

Champs Hill Records is proud to be associated with the Sussex International Piano Competition, giving the winner an opportunity to make a recording. Varvara Tarasova won first prize (as well as the audience prize) at the 3rd Sussex International Piano Competition in 2015, held in Worthing, West Sussex, UK.



VARVARA TARASOVA: SCHUMANN & BRAHMS



VARVARA TARASOVA *piano*

I FOREWORD

Making a CD is a special moment for every artist, especially when it is your first disc. So it was for me. The entire recording process was a wonderful time I will never forget. Working in collaboration with a great team (special thanks to my producer Patrick Allen) in a wonderful atmosphere was inspiring and enjoyable!

As the winner of the 3rd Sussex International Piano Competition, I was honoured to record & release a CD with Champs Hill and the generous support of Mary and David Bowerman.

Since the beginning of my professional life, I always dreamed of playing the work of Brahms, but it took time until I felt I was ready. His music is deeply intense and emotionally very strong, making it difficult to perform but so interesting to listen to. It was similar with Schumann but for another reason – the bright images and wide range of characters from his *Carnaval* Op.9 grab the audience's attention and the music impresses with its perfection and variety.

The lives of these two composers were linked in a unique way and I have been always interested in the musical connection reflected in Brahms' early work, *Variations on a Theme by Schumann* Op.9.

Creating one's own interpretation is an exciting process that requires not only professional qualities but the ability to open your soul to the audience – this is the most important thing for me as an artist. I am thrilled to have an opportunity to share my vision of this beautiful music!



I TRACK LISTING

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–97)

EIGHT PIANO PIECES Op.76

1	Capriccio	03'13
2	Capriccio	03'24
3	Intermezzo	02'32
4	Intermezzo	02'06
5	Capriccio	03'06
6	Intermezzo	03'03
7	Intermezzo	03'30
8	Capriccio	03'26

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY SCHUMANN Op.9

9	Theme – Ziemlich langsam	01'09
10	Variation 1 – L'istesso tempo	01'04
11	Variation 2 – Poco più mosso	00'29
12	Variation 3 – Tempo di tema	00'55
13	Variation 4 – Poco più mosso	00'43
14	Variation 5 – Allegro capriccioso	00'56
15	Variation 6 – Allegro	00'52
16	Variation 7 – Andante	00'53
17	Variation 8 – Andante (non troppo lento)	01'27
18	Variation 9 – Schnell	00'36
19	Variation 10 – Poco Adagio	01'58
20	Variation 11 – Un poco più animato	00'38
21	Variation 12 – Allegretto, poco scherzando	00'40
22	Variation 13 – Non troppo presto	00'32
23	Variation 14 – Andante	00'59
24	Variation 15 – Poco adagio	01'50
25	Variation 16 – Adagio	01'45

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–56)

CARNAVAL Op.9

26	Préambule	02'30
27	Pierrot	02'29
28	Arlequin	01'13
29	Valse noble	02'11
30	Eusebius	01'53
31	Florestan	00'53
32	Cocquette	01'44
33	Réplique	00'53
34	Papillons	00'53
35	A.S.C.H. – S.C.H.A.: Lettres dansantes	00'54
36	Chiarina	01'49
37	Chopin	01'30
38	Estrella	00'27
39	Reconnaissance	01'45
40	Pantalon et Colombine	01'00
41	Valse allemande	00'59
42	Paganini	01'29
43	Aveu	01'10
44	Promenade	02'42
45	Pause	00'19
46	Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins	04'07

Total playing time: **75'13**

Produced & engineered by Patrick Allen
Edited by Patrick Allen
Recorded from 13th–15th June 2016 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen
Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: Joanna Wilson

The opposition between the rational and irrational, that which is thought and that which is felt, gathered force during the so-called long nineteenth century, between the French Revolution and the beginning of the First World War. As with all battles of ideas, it became more complex but no less bitter over time, fought by countless competing factions and rival sects, harnessed to the mighty forces of Romantic nationalism or pragmatic Liberalism, and directed as the century aged to matters beautiful, erotic, morbid and mystical. Robert Schumann took his place in the front line of German Romanticism, as composer, writer and polemicist, co-founder of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and art's champion against its philistine enemies.

