



PLAY!
Fest
2026

EVENT PROGRAMME

FIVE DAYS IN 1842

Tuesday, 9 June 2026, 1.00pm

Boilerhouse Auditorium

There will not be an interval during this event.

Estimated event finish time: 1.30pm

Please no flash photography or visual/audio recording throughout the event.

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EVENT OVERVIEW

Five days of furious sketching. Five players. One blazing Romantic classic.

YOUR PERFORMERS

Christopher Bacon (violin), Catherine McAlpine (violin), Maisie Pierce (viola), Tatiana Kalmykova (cello), Ignacio Hellens (piano).

EVENT PROGRAMME

Robert Schumann (b. 1961): Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44

Robert Schumann first met Clara Wieck when he was 18 and she was 9. A dozen years later, the two were married, forever altering his life and the subsequent course of Romantic art. Few other romances in the history of music have yielded as much important work. Schumann wrote a number of works for his talented wife to perform, among them the Piano Quintet in E-flat.

Unlike his friends Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Brahms, all of whom were meticulous and methodical in their working habits, Schumann composed the bulk of his music in white-hot fits of inspiration. The year 1842 was Schumann's year of chamber music. In April, he ordered the scores of all the Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven string quartets in print and on June 4 began to write a string quartet of his own. By July 22, all three of the Opus 41 quartets were finished. The two works for piano and strings were written even more quickly: The quintet, Op. 44, was sketched in only five days—the complete score was finished October 12—while the quartet, Op. 47, was sketched between October 24 and 30 and completed within a month.

While Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn all offered models for the piano quartet, Schumann was the first important German composer to write for the seemingly natural but curiously neglected combination of

piano and string quartet. Prior to Schumann, Luigi Boccherini was the only composer of any consequence to write piano quintets (Brahms, Dvořák, and Franck would subsequently add lasting contributions to the form). Schumann's source of inspiration for the Piano Quintet may have been Mozart's arrangements of three of his piano concertos with string quartet accompaniment—like those, the Schumann Quintet is a curious amalgam of concerto and chamber work. Mendelssohn played the piano part at a private concert on December 6, 1842; the first public performance was given at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on January 8 the following year with Clara Schumann, the work's dedicatee.

The first movement, *Allegro brillante*, begins with one of the boldest of Schumann's inspirations: a powerfully striding theme from which all of the movement's other thematic material, including the expressive second subject, is derived. The second movement, *In Modo d'una Marcia*, is a menacing C-minor march that would strike responsive chords in many late-Romantic composers, most notably Gustav Mahler. The march is interrupted by two wildly disparate contrasting sections, a rich theme in C major and a stormy F-minor episode, suggested, apparently, by Mendelssohn.

The brilliant Scherzo is based on a simple scale ingeniously disrupted by a series of misplaced accents. There are two trios: the first containing a veiled reference to the principal theme of the first movement, the second an exuberant country dance with gypsy overtones. The vigorous finale is a fusion of sonata and rondo forms. After the dramatic development, the movement ends with a fugal coda in which the great theme from the first movement returns for the final time.

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