



# Clara

*Janice Galloway*

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With "some of the greatest words ever written on thwarted love since *Romeo and Juliet*" (*The Times*, London), *Clara* reignites, from between the lines of history, the great love of Robert and Clara Schumann.

This impassioned novel gives voice to Clara Wieck Schumann, one of the most celebrated pianists of the nineteenth century, who today is best remembered not for her music but for her marriage. "How often you must purchase my songs with invisibility and silence, little Clara," says Robert, and, for Clara, the price of his love is dear. Shrouded in alternate layers of music and silence, the Schumann union was anything but a lullaby, marked by her valiant struggle for self-expression and his tortuous descent into madness.

*Clara*, a deeply moving fugue of love, solitude, and artistic creation, Janice Galloway "has taken a melodic line and scored it for an orchestra" (*The New York Times Book Review*).

## Clara Details

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Author : Janice Galloway

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## From Reader Review Clara for online ebook

### **Nicola Morrice says**

One of my favourite books of all time- it just puts into words the feelings you have when playing the piano and why music is so beautiful and tragic. She also takes you straight into the heart of Robert and Clara Schumann's relationship and you come away feeling as though you knew them. A very beautiful and powerful book.

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### **Christina says**

This is an excellent book about Clara Schumann, through the death of her husband, the great composer Robert. Clara's father recognized her skill at the piano at an early age, and he pushed her hard to become a concert pianist. She was extremely talented, but in many ways her life was not that of a normal young girl. Her father adamantly opposed a relationship with Robert, and did all he could to keep them apart. Robert was a troubled genius, and they had a stormy marriage. The book brings all of this to life in an interesting way. The narrative voice changes, and there are many, many references to musical compositions. This is a very interesting book, but I think readers without some musical knowledge might find it bewildering at times.

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### **Saskia says**

Before reading Clara, I had never known about Clara Schumann's artistic talents. In addition, I was unfamiliar with the genre of biofiction, only having read either biographies or novels. However, I found the reading experience to be very enjoyable and interesting due to some pre-existing knowledge regarding the subject matter of classical musicianship. Many names, mostly composers', throughout the book I knew because of my personal experiences playing their works on the flute. I was astounded by the vast artistic network Clara was a part of and by her accomplishments as a musician. Furthermore, the expression of her thoughts and feelings by Galloway's beautiful prose added to the perception of the highly creative minds of Clara and the people surrounding her. Also the way in which the author conveyed Robert's confusion and erratic behaviour, at times even visualising it by mixing lines from sheet music, lyrics and stray thoughts (114f.) was especially effective in giving insight into the character's mind.

One of the most significant tropes in the book is Clara's ability to practice self-control, while at the same time refusing to be oppressed and being ready to make unconventional and bold decisions. Taking into account the strict teachings of her father who, "Before he knew what she was, who she was, he knew what she would be: the greatest pianist he could fashion, his brightness, a star." (23), her later dutiful and obedient life with her husband seems like a continuation of the father-daughter relationship. Of course, the kinds of life Friedrich and Robert want for Clara are vastly different. Friedrich wants his daughter to restrain her romantic feelings towards Robert for the benefit of becoming a great concert pianist and not to settle down to family life, which at the time were mutually exclusive for a woman. Robert on the other hand wants her to give up her career and be a devoted wife and mother, leaving public artistic endeavours to him. She makes the decision to follow her heart and elopes with Robert, thus defying her father's control once and for all but placing herself under Robert's. Though she supports him and largely complies with his wishes such as not

playing the piano in the house so as to not distracting him, she is aware of her amazing talent and never intimidated by her husband. Clara knows for example that she can provide for the family when Robert's income does not suffice and insists on a tour to Russia, much to her spouse's dismay:

*Damn it to hell, Russia, and all Clara's fault. The value of the rouble, our finances, the prestige of St Petersburg, my strength and youth, the second time they have asked me, such invitations may not come again, her logic impeccable, chilling to the bone. Besides he had promised. The day after their wedding, his birthday gift to her as he held her hands: a Russian tour for certain. What was he to say now? Russia dear Christ in February! He would die. (230)*

In my opinion, Galloway gave Clara a strong voice and depicted her as a woman with a tremendous amount of passion on the one hand and an admirable sense of self-control owed to the different societal roles she has to fulfil. When Clara looks back on her life in the very beginning of the book, she talks about musicianship saying, "Passion one might take for granted: its control is the medium through which all else flows." (5), which is applicable to her career, as well as her marriage, her children and even her relationship to other musicians.