Long before he met Schumann, and certainly before he knew much of his music, the teenage Brahms selected literary quotes from his idol to record in one of a series of notebooks. The older man's reverence for the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and fascination with his moody, music-obsessed alter ego Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler inevitably conditioned the young Brahms's attitudes to art. Brahms later marked individual movements in the manuscript of his *Variations on a Theme of Schumann* Op.9 with a 'Br' or a 'Kr' – one short for Brahms, the other for Brahms as the junior Kreisler – mirroring thereby Schumann's own alter egos, the passionate and spontaneous Florestan and the introvert Eusebius, the fictional Davidsbündler or 'League of David'.

Carnaval projects the Florestan side of Schumann's persona. The work, written between December 1834 and the beginning of the carnival season two months later, gives free rein to his passion for musical quotation and allusion, the artist's expression of delight in wearing masks and adopting carnivalesque disguises. While its inspiration was fuelled by the composer's brief romantic attachment to Ernestine von Fricken, *Carnaval* includes ideas and influences that pre-date his first meeting with the young woman from the village of Asch in Bohemia. The main waltz theme from the opening of Schumann's suite of piano pieces *Papillons* of

1831, for instance, is quoted in 'Florestan', the sixth piece in *Carnaval*, and surfaces again in the work's closing 'Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins'.

Ernestine's birthplace supplied a striking synchronicity with existing sketches by Schumann for a theme based on the notes A-S-C-H (or A, E flat, C and B in English musical nomenclature), the only musical letters in his name. These three- and four-note themes, or 'sphinxes' as Schumann styled them in the score of *Carnaval*, provide the note sequences S-C-H-A; As-C-H (or A flat, C and B); and A-S-C-H. He used the second and third combination, but not the first, to generate thematic material in all but two of the twenty-one pieces in *Carnaval*; despite the reference to S-C-H-A – the order in which the letters appear in the composer's name – in the title of 'Lettres dansantes', Schumann's musical cryptogram remains silent. 'Schumann thus casts himself as an unseen presence [in *Carnaval*];' observed the scholar John Daverio, 'a master puppeteer regulating the motions of his creations from behind the scenes.'

And what a company of characters they are, fantastic creatures thrust together by the topsyturvydom of a carnival ball. The masked guests include stock figures from the *commedia dell'arte*, 'Pierrot', 'Arlequin' and 'Pantalon et Colombine'; the dual aspects of Schumann's nature, 'Eusebius' and 'Florestan'; Ernestine von Fricken and the prodigious young pianist Clara Wieck (the future Clara Schumann) in the respective disguises of 'Estrella' and 'Chiarina'; Chopin and Paganini as 'Chopin' and 'Paganini' (composers whom Schumann admired but had not met); and members of the *Davidsbündler* spoiling for a fight with the Philistines. The 'Valse allemande' and 'Promenade' evoke the choreography of a ball, while 'Reconnaissance' and 'Aveu' no doubt concern Schumann's recognition of the masked Ernestine and his avowal of love for her. The final 'Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins' waltzes its way to victory over the enemies of romantic expression, represented by an antiquated 'Grossvater Tanz', before closing with a coda based on material from the work's opening 'Préambule'.

Fleeting moods, fragmentary themes and passing ideas belong to the world of *Carnaval*. Schumann matched the work's surface spontaneity to a complex background of structural unity and subtle musical relationships. The work's ever-changing moods, its composer noted, 'alternate too quickly for an audience to follow along without being startled at every moment'. Startling, too, is Schumann's ability to translate personal biography into music, to match sounds to the force of recollected feeling and sentiment. In 1837 he explained to the Bohemian pianist and composer Ignaz Moscheles that *Carnaval* was chiefly concerned not with a programme: the titles of the pieces and their overall organisation, Schumann confided, arose after their composition; rather, the work was about emotions and moods drawn from experience.

