

STEREO

MCS 2160

LUDWIG

OLSHANSKY

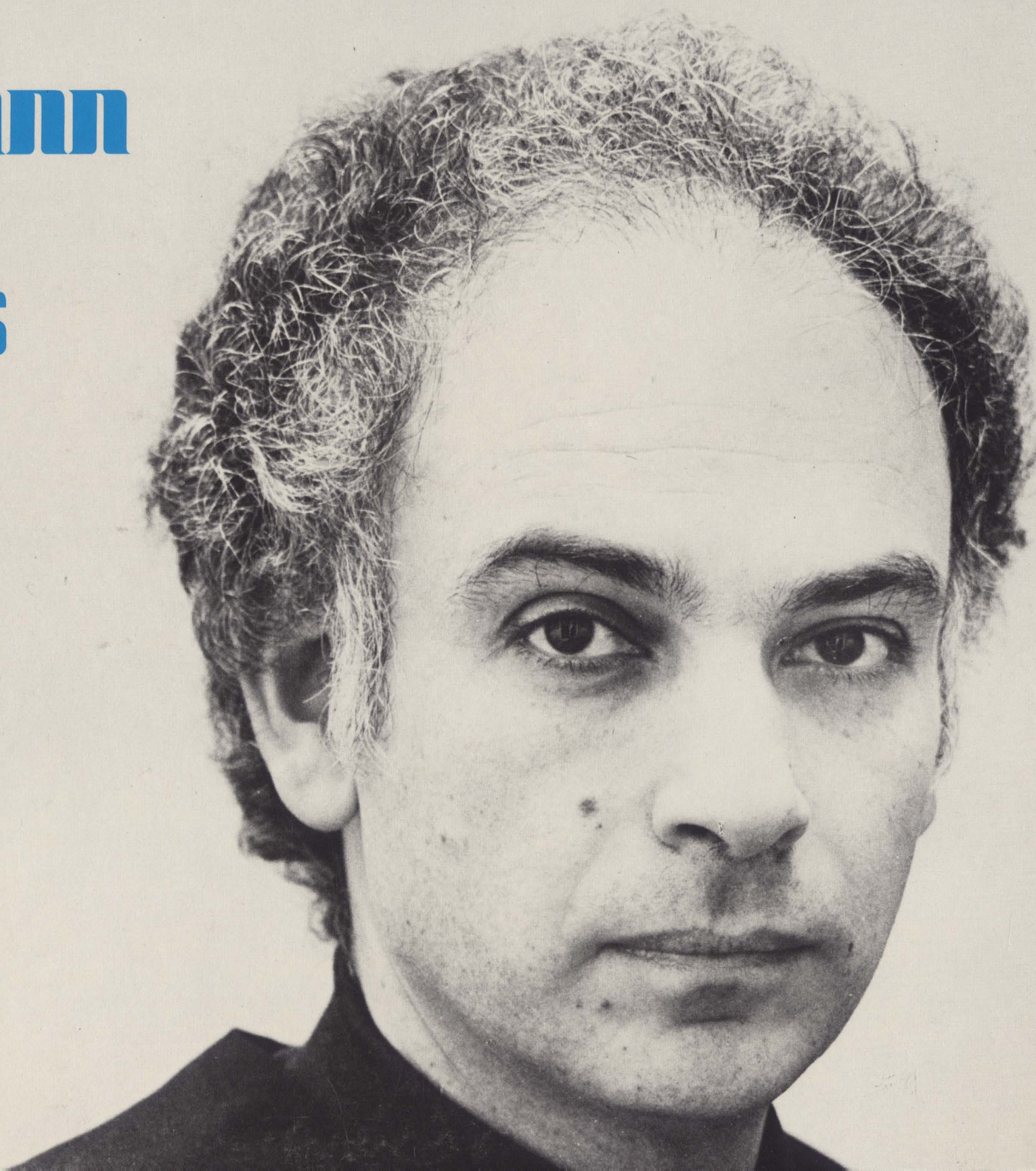
PIANO

Schumann

KREISLERIANA, Op. 16

Brahms

3 INTERMEZZI
from Op. 119



Side One

SCHUMANN

Kreisleriana, Op. 16 (beginning) (25:32)

