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CONCERT
SEASON

STEVEN OSBORNE

PIANO

Sunday, March 23

Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechart



This concert sponsored by Sandy Bellamy, PREC and Strait Coffee

Steven Osborne OBE is one of Britain's most treasured musicians with an immense depth of musicality and exceptional refinement of expression across diverse repertoire. His numerous awards include The Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year, two *BBC Music Magazine* Awards and two *Gramophone* Awards.

Described by *The Observer* as "always a player in absolute service to the composer", Steven Osborne's 33 recordings on Hyperion have won multiple awards. Osborne has performed at many of the world's prestigious venues including the Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Kennedy Center Washington and is a regular guest at both Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall. Concerto performances take Steven Osborne to major orchestras all over the world.

Steven Osborne won first prize at the Clara Haskil Competition (1991) and the Naumburg International Competition (1997). Born in Scotland, he studied at St. Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Patron of the Lammermuir Festival and in 2014 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to music in the 2022 Queen's New Year Honours.



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The Program

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born Zwickau, June 8, 1810; died in Endenich, July 29, 1856

Arabesque in C major, Op. 18

During much of 1838, Schumann endured a forcible separation from his fiancée Clara Wieck, whose father strongly opposed their union on the grounds of Schumann's poverty. In addition, he was making no progress in trying to interest publishers in Vienna in taking up his cause either as a composer or as editor of his music journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. The period caused him no end of anxiety, which at times bordered on depression. Nevertheless, Schumann produced a wealth of piano music that year, including the *Kinderszenen*.

The *Arabesque* was completed in January of 1839. Eric Frederick Jensen, in his monograph on the composer, claims that it is "precisely the kind of composition that Schumann would never have composed if he had not been concerned about his income." The composer himself wrote that the *Arabesque* was "feeble and intended for ladies," a comment that has failed to prevent hundreds of male pianists from programming it or generations of concert goers from enjoying it.

In the world of fine arts, the word arabesque refers to sinuous, spiraling lines or linear motifs.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (near Paris), August 22, 1862; died in Paris, March 25, 1918

Children's Corner

The Snow is Dancing

Jimbo's Lullaby

The Little Shepherd

Serenade for the Doll

Between 1906 and 1908 Debussy wrote a series of six little piano pieces (we hear four this afternoon) for his five-year-old daughter Claude-Emma ("Chouchou"), prefacing the score (published in 1908) with the dedication, "To my dear little Chouchou, with her father's affectionate apologies for what follows." The use of English titles, for both the collection and the individual pieces, is usually explained as a bow towards Chouchou's English governess. Harold Bauer gave the first public performance of Children's Corner in Paris on December 18, 1908. Shortly thereafter, Debussy's friend and fellow composer André Caplet orchestrated the suite and introduced it in New York in 1910. Debussy conducted it in Paris the following year.

This is not music for a child as much as it is about a child. Each of the miniatures portrays some aspect of Chouchou's little world with touching simplicity and endearing charm. "Snow is Dancing" is a realistic and exquisite vignette of a child quietly studying the feathery world of snowflakes outside her window. "Jimbo's Lullaby" portrays Chouchou singing to her beloved stuffed elephant Jimbo, who needs to be coaxed to sleep with stories and gentle songs. The awkward gait of the animal and the exotic land of its origin are suggested by the music, which never rises above the level of piano. "The Little Shepherd" offers a tender pastoral scene from a child's perspective, probably inspired by a cardboard cutout or drawing. "Serenade for the Doll" evokes another of Chouchou's favorite playthings. Although the music is more whimsical than romantic, strumming effects as from a banjo or guitar allude to the character of the title.

DEBUSSY

Two Arabesques

Debussy's *Two Arabesques* are among his earliest published piano pieces, composed in 1888. The title comes from the world of decorative art—delicately patterned, interlacing tracery adorning picture frames, rooms, objets d'art and the like. In Debussy's *Two Arabesques*, you'll hear ornamental patterns repeated, transformed and intertwined. Both *Arabesques* are unpretentious, charming little pieces.

SCHUMANN

Kinderszenen, Op. 15 (Scenes from Childhood)

Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples)

Kuriose Geschichte (A Curious Story)

Hasche-Mann (Blind Man's Buff)

Bittendes Kind (Pleading Child)

Glückes genug (Perfect Happiness)

Wichtige Begebenheit (An Important Event)

Träumerei (Dreaming)

Am Kamin (By the Fireside)

Ritter vom Steckenpferd (Knight of the Hobby-Horse)

Fast zu ernst (Almost Too Serious)

Furchtenmachen (Frightening)

Kind im Einschlummern (Child Falling Asleep)

Der Dichter spricht (The Poet Speaks)

The Program

The 13 intimate piano pieces that make up Schumann's *Kinderszenen* were written in 1838 and quickly became some of the composer's most popular music. "Träumerei" has become one of the icons of western culture. Like Debussy's *Children's Corner*, while this is not music expressly for children, it is about children.

Schumann was particularly drawn to the whole world of childhood in all its freshness, innocence and simplicity. Each vignette captures to perfection some aspect of recollected childhood: rapt absorption in thought, a soaring imagination, a moment of fear, desire to be someone or someplace else, unadulterated joy or a confusing dream. Eventually the child drifts off into slumberland. The final word goes to a "poet," whom we may well imagine to be the composer himself. Schumann wrote to a friend that "in my compositions I myself have become brighter, softer and more melodious. You will already have noticed this in my *Kinderszenen*."

INTERMISSION

Steven Osborne will offer commentary on the second half of the programme from the stage:

Marion Bauer

From the New Hampshire Woods Op.12 No.1 White Birches

Meredith Monk

Railroad (Travel Song)

Frederic Rzewski

"Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" from Four North American Ballads for Piano

Steven Osborne

Improvisation

Keith Jarrett (trans. Osborne)

My Song

Bill Evans (trans. Osborne)

I Loves You Porgy

Oscar Peterson (trans. Osborne)

Indiana

Programme notes: Robert Markow

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