

Female Composers - a music podcast with a pinch of history:

Clara Schumann (episode 6)

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MUSIC: Clara Schumann - *Soirées musicales: Toccata in A minor Op. 6 No. 1* [excerpt]

Welcome to another episode of "Female Composers – a music podcast with a pinch of history." Today, we're diving into the heart of 19th-century Romanticism. When we hear "Schumann," many of us immediately think of Robert. But the one who truly ruled the European piano scene in the 19th century, who transformed the modern instrumental recital, and influenced musical tastes across the continent for over 60 years, was Clara. Just a quick reminder that this series is made possible by a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and we're all set to embark on today's journey through time and space!

MUSIC: Clara Schumann - *4 Pièces fugitives Op. 15: Scherzo* [excerpt]

Clara Schumann, originally Clara Josephine Schumann and née Wieck, was born on September 13, 1819, in Leipzig. She came from a family where music was truly central to their lives. Her mother, Mariane Tromlitz, was a well-known singer and pianist, while her father, Friedrich Wieck, initially studied theology but dedicated himself to teaching piano. He operated his own piano factory, ran an instrument shop, and had a business for renting musical materials. Clara also had siblings - sadly, her eldest sister, Adelheid, passed away in infancy. She had an older brother, Friedrich Alwin, and younger brothers, Gustav and Victor, who also died young.

The Wieck family home in Leipzig wasn't exactly a cozy haven; it was said to be filled with tension between the parents. When Clara was just five, in January 1825, her parents went through a messy divorce. According to Saxon law back then, Clara and her siblings became their father's sole responsibility. Mariane relocated to Berlin, and Friedrich Wieck quickly recognized young Clara as the ideal student to showcase his unique piano teaching method. For a long time, Clara's interactions with her mother were mostly through letters and brief visits.

It's pretty fascinating that Clara hardly said a word until she turned four. People thought she might have a developmental delay, but once she got her hands on the keyboard, her quietness turned into an incredible skill. Historians and biographers today think her silence

might have had emotional and psychological reasons, kind of like what we see with selective mutism or neurodiversity now. The Wieck household was filled with tension, constant arguments, and she had a strict father, which likely had a big impact on her as a child. Then, around the age of five, everything changed when her dad, Friedrich Wieck, started giving her serious piano lessons. It was only when she was regularly surrounded by sounds that she began to find her voice. Researchers often point out that music was her first, natural way of communicating.

Clara's dad was really controlling and had big dreams for her, carefully organizing her daily routine. Starting on October 27, 1824, when Clara turned five, she had to take an hour-long piano lesson with him every day, plus two to three hours of intense practice afterward. Friedrich Wieck also restricted her general education to music theory, harmony, counterpoint, and instrumentation, which she learned from the best teachers in Leipzig and Dresden.

A big part of her education was keeping a diary. Her dad wrote in the first person, pretending to be Clara, and made her copy his words and business letters. This way, he not only taught her music but also how to handle her own career. The letters included things like tough negotiations with concert organizers, agreements on payment rates, choosing repertoire, and even some heated letters to publishers and music critics. From a young age, he showed her the harsh realities of the music business. It seems that until she turned 18, Clara's diary entries were basically a record of her father's words, as he aimed for complete control over every part of her life.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Romanze w a-moll, WoO 28* [excerpt]

The results of this intense training came pretty fast. Clara Wieck made her official stage debut on October 20, 1828, at the renowned Leipzig Gewandhaus, and she was just nine years old at the time. She played alongside another one of her father's students. But it was on November 8, 1830, that she had her first full solo concert there. During this recital, she showcased not only pieces by popular virtuosos of the time, like Czerny, Kalkbrenner, and Herz, but also her own work – Variations on an Original Theme (Variationen über ein Originalthema).

At just eleven years old, Clara kicked off her first big concert tour, all under the careful guidance of Friedrich Wieck. She traveled to Paris and Vienna. It was in Vienna, back in 1838, that the eighteen-year-old Clara really made waves. Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria was so taken with her performance that he granted her the distinguished title of *Königliche und Kaiserliche Kammervirtuosin* (Royal-Imperial Chamber Virtuoso). That same year, she was also honored as an honorary member of the esteemed *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Society of Friends of Music) in Vienna, which was quite an impressive achievement for a young woman at that time.

