

Only Connect

A Competition to Create and Orchestrate a Cycle with Songs by Clara Schumann

Clara Schumann (1819–1896) achieved fame in her time as one of Europe’s leading pianists. She also began composing at an early age, though her marriage to Robert Schumann led her to concentrate on performing his works rather than promoting her own. She all but ceased composing after 1853.

Clara Schumann’s compositions, including some 20 songs for voice and piano, have been rediscovered, republished and recorded in recent decades. Like most composers of her time – including her husband Robert – Clara Schumann never wrote any songs with orchestra. The genre of the ‘orchestral song cycle’ was a product of the second half of the 19th century, and the most popular examples of the genre – from Hector Berlioz’s *Les nuits d’été* to Gustav Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and Richard Wagner’s *Wesendonck-Lieder* – were arrangements of existing works for voice and piano. In the last case, the arrangements were not even made by Wagner himself, but by his former assistant Felix Mottl.

The [Basel Academy of Music FHNW, Classic](#) proposes revitalising this tradition of orchestrating songs. It is holding a competition for young composers and arrangers **of any nationality, aged 28 or less as of 31 December 2025**, their task being to orchestrate between **three and five songs** by Clara Schumann to create a **coherent cycle for soprano voice with orchestral accompaniment**. Participants may orchestrate these songs as standalone pieces or may create a continuous musical text by inserting transitions or interludes between the songs; in this latter case, they may also incorporate other music by Clara Schumann (from any genre).

The duration of the cycle will depend on the number and nature of the songs chosen for orchestration, but is expected to be **between 15 and 25 minutes**. The maximum orchestral forces available are as follows (any combination of these is permissible):

2 fl, 2 ob, 2 clar, 2 bn / 2 hn, 2 trp, 3 trbn, tb / strings / timp & 1 perc

The jury will comprise the composers [Cheryl Frances-Hoad](#) and [Karin Wetzel](#), Christian Knüsel (Artistic Director, Neues Orchester Basel) and Chris Walton (Music Academy Basel).

Scores must be submitted by 31 December 2025. The jury will choose one cycle to be performed by the [Neues Orchester Basel](#); the composer will be invited to Basel to attend. This cycle will receive a cash prize of CHF 2,000.-

For more information, contact Chris Walton, chris.walton@fhnw.ch, and mark your email *Only Connect*.