

# The Socio-Political Faces of Clara Schumann on German Film

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*Filmic portrayals of Clara Schumann from World War II to the present provide a fascinating insight into changing conceptions of her professional and domestic roles. Just as fictional reshapings of her biography from the late-nineteenth century to the present can be understood to relate to changing social and political contexts, filmic portrayals of this great musical figure over the past 80 years speak to both constancy and change. The image that remains constant, the depiction of a loyal wife in the service of her husband's art, takes on different guises as it is reflected in the mirror of each film's historical, social, and political moment. In *Träumerei* (1943/44) Clara Schumann provides an idealized depiction of the German woman in the context of war, one who sacrifices her performance career for love of husband, children and domesticity. *Song of Love* (1947) reflects the revered role of the mother of a large family in post-war America. Limiting its narrative frame to the years leading up to Robert Schumann's death, *Frühlingssinfonie* (1974) casts a new light on the domestic strands explored in *Träumerei*, reflecting then recent developments in research in the *Neue Schumann-Gesamtausgabe*. In *Geliebte Clara* (2008), whereas the titular focus shifts explicitly to Clara herself, this passionate retelling is based on the familiar narrative that informs all four films. Building on the historiographical work of Beatrix Borchard, Matthias Wendt, and Yael Braunschweig, this article provides a rich cultural context for each film, and explores how that context relates to source materials including letters and diaries. Reaching beyond that scholarship, this article challenges the familiar narrative found in these movies by re-reading passages of Clara's letters and diaries that can be understood to express regret and frustration at the limitations that her domestic life imposed on her artistic career.*

If we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographers have for the most part failed to solve it.<sup>1</sup>

In explaining a past life to ourselves, we are already interpreting it. What remains, no matter how much we try to elucidate, comprehend, reexperience it, is never the life itself, but rather always its legend.<sup>2</sup>

Competing understandings of biography – as meditation or quest – are of interest to metabiography: is biography understood as the solving of a mystery, the capturing of

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 95–100, here 95.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology*, trans. Robert E. Norton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009): 1–2.

the subject, or is its focus on open-ended processes of rumination, speculation, mourning, and remembrance?<sup>3</sup>

I must admit, at the outset, to feeling some sympathy with Paul Wingfield's disdain for biography as a genre of writing. He groups his concerns on the matter in three broad categories: evidence, ethics and explanatory force.<sup>4</sup> Regarding evidence, he provocatively asserts that 'the survival of documentary detritus about any individual's life is random'.<sup>5</sup> Regarding ethics, he questions whether the 'discretion and tact' that form the basis of responsible scholarship can reasonably be upheld in shaping a coherent narrative out of such detritus. And, regarding explanatory force, he wonders, 'if an author's writings do indeed reveal something about his life, "how exactly (and how dependably) do they do their revealing"'.<sup>6</sup> In her recent monograph, *Metabiography: Reflecting on Biography*, Caitríona Ní Dhúill takes up similar concerns in a more sustained fashion. 'Conventional biography', she argues, 'upholds the assumption that the private sphere is a realm of authenticity and truth'.<sup>7</sup> She outlines the tendency for biography to focus its attention on the verifiability of evidence. Yet the tension that exists between the demands of fact and the demands of narrative, or, as Ní Dhúill puts it, between 'life's traces and life stories' has become increasingly pronounced.<sup>8</sup> Patterns in life writing in recent decades, she continues, exhibit 'a palpable scepticism towards any attempt to cordon off fiction from fact'. Ní Dhúill's book charts how metabiography recognizes the malleability of the raw material and affords a heightened awareness of the socio-political purposes that the subjects of biographies have been made to serve. The raw material of biography offers itself up repeatedly for reworking so that, as Nicolaas A. Rupke puts it, 'the metabiographical approach has vanquished any notion of being able to tell "Humboldt: the true story"'.<sup>9</sup> Instead, metabiography allows us to examine ways of engaging with past lives. It recognizes that 'the encounter with traces of the past, and the attempt to synthesize these as narrative, is an ideological minefield'.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding my own scepticism, it is precisely the ideological minefield of biography as manifest in the realm of film that I explore in this study of three German biopics on the towering nineteenth-century musical figure Clara Schumann. The biopic, I suggest, is at two removes from the genre of biography, with biographical fiction mediating the two. The fact or fiction question, or the quest for verifiability, becomes less pronounced as we proceed from biography to biopic. Julia Novak and David Ferris have grappled with the negotiation

<sup>3</sup> Caitríona Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography: Reflecting on Biography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 34.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Wingfield, 'Zdenka Janackova's Memoirs and the Fallacy of Music as Autobiography', in *Janacek and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 165–96.

<sup>5</sup> Wingfield, 'Zdenka Janackova's Memoirs and the Fallacy of Music as Autobiography', 165.

<sup>6</sup> Wingfield, 'Zdenka Janackova's Memoirs and the Fallacy of Music as Autobiography', 167.

<sup>7</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 215.

<sup>10</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 29.

between fact and fiction in the biographical novel on Clara Schumann.<sup>11</sup> The musical biopic offers a further turn of the biographical screw in that it inflects an already ideological stance with the demands of drama on screen.

Embracing a metabiographical method developed by Ní Dhúill, this article is concerned with how the raw biographical evidence on Clara Schumann has been subjected to various interpretations, narrative strategies, and ideological agendas in three German films: *Träumerei* (1944), *Frühlingssinfonie* (1983), and *Geliebte Clara* (2008). Each of these films views Clara Schumann through a mirror that reflects its own particular socio-political era in German history. The three films can hardly be understood to further the biographical canon on this pivotal musical figure, or to reclaim a lost life. Instead, they claim the life of Clara Schumann for a particular cause. We move from Clara Schumann as seen through the lens of World War II to Clara Schumann against the backdrop of East Germany behind the iron curtain and, finally, to consider the subject through the feminist lens of a West German filmmaker following German reunification.

The fact that there are two people involved in this biographical landscape allows us to rethink biography as a story of relationships, rather than being concerned with a single protagonist. Beatrix Borchard addresses this unique aspect of Schumann biography. In fictionalized and semi-fictionalized accounts, she argues, the name Schumann stands for more than a composer and their work. Rather it stands for the distinctive artistic pair of Clara and Robert Schumann, for the constellation between (masculine) composer and (feminine) interpreter, and for an artistic marriage between two people who battle together for German art.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on the concept of 'bio-mythology' from Roland Barthes, Borchard argues that a 'system of meaning' (which turns an artist into a hero) can be applied to the Schumanns. Barthes provides the example of Beethoven, the artist who is 'brought forward as a complete hero, endowed with a discourse (a rare occurrence for a musician), a legend (a good ten or so anecdotes), an iconography, a race (that of the Titans of art, Michelangelo, Balzac) and a fatal malady (the deafness of he who creates for the pleasure of our ears)'.<sup>13</sup> In grappling with the mythology that has grown up around Robert Schumann in the first instance, and the Schumanns as a pair in the second, Borchard extends Barthes 'system of meaning' ('Bedeutungssystem') to a 'Schumann complex of meaning' ('Bedeutungskomplex Schumann') that tends to focus on the following features:

The revolutionary claims with which Robert Schumann came to the public, the early piano cycles, the dramatic history of the marriage, the Eichendorff and Heine settings, the *Spring Symphony* op.38, his suffering from the bourgeois way of life he chose for himself, lack of recognition which is bound up with his role as a travel

<sup>11</sup> Julia Novak, 'Biographical Fiction to Historiographical Metafiction: Rewriting Clara Schumann', *Brno Studies in English* 37/2 (2011): 145–58; David Ferris, 'The Fictional Lives of the Schumanns', in *Rethinking Schumann*, ed. Roe-Min Kok and Laura Tunbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 357–94.

<sup>12</sup> Beatrix Borchard, 'Orte und Strategien der Kulturvermittlung, Oder: Clara Schumann als "konzertierende Vermittlerin" deutscher Instrumentalmusik in Paris', in *Übergänge. Zwischen Künsten und Kulturen: Internationaler Kongress zum 150. Todesjahr von Heinrich Heine und Robert Schumann*, ed. Henriette Herwig et al. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2007): 85–102, here 86.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Musica Practica', in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977): 151.

companion to Clara, his late work interpreted as evidence of his incipient mental illness, his failure as a conductor in Düsseldorf, then – until well into the twentieth century under the category ‘Genius and Madness’ – his attempted suicide and the last months of his life in Eendenich.

At the core of this ‘Schumann complex of meaning’, Borchard continues, is ‘the idea of an artistic marriage as a constellation between two musicians who fight together for German art not with rivalry, but rather to complement one another’s skills’.<sup>14</sup> In Borchard’s conception, certain semantic features of this ‘complex’ are ‘emphasized and functionalized more strongly than others, depending on what fits the temporal horizon and therefore seems plausible’. We might think of this as a type of Schumann bingo, if you will, with particular features of the ‘Schumann complex of meaning’ being taken to depict a particular setting, but always being drawn from a common pool. Borchard recognizes this ‘complex’ to be in operation not only in ‘scholarly and popular publications, but also in busts, monuments, films, and above all musical interpretations’.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, she shows how Clara Schumann herself played a pivotal role in shaping this legacy for posterity, and ensured that after her death, she would be part of the Schumann ‘concept’.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the abundance of primary source materials brought to light since the 1980s, the image of Clara Schumann within the ‘Schumann complex of meaning’ has been substantially enlarged to include an assessment of her career as composer, pianist, arranger, editor, teacher and organizer of the business of a virtuoso schedule, with these facets being valued in their own right, apart from their dependence on Robert’s reputation.<sup>17</sup>

As is the case in many literary depictions of the Schumanns, there is a tendency in the films under consideration here for the year of Robert’s death to mark the point at which Clara gradually becomes a less compelling subject.<sup>18</sup> In the critical exploration of these three films that follows in this article, we will witness how Clara Schumann is bound by the same limitations imposed on the protagonist of

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<sup>14</sup> Beatrix Borchard, ‘Von Robert zu Clara Schumann und zurück?’, *Schumann Studien* 9, ed. Ute Bär (Sinzig: Studio, 2008): 81–96, here 82. On the subject of madness, see also David Ferris, ‘Schumann and the Myth of Madness’, *Nineteenth Century Music Review* 18/3 (2021): 389–426.

<sup>15</sup> Borchard, ‘Von Robert zu Clara Schumann und zurück?’, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Borchard, ‘Von Robert zu Clara Schumann und zurück?’, 81.

