

JEAN-SÉLIM ABDELMOULA

piano

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854-1928)

In the Mists

I. Andante

II. Molto adagio

III. Andantino

IV. Presto

(approx. 16 minutes)

JEAN-SÉLIM ABDELMOULA (b. 1991)

Two Interludes (2006)

Interlude I. Molto moderato

Interlude II. Lentamente

Coda. Un poco andante

(approx. 6 minutes)

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854-1928)

Sonata 1. X. 1905 'From the Street'

Presentiment

Death

(approx. 14 minutes)

Intermission

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Sonata in B-flat major D 960

Molto moderato

Andante sostenuto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza

Allegro ma non troppo

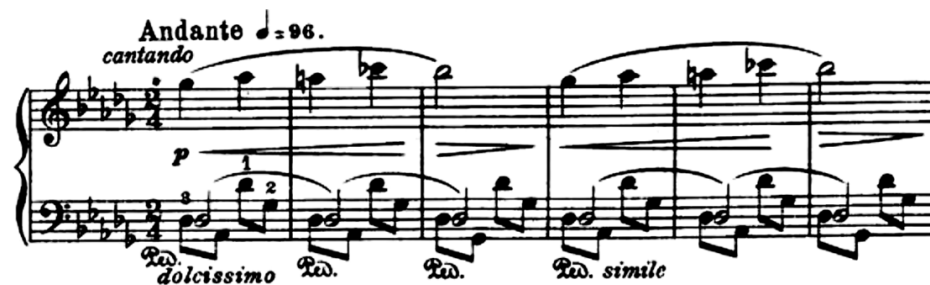
(approx. 40 minutes)

Leoš Janáček

In the Mists

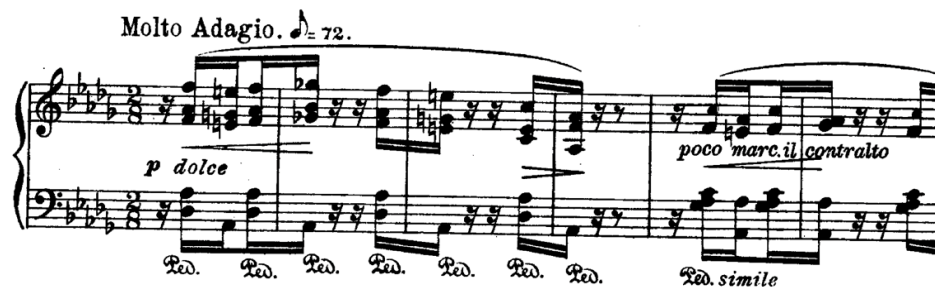
Janáček's four-movement piano cycle from 1912 presents us with intimate, personal and emotionally immediate music that stands stylistically on the border between Eastern and Western Europe. Its sound world is that of the fiddles and *cimbalom* (hammered dulcimer) of Moravian folk music, and its compositional style is also folk-like in its use of small melodic fragments, repeated and transformed in various ways. In the composer's use of harmonic colour, however, there is more than a mist of French impressionism à la Debussy, but an impressionism filtered through Czech ears.

The *Andante* sets the tone of introspection with its dreamlike repetition of a tonally ambivalent 5-note melody, set against non-committal harmonies in the left-hand ostinato.



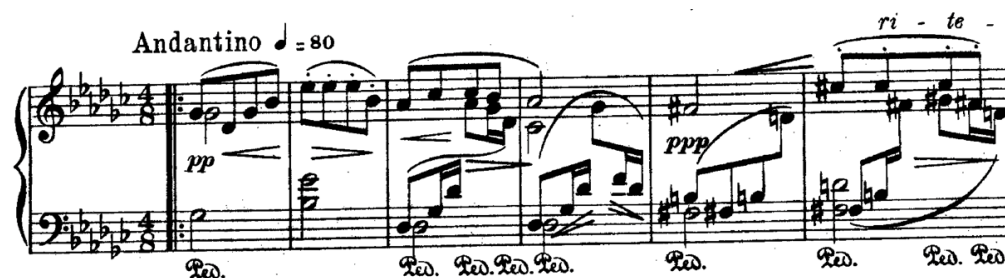
A contrasting middle section brings in a less troubled chorale melody that alternates with, and then struggles against, a cascade of cimbalom-like runs before the nostalgic return of the melancholy opening material.

The many contrasting sections of the *Molto adagio* second movement are dominated by varied repetitions of a 4-note motive stated at the outset.



Fast and slow variants of this noble but halting melody alternate within the movement.

The *Andantino* is similarly fixated on a single idea, presenting the gracious opening phrase in a number of different keys



until it is interrupted by an impetuous development of its accompaniment figure. It ends, however, exactly as it began.

The 4th movement, *Presto*, with its many changes of metre, is reminiscent of the rhapsodic improvisational style of the gypsy violin.



