

The NAXOS logo is a blue square with the word "NAXOS" in white, serif, all-caps font. Above the text are three stylized white columns.

SCHUMANN

**Piano Quintet • Piano Quartet
Märchenerzählungen**

The background of the cover is a scenic landscape photograph. It shows a valley with a lake, surrounded by dense green forests and rolling hills. In the foreground, a large, ornate castle with multiple towers and turrets is perched on a hillside. The sky is a soft, hazy yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

**Fine Arts Quartet
Xiayin Wang, Piano**

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44 • Piano Quartet in E flat major, Op. 47 Märchenerzählungen, Op. 132

Central to Schumann's music is the reflection of his so-called split personality, that is, the free and happy Florestan side and the restrained and pensive Eusebius side of his character. How much this reflects his own mental illness resulting in his attempted suicide in 1854 by a leap into the icy Rhine and his death two years later in a mental institution, we shall leave to the psychiatrists. What we need to study is the glorious result of his compositional efforts despite, probably not because of, his sufferings. Of course, we might note that Schumann was subject to the well-known conflict of two artists in a marriage, this time somewhat in reverse of Gustav and Alma Mahler or Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. On a tour of Russia with his more famous wife, Clara, he was asked whether "he, too, was a musician".

Schumann was preoccupied with chamber music between 1841 and 1843. This period, following his marriage to Clara Wieck in September 1840, was marked by the extremes of happiness and pain that beset Schumann all his life. He was aware of being in Clara's shadow but suffered much from any separation from her as she pursued her active career. When she returned from a month-long trip to Copenhagen in April 1841, he set to work on three string quartets followed in the fall by the *Piano Quartet*, the *Andante and Variations* for two pianos, two cellos and horn, the *Piano Trio in A minor*, and the wonderful *Piano Quintet*.

The direct route Schumann's music takes to our hearts is no better demonstrated than in his *Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44*, composed in September 1842 in just five days. It was dedicated to Clara Schumann, who was the pianist in the first reading of the work at the Schumann home. For a private performance the following December, no less than Felix Mendelssohn filled in for an ailing Clara.

The work seems amazingly free from the effects of the mental illness that plagued Schumann. The first movement bears his familiar imprint with its bold, heroic opening followed by a lovely song. The cello and viola hold sway in the second theme while the piano takes centre stage with virtuosic runs in the development section. All join forces for the thrilling recapitulation. The second movement is, as the

tempo marking indicates, "in the manner of a march". In this case, we have a kind of universal funeral march not intended as a tribute to an individual but one for humanity itself and its frailties. A lyrical section intervenes and lifts the mood before a return to the solemn march. A forceful and faster section follows which, in turn, becomes lyrical before it, too, returns to the spirit of the opening march. A simple, unadorned moment concludes this movement that seems to be almost a war between the happy and the sad – a true reflection of Schumann's own personal battle between his warring personalities. The third movement *Scherzo* is a thorough exploration of scale patterns underscored by interesting and irregular rhythmic patterns. Two trio sections interrupt the scales, the second one a brilliant revision suggested by Mendelssohn when he played the piano part. In the last movement Schumann returns to the heroic vigour and song-like quality of the first movement but adds to that an astounding three-voiced fugue. Of special note in this movement is Schumann's honouring of Classical form despite his attempt to free music from those confines in the name of Romanticism. Having no real precedent, the work was a pioneer for the great quintets of Brahms, Franck, and Dvořák.

The brief but riveting *Sostenuto assai* that opens the Schumann's *Piano Quartet in E flat major, Op. 47*, quickly gives way to the powerful and expressive *Allegro ma non troppo* that dominates the first movement with its recurring themes and pulsing rhythm maintained by the piano. We have a momentary return to the *Sostenuto* before the themes are restated and developed in a livelier *Allegro* section which, after a sustained moment, leads to the thrilling *Più agitato* that concludes the movement. The staccatos of the second movement *Scherzo* are interrupted twice by more sustained trio sections before the movement wisps into thin air. Then we are taken into the heaven of the *Andante cantabile* with its moving lyricism for each instrument in turn. The opening cello song is unforgettable, but the violin, viola, and piano all have their moments. The wonderful *Finale* seems to combine the power of the first movement with the lyricism of the third

movement and the liveliness of the *Scherzo*. The masterful writing of the *Piano Quartet* is some of Schumann's best. The work was completed in October 1842 and concluded Schumann's creative burst of chamber music. It was written for Court Matvei, an obviously accomplished amateur cellist, but given its première by professional musicians in Leipzig on 8th December, 1844. The pianist was Clara Schumann.

In his fascinating essay included in *Schumann and His World* (Princeton University Press), conductor and scholar Leon Botstein states: "Like Flaubert's Emma Bovary or Stendahl's Julien Sorel, Schumann led his life in imitation of what he read in books." Botstein ties Schumann closely to the German Romantic writer Jean Paul (born Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, 1763-1825) whose philosophy of life and artistic creation seems to match Schumann's. With Schumann he also shared a troubled spirit although that did not take the toll on him that it did on Schumann. Interestingly, Jean Paul wrote the preface to E.T. Hoffman's *Fantasy Pieces*, a collection of stories sharing the same title as Schumann's *Op. 12* and *Op. 88*, works that point to his later *Op. 132 Märchenerzählungen* (Fairy Tales) musically if not programmatically. It should be noted, however, that there are no specific stories associated with *Märchenerzählungen*. Botstein also suggests a relationship between *Märchenerzählungen* and the German painter Rethel, who, like Schumann, suffered from manic depression despite his inspiring work.

