would be inaccurate to assert that Schubert's piano writing is any more difficult or idiosyncratic than his idol Beethoven, all pianists who perform his sonatas and chamber works have to surmount some rather formidable technical challenges. In the case of the *Piano Trio in E-flat major* D. 929, sections of the first and final movements bristle with difficulties, which suggest questions of what the composer had imagined. All of Schubert's works for trio remained unpublished at the time of his death, though a debut performance date can be verified for the partner work, in B-flat major D. 898. Both full-length trios and the short *Notturno* D. 897 (performed in these concerts last year) appeared posthumously in the 1830s and 40s.

Modern-day listeners may recognize one of the more striking themes from the E-flat trio, which opens the slow movement and recurs several times in the finale. It was first used in the 1975 Kubrick epic *Barry Lyndon* and half a dozen other films since then, and also more recently in a few television miniseries, most recently ABC-TV's *The Killing Season*. It is unclear what has attracted producers to this elegiac cello melody as the backdrop for both period costume dramas and horror / crime / political thrillers (fiction or otherwise). Perhaps its plaintive quality strikes an emotional chord unlike many of its counterparts in the chamber music canon, but it could also be the ominous chordal repetitions that offer something distant or dark, which enhances the soundtrack to an audio-visual visual medium.

In one respect, the Trio is quite innovative for its time, in that each movement is connected musically in some way. A 'through-line' that binds the work as a whole is created by the presence of several themes which use repeated notes or chords, normally in groups of four. The opening movement is in the traditional sonata form with a rather stock standard announcement in instrumental unison, but a secondary theme soon announces the repeated-note idea very quietly. As already mentioned, this rhythmic pattern forms the accompaniment to the slow movement theme, while in the Scherzo / Minuet and Trio third movement the repeated-note idea occurs mainly as a secondary motive. In the finale, a rather spikey musical episode using very soft and high textures again presents this musical idea, albeit in a manner which is more idiomatic to strings than piano. When the cello theme returns in this last movement, rather than using its original accompaniment as the foil, Schubert surrounds it with cascading double-note arpeggios, which ultimately build into a massive triumphant climax.

Schumann used the work title *Fantasiestücke* four times, for two piano sets (Op.12 and Op.111) and two chamber works including the Op.73 for clarinet (or violin or cello) with piano. The Op.88 work however might not have been so named, had the composer not originally discarded it as not being a 'serious' piano trio. Perhaps by the end of his 'chamber music year' in 1842, having composed three string quartets, the piano quartet and the piano quintet, he was simply exhausted. He may well have considered the trio to be unsuitable for publication, in comparison to his other small ensemble efforts to date. Schumann's comment in his diary for December that year, "writing on the trio is too much … unwell in the evening" indicates the onset of a wintry depression that would plague his later years.

Indeed, as the composer would have himself recognised, the Op.88 *Fantasiestücke* is a rather unconventional set, and probably not suitable for consideration as a standard sonata-form chamber work worthy of the formal title 'Piano Trio'. It opens with a short simple movement in which the cello mostly doubles the piano, and this is followed by a Humoreske in which several contrasting ideas are framed by a light staccato theme. The string instruments come into their own as melodic collaborators in the Duett, where the piano is primarily accompanimental. The march-like Finale

has a similar structure to the second movement, but concludes with a rather curious coda section, in which the piano plays a persistent chordal theme against prolonged syncopated lines in the strings.

Schumann went on to compose two rather more conventional piano trios which appeared in 1847 (Op.63 and Op.80), before eventually publishing Op.88 in 1850, by which time he had come to value its inherent worth and musical interest. Perhaps it was his re-acquaintance with his first efforts in the trio medium that then inspired him to produce in 1851 his final work in this genre, Op. 110. That trio was also part of another final intensive chamber music phase that included his two violin sonatas. In this sense, Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* is both a beginning, as his first piano trio, and also quite closely connected to his final contribution to this time-honoured chamber music medium.

No.7 - *Clara Schumann and Friends*, 6 May 2016

Gade – Violin sonata No.1 in A Op.6
Clara Schumann - Three Romances for Violin and Piano Op.22
Brahms – Violin sonata No.2 in A Op.100

One of the most illustrious friendship circles of all time is the group of composers and performers that gathered around the Schumanns in the 1840s and early 50s. The so-called 'Davidsbund' (band of David) who fought against cultural 'Philistines' is immortalised in numerous compositions by Robert Schumann (1810-56), which at times use quite explicit musical ciphers or codes. His wife Clara (née Wieck, 1819-96) was an essential member of this group, and later as a widow did much to keep his legacy alive by maintaining lifelong contacts with their mutual colleagues. This program features three works for violin and piano which embody the collegiality she enjoyed with two musicians who hailed from northern parts – the Dane Niels Gade (1817-90) and Johannes Brahms (1833-97) from Hamburg, and another from Hungary, Joseph Joachim (1931-1907). All three were composers, but while Brahms was a pianist of comparable stature to Clara, Gade and Joachim were both violinists.