Although the mature Brahms was labelled as a conservative, his early works were recognised above all for their originality and creative freedom. Robert Schumann, enthralled by the experience of hearing the young composer's music for the first time, noted in his diary on 1 October 1850: 'visit from Brahms – a genius'. He restated his opinion in print a few years later in 'New Paths', a short article for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. 'Many new and significant talents have arisen; a new power in music seems to announce itself; the intimation has been proven true by many aspiring artists of the last years.... To me ... it seemed that under these circumstances a musician must inevitably appear, called to give expression to his times in ideal fashion; a musician who would reveal his mastery in a gradual evolution but one who, like Athena, would spring fully armed from the head of Zeus. And such a one has appeared.... His name is Johannes Brahms....' Schumann stressed the difference between Brahms's existing chamber works, piano pieces and songs, as if each stemmed 'from its own individual source'; he found, however, an essential unity that brought these works together 'like a rushing torrent ... into a single waterfall'.

The Schumanns, Robert and his wife Clara, provided practical as well as emotional support to the eternally self-critical Brahms, opening doors to the Leipzig music publisher Breitkopf und Härtel and creating opportunities for him to meet other 'new and significant talents', Schumann's composition pupil Albert Dietrich among them. The tragedy of Schumann's decline into madness and eventual death in an asylum affected Brahms as deeply as had their friendship. 'To me Schumann's memory is holy,' he wrote years after his mentor's death. 'The noble pure artist forever remains a model and ideal. I will hardly be privileged to love a better person.'

On 11 June 1854, a few months after Schumann jumped into the Rhine determined to end his life, Clara Schumann gave birth to the last of her eight children. Brahms marked the occasion by sending her the manuscript of his 'Little Variations on a Theme by Him Dedicated to Her'. Clara responded in a letter touched by pathos and genuine affection. 'You have given me deep joy with your tender attention,' she wrote. 'What I felt when I read your dedication I cannot say, yet you knew it already, inasmuch as you wrote it, and so accept by written thanks, the sincerest, which I hope to give you soon in person. I read through the Variations, but reading music affects my head so greatly, nowadays, that I couldn't get to know them as thoroughly as I would have wished.... Genuine Brahms they are, serious and humorous, that I know.'

The *Variations on a Theme by Schumann* Op.9, as they were titled by Breitkopf und Härtel, stand among the finest works of the composer's youth. Brahms added two variations to his original score before its publication in the autumn of 1854: 'through one of them, *Clara speaks!*', he confided to his close friend Joseph Joachim. Variation 10 quotes the 'Theme by Clara Wieck' which Schumann had included in his *Impromptus* Op.5, its use here conveying a double evocation of Clara and Robert. The variation also contains an allusion to the *Adagio* of Schumann's String Quartet Op.41 No.1. Allusions surface again in the fourteenth variation, probably influenced

by 'Chopin' from *Carnaval*, and in the evocation of the last of the composer's Op.5 Impromptus, used in Variation 16 as the translucent accompaniment to the bass line of Schumann's theme.

Schumann wrote to Brahms from the asylum in the Bonn suburb of Endenich at the end of 1854; while his letter has not survived, Brahms's reply offers a sense of its contents: 'How can I convey to you my joy over your cherished letter,' he began, before expressing deep gratitude. 'The extravagant praise which you consider my Variations to merit fills me with joyful courage.' Schumann replied soon after. 'I keep being edified by your Variations; many of them I would like to hear [played] by you and my Clara; I have not mastered them completely ...' He was particularly caught by Variation 9, which contains a clear allusion to the fifth piece of Schumann's *Bunte Blätter* Op.99. '[W]here is [the melody] from?' asked Schumann – 'from a song?'

Brahms based his Variations on the second of Schumann's five *Albumblätter*, a pensive piano miniature in F sharp minor sketched over twenty-four bars and later recycled in the *Bunte Blätter* collection. Clara used the piece for her own *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann* Op.20, created in the summer of 1853 as a birthday present for her husband. Brahms enlisted the theme as the material for his own tribute to the Schumanns. His sixteen Variations fall into two equal halves, the first set of eight brought to life within the tonic key of F sharp minor, the second expressed in keys separated by various degrees from the tonic. Variation 9, for example, arises from the subdominant B minor and its successor from the submediant D major, while Variation 15 is cast in the key of G flat major.