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### **Robin Friedman says**

Clara Schumann's (1819-1896) life continues to fascinate and inspire. Some years ago, I saw the world-premiere of an opera, also titled "Clara" at the University of Maryland by the American composer Robert Convery. Clara Schumann is the subject of an excellent website and of recent biographies, including "Clara Schumann: the Artist and the Woman" by Nancy Reich. Clara Schumann's compositional output consists of only about 60 works, but it continues to be recorded and performed.

Janice Galloway's novel, "Clara" (2002), introduces the reader to a remarkable woman and to her times. Clara was the daughter of Frederick Wieck, a notable piano teacher, and of a woman who left Wieck to marry another man when Clara was young. Clara Wieck was a child prodigy with virtuosic ability at the piano. At the time, the role of piano virtuoso was just coming into its own.

Clara fell in love with the great romantic composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856), ten years her senior, when Schumann was a student of Wieck. Her father bitterly opposed the marriage, but the couple persevered and were married following litigation in the German courts. The marriage was difficult, as Robert needed absolute quiet in order to compose and was moody and tempermental to say the least. The couple had eight children, and Clara still proved determined to pursue her calling as a concert artist. Schumann's instability gradually lead to insanity. He was institutionalized for the last years of his life following a failed suicide attempt. The novel covers Clara's life up through the death of Robert Schumann with only brief allusions to her life as a concert pianist following his death. Clara outlived Robert by 40 years.

This book presents a compelling picture of lives filled with the love of music. Robert was a highly gifted composer while Clara devoted her great talents to the art of interpretation. Ms. Galloway shows well the vicissitudes of the creative life, both for the composer and the interpreter. The book is a love story, rarer than might be supposed in today's world, presenting a picture of a gifted couple's devotion to each other. In particular, it presents a compelling portrait of Clara Schumann with her devotion to a difficult individual through his descent into psychosis.

Ms. Galloway stays close to the facts of her story, gets inside her characters, and avoids the temptation to

judge or to editorialize based upon the values of another age. She presents balanced portraits of the characters in her story and allows the reader to see the nuances and ambiguities inherent in all human conduct. For example, Ms. Galloway lets the reader see that Wieck had a point, after all, in his doubts about the marriage and about Robert's mental instability which was surely visible over the years. Ms. Galloway also points out Clara's growing devotion to what she was born to do -- play the piano -- and how her independence sometimes rested uneasily with her love and commitment to Robert. Her love for Robert was surely the most important force in her life.

The novel moves slowly at times, but it builds as it progresses in both writing style and in depth of understanding. The novel does an outstanding job in linking the events of Clara and Robert's lives into their music. I enjoyed the treatment of Robert Schumann's "Carnaval", a great work for the solo piano and a favorite of mine, his song cycles, piano concerto, symphonies, and other compositions which receive thoughtful attention in the book.

The paperback edition of this book includes some good questions suitable for book groups together with a revealing interview with Ms. Galloway. The book shows how music and creativity enable people to reach the best of what is in them and to transcend the pain of sorrow and suffering and the banalities of the everyday. I found this book a moving presentation of the love of a woman and a man for each other and of the love of both for music. I was both inspired by the story of Clara's life and also moved to revisit Clara's music and the music of her tormented but gifted husband.

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### **Rita says**

Galloway is known mainly for 3 novels:

The trick is to keep breathing, 1989, the tale of a young teachers' emotional collapse  
Foreign parts, 1994, in which two West of Scotland welfare rights workers kvetch and fret their way round France  
Clara, 2002, based on the life of Clara Schumann.