The Schumanns were well established in Leipzig before Mendelssohn settled there in the early 1840s as founder of the Conservatory and director of the Gewandhaus concerts. The premiere of Gade's first symphony was conducted by Mendelssohn in 1843, and soon afterward the Danish musician also relocated to Leipzig. Gade worked alongside Mendelssohn and succeeded him as Gewandhaus conductor, but his friendship with the Schumanns was particularly close. Robert wrote 'in my view I have seldom harmonised with anyone as much as Gade', and saluted him in the 'Nordisches Lied' (No.41 of the *Album for the Young*) by using the four letters of his surname as the main motive. However it was Clara who first met Gade in person, during a northern concert tour in the spring of 1842. Although she was somewhat distracted by Robert's pining during her absence from home and their firstborn, Clara was genuinely proud of her concert successes in Copenhagen, the highlight of which was a concert in early April when she performed solos alongside one of Gade's orchestral overtures.

Gade's admiration for the Schumanns is embodied in his first two violin sonatas, which were dedicated in turn to Clara and Robert. Sonata No.1 in A Op.6 was composed during 1842, and performed in Leipzig by composer and dedicatee in December 1843. As some commentators have noted, there are tinges of Nordic mythology, with possible references to mermaids and their fraught relationship with their human admirers. The atmospheric water-imagery figurations of the first movement, the limpid violin patterns and broad melody of the second, and the minor-key resignation of the finale could well be interpreted in this manner.

Clara Schumann composed only two chamber works, the well-known Piano Trio and Three Romances for Violin and Piano Op.22, which appeared in 1853 alongside a similar set of Romances for solo piano Op.21. The dedicatees of these sets were in turn Joachim and Brahms, both of whose careers were already intertwined with the Schumann household. The impetus for Clara's pieces was Joachim's success in performing the Beethoven concerto at the Lower Rhine Festival in Düsseldorf that year, which Brahms also attended. The Schumanns had become aware of him a decade earlier, when as a child prodigy he came to Leipzig to study with the Gewandhaus concertmaster Ferdinand David. In adulthood Clara performed about 240 concerts with Joachim, her most frequent musical partner. Though he was a supreme virtuoso, the Romances were described to her publisher by Clara as 'not difficult' but she claimed 'Joachim is fond of playing [them] with me'. The piano part is highly idiomatic, with well-spaced textures, but the violin contributes strongly as an equal partner.

The professional relationship between Brahms and Joachim is immortalised in the dedication of their respective violin concertos to each other, though the latter's work is not often heard today. Their friendship suffered during Joachim's marital breakdown, which was later resolved by Brahms' composition of the Double Concerto in 1887, a product of his second consecutive summer holiday in Thun, Switzerland. The year before Brahms had also composed some of his most lyrical chamber works there, notably the Sonata for Piano and Violin in A major Op.100. At its premiere in Vienna in December 1886 by the composer and violinist Joseph Hellmesberger, the critic Hanslick stated it was as if 'following a thunderstorm that has gloriously discharged itself, we are drawn into the delicious stillness of an aromatic summer evening'. He also noted that its three movements forego the customary element of contrast, in fact the middle movement juxtaposes lyrical and scherzo-like sections. The first movement also alludes to various songs, including 'Wie Melodien' (like melodies it steals softly through my mind) composed that same summer, and also Wagner's 'Prize song' from *Die Meistersinger*.

One might have expected Joachim to be involved with the genesis of Brahms' violin sonatas, but it appears that Clara Schumann was his main mentor for the first of the series in G major, which to an even greater extent quotes his original song melodies. In December 1886 she wrote to Brahms, advising him that she expected to soon perform the newly written Op.100 with Joachim in Frankfurt, where she then lived. Joachim also played it in Berlin the following year,

when he generously agreed to be associate artist in the local debut of the young English pianist Fanny Davies, a former student of Clara Schumann.

