

March 4, 2026

Dear Selection Committee for the CCAM Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award:

I am writing as faculty mentor to DMA candidate Qiaohui He, who is applying for 2025–26 College of Creative Arts and Media Faculty/Student Mentored Research Award. Her contribution is based on a research proposal that she developed during fall semester, 2026 as part of her application for Ph.D. programs in musicology. Since we do not offer this degree, Qiaohui is applying to prestigious programs in Hong Kong. I met with Qiaohui weekly during the fall semester to work on this research proposal.

Qiaohui's research proposal centers on the *Symphonic Etudes*, op. 13 (1847), by Robert Schumann (1810-1856). The work also had a provisional title, *Symphonic Variations*. Qiaohui's work explores the genre-crossing involved in a piece which can be called a variation set, a collection of etudes, and a symphonic work, even as it transgresses the received boundary between absolute and program music. Understanding the unique position of this work requires understanding cultural concepts contemporaneous to the composition, especially the German notions of *Bildung* and *Kunstreligion*. Those embedded ideas specific to musical culture must also be considered, especially the moral significance given to "symphonic" thinking. This question of morality weighed heavily on Schumann at the time, as he strove to win the hand of Clara Wieck, whose father considered him dissipated and unreliable. It also requires a deep musical context, comparing this work to other piano works of the time, especially those of Franz Liszt and Frederic Chopin. Qiaohui addresses not just the significance of the work at the time of its composition, but also the genre and character ascribed to it by later generations. The most significant of later interpreters was Robert's wife, Clara Wieck Schumann, whose 1887 edition of the piece is of highest significance. As Clara determined what variations should be included and which should not, she became the co-composer. Given the status of women and wives in German at the time, this is most remarkable.

It was a joy to work with Qiaohui, whose extraordinary work ethic is matched by her enthusiasm. I marveled at what she was able to accomplish in such limited time. Her work is characterized by clear and expressive writing, lucid exposition of topics that are themselves far from lucid (such as Romantic aesthetics), and a remarkable grasp of a broad range of scholarly issues. It demonstrates a sustained and intense effort, completed with noteworthy dispatch, with strong results.

Thank you for your consideration of Qiaohui's proposal.

Sincerely yours,



Andrew Kohn, Ph.D.
Professor of Music and
Coordinator of the Music Theory area