<sup>17</sup> A select list of the publications resulting from the primary sources brought to light in the 1980s includes the *Schumann Briefedition*, ed. Thomas Synofzik et al., Robert-Schumann-Haus, Zwickau, und dem Institut für Musikwissenschaft der Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber, Dresden: [www.schumann-briefe.de/editions-plan.html](http://www.schumann-briefe.de/editions-plan.html); Gerd Nauhaus, ed., *The Marriage Diaries of Robert and Clara Schumann: From their Wedding Day Through the Russia Trip*, trans. Peter Ostwald (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993); and Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist’s Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*, trans. Grace E. Hadow, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1913; rev. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> A similar tendency has been widely commented upon in relation to the biographical representations of the Schumanns. See Matthias Wendt, ‘Albtraum zwischen Trümmern: Der erste Schumannfilm Träumerei in Zwickau uraufgeführt, in Düsseldorf verboten’, *Schumann Studien* 9, ed. Ute Bär (Sinzig: Studio, 2008): 297–318; and Monica Steegeman, ‘Clara Schumann – eine Replik auf Rollenklischees und Vorurteile’, in *Schumanniana Nova: Festschrift Gerd Nauhaus zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Bernhard R. Appel, Ute Bär, and Matthias Wendt (Sinzig: Studio, 2002): 679–97.

her husband's song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben*. Taken together, the films bring us from the year in which Robert Schumann moved into the Wieck house (an event that resonates with the song 'Seit ich ihn gesehen', or 'Since I saw him') to Robert's death and its immediate aftermath, which eerily echoes Chamisso's poem 'Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan' ('Now you have caused me the first grief') depicting a woman who has been widowed soon after her marriage, set by Robert as the final song in the cycle.<sup>19</sup> In these films, to borrow the words of Ruth Solie, Clara Schumann is not permitted 'to rupture the surface of her cyclic time, to live beyond the death of the hero'.<sup>20</sup> This is intricately linked to what Jeffrey Kallberg identifies as 'an idealized conception of women, a pervasive mode of interpretation forced upon [women] by men'.<sup>21</sup> *Träumerei* extends from Clara's 1839 tour of Paris to the time of Robert's death in 1856, along the way taking into account Johannes Brahms's entrance into the Schumanns' lives, with a brief coda affording us a glimpse of Clara Schumann in her old age. Yet this coda is by way of a retrospective reflection on Robert's life and work, rather than a depiction of her own, as she performs the piece 'Träumerei' from *Kinderszenen. Frühlingssinfonie* is concerned with Clara's 'virtuoso years' from 1830 to 1840. It places a significant focus on her performance career, whilst also being preoccupied with the relationship between these lovers from the time Robert first came to the Wieck home to their marriage in 1840. *Geliebte Clara* depicts the Düsseldorf years of 1851 to 1856 in compressed form. It too features a brief coda following Robert's death which confronts the possibility that there was an erotic relationship between Clara Schumann and Brahms. As we will see, although this film does not rupture the surface of the time that Robert and Clara spent together, it is the only one of the three films under consideration to break the pervasive mode of interpretation by reading the life of Clara Schumann through a feminist lens.

#### Ufa's *Träumerei* (1944)

To an audience of the early twenty-first century, *Träumerei* may come across as 'an entirely nonpropagandist biographical account of the composer and his relationship with Clara'.<sup>22</sup> To a German audience in 1944, however, it was clearly stamped as a piece of National Socialist Cinema.<sup>23</sup> *Träumerei* was produced in 1943–44 by Ufa (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), the film company founded in 1917, described by Klaus Kreimeier as 'a propaganda factory'.<sup>24</sup> In 1927 when facing

<sup>19</sup> Rufus Hallmark, *Frauenliebe und Leben: Chamisso's Poems and Schumann's Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 223.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth Solie, 'Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs', in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 219–40.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne', *Representations* 39 (1992): 102–33, here 114–15.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Barham, 'Recurring Dreams and Moving Images: The Cinematic Appropriation of Schumann's Op. 15 No. 7', *19th-Century Music* 34/3 (2011): 271–301, here 292.

<sup>23</sup> The main roles are played by Hilde Krahl (Clara Schumann), Mathias Wiemann (Robert Schumann), Friedrich Kayssler (Friedrich Wieck), Emil Lohkamp (Franz Liszt), and Ullrich Haupt (Johannes Brahms).

<sup>24</sup> Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 4.

bankruptcy, the company was bought by Alfred Hugenberg, an influential German media entrepreneur, Chairman of the German National People's Party, and later a Minister in Hitler's cabinet. Box office successes such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and *Frau im Mond* (1929) quickly ensued. Hugenberg transferred ownership of the company to the Nazi Party in 1933. For the National Socialists, Ufa was a pedagogic institution devoted to 'education for war'. Over time, it became Goebbels' 'playground for political adventurism'.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the war, as Michael Kater argues, 'responding to state pressure', Ufa reflected 'the broken spirits, the suicidal blindness, and the distorted emotions of Germany's body politic – an endangered body politic whose daily life was increasingly twisted by a seemingly all-powerful government machinery'.<sup>26</sup>

*Träumerei* was the last in a series of 'biopics' in National Socialist Cinema focussing on individual figures including the composers outlined in Table 1, as well as literary and artistic figures such as Schiller and Rembrandt.<sup>27</sup> The films had a specific objective: to focus on beautiful art by way of demonstrating the German commitment to art in a time of war.<sup>28</sup> Composer 'biopics' of this time had a number of shared characteristics. In each of the Ufa productions, signature pieces of music by the composer under consideration are prominently displayed. Guido Heldt argues that these compositions 'are often bound up in the love stories', usually portrayed as though they were 'written for the beloved woman in moments of romantic inspiration'.<sup>29</sup>

The Ufa *Künstlerfilmen* can be understood as part of a heroic biographical tradition that upholds a heroic-masculinist worldview.<sup>30</sup> Manuel Köppen divides these films into three categories that reflect the changing fortunes of Germany in the war. The first category comprises end-weighted films that push for a finale, a catastrophe that invariably offers a solution according to the rules of classical dramaturgy. The second category concerns the theme of endurance, with the artist triumphing over a catastrophe before then having to face further challenges. The third category, to which *Träumerei* belongs, concerns themes of loss, pain, futility and, crucially, the message that art provides solace and consolation in difficult times.<sup>31</sup> This is directly bound up with the political reality by 1943–44 that the war effort was lost.

Almost all of Ufa's *Künstlerfilmen* focus on male artists, which speaks to the historical exclusion of women from positions of social importance.<sup>32</sup> *Träumerei* is the exception in this Ufa repertoire for also focussing on a woman, portraying what Janina Klassen refers to as the 'dream couple of Romanticism'.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with

<sup>25</sup> Michael Kater, *Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 3–6.

<sup>26</sup> Kater, *Twisted Muse*, 243.

<sup>27</sup> The information in this table is drawn from Heldt, 'Hardly Heroes', 130–31.

<sup>28</sup> Manuel Köppen, 'Der Künstlerfilm in Zeiten des Krieges', *Kunst der Propaganda: Der Film im Dritten Reich* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008): 57–87, here 58.

<sup>29</sup> Guido Heldt, 'Hardly Heroes: Composers as a Subject in National Socialist Cinema', in *Music and Nazism: Art Under Tyranny, 1933–1945*, ed. Michael Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2004): 120.

<sup>30</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Köppen, 'Der Künstlerfilm in Zeiten des Krieges', 84.

<sup>32</sup> As Karen Hollinger notes, the subject of biopics has been 'overwhelmingly male, and the biopic has been characterized as one of the most male-oriented film forms'. Karen Hollinger estimates 25–28 per cent of biopics feature women. See Karen Hollinger, *Feminist Film Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012): 158.

<sup>33</sup> Klassen, *Clara Schumann: Musik und Öffentlichkeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009): 491.

**Table 1** Ufa's composer biopics

Film	Year	Featured Composer/ Musician	Rating
<i>Leise flehen meine Lieder</i> (or <i>Schuberts unvollendete Symphonie</i> )	1933	Schubert	
<i>Abschiedswalzer</i>	1934	Chopin	'künstlerisch' ('artistic');
<i>Aufforderung zum Tanz</i> (or <i>Der Weg Carl Maria von Webers</i> )	1934	Weber	
<i>Liebesträume</i>	1935	Liszt	
<i>Drei Mäderl um Schubert</i> (or <i>Dreimäderlhaus</i> )	1936	Schubert	'künstlerisch wertvoll, volksbildend' ('artistically valuable, of educational value to the people')
<i>Es war ein rauschende Ballnacht</i>	1939	Tchaikovsky	'künstlerisch besonders wertvoll, kulturell wertvoll' ('especially artistically valuable, culturally valuable')
<i>Eine Kleine Nachtmusik</i>	1939	Mozart	'künstlerisch wertvoll' ('artistically valuable')
<i>Falstaff in Wien</i>	1940		
<i>Friedmann Bach</i>	1941	Friedmann Bach	'künstlerisch wertvoll, kulturell wertvoll' ('artistically valuable, culturally valuable')
<i>Wen die Götter lieben</i> (or <i>Mozart</i> )	1942	Mozart	'staatspolitisch, künstlerisch besonders wertvoll' ('related to national policy, especially artistically valuable').
<i>Lache Bajazzo</i>	1943	Leoncavallo	
<i>Träumerei</i>	1944	Clara and Robert Schumann	'künstlerisch wertvoll' ('artistically valuable').

Borchard's 'Schumann complex of meaning', by having two musical biographies intertwined, *Träumerei* is the ideal vehicle for this third category. The film charts major events in the life of Clara Wieck (later Schumann) from the time of her Paris concert tour in 1839 to the death of her husband in 1856. In a departure from earlier Nazi genius plots, it not only has 'a weakness for failing men', but it also espouses a spirit of consolation and renewal through the strong woman trope of National Socialist ideology.<sup>34</sup> As Yael Braunschweig asserts, 'While Robert's biography posed problems for Nazi propaganda', on account of his incipient madness, 'Clara could be assimilated more readily into a narrative aligned with Nazi ideals'.<sup>35</sup> She was a prime representative of the 'new age, healthy in body and soul'.<sup>36</sup>

Work on the Ufa-film that was originally to be called *Clara Schumann* was initially postponed before a green light was given for production under the less ostensibly biographical title *Träumerei*.<sup>37</sup> Taken at face value, this title offers a retreat into reverie for those who needed to be reassured, in the final years of the Second World War, that failure was not an invalidation. Matthias Wendt suggests that censorship 'may have played a significant role in the choice of title' for it seemed to offer positivity in 'times of looming catastrophe'.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Karl Laux suggested that an alternative title could have been *Aufschwung* ('upsurge' or 'recovery'), with reference to Robert Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, No. 2, which is also featured on the soundtrack.<sup>39</sup> Klassen broaches the matter more directly in arguing that the film was 'forged for propaganda' to provide escapism for the war-weary and to allow them to 'return to the Biedermeier good old days'. There, she suggests, the audience of *Träumerei* was 'awaited by a fateful woman, a capable, restlessly creative mother who, without a man, cheerfully led her blonde children through the catastrophe'.<sup>40</sup>

Clara takes on a number of gradually changing guises in this film. The first is the 'beloved woman' of the composer, and the devoted mother of her children – the overtly domestic sonic signifiers for which are 'Träumerei' and 'Widmung'.<sup>41</sup> Braunschweig suggests that this resonates with the primarily female audience for whom *Träumerei* was intended, given that, by 1944, most able-bodied, non-exempt men were serving on the warfront.<sup>42</sup> On the path toward her heroism, Clara's struggle reminds her of her real obligation – a message that is repeatedly driven home by the characters Friedrich Wieck and Franz Liszt – to be the revered artist who championed the canon of great German artworks. While Robert 'reintroduce(s) simplicity, depth and beauty into German art, which has suffered from too much foreign influence',<sup>43</sup> Clara secures the immortalization of these German compositions through her performances.