The connection between Gade and the others in this group also continued for many years, with Clara mentioning having received a letter received from him in 1887 which took her fondly back to 'days long since gone by'. As early as 1850, Gade had benefitted from Joachim's input into his second violin sonata. Nearly twenty years later Joachim wrote to Clara Schumann that 'except for Brahms, I would be hard put to find another musician [Gade] with such a subtle musical understanding of everything that is beautiful'. In return, Gade dedicated several works to Joachim including the *Folkedanse* Op.62 for violin and piano composed near the end of his life. Brahms' creative connections with Gade are less apparent, but some writers have suggested that there were musical influences. In terms of his inclination to use modal harmonies, Brahms could well have been inspired by Nordic folk music which Gade also employed in his early works. The two had met in Hamburg in 1851, and maintained contact across several decades. Their mutual admiration of Schumann and their own personal connections with Clara would have been a strong element in their friendship, but Gade also acknowledged Brahms as 'the most talented of the younger Germans'.

Prophetically, Robert Schumann had drawn together various emerging musical trends in his final published article of 1853 (*Neue Bahnen* – New paths), when he acknowledged Joachim to be a significant 'emerging artist' of the age, Gade as a 'spry forerunner', and most notably Brahms as the 'chosen one'. The fact that his dear wife Clara maintained lifelong relationships with each of these male colleagues only serves to confirm that the close circle of musical friendships, established during their formative years, was mutually valued and the also inspiration for much creative endeavour throughout each of their long careers.

No.8 - Northern Passion, 12 May 2017

Gade - Trio in F Op.42
Brahms - Quartet in G minor

During the nineteenth century much of the focus of musical life in Germany-speaking Europe was on major centres such as Vienna and Leipzig. The title of this program alludes to the fact that while many composers were indeed associated with such places, their origins lie elsewhere. The works being performed this evening have been selected because of the proximity of time and place of their composition, in the early 1860s in the northern cities of Copenhagen and Hamburg. The composers also knew and respected each other. Niels Gade met the young Johannes Brahms in 1851, and they maintained contact with each other over several decades.

Gade was well established as Denmark's most prominent musician by the time he composed his single Piano Trio Op.42, having already proved himself abroad. In contrast his younger contemporary Brahms was still resident in his birthplace of Hamburg when he wrote the Piano Quartet Op.25, though he would soon relocate to Vienna and even use this work as his debut appearance there as both pianist and composer.

A common link that existed between Gade and Brahms was their mutual friendship with both Robert and Clara Schumann. Gade had made Clara's acquaintance on her first concert tour to Denmark in 1841, and soon thereafter he moved to Leipzig where he also became firm friends with Robert. After numerous triumphs there, including his first violin sonata which was dedicated to Clara, Gade later also inherited the mantle of Mendelssohn by succeeding him as director of the Gewandhaus concerts. However on the outbreak of war between Denmark and Prussia in 1848, Gade returned home permanently but he often made return visits to the German states.

After being welcomed into the Schumann household from 1853 onwards, by which time they were resident in Düsseldorf, Brahms maintained a close relationship with each of them and also other members of their circle. The lifelong friendship between Brahms and Clara Schumann is legendary, and numerous indications of their artistic symbiosis are found in their voluminous correspondence and many of his compositions. Another mutual friend, the great violinist Joseph Joachim, also drew an interesting parallel between tonight's featured composers in a letter to Clara: 'except for Brahms, I would be hard put to find another musician [Gade] with such a subtle musical understanding of everything that is beautiful'.

This prominent and influential group of musicians also paid each other the compliment of dedicating one or more of their works to each other. Prophetically, Robert Schumann's final published article mentions both Gade as a 'spry forerunner' and Brahms as 'the chosen one'. The sharing of this chamber music program between these two 'northerners' is therefore appropriate on many levels.

The Trio in F Op.42 by Neils Gade is considered to be the most substantial of his chamber works that include the piano. On first hearing it might appear somewhat unassuming, in the style of 'Hausmusik' that was popular at the time, and where none of the instrumentalists is expected to conquer virtuoso challenges. Composed in the customary four movements, with the light scherzo placed second and the slow movement proceeding without break into the finale, there is an emphasis on lyricism and textural clarity.

None of the movements is overblown in terms of structure or breadth of thematic writing, but at the same time there is a sense of satisfaction in having 'just enough' in the way of melodic ideas and their development. One is also hard-pressed to detect any typically 'Nordic' traits by way of folk themes or rhythms. Gade was well-schooled in the 'Leipzig style' both in composition and string playing, and being himself a violinist and pianist the writing for all instruments is idiomatic and effective in performance.

