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SPRING CONCERTS 2024

Paul Lewis
plays Schubert Piano Sonatas
May 11, 13, 15, 17 2024

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

Welcome to this extraordinary series of concerts, the complete Piano Sonatas of Franz Schubert, performed by Paul Lewis, one of today's greatest and most celebrated Schubert interpreters. It is truly one of the great privileges in our 44 years of concert presentation to bring this series to Vancouver. And this wonderful venture has been made possible by the great support of Elaine Adair. Thank you, Elaine, for these four wonderful evenings of music! Music played on the piano which Paul chose for the VRS at the Steinway factory in Hamburg 16 years ago. The piano which has been meticulously cared for by our wonderful technician, Scott Harker, with occasional visits from Ulrich Gerhartz, Head Technician at Steinway in London.



As you'll read a bit further on in this program Kurt Gagel, alongside Elaine, was in Hamburg with us when Paul chose our beloved Steinway. Kurt passed away over the winter and we wanted to memorialize him and the impact he had on the VRS by dedicating this series of performances to him. We miss you, Kurt.

We also owe thanks to the Peak Group of Companies for its wonderful support of our series over the years, and the City of Vancouver and the Government of British Columbia for their support.

I want to thank our wonderful staff and our Board of Directors as we come to the close of what I can only describe as a TRULY sensational season.

And last, but not least, to our patrons and donors who have been most loyal and supportive, we offer our most sincere gratitude. As I've said many times before, you are our life blood.

Have a wonderful summer and miss us terribly! We'll be back in September with another fabulous season.

Leila



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音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

Paul Lewis plays Schubert Piano Sonatas

Paul Lewis, piano

May 11, 13, 15, 17, 2024
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

CONCERT 1 pages 6-15

Saturday, May 11, 2024 | 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

Piano Sonata No. 7 in E-flat major, D. 568
Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor, D. 784
Piano Sonata No. 17 in D major, D. 850

CONCERT 2 pages 16-25

Monday, May 13, 2024 | 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

Piano Sonata No. 15 in C major, D. 840
Piano Sonata No. 13 in A major, D. 664
Piano Sonata No. 16 in A minor, D. 845

CONCERT 3 pages 26-36

Wednesday, May 15, 2024 | 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

Piano Sonata No. 4 in A minor, D. 537
Piano Sonata No. 9 in B major, D. 575
Piano Sonata No. 18 in G major, D. 894

CONCERT 4 pages 37-48

Friday, May 17, 2024 | 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

Piano Sonata No. 19 in C minor, D. 958
Piano Sonata No. 20 in A major, D. 959
Piano Sonata No. 21 B-flat major, D. 960

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Kurt Gagel

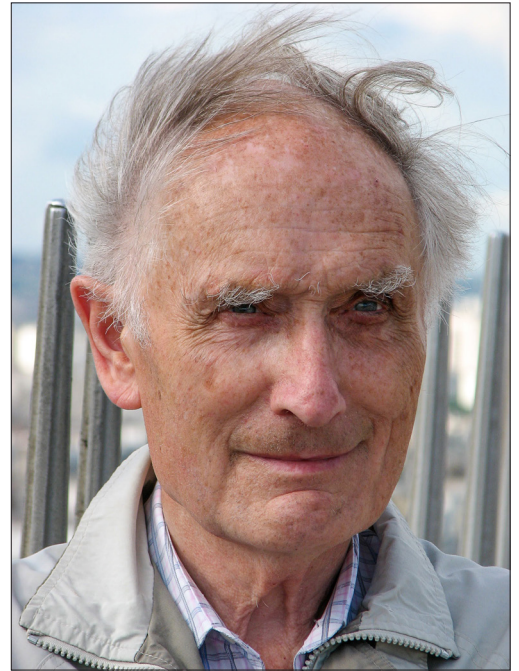
This series of the complete Schubert Sonatas performed by Paul Lewis is dedicated to the memory of KURT H. GAGEL, a member of the VRS board from 2003 – 2010.

Kurt was a great supporter before becoming a board member, and continued with his wonderful support until he passed away on November 26, 2023 at the age of 92. He was a great lover of our summer Vancouver Chamber Music Festival and became quite close to Paul Lewis and to another British pianist, Steven Osborne.

Kurt was the board member who championed our endeavour to purchase a new Hamburg Steinway Model D concert grand piano in 2008. With an incredible gift from Martha Lou Henley, we were able to make our dream come true, and we headed off to Hamburg with Kurt and his late wife, Ingrid, Elaine Adair, Gloria Wong, our wonderful piano technician, Scott Harker and my husband, Leon. In Hamburg, we met up with Paul Lewis, who selected the piano for us at the Steinway factory – it is the piano you will hear in this series, and the piano that has been delighting you, our audience, as well as the great pianists we love, ever since.

Incidentally, Kurt was so enthusiastic about the experience and so true in his passion for the piano, that he ended up purchasing a gorgeous Hamburg Steinway Model B for his own home on that trip.

Kurt, the VRS is better off for having had you in its orbit.



Paul Lewis, piano

Early Life & Education: Paul Lewis CBE studied with Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London before studying privately with Alfred Brendel. Paul is Co-Artistic Director of Midsummer Music, an annual chamber music festival held in Buckinghamshire, UK, and this year is the Co-Artistic Director of Norway's Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival up in the Arctic Circle.

Performances: With a natural affinity for Beethoven, Paul took part in the BBC's three-part documentary *Being Beethoven* and performed a concerto cycle at Tanglewood during the summer of 2022. Paul has performed the cycle all over the world, including with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, the Melbourne Symphony, the Orquestra Simfònica Camera Musicae, the São Paulo State Symphony and the Royal Flemish Philharmonic orchestras.

Over the last two seasons Paul has been performing a four-programme Schubert piano sonata series at over 30 venues around the globe, showcasing the completed sonatas from the last 12 years of Schubert's life.

Recordings: Besides many award-winning Beethoven and Schubert recordings for Harmonia Mundi, Paul's discography also demonstrates his characteristic depth of approach in other Classical and Romantic repertoires such as Haydn, Schumann, Mussorgsky, Brahms and Liszt. In chamber music, he is a regular at Wigmore Hall, having played there