<sup>34</sup> Heldt, 'Hardly Heroes', 122–23.

<sup>35</sup> Yael Braunschweig, 'Biographical Listening: Intimacy, Madness, and the Music of Robert Schumann' (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013): 55.

<sup>36</sup> Kater, *Twisted Muse*, 240–41.

<sup>37</sup> Köppen, 'Der Künstlerfilm in Zeiten des Krieges', 83.

<sup>38</sup> Wendt, 'Albtraum zwischen Trümmern', 312.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Laux, *Robert Schumann Blätter: Mitteilungen der deutschen Robert-Schumann-Gesellschaft* 2 (August 1944): 15. Cited in Wendt, 'Albtraum zwischen Trümmern', 312. Karl Laux was President of the Zwickau Robert-Schumann Gesellschaft from 1957 and for many years Vice-President of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung.

<sup>40</sup> Klassen, *Clara Schumann: Musik und Öffentlichkeit*, 491.

<sup>41</sup> On the mother trope, see Braunschweig, 'Biographical Listening', particularly chap. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Braunschweig, 'Biographical Listening', 55.

<sup>43</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.



Table 2 Music featured in *Träumerei*

Composer	Work	Movement/Section
Robert Schumann	Symphony No. 4 in D minor	III. Scherzo. Lebhaft-Trio IV. Langsam, lebhaft
	<i>Fantasiestücke</i> , Op. 12	2. 'Aufschwung'
	<i>Myrthen</i> , Op. 25	1. 'Widmung'
	<i>Kinderszenen</i> , Op. 15	5. 'Glückes genug' 7. 'Träumerei'
	Andante and Variations for Two Pianos, Op. 46	
Franz Liszt	Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major	IV. Allegro animato
	Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major	I. Allegro maestoso
	Transcendental Etude	No. 7, 'Eroica'
Johannes Brahms	Fünf Lieder, Op. 49	No. 4. 'Wiegenlied'
Richard Wagner	<i>Lohengrin</i>	Prelude to Act III

This is reflected in Werner Eisbrenner's luscious soundtrack. Partially an original score, it is wholly dependent on its skilful manipulation of the music of Robert Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, and Wagner, featuring excerpts from the pieces outlined in [Table 2](#).

Pervasive throughout the dialogue of *Träumerei* are meditations on the nature of dreams (that is, dreams broadly conceived, and represented by Robert Schumann's *Träumerei*), and on the nature of art, with the two intersecting and competing as they relate to life. These meditations trace the diminishing fortunes of Germany in the war, and the trajectory that moves from the failure of a fallen hero (embodied in the composer) to the imperative for a healthy future direction (embodied in the virtuoso pianist). In the first of these dialogues, Robert Schumann asks Friedrich Wieck for Clara's hand in marriage. Avoiding a direct answer, Wieck counsels that 'life admits of no dreams', to which the idealist composer responds 'but art thrives on dreams ... it is dream'. This prompts Wieck forcefully to distinguish between the realm of art, which is bound up with reality, and the ephemerality of dreams: 'Art is the harshest reality there is, dear Schumann. Dreams are like blossoms. A hard winter and there is nothing left.' His final utterance on the matter is that 'art and life are enemies ... forget your dreams'.<sup>44</sup>

In counterpoint with Robert's amorous intentions as articulated at the outset of this film is the thriving career of the prodigious Clara Wieck. As she departs for her first unaccompanied concert tour in Paris, from February to August 1839, Eisbrenner employs Robert's Andante and Variations for Two Pianos, Op. 46 as an inventive means to juxtapose what Alexander Stefaniak has termed Robert's 'Innigkeit', with the vibrancy of Clara's pianism.<sup>45</sup> Sitting alone in Leipzig, Robert contemplatively plays the espressivo theme. The camera then opens onto a grand Parisian soirée and the exuberant virtuosity of Clara, in duet with Liszt, playing not the French repertoire for which she was famous at that time, but the *Più animato* Variation IV from this same set of variations. Eisbrenner's seamless

<sup>44</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Quintet Variations', as Schumann called them, composed in 1843, were arranged for two pianos to allow for more enhanced performance opportunities. This two-piano version was first performed by Clara and Mendelssohn at a concert of Pauline Viardot Garcia on 18 August 1843.

montage brings us again to the solitary composer and his pensive theme, before returning to Paris to hear the variations reach their brilliant bravura close.<sup>46</sup> The overt contrast between the introspective composer and the illustrious, extroverted performer is further enhanced through the imagery of darkness and light that runs throughout *Träumerei*. Robert, and his encroaching mental illness, is associated with the world of shadows, while Clara is associated with the realm of light. Friedrich Wieck's vehement opposition to the marriage of Clara and Robert is positioned around his conviction that 'A woman is either an artist or a housewife'. His indictment of Robert's character and his music is also suffused with the imagery of light and dark: 'His music lacks body, structure, and form. It is the music of exuberance, of uncontrolled feelings. ... It's true. He's talented. But, it's a dark talent, like a well at night, which, if there's light in it, is from moonlight.'<sup>47</sup> Later in the film, Robert confides to Brahms that he hears 'sounds day and night, but I'm no longer able to give them shape. I'm drowning in them. They're dragging me down to a kingdom dominated by shadows. A kingdom without light. Yes, without light.'<sup>48</sup> This imagery can further be mapped onto a sacrificial Christ: repeatedly throughout the film the shadow of a cross is projected through a window and cast on the floor. With the sacrifice of Robert's life, it is implied, comes the resurrection of his works through Clara's performative agency.

Following their victory in the court case, and the wedding, the film skips directly to the Schumann family home in Dresden in 1845 where 'Glückes genug' from *Kinderszenen* becomes the sonic signifier for familial bliss as the children Marie and Elise play in the garden. The main characters are reunited as Wieck comes to Dresden to attend Liszt's concert. Liszt has better luck calling at the Schumann house than Wieck had, for he finds Clara at home, happily discharging her domestic duties as wife and mother. Having persuaded the couple to attend his concert that evening, he engages in subterfuge to get Clara onstage for the first time since her marriage. Following his performance of his own Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major, Liszt is asked by the Emperor to play his Transcendental Etude No. 7, the 'Eroica'. Addressing his Excellence, he proposes that the esteemed Clara Schumann, who sits in the audience, might perform this piece instead. Following a tense pause, she acquiesces, executing the fiendishly difficult piece with brilliant flair. Liszt later urges her to 'become again what you once were: a great artist!'<sup>49</sup> When she challenges him to think of Robert, Liszt repeats that 'I'm thinking of you. You must again embrace who you are.'<sup>50</sup>

Very little marks Robert Schumann's material success as a composer in *Träumerei* unless, as Clara's father had warned during the court case, it is mediated through her performative agency. During the interval of Liszt's concert, Robert learns that Wagner has composed the opera *Lohengrin* which brings on a crisis of confidence, for its libretto draws on the same material as that with which Robert was at work in *Genoveva*. (Both operas respond to Weber's *Euryanthe*.)

<sup>46</sup> As Beatrix Borchard asserts, in this film, true German music is opposed to a 'virtuosity calculated for external effects, represented by Franz Liszt, which is linked to "French" culture'. However, in this important scene, the piece that is the vehicle for virtuosity as Clara plays with Liszt is Robert Schumann's German music. Borchard, 'Von Clara zu Robert und zurück', 89.

<sup>47</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

<sup>48</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

<sup>49</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

<sup>50</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

Robert leaves the concert hall and returns home where Clara finds him, again in the darkness, burning the opera manuscript. She promises to relieve him of the financial burden of supporting their large family. Her return to the concert stage, she proposes, would allow more time for Robert's composition while her tours will promote his music: 'I'll go with you, Robert. We'll travel together. To Vienna, Berlin, Paris, I'll play your music until the world believes in you.' The symphonic majesty of Wagner's *Lohengrin* segues to Eisbrenner's arrangement of 'Widmung', and an intimate acting out of Rückert's poetry as Robert declares 'You're my soul' and Clara reciprocates, 'You're my heart.'

Besides its use in the opening and closing credits, the intimate piano miniature 'Träumerei' is heard three times in this film. It first serves as a promise of love when Robert presents Clara with the manuscript at the beginning of the film. Following her initial gush of affection, the 19-year-old sits at the piano and addresses an imaginary audience: 'Madame, Messieurs, I will play "Träumerei" by Mr Robert Schumann'.<sup>51</sup> The second hearing depicts Robert's benighted state at the asylum and is incorporated into a retrospective montage that recapitulates much of the music heard earlier in the film. When the 36-year old Clara arrives at Eindhoven, she finds Robert sitting quietly in the garden, composing. At first, he does not recognize her, as a distorted version of 'Widmung' emanates from the orchestra. When she offers greetings from the children, 'Glückes genug' is woven into Eisbrenner's score. This conjuring up of familial bliss jogs Robert's memory and he asks her, 'Clärchen, do you still play?'. He then relives the scene when he first presented her with the manuscript of 'Träumerei' in 1839, reciting aloud the words she had said to her imaginary Parisian audience. To the sound of Eisbrenner's orchestration of 'Träumerei', Robert again hands Clara a piece of manuscript. On this occasion, however, the paper contains only the nonsense notes of his fevered brain. Clara then utters that most poignant of German farewells, distinctive for its finality: 'Lebewohl'. The coda to the film offers the third hearing of 'Träumerei', a reminiscence of love from the aged Clara who performs the piece as an encore to her final concert as the film draws to a close, and she describes Robert as 'the star of my life'.<sup>52</sup>

The nature of Clara's sacrifice is made manifest toward the end of the film as she bids farewell, one after the next, to important people and treasured aspects of her life. After her husband's descent into mental disintegration, and after his eventual death, she bids farewell to the young Brahms who has become endeared to the entire family, and whose amorous feelings for Clara, although not fully matched, are nonetheless reciprocated to some extent. Although the film is loosely based on the raw material of biography, it also fictionalizes and reinvents such raw material in being framed around fictional memories that are recorded in Clara Schumann's diary and shown on screen. This accentuates the ideological message of the film which, in the midst of Clara's grief following Robert's death, is reinforced by her father who reminds her – and the audience – of her responsibility to that 'which is greater than happiness and pain': in this instance, 'Art. It's our consolation. It's our duty'.<sup>53</sup> In a turn of events that is striking in terms of our understanding of the portrayal of this father–daughter relationship, which merits further scholarly

<sup>51</sup> Dialogue from *Träumerei*.