Members of the Fine Arts Quartet perform Schumann's optional version of *Märchenerzählungen* which replaces the clarinet with the violin. The work was composed in October 1853, some ten years after his concentrated period of chamber music and dangerously close to his suicide attempt in 1854, although that grim detail of Schumann's life is not evident in the warm and even happy spirit of the work. The first movement, for example, with its light-hearted arpeggios from the piano and its general graciousness, suggests an untroubled soul. Here we also have the statement of a "kernel" theme which works its way through the entire piece, a technique that Brahms would develop to its fullest. The happy spirit continues in the decisive and spirited second movement with its octave leaps for all three instruments and emphatic statements by the piano. A lyrical turn and dotted rhythms suggest something more but hardly the heart of darkness. The third movement, much in contrast to the second, offers the lyrical singing style we so often associate with Schumann. Both violin and viola have lovely solo moments while the piano remains steady with a rocking motion. The final movement returns to the spirit of the second movement but with a different take. The energetic and definitive opening statement changes to a lighter mood in the development but returns to its original strength for the conclusion.

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Fine Arts Quartet

The Fine Arts Quartet is one of the most distinguished ensembles in chamber music today, with an illustrious history of performing success and an extensive recording legacy. Founded in Chicago in 1946, and based at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee since 1963, the Quartet is one of the elite few to have recorded and toured internationally for over half a century. Three of the Quartet's artists (Evans, Boico, Laufer), performed together for nearly thirty years. Each season the Quartet tours worldwide, with concerts in such musical centres as New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Moscow, Tokyo, Beijing, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Mexico City, and Toronto. The Quartet has recorded over 200 works, over eighty of them with Evans, Boico, and Laufer. The latest releases include the world première recording of Efreim Zimbalist's Quartet in its 1959 revised edition, the world première digital recording of Eugène Ysaÿe's long-lost masterpiece, *Harmonies du Soir*; Fritz Kreisler's Quartet, Saint-Saëns Quartets, Beethoven Quintets, Franck Quartet/Quintet, Fauré Quintets, Bruckner chamber music, Schumann Quartets, Mendelssohn Quintets, the complete early Beethoven Quartets, Mozart Quintets and Dohnányi Quartets/Quintets, American quartets by Antheil, Herrmann, Glass, and Evans, and chamber music by Glazunov. For more information: www.fineartsquartet.org

Xiayin Wang

An artist with a winning combination of superb musicianship and riveting technical brilliance, pianist Xiayin Wang conquers the hearts of audiences wherever she appears, as recitalist, chamber musician, and orchestral soloist in such venues as New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Winning high praise from the American press, she has also toured with the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra in St Petersburg itself, as well as in the United States in Houston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Washington D.C. and New York. Xiayin Wang has seven recordings to her credit, including a highly lauded CD of Richard Danielpour's *The Enchanted Garden: Preludes Books I and II* recorded for Naxos (8.559669). Her recording of the piano music of Earl Wild on Chandos received the highest critical praise. A Steinway Artist, she is represented by Thea Dispeker, Inc. Please visit: www.xiayinwangpiano.com Photo by Dario Acosta



The Fine Arts Quartet From left to right:
Ralph Evans, Efim Boico, Wolfgang Laufer, Nicolò Eugelmi
Photo courtesy of the Amalfi Music Festival



Between 1841 and 1843 Schumann wrote some of his greatest chamber works, among them the *Piano Quartet* and the *Piano Quintet*, both in E flat major. Written in an astonishing five-day period, the *Quintet* displays both the heroic and the lyric impulses in his music, boldness contrasting with songful tenderness, and march themes with lyricism. The *Piano Quartet* also exudes such qualities, not least in the ravishing slow movement, and the masterful breadth of Schumann's expression. The four *Märchenerzählungen* are happy, energetic pieces.

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44 30:54		Märchenerzählungen (Fairy Tale Narrations) for Violin, Viola and Piano, Op. 132 15:58	
1 I. Allegro brillante	9:12	9 I. Lebhaft, nicht zu schnell	3:12
2 II. In modo d'una Marcia – un poco largamente – agitato	8:56	10 II. Lebhaft and sehr markirt	3:39
3 III. Scherzo: Molto vivace	4:55	11 III. Ruhiges Tempo, mit zarten Ausdruck	4:22
4 IV. Allegro ma non troppo	7:49	12 IV. Lebhaft, sehr markirt – Etwas ruhigeres Tempo – Erstes Tempo	4:38
Piano Quartet in E flat major, Op. 47 28:27			
5 I. Sostenuato assai – Allegro ma non troppo	9:22		
6 II. Scherzo: Molto vivace	3:27		
7 III. Andante cantabile	7:22		
8 IV. Finale: Vivace	8:16		



Fine Arts Quartet
Ralph Evans, Violin I¹⁻⁸ • Efim Boico, Violin II^{1-4, 9-12}
Nicolò Eugelmi, Viola • Wolfgang Laufer, Cello
Xiayin Wang, Piano



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