



Clara Wieck-Schumann: Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17, movement 1 (for component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

The composer

Clara (Wieck) Schumann was born in Leipzig, Germany, in 1819 and died in Frankfurt in 1896. She was best known in her lifetime as a concert pianist, but her reputation as a composer has grown in recent years as her works have been rediscovered. Despite the success of several 19th-century female novelists around Europe, female composers, during Clara's lifetime (and beyond), were neither expected nor encouraged!

She was brought up by her father, Friedrich Wieck, a gifted piano teacher, and began her performing career as a child. In her teens Clara performed around Europe, laying the foundations for a lifelong career. The composer **Robert Schumann** was a pupil of Clara's father, and despite Friedrich's opposition to the match (taken all the way to a court case!), the two married in 1840. Clara had composed as part of her musical education with her father, producing a Piano Concerto (which she performed, with Mendelssohn conducting) at the age of 15 and continuing to produce works at a good rate into early middle age.

Most of her works feature the piano, either as a solo instrument, as part of an ensemble, or as an accompaniment. Clara's composing decreased as her family responsibilities became more and more difficult (she gave birth to eight children, but only four survived). In addition to running the household, she was also the main breadwinner as Robert Schumann earned little money as a composer and later in life suffered from mental illness, causing his final years to be spent in an asylum.

Clara knew, and worked, with Joseph Joachim, one of the leading violinists of the 19th century. She also knew, and had famous correspondence with, Johannes Brahms, whose composing she encouraged.

The piece

- The Piano Trio (piano, violin and cello) was one of the most important forms of chamber music from the late 18th to well into the 19th century.
- Much chamber music was written for performance in the *salons* of the patrons and performers. Concert performances of trios such as this became more common as the

century progressed. Clara Schumann, as a professional, would probably have played her trio in both the *salon* and the concert hall.

- Composers in the Classical style, such as Mozart and Haydn, had established the form, and Beethoven and Schubert developed it further in the early Romantic style.
- Clara would have performed this core repertoire and this made the trio a natural outlet for her creativity.
- The piece was written in 1846, a year in which she gave the premiere of Robert Schumann's piano concerto and had her fourth child.
- It is one of only a few multi-movement works in her *oeuvre*, following the full four-movement pattern of the genre:
 - Allegro moderato – G minor
 - Scherzo and trio – B \flat /E \flat
 - Andante – G major
 - Allegretto – G minor.

Performing forces and their handling

- The instruments are given fairly **equal roles** in this movement, unlike many piano trios, where the piano dominates.
- Although not without difficulty, none of the parts here are particularly **virtuosic**, perhaps being intended for performance by capable amateurs, as well as by professional musicians.
- Violin and cello use **double-stopping**, both at loud dramatic moments (bars 284–286) and to fill in the texture during quieter passages (bars 73–77).
- The violin plays mainly in the **two octaves** above its lowest string, but it does have music that stretches nearly another octave above this at times.
- The cello uses both its **resonant low range** and its **powerful upper range**, up to an octave above middle C at times.
- The cello provides:
 - support for the bass of the harmony at times, including **pedal notes** (bars 73–80).
 - 'tenor-like' mid-range parts to outline inner parts (bars 37–41).
 - material high in its register (bars 134–138; note that the notation here is in the **treble clef**, but written an octave **higher** than it sounds).
- The piano provides both **melodic** and **accompaniment** textures:
 - The writing is typical of the **Romantic period**, but is perhaps **more intimate** and less virtuosic at times than some of the works of **Beethoven**, for example.
 - Important melodic material is often presented in a **single octave** (without doubling) (bars 9–14).
 - The **middle range** of the keyboard is favoured, especially in the right-hand material – the highest note is the G two and a half octaves above middle C.
- Schumann is always sensitive to the balance between the instruments, placing some of the piano material in a **lower register** to avoid masking the strings at times.

