

## Vadim Gluzman plays Brahms

### ONE-MINUTE NOTES

**Robert Schumann:** Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52

Musicians often refer to Robert Schumann’s Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52 as “the symphony without a slow movement.” Schumann composed it in 1841, his so-called “year of the symphony,” when he devoted virtually all his energy to orchestral scores. It is less monumental, however, than either of his first two symphonies. The melodies are alternately high-spirited and lyrical, and the music is upbeat nearly throughout. Furthermore, the scoring is comparatively light, especially for Schumann, who is sometimes chided for wielding a heavy hand when layering symphonic sound. Guest conductor Lina González-Granados and the New Jersey Symphony provide us with a rare treat in these performances of an infrequently heard work.

**Gabriela Ortiz:** *Clara*

Mexico City native Gabriela Ortiz grew up immersed in Mexican folk music, then gained international perspective studying in Paris and London. Her compositions are a melting pot that draws on elements of Latin, Afro-Cuban, and contemporary styles, as well as folk and popular music.

*Clara*, whose five sections are played without pause, fuses past and present in Ortiz’s exploration of the complex relationship between Clara and Robert Schumann. Ortiz calls them “imaginary dialogues of a poetic and musical nature.” She has written:

I have employed two fundamental musical tools: a brief rhythmic sequence that appears constantly as a Leitmotif or *idée fixe*, acting as a thread to guide me between the sections that correspond to Robert or Clara, and a melodic [oboe theme] that represents Clara’s private world. . .The central part, “My response,” seeks to bring Clara and Robert into my own world, and to explore her questioning of her own compositional talent.

### **Johannes Brahms: Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77**

Beethoven and Brahms each composed one violin concerto; both are in D major. Parallels between the two works are extensive. They share an atmosphere of dignity, self-confidence, and supreme command. Both are gentle without lacking strength; more introspective than showy and marked with each composer's individuality. In fact, Brahms modeled his concerto on Beethoven's. He was the acknowledged symphonic successor to Beethoven. It was logical for him to look to the earlier concerto when considering one of his own. The overall impression both concertos leave is symphonic rather than virtuosic, and unfailingly majestic.

Brahms composed his concerto in summer 1878, one year following his sunny Second Symphony, also in D. His friend Joseph Joachim had wanted a concerto from Brahms for a long while, and Joachim—one of the greatest violinists of the 19th century—played a significant role in the evolution of the solo part. The cadenza is also Joachim's and remains the one most frequently performed.

The principal themes of all three movements are clearly built on triads, giving the concerto a strength of motivic unity that further relates it to its Beethovenian model. Brahms' placement of his lovely slow movement in the pastoral key of F Major further underscores the generally sunny disposition of this work, so obviously reflective of a peaceful summer and comparatively happy time in the composer's life. Joachim's Hungarian roots surface in the finale, which is flavored with a tinge of Romani rhythms and harmonies.

### **Robert Schumann: Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52**

#### **Robert Schumann**

**Born:** June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony, Germany

**Died:** July 29, 1856, in Eendenich, near Bonn, Germany

**Composed:** 1841

**World Premiere:** December 6, 1841, in Leipzig, Germany.

**Duration:** 17 minutes

**Instrumentation:** two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

Robert Schumann's Overture, Scherzo and Finale is exactly contemporary with his First Symphony and the first movement of the Piano Concerto, yet it is unlike those two works or, for that matter, any other work he composed. Its mish-mosh of a title, adopted only after Schumann discarded 'Sinfonietta' and 'Suite,' tells us only that it is in three movements of contrasting character. More important is what the title reveals by virtue of omission: a slow movement. If a slow movement had been inserted before or after the Scherzo, this work would approximate a symphony. Schumann never added that fourth movement, however, and we have no

reason to believe that he ever intended to do so.