In Scotland Galloway is also known for music criticism, short story writer, and as the librettist to Sally Beamish's opera Monster, 2002.

"This is not about me" is Galloway's memoir up to age 11, a child who learned to 'keep her interior life well hidden'. Sounds like a very good book [LRB:] but definitely a sobering read about dysfunctional family.

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### **Steven says**

That this is a heartfelt tribute to the pianist-composer Clara Schumann there can be no doubt, as it is written with the clarity and intensity only love provides.

However, this tome is indeed not only dense, as some reviewers have noted, but oftentimes veers into the realm of the verbose: there is a lot of repetition and not-infrequent lapses of telling, in addition to showing, action. I'll cite only one example of each.

Unnecessary repetition: how many times do we have to see Robert drop his conductor's baton in order to

drive the point home that he's absolutely atrocious as a conductor and will never improve? While I don't know the precise number, but as a reader I know that I was shown Robert's bumbling at the podium too often. (In the same vein, I got that Clara wanted very much to be both 'a Good Wife' and a 'Good Daughter,' and a little less reminding of both would've served the text well).

Telling: the most egregious example was when Reuter came to their house in Dresden and told Clara about how to help Robert's condition, in which we are told a) that Reuter thought he was offering her consolation, b) that he was misunderstood, and c) Clara's reaction, which subsequently makes b) especially redundant; whereas a) can be inferred as well from Reuter's general demeanor.

To say that the old adage, 'half as long, twice as good' applies is pithy, but I do feel that some strong editing could've cut 1/4 to 1/3 of the text while still retaining its emotional impact.

All that being said, the cast of minor characters is sprawling and very well-depicted - no mean feat. The relationships between some are downright touching (e.g., Mendelssohn, Emilie, etc.), and the descriptions of Schumann's bipolarity is vivid and intense, as is his genuine feeling for Clara.

Frederick Wieck is also very well-depicted, the controlling and manipulative man that he is. My only regret is that, with the death of Schumann at the end, we are not told whether he was still alive or not, as it would've been at least interesting to know how he reacted.

Overall, a solid work, and well worth the read!

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### **Tuck says**

in the h w wilson fiction catalog. you really got to be interested in the Schumanns and Clara's family, the Wiecks to hang with this book. it takes a long time to get things set up as we join Clara's life at 4 years old (400 some odd dense pages). ultimately it is a very sad, devastatingly sad, story of artists, fucked up families, hard living in the 19th century, being rich in the 19th century, love and genius. Author Janice Galloway is a very beautiful writer, and writer who has done in-depth research of her topics, a writer who takes her time.

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### **Marita says**

How to shatter illusions! After reading this novel I shall never again be able to think of Robert Schumann as some nice man scribbling away at his beautiful compositions prior to becoming mentally unbalanced and attempting suicide. In this beautiful biographical novel about Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896) there are some very unlikeable people, Robert Schumann being one of them.

When Clara was still a young child her mother left home and married a friend of her husband's, leaving Clara in the care of her father, Friedrich Wieck. From this time on Clara was ruled first by a domineering father, and later by a domineering husband. Both father and husband were very demanding.

From the word go Wieck set out to turn the very gifted Clara into a world class pianist. He succeeded admirably in this task as Clara achieved much success and fame, but then 11 year old Clara met 20 year old Robert Schumann and the rest is history.

Clara and Schumann became engaged against Wieck's wishes when she was eighteen, and after a legal scrap with Wieck, Clara and Schumann finally, two years later, received the court's permission to marry. Wieck was absolutely set against Clara marrying Schumann, and after their marriage several years elapsed before Wieck would agree to see them.

"He was shaken to his soul. And what had done this? A daughter. He sighed. But then a daughter without duty was no daughter at all. Ponder this: a father who was ashamed to call his daughter his own. A daughter for whom he had provided everything, for whom he had given up ten years of his own life, yet a daughter who rose against him and against all his clearly expressed wishes when his back was turned."