<sup>52</sup> For a comprehensive overview of how this piece has been appropriated in cinema more broadly, see Barham, 'Recurring Dreams and Moving Images'.

<sup>53</sup> Dialogue in *Träumerei*.

attention, Clara takes her father's advice and makes it directly applicable to her promotion of Robert's music. In her final words in *Träumerei*, she admits that 'Father was right. Art has been my only consolation. My only duty. My love for Robert and my dedication to his work became the sole purpose of my life. Even today, when I perform in public for the last time, I'm playing only for him.'<sup>54</sup> To a German audience at the time of the bombing of Berlin, it would have been clear, as Borchard puts it, that 'when everything falls apart, ... women must continue the work of their men'.<sup>55</sup>

The DVD issue of *Träumerei* features a German Wartime Newsreel from 'Die deutsche Wochenschau' of 28 September 1944. Screenings of newsreels were obligatory for all theatres from 1938 onward, with the number of prints steadily increasing.<sup>56</sup> Along with reports from the Eastern and Western front, the September 1944 Newsreel shows Germans who work past retirement age for the war effort and women employed in traditionally male occupations, many of whom had sons fighting or already fallen on the war front. The narrator declares that 'this is a people who have fought bravely for five years and now face the collapse of their very existence'.<sup>57</sup> Images of the war-wounded being carried home form a backdrop to the newsreel's three main messages: the importance of working tirelessly for victory, the imperative for the Hitler youth to learn skills for their future trades, and the significance of the role of strong women who, despite their personal grief and loss, continue to play a vital role in 'a determined and unified nation'.<sup>58</sup>

Casting Hilde Krahl in the role of Clara Schumann as the heroine of this tragic downfall was an astute choice. She was familiar to audiences from her work in films during the Third Reich. She was also a favourite in illustrated magazines because of her marriage to Wolfgang Liebeneiner, the head of the Nazi film agency from 1943–45.<sup>59</sup> The engagement of Matthias Wieman to play Robert Schumann built on his repeated casting as a heroic figure in the National Socialist era, with prominent roles including Michelangelo (*Michelangelo*, Curt Orel, 1940) on screen and Faust (*Faust*, Schauspielhaus Hamburg, 1940) on stage. In May 1937 Wieman became a member of Ufa's transformed Board of Directors who were charged by Joseph Goebbels to 'lend artistic direction to the Ufa output'. This Board 'set out to stamp German film with a particular National (Socialist) aesthetic'.<sup>60</sup>

When considered in the context of the overtly political agenda of Ufa's *Künstlerfilmen*, *Träumerei* can be understood as a propagandist film bound up with themes of loss, pain and futility in the final years of World War II. It underlined the capacity for art to provide solace and consolation in difficult times by drawing on the raw biographical material of Clara Schumann's life. It is worth drawing one last parallel with *Frauenliebe und Leben* by way of closing the circle.

<sup>54</sup> Dialogue in *Träumerei*.

<sup>55</sup> Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Musik als Lebensform*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Katy Hoffmann, 'Propagandistic Problems of German Newsreels in World War II', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24/1 (2004): 133–42.

<sup>57</sup> See [www.awm.gov.au/collection/C189270](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C189270) for the German Newsreel of 28 September 1944.

<sup>58</sup> German Newsreel of 28 September 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Robert G. Moeller, 'What Did You Do in the War, Mutti? Courageous Women, Compassionate Commanders, and Stories of the Second World War', *German History* 22/4 (2004): 563–94, here 567.

<sup>60</sup> Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts: The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2007): 36.

Robert Schumann did not set the final poem in Chamisso's cycle, 'Traum der eignen Tage' ('Dream of my own days'). This poem revisits earlier themes in the collection, now from the perspective of a grandmother. Just as the omission of the ninth poem from the song cycle, as Ruth Solie argues, deletes the protagonist's later role as mother and grandmother, so too *Träumerei* is concerned with Schumann's role as mother only to the point of her husband's death. Her duty then turns to Robert's music.<sup>61</sup> The character of Clara Schumann in *Träumerei* can be understood to have upheld the strong woman trope of National Socialist ideology.

### DEFA's *Frühlingssinfonie* (1983)

The 1983 film *Frühlingssinfonie*, directed by Peter Schamoni and Hans Neunzig, was produced by the East German film company DEFA (Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft). The screenplay is based entirely on words taken from the correspondence and diaries of Clara and Robert. Starring Natassja Kinski as Clara Wieck, Herbert Grönemeyer as Robert Schumann, and Rolf Hoppe in the role of Friedrich Wieck, it focuses on Clara's so-called virtuoso years from 1830 – the year of her first concert tour, when Robert came to live in the Wieck house – to her marriage to Robert Schumann in 1840. The debut performance of Robert's Symphony No. 1 is heard in a coda of the film to which it gives its name. *Frühlingssinfonie* problematizes Klassen's 'dream couple of Romanticism'. The summary account of the film from the 1984 New German Film section at the Berlin Film Festival Program reads: 'The love story of Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann, but also the love-hate story of Schumann and Friedrich Wieck, Clara's father, whose bond with his daughter lies beyond mere paternal love: in managing her career he seeks his own artistic fulfilment'.<sup>62</sup>

*Frühlingssinfonie* can be understood as part of what Seán Allan frames as 'the Romantic turn in East German film production', that was paralleled in West Germany, as we will see when we turn to Helma Sanders-Brahms.<sup>63</sup> It is one of DEFA's *Künstlerfilme* produced in the 1970s and 80s that portray Romantic or quasi-Romantic works by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors, artists and composers (as outlined in Table 3) by way of generating hard currency. The revival of interest in German Romantic and Idealist figures such as Novalis, Kleist, Hölderlin, and Robert Schumann on film allowed for a questioning of the optimistic teleology of the Enlightenment. These films were 'symptomatic of a pronounced loss of faith in teleological models of history (whether Marxism or the economies of free-market capitalism) on both sides of the political divide'.<sup>64</sup> This parallel turn was articulated in quite different forms in both East and West Germany.

Once again invoking Borchard's 'Schumann complex of meaning', the dual focus on Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann further enhanced DEFA's opportunity to deal with a number of key issues from dual perspectives: the subjectivity and

<sup>61</sup> See Ruth Solie, 'Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs', 228.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Eric Rentschler, 'Remembering Not to Forget: A Retrospective Reading of Kluge's Brutality in Stone', *New German Critique* 49 (1990): 23–41, here 37.

<sup>63</sup> Seán Allan, *Screening Art: Modernist Aesthetics and the Socialist Imaginary in East German Cinema* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2019): 205.

<sup>64</sup> Seán Allan, *Screening Art*, 201.

**Table 3** DEFA's *Künstlerfilme* produced in the 1970s and 80s

Film	Featured author/ composer/artist	Director	Year
<i>Die Elixiere des Teufels</i> [ <i>The Devil's Elixirs</i> ]	E.T.A. Hoffmann	Ralf Kirsten	1973
<i>Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts</i> [ <i>From the Life of a Good for Nothing</i> ]	Josef von Eichendorff	Ralf Kirsten	1973
<i>Die Leiden des jungen Werthers</i> [ <i>The Sorrows of Young Werther</i> ]	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	Egon Günther	1976
<i>Beethoven—Tage aus einem Leben</i> [ <i>Beethoven – Days from a Life</i> ]	Ludwig van Beethoven	Horst Seemann	1976
<i>Halbte des Lebens</i> [ <i>Half of Life</i> ]	Friedrich Hölderlin	Herrmann Zschoche	1976
<i>Frühlingssinfonie</i> [ <i>Spring Symphony</i> ]	Clara and Robert Schumann	Peter Schamoni	1983
<i>Caspar David Friedrich – Grenzen der Zeit</i> [ <i>Caspar David Friedrich – The Limits of Time</i> ]	Caspar David Friedrich	Peter Schamoni	1986

individuality of the artist, establishment versus anti-establishment figures, the bourgeois milieu as a reflection of capitalism and as a critique of the cultural traditions that were dominant in the DDR, and 'the inherent contradiction of producing politically progressive work in a society where, increasingly, art was regarded as a decorative commodity ripe for commercial exploitation by a new class of bourgeois entrepreneurs'.<sup>65</sup> *Frühlingssinfonie* at once acts out and critiques the conditions for artistic production in the contemporary DDR, even if none of this socio-political context is explicitly stated in DEFA's promotional material for the film.

Matthias Wendt takes the theme of *Frühlingssinfonie* to be 'Clara's liberation from the yoke of her father and her husband'. Underlining biography's claims to verifiability, he argues that this theme does not emerge from the primary sources, but nonetheless, continues to be taken up in fictional accounts of the lives of the Schumanns.<sup>66</sup> This is in keeping with Ní Dhúill's assertion that 'Because fiction permits – even invites – a speculative recreation of the subject's inner life which would be inaccessible – and inadmissible – to biography proper, biographical fiction has often been seen as a form of more or less flawed or misappropriated biography'.<sup>67</sup> Yet the directors of *Frühlingssinfonie* were keen to demonstrate the relationship between the raw biographical material and the events depicted on screen, publishing a book with a selection of original correspondence between the central characters on which the screenplay is based.<sup>68</sup> The film is a scholarly reconstruction of documented life events which have been synthesized and

<sup>65</sup> Seán Allan, *Screening Art*, 203.

<sup>66</sup> Matthias Wendt, 'Das Schumann-Bild in der Belletristik', in *Schumann Handbuch*, ed. Ulrich Tadday (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzner, 2006): 563–69, here 566.