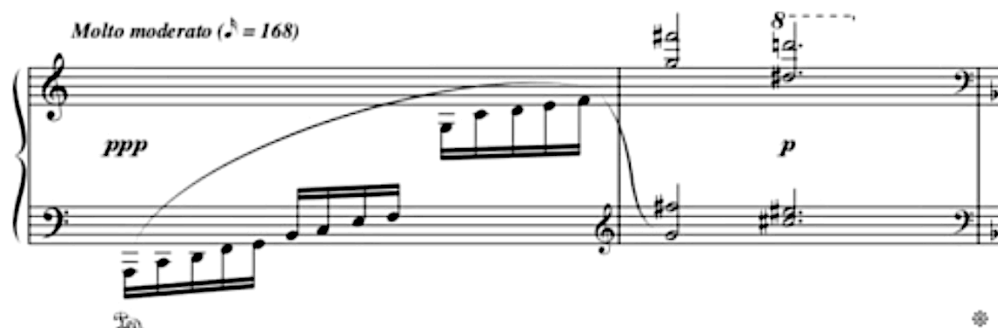
The *cimbalom* of Moravian folk music can be heard most clearly in the thrumming drones of the left-hand accompaniment and in the occasional washes of metallic tone colour in the right hand.

Jean-Sélim Abdelmoula

Two Interludes (2006)

Swiss pianist-composer Jean-Sélim Abdelmoula writes piano scores steeped in the drifting polychromatic overtones of long-pedalled keyboard gestures. This atmospheric sonic ‘haze’, wafting to the ear at a soft dynamic level, inevitably suggests a French sensibility but there is more happening in his works than a mere play of delicately sifted tonal colours. At heart, Abdelmoula considers himself a composer who is “keen to maintain a traditional sense of melody,” as he said in a recent introduction to his *Two Interludes*, a work that was composed back in 2006 when he was still in his mid-teens.

The opening of Interlude I displays the wide range of the keyboard from which he pulls his sonorities, with major 7ths playing a leading role in the overtone mix in the high register.

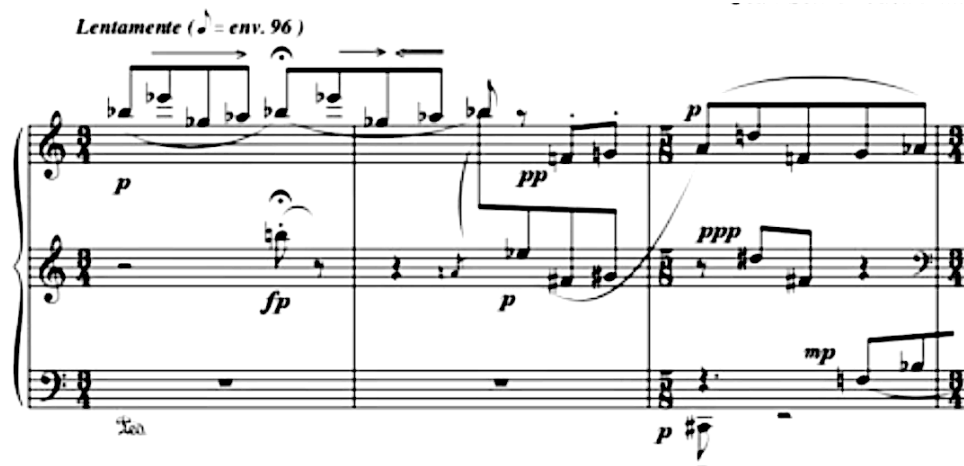


Eventually a four-note melodic pattern emerges that will recur throughout the entire work, one that circles around a central pitch with constant changes in melodic direction.

Boosting the composer's "traditionalist" credentials, this 'circling' melodic motive even occurs in an imitative texture.



And this same melodic outline structures the opening gestures of Interlude II, as well.



It also recurs in multi-voiced passages of the work's Coda:



So while the composer offers a bewildering vast range of tonal space for the ear to interpret, there is a consistent thread of melodic interest woven through the texture of this work that guides the musical 'discussion'.

Leoš Janáček

Sonata 1. X. 1905 'From the Street'

At the beginning of the 20th century and until the end of The Great War (1914-1918), the Czech province of Moravia formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the language of its ruling elite was German. But on October 1st, 1905, a demonstration was held in Brno to promote the establishment of a Czech university in the city, prompting an outbreak of ethnic violence that claimed the life of a 19-year-old worker called František Pavlík (1885-1905).

This death inspired Janáček to write his first and only piano sonata, subtitled 'From the Street', which was premiered on 27 January 1906 but then disappeared from public view. Janáček, you see, in a fit of depression had burned the last movement, a funeral march, and thrown the first two movements into the Vltava River. Only in 1924 did pianist Ludmila Tučková, who performed the work at its premiere, reveal that she had copied out these first two movements, allowing the work to be re-performed and published for the first time.