Brahms' Quartet in G minor Op.25 has distinguished origins in having been previewed and also premiered by Clara Schumann in Hamburg in 1861. One year to the day in 1862, Brahms achieved great success through this work in his Viennese debut, where he was partnered by members of the acclaimed Hellmesberger Quartet. The audience went wild over the 'Rondo alla Zingarese', and it soon appeared in print alongside its more Schubertian partner work, the Piano Quartet in A major Op.26. The idea of having a 'gypsy' finale was not knew, having been made famous by Haydn in his G major piano trio, but even the Hungarian Joachim recognised that Brahms had 'beaten him on his own turf!' The unsettled feeling of frequent 3-bar phrases is offset by the instant familiarity the regular repetitions that a Rondo form provides, while the percussive strumming evokes the world of gypsy bands with their cimbalom / dulcimer.

The expansive first movement did not meet with universal approval from Clara, who commented there was 'too much D and not enough G minor' in its exposition. Some years later the younger Viennese contemporary Arnold Schoenberg however praised Brahms' economy of 'perpetual variation' in which the large movement is derived primarily from a 1-bar idea. He would also later orchestra the complete work, as further evidence of his respect for the older composer.

In comparison, the second movement was greeted enthusiastically by Clara, who would have instantly recognised one of her favourite devices, the 'pedal point' whereby a sustained note is surrounding by changing harmonies. At the opening the cello plays middle C more than 50 times before changing pitch. There is also clear usage of the 'Clara' theme [C-B-A-G-A: 'L' and 'R' substituted respectively by B and G] which the upper strings announce, although here transposed into C minor. Since the original title of 'Scherzo' was considered by Clara to be inappropriate for the movement's moderate tempo, Brahms changed it to 'Intermezzo'. And thus was ushered in a long series of works bearing this title, mostly shorter piano solos, up to the end of career.

The third movement is also somewhat unusual in that is not extremely slow ('con moto'), but this reduction of tempo contrast between his inner movements is something which Brahms would continue to feature quite often in his instrumental works. The entrance of dotted rhythmic patterns announces a change of key from E-flat to C major, with triumphant fanfares shining through, rather like the brass outbursts in the slow movement of Beethoven's fifth symphony.

Taken as a whole, the Piano Quartet has many of the typical features of the mature Brahms. Having started his performing career as accompanist to the gypsy violinist Remenyi, he would go on to produce the world-famous Hungarian Dances, but this Quartet is probably Brahms' most carefully considered excursion into this domain. Listeners are sure to be swept up by the rhythms of the rousing finale, which offers some light relief after three very substantial movements that are all full of 'northern passion'.

No.9 - *Piano Trios by Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn*, 20 April 2018

Schumann - Trio in G minor Op.17
Hensel - Trio in D minor Op.11

For many reasons, the pairing of chamber works by two of the most distinguished female musicians of the nineteenth century is a perfectly natural combination. Firstly, both were personally and artistically connected to a major figure of German romanticism. Clara Schumann was the wife and muse of Robert whose music she constantly championed, particularly during the four decades after his early death. Fanny Hensel was the elder sister of Felix Mendelssohn with whom she shared many early musical experiences, though her later career was largely conducted in private circles. In an age when a female composer was rarely given encouragement, both Clara and Fanny had some early works published under their male counterpart's name, and conversely some of their musical ideas appeared in Robert and Felix's output.

The great majority of both composers' creative efforts were directed into smaller forms of the short piano piece or solo song, and much less often into larger genres involving orchestral forces. Both Clara and Fanny grew up in households full of music, so in addition to their individual training as pianists, they were also exposed to collaborative music-making. Performing as associate artists in ensembles was an equally familiar idiom to their solo playing, in which both excelled. It is therefore surprising that so little chamber music was produced by them, and also somewhat coincidental that the major work in this medium by both Fanny and Clara was a trio for piano, violin and cello produced during 1847.

For each family this was a period of considerable stress and tragedy, but it is perhaps unwise to read too much autobiographical content into these trios. Having enjoyed a close bond with her brother Felix while they were both resident in Leipzig up to the mid-1840s, the Schumanns visited Berlin in early 1847, during which time the friendship between Clara and Fanny deepened. However, Clara was more complimentary of Fanny's skills as pianist than as composer, even though both were highly trained and eminently capable in this field. Irrespective of such concerns, it may be more than a mere coincidence that in the months immediately following the premiere of Fanny's trio in April 1847 that Clara would complete her own work.

