April 2025

by Rebecca Winzenried

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 105 (1851)

Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck
Allegretto
Lebhaft

Robert Schumann was beginning his second year as director of the municipal choir and orchestra in Dusseldorf when he dashed off his first Violin Sonata over a quick few days in September of 1851. His time in Dusseldorf, while much anticipated, had not been easy. Relationships with the musicians and singers were strained, there were complaints about his conducting, and there had been quarrels over programming. All of which may have been exacerbated by the mood swings of his increasing mental instability. He told a friend that the outpouring of work into his Sonata had been fueled when he was "very angry with certain people."

The results: a richly expressive, three-movement sonata that some have interpreted as encapsulating the composer's turbulent inner life. The first movement is indicated as *Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck*, "with passionate expression." It lives up to that most Romantic of billings as the violin opens with an ardent, restless theme in the lower register, presented in exchange with the piano. The movement introduces the intricate violin and piano writing throughout this work (perhaps attributable in part to Schumann's muse, his wife Clara, a celebrated concert pianist who premiered the piece with noted violinist Ferdinand David, its dedicatee).

The Sonata takes a turn in the second movement *Allegretto*, opening with a gentle melody in the violin that breaks out into a different mood with a sprightly scherzo. Schumann combines what might have been the second and third sections of a four-movement sonata into a single one that displays the contrasting, alternating elements of one's personality. He had long referred to his own dueling temperaments as Eusebius (the introspective side) and Florestan (the more impetuous character). A tempo of *Lebhaft* (lively) marks the angsty third movement. Clara Schumann remarked that in early read-throughs it was difficult to capture the brusque tone her husband intended.

Schumann's Dusseldorf period proved professionally challenging, and personally devastating as his mental health deteriorated, leading to a suicide attempt and institutionalization in 1854. However, the fall of 1851 found Schumann coping through a burst of chamber compositions, with the Piano Trio No. 3 in G minor and a Second Violin Sonata in D minor, the latter an apparent attempt to follow up with what he considered a better work than the first.

April 2025

by Rebecca Winzenried

Clara Schumann (1819–1896)
Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22 (1853)

Andante molto
Allegretto
Leidenschaftlich schnell

For better or worse, Clara Wieck Schumann's musical legacy is forever entwined with that of her husband, Robert. She had started writing music early on, performing the premiere of her own Piano Concerto at the age of 14 (led by Felix Mendelssohn), while her renown as a concert soloist grew. In the spirit of the era, though, she largely set composing aside after marriage to run the household, give birth to eight children (seven survived to adulthood), and lend unwavering support to Robert's career.

Yet, Clara was never entirely out of the music scene and connections she had made as an in-demand soloist. The family's move to Dusseldorf in 1850 provided her with a space in the home she could devote to her music, and she returned to composing. Romances, short instrumental pieces meant to suggest a mood, were a favorite form that could be performed in salon settings. They also furthered a musical dialogue between the romantically inclined Schumanns. Robert had presented his Three Romances for Oboe and Piano, Op. 94, to Clara as a Christmas gift in 1849, and she performed the first private performance in a version with violin.

Clara wrote two sets of Three Romances, Op. 21 and 22, in 1853. The second set of Romances would prove to be her last composition. She stopped writing after Robert was institutionalized in early 1854, although she would later go on to tour the work with its dedicatee, star violinist Joseph Joachim.

Three Romances, Op. 22 can be heard as a response to the emotional whirlwind Clara must have been experiencing with her husband's erratic behavior (modern scholars believe he may have had bipolar disorder). Although Robert had been buoyed by the talent he saw in 20-year-old Johannes Brahms, who had turned up on their doorstep in September seeking mentorship, and essentially never left. Of the Three Romances, the first, *Andante molto* is sweetly lyrical, tinged with a sense of longing. The *Allegretto* adopts a sense of playfulness in syncopated measures, ending on a note of hopefulness. The third, *Leidenschaftlich schnell* (passionately fast) binds the lyrical violin and arpeggiated piano in close embrace.

April 2025

by Rebecca Winzenried

Oliver Leith (b. 1990)
***Eeyore*, for Horn and Piano (2024, U.S. Premiere)**

Yes, indeed, British composer Oliver Leith's innovative new work for horn and piano takes its name from the doleful donkey of Winnie the Pooh tales. In his program note, Leith writes: "*Eeyore* is tediously, comedically, joyfully sad. So resolute in sadness that it becomes a different thing. The horn, usually a coiled heroic tube billowing gold here brays wobbled sad songs, whuffles one-note laments with tiny shimmering blemishes — emoting within a very limited band of notes. Saying as much as a donkey can. A duet between donkey and a piano. Triumphantly sad."

Eeyore was commissioned for horn player Ben Goldscheider and Camerata Pacifica by Judy Vida-Spence, in memory of her husband Stuart Spence, with additional support by the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Goldscheider and pianist Richard Uttley performed the World Premiere on November 24, 2024 at St Paul's Hall at the University of Huddersfield in the U.K. These performances, with Goldscheider and pianist Gilles Vonsattel, mark the U.S. Premiere.

