Sunday, March 9, 2025, 3pm
Hertz Hall

# Benjamin Beilman, *violin*
# Steven Osborne, *piano*

**PROGRAM**

Clara SCHUMANN (1819–1896) — Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22 (1853)
- Andante molto
- Allegretto
- Leidenschaftlich schnell

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) — Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 78, *Regensonate* (1878–1879)
- Vivace, ma non troppo
- Adagio
- Allegro molto moderato

*INTERMISSION*

Lili BOULANGER (1893-1918) — Two Pieces for Violin and Piano (1911–1914)
- Nocturne. Assez lent
- Cortège. Pas vite

César FRANCK (1822–1890) — Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano (1886)
- Allegretto ben moderato
- Allegro
- *Recitativo–Fantasia.* Ben moderato – Molto lento
- Allegretto poco mosso

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**Above**: Benjamin Beilman. Photo by Sophie Zhai.
**Below**: Steven Osborne. Photo by Ben Ealovega.

**Clara Schumann**
**Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22**

Until recently, any mention of a composition in the context of the Schumanns would almost automatically be attributed to Robert Schumann (1810–1856), overshadowing the contributions of his wife Clara Josephine Wieck Schumann (1819-1896). Thankfully, with the entrenched erasure of women composers from the canon now being actively challenged, Clara Schumann's remarkable legacy has started to receive long overdue recognition.

Not that Clara née Wieck lacked celebrity of her own during her lifetime. In fact, the acclaim she earned as a virtuoso pianist often outshone that accorded her husband's work as a composer. She even dazzled her contemporaries with her compositional skill and imagination. For example, she wrote and performed her Piano Concerto in A minor while she was still a teenager, presenting it a good decade before she gave the world premiere of Robert's Piano Concerto, which happens to be in the same key (A minor).

Robert even inscribed Clara's presence into his sole keyboard concerto and other works by "spelling" out her name or quoting musical references that held special significance for the couple. Her own concerto even provided a model for aspects of his A minor Concerto.

Yet Clara herself internalized and reflected the conventional biases her era held against woman as composers: "I once believed I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea," she confided in a statement that bears painful historical witness to the situation. "A woman must not desire to compose—there never was one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?" Compounding the cultural barriers Clara experienced as a woman composer were the demands of heading a large family following Robert's tragic early death.

Combined with her own perfectionist tendencies, these challenges contributed to her decision to published only a small body of works: 23 compositions with separate opus numbers, beginning with her Op. 1 set of four polonaises for solo piano (which she began at the age of 11). Clara ceased composing entirely after Robert's death in 1856—she was only 37 at the time—and dedicated herself instead to safeguarding his memory as well as to performance. Beyond her Piano Concerto, which has gained renewed prominence of late, Clara Schumann's catalogue consists primarily of pieces for solo piano, chamber music, and lieder.

The Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22, were completed in 1853, just a year before Clara's life took a tragic turn. In 1854, Robert attempted suicide by jumping into the Rhine River and subsequently committed himself to an asylum, where he would remain until his death two years later. The Romances are the second-to-last compositions Clara published and the only ones she wrote for the pairing of violin and piano. The violin part was composed for Joseph Joachim, the distinguished violinist and close friend of both Clara and Johannes Brahms. Clara often toured with Joachim, performing these pieces together.

Clara had completed the Three Romances during the summer of 1853, before Brahms' unexpected entrance into their lives. Each of the three pieces is distinct in color and mood. The first is a lyrical reverie, delicately weaving in a reference to one of Robert Schumann's violin sonatas. The second is more playful and animated, while the Third—the longest and most passionately energetic of the set—showcases Clara's gift for crafting lush, expressive melodies and at the same time balancing the voices of the two instruments.

**Johannes Brahms**
**Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 78,**
***Regensonate***

In September 1853, the year of Clara's Three Romances, a 20-year-old unknown named Johannes Brahms arrived at the Schumann household with a letter of introduction from Joachim. Both Clara and Robert were immediately struck by his extraordinary talent and invited him to stay. Brahms became a lifelong friend of the family, benefiting from Robert's mentorship and Clara's invaluable advice on his compositions—a generally overlooked contribution that, too often, is eclipsed by speculation about their possible romantic connection (requited or not). During the devastating period of Robert's decline and death, Brahms offered Clara crucial emotional support as she managed the care of her children and her demanding career as a concert pianist.

Like Clara, Brahms was a relentless perfectionist—a tendency that impelled him to suppress much of his early creative output, thus accounting, at least in part, for his reputation as a "late bloomer." Brahms famously spent decades refining his First Symphony, continuing to revise it even after its 1876 premiere. It is no surprise, then, that he waited until 1879, at the age of 46, to officially present the first of his three sonatas for piano and violin. True to form, he destroyed numerous earlier attempts, as he often did with what he considered his "juvenilia."

