

Adelina de Lara speaks of her lessons with Clara Schumann

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmX_Fm5_dtw/ / „Adelina de Lara speaks of her lessons with Clara Schumann and plays Novellette No 2“)

When I first met Clara Schumann, I was a child of thirteen years, but I had given recitals from the age of six. Fanny Davies, the famous pupil of the Schumann school to whom I owe so much, heard me play Schumann's second Novelette in D [Major, from op. 21]. She at once said I must study with Clara Schumann, and through her it was arranged later by the musical residents of Birmingham to raise a fund large enough to enable me to study firstly with Fanny Davies for a year, so that I should be ready for an audition with Madame Schumann later on, if she would grant one to me, and then to study with her. Well, this all came to pass. I played to the great teacher and she consented to take me in her class at Frankfurt. I remained with her nearly six years.

One of the strongest impressions Clara Schumann's teaching left on my mind is that of her intolerance of affectation and sentimentality. I am not referring to true expression, for no one felt music more keenly than she did. She taught us to play with true sincerity and love – to choose music with reverence, not just music which merely displayed one's technique. We were told to be truthful to the composer's meaning, to discover and emphasise every beauty in the composition, to see pictures as we played. “A real artist must have vision”, she said. If the music were to mean anything to our listeners, it must mean even more to us, and in giving pleasure to our hearers we had a great purpose to fulfill.

Apart from this, her musical outlook was one of academic correctness. Her vigilance never relaxed in matters of tone quality, rhythm, and phrasing. In short, she treated the pianoforte as an orchestra and required her pupils to consider every phrase and to express it as though it were given to a separate instrument. Schumann's keyboard music is extremely orchestral, and the pianist who concentrates on this aspect of it will most successfully achieve fullness and depth of tone, which are so particularly characteristic of the Schumann school.

As for speed, it is a terrifying thing, a menace, and much has been lost in its interest. Clara Schumann insisted over and over again that her husband's music contained no ‘passage-work’ whatsoever. “Keine Passagen!” (“No passages!”), she would cry out in despair, if one tried to rattle through any rapid figuration with mere empty virtuosity. To her, there was meaning and inspiration in everything he wrote. Particularly was this notable in her teaching of the

Schumann [Piano] Concerto and we pupils such as Fannie Davies, Ilona Eibenschütz, Leonard Borwick and myself have naturally interpreted this great work as her tradition demanded. The last movement is played so often far too quickly, thereby losing the wonderful phrasing and cross-rhythm, also the waltz motif which runs right through it.

Clara Schumann was one of the world's greatest teachers, a supreme interpreter of the classics, a noble woman and, as all know, the wife of Robert Schumann.

Transkribiert von / transcribed by Yasuhiro Nakanishi (Tokyo) und Nigel Netheim, Frühling/spring 2024