The genesis of Clara's Trio G Minor Op.17 occurred against a background of family grief following the death at the age of 16 months of Emil, the Schumanns' fourth child and first son. During the summer months they took a short break so Robert could gain some respite, and although she was already pregnant with their next son, the intensive work on her trio gave Clara some much-needed diversion. But while she was the dedicatee of Robert's acclaimed Piano Quintet composed in 1842, the same year he also published the Piano Quartet, he had not yet produced a trio. Robert was perhaps encouraged to do so as Clara completed the G Minor work, which was published in September 1847. Since his first piano trio was premiered that same month, the two works were often paired in concerts and so direct comparisons were inevitable. Many colleagues admired Clara's Trio, though she was rather self-deprecating, describing it rather inaccurately as 'effeminate and sentimental'.

As her only four-movement composition in sonata form, Clara's powers of invention are evident, though her Trio is not as overtly virtuosic as might be expected from one of the greatest pianists of her age. The yearning opening theme emerges gradually, rather than decisively announcing itself. The designation of the second movement as a Scherzo, but in Minuetto tempo, is a bit elusive as it is more like an intermezzo, while it has been suggested that the third movement pays homage to the 'Song without Words' genre. Throughout each movement, there is much sliding chromaticism in melodic lines and inner voices, but in the finale this aspect comes to the fore. Also, as if desiring to include there all those expected features of a major chamber work which had not yet been employed, the finale has some rather orchestral passages for the piano, and also a fugal section which provides a heightened seriousness and textural complexity.

While Clara Wieck-Schumann was destined from childhood to be a very public musician, Fanny Mendelssohn's performance opportunities were almost entirely limited to the 'Sonntagsmusiken' (Sunday musicales) that she directed as Frau Hensel in the family home in Berlin during her later years. These concerts followed the pattern of those presented by herself and Felix as child prodigies during their formative years, when a number of works were newly written in honour of a family member's birthday or other celebration. This was the case with the Trio in D Minor Op.11, composed in the summer of 1846 and first heard in a Sonntagsmusiken on 11 April 1847 for the birthday of their sister Rebecka. Although it met with great success and augured well for yet another successful season, Fanny died of a stroke just over a month later. The work was published posthumously in 1850.

By all accounts Fanny's performance skills were outstanding, even if one only considers the piano works produced in great quantity for performance in her salon concerts. In choosing D Minor as the home key, a comparison with the well-

known trio by Felix is inevitable. Each work bristles with pianistic challenges, but Fanny's writing arguably covers a greater variety of textures and orchestrally inspired keyboard idioms. The immense first movement uses tremolo effects, effusive octave doublings and rumbling bass line patterns, while the finale juxtaposes improvisatory cadenzas with sweeping melodies and scintillating bravura passages, almost in the style of Hungarian gypsy music which was then becoming fashionable. The more modest inner movements evoke moods usually explored in the Songs without words genre which Felix made his own, but which Fanny also fostered. Significantly, the third movement is even titled 'Lied' (song), and perhaps wisely this Trio eschews inclusion of a Scherzo, that other typically Mendelssohnian genre.

It is still surprisingly rare even today to hear a program of exclusively female composers, but hopefully works such as those presented tonight are becoming well established in the standard canon. Having family names in common with their better known male counterparts inevitably invites points of comparison, such as the comments provided above. But by examining these close interrelationships within this impressive circle of mid-nineteenth century musicians, it is clear that there was great mutual respect for each other's artistic identity and creative output, irrespective of questions of gender.

No.10 - *Chamber Music from Leipzig*, 3 May 2019

Herzogenberg - Trio No.2 in D minor Op.36
Quartet in E-flat Op.47

Since the arrival of the Streicher piano in Brisbane a decade ago, it has been heard annually in chamber music by composers who would have been familiar with this type of instrument. It has been a great privilege and revelation to hear various familiar works by well-known romantic era composers, whose sometimes dense textures can be heard with greater clarity that is often possible with modern pianos. In particular, returning to Schumann, after being heavily involved with his solo music as a student, has been a particular pleasure for me as the proud owner of this Streicher piano. In addition, the opportunity to (re)discover several composers whose careers intersected or ran parallel to those who are better known today, has been an additional benefit.