The Sonata in G major, Op. 78, known as the *Regensonate* ("Rain Sonata"), incorporates allusions to two of Brahms' lieder from his Op. 59 set of 1873: "Regenlied" ("Rain Song") and "Nachklang" ("Lingering Echo"), settings of poems by his friend Klaus Groth. These songs reflect a Proustian evocation of childhood memories triggered by the sound of falling rain. Brahms composed the sonata during 1878 and 1879 at his idyllic retreat near the Wörthersee in southern Austria, where he had recently completed his Violin Concerto and Second Symphony.

This sonata is remarkable for its poignant blend of melancholy and lyricism. Its third movement rondo draws directly on the "Regenlied" melody, prompting Clara Schumann—by then in her 70s—to write to Brahms: "You can imagine my rapture when in the third [movement] I once more found my passionately loved melody … I say 'my' because I do not feel anyone feels the rapture and sadness of it as I do."

The Romantic practice of embedding song melodies into instrumental works, often with an implied subtext, was inspired by composers like Schubert and Robert Schumann. Brahms carries this tradition further in Op. 78 by weaving elements of the "Regenlied" throughout the sonata. The long-short-long rhythm that introduces the song serves as a unifying motto, permeating the entire piece like the steady fall of rain. Likewise notable is Brahms' attention to the interchange between the piano's sonority and the gentle flow of the violin's cantabile. At the recapitulation in the first movement, he reverses the roles presented at the outset, with the violin's pizzicato notes now taking the place of the piano's tolling chords—an enchanting transformation.

Biographer Jan Swafford points out that while the harmonic language is "conventional and unambiguous," Brahms is astonishingly innovative with regard to "rhythmic freedom," continually recalibrating the metrical flow into subtly altered relations of twos against threes and vice versa.

The Adagio, in E-flat major, offers a warm yet somber lyricism. The motto rhythm subtly suggests a funeral march in one episode, foreshadowing its return at key moments in the final movement, which shifts to G minor. Only in the coda does the sonata resolve to its home key of G major. As musicologist Lawrence Wallach observes: "The motto is passed back and forth between the instruments in overlapping statements, as if they were calling their farewells to each other across an increasing distance."

Sophie Zhai

**Lili Boulanger**
**Two Pieces for Violin and Piano**

Clara Schumann was still alive when Lili Boulanger entered the world: a poignant historical overlap linking widely differing generations of women who nevertheless shared the challenges of confronting a male-dominated musical landscape. Clara, who passed away in 1896, broke barriers as a virtuoso pianist and composer, while Lili, the first woman to win First Prize at the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1913, carried that legacy forward with her uniquely imaginative and affecting music.

Marie-Juliette Olga Boulanger, who became known as Lili, was only 19 when she garnered the coveted honor in 1913. She impressed the jury with her cantata *Faust et Hélène*, a remarkably sensitive and compelling work completed in just four weeks, as required by the competition's rules. Lily had been born into a highly musical family. Her Russian aristocrat mother first met Ernest Boulanger, a cellist, composer (known for his comic operas), and conductor, when he was on tour conducting an opera in Russia. He later became a professor of singing at the Paris Conservatoire and taught his wife voice. Already 77 at the time of Lili's birth, Ernest Boulanger was himself a laureate of the Prix de Rome, having won it in 1835 for his cantata *Achille*.

Lili began sitting in on classes at the Conservatoire as a child, accompanying her sister Nadia (five years her senior). When she was allowed to officially become a

pupil, she studied with Paul Vidal and Gabrielle Fauré, who directed the Conservatoire at the time. She also contended early on with chronic illness exacerbated by bronchial pneumonia as a child. As a result, Lili did not have long to enjoy her Prix de Rome victory: she died in 1918, only 24 years old—months before the end of the First World War, which had torn apart the culture into which she had been born.

Nadia Boulanger, by contrast, who was also unusually gifted, lived until 1979, when she was 92. Over the course of her many decades, Nadia became a pioneering female conductor and one of the most formative teachers in music history, mentoring generations of composers (many of them Americans in Paris), from Aaron Copland and Philip Glass to the late Quincy Jones. She was additionally a staunch advocate of Lili's legacy.

*Deux morceaux* ("Two Pieces") is the collective title given to two separate compositions: "Nocturne" from 1911 (first sketched in 1908) and "Cortège" from 1914, which are alternately performed by flute or violin and piano. The F major "Nocturne," which may remind some listeners of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, makes innovative use of a lingering drone and bold harmonies to establish atmosphere. Despite obvious influences from Fauré and Debussy, Boulanger was already evolving a voice of her own at this early age.