1. Ausserst bewegt
2. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch
3. Sehr aufgeregt
4. Sehr langsam
5. Sehr lebhaft

ROBERT SCHUMANN: KREISLERIANA, Op. 16

More than any other composer of his times, Schumann's works bear the distinct mark of his most intimate personal history. Coming late to the field of music, after having been sent to Heidelberg to study law, he was for many years under the pressure of having to prove himself, economically and artistically, not only to his family but to the musical circles in which he travelled. This pressure, particularly as it unfolded in his pursuit of Clara Wieck, whose father demanded that he show proof of earning over 2000 thaler a year, took its toll on his pride and played no small part in the tragedy of his early mental breakdown and death. It was only at the age of twenty, after making an Easter journey to hear Paganini, that he had made the final decision to risk everything for music. To convince his mother he wrote: "My whole life has been a twenty years' war between poetry and prose, or, let us say, music and law . . . Now I stand at the parting of the roads. If I follow my own bent, it points, as I believe, correctly, to music. We always called it an uncertain future and a precarious livelihood." The man to whom his mother appealed for advice was Friedrich Wieck, a well-known piano teacher of Leipzig with whom Schumann wished to study. "All rests on your decision," she wrote to Wieck, "the whole happiness for life of a young inexperienced man who lives but in a higher sphere and will have nothing to do with practical life."

Wieck agreed to take Schumann on as a pupil and lodged him in his house, but those last words of the mother's letter were to haunt both teacher and student for years to come when, at age twenty-five, Schumann fell in love with Wieck's beautiful and gifted sixteen year-old daughter, Clara. The war between father and lover, ultimately to end in a courtroom drama, was fought not only externally, but internally in the fragile nature of Schumann who felt strongly that both his manhood and his genius were under attack. From 1836, when he first began courting Clara, up to the date of their marriage in 1840, he underwent a series of emotional upheavals which brought him at times to the very edge of collapse. Clara herself often provoked these crises as she vacillated between loyalty to her father (a piano prodigy, under his guidance she had been playing in public since age nine) and her love for Schumann. The compositions he composed during this turbulent period come close to being a diary recording his interior landscape as events took him from the height of ecstasy to the depths of despair in a constantly repeated pattern. Prone easily to melancholy and self-doubt, when Clara in 1837 wavers in her promise to marry him, Schumann writes, "My head is on fire and my eyes are heavy with grief over you." When she regains her courage in March, 1838 and pledges to defy her father if necessary in order to join him in Vienna, a blissful Schumann replies, "Your letter raised me from one joy to another . . . Oh, Clara, there is so much music in me now. Just think, I have finished another whole volume of new things. *Kreisleriana*, I shall call it; you and

Ludwig OLSHANSKY

plays

SCHUMANN

Kreisleriana, Op. 16

BRAHMS

3 Intermezzi, Op. 119

the thought of you play the chief part, and I will dedicate it to you."

Written in four days, this set of eight pieces for piano, whose title was inspired by Kappellmeister Kreisler in E.T.A. Hoffman's book *Fantasiestücke in Callot's manier*, (Kreisler, a lovable, romantic personality, "liked to wear an E major cravat with a C minor waistcoat"), was eventually, when published, to be dedicated to Chopin. But like most of Schumann's music, it is Clara Wieck who is at the heart of it. In *Kreisleriana*, as in the passionately beautiful and poignant *Fantasia in C* (Opus 17) he sends out secret messages to his beloved, simultaneously revealing a personality at once profound and childlike, melancholy and joyous, passionate and calm. The various sections veer between these alternating sides of Schumann's dual nature. In this as in other compositions, he strove for classical form, but true to the age in which he lived, used his own musical language to achieve the heights of romanticism.