Conformity to a single key proves more liberating than limiting in the first eight variations, offering a strong framework for Brahms's invention. Schumann's theme migrates to the bass line of Variation 1 and makes its way through the second in heavy rhythmic disguise. The third variation catapults the theme between treble

and bass registers while its successor colours the melodic line with unexpected harmonies. Metrical manipulation marks the fifth and sixth variations, the latter prefiguring a favourite trait of later Brahms in its shifts of rhythmic accent, preparing the ground for a seventh variation in which the theme emerges as broken melodic fragments, as if half-remembered from a remote past. The song returns to mind in Variation 8, given voice in the piano's top line and mirrored in canonic imitation in the left hand by sonorous octave tremolos, reiterated like the eternally wise chatter of birds. Counterpoint rules the composition's second half, woven into the canonic imitation of the fourteenth and fifteenth variations and present in the mirror inversion of the theme's bass line in the exquisitely beautiful Variation 10.

Schumann's mastery of miniature instrumental forms, so alive in works such as *Carnaval* and the *Bunte Blätter*, set the standard to which Brahms aspired in his Eight Piano Pieces Op.76. The collection, written in 1878 and published the following year by the Berlin-based firm of Simrock, places intimacy above virtuosity, poetic expression and fleeting moods over the certainty of rigorous argument. Yet the miracle of these works resides in their blend of expressive freedom and intricate motivic development, part of a dependent relationship between content and form concerned with everything from timbre and texture to harmonic modulation and the key of individual pieces.

Michael Musgrave, among the most perceptive Brahms scholars of recent times, suggests that the variations in mood so prevalent in the Eight Piano Pieces prefigure later developments in the composer's music while echoing the spirit if not the formal techniques of his earlier piano variations. 'Variation becomes an integral part of their exploration of character and moods,' he observes. The set's four capriccios and four intermezzos, Musgrave continues, reflect aspects of the composer's character, the former rooted in his study of music's past, the latter

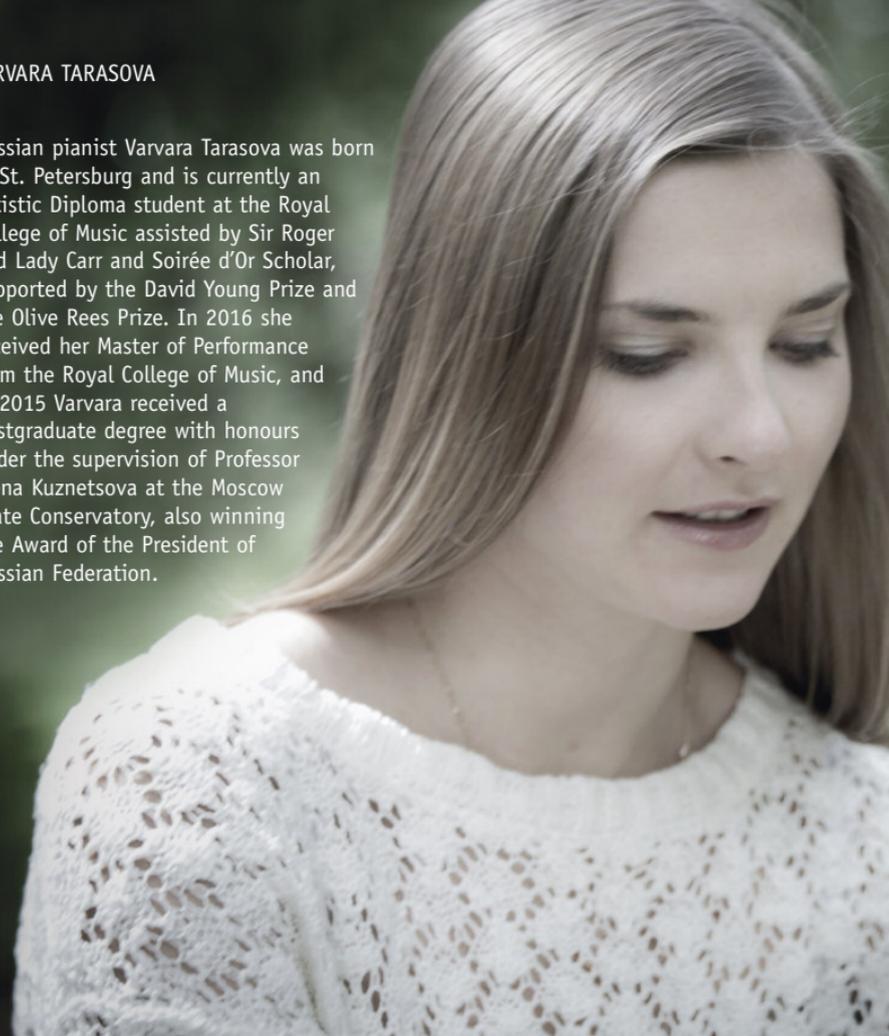
presenting introspective reflections on his present nature. There is something of the fall of rain about each piece, something steady yet ever changing. Brahms diverts myriad emotions into a stream of rich ideas, such as the lyrical melody that courses through the first capriccio or the high-spirited semiquavers of the following movement.