<sup>67</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 73

<sup>68</sup> Hans A. Neunzig and Peter Schamoni, eds, *Frühlingssinfonie: Clara Wieck und Robert Schumann – Die Geschichte einer Leidenschaft und zahlreichen Fotos aus den Film 'Frühlingssinfonie'* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne, 1983).

interpreted, and positioned within a broader horizon of meaning. We might well turn to Ní Dhúill's critical stance on the reliability of evidence: 'To assume, as biographies often invite us to do, that letters unlock the private or inner life is to bypass the question of how to read them'.<sup>69</sup>

Whereas *Frühlingssinfonie* is not as blatantly subversive as Horst Seemann's *Beethoven – Tage aus einem Leben*, its critique of bourgeois sentimentality is never far from the surface. In the rivalry between Friedrich Wieck and Robert Schumann, both stand to gain much from the labour of Clara – Wieck's profit being commercial, Schumann's being artistic. This is reflected in the narrative structure of the film which focuses principally on two central periods within the decade 1830–1840: Clara as a child prodigy, with Friedrich Wieck taking her from one city to the next and one princely court to the next; and Clara no longer wishing to be 'imprisoned in the golden cage of virtuosity',<sup>70</sup> and instead choosing to pursue her love for Robert.

The entrepreneurial spirit of Friedrich Wieck is foregrounded throughout the film. He is consistently preoccupied with the business of a virtuoso career, from the pedagogical training of Clara, to tuning and transporting pianos, negotiating terms with concert venues, designing and manufacturing posters and promotional material, bookkeeping, page turning, and serving as chaperone. As he counts the plentiful profits following one of her concerts, he hands Clara a single coin, saying 'Das ist für dich' ('That is for you'). At the next concert, a gentleman with whom Wieck converses proposes 'You make a lot of money with your daughter, Herr Wieck', to which Wieck replies, 'I make music'. In an exchange that draws attention to Wieck's significant investment of time in Clara's career, a lady at the same concert suggests that he must thank heaven every day that he was given a daughter such as she. 'Yes', Wieck retorts, 'once, when it snowed, an unruly snowflake fell directly onto my hand and, behold, there was Clara, just as she is standing before you'.<sup>71</sup> When asked if he has more musical children he responds that he has only one life to give away.<sup>72</sup> The transactional nature of the business of Clara's career is made most explicit in the scenes depicting the court case. A full legal transcript of the excerpt shown in the film is included in Schamoni and Neunzig's book.<sup>73</sup> The theme of Friedrich Wieck having given up his life for his daughter becomes a leitmotif throughout the film and is given poignant potency when, following her marriage to Robert, Wieck closes his shop and moves away from Leipzig.

The title *Frühlingssinfonie* refers obliquely to what Neunzig and Schamoni call 'the long winter and stormy early spring' of the relationship between the two lovers. It refers explicitly to Robert's First Symphony, the work that will be completed and have its debut performance under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn as the film draws to a close. The DVD sleeve states that the music in the film is by Schumann and Mendelssohn. The DEFA website is even narrower in claiming that all of the music is by Robert Schumann.<sup>74</sup> Yet, as was the case in *Träumerei*, the rich and sophisticated manner in which music by numerous

<sup>69</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Neunzig and Schamoni, eds, *Frühlingssinfonie*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Dialogue in *Frühlingssinfonie*.

<sup>72</sup> Dialogue in *Frühlingssinfonie*.

<sup>73</sup> Neunzig and Schamoni, eds, *Frühlingssinfonie*, 144–9.

<sup>74</sup> See [www.defa-stiftung.de/filme/filmsuche/fruehlingssinfonie/](http://www.defa-stiftung.de/filme/filmsuche/fruehlingssinfonie/), accessed on 21 August 2020.

composers is employed in this film plays a vital role in portraying Clara the virtuoso pianist, whose performance career is given its most extensive treatment of all our three films in this one, as outlined in Table 4.

The captivating opening scene features Gidon Kremer playing the role of Paganini. Two separate musical responses follow his scintillating performance of his Caprice No. 17 in E-flat Major: Robert vows to become the 'Paganini of the keyboard', while Clara, at the tender age of eleven, already performs with Paganini. The splendour of her virtuoso career is illustrated through her performance of Felix Mendelssohn's Piano Sextet in D major, a work that makes formidable demands on the pianist, equal to those of a piano concerto, although here with reduced chamber forces. Her propensity for ensemble playing is given a further dramatic flourish as she, by far the youngest and the only female of four solo pianists, performs Carl Czerny's *Quatuor Concertante*, Op. 230. The choice of Chopin's Etude in F, Op. 10 No. 8 has singular significance for showing the artistry with which Clara Wieck developed her concert programmes, taking that which was perceived to be the esoteric repertoire of the practice room and placing it on a concert stage.<sup>75</sup> Venturing beyond the recital, Clara's prowess is evident in the multiple performances of Beethoven's Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 4 that she performs repeatedly throughout the film, the latter featuring Clara's own cadenzas. Her strong vision for how German chamber music ought to be performed is played out with fury (and national chauvinism) in her berating the 'French dilettantes' with whom she rehearses Mendelssohn's Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 1 during her concert tour of Paris in 1839.<sup>76</sup>

Clara Wieck's own compositions are also featured in the narrative and on the soundtrack of *Frühlingssinfonie*. At the beginning of their acquaintance, the 11-year old plays her 4 Polonaises for Piano, Op. 1 to Robert, pieces that were inspired by Chopin. Although we never hear her Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7, Friedrich Wieck refers to it repeatedly by way of persuading her to abandon her infatuation with Robert, and instead focus her energy on her own career: 'Clara, you are an artist. An artist must never become dependent on a person. At home in Leipzig I finished the score of your great Concerto in A minor. You could become a female Beethoven. And what is he? A disabled piano player, a debt maker, and philanderer.'<sup>77</sup>

Where the intricate interweaving of the musical lives of Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann is concerned, Clara is shown to have been central not only to the public promotion of Robert's compositions, but also to his very compositional process through the internal fusion between their compositions. In this dramatization, it is Clara who first performs *Papillons*, Op. 2, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.<sup>78</sup> She

<sup>75</sup> Valerie Woodring Goertzen, 'Clara Wieck Schumann's Improvisations and Her "Mosaics" of Small Forms', in *Beyond Notes: Improvisation in Western Music of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Rudolph Rasch (Lucca: Brepols, 2011): 153–62; and Goertzen, 'By Way of Introduction: Preluding by 18th- and Early 19th-Century Pianists', *Journal of Musicology* 14/3 (1996): 299–337.

<sup>76</sup> On the differences between French and German musical culture as they relate to Clara Schumann, see Beatrix Borchard, 'Orte und Strategien der Kulturvermittlung'.

<sup>77</sup> Dialogue in *Frühlingssinfonie*.

<sup>78</sup> The film conveys nothing of the reservations Schumann confided to his diary about Clara's performance and evident lack of understanding of the piece. See Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985): 90.



**Table 4** Music in *Frühlingssinfonie*

Composer	Work	Movement	Character performing/Details
Ernst Moritz Arndt	'Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland'		Men singing in pub
Beethoven	Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major	III. Rondo. Allegro scherzando III. Rondo. Vivace	Clara Wieck Clara Wieck
Czerny	<i>Quatuor Concertante</i> , Op. 230		Clara Wieck
Chopin	Etude in F, Op. 10 No. 8		Clara Wieck
Mendelssohn	Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 1 Piano Sextet in D major, Op. 110	I. Allegro vivace IV. Allgero Vivace	Clara Wieck & chamber musicians in Paris Clara Wieck & chamber musicians at Leipzig Gewandhaus
Paganini	<i>Lieder ohne Worte</i> , Op. 19 (1829–30) 24 Caprices, Op. 1 Cantabile in D major, Op. 17	No. 6, 'Venetianisches Gondollied' No. 17 in E-flat Major	Mendelssohn Paganini Paganini & Clara Wieck
Schubert	Piano Trio in E flat, D. 929		Diegetic
Robert Schumann	<i>Carnaval</i> , Op. 9 Toccata, Op. 7 <i>Papillons</i> , Op. 2 <i>Papillons</i> , Op. 2 Piano Sonata No. 1 in F# minor, Op. 11 Symphonic Studies, Op. 13 Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22 Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 <i>Kinderszenen</i> , Op. 15 <i>Myrthen</i> , Op. 25 Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44 <i>Dichterliebe</i> , Op. 48 Symphony No. 1 in B flat Major, Op. 38, 'Frühlingssinfonie'	March of the Davidsbündler against the Philistines I. Un poco adagio – Allegro vivace Etude No. 6 I. So rasch wie möglich IV. Rondo Allegretto (coda) Quasi Variazioni, Var. IV 1. Allegro affetuoso 7. 'Träumerei' 1. 'Widmung' II. In modo d'una Marcia. Un poco largamente-Agitato 8. 'Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen'	Robert Schumann Robert Schumann Clara Wieck Robert Schumann & Diegetic Robert Schumann, later Clara Wieck Clara Wieck Clara Wieck Clara Wieck Diegetic Robert Schumann Diegetic Diegetic Diegetic Diegetic Robert Schumann Mendelssohn, Gewandhaus Orchestra Clara Wieck
Wieck	4 Polonaises for Piano, Op. 1		

introduces Robert's Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22 to a Viennese audience during her fêted tour of Vienna in 1837–38. It was on this occasion that she was bestowed with Austria's highest honour – Royal and Imperial Virtuosa – and it was this tour that would prompt Franz Grillparzer to pen his laudatory poem 'Clara Wieck und Beethoven', which she and her father recite aloud, as she (at the age of 17) sits on his knee.<sup>79</sup> The scene where Clara plays the slow movement of Robert's Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor reveals an even deeper level to this musical interrelationship whereby Clara the composer is enticingly brought to the fore, before once again retreating to the role of performer, perhaps revealing the film's attitudes towards the hierarchy between composition and performance which, in turn, has implications for how we understand Clara Schumann's legacy. As she plays bars 113–129.1 of Variation IV of the third movement, Quasi Variazioni, just as she reaches the **a tempo** marking at bar 120, she affectionately says to Robert, 'es ist von mir' ('this is by me').<sup>80</sup> As Linda Correll Roesner puts it, the 24 bars that comprise the 'Andantino de Clara Wieck' upon which Robert's movement (and the entire sonata) is based 'are not Schumann's harmonization of a theme by Clara, but an entire piece by Clara'.<sup>81</sup> Those aware of the compositional genesis of Robert's Sonata will appreciate how, in this simple filmic gesture, the audience is brought from an acknowledgment of Clara's nascent compositional capacity to an understanding that the times in which she lived did not permit that capacity to reach its fullest potential. The film seems to play into this narrative, rather than questioning it, historical 'reality' here running alongside fictionalization. Even as Schumann identifies her own composition in the piece she plays, it is heard through Robert's re-composition.

