

Romantic



Connections

The LeRoi-Nickel
Piano Duo

Goetz
Schumann
Mendelssohn

Romantic Connections

Timothy & Nancy LeRoi-Nickel, duo pianists

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

**12 vierhändige Klavierstücke für
kleine und grosse Kinder. Op. 85**
**12 Four-Hand Piano Pieces for
Little and Big Children**

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | Geburtstagsmarsch
<i>Birthday March</i> | 2:34 |
| 2 | Bärentanz
<i>Bear Dance</i> | 1:20 |
| 3 | Gartenmelodie
<i>Garden Melody</i> | 2:40 |
| 4 | Beim Kränzewinden
<i>Twining Wreaths</i> | 1:44 |
| 5 | Kroatenmarsch
<i>Croatian March</i> | 2:38 |
| 6 | Trauer
<i>Mourning</i> | 2:37 |
| 7 | Turniermarsch
<i>Tournament March</i> | 4:26 |
| 8 | Reigen
<i>Round Dance</i> | 1:41 |
| 9 | Am Springbrunnen
<i>At the Fountain</i> | 2:37 |

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 10 | Versteckens
<i>Hide and Seek</i> | 1:25 |
| 11 | Gespenstermärchen
<i>Ghost Stories</i> | 3:12 |
| 12 | Abendlied
<i>Evening Song</i> | 2:51 |

HERMANN GOETZ (1840-1876)

Sonata in G Minor, Opus 17

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 13 | I. Langsam (slow) / sehr
lebhaft (very lively) / sehr
langsam (very slow) | 7:58 |
| 14 | Mässig bewegt
<i>(Moderately moving)</i> | 4:58 |
| 15 | Langsam (slow) / graziös
und nicht zu rasch (<i>gracious
and not so fast</i>) | 7:46 |

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 16 | Allegro brillante, Opus 92 | 9:09 |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|

Total CD Time: 59:42

The three Romantic composers included on this disc form a natural connection. They represent the mid-19th century romantic tradition at its finest and most "classical." The energy and formal restraint of Mendelssohn and the dreamy-eyed lyricism of Schumann find their synthesis in the modest but polished works of Hermann Goetz. It is no surprise that the cantankerous old playwright and music critic George Bernard Shaw mentioned the three in the same breath, coming down firmly on the side of the least-known composer. All three were primarily pianists, but also wrote well for chamber ensembles, symphony orchestra, organ, and voice. In the latter category, Mendelssohn was particularly distinguished in oratorio, Schumann in Lieder, and Goetz in opera. The three were conservative in approach. They cherished domestic values. They all had extra-musical artistic abilities. They died young. The similarities among the three are striking, especially to the ear.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) had a special love for children. He and his pianist wife Clara raised eight children during the fourteen years of their marriage from 1840 to Schumann's tragic breakdown in 1854. The constant stimulation of a home full of children must have been a source of comfort for Schumann in the midst of frequent frustration in his musical career and depression over his deteriorating mental health. All but one of Schumann's piano works inspired by children date from this period: *Album for the Young* (1848), *Scenes from the Ball* (1851) which was originally entitled *Children's Ball*, the title he then used for his opus 130 (1853), and the three *Sonatas for Children*, opus 118 (1853). The enormous success of the *Album for the Young* prompted Schumann's publisher to request a sequel for piano duet the following year, *Twelve Four-Hand Piano Pieces for Little and Big Children*, opus 85, written in September of 1849 and published in 1850. Actually, the twelve pieces are more similar in mood, texture, and inspiration to Schumann's immortal set of *Scenes from Childhood*, opus 15 (1835). Of Schumann's five sets of duet works, including his very first piano compositions, *Eight Polonaises* (1828), these twelve pieces are by far the most refreshing, captivating, and pianistically satisfying.

Schumann's musical imagination is remarkably accurate. One can see a room full of children in party hats marching around the glowing candles on a birthday cake. Schumann and his daughter Marie surprised Clara with a first performance of "Birthday March" on September 13, 1849. The "Bear Dance" is a successful elaboration of an unpublished sketch from the *Album for the Young*. One can imagine a trained bear in irons dancing to the wave of his master's stick in a tiny village square. "Garden Melody" and "Mourning" are lyrical gems, the latter a brief but perceptive depiction of childhood melancholy. "Circle Dance" brings an image of children in a field of blossoms, pausing, in "Twining Wreaths," to braid colorful crowns of wild flowers, while Schumann weaves 16th notes between *primo* and *secondo* pianists. The trumpets and drums of the "Croatian March" and "Tournament March" remind one of another set of twelve piano duets for children, Bizet's *Jeux d'Enfants*. One could almost be splashed in the face in "By the Fountain," a small-scale Lisztian *jeux d'Eau*. In "Hide and Seek" and "Ghost Stories," Schumann demonstrates that a little melody, harmony, and rhythm can be worth a thousand pictures. The lovely, concluding "Evening Song" has mesmerized generations of Schumann's enthusiasts. It has surfaced in arrangements for violin, cello, organ, full symphony, and even voice,

joining Schubert's *Marche Militaire*, Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* and Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances* as an original piano duet better known in transcription. The great violinist/conductor Joachim even inserted "Abendlied" in a performance of Brahms' *German Requiem* when Clara was in attendance. Such dubious laurels are certainly well earned; the melody is one of the most intoxicatingly "romantic" tunes Schumann ever wrote.