Schumann is portrayed as being smug, self-centred, pompous, petulant, manipulative, moody and melancholic. He was a hypochondriac who suffered from mood-swings and lethargy, and who consumed too much alcohol as well as too many cigarettes. He was indignant and full of outrage when Clara received invitations addressed to her alone. He was full of self-pity and acted the martyr when she went on a tour to Russia without him. He seemed to be utterly lost without Clara. But in spite of his personal problems he did in fact compose some wonderful music. Perhaps I didn't like this person, but I certainly felt compassion for the mentally ill composer/conductor.

Clara must have loved Schumann dearly. She not only defied her father in order to marry the gifted Schumann, but she bore the latter a large number of children, put up with his moods, nursed him, protected him and supported him emotionally and financially. She achieved much fame for her skill and artistry as a pianist, but she also composed in her own right. Because Robert's fame eventually eclipsed hers and we are more familiar with his works today, I had not fully appreciated the extent of her brilliance. I knew that she was both a gifted pianist and a composer, but I had not realised how famous she was in her own lifetime.

This touching novel is an excellent account not only of the Schumanns, but also of their social milieu and of the events of the day, including the Austro-Prussian war. Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, Richard Wagner, Louis Spohr, Joseph Joachim, Johannes Brahms and Swedish opera star Jenny Lind are some of the people encountered in the story.

Well-written, dense, intense and highly recommended.

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### **Lorna says**

A rich book about a fascinating family, heart breaking struggles and the 18th C music scene. It is written in keeping with its times, in quite a formal style, which is at times beautiful and masterful but can also be cold. Amazingly researched, immaculately detailed, it is an impressive literary achievement and I will be looking for more Janice Galloway books to read in the future.

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### **Lin says**

I really wanted to enjoy Clara – the story of a brilliant pianist who despite her controlling father and husband still had a career in a time when women were expected to stay at home and bear children. I just couldn't get used to Janice Galloway's style of writing. I was often at sea about who was being referred to. I read to about

page 300 then speed read to the end.

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### **Rachel M says**

This is a beautiful depiction of the life of Clara Schumann, the world-famous pianist made even more renowned through her marriage to the composer Robert Schumann. I enjoyed every moment of this book, more for Galloway's adroitness at capturing impressions than for a fast-moving plot. Clara's story is a captivating one because she is constantly pulled between the chance to grow as a pianist and performer in the world and being a devoted mother and wife at home. Born and bred with an amazing talent, Clara nonetheless has a deep humility and capacity to learn from the others in her life - such personalities as Mendelssohn and Brahms. Throughout her husband's long-time mental illness, she remains his faithful supporter and promoter, and often works behind the scenes to keep her family well-fed and cared for. In this book I found a character I could admire and learn from.

I think that any modern woman could relate to Clara's struggle: ought she, as some encourage, to put away her own gifts in order to be her husband's supporter and a homemaker? Or should she, as her father advises, put aside her desire to marry Robert and instead pursue a more prestigious but lonelier career as concert pianist? Clara reconciles these apparently mutually exclusive paths in a way that I find admirable, showing that there is more to her person than the roles that she fulfills.

“A pianist must develop more than technique, more than musicianship, more, even, than luck. She needs the capacity to deny fear. Passion one might take for granted: its control is the medium through which all else flows. That every emotion evolved by music is created through containment is a commonplace. For all the shimmering details of this reflection, then, the depth of her training is the only thing that shows.” -pg 5

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### **Bethany says**

Janice Galloway's *Clara* is a fictional biography of Clara Wieck Schumann, wife of famed composer Robert Schumann, child prodigy, and a composer in her own right. Galloway writes with an almost journalistic tone without seeming like she is reporting the events: the reader certainly feels like he is a participant in Clara's life. It is fascinating to discover what Clara Schumann was like, and with whom she rubbed shoulders - there were a great many musical geniuses around her time.

