

# **CLARA**

**Music: Victoria Bond**  
**Libretto: Barbara Zinn Krieger**

## **Synopsis**

### **ACT ONE**

#### **PROLOGUE**

Clara Schumann, dressed in mourning for Robert and at the height of her fame, is alone in a spotlight. The music underscores a series of voices from her past.

#### **SCENE ONE**

##### **The music room in the Wieck home**

Clara, twelve years old, practices one of her own compositions which she will debut at the Gewandhaus. Friedrich Wieck, Clara's father, corrects her playing. Although he is relentless in his hectoring, he muses to himself about his "miracle child."

#### **SCENE TWO**

##### **The Gewandhaus stage, the evening of Clara's debut**

At the conclusion of Clara's performance the audience congratulates the new *Wunderkind*. Clara and Robert Schumann, who has just become Wieck's pupil, share their feelings about music. Clara speaks with her mother, Wieck's ex-wife Marianne, their inner thoughts revealing an intense longing to be together.

#### **SCENE THREE**

##### **The Wieck Home**

Clara is practicing and Robert sneaks up playfully, and teases her, saying that she is too serious. He plays his composition *Papillons* for her, and when she begs to play it herself, Robert insists she try to imagine the scene the composition suggests before attempting to play it. After struggling, she does so successfully, and he gives her the music of *Papillons* to play. Wieck enters and listening to Clara play the new composition, is intrigued, but insists that she and Robert return to their technical exercises.

#### **SCENE FOUR**

##### **The Wieck home, the evening of Clara's eighteenth birthday**

Clara's friendship with Robert has blossomed into a romance. She sings of her love for him and when he enters, they pledge their love for each other. Robert has written a letter to Wieck, asking for permission to marry. He is apprehensive, but Clara tries to reassure him. Wieck enters, furious. He forbids Robert to see or speak with Clara without his permission. Robert hands him the letter. Wieck sneers as he reads it, rips it up and then calmly tells Clara they are going on a tour where she will play in the musical capitals of Europe. Clara protests. Wieck threatens to wash his hands of her unless she agrees. He orders Robert to leave. Clara begs her father to let her say goodbye. Robert is bitter. After Wieck exits he talks of suicide, frightening Clara. She assures him she will find a way to write, and that they will be together someday. Wieck returns and chases Robert out. Alone, Clara is torn between love for her father and love for Robert. She sings "Two Loves," the aria which won the 2013 Miriam Gideon prize.

## **ACT TWO**

### **SCENE ONE**

#### **The Schumann home**

Robert and Clara have been married one year and Wieck and his second wife Clementine arrive for a visit. All are tense. Wieck brags about his new protégé, his daughter by Clementine. Clara is stung. Robert springs to her defense by offering to accompany her on her next concert tour, but after the Wiecks leave, he confesses that he lied only to placate her father.

### **SCENE TWO**

#### **A rehearsal room, eleven years later**

Robert conducts a chorus in rehearsal with Clara accompanying. He hears a high-pitched sound and stops. The chorus complains that he is not competent to be their conductor. Clara is outraged and chases them out.

### **SCENE THREE**

#### **The Schumann home one year later**

Robert and Clara argue over her concertizing. They exit. Johannes Brahms rings the bell and Robert answers, asking him to play one of his compositions. Robert interrupts him to call Clara into the room and together they rhapsodize over the young genius.

### **SCENE FOUR**

#### **The Schumann home, six months later**

Brahms and Clara are playing a four-hand duet by Robert. Although the music is calm on the surface, underneath each one voices turbulent inner thoughts, questioning whether they are more than friends. Robert enters and seeing them together is comforted by their friendship, convinced that they are both devoted only to him.

### **SCENE FIVE**

#### **The Schumann home**

Robert hears voices and Clara, distraught, exits to get a doctor, leaving Robert in the care of daughter Marie. Robert evades Marie, and leaves. Clara returns, frantic when she discovers Robert gone. There is a commotion outside and townspeople bring a dripping wet Robert home. They explain he has attempted suicide by trying to drown in the river. Robert sees them as devils, taunting him and telling him to kill Clara. Terrified, he begs to be sent to an asylum. Clara implores him not to leave her, but heartbroken, finally agrees.

### **SCENE SIX**

Clara writes to Brahms asking him to visit Robert, as the doctor has forbidden her to see him. After he returns Clara presses him for news of Robert. At first he is reluctant, but finally he reveals that Robert will never leave the asylum. Clara refuses to listen and believes Robert will return.

### **EPILOGUE**

Clara plays one of Robert's compositions. The voices from her past sing as the curtain falls.