

THE SCHUMANN LETTERS

Susan Gilmour-Bailey, soprano,
Michael Kim, piano, Colin Fox, narrator

ARTISTIC VISION

German composer Robert Schumann first fell in love with a young Clara Wieck during his early piano training under her father. Clara herself, was a virtuoso pianist garnering attention throughout Europe. Nonetheless, her father was bitterly opposed to the courtship. During this time, an estimated 20,000 letters were written between these two. In 1840, after a long and acrimonious legal battle with Clara's father, Robert went to court to seek legal consent. His love eventually won out and the couple was soon married.



The Schumann Letters sprang from a conversation over coffee nearly two years ago between friends Andrew Kwan and Colin Fox. Breaking new creative ground was the whole point of the discussion. "We felt that a new delivery model was needed in the presentation of classical music", says Kwan. "So often we see words-and-music as something that is similar to verbal program notes: someone talks, the musician plays. Given the depth of the story behind Schumann and the many letters kept and catalogued, we knew that there was an opportunity to do more. In February 2008, we decided to present classical music with ab

solutely no adulteration. We didn't want to water anything down. We didn't want to do arrangements. We wanted to present what Schumann wrote, and to present German letter but in the context of the story. The letters themselves numbered in the thousands but in our research we realized that some letters were copied three or four times because of the intricacies needed for Robert to get a message to Clara. Her father, Frederic Wieck was extremely controlling and so Robert would have to write a letter to a friend, who would rewrite it and pass it along to a friend of Clara, who would then rewrite the letter yet again in her own handwriting."

Kwan credits Fox for writing the narrative that would put the letters into context and integrate the story with excerpts to take the audience through this very poignant love affair. The story follows the tribulations of their as recast and celebrated by the creative team of Fox, Kim, Gilmour-



Bailey. "Honestly, it came together very smoothly but that is due to the great respect each artist had for the others in recognizing that all three parts were equally important and needed to achieve the right balance."