*Clara* is somewhat difficult to get into, but if you make it to that point, you will be hooked. I recommend this for people with basic knowledge of music theory, as it is pervasive and important to the plot advancement.

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### **Mary Czarnecki says**

This is about the renowned, celebrated pianist of the 19th cent., Clara Wieck Schumann, whose husband was the composer Robert Schumann. She is raised mostly by her demanding father, a well-known piano teacher. She is a prodigy & her father alternately praises & demeans her, sometimes abusing her verbally-- a perfectionist & obsessive who is determined to shape his talented daughter to his own image of what she shld be-- a virtuoso who will be world famous & earn them lots of money. She is highly disciplined by nature, but cowed by her father's selfish zeal for her playing-- he wants her to be known as the best pianist in Europe,

not "merely" a woman pianist, which was a kind of an oddity then, in the 1830's-'40's. As Wieck teaches her & takes her to higher levels of accomplishment, at the same time he verbally & physically abuses Clara's brothers-- they all play, but not nearly as well as Clara. When Clara steps out onto the world stage, she is given every accolade, gifts, rave reviews & praise. She remains, however, shy and hesitant to believe all the hype. There are critics who are certain that her father has brainwashed her and later that her husband is writing all the music that she has composed. While she is becoming famous, she meets Robert Schumann, a student of her father's. They fall in love-- he is known as a tempermental, emotional romantic who is brilliant but has bouts of depression & frenetic activity-- now we see it as bi-polar disorder, but then it was assumed he was just an eccentric artiste. Wieck is dead set against their marrying-- he will lose Clara to Robert & her income from performances. After several years of back & forth about it, Wieck makes monetary demands of her as conditions of letting her marry. She & Robt go to the courts, who grant them approval instead. Her father still makes her miserable & Robt grows to hate him even as he descends into severe mental illness. All the signs are there, but even tho Clara has been all over Europe & Russia she is still naive abt relationships, her mother having decamped years before, divorcing her father & marrying another man who actually made her happy. She pretty much abandons Clara, altho Wieck is mostly to blame, since he has made some kind of deal w/the mother, letting her have the youngest baby in exchange for giving up any rights to Clara... it's pretty demented & dysfunctional. Clara & Robt have 1 baby after another, total of 8, with several miscarriages in between. She even plays a concert right after a miscarriage-- a pretty ugly scenario for her; she is in pain & still bleeding heavily, playing strenuous piano pieces for an audience so they will have money to live on, since Robt doesn't really earn anything. She is nothing if not fiercely dedicated to her art & to her family. She is the one, tho, who has to be strong all the time, acquiescing to Robt's temper, tiptoeing around him so he can compose & write, nursing him back to health through all his illnesses, imagined & real, as well as his episodes of madness. He has a doctor friend who has helped him for years & seems to understand him & his moods, but he doesn't really help Clara, since there is no real treatment for his mental state, except using leeches & mineral baths. The writing in this story is odd-- some of seems to be stream of consciousness; there are no quote marks to delineate when a certain person is speaking, but you usually figure it out. You do get more of a personal viewpoint w/feelings, thoughts, reactions-- but some of it is disconcerting if you don't want to stray from conventional exposition in a novel. Once again, learned a lot abt people I don't think about or ever knew anything about.

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### **Edmund Bloxam says**

Cannot speak more highly of this book.

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### **Jen Abounader says**

The Schumanns and their friends pretty much represent one of my favorite eras of classical music - the music was great, and the composers themselves yielded lots of sordid stories. This story, for instance, is about how the famous pianist Clara Wieck (who, although you never hear about her due to the fact that she was written out of history on account of her being a lady, pretty much set the standard for the modern piano recital and was very famous in her time) fell in love with the composer Robert Schumann (who was insane).

While the beginning of this book is sort of slow (I could only read about Clara's early life so long without getting bored), it picks up after Schumann enters the mix. The narrative style is a little difficult to get used to, but once the book gets going it becomes an asset rather than a hindrance.

My recommendation is to pick up music by both of the Schumanns before you read this book, because you'll want to listen to what you're reading about.

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