The piece brings together strong voices in contemporary music. London-based Leith, whose work combines electronics, video and traditional acoustic music, has been commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Festival-Aix-en-Provence, and Tanglewood Music Festival, among others. His honors include the British Composer Award and a Royal Philharmonic Composer Prize. Goldscheider has premiered more than 50 works for horn, including concertos, solo, chamber, and cross-genre projects. Stuart Spence, the notable arts advocate and collector who died in 2021, supported the commission of new works for Camerata Pacifica.

Unfolding over 12 minutes, Leith's new work stretches the horn's boundaries in four brief movements with recognizably Eeyorian titles: *Sure is a cheerful colour, Thanks for noticing me, It's all for naught,* and *Eeyore*. Publisher Faber Music notes that it opens with a throbbing, steady tread, before the second movement sets out a braying figure using harmonics over two octaves. The third movement is "a crying foghorn," with grand, broad gestures, before a final movement that orbits sadly around a single G-sharp. "The carefully calibrated microtonal bends that are a characteristic feature of Leith's work — 'tiny shimmering blemishes' — are spotlighted throughout the work, with the horn mostly circling a limited group of pitches."

April 2025

by Rebecca Winzenried

Zoë Martlew (b. 1968)
***Nibiru* for Horn and Electronics (2024, U.S. Premiere)**

Ben Goldscheider's quest to expand the horn repertoire continues with Zoë Martlew's *Nibiru*. He performed the World Premiere on June 27, 2024 at Southbank Centre in London. Commissioned for Goldscheider and Camerata Pacifica by Judy Vida-Spence in memory of her husband, Stuart Spence, *Nibiru* has its U.S. Premiere in these performances.

Goldscheider partners in *Nibiru* with electronic sounds, to which he is no stranger. He has said, "I am personally fascinated by the speed of the technology and how, in surround sound, the eyes and the ears begin to deceive one another as the live horn playing intertwines with the electronics."

One of the few things it's possible to pin down about composer Zoë Martlew is that electronics figure regularly into her work. The U.K. native is a cellist, cabaret artist, curator, performer, educator, media commentator, and host of the podcast *The Music That Made Me*. Her music has been performed by the London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, pianist and composer Huw Watkins, and oboist Nicholas Daniel, among others, and she represented the U.K. at the 2024 International Society of Contemporary World Music Days.

Martlew has described *Nibiru* as an apocalyptic space drama for horn and electronics.

It draws on the concept of the Nibiru cataclysm, a doomsday prophecy of a collision between Earth and a large planetary object, known as Nibiru or Planet X. The scenario, which purportedly can be traced to ancient Sumerian texts about Earthly encounters with space travelers, gained followers throughout the last century; believers foresee the Nibiru cataclysm as possible early in the 21st century.

Martlew has written: "Rich fuel for sonic drama, my take on this fabulous space legend opens with nuclear armageddon, while the solo horn, harbinger of apocalypse, calls to the heavens for the salvation of humanity. Prayers for world peace (including real-life clips from the Dalai Lama, prayers in Ukrainian, Hebrew, Celtic, Sanskrit and from Aboriginal and Hopi tribes) are offered up, as the sole survivor (luckily carrying a French horn) rockets into the vast unknowns of deep space. From the depths of shifting dimensional awareness, a new Eden emerges, represented here by the last known recording of a male Kaua'i 'ō'ō bird in Hawaii, calling for a mate that never came..."

April 2025

by Rebecca Winzenried

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Horn Trio in E Flat Major, Op. 40 (1865)

Andante
Scherzo (Allegro)
Adagio mesto
Allegro con brio

Innovations in horn construction led to changes in performance and repertoire during the mid-19th century. The valve horn, which increased the instrument's chromatic possibilities, was becoming a popular choice over the natural horn, or hand horn, as Johannes Brahms called it, in which pitches were modified by placing a hand inside the bell. With his Horn Trio, Brahms added another wrinkle by swapping the instrument's rich, mellow tone for the cello line. It was a revelation. The horn was always considered too overpowering in combination with violin and piano, but Brahms proved how beautifully it could work.

At the same time, he stuck to tradition by writing the work specifically for natural horn. His father, a professional musician, had played the horn, and Brahms had learned the instrument as a child. He played horn in orchestras early in his career, and felt the natural horn produced more open tones and a fuller sound, setting a different mood.

Brahms wrote the Horn Trio during the summer of 1865, which he spent at Baden-Baden, in the Black Forest. His mother, with whom he was particularly close, had died earlier that year and the composer was still in mourning. Deep-set memories were no doubt flooding his mind, and the natural surroundings, perhaps with the sound of hunting calls, may have brought the horn to mind.

He later pointed out to a friend a particular point in the forest where the pensive theme for the first movement came to him.

The second movement breaks into a boisterous *Scherzo* with a rustic, countryside feel. It offsets the poignant *Adagio mesto* (slowly, sadly) that seems to capture the composer's deeply felt sense of loss, as an elegiac piano introduction leads into an achingly emotional theme. A nostalgic tone is struck with fragments of a German folk song Brahms heard as a child. That folk theme takes on a different mood in the last movement, a galloping *Allegro con brio*, with the horn's hunting calls leading the charge.

Brahms played the piano part for the Trio's premiere in November of 1865. For its publication the next year, he notated the work for natural horn, although it inevitably came to be performed more often on valved horn. Nodding to the popular market, Brahms also published a version for cello, violin, and piano.