Close analysis reveals the network of harmonic relationships between the pieces of Op.76, opening in F sharp minor, pivoting by degree to the C sharp minor of the turbulent third capriccio, and arriving at A minor in the final intermezzo and C major in the closing capriccio. Brahms's so-called 'developing variation' technique is used here to fashion the subtlest of changes in melody and mood, whether drawing out a 'hidden' inner melody to the foreground in the second capriccio or building two melodies from one in the case of the second intermezzo. The composer's shape-shifting invention also extends to rhythm and metre, strikingly so in the third, fifth, sixth and final pieces. The first intermezzo, for example, evades the natural stresses of four beats in the bar by constantly shifting right-hand syncopations, exploring contrasts between duple and triple time, and effectively dissolving the presence of regular bar lines. After the spare textures of the final pair of intermezzos, Brahms unleashes one last outburst of joyful emotion in his closing capriccio, wayward in harmony and ecstatic in its rhythmic playfulness.

Andrew Stewart

I VARVARA TARASOVA

Russian pianist Varvara Tarasova was born in St. Petersburg and is currently an Artistic Diploma student at the Royal College of Music assisted by Sir Roger and Lady Carr and Soirée d'Or Scholar, supported by the David Young Prize and the Olive Rees Prize. In 2016 she received her Master of Performance from the Royal College of Music, and in 2015 Varvara received a postgraduate degree with honours under the supervision of Professor Elena Kuznetsova at the Moscow State Conservatory, also winning the Award of the President of Russian Federation.



In 2014, she was awarded first prize at the 21 Concorso International de Piano Rotary Club Palma Ramón Llull (Palma de Mallorca, Spain) and triumphed at the 17th Grand Prix International Piano et Recontres 'Jeunes Talents' (Montrond-les-Bains, France). In 2015 Varvara won the 3rd Sussex International Piano Competition (Worthing, UK), audience prize and best performance of the compulsory piece; she also received the Hopkinson Gold Medal at the Chappell Medal Competition (London). The following year Varvara won 'Sonderpreis Kunststation Kleinsassen', 'Sonderpreis Bridgewater Sinfonia' and 'Steingraeber and Sohne Sonderpreis' at the PIANALE International Academy and Competition (Fulda, Germany); and the 'Peppino e Elsa Orlando' prize at the 54th International Piano Competition A. Speranza (Taranto, Italy).

Varvara has performed concertos with a number of orchestras and conductors including the Kremlin Chamber Orchestra under Misha Rakhlevkiy, the St. Petersburg State Capella Symphony Orchestra with Alexander Chernushenko, the Russian Chamber Orchestra under Konstantin Orbelian and the Worthing Symphony and Northampton Symphony orchestras with John Gibbons. Varvara collaborates with the Yamaha Artistic Centre and St. Petersburg International Performing Arts Centre.

Varvara has performed in the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Portugal, as well as in the USA, Brazil and of course, Russia. She participated in the 'Torre de Canyamel' Piano Festival (Mallorca), Rheingay Music Festival (Germany), 'Creative Youth' Music Festival (Moscow) and Medtnerfest (London).

This Champs Hill recording is Varvara Tasarova's first CD release and part of her prize as the winner of the Sussex International Piano Competition in 2015.

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