"What makes her own voice," according to the composer and music scholar Bruce Adolphe, is that "she is willing to do slightly stranger things than her teachers were doing at that time … walking a dangerous chromatic path." The funereal implications of its title notwithstanding, the joyfully syncopated "Cortège" in E major conveys an attitude notably different from the mysterious melancholy often associated with Lili Boulanger's music. It was dedicated to the violinist Yvonne Astruc, a family friend.

**César Franck**
**Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano**

Although César Franck was a child prodigy, he might also be seen as an encouragement to late bloomers. It was not until he was well into his fifties that Franck started producing the masterpieces for which he is remembered: in particular, his contributions to the genres of the symphony, string quartet, piano quintet, and violin sonata—one of each. The Violin Sonata in A major dates from 1886, when Franck was 63 years old.

Born in 1822 in Liège (eight years before modern Belgium was established), Franck became a French citizen when he was a teenager. His father pressured him to prepare for a virtuoso piano career by enrolling at the Paris Conservatoire. The young musician was, frankly, too introspective and modest to be comfortable in that role. He found his niche by taking on various organ posts and, eventually, was named organist at Sainte-Clotilde in Paris, where he could build on his reputation as an improviser and composer of organ and sacred music.

Franck's appointment as organ professor at the Conservatoire in 1872 signaled a new phase of intense creativity. In the wake of the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, a desire to promote an authentic French style in instrumental music intensified. Franck's synthesis of Romantic language with Classical forms made a profound mark on a new generation of French composers.

The Violin Sonata, like the earlier Piano Quintet, bursts with passions that were a bit hard to square with the sober, pious figure that Franck's reputation as an organist had encouraged. Rumors were spread that the Quintet secretly encoded the composer's infatuation with one of his pupils, the highly colorful Irish firebrand and fellow composer Augusta Holmès, which generated scandal (and furnished the backdrop for Ronald Harwood's historical novel from 1978, *Cesar and Augusta*).

Franck presented the Violin Sonata as a wedding gift to the so-called "king of the violin," Eugène Ysaÿe (who had also been born in Liège) and his wife. Ysaÿe and the pianist Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène hastily rehearsed the new score so that they could play it for the gathered wedding guests in the fall of 1886; but the official public premiere took place at an afternoon concert in December at the Musée Moderne de Peinture in Brussels.

One of Franck's most devoted followers, Vincent d'Indy, later described the dramatic circumstances of the first public performance. It was almost canceled because no artificial illumination was allowed in the museum, and visibility was quickly reduced as daylight diminished: "The two artists, plunged into gloom…performed the last three movements from memory, with a fire and a passion the more astounding to the audience in that there was an absence of all externals which could enhance the performance. Music, wondrous and alone, held sovereign sway in the darkness of night."

Franck casts the work in four movements, but these are interlinked as two pairs forming a slow–fast pattern. The fantasia-like third movement, for example, has a preludial function with respect to the faster final movement, distantly echoing the older church sonata form of the Baroque era. Yet alongside any archaizing tendencies, Franck devises a tightly integrated narrative based on the cyclical reappearance and transformation of thematic material across the entire work.

The violin plays the sonata's germinal idea in the opening, barcarolle-like movement, which features subtle dialogue with the piano. White-hot passion bursts forth in the chromatically heaving Allegro. Franck, whose keyboard style reflects his unusually large hands, places extravagant demands on the pianist in this movement in particular.

The "Recitativo-Fantasia," as Franck styles the third movement, introduces a striking phrase on the violin, full of yearning, that is a possible candidate for the famous "little phrase" Proust describes as haunting the protagonist of *Swann's Way* when he hears a fictive sonata by Vinteuil.

The Allegretto poco mosso fourth movement begins as a rondo on a theme decorously presented in canonical exchanges between the instruments. But this music, too, grows impassioned as Franck recalls earlier ideas—including the "little phrase"—and culminates in an exuberant affirmation by the musical partners as they conclude the work—and Franck's wedding gift.

—*Thomas May*

*Thomas May is a writer, critic, educator, and translator. Along with essays regularly commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, the Juilliard School, the Ojai Festival, and other leading institutions, he contributes to the* New York Times *and Musical America and blogs about the arts at www.memeteria.com.*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Benjamin Beilman** is one of the leading violinists of his generation. He has won international praise for his passionate performances and a deep rich tone that the *New York Times* has described as "muscular with a glint of violence," and the *Strad* called "pure poetry." *Le Monde* has described him as "a prodigious artist, who combines the gift of utmost sound perfection and a deep, delicate, intense, simmering sensitivity."

Beilman's 2024–25 season includes his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic and Kirill Petrenko on tour in the US, as well as return engagements with the Chicago Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, and Antwerp Symphony. He also makes his debut with the

Belgian National Orchestra in a performance of Stravinsky's concerto, and with the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony performing Korngold.