It's important to note that from a young age, Clara not only played music by others but also created her own. She wrote pieces that she could showcase in concerts, pushing back against the male-dominated field of composition. Her standout work from this time is the Piano

Concerto in A minor, Op. 7, which she began composing at the young age of thirteen in 1832. The first performance of this technically demanding piece happened on November 9, 1835, in Leipzig. The Gewandhaus Orchestra was led by none other than Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy himself. Just imagine: a sixteen-year-old girl performing her own piano concerto under the direction of one of the greatest conductors of that time. It was a definite sign – a new world-class star had arrived.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Soirées musicales: Mazurka in G minor Op. 6 No. 3* [excerpt]

Let's take a quick trip back to 1828. In Leipzig, an eighteen-year-old law student named Robert Schumann crosses paths with the respected teacher Friedrich Wieck and decides to ditch his law studies for the piano. Fast forward two years to 1830, and the young musician moves right into the Wiecks' apartment, practically becoming part of the family. Growing up there, young Clara watches the quirky guy, who's nine years older than her, with keen interest. Over time, what started as a childhood crush blossoms into something much deeper. Then, in November 1835 - when Clara is already sixteen - they share their first secret kiss, which Robert captures with heartfelt emotion in his diary.

When Friedrich Wieck finds out about his cherished student and daughter's relationship with the emotionally unstable and financially struggling Robert, he's livid. He firmly prohibits any contact between them, takes Clara to Dresden, and sets up exhausting concert tours to keep her mind off her love. But the couple doesn't give up. They carry on a secret, passionate correspondence, and on August 14, 1837, they quietly get engaged.

At this really tough time, when Klara's dad is putting her under a lot of pressure, her mom, Mariane, steps in unexpectedly and plays a crucial role. Even though she divorced Wieck years back and lost custody of Klara, she now becomes her biggest support. Mariane quickly opens her Berlin home to the stressed-out Klara, giving her a safe place to land. Her mom's house turns into not just a shelter from her overbearing father but also the only spot where the lovers can finally meet openly and without any worries.

Since her father was still completely against giving his consent, which kept the couple from legally tying the knot before Clara turned 21 (the age of maturity under Saxon law), the lovers chose to take a bold step. In 1839, they decided to sue Friedrich Wieck, asking for his father's consent to be legally overridden. The whole process stretched on for many long, exhausting months. Wieck harshly attacks Robert's character, claiming he's an alcoholic and financially unstable. Throughout this legal struggle, Clara Wieck's mother once again supports the young couple, officially giving her consent for their marriage. This is seen by the court as clear proof that Wieck's opposition is driven by spite rather than genuine concern. In the end, the court throws out her father's accusations. The day before she turns twenty-one, on September 12, 1840, in a church in Schönefeld, near Leipzig, Clara Wieck finally becomes Clara Schumann.

The court's decision, however, did nothing to calm Friedrich Wieck's anger and desire for revenge. He took the loss as a personal affront, and even after the verdict was delivered, he

did everything in his power to make the newlyweds' lives a nightmare. In a jealous rage, he refused to give his daughter her own piano, an instrument she had played since she was a child – he only returned it when another court order forced his hand. Robert Schumann struck back by filing a separate defamation lawsuit against his father-in-law for previous false claims of alcoholism. Robert's win was solidified by a ruling that required Wieck to pay significant damages and sentenced him to eighteen days in jail for his outrageous behavior in the courtroom. Cut off from controlling his most gifted protégé, Friedrich shifted his twisted ambitions to Clara's younger half-sister, Marie, determined to show the world that he could produce the next great pianist without the help of his ungrateful daughter Clara.

The hatchet was finally buried just three years later, in 1843. With Schumann's fame on the rise and the joy of his first grandchildren's arrival, Wieck set aside his pride and wrote to his son-in-law suggesting that "for the sake of Clara and the world" they should stop keeping their distance. While Clara welcomed her father's gesture with great relief, Robert kept a significant distance from his father-in-law for the rest of his life, and the bond between father and daughter was never completely restored.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - 4 Pièces fugitives op. 15: Scherzo [excerpt]*

At first, their marriage looks perfect, but soon enough, reality hits hard. They move to Leipzig, settling at Inselstraße 18, in a classic house that dates back to 1838. There, they maintain an intriguing shared document – the "Ehetagebuch" (Marriage Diary), where they take turns sharing their thoughts, joys, and conflicts.

