

PERSONAL TOUCH

A musical gift of love from Robert Schumann to his wife Clara on their wedding day was replicated at another marriage ceremony last summer, when pianist *Margaret Fingerhut* received a very special facsimile from her new husband, Sainsbury's chairman David Tyler

IT WAS A WEDDING GIFT BEYOND all wedding gifts, all the more so because it came as a complete surprise when David, my new husband, presented it to me at our wedding reception in the summer.

I had recorded a disc of encores for Chandos, called *Endless Song*, and one of David's favourite tracks was Liszt's wonderful transcription of one of Schumann's best-

loved and most beautiful songs, *Widmung* (Dedication). Whenever I played it in concert, I would tell the audience the romantic story of how Schumann had composed and presented it as a surprise for Clara on the eve of their wedding in 1840. Unbeknown to me, this story and the passionate words of the Rückert poem ('You my soul, you my heart'), inspired David to set about creating his own surprise gift to present to me on our

wedding day: a perfect facsimile copy of the manuscript of Schumann's song.

First, however, he had to find an extant copy of it. This would be a daunting task for anyone, but particularly so for a non-musician such as David. Fortunately, he was introduced to the arts consultant Charles Kaye who, fired up by such a romantic project, generously offered his expertise to help him fulfil his quest. After some detective

A musical gift of love: Margaret Fingerhut and David Tyler on their wedding day



work, Charles managed to track the only existing fair copy in Schumann's hand to the Juilliard School Manuscript Collection. Along with *Widmung*, the autograph also included Schumann's touching setting of *Stille Liebe* (Silent Love) to a text by Justinus Kerner. This is another poem of adoration, albeit tinged with greater sadness than *Widmung*. The Juilliard Trustees were prepared to grant their approval for a high-quality facsimile to be made, on condition that a limited edition could be produced and be made available to other music libraries and collectors.

The facsimile was printed and hand-bound using traditional methods by two family companies in Salzburg. A very few copies of the edition were bound in red velvet, with gold lettering, reproducing exactly the binding Schumann had commissioned to present 'To my beloved Clara'. She in turn had noted in her diary that, 'My Robert has given me a beautiful bridal gift... I was deeply moved'. The paper for the facsimile

was selected in consultation with the British Library's curators of music autographs, and is of a quality and feel as close to that of the original as can be achieved today, 177 years on.

Thus this truly magical publication came into being. Obviously, none of this was known to me, which made it all the more overwhelming when it was presented to me. I certainly had not anticipated that my wedding breakfast would be largely spent in a flood of tears! So perfect is the quality of the facsimile, together with its very special red velvet binding, that it still gives me a frisson each time I hold it in my hands. To see Schumann's own manuscript writing, so small and neat, yet also so swift and eager, makes me feel as if I somehow have a little window into the composer's heart and soul. Moreover, the manuscript is clear enough to be able to play from (although the words of the text are harder to discern as his actual handwriting is not so legible). I have had a private run-through

of the songs, and it is wondrous how the act of playing from the composer's own handwriting can give one such an added visceral connection to the music.

For those keen to search out a copy of *Widmung*, it is available through OMI (Old Manuscripts & Incunabula), New York. The edition also includes an authoritative critical appreciation by music writer and Juilliard School professor, Michael Musgrave, giving full details of the provenance and story of its creation. I hope that the story of how this facsimile came about will inspire others, be they private collectors or curators of manuscript collections, to find the way to make similar rare treasures available around the world in the future. There is no doubt that this unique facsimile of a significant manuscript has brought me unbounded joy – both musical and marital! 🎵

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