Structure

- The movement is in **sonata form** – the structural pattern (a 'flexible blueprint') established in the Classical period – which has three main sections:
 - Exposition (bars 1–90) – repeated
 - Development (bars 91–164)
 - Recapitulation (bars 165–288)

Exposition (bars 1–90)	<p>First subject group</p> <p>Bridge /transition</p> <p>Second subject group</p> <p>Codetta</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First subject 1(a) bars 1–4 and 1(b) bars 5–8 violin in G minor (tonic) • Bars 9–15 1(a) and (b) piano • Bars 22–23 chordal ff idea 1(c) homorhythm answered by legato p on violin 1(d) bars 23–25 • Bars 30–45 music moves towards B♭ major (relative major) • Dominant pedal heard bars 41–44 • Ic–V–I in B♭ bars 44³–45¹ • Bars 45–48 second subject 2(a) (syncopated minims) in piano and 2(b)(bars 47–49) (quavers) in B♭ major • Rising diminished seventh figures in strings • Bars 49–53 2(a) and (b) repeated in sequence a tone lower, with passing modulation to E♭ at bar 53 • Bars 56–59¹ <i>poco rit.</i> brief visit to D major (dominant) • Bar 59² sudden return to B♭, via an accented V⁷ chord • Bars 61–65 and 65–69 repetitions of 2(a) and (b), moving through G minor and E♭ major • Bars 73–81 sequential quaver ideas (piano) over chords (violin) and dominant pedal (cello) • Bars 84⁴–85¹ perfect cadence in B♭ • Bars 85–86 piano RH figure, in thirds, which is used to take the music back towards G minor in the following four bars. • Exposition repeated
Development (bars 91–164)	Various keys visited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens with material based on rising stepwise figure (bar 91) in violin • Piano plays downward parallel chromatic triads (some chromatic) passing through C minor (bar 94) towards E♭ • Bar 103 cello begins series of contrapuntal entries in dialogue with the violin • All based on 1(a) in various keys: sometimes bar 1 used only, sometimes bars 1 and 2 of the original are used • Downward fifth is sometimes expanded or contracted to fit harmony/tonality often creating more angular and dramatic feel (e.g. dim. fifth bar

	Dominant preparation for Recapitulation	<p>103)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bar 125 – gentler section, still contrapuntal, with lighter piano accompaniment • Bar 134 cello plays more complete version of 1(a) altered to fit the F minor harmony • Bar 139 violin melody from 93 developed in sequence over cycle of fifths in accompaniment • Bar 149 climactic entry of 1a in the piano LH in octaves • Bar 155 piano takes up violin idea from bar 139 over doubled dominant pedal in violin and cello which leads to the recapitulation
Recapitulation (bars 165–end)	<p>First subject in tonic</p> <p>Second subject in tonic (major)</p> <p>Coda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bars 165–190 verbatim repeat of exposition first subject group • Bar 191 bridge/transition altered to move towards G major • Bar 210 second subject 2(a) and (b) in G major (tonic major) • Bar 220 music moves towards B major (very remote from G minor) • Bar 236 codetta material from exposition • Bar 250 return to G minor • Music based on development of material from bars 85–86 • Bar 266 final statement of 1(a) in violin/cello leading to repeated cadential figures, imitative interplay between violin and cello and final flourish • Bar 276 – end sees a series of diminished chords resolving onto chord I, over a tonic pedal. The final cadence in the piano is plagal (but still over a tonic pedal in the cello)

Texture

- Chamber music is a 'discursive' form, where ideas are traditionally passed around the ensemble, as if in conversation. For this reason, the textures change frequently and the examples below are illustrative rather than comprehensive.
- **Homophonic** textures are common from the beginning (bars 1–8), where the violin melody is accompanied by the piano. When this idea is repeated, from bar 9, the texture is still predominantly **homophonic**, with the piano RH melody being accompanied by broken chords in the left hand, but the texture is augmented by counter-melodies in both violin and cello. Although not fully polyphonic, this type of texture has sometimes been described as **polyphonically animated homophony**.
- **Polyphonic** textures are less common but the **development section** contains passages of **close imitation** (bars 115–130) between cello and violin, and this, with the quaver figurations in the piano part, at the time creates a busy polyphonic texture.
- There is also interplay between **violin and piano** (bars 34–38).
- **Pedal textures** are used in this extract:
 - Dominant pedal in cello (bars 73–84)
 - Dominant pedal in violin and cello (two octaves apart) (bars 155–164)

- The left hand does use some **doubled octaves**, in the lower register (bars 99–104)
- **Block chord textures** (bars 45–57)
- **Octave doubling between the hands** (bars 73–74) and in **sixths** (first 5 quavers of bars 74, 75 and 76)
- **Exciting rising and falling arpeggio figures** (reminiscent of the last movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata), which act as a 'backdrop' to the loudest parts of the development section (bars 107–121)
- **Accompaniment textures** include:
 - **rocking quavers** (bars 1–4)
 - light, **offbeat** chords in the right hand, against left-hand notes **on the beat** (bars 5–6)
 - **arpeggio textures** (bars 139–145).