Since 2009, the instrument has been heard in works by Beethoven, Schubert, Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, Brahms, as well as Neils Gade, Josef Rheinberger, and even an early Brisbane composer, Percy Brier. Tonight's program continues this pattern by pairing one of the great romantic piano quartets, by Schumann, with a piano trio by Herzogenberg whose works have until recently been largely overlooked. While the two composers would not have known each other, the composition of both tonight's works in Leipzig, but nearly 40 years apart, also provides an interesting link.

Heinrich von Herzogenberg spent his early years in his native city of Graz and then from Vienna, where he studied at the Conservatoire and befriended Brahms who had relocated there in the early 1860s. The lifelong friendship with Brahms, who also admired the artistic talent of his piano student Elisabeth von Stockhausen, whom Herzogenberg soon married, has often clouded the commentary about his output. While Brahms was certainly a strong influence in Herzogenberg's early works, upon relocation to Leipzig in 1872 he found his unique voice and professional identity. When the Trio Op.36 appeared 10 years later, Herzogenberg claimed he was 'finally on solid ground' as a composer. The support of Philipp Spitta was significant in this phase, not the least because they shared a passion for JS Bach, Leipzig's most famous former resident. This Trio does not however look backwards in time, nor sideways to contemporaries such as Brahms, but it clearly shows that chamber music had found another fine exponent in Herzogenberg.

The composer was particularly proud of it, as seen in some of his perceptive if self-deprecating comments made to colleagues. When sending a copy to the dedicatee Professor Theodor Wilhelm Englemann and his pianist wife in Utrecht, Herzogenberg writes: 'If it displeases you both I am really very sad, because it is unforgivably dear to my heart. … ensemble playing is everything in this piece … unfortunately your wife will not find the piano part enjoyable; either it is just dudel-dudel-dudel, or it is really difficult, and not at all entertaining'. After a tightly constructed first movement in sonata form, the expansive slow movement in the unusual key of F sharp major is followed by a tautly demonic scherzo, culminating in a conciliatory and triumphant finale. Herzogenberg moved to Berlin in 1885, so this Trio is a culmination of his Leipzig years.

It is inevitable that any discussion of Schumann's chamber music commences with a review of the year 1843, in which his most successful works in this medium appeared. After exclusively focussing on solo piano works until his Opus 23, he moved in turn to solo song in 1840 around the time of his marriage to Clara, and then to orchestral music the year following. The so-called 'year of chamber music' in 1842 saw yet another reorientation of focus, with the appearance of three string quartets, and the two works involving piano which finally placed him on a par with his peers in this genre. Composed with a few weeks of each other in the autumn of that year, the Piano Quintet Opus 44 and the Quartet Op.47 have inevitably been linked to each other, not the least because they are both set in E flat major. However, the latter work has suffered somewhat from being created so close to its sibling. Established string quartets have tended to promote the quintet medium when combining with pianists, and indeed in Schumann's case the two instrumental forces tend to hold their own ground, with the strings forming a mini-orchestra.

In the case of the Piano Quartet, there is much interplay of parts, and opportunities to highlight different combinations, such as the viola playing themes in unison with the piano. Schumann highly valued the work, which had its public premiere at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in December 1844, when Clara collaborated with Ferdinand David (who also premiered Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto there the following year), Neils Gade playing viola, and cellist Franz Karl Wittmann. Clara had previously played it in a private recital in St Petersburg, which explains the dedication to Count Matyev Yuryevich Wielhorsky. After a broadly ranging first movement that develops a four-note motive that prefigures Sibelius' 'Finlandia', a Mendelssohnian scherzo follows, with two contrasting Trio sections that toy with norms of harmony and rhythm. The expansive slow movement melody is given to each instrument in turn, with a rather ethereal coda that sets up the main theme of the finale, which is instead rather boisterous with elements of counterpoint.

No.11 - *Mendelssohn, Brahms and the Streicher piano*, 7 May 2021

Mendelssohn - Trio No.2 in C minor Op.66
Brahms - Trio No.2 in C Op.87

Since the arrival of the Streicher piano in Brisbane just over a decade ago, it has been heard annually in solo and chamber music by composers who would have been familiar with this type of instrument. It has been a great privilege and revelation to hear various familiar works by well-known romantic era composers, whose sometimes dense textures can be heard with greater clarity that is often possible with modern pianos. Since 2009, the instrument has been heard in works by Beethoven, Schubert, Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, Brahms, as well as Neils Gade, Josef Rheinberger, Heinrich von Herzogenberg and even an early Brisbane composer, Percy Brier. This evening's program presents two 'No.2' trios by composers who had many mutual acquaintances but never met in person. Mendelssohn and Brahms were both part of the musical circle of Robert and Clara Schumann, but in different times and locations.

