



While **Robert Schumann** (1810-1856) was one of the most prominent musical figures of the Romantic Era, his romanticism stemmed from a deeper root than the century he lived in. His entire life was filled with endless struggles, coupled with endless love. He lost a few family members rather early; acquired a serious hand injury that ended his dream of becoming a concert pianist; was rejected by his wife's father who bitterly opposed his marriage proposal; and suffered from long-term mental illnesses that ultimately contributed to his death. Yet on the "bright side," he developed a long-lasting love relationship with Clara Wieck Schumann, whom he married in 1840 after overcoming a legal battle with her father. The romantic sentiments that he felt for Clara were often reflected in the composer's music.

This disc is titled "Romance at the Piano" because the three sets of piano works presented are all reflective of Schumann's romanticism, each in a slightly different way. ***Kinderszenen, Op. 15***, is a set of 13 short pieces composed in 1838, each with a descriptive title that the composer added later as "hints for interpretation." In a letter to Clara, Schumann described ***Kinderszenen*** as "peaceful, tender, and happy, like our future," revealing Schumann's romantic and poetic visions of his married life with Clara and their children. ***Kreisleriana, Op. 16***, written in 1840, was named after a fictional character, Kreisler, who was introduced by the poet E. T. A. Hoffmann. The range of musical expressions displayed in the eight pieces reminds the audience of the two imaginary characters Schumann had introduced in his ***Davidshündlertänze, Op. 6*** – the passionate and impulsive Florestan, and the reflective and melancholic Eusebius. Schumann told Clara in one of his letters that one could find Clara's life as well as his own in ***Kreisleriana***, that she would smile when she discovered herself in it, and that there was "utterly wild love" in some passages. As such, ***Kreisleriana*** could be viewed as a poetic manifestation of the composer's love towards Clara. ***Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 111***, written in 1851, was considered one of Schumann's mature piano works. The three pieces, while each having their individual thematic elements, are to be played consecutively as one set, as Schumann specifically indicated such continuity with the term "attacca" between the pieces. The various qualities of Schumann's music are displayed in this set – the passion and frenzy, the dreaminess and tenderness, the poetry and drama, expressing a wide range of joy and pain experienced in the composer's rather short and romantic life.



Ho Yan Agnes Wan, *pianist*



Praised as a “big pianist, big musician, big potential” with “compelling artistry that draws the listeners in and envelops them with musical joy,” Hong Kong-native pianist Ho Yan Agnes Wan was a finalist (the only solo pianist among the finalists) of the 2012 International Web Concert Hall Competition. She has previously received awards at the Los Angeles Liszt International Piano Competition, Artists International Debut Auditions, the Bradshaw and Buono International Piano Competition, Loyola Concerto/Aria Competition, University of Iowa All-University Concerto/Aria Competition, and the University of Iowa Chamber Music Competition. An active recitalist, she has performed in Canada, France, Hong Kong,

and various parts of the United States. Her performances have been broadcasted live on radio stations including the WFMT Chicago, WPLN Nashville, and WUOL Louisville. Also an experienced clinician, she has adjudicated for many youth competitions and presented a range of pedagogical topics at various music teachers association events. Her book, ***Physical and Mental Issues in Piano Performance: The Interrelationships between Physical Tension, Performance Anxiety, and Memorization Strategies***, was published by VDM-Verlag in 2008. A graduate of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Loyola University New Orleans, and the University of Iowa, where she was granted her bachelor, masters, and doctoral degrees in piano performance respectively, she also holds an Artist Diploma in Piano from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Her teachers have included Gabriel Kwok, Nancy Loo, H. Jac McCracken, Uriel Tsachor, Rene Lecuona, James Tocco, and Michael Chertock.

More information can be found on her website at <http://www.agnes-wan.net>.

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Recorded, Edited, Mixed, and Mastered by: Kevin Edlin
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