Obsidian
Mika Sasaki plays Clara Schumann
1  Scherzo in C Minor Op.14 4:32  Clara Schumann

2-7  Three Preludes and Fugues Op.16 12:04  Clara Schumann
   Prelude I  1:56
   Fugue I   1:45
   Prelude II 2:09
   Fugue II  1:46
   Prelude III 2:16
   Fugue III  2:11

8-15 Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op.20 12:01  Clara Schumann
   Theme  1:06
   Var. 1  0:49
   Var. 2  1:04
   Var. 3  1:13
   Var. 4  1:04
   Var. 5  1:13
   Var. 6  1:14
   Var. 7  4:17

16-32 Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op.9 20:06  Johannes Brahms
   Theme  1:23
   Var. 1  1:18
   Var. 2 Poco più moto 0:30
   Var. 3 Tempo di tema 1:11
   Var. 4 Poco più moto 0:45
   Var. 5 Allegro capriccioso 0:55
   Var. 6 Allegro 0:54
   Var. 7 Andante  0:53
   Var. 8 Andante (non troppo lento) 1:50
   Var. 9 Schnell  0:39
   Var. 10 Poco Adagio 2:17
   Var. 11 Un poco più animato 0:45
   Var. 12 Allegretto, poco scherzando 0:49
   Var. 13 Non troppo Presto 0:43
   Var. 14 Andante  1:26
   Var. 15 Poco Adagio 1:42
   Var. 16 Adagio  2:06

   I  Andante molto  2:59
   II Allegretto  2:48
   III Leidenschaftlich Schnell 4:05
   with violinist Petteri Iivonen

36   Obsidian Liturgy 10:22  Max Grafe

37   Notturno from Soirées musicales Op.6 4:58  Clara Schumann
This album celebrates Clara Schumann, her music, and the intricate artistic circle of musicians who surrounded her. She and her husband, Robert Schumann, and lifelong friend, Johannes Brahms—both of whose music she championed and adored—continuously inspired one another, and honored their friendship and affections through musical quotations and dedications in their compositions. She was their muse, confidant, constant source of inspiration, and colleague, whose pianistic finesse and compositions they both admired. Her legacy as a composer is demonstrated in the twenty-three opuses of solo piano, voice, and chamber music, as well as several works without opus numbers, unpublished, or lost. Despite the struggles in her life as a widowed mother of eight children, her invaluable contribution as an editor and champion of the works of Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms lives on through their compositional output, and her versatile roles as a dedicated artist continue to inspire us today.

The repertoire presented in this album reflects an intertwined web of musical influences and inspirations between artists. The two sets of *Variations on an Original Theme by Robert Schumann*, op. 20 (tracks 8-15) and op. 9 (tracks 16-32), by Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, respectively, are a tribute to the three artists’ affectionate relationships, often referred to as a love triangle. As a theme, Clara borrowed a short F-sharp minor piece from her husband’s *Bunte Blätter*, op. 99, which includes a longing motif that seems to express his love for her in musical code (known as
the “Clara motif,” the notes “C#-(B)-A-(G#)-A” spell out her name in this theme), and presented her set of variations on Robert’s birthday in 1853. A year later, following Robert’s suicide attempt and hospitalization, Johannes Brahms wrote a set of variations using the same theme. His variations are dedicated to Clara, who was pregnant with the Schumanns’ seventh child and left by herself to take care of their children while Robert was hospitalized. These variations pay musical homage to Robert. (For example, Variation 9 is written in an identical texture to a movement in Robert’s Bunte Blätter).

Clara Schumann’s Three Preludes and Fugues, op. 16 (tracks 2-7), were published as a surprise birthday present from Robert to Clara in 1845. The husband and wife had studied J. S. Bach’s music together, and each wrote contrapuntal pieces that were inspired by Baroque counterpoint. These preludes and fugues also suggest Clara’s knowledge of Felix Mendelssohn’s output of the same genre, as the music displays Romantic charm and lyricism while drawing inspiration from Bach.

The Scherzo in C Minor, op. 14 (track 1), and Notturno from Soirées musicales, op. 6 (track 37), suggest influences of character pieces written by another contemporary composer, Frédéric Chopin. Clara must have been aware of the handful of nocturnes and four scherzos he had published. The fiery, stormy energy of her own scherzo is reminiscent of Chopin’s “Revolutionary” and “Ocean” (op. 10 no. 12 and op. 25 no. 12, respectively), while her original musical qualities are unmistakable. The Notturno introduces a simple but yearning melody, followed by a contrasting section with a somewhat urgent, troublesome character, which gradually subsides and dissolves back into the serenity of the night that we had heard in the beginning. This opening melody must have touched Robert Schumann; a few years later, he includes this melody, labeled “a voice from the distance,” in the end of his Novelletten, op. 21.
I am thrilled to be joined by my friend and colleague, Petteri Iivonen, in Clara’s **Three Romances for Violin and Piano, op. 22** (tracks 33-35), a work that was inspired by and dedicated to the famous violinist Joseph Joachim. Joachim was also a lifelong friend and respected colleague of Brahms, who often sought Joachim’s advice on his compositions, and to whom he dedicated his violin concerto. Also a frequent chamber music partner of Clara’s, Joachim took delight in performing these Violin Romances, and continued to play them in later years. Sadly, Clara’s compositional output comes to an end shortly after having written this lovely set for violin and piano, at the age of 34. Following the death of her husband three years later, she supported their children, and even some of their grandchildren, by maintaining a multifaceted musical career of performing, editing (promoting her husband’s works), and teaching, while also taking care of household responsibilities.