Logistical issues pop up pretty quickly. Robert needs complete silence to create his masterpieces, like the Spring Symphony. Clara, on the flip side, has to practice for hours every day to keep her spot as Europe's top pianist and make a living. She often put her husband's needs first, which took a toll on her own creative pursuits. In just 13 years of marriage, Clara had eight kids: Marie (1841), Elise (1843), Julie (1845), Emil (1846 – who sadly passed away as a baby), Ludwig (1848), Ferdinand (1849), Eugenie (1851), and Felix (1854).

Because Robert's mental health was getting worse, the family decided to find a new place to live. They relocated to Dresden and then, in 1850, to Düsseldorf, where Robert became the city music director. In August 1852, they settled into a tenement at Bilker Straße 15. Unfortunately, the living situation was tough – the street noise and the cramped rooms made it really hard for Clara to practice without bothering her husband, and she nearly stopped composing altogether.

Clara steps up as the main provider for the family. When Robert falls into a deep depression, experiences auditory hallucinations, and can no longer conduct the orchestra, she takes on the responsibility of keeping the household running. Even though they traveled to Russia together in 1844, in the following years, Clara organizes more demanding tours to make ends meet. The situation reaches a breaking point on February 27, 1854, when Robert, during a psychotic episode, tries to take his own life by jumping into the Rhine. At his own request, he is admitted to an asylum in Endenich, near Bonn, where he passes away on July 29, 1856.

Clara is left to care for their seven surviving children, but with her determination and remarkable success, including concerts in England in 1856, she manages to pull the family through the financial struggles.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Soirées musicales: Mazurka in G minor Op. 6 No. 3* [excerpt]

Clara Schumann's life was closely linked to the stories of some of the most significant artists of the 19th century. Her circle of social and artistic connections is truly impressive. As a teenager in Weimar, she had the chance to meet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, after hearing her play, gifted her a medal with his image and a personal dedication. Violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini held her in high regard, and from an early age, she was captivated by and promoted the remarkable works of Franz Schubert. During her travels, she had the opportunity to meet Fryderyk Chopin in person. Clara became one of the leading champions of the Polish composer's music in Germany – at just twelve years old, she performed his incredibly challenging Variations on "Là ci darem la mano," Op. 2.

Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz often visited their home on Inselstraße in Leipzig. But the key person in this group was definitely Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, a close family friend who backed Clara's composing dreams and led many of her concerts.

You can't really discuss Clara's life without mentioning two key relationships that shaped her later years. The first one was with Johannes Brahms. He showed up at the Schumanns' home in Düsseldorf in September 1853, just a twenty-year-old composer from Hamburg who was still pretty much unknown. He captivated both Robert and Clara with his incredible talent. When Robert ended up in a mental hospital, Brahms became Clara's support system. He helped take care of the kids and pitched in with the household expenses. Their bond, filled with passion and mutual respect, lasted until Clara passed away in 1896, even though they never chose to marry. Another significant friend in her life was the remarkable violinist Joseph Joachim. For many years, Clara and Joachim made a legendary chamber music duo, traveling all over Europe and delivering top-notch performances to their audiences.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Soirées musicales: Toccata in A minor Op. 6 No. 1* [excerpt]

When Robert Schumann passed away in an asylum in 1856, the world didn't pause for 37-year-old Clara. She found herself alone with a big family, needing to support seven growing kids. But instead of giving in, Clara dove into her work and became a true pioneer of European music. For the next forty years, she traveled all over the continent, performing concerts from London to St. Petersburg, and became one of the most significant and celebrated pianists of the 19th century. She showed Europe how to appreciate the music of Chopin, Brahms, and – most importantly – her late husband, whose legacy she edited and published with almost a sacred dedication. Even though life wasn't gentle to her as she endured the loss of her four adult children and eventually lost her hearing – she remained strong until the very end. She taught at the Frankfurt Conservatory, inspired countless generations, and stayed the closest friend of Johannes Brahms. Her remarkable stage career wrapped up in March 1891 with her final public concert. Five years later, an entire era came to a close. Clara Schumann passed

away on May 20, 1896, at the age of 76, after suffering a stroke. She left this world not just as the widow of a great composer, but as an absolute icon who, through her own work and talent, shaped the essence of Romanticism.