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Despite its programmatic origins, the first movement, ominously labelled *Presentiment*, is in fairly standard sonata form, with even a repeated exposition. Its plangent first theme is presented simply at the outset, then immediately repeated with a more fulsome, folk-like accompaniment.



Immediately noticeable is the extraordinarily wide spacing of the piano texture, evocative of the timbre and idiom of the hammered dulcimer (*cimbalom*) used in Moravian folk music, the restless jangling of which is heard in the middle register.

The consoling 2nd theme is more lyrically conceived



but both themes display Janáček's characteristic use of small motives to create larger phrase units that accumulate in meaning through repetition.

The development section concentrates on the descending line of the first theme, extending it into a series of cascading sobs of helpless weeping until the more measured tone of the opening returns in the recapitulation.

The second movement, entitled *Death*, focuses in emotionally on the loss of a young life. Evocative of the void left by the death of the young František Pavlík, its first section begins almost every bar with a gesture of emptiness: a 16th note rest in both hands.



The whole movement is built from the repetition of a single modally-inflected phrase, dully repeated in the opening section, but more operatically sung out in the expansive middle section that seems to be confronting the finality of death and raging against the injustice of a young life lost in the national struggle for a Czech identity. Finally, however, the meditative mood of the opening returns to end the movement *ppp* as it edges towards the silence of the grave.

Franz Schubert

Sonata in B-flat major D 960

Schubert's last piano sonata, written in 1828 a scant few months before his death, exemplifies in one single work the full range of his gifts as lyric melodist, serious musical dramatist, and refined exponent of the light, dance-besotted musical style of Vienna.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, is typically generous in its bounty of themes. It opens with a peaceful melody of remarkably small range with a hint of pathos in its second strain, accompanied by a repeated pedal tone in the left hand, like a pulsing human heartbeat.



It ends with a mysterious trill at the bottom of the keyboard that will be an important structural marker in the movement, repeated at the first ending of the exposition and again just before the start of the recapitulation.

This tentative opening theme evolves to blossom into full-throated song before a 2nd theme arrives to introduce a contrasting note of worry, circling as it does around the notes of the F# minor triad.



Schubert's varied cast of thematic characters is complete with the arrival of a 3rd theme of 'hopping bunnies' that scampers over a wide range of the keyboard to end the exposition on a buoyant note of emotional uplift.



Each of Schubert's three themes passes fluidly between the major and minor modes like a tonal dual citizen, mirroring the alternating moods of sweet yearning and inner anxiety that characterize the composer's trademark 'outsider' persona.

The development is where all the drama lies in this movement, as Schubert passes his melodic material through a harmonic colour wheel, building to an intense climax that acts as a rare moment of sonic emphasis amid what is, essentially, a movement of delicate shades of nuance.

Much more overtly dramatic is the *Andante sostenuto* slow movement, surreal in its starkly spare texture of layered sonorities. It features a sombre, halting 'funeral march' melody seated in the mid-range and shadowed both above and below by a rocking figure that quietly resounds like the echo inside a stone tomb.



Only Schubert could create such a melody, one that combines sad elegy with tender reminiscence and pleading prayer. This eerie atmosphere is relieved only by the nostalgic strains of the movement's more militant middle section – an attempt to take heart, perhaps, but an attempt that inevitably fails as the opening mood returns to conclude the movement.

The third movement scherzo, *Allegro vivace con delicatezza*, is indeed 'delicate' if judged by the standards of Beethoven's rough-house humour. More typically Viennese in its subtlety, its own brand of good-natured humour features melodies studded with twinkling grace notes and merry echo effects in the high register.



A steady interchange of material between treble and bass creates the impression of a dialogue between two real musical 'characters'. The contrasting trio in the minor mode is much more sedate, sitting put in the middle of the keyboard and shifting its weight around in gentle syncopations.

Still in a humorous frame of mind, Schubert begins his rondo finale, *Allegro ma non troppo*, with a mock ‘mistake’.



Starting off in the ‘wrong’ key, C minor, he then ‘remembers’ that he wants to be in B flat major and makes a mid-course correction at the end of the first phrase. This joke of changing theatrical masks from the serious to the comedic and back again is played out frequently during the movement, and never more dramatically than when a gloriously songful melody is rudely interrupted by a forceful new motive in a dotted rhythm that charges in, like a SWAT team breaking down the door of an evil-doer's lair.



But it was all a misunderstanding, of course, and these threatening minor-mode motives are soon dropped in favour of an almost parodistic variant of the same material in the major mode, something that kindergarten children might skip to at recess.

In short, this is a finale filled with congenial joking of the most sophisticated kind, created by a true pianistic ‘sit-down comic’ in love with the Viennese sense of humour.

Program notes by
Donald G. Gíslason 2023