What, then, are we to make of this unique conglomerate for orchestra? Why did Schumann not simply call it a symphony? Part of the answer lies in the dominant high spirits of the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale. Schumann emphasizes charm rather than emotional weight. The Austrian musicologist and composer Hans Gál has suggested that Schumann's reverence for Beethoven may have prevented him from assigning the term "symphony" to these three movements. Gál also offers an explanation for Schumann's use of the term Overture for the slow introduction and allegro that constitute the first movement.

For him, [the title 'Overture'] was a convenient term for indicating the form of a symphonic first movement, to which Mendelssohn's overtures had always adhered, just as much as had Beethoven's.

Gál correctly points out that by 1841, the year of the "Spring" Symphony and the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, the term 'overture' did not exclusively denote an instrumental prelude to an opera or other stage work. Composers used the designation for an abstract instrumental movement. Schumann's overture opens with a plaintive slow introduction in e-minor, whose yearning theme seems to reach in anticipation of a brighter mood. He does not ask us to wait long. With the transition to the E-major allegro, Schumann introduces repeated anapests [a short-short-LONG rhythmic pattern] in a lighthearted, dancing theme. The Overture is a small-scale sonata form whose lovely musical ideas linger just long enough to make us wish to hear them again.

The Scherzo and Finale are also characterized by pronounced repeated rhythms. Contrast occurs in the lyrical themes of its central trio section, which reflect the influence of Schumann's friend and colleague Felix Mendelssohn. The trio is played twice. The Scherzo's repetitive dotted figure requires great precision from both conductor and orchestra. Mendelssohnian flavor is also present in the Finale. Using the speed and energy of the Scherzo as a springboard, Schumann adds in some fine fugal passages.

Despite a tepid reception when the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale was premiered in Leipzig in December 1841, Schumann was very proud of this work, particularly of the subtle thematic connections he had woven among the three movements. He remained convinced that it would eventually find its audience. Inexplicably, it remains little known. Considering the freshness of its musical ideas, the tight formal discipline and the relatively transparent orchestration, this piece deserves to be counted among Schumann's finest orchestral essays.

## **Gabriela Ortiz: *Clara***

### **Gabriela Ortiz**

**Born:** December 20, 1964, in Mexico City, Mexico

**Composed:** 2022

**World Premiere:** March 9, 2022, at Alice Tully Hall in NYC. Gustavo Dudamel conducted the New York Philharmonic.

**Duration:** 23 minutes

**Instrumentation:** two flutes (second doubling piccolo and alto flute), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion (gong, vibraphone, suspended cymbal, crotales, guïro, whip, claves, bass drum, xylophone, glockenspiel, crash cymbals, side drum, tom tom, cabas, woodblocks, three triangles), and strings

Mexico City native Gabriela Ortiz is an internationally educated musician, having studied at both the Paris École Normale de Musique, London’s Guildhall School of Music and University of London. She serves on the faculty of the National School of Music at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City and has also taught at Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music. She has earned a bevy of composition awards in Mexico; in this country she was both a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fulbright Fellow. She is Carnegie Hall’s composer-in-residence this season.

Ortiz grew up immersed in Mexican folk music—both her parents were folk musicians—and her compositions are a melting pot that draws on elements of Latin, Afro-Cuban, and contemporary styles as well as folk and popular music, including rock, and jazz. She composed *Clara* at the behest of New York Philharmonic Music Director Designate Gustavo Dudamel, who suggested a work based on the relationship between Clara Wieck Schumann and Robert Schumann. Her composer’s note introduces the work.

Thanks to [Gustavo Dudamel], I was able to delve into the broad legacy of both more deftly; especially that of Clara who, in addition to being a splendid composer and one of the most important pianists of the 19th century, was the editor of her husband’s complete works, as well as a teacher, mother, and wife.

*Clara* is divided into five parts that are played without interruption:

Clara

Robert

My response

Robert's subconscious

Always Clara

Except for “My response,” all of these sections comprise intimate sketches or imaginary outlines of the relationship between Clara and Robert. My original idea was to transfer onto an ephemeral canvas the internal sounds of each one without attempting to illustrate or interpret, but simply voice and create, through my ear, the expressiveness and unique strength of their complex, but also fascinating personalities.