Stylistically, the creative outputs of the featured composers also belong to distinct generations, namely the first flush or German romanticism up to the 1840s in the case of Mendelssohn, and its later phase during the second half of the nineteenth century when Brahms was active. Despite their shared respect for the classical tradition and an ongoing loyalty to sonata forms as a structural basis, one would not normally consider Mendelssohn and Brahms to have adopted the same musical accent or dialect in their works. On closer inspection however, the trios being performed on this program exhibit a number of similarities as discussed below. Another link, if somewhat less tenuous, is that the composers' birthplaces were less than one kilometre apart in the Neustadt area of Hamburg. While Mendelssohn's career took him to Berlin, London, Leipzig and beyond, Brahms was denied the opportunity to hold a major appointment in his home city, instead settling in Vienna for the last three decades of his life.

The Mendelssohn Trio No.2 in C minor Op.66 was composed during 1845 in Frankfurt am Main, a city where his wife had family connections. It was completed by the end of April and presented to his sister Fanny later that year as a birthday gift, thus continuing the siblings' tradition of creative collaboration. In what most pianists would regard as a major understatement, the composer wrote in a letter to Fanny that the Scherzo is 'a trifle nasty to play'! The work was dedicated to Ludwig Spohr, whose works Mendelssohn had championed in his Gewandhaus concerts in the mid-1840s, but the première performance was given by the composer and two colleagues in the Leipzig orchestra, the violinist Ferdinand David and cellist Carl Wittmann. Some melodic themes within the first and second movements are reminiscent of Mendelssohn's 'Song without words' idiom, even though they are supported by scintillating piano figurations. The fourth movement in rondo form features a chorale-like section, a device which Brahms also adopted 30 years later in his C minor Piano Quartet Op.60. Interestingly, that work's finale features a theme that almost directly quotes the Mendelssohn trio's opening. Typical of many nineteenth-century minor-key works from Beethoven onwards, Mendelssohn culminates with a brilliantly triumphant flourish, in the major mode.

The Trio No.2 in C major Op.87 by Brahms is firmly placed in his mature stylistic period, while also exhibiting a number of points of connection to his forbears, including Mendelssohn. The most obvious of these is the third movement, where Brahms adopts the 'elfin Scherzo' idiom made famous by the earlier composer in several key works, commencing with his youthful *Midsummer night's dream* overture. Brahms completed this trio in the summer of 1882 at Bad Ischl near Salzburg, but was first performed the following year in Frankfurt am Main, where Mendelssohn was resident during the completion of his trio. The skill of Brahms in offering a wealth of thematic material, but without losing structural coherence, is evident in the first movement whose opening closely parallels that of the finale. On the other hand, his ability to draw seemingly endless possibilities from a single tautly-shaped theme can be seen in the variations of the second movement. Brahms only rarely reveals his sense of humour, but the fourth movement's 'giocoso' (playful) indication is a rather obvious hint, to the extent that some commentators have likened its opening melody to some well-known television cartoon theme tunes – listeners are invited to guess which ones!

No.12 – *Milestones and Miniatures of Romantic Chamber Music*, 29 May 2022

Dvořák – Bagatelles Op.47
Brier – 'Love's Reverie' and 'Serenade'
Brahms – Two Gesänge with viola Op.91 and Piano Quintet in F minor Op.34

This program celebrates both the larger and smaller forms of chamber music with repertoire composed over a 50-year period, 1864-1914. Each selection demonstrates how interconnected musical careers can give rise to works which accrue great significance, far beyond the context of their dedicatees and first performances.

The Bagatelles Op.47, composed by Dvořák in May 1878, received its première in the Prague home concerts of Josef Srb-Debrnov. Dvořák's public attention was hard-won, achieving this in his own city only at the age of 30. He also sought recognition beyond his Bohemian homeland, which finally came after winning several prizes in the Austrian State Prize for Composition during the mid-1870s. As a panel judge, Johannes Brahms empathised with his slightly younger colleague Dvořák, later giving concrete assistance by recommending him to Simrock, the Berlin publisher. This led to a commission, the first set of Slavonic Dances Op.46, which was completed within days of the Bagatelles. Both sets soon appeared under the Simrock imprint, but the publisher probably requested that the Bagatelles score indicate 'or piano'. The original domestic context, where only a harmonium was available, gave rise to some idiomatic keyboard writing. So in pursuit of 'the original', we have elected to use a harmonium today. The short pieces occasionally employ folk-like melodies and rhythms, which suit the wind-drone sound qualities of the instrument. The five short sections eschew the sonata forms which usually pervade larger chamber works. Another somewhat unusual aspect is the string scoring, for two violins and cello.