Hermann Goetz was musical jack-of-all-trades. He was a successful composer, operatic producer, orchestra conductor, church organist and choral director, music critic, and distinguished pianist, highly regarded by his mentor, Hans von Bülow. Goetz produced many well-crafted, substantial works in his short creative life, lived under the constant shadow of incurable tuberculosis. His solo piano music consists primarily of short, sentimental but attractive character pieces. The *Piano Concert in B-flat* enjoyed considerable success, and his two operas, *Taming of the Shrew* and *Francesca von Rimini*, have been revived from time to time. It was his *Symphony in F* that so delighted George Bernard Shaw. Goetz's name appears often in the three volumes of Shaw's published musical criticisms. In his inimitable, opinionated and overstated way, Shaw wrote that "He (Goetz) has the charm of Schubert without his brainlessness, the refinement of Mendelssohn without his limitations and timid gentility, Schumann's sense of harmonic expression without his laboriousness, shortcomings, and dependence on external poetic stimulus; while as to unembarrassed mastery of the materials of music, shewing itself in the Mozartean grace and expressiveness of his polyphony, he leaves all three of them simply nowhere. Brahms, who alone touches him in mere brute musical facility, is a dolt in comparison to him." This is quite a vote of confidence from a respected critic of the day who was also a trained musician.

The *Sonata in G minor*, which ranks with the finest of Goetz's chamber music, was written in 1865 but published posthumously in 1878. The quick tempi of the first and last movements are both framed by "langsam" (slow) sections, adding that necessary element of German romantic "Angst." In both cases, however, Goetz breaks away from the return of the slow tempo with an urgent rush to the final bar. The light, nervous 16th-note motion and high energy level remind one of Mendelssohn. The second movement, beautifully crafted for the duet medium, exudes an obvious Schumannesque charm and lyricism. Throughout, the work is classical in form, conservative, and abounding in polished counterpoint.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) wrote his A major *Allegro Brillante*, opus 92 on March 23, 1841 and performed it in concert eight days later with Clara Schumann, to whom the work is dedicated. The piece has remained popular on the concert stage ever since. It has a distinct scherzo quality, conjuring up the nymphs and fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The first theme is always introduced by a rush of ascending scale passages. The second, more lyrical idea appears twice surrounded by bravura passage work and the high spirits of the piece never falter. The writing is gratifying for four hands with varying scale forms and thematic material passed seamlessly between the players to great musical and visual effect. After a brief comic dialogue, the unrelenting energy spills over into a rousing coda marked "presto."

TIMOTHY & NANCY LEROI NICKEL

are a dynamic team of experienced performers specializing in original music for keyboard, four hands. Equally comfortable performing on organ or piano, the Nickels have brought the large and colorful keyboard duet repertoire to concert halls throughout the Pacific Northwest, on tours across the U.S.A., and in Europe. They have played two recitals at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York, and gave the West Coast premiere of Leonard Bernstein's last work, *Arias and Barcarolles*. After their May, 1990 London debut at the Purcell Room, Malcolm Miller wrote in *Music and Musicians International* that "their polished style and original programme



were winning qualities . . . and the critic from *Musical Opinion* described their playing of Stravinsky's original duet version of *The Rite of Spring* as "... a performance of dazzling impact." Their recording on ARSIS CD 104 of works for organ, four hands, was enthusiastically received by the critics. *The American Record Guide* says "The Nickels are exquisite performers . . . Their programming is also well done . . . Nothing slipshod, boring, or tawdry here. Just music making of the first rank." The Nickels received the Certificate of Advanced Study from the Guildhall School in London. At home in Portland, Oregon, they are both faculty members at Marylhurst College.

Originally recorded in 1983 in analog for Desto Records (vinyl never released) on the Imperial Grotrian Grand Piano at Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon

Recording Engineer: Fred Armentrout, Portland Oregon

Editing & transfer to digital: Fred Armentrout

Mastering for CD: Robert Schuneman, Arsis Audio, Boston, MA

Booklet Cover: gouache & watercolor by Jim Nickel, New York, NY. Used by permission.

Romantic Connections

Timothy & Nancy LeRoi Nickel, duo pianists

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

12 Pieces for Little and Big Children, Opus 85

1	Birthday March	2:34	2	Bear Dance	1:20
3	Garden Melody	2:40	4	Twining Wreaths	1:44
5	Croatian March	2:38	6	Mourning	2:37
7	Tournament March	4:26	8	Round Dance	1:41
9	At the Fountain	2:37	10	Hide and Seek	1:25
11	Ghost Stories	3:12	12	Evening Song	2:51

Hermann Goetz (1840–1876)

Sonata in G Minor, Opus 17

13	I. Slow / Very Lively / Slow	7:58
14	II Moderately moving	4:58
15	III. Slow / Gracious and not too fast	7:46

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847)

16	Allegro brillante, Opus 92	9:09
----	-----------------------------------	------

Total CD Time: 59:42



ARSIS Audio
138 Ipswich Street, Boston, MA 02215
<http://www.arsisaudio.com>

Made in U.S.A.

© 1998 by Arsis Audio, a division of
ECS Publishing, Boston, Massachusetts

All rights of the producer and of the owner of
the work reproduced reserved. Unauthorized
copying, lending, public performance or
broadcasting of this recording is prohibited.