*Clara* parts from the idea that music will grant us access to a non-linear conception of time that is more circular, where the past (them) and the present (me) can meet, converse and get to know one another. During these imaginary dialogues of a poetic and musical nature, an intimate diary began to grow in me filled with nuances, confessions, and internal contradictions that find in music their own reference,

significance, and internal coherence, expressing all that which cannot be read or explained, but rather must be heard. I like to think that throughout *Clara*, Clara Wieck Schumann is here, in this concert hall with us. In order to clearly identify these sections, I have employed two fundamental musical tools: a brief rhythmic sequence that appears constantly as a *leitmotif* or *idée fixe*, acting as a thread to guide me between the sections that correspond to Robert or Clara, and a melodic theme represented by the oboe that, in a more personal way, represents the latter's private world. At the end of the piece, this leitmotif can be heard as breathing, leaving implicit the permanence and legacy of both figures.

In the central part of the work, “My response,” I seek two objectives: first, to bring Clara and Robert into my own world, one of a rhythmic strength and color characteristic of my language, of the unique vitality born out of the entrails of the land I come from; and second, to explore a quote considered to be very controversial, in which Clara wrote: “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—there has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?”

Throughout history, women have had to overcome major obstacles marked by gender differences. We have gradually unfolded within the musical arts with great difficulty. However, as is well known, there are many of us who have rebelled against these evident forms of injustice and struggled to gain recognition and a place in society. This piece represents an acknowledgment of Clara, a tribute to her and my definitive, resounding response to her question. It also signals my gratitude to all the women who, in their time, challenged the society they were raised in by manifesting their artistic oeuvre.

Ortiz’s five sections are relatively easy to discern, even on a first hearing. The solo oboe in *Clara* makes an almost immediate appearance. Ortiz marks her tempo indication as *Deciso, espressivo* [Decisive, expressive]. “Robert” emerges as confused, agitated, and chaotic. Extensive use of tritones—the most discordant interval—provide a quiet dissonance as he retreats into himself. The texture becomes more dense as blurred threads intertwine. A stretch of rapid repeated notes leads to “Response,” the section in which Ortiz’s Latin roots surface. Intensely rhythmic, and sometimes almost battle-like, this segment builds to a frenzy. “Robert’s subconscious” marked “*Intimo, espressivo*” Clara’s presence in his subconscious recurs with the oboe solo. Blurred sonorities suggest his unmoored mental state. The transition to “Always Clara” is a tick-tock passage for wood blocks. The composer’s directive for this final section is “Lyrical with drops of water,” a mixed metaphor reflected in solos for alto flute, cello, and eventually a string quartet within the larger ensemble; and a duet for piccolo and xylophone. The coda—“Frozen Time”—is delicate, with winds producing an air sound with no pitch, and a percussion dialogue like a melodic dripping faucet that dissipates to nothingness. Past and present have found their fusion.

## **Johannes Brahms: Violin Concerto in D, Op. 77**

### **Johannes Brahms**

**Born:** May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

**Died:** April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

**Composed:** 1878

**World Premiere:** January 1, 1879, in Leipzig. Joseph Joachim was the soloist; Brahms conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

**Duration:** 38 minutes

**Instrumentation:** two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets in A, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo violin, and strings

Beethoven and Brahms each composed one violin concerto; both are in D major. The parallels between the two works are extensive. D major is a logical and frequent choice for a violin concerto because the tonality lies very favorably for the instrument. More to the point is a shared atmosphere in the two works: dignified, self-confident, supremely commanding, and fully aware of its own power. Both are gentle without lacking strength; more introspective than showy; at once marked with individuality, yet breaking from the more dramatic works each had been composing.