The use of music in *Frühlingssinfonie* also underlines a productive counterpoint in the lives of these two artists through a series of imaginative pairings. As Robert comes to recognize the devastating implication of his finger injury on his performing career, Clara thrives as a concert pianist, in a montage that cuts from her exuberant performance of Chopin's Etude to Robert's pained attempts to play his Toccata. As Robert begins to gain notoriety for his compositions, it is through Clara's performative agency that he does so, as evidenced in a further montage that cuts between Robert ham-fistedly playing *Papillons* in an audition for Heinrich Dorn, to Clara performing a sparkling rendition of that piece in concert in 1835. Along similar lines, Robert's hampered rendition of his Etude No. 6 from the *Symphonic Studies*, Op. 13 gives way to Clara's polished performance of that piece at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

The sense of foreboding that pervades *Frühlingssinfonie* is perhaps nowhere more strongly stated than in Robert's flashback scene where he wakes in the night and drinks heavily to quieten his inner demons. Paganini's music continues to haunt Robert, along with distorted versions of his own compositions heard

<sup>79</sup> It was Clara's performance of Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata that prompted Grillparzer to write this poem. See Franz Grillparzer, 'Clara Wieck und Beethoven', *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur* (1837), translated in Alessandra Comini, *The Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2008): 195. Beatrix Borchard takes note of the incestuous overtones in how the relationship between Clara and Friedrich Wieck is depicted in this film. See Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Musik als Lebensform*, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Dialogue from *Frühlingssinfonie* at 41:00.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Correll Roesner, 'The Autograph of Schumann's Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 14', *The Musical Quarterly* 61/1 (1975): 98–130, here 113.

earlier in the film as he recalls a number of significant moments: a letter to Clara of 16 February 1839 reads, 'When I see you again for the first time, I cry, I scream, I won't let you go again. Then you are no longer allowed to leave me. I've suffered too much for you';<sup>82</sup> the voice of Friedrich Wieck calling him a 'semi-genius' and a 'Viertelfaust'; and the sound of his mother cautioning him to remember 'how many great artists have gone before [him]'. The flashback culminates with the slow movement of his Piano Quintet accompanying a hallucination of a funeral carriage outside his window, a filmic representation of the frequent premonitions of death that beleaguered Robert Schumann's life.<sup>83</sup>

Against this troubled background, Robert's bestowing the gift of 'Träumerei' on Clara on the eve of her trip to Paris in 1839 attains an ominous hue.<sup>84</sup> Although it speaks to the domestic realm with which Clara is habitually associated, when viewed in relation to the sequence of events in *Frühlingssinfonie* it also undermines the prospect of any such domestic bliss. When 'Widmung' is heard in the closing marriage scene, it too seems to undermine any prospect for future happiness. Drawing on Clara Wieck's correspondence, the directors show that when she decided to pursue the path of love, 'she initially decided against her career, especially as a composer'. Following the initial euphoria of their relationship, as the directors frame it, 'we see Robert Schumann sinking from a feeling of happiness into deep depression'.<sup>85</sup> The final scene of the film sees Robert in their new apartment, working through ideas for his *Frühlingssinfonie* with Mendelssohn. When Clara shares the good news that her father has finally returned her piano, Robert protests that 'I only hope our place is not too small and thin-walled for two instruments'. Clara is dumbfounded and, after an uncomfortable silence, Robert apologizes. Clara is shown to have exchanged the golden cage of virtuosity for the gilded halls of domesticity.

### *Geliebte Clara* (2008)

East Germany's DEFA, with its focus on German Romanticism, found a counterpart in West Germany in the New German Cinema of producers such as Helma Sanders-Brahms. In *Geliebte Clara* we encounter what Ní Dhúill refers to as 'biography's "gender trouble"' in that Sanders-Brahms privileges the viewpoint of the woman, thereby giving space to perspectives that have been typically marginalized or silenced in accounts of Robert Schumann. Sanders-Brahms's Robert Schumann is unheroic. *Geliebte Clara* might fit well in Richard Holmes's category of biography that espouses 'a suppressed desire to devalue greatness, to find the feet of clay and the rattling skeleton in the cupboard'.<sup>86</sup> As the film navigates the tension between fact and fiction, it is heavily weighted toward the sexual, with

<sup>82</sup> 'Wenn ich dich zum ersten Mal wiedersehe, da weine ich, da schrei ich, da laß ich Dich nicht wieder los. Dann darfst du nicht mehr von mir. Zu viel habe ich schon um dich gelitten'. Letter from Robert Schumann to Clara Wieck, 16 February 1839, cited in Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Ihr Leben. Eine biographische Montage. Mit einem Essay der Autorin: 'Mit Schere und Klebstoff'* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2015): 107.

<sup>83</sup> See Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*.

<sup>84</sup> Barham, 'Recurring Dreams and Moving Images'.

<sup>85</sup> Neunzig and Schamoni, eds, *Frühlingssinfonie*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Holmes. 'Biography: Inventing the Truth', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 15–25, here 18.

many salacious scenes.<sup>87</sup> It provides a feminist counterpoint to the depiction of the Schumanns in *Träumerei* and *Frühlingssinfonie*.

*Geliebte Clara* is notable not only for featuring a female subject in a genre dominated by male content, but also for being directed by a woman. A leading figure in New German Cinema, Helma Sanders-Brahms's (1940–2014) films have faced their most difficult reception in her native Germany for the uncomfortable social commentaries they present in dealing with the working classes, the marginalized, and women's issues.<sup>88</sup> An enduring theme in her output is the reputation of Germany on an international stage. As she explicates in her booklet on the making of *Geliebte Clara* (2008), the collective memory of the world tends to focus on two epochs in German history: 'the Nazi era as the darkest, the romantic era as the most beautiful'.<sup>89</sup> For Sanders-Brahms, Schumann and Brahms are central to the image of German Romanticism that is pervasive in conceptions of Germany on account of 'the longing but also the darkness, the beauty, and the beauty of feeling' in their compositions.<sup>90</sup> Sanders-Brahms's films tend to revisit this bifurcated view of Germany. The award-winning film *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter* (*Germany, Pale Mother*, 1979) stands as her most pronounced statement on the Nazi era and its aftermath. A number of her films explicitly address themes related to German Romanticism, including *Heinrich* (1977), concerning the life and suicide of the poet Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), and *Geliebte Clara*.<sup>91</sup>

There is a further link between *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter* and *Geliebte Clara*, for both films have women at the centre of their narrative. Sanders-Brahms is celebrated for foregrounding 'the family as the site where historical memory (or its lack) and the more or less palpable residues of authoritarian structure move from generation to generation'.<sup>92</sup> *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter* is an auto/biographical, socio-historical film that deals not just with the life of Sanders-Brahms's mother from the perspective of a daughter trying to understand it. In *Geliebte Clara*, two histories are again woven together: the personal and the political, the former through the focus on Clara Schumann and her family, the latter through the focus on German Romanticism. Unlike *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter*, the director writes,

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<sup>87</sup> For a fascinating exploration of the attempts to regulate Clara Schumann's sexuality and femininity in seemingly benign terms in relation to her title as a 'priestess', see April L. Prince, '(Re)Considering the "Priestess": Clara Schumann, Historiography, and the Visual', *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 21 (2017): 107–40. See also April Prince's article in this journal issue.

<sup>88</sup> Steven Taubeneck, 'Helma Sanders Brahms: An Introduction', in *Women Filmmakers: Refocussing*, ed. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003): 65–71, here 68.

<sup>89</sup> Helma Sanders-Brahms, *Clara Schumann und ihre Beziehung zu Robert Schumann und Johannes Brahms – Entstehung eines Films* (Cologne: Verlag Frank-Michael Rommert, 2009): 3.

<sup>90</sup> Sanders-Brahms, *Clara Schumann und ihre Beziehung zu Robert Schumann und Johannes Brahms*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> As Sabine Hake frames it, *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter* is a 'highly allegorical interweaving of family story and national history in what became [Sanders-Brahms's] most famous and most controversial film'. Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2008): 177.

<sup>92</sup> John E. Davidson, *Deterritorializing the New German Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 69.

this time, it is not my mother, who only a few people knew apart from myself and my family, but the first female European celebrity produced by my nation. A pianist ... on the same level as the great Franz Liszt, herself a successful composer who also helped the two most important German composers of her time to their breakthrough.

The film confronts themes of women's sacrifice through the experience of this star who was also a housewife and loving spouse and mother, 'a highly gifted and inspired woman in the conflict between her career, her husband and children, who has to sacrifice herself against her will in order to preserve life around her'.<sup>93</sup>

Georg Maas argues that film biographies confront the relationship between the dramatic construct and the historic construct, developing a scenario that is a matter of what could have been.<sup>94</sup> This is closely related to Hayden White's idea of the 'imaginary discourse', and speaks to the ways in which legacies are constructed at the intersection of these two sides of the spectrum.<sup>95</sup>

Given the proximity of *Geliebte Clara* to our own time, it seems reasonable to wonder whether Sanders-Brahms was aware of the developments in what Laura Hamer has called 'the first wave of feminist music scholarship'. In the 1990s, this first wave sought to uncover social constructions of gender within music. In German-language scholarship examples are found in the writings of Klassen, Borchard, and Eva Rieger amongst others, while a select few from English-language scholarship includes the work of Susan McClary, Marcia Citron, and Ruth Solie. The quest of these scholars for musical meaning not only arises from, but is also 'contingent upon music's social and historic contexts'.<sup>96</sup> As such, and in keeping with the new musicology, this scholarship puts a question mark over any claim for the autonomy of music.

In *Geliebte Clara*, Helma Sanders-Brahms is not concerned with the question of whether or not music has autonomy. Instead she is concerned with how historical-biographical stories are told. In other words, her quest is for biographical meaning, rather than musical meaning. There is no way to tell whether or not she was aware of and conversant with feminist musicology, even if her directorial decisions in *Geliebte Clara* would seem to be in sympathy with the thrust of 'first wave feminist music scholarship'.

Much like Schamoni and Neunzig, for Sanders-Brahms the archival traces of Clara Schumann's life form the building blocks from which her story of that life is to be (re-) constructed. The screenplay for *Geliebte Clara* is based on Sanders-Brahms's intimate knowledge of the wealth of the Schumanns' personal documents. Yet she expands the limits of generic convention of the biographical film

<sup>93</sup> Helma Sanders-Brahms, *Geliebte Clara* interview, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2CMQ1ZXQE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2CMQ1ZXQE), accessed 24 July 2020.

<sup>94</sup> Georg Maas, 'Frühlingssinfonie: Robert und Clara Schumann im Film', *Robert Schumann für die Jugend: Beiträge zu Theorie und Praxis des musikpädagogische Komponistenporträts* (2008): 92–111, here 93.