Tonality

- The work, and this movement, are in the key of **G minor**.
- **Sonata form** is partly about **key contrast**, and this movement follows the Classical principles in terms of the keys used in the three main sections of the movement:
 - **Exposition** – first subject G minor (tonic), second subject B \flat major (relative major)
 - **Development** – a very flowing set of modulations including E \flat /F minor/G minor/C minor/F minor
 - **Recapitulation** – first subject G minor (tonic), second subject G major (tonic major)
 - **The closing coda** – returns to G minor (tonic).
- There are also some brief **passing modulations** in each of the three sections, including excursions to **D major** (bars 56–59) during the second subject group of the exposition and **B major** at the parallel point (bar 223) in the recapitulation.
- **Modulations** are conventionally prepared, with perfect cadences, although the return to the home key is sometimes rather abrupt, as in bar 59.
- **Tonic and dominant pedals** strengthen the sense of tonality:
 - **dominant pedal** bars 155–164
 - **tonic pedal** bars 276–end.

Harmony

- The harmony is predominantly **tonal** and **diatonic**, using **functional** progressions.
- Major and minor chords, mostly in root position and first inversion, are used as the basis for the harmonic style.
- There are frequent cadence points.
- **Traditional progressions** such as **perfect cadences** (bars 84–85) and **Ic–V–I** (21³–22¹) are used.
- More **complex chords** are used as part of the **Romantic style**, using **chromatic harmony**:

- **diminished seventh** chords – often used as a substitute chord for V⁷ (bars 110–11, 114–115)
- **augmented sixth** chords – usually used to approach chord V or I_c (bars 11³–12¹, 148³–149¹)
- chords involving more **dissonant extensions** – the chord at bar 83 has elements of a **dominant minor ninth**
- suspensions are plentiful, e.g. 7–6 in bar 129 and 4–3 in bar 143.
- **Secondary dominant** chords as part of otherwise diatonic progressions – at bar 40³ a C major chord (V of V) eases the line to the dominant (F).
- Progressions that follow a **chromatic bass** line downwards, using parallel triadic movement (bars 17⁴–20¹)
- Use of **cycle of fifth** progression at bars 139–143.

Melody

- Sonata form is also about **melodic contrast** and Schumann ensures that there is sufficient contrast of character between her main melodic ideas.
- First subject (a) and (b) (bars 1–8) – an 8-bar theme, made up of two balanced 4-bar sections – antecedent and consequent (purely diatonic in nature).
 - (a) bars 1–4 features a plaintive **downward fifth** and a tied rhythm on the way to its concluding imperfect cadence.
 - (b) bars 5–8 answers with a more animated rhythm through a rising sequence, and with an upwards octave leap.
 - 1(c) and (d) are shorter ideas, but more contrasted, setting an almost 'Brahmsian' dotted idea against a more lyrical answer through a falling sequence.
- Second subject is made up of two 2-bar ideas:
 - (a) bars 45–47 syncopated descending stepwise ending with an appoggiatura
 - (b) bars 47–49 repeated 'chattering' quaver figures beginning on the sixth quaver of the bar, against a melodic diminished seventh in the violin.
- **The development section** is largely focused on the first two bars of 1(a), where the falling fifth is expanded or contracted to fit the surrounding harmonic scheme.
- There are many examples of chromatic writing, e.g. bars 243–245.

Rhythm, tempo and metre

- **Allegro moderato**. There is a short *poco rit.* in the second subject group, but otherwise the tempo is unchanged.
- The 4/4 metre – four crotchet beats are heard in the passages with more rapid **harmonic rhythm** (bars 5–6), but quite often the feel is more of 2/2.
- The themes all have a distinctive rhythmic character. For example, 1(c) has **dotted rhythms**, and 2(a) is **syncopated**.
- 1(c) and (d) both open with an anacrusis.
- Some of the more lyrical melodies (e.g., bars 139–149) are helped by ties over the bar line.
- There are many lively rhythms and much **quaver passage work**.
- There are quite frequent **syncopations**, but never extreme enough to lose the strong sense of pulse and metre.