Last season included Beilman's subscription debut with the Chicago Symphony with Semyon Bychkov, and six weeks of performances in Europe, including concerts with the SWR Symphonieorchester Stuttgart alongside Elim Chan, a return to the Kölner Philharmonie with the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken, and appearances at the Grafenegg Festival, Festpielhaus St. Pölten, and at the Musikverein in Vienna with the Tonkünstler Orchester and Tabita Berglund. He also returned to play-direct the London Chamber Orchestra, and reunited with Ryan Bancroft for his debut with BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Meanwhile, performances in the US included his debut with the St. Louis Symphony under Cristian Măcelaru, as well as returns to the Minnesota Orchestra with Elim Chan.

In past seasons, Beilman has performed with major orchestras worldwide including the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Trondheim Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, Taipei Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Zurich Tonhalle, Sydney Symphony, and Houston Symphony. He has also toured Australia extensively in recital with Musica Aviva, and in 2022 became one of the youngest artists to be appointed to the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music.

In recent seasons Beilman's commitment to and passion for contemporary music has led to new works written for him by Frederic Rzewski (commissioned by Music Accord), and Gabriella Smith (commissioned by the Schubert Club in St. Paul and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music). He has also given multiple performances of Jennifer Higdon's violin concerto, and recorded Thomas Larcher's concerto with Hannu Lintu and the Tonkünstler Orchester, as well as premiered Chris Rogerson's Violin Concerto (*The Little Prince*) with the Kansas City Symphony and Gemma New.

Conductors with whom he works include Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Cristian Măcelaru, Lahav Shani, Krzysztof Urbański, Ryan Bancroft, Matthias Pintscher, Gemma New, Karina Canellakis, Jonathon Heyward, Juraj Valčuha, Han-Na Chang, Elim Chan, Roderick Cox, Rafael Payare, Osmo Vänskä, and Giancarlo Guerrero.

Beilman studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with Ida Kavafian and Pamela Frank, and at the Kronberg Academy with Christian Tetzlaff, and has received many prestigious accolades, including a Borletti–Buitoni Trust Fellowship, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and a London Music Masters Award. He has also recorded works by Stravinsky, Janáček, and Schubert for Warner Classics. Beilman performs with the ex-Balaković F. X. Tourte bow (c. 1820) and plays the "Ysaÿe" Guarneri del Gesù from 1740, generously on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.

**Steven Osborne** (OBE) is one of Britain's most treasured musicians, with an immense depth of musicality and refinement of expression across diverse repertoire, be it in Beethoven or Messiaen, Schubert or Ravel, Prokofiev or jazz improvisations. His many awards include the Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year, two *BBC Music Magazine* Awards, and two *Gramophone* Awards. Osborne has been praised by the *Observer* as "always a player in absolute service to the composer."

His residences at, among others, London's Wigmore Hall, Antwerp's deSingel, the Bath International Music Festival, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra speak to the respect he commands. Osborne's 32 recordings on Hyperion have won multiple

awards and his two 2021 releases of Prokofiev's *War* Sonatas and French works for piano duet with Paul Lewis were both shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award.

Osborne's recitals have been publicly and critically acclaimed, with recent programs revisiting his recording repertoire of Beethoven and Rachmaninoff interspersed with his own improvisations and music by another of his much-admired composers, Schubert. He has performed at many of the world's most prestigious venues, including Vienna's Konzerthaus as well as the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Berlin Phillharmonie and Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and the Kennedy Center in Washington (DC), and he is a regular guest at both Lincoln Center and London's Wigmore Hall.

Concerto performances take Osborne to major orchestras all over the world, including recent visits to the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Radio Symphonieorchester Wien, Oslo Philharmonic, Danish National Radio, London Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Aspen Music Festival, and Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center with repertoire ranging from Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, and Messiaen through to Tippett, Britten, and Julian Anderson (who dedicated his 2017 Piano Concerto to Osborne). Recent seasons have seen returns to the London Philharmonic Orchestra to perform the Tippett Piano Concerto with Ed Gardner and performances with the Stuttgart Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, Singapore Symphony, West Australian Symphony, Adelaide Symphony, and the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra.

A Hyperion label artist since 1998, his recordings have received numerous awards in the UK, France, Germany, and the US, including two *Gramophone* Awards, three Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik Awards, and a Choc in *Classica Magazine,* in addition to a number of Editor's Choice citations in *Gramophone* and Recordings of the Year designations from the *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Sunday Times*. His recordings span a wide range of repertoire that includes Beethoven, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Liszt, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Medtner, Messiaen, Britten, Tippett, Crumb, and Feldman.

Osborne won first prize at the prestigious Clara Haskil Competition in 1991 and the Naumburg International Competition in 1997. Born in Scotland, he studied with Richard Beauchamp at St. Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and Renna Kellaway 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. Osborne was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to music in the 2022 Queen's New Year Honors.