Brahms modeled his concerto on Beethoven's. He was the acknowledged successor to Beethoven in the realm of the symphony. It was logical for him to look to the earlier concerto when considering one of his own. The overall impression both concertos leave is symphonic rather than virtuosic, and unfailingly majestic.

Brahms composed his concerto during the summer of 1878, one year following his sunny Second Symphony, also in D. His friend Joseph Joachim had wanted a concerto from Brahms for a long while. Brahms sent the first movement solo part to him in Salzburg on August 22, 1878, with a report that the work would comprise four movements. Joachim was delighted, replying within days:

To me it's a great, genuine joy that you're writing a violin concerto (in four movements, no less!). I have immediately looked through what you sent, and here and there you'll find a note and a comment regarding changes—without a score, of course, it can't really be relished. Most of it is manageable, some of it even very original, violinistically. But whether it can all be played comfortably in a hot concert-hall I cannot say, before I've played it straight through. Any chance that one might get together for a couple of days?

They did indeed get together, and Joachim played a significant role in the evolution of the solo part. He also made substantive recommendations about the orchestration, recommending a reduction in forces or a thinning of texture in key places that allowed the violin to deliver its argument with more authority. Joachim wrote a cadenza that remains the one most frequently performed.

Brahms continued to work on the score throughout the autumn, eventually abandoning sketches for the two central movements in favor of a single adagio that he described—a bit coyly—as “feeble.” He sent Joachim the final score on December 12. Remarkably, Joachim played the premiere barely three weeks later, on New Year's Day 1879, in the Leipzig Gewandhaus. We know the size of the orchestra both from contemporary reports about the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and, more particularly, from a letter written by Heinrich von Herzogenberg specifying the number of string parts that had been copied for the first performance: enough to

accommodate ten first violins, ten seconds, six violas, six cellos and three double basses. It is a startlingly modest complement, especially given the larger orchestras that we hear in most modern performances.

The principal themes of all three movements are clearly built on triads, giving the concerto a strength of motivic unity that reminds the listener once again of the Beethovenian model. Brahms opens with a broad orchestral exposition, taking an unusual amount of time to introduce his thematic material and build up to the soloist's entrance. Dramatic and cadenza-like, the violin's opening statement is the more noteworthy for being in minor mode. Brahms' mastery is evident in the way he asserts the violin's parity with the orchestra. Throughout the powerful first movement, he reduces the ensemble to just strings, or even partial strings to highlight a judicious contribution from the woodwinds. Without compromising the integrity of the orchestra's material or the inherent drama of the music, the soloist is able to hold his own, with majesty and dignity.

Brahms' placement of his lovely slow movement in the pastoral key of F major further underscores the generally sunny disposition of this work, so obviously reflective of a peaceful summer and comparatively happy time in the composer's life. The oboe theme at the beginning of the Adagio is one of the instrument's finest moments in the Brahms canon. A wind chorus supports it, recalling lovely moments in Brahms' early Serenades, but actually building upon scoring ideas in his own subtle first-movement orchestration. One of the Adagio's strokes of genius is that Brahms has his soloist depart from the theme after only three notes, tracing its own embroidery in many different fashions. Ivor Keys calls it "variation by elongation." At the end, pizzicato triplets outlining arpeggios hint at the underpinning of the last movement.

Joachim's Austro-Hungarian roots surface in the finale, which is flavored with a tinge of Romani rhythms and harmonies. Brahms was returning a compliment from the violinist, who had written his own *Konzert in ungarischer Weise*, Op. 11 [Concerto in the Hungarian Manner] in 1861 and dedicated it to Brahms. Double stops abound in the main theme, which—like a true Viennese waltz—requires a certain amount of *élan* to deliver with just the right hesitation and plunge in its rhythm. Brahms has written earthy music, a joyous dance for the people, cleverly enclosed within a rondo structure. His coda, a brisk final statement of the main idea, switches neatly to 6/8 meter and accelerates to *poco più presto*, introducing a jocose hunting horn aspect to the concerto's final moments.

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