JOHANNES BRAHMS: INTERMEZZI, Op. 119, Nos. 1, 2, 3

While Schumann came from a middle class family, Brahms (1833-97) was born in a crowded slum district of Hamburg. His preparation for a musical career began earlier than Schumann's, however. By the time he was twenty he had already established himself as a remarkable talent at piano, had studied composition and had begun seriously to compose. Schumann on meeting him in 1853 at once saw his genius, and with that same largeness of spirit in which he had championed so many other talents, wrote in his magazine *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, "He has come, a young man over whose cradle Graces and Heroes stood watch. His name is Johannes Brahms." The now famous article was an eventful moment for Brahms, launching him overnight into fame. It was significant for other reasons as well: to the end of his life he became intimately tied to the Schumann family, befriending and helping Clara and her children throughout her husband's hospitalization and death in 1856, and remaining Clara's most intimate friend until her own death in 1896. It was Schumann who had persuaded Breitkopf and Härtel to publish Brahms' works, many of which he dedicated to Clara and which she introduced to the public in concert.

The works Brahms composed for piano fall into three groups: the first, early works, consist of the sonatas and sets of variations, including the Paganini, or "Studies" as Brahms titled them. There then followed a gap of twelve years before he wrote for piano again. In this second period came *Klavierstücke*, Op. 76 and the two Rhapsodies of Op. 79. In the last period, coming again after a lapse of twelve years, Brahms wrote some of the most extraordinary pieces in all of his piano music. These are short works entitled *Intermezzo* or *Capriccio* in which the art of musical economy is almost unsurpassed. Among them is Op. 119, composed in 1893

Side Two

Kreisleriana, Op. 16 (conclusion) (10:53)

6. Sehr langsam
7. Sehr rasch
8. Schnell und spielend

BRAHMS

1. *Intermezzo* (Adagio), Op. 119 No. 1 (4:01)
2. *Intermezzo* (Andantino un poco agitato), Op. 119 No. 2 (4:11)
3. *Intermezzo* (Grazioso e giocoso), Op. 119 No. 3 (1:47)

when Brahms was 60 years old. It consists of three *Intermezzi* and a Rhapsody (only the *Intermezzi* are performed on this record). Of *Intermezzo* No. 1, the *adagio* in B minor, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann, "The little piece is unwontedly melancholy . . . every bar and every note must sound as if played *retardando*, as though one were trying to draw melancholy out of every single one, as though one were luxuriating and enjoying the dissonances . . ." *Intermezzo* No. 2 (E minor) reveals the influence on Brahms of his Austrian summers at Ischl where he met and became friends with Johann Strauss. A devotee of the Strauss waltz, Brahms here pays homage, introducing in the middle section a break from the earlier agitated rhythm in order to glide in E major into an enchanting Viennese waltz. The *Intermezzo* in C major displays a lighthearted mood in which Brahms allots the melody to the middle voice. It contains remarkable subtlety, both rhythmic and harmonic. As a whole these pieces return to the exuberant power of Brahms' early sonatas but are now combined with all those depths of invention and color characteristic of his later years.

Notes by Arthur White

"Olshansky's Schumann is romantic piano playing at its best, and Monitor has given him an excellent recording, with almost eerily noiseless surfaces!"

Martin Mayer in *Esquire Magazine*

"Olshansky's *Fantasia* (Schumann) is a beauty. His performance is one of nobility and total commitment."

S.L. in *High Fidelity Magazine*

"Ludwig Olshansky is an elegant and poetic Chopin player . . . He does beautiful things with the Ballades . . ."

R.F. in *Stereo Review*

OLSHANSKY ON MONITOR RECORDS

SCHUMANN *Fantasia* in C Major, Op. 17

BRAHMS Sonata No. 1 in F Sharp Minor, Op. 2 .. MCS 2127

BRAHMS Piano Music: *Fantasias*, Op. 116; *Intermezzi*, Op. 117; Rhapsody in B Minor, Op. 79 No. 1 MCS 2152

CHOPIN 4 Ballades; Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 17 No. 4; Nocturne in C Sharp Minor, Op. 27 No. 1 MCS 2157

(Also on cassette: 55003)

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