Brahms was already well-known as a published composer by his 30th birthday, in 1863. Even so, his first mature pinnacle is generally acknowledged to be the Piano Quintet Op.34, published in 1865. The scoring, for string quartet and piano, was in fact the work's third and final version. It started as a string quintet (score now lost), but as advised by two close colleagues, the violinist Joseph Joachim and pianist Clara Schumann, major changes were made progressively. An alternative two-piano version also appeared, in 1871. The emphasis on the sixth scale degree of F-minor (Db) hints at the Appassionata Sonata by Beethoven, one of the composers whose legacy loomed heavily over Brahms in his early years. Other Beethoven-like references abound, alongside the 'Slavic' tone which is evident in both the slow movement and the finale's theme, first heard in the cello. The third movement juxtaposes elemental force with taut rhythms which are relieved by a much gentler lyrical mood in the Trio section. The finale then successfully addresses the 'last movement problem' with an expansive Rondo form, preceded by a mysteriously brooding introduction. The work was first performed in June 1866, at the Leipzig Conservatory, though it had already been heard in a private concert, with Clara Schumann as pianist.

The works already discussed are clearly 'milestones', but the 'miniatures' which complete the program are no less significant. The 2 Gesänge Op.91 had a long genesis arising from Brahms' deep friendship with Joachim and his wife Amalie, an eminent contralto. The set's second song was the first to be composed, in 1863 at the time of these friends' marriage, but the final form appeared the next year, after the birth of their first child. The viola's lullaby melody 'Joseph lieber, Joseph mein', a hymn dating from the 16th century, acts as a foil for the image of rustling palm trees. The singer, in the role of Mary, asks the angels to silence the trees so the Christ-child can sleep peacefully. By 1884, when the other song was composed, the Joachims had six children but their marriage was in turmoil. Brahms sided with Amalie, whom he defended against the accusations of adultery brought by her husband. In this song Brahms expressed his advocacy for their reconciliation, which did not occur. The rift with Joachim caused Brahms deep sorrow which later gave rise to a much larger peace-offering, the Double Concerto for violin and cello. Beyond the extra-musical connections of the Op.91 songs, they also combine three of the composer's favourite instruments, whose warm middle registers collaborate most effectively.

At one of our early 'Streicher' concerts, in May 2012, we performed a violin sonata by Percy Brier who, during the early twentieth century, was one of Brisbane's busiest musicians. The newly created score and recording of the sonata were later published by Wirripang, the Australian music publisher which has also undertaken to include Brier's Serenade for viola and piano in their catalogue. Until these editions were created, Brier's chamber works had remained in manuscript, housed in the special collections of the University of Queensland's Fryer Library. A few years ago, this viola work was used as a postgraduate assessment project which has led to the score, edited by Timothy Tate, which we are using today. The work was composed in 1911 and performed in August that year by Brier as pianist with violist AH (Harry) Sleath (1868-1942). Around this time, Brier was studying the viola to inform his own string writing and he even performed publicly as a violist, alongside Sleath, in the Octet for Strings by Neils Gade. This took place in 1910, within the first concert by the newly formed Chamber Music Society, in which the acclaimed Jefferies string quartet featured prominently. Sleath was clearly well-respected by his musical colleagues, not the least for his versatility in also

playing the violin, or his fine Gaurnerius cello, in ensembles over a 40-year period up to the early 1930s. The song Love's Reverie was composed in 1914, quite possibly as a gift to Brier's fiancée, Eva Baynes, whom he married the following year. The poem was by local writer Emily Congeau, who subsequently financed the song's publication by Sapsford and Co., so it therefore also became a 'milestone' in the composer's career as the first of his works to appear in print.

Some of today's performers and audience members have special links to the first performers of the Serenade. In the 1860s Harry Sleath's father, Henry Walter Sleath, founded one of Brisbane's major music retail firms, which remained in business for over a century. Harry's son Howard Sleath was a well-known instrument maker who, in 1974, produced a set of instruments that led to the formation of the Mayne String Quartet including John Curro and Elizabeth Morgan. The music store, managed by Geoff Sleath, was a major source of instruments, including a violin acquired by Margaret Connolly during her early studies. The legacy of Percy Brier also continues across the generations through his hundreds of students, one of whom was Anne Fulton's grandmother!