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Romanze w a-moll, WoO 28* [excerpt]

THE MUSIC CORNER

Clara Schumann (née Wieck) created her early piano pieces in the 1830s, a time when her international virtuoso career was really taking off, alongside the ups and downs of her relationship with Robert Schumann. The collection *Soirées musicales*, Op. 6, which came out in 1836 and is dedicated to her friend, pianist Henriette Voigt, perfectly captures the 19th-century brilliant style. These works blend challenging technical requirements with deep lyricism, showcasing the young artist's strong admiration for Frédéric Chopin's music. The Toccata in A minor (Op. 6 No. 1) is particularly striking with its driving, rich texture and bold tempo, demanding a lot from the performer in terms of staccato articulation and note repetition.

The Mazurka in G minor (Op. 6 No. 3) really pays homage to Chopin's national style, blending a sad, reflective vibe with a unique, fragmented dance rhythm and striking harmonics. This piece also formed the core theme for the opening movement of Robert Schumann's well-known cycle, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6 (David's Union Dances).

MUSIC: *Clara Schumann - Soirées musicales: Toccata in A minor Op. 6 No. 1*

Clara Schumann - Soirées musicales: Mazourka in G minor Op. 6 No. 3

1. Biographies and Scholarly Monographs (Books)

- **Contemporary Scholarly Biography:** One of the most acclaimed and comprehensive studies of her private and artistic life is *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* by Nancy B. Reich, available on [Google Books](#).
- **Historical Editions and Diaries:** A classic two-volume 1913 study based on diaries and letters —*Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters* compiled by Berthold Litzmann—can be browsed on [Google Books](#).
- **Daughter's Memoirs:** An intimate insight into the domestic and artistic life of the Schumann family is offered in *The Schumanns and Johannes Brahms: The Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann*, made available by [Google Books](#).

2. Official Institutional Archives and Manuscripts

- **Main Archive in Zwickau:** The largest collection of memorabilia, autographs, and a complete collection of the pianist's concert programs can be found in the resources of the [Robert-Schumann-Haus Zwickau](#).

- **Düsseldorf Collection:** Over 870 letters and handwritten dedications by Clara Schumann are preserved by the institute described on the [Heinrich-Heine-Institute Düsseldorf](#) profile.
- **US National Resources:** Digital scans of manuscripts (including autographs of the Songs Op. 23 or cadenzas for Mozart's concertos) are available in the catalog of the [Library of Congress](#).

3. Scholarly Articles, Press, and Period Essays

- **Online Biographical Essays:** An extensive database of open-access texts and essays analyzing her historical image is published by the official [Schumann Portal](#).
- **Scholarly Journal:** International reviews of books, recordings, and critical texts are gathered on the digital platform [Schumann Journal](#).
- **Social Position Analysis:** An academic paper analyzing her struggles as a woman, mother, and artist in the 19th century can be read via [Illinois Wesleyan University \(Digital Commons\)](#).

4. Sheet Music and Public Domain

- **Collection of Original Compositions:** All surviving works, including her *Piano Concerto Op. 7* or *Piano Trio Op. 17*, are hosted in the library of [IMSLP \(International Music Score Library Project\)](#).
- **Transcriptions of Her Husband's Works:** A 120+ page collection of Robert Schumann's songs arranged by Clara for solo piano can be downloaded directly from [IMSLP - 30 Mélodies de Robert Schumann](#).

5. Radio Broadcasts and Historical Podcasts

- **British Broadcasts:** A comprehensive look at the artist's relationships with other creators of the era can be found in the multi-part program [BBC Radio 3 - Composer of the Week](#).
- **German Audio Documentaries:** A radio documentary series exploring the relevance of her work for the modern world was produced by [rbb \(Alles Clara\)](#).

6. Databases of Works and Repertoire

- **Complete Complete List of Works:** A complete, digitized index of compositions divided into works with opus numbers and lost works is available on the official [Werkverzeichnis von Clara Schumann](#).
- **English Version of the Works Database:** For researchers using English, a similar catalog is structured on the [Schumann Portal - Catalogue of works](#) subpage.

7. Biographical Content on YouTube

- Video materials, lecture recordings, and visual mini-biographies are constantly aggregated and recommended by the dedicated external repository [Clara Schumann Channel](#). Direct video content can be searched on YouTube using the phrase "*Clara Schumann biography documentary*".