<sup>95</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): 44.

<sup>96</sup> Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 131.

by creating a form of interchange between the official documentary evidence<sup>97</sup> and what she supposes might have been Clara Schumann's subjective experience. In order to do this, as Irmgard Knechtges-Obrecht and Beatrix Borchard observe, she relies on the use of symbols.<sup>98</sup> If you attempt to see Robert 'from [Clara's] perspective, and not from historically, verifiable knowledge', Knechtges-Obrecht adds, then things could have presented themselves as Sanders-Brahms depicts them. Clara 'could have felt this extremely difficult phase of her marriage and her life in this way, her sick husband might have behaved this way'.<sup>99</sup>

The darker aspects of the married relationship that were merely hinted at in *Frühlingssinfonie* are given powerful and at times disturbing expression in *Geliebte Clara* with recourse to German literary fiction.<sup>100</sup> Sanders-Brahms conjures up E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana*, 'a musical portrait of violence and madness', to depict the more erratic aspects of Robert's behaviour.<sup>101</sup> John MacAuslan provides a useful outline of the plot of *Kreisleriana* upon which Sanders-Brahms plays:

A strange musician came to a castle, where the lord's daughter fell in love with him; she was heard singing to his lute under a tree with his horsemen, and under the tree they found a stone, blood welling from it, and below the stabbed girl's body and the stranger's shattered lute. Since then a nightingale has sung from the tree at midnight, its laments piercing the heart, and from the blood have grown strange mosses and grasses entwined around the stone. For Chrysostom, the mosses united with the songs of the nightingale and the girl to bring him exquisite music which he could not reproduce; but perhaps that inspiration, allied with technical skills in counterpoint, would eventually lead him to artistic fulfilment, Kreisler detects 'the voice of the poet buried within' his apprentice, sends him on his journey to Sais, and bids him farewell 'as if we were in the end but one person'; then he too disappears.<sup>102</sup>

The Kreislerian episode spans two scenes in the film, the first at a dinner party with guests from the Düsseldorf Orchestra, Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski and Julius

<sup>97</sup> Sanders-Brahms carried out 12 years of research in Schumann houses and research institutes, as mentioned in her booklet on the making of the film. Helma Sanders Brahms, *Clara Schumann und ihre Beziehung zu Robert Schumann und Johannes Brahms*.

<sup>98</sup> Irmgard Knechtges-Obrecht, "'Das Klavier war der Schlüssel'": Ein Bericht über den Film *Geliebte Clara*', *Correspondenz: Mitteilung der Robert-Schumann-Gesellschaft* 31 (2008): 27–33, here 30, and Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Musik als Lebensform*, 66.

<sup>99</sup> Knechtges-Obrecht, 'Das Klavier war der Schlüssel'. According to Peter Ostwald, 'The 1 April letter from Dr Peters ... is the only existing document from Eendenich that alludes to violence on the composer's part. ... It seems probable that upon being admitted to the hospital Schumann was in a state of extreme agitation, which might have escalated into aggressive behavior if he had been interfered with (a scenario that he feared when Clara came too close to him)'. Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*, 279.

<sup>100</sup> The literary plays an important role in much of Sanders-Brahms's output. *Heinrich* is about the writer Heinrich Kleist, the characters in *Under the Pavement* are acting in a Greek Tragedy, *A Future for Emily* begins with Brigitte Fossey acting in Kleist's *Penthesilia*, *Laputa* begins with long quotations from Jonathan Swift, and *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* begins with a Berthold Brecht poem. See Peter Brunette, 'Helma Sanders-Brahms: A Conversation', *Film Quarterly* 44/2 (1990): 34–42, here 40–41.

<sup>101</sup> Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*, 140. See also Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, 'Johannes Kreisler's Certificate of Apprenticeship', trans. Max Knight, *19th-Century Music* 5/3 (1982): 189–192.

<sup>102</sup> John MacAuslan, *Schumann's Music and E.T.A. Hoffmann's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 148.

Tausch, the second a rehearsal the following day. As the inebriated Robert descends to the cellar to fetch another bottle (this only for himself, as his guests have repeatedly declined the offer of more wine), an embarrassed Clara follows him. She finds him chipping away at a block of wood with a knife, and pouring red wine over it. In a scuffle, he drops the bottle, but proceeds to drink from the broken neck. Clara implores him to stop, breaking the news that she is again pregnant. 'Is it mine?' he asks. Clara strikes him, and he returns a violent blow that pushes her to the ground. The following day, with Robert being unfit to stand before the orchestra, Clara conducts the second movement of the Rhenish Symphony while attempting to cover the bruises on her face.<sup>103</sup> As she does so, Schumann dances in the background wearing his house coat, to the evident alarm of the orchestra members.

Sanders-Brahms has discussed the connection between these two scenes in what many viewers are bound to find an objectionably fantastical depiction of this period in the Schumann's lives:

The film worked towards this rehearsal without the music having played more than a few notes on the subject – then Robert comes into the rehearsal room in a tight black velvet robe, he doesn't leave, but he dances, and his tails fly just like the image on the first edition of E.T.A. Hoffmann's story about Kapellmeister Kreisler, who is in league with the devil, kidnaps his beloved woman from his father, who is then said to have killed her and buried her under a stone from which blood sometimes comes out. A link has been struck with the previous night, when Robert drills a block of wood with a knife and pours blood-red wine over the bare knife.<sup>104</sup>

The manner in which Sanders-Brahms mixes the real and the fantastic is evocative of Hoffmann's writings and what Paola Meyer refers to as 'the aesthetics of fear in German Romanticism'.<sup>105</sup> Johannes Jansen ventures that this scene anticipates the end of Robert's life after a skull operation in the asylum at Eendenich.<sup>106</sup> Whether or not it alludes to Robert's impending death, by avoiding the established narrative or mythic patterns, and instead encountering the psychological complexity of the lives of the Schumanns, Sanders-Brahms renders Robert a protagonist, but no longer a hero or a saint. The use of this tale from Hoffmann is further related to Sanders-Brahms's use of fairy tales throughout her films and her conviction that fairy tales and myths work with the subconscious.<sup>107</sup> When she constructs her scenes and writes dialogue, she tries to 'be as intense as possible', finding 'a certain

<sup>103</sup> The Rhenish Symphony is used repeatedly throughout the film to signal Robert's psychological pain. As both Johannes Jansen and Knechtges Obrecht assert, Clara was never a conductor. Yet, as Borchard notes, there are ample reports from members of the Düsseldorf Chorus that tell us that Clara frequently sat in the front row of rehearsals with the score in her lap and intervened with the choir behind the back of her 'absent-minded conducting husband'. Borchard, *Clara Schumann: Musik als Lebensform*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Helma Sanders-Brahms, *Clara Schumann und ihre Beziehung zu Robert Schumann und Johannes Brahms*, 29.

<sup>105</sup> See, for instance, the 'Introduction' to Paola Mayer, *The Aesthetics of Fear in German Romanticism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020).

<sup>106</sup> Johannes Jansen, 'Filmstart im Dezember: *Geliebte Clara*', *Concerto: Das Magazin für Alte Musik* (2008): 19–20.

<sup>107</sup> 'Interview and Excerpts from a Master Class with Helma Sanders Brahms', in *Women Filmmakers: Refocussing*, 71–77, here 76.

concentrations of ideas and situations' in these texts.<sup>108</sup> The evocation of violence is also redolent of the problematic legacies of German Romanticism depicted throughout the sixties and seventies by DEFA film directors.<sup>109</sup> In keeping with those earlier films, Sanders-Brahms uses Hoffmann and Romanticism not as a stabilizing force, but instead to exploit the more sinister depths and the question of a lack of stability in the Schumann relationship.

The suggestion of domestic violence that hovers menacingly beneath the surface throughout *Geliebte Clara* is not divorced from the historical record of the Schumann marriage. Clara confided to her diary in February 1854: 'At night there were often moments in which he begged me to leave him, as he might do me an injury. Then I would go away for a few minutes in order to quiet him, and when I came back, it was all right again'.<sup>110</sup> As Knechtges-Obrecht interprets it, 'This film version of Schumann is marked by devastating long-term consequences of syphilis, he also has a form of mental illness, he suffers from seizures and hallucinations, he increasingly puts pressure on, even threatens his wife, becomes violent, and also seems obsessed with his jealousy of Brahms'.<sup>111</sup> The depiction of the physical relationship between Clara and Robert suggests that sex served as a palliative for Robert's headaches and nervous agitations, and that it was bound up with his increasing need to be reassured of Clara's love. The revelation of things typically hidden from public view takes on a double complication here: on the one hand they are loosely related to the raw material of these lives, and on the other hand they are refracted through the realm of fiction. Sanders-Brahms moves away from the heterogeneity of biographical practice and derails and disrupts the protagonistic narrative of the 'great man'. *Geliebte Clara* exhibits the 'anti-heroic and anti-biographical counter-traditions' that Ní Dhúill considers to be typical of a 'scepticism towards, and distrust of, biography's claims'.<sup>112</sup>

The film glosses over what we know of the considerable trouble the family had in finding suitable accommodation in Düsseldorf.<sup>113</sup> The fourth house on Bilker Straße to which they moved in September 1852 finally proved satisfactory to their needs, offering the distinct advantage that, for the first time since their marriage, Clara had her own 'study on the second floor, where Robert can hear nothing'.<sup>114</sup> They had been married for less than two weeks in 1840 when Clara confided to her diary that 'it's bad that Robert can hear me in his room when I'm playing, so that I can't work during the morning which is the best time for serious study'.<sup>115</sup> By January 1853, she could record that 'I began to work again, at last. When I am able to work regularly like this, I feel really in my element; quite a different feeling seems to come over me, I am much freer and lighter,

<sup>108</sup> Brunette, 'Helma Sanders-Brahms: A Conversation', 41.

<sup>109</sup> Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, 106.

<sup>110</sup> Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life*, 2: 57.

<sup>111</sup> Knechtges-Obrecht, 'Das Klavier war der Schlüssel', 29.

<sup>112</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 20.

<sup>113</sup> On the Schumann's ongoing trouble with accommodation in Düsseldorf, see Irmgard Knechtges-Obrecht, *Clara Schumann: Ein Leben für die Musik*, 102.

<sup>114</sup> Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life*, 2: 35.

<sup>115</sup> Diary entry of 20–27 September 1840 in Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher*, ed. Georg Eismann and Gerd Nauhaus (Basel: Stroemfeld and Roter Stern, 1971–82). Translated in Martin Geck, *Robert Schumann: The Life and Work of a Romantic Composer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 134.



Table 5 Music featured in *Geliebte Clara*

Composer	Work	Movement
Clara Wieck	<i>Romance Variée</i> , Op. 3	Theme
Robert Schumann	Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54	Allegro affetuoso
	Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, 'Rhenish'	Lebhaft, sehr mässig
	<i>Albumblätter</i> , Op. 99	Ziemlich langsam
	<i>Fantasiestücke</i> , Op. 12	'Des Abends'
Johannes Brahms	Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8	Scherzo
	Piano Sonata No. 2 in F# minor, Op. 2	Allegro non troppo
	Fünf Lieder, Op. 49	'Wiegenlied'
	Hungarian Dances	No. 5 in G minor
	Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15	Maestoso-Poco più moderato

and everything seems to me more bright and cheerful'. Nonetheless, the film reflects further obstacles that continued to stand in the way of Clara devoting sufficient time to her music making. When she rejoices that 'This house will bring us luck' and reports her 'wish to compose again', for instance, Robert responds: 'But did you not already complete it. Do you not want me anymore?'<sup>116</sup>

The soundtrack to *Geliebte Clara* contains only the pieces heard in the orchestral rehearsals and the music which the three main characters play to one other, as outlined in Table 5. Knechtges-Obrecht perceptively notes the integral role of music in this film which features not as an accompaniment or a commentary on events, but rather as aesthetic material in its own right, and 'an important medium for expressive design'. As particular pieces of music are heard, uninterrupted by dialogue or events happening onscreen, 'the camera dwells on a single face, on a single scene, for minutes at a time, so that the music itself becomes the action'.<sup>117</sup> A powerful example of this is found in the scene where Clara Schumann plays Brahms's compositions following his first visit to their home in Düsseldorf in 1853. As she opens the manuscript, she comments that Brahms is 'like a stray cat who wishes to become a tiger'. She begins to play the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 2 in F# minor, Op. 2, a movement that shifts between restraint and passionate outburst, often within a single bar. At the fermata at bar 15, looking over Clara's shoulder, Robert comments that 'there we have our tiger'. Clara continues to play the Allegro non troppo ma energico exposition from bar 16, the cinematography now intently focused on the music with its ominous rising bassline resonating as the music increases in both dynamics and register.<sup>118</sup>

The triangular relationship between the Schumanns and Brahms is established through the use of music in sophisticated and nuanced ways. *Geliebte Clara* is framed by the celebrated virtuoso pianist performing Robert's Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 at the opening of the film, and Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor, op. 15 at its close. Throughout the film, the actors portray what Nancy Reich has referred to as 'the extraordinary sharing and flowing of ideas' between

<sup>116</sup> Dialogue from *Geliebte Clara*.

<sup>117</sup> Knechtges-Obrecht, 'Das Klavier war der Schlüssel', 27–32.

<sup>118</sup> This entire scene lasts from 00:25:32 to 00:30:30. The original dialogue at this point is: Clara Schumann: 'Er hat etwas von einer streunende Katze, die ein Tiger werden könnte'. Robert Schumann: 'Nun also, da haben wir unseren Tiger'.

Clara and Robert throughout their lives together.<sup>119</sup> Yet along with such sharing, in Sanders-Brahms's account, comes the distinct silencing of Clara Schumann's compositional voice which is signalled on two occasions in the film. The first is when Brahms visits the Schumann house for the first time, and the three figures form a musical bond. This is the same scene described above with his Piano Sonata No. 2. When Robert asks Brahms if he would not rather play his own music, he admits that he could not play it the way Clara does, a nod to the integral role that she assumed in becoming one of the most gifted interpreters of Brahms's music. When asked what he would like to play he responds that 'Madame Schumann plays Brahms and I will play Robert Schumann, in my own way'. At hearing the theme from *Bunte Blätter*, Op. 99, *Albumblätter* No. 1, *ziemlich langsam*, Clara exclaims, 'That is my romance, I invented it when you were still a child, younger than you'.<sup>120</sup> As Brahms continues to play, Robert joins him at the keyboard in Variation I, the two composers elaborating together on the theme that Clara has claimed as her own compositional property. Regardless of the correct authorship of the music chosen for this scene, it is highly effective in depicting the intimacy of the shared music-making between these three figures.

The second of these two connected scenes, at the end of the film, features Clara Wieck's *Romance Variée*, Op. 3 (1833). Sanders-Brahms plays on these variations in connection with Robert's admission to the asylum in Eendenich, and the subsequent birth of the Schumann's eighth child, Felix.<sup>121</sup> These events mark the return of Brahms to the Schumann family home whereupon he resumes his role as the favourite uncle of the Schumann children, organizing a picnic on the floor of Clara's bedroom where she is confined with the new-born baby. As the children enjoy their food, Brahms plays the theme from Clara's *Romance Variée* (the theme to which Clara had alluded when Brahms first visited the Schumann home).

'That is my youthful sin', Clara reminisces, prompting Johannes to ask for how long she had not composed. Her two-word response is telling: 'Ewigkeit. ... Robert'. The theme from Clara's *Romance Variée* has had a series of potent after-lives, the first of which is in Robert's *Six Impromptus on a Theme of Clara Wieck*, Op. 5 of 1833.<sup>122</sup> In the film, we move from Clara's statement on why she no longer composes, to her performing Schumann's *Impromptus* on the concert stage. The gender dynamic that Jeffrey Kallberg notes in the creative interflow between the Schumanns is pertinent to how Sanders-Brahms depicts this scene: 'When quotation becomes transformation, it suggests at the very least a kind of exertion of Robert's self over Clara's, an "authorizing" of the feminine work. And it calls

<sup>119</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, 231.

<sup>120</sup> Dialogue from *Geliebte Clara*. The musical director for *Geliebte Clara* evidently confused the themes from Robert's *Albumblätter* with Clara's *Romance Variée*, Op. 3. The theme that Brahms plays is composed by Robert Schumann, and is not a part of Clara Wieck's *Romance Variée*, Op. 3. In May 1853 Clara's diary announces: 'Today I once more began ... for the first time for years, to compose again; that is, I want to write variations on a theme of Robert's, out of *Bunte Blätter*, for his birthday: but I find it very difficult. – The break has been too long'. On 3 June, she adds: 'The work is done. It seems to me that it is not a failure, and now all the birds are alive again and sing the whole summer long'. Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life*, 2: 85 (Ebook).

<sup>121</sup> Felix Schumann was born on 11 June 1854.

<sup>122</sup> There has been scholarly disagreement on whether Clara Wieck or Robert Schumann invented this theme. See Claudia Stevens Becker, 'A New Look at Schumann's *Impromptus*', *The Musical Quarterly* 67/4 (1981): 568–86.

into question the propriety of maintaining, as has one writer, that the two “enjoyed a complete dialogue, made possible by a shared musical heritage”.<sup>123</sup>

Helma Sanders-Brahms has been criticized for not embracing a more staunchly feminist stance in *Geliebte Clara*. She faced the difficult task of providing a faithful portrayal of the social conditions of the time in which Clara Schumann lived. This required her to resist the view, articulated by Litzmann and others, that Clara’s willingness to subordinate her own interests made her the ‘representative of genuine, elegant femininity’.<sup>124</sup> Yet it also required her to resist the temptation to treat the historical material in an anachronistic manner, and to recognize that such an ideal of femininity as outlined by Litzmann is the product of a masculine society. As Rufus Hallmark notes in his extended study of *Frauenliebe und Leben*, ‘women of the era by and large consented to prescribed roles’, and ‘Clara Schumann was no exception’.<sup>125</sup> This is bound up with the fear for women of appearing ‘unnatural’ that Ruth Solie describes in her thought-provoking account of *Frauenliebe und Leben*.<sup>126</sup> Sanders-Brahms’s attempt to unsettle what we know of the relationship between Clara and Robert Schumann serves, to borrow the words of Caitríona Ní Dhúill, ‘to reclaim the marginalized stories rendered invisible by patriarchy’s exclusionary violence’.<sup>127</sup> When viewed in relation to *Träumerei* and *Frühlingssinfonie*, Sanders-Brahms questioning of, and overturning of established conventions of history and biography in the biopic is all the more pronounced and worthy of our attention. Nancy Reich’s reaction to the film is worth quoting at length by way of illustrating just how difficult Sanders-Brahms’s task was:

Recently I took the opportunity at the Museum of Modern Art in New York to see a film, *Geliebte Clara* (Beloved Clara). I shall only mention it in passing, because the less said about it the better. The audience that night seemed very excited about the screening. But I was very upset, even angry, at the lies and errors in the film. In my opinion the filmmakers seemed to know very little about Brahms and the Schumanns. Robert was portrayed as a weak and ill character, and Brahms was seen as just a kid who fell in love with Clara. It concluded with a graphic love scene between her and Brahms after Robert had died. It seemed like many in the audience enjoyed that, but it had nothing to do with the historical facts we know. I can only hope it will not have a release in America. Most people don’t know about the Schumann–Brahms story and might assume what they’re seeing is the truth.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

Confronted with the impossibility of a comprehensive overview of the shared lives of Clara and Robert Schumann (as well as Johannes Brahms), the directors of these three films proceeded by selectivity. Through focus, omission, and changing

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<sup>123</sup> Kallberg, ‘The Harmony of the Tea Table’, 123, citing Anna Burtin, ‘Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck: A Creative Partnership’, *Music & Letters* 69 (1988): 211–28, here 224, and Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, 231.

<sup>124</sup> William Kleefeld, *Clara Schumann* (Leipzig: Bielefeld, 1910): 1, cited in Borchard, ‘Von Robert zu Clara Schumann und zurück?’ 85.

<sup>125</sup> Hallmark, *Frauenliebe und Leben*, 6.

<sup>126</sup> Solie, ‘Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann’s *Frauenliebe* Songs’, 224.

<sup>127</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 16.

<sup>128</sup> Nancy Reich quoted in John C. Tibbetts, *Schumann: A Chorus of Voices* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2010): 442.

perspectives, they reveal what Richard Holmes refers to as the 'shifts and differences – factual, formal, stylistic, ideological, aesthetic' of these past lives.<sup>129</sup> In one of this article's three epigraphs, Ní Dhúill contemplates whether biography is to be understood as the solving of a mystery, the capturing of the subject, or is its focus on open-ended processes of rumination, speculation, mourning, and remembrance'.<sup>130</sup> It is the job of biographers and metabiographers to reflect further on this question. What is certain is that the layers of biographical discourse on Clara Schumann, and the degrees of fictionalization about her life will continue apace, each of them grappling anew with the tension that exists between 'life's traces and life's stories'.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Richard Holmes, 'The Proper Study?' in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 7–18, here 15.

<sup>130</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 34.

<sup>131</sup> Ní Dhúill, *Metabiography*, 96.