One can imagine Clara’s pain, living through not only her husband’s death, but also the deaths of four of her own children, one of whom died in an asylum. There is no doubt that her love for music and close circle of musical friends kept her inspired and passionate throughout the rest of her long life, helping her endure enormous personal difficulty. As the year 2016 marks the 120th and 160th anniversaries of the deaths of Clara and Robert Schumann, I was also delighted to include **Obsidian Liturgy** (track 36), composed for me and Clara Schumann by my dear friend and colleague, Max Grafe. The piece unfolds through a sequence of emotionally dramatic musical events: an “Invocation” is followed by a ritualistic “Canticle” that builds into a fervent and obsessive “Incantation,” culminating in a cataclysmic explosion. After some seconds of silence, a vertiginous “Trance” of left-hand ostinatos sound from the distance, followed by a climactic “Peal” of strong, harsh bells. The “Benedictus” finally creates a sense of resolution, despite its haunting overtones, and finally, a desolate “Ite, missa est,” concludes the liturgy.
Clara Schumann’s superb musicianship and pianistic genius are demonstrated in the exquisite works recorded in this album. Her legacy lives on through these works, and through the strong influence she had on her musical family. Clara continues to inspire the next generations of striving artists like me. We cannot celebrate her legacy without acknowledging her circle of musical friends, who continuously stimulated each other’s creativity and imagination, made music together, and promoted each other’s works.

I express my sincere gratitude to executive producers David and Margie Barry who championed this project, the supportive staff and engineers of Yarlung Records and Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and two of my musical inspirations, Petteri and Max.

--Mika Sasaki, June 22nd, 2016

This recording made possible with generous support from

David and Margie Barry
Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Ann and Jean Horton
Carlos and Haydee Mollura
Stratton-Petit Foundation
Skip and Linda Victor
Wells Fargo
The Westin South Coast Plaza
Producer’s Notes:

Love triangles have inspired art, poetry, music, war and much of history since the dawn of humanity. The relationship between the three great composers and musicians Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann and Robert Schumann didn’t start any wars, but it did inspire much joy and pain for the three of them and fueled some great music which accompanied their struggles.

Music historians disagree about the nature of this three-way relationship. Much of the critical correspondence (carefully saved for many years) was burned by Clara Schumann late in her life at Brahms’ suggestion, forever keeping the nature of these friendships private.

Brahms met Robert and Clara Schumann in 1853. Robert was 43, Clara 33 and Brahms 20 years old. The three of them clearly loved and supported each other during many years of friendship, including a period when Brahms lived with the Schumann family. Brahms looked up to Robert as a mentor and father figure and Brahms fell deeply in love with Clara, and remained in love with her until their deaths. Clara loved Brahms as a son and as a
good friend and confidant. This complicated friendship may have increased the pressure Clara must have felt in her life, but it also gave her great solace. It affected Clara’s talent, both as a pianist and as a composer and it influenced the choices, both musical and psychological, that she made during her difficult life. I have long been interested in Clara’s music, and if I am forced to confess, I think she may have been an even greater composer than her illustrious husband Robert. She manages to express enormous joy and depths of sadness in her compact writing, only possible by a composer of her power and virtuosity.

Mika Sasaki and I discussed several themes and composers when we were crafting her debut album. Mika appreciates and performs new music regularly, and because her heart belongs in the Romantic era, she plays new music with special grace. When we first talked about Clara Schumann, Mika’s eyes lighted up and she rushed to the library at Juilliard to do more research on a composer she already admired. Mika added music by Brahms and a melody by Robert Schumann, which give us a better visceral and musical understanding of the affection these three friends felt for one another.
To take us firmly into the 21st Century, composer Max Grafe wrote *Obsidian Liturgy* for two great pianists coming together in this project, Mika Emily Sasaki and Clara Wieck Schumann. Max inscribed his dedication on the score in the style of Robert Schumann. The dedication reads “To M.E.S. and C.W.S.”, two remarkable and very different women.

Special thanks to David and Margie Barry, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Ann and Jean Horton, Carlos and Haydee Mollura, Stratton-Petit Foundation, Skip and Linda Victor and Wells Fargo for underwriting this recording, and to our friend Aaron Egigian for being such a gracious host at Segerstrom Center, along with Tom Lane and Ed O’Brien who took such excellent care of us in Samueli Theater. And thank you to Yarlung patron Michelle Rohe, for giving this glorious New York Steinway (serial number 549654) to Segerstrom Center.

Notes on our recording engineers and recording equipment:

**Stereo**

We recorded the stereo version of *Obsidian* using Ted Ancona’s AKG C-24 stereo microphone with a special new-old-stock RCA 6072 vacuum tube in it supplied and calibrated by David Bock, Yarlung’s microphone technician. We chose an Elliot Midwood all vacuum tube microphone preamplifier and fed our signal into our SonoruS ATR12 analog tape recorder using Agfa 468 tape made by EMTEC and into our Merging Technologies Hapi converter recording DSD256 using Pyramix Software.

Yarlung designed our interconnects. Power cords for our most sensitive analog equipment were made for us personally by Gary Koh from Genesis Advanced Technologies. Digital components used
power cords from Aural Symphonics. Stereo formats were monitored on speakers from Genesis Advanced Technologies. Our SonoruS Holographic Imaging and 5 Channel Surround Sound versions, mentioned below, are available as high resolution downloads. Please visit www.yarlungrecords.com for more information about these formats.

**SonoruS Holographic Imaging**

We used the AKG C-24 and added two additional mid-hall Schoeps M222 vacuum tube microphones,¹ which Yarlung recording engineer Arian Jansen fed into the SonoruS Holographic Imaging processor to create a 2 channel mix that uses a proprietary matrix incorporating phase, timing and EQ information from the four microphones to reproduce a three-

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¹ Our Schoeps microphones also belong to my friend Ted Ancona at Ancona Audio.
Arian captured this Holographic Imaging version using his SonoruS ATR12 analog tape recorder using EMTEC 528 broadcast tape which we then converted to PCM and DSD for our various download formats.

5 CHANNEL SURROUND SOUND

NativeDSD mastering engineer Tom Caulfield came from Boston to record Obsidian in 5 Channel Surround Sound using five DPA 4006A microphones. Tom built a carbon fiber array to hold the microphones, which takes inspiration from a standard Decca Tree with three forward microphones and two additional surround microphones about twelve feet to the rear. Tom fed these microphones directly into his Merging Technologies Horus converter to record in 256DSD.

No editing!

We believe that the musical intent communicated directly by our musicians is generally superior to a musical arc that I could create after the fact in postproduction, so we don’t edit within movements.

2 A note on SonoruS Holographic Imaging: with the correct playback setup, this format can fill the room with musical information, with sound coming from up to 270 degrees around the listening position. Holographic Imaging only works for one person in that exact listening position, however, and it only works if every component in the playback chain is phase coherent. My “best” speakers do not image correctly enough to give me the full holographic image. Please don’t be offended if your super-expensive system cannot accurately reproduce the holographic effect. Not all premium audiophile systems are designed to incorporate this degree of phase representation. Please download our Holographic Imaging test tracks first to determine if your system can accurately portray the signal circling around your listening position. If it can, enjoy! If it cannot, I recommend the stereo or surround sound versions of this album which I hope you enjoy very much. The test tracks are available at www.yarlungrecords.com/sonorus
In this case, however, it was imperative for us to be able to use unedited movements given the number of formats involved (analog tape, DSD, SonoruS Holographic Imaging and 5 Channel Surround Sound). Even though it was more work to prepare for a recording like this, Mika loved the idea that her album would be real music instead of a facsimile; she liked that her interpretations would not be surgically assembled by the producer after the fact. Mika and violinist Petteri Iivonen performed much of this music in live concert for invited guests in Samueli Theater on March 30th, 2016. They left our audience thrilled, eager for more music by Clara Schumann, Mika Sasaki and Petteri Iivonen.

--Bob Attiyeh, producer

Recording Engineers:
Bob Attiyeh, stereo analog tape and DSD
Tom Caulfield, 5 Channel Surround Sound
Arian Jansen, SonoruS Holographic Imaging

Assistant Producer: Jacob Horowitz
Steinway technician: Kathy Smith

Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman & Bob Attiyeh

Executive Producers: David and Margie Barry

Layout: Eron Muckleroy
Cooper Bates Photography
Scherzo in C Minor Op.14
Clara Schumann

Three Preludes and Fugues Op.16
Clara Schumann

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op.20
Clara Schumann

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op.9
Johannes Brahms

Three Romances for Violin and Piano Op.22
Clara Schumann

Obsidian Liturgy
Max Grafe

Notturno from Soirées musicales Op.6
Clara Schumann

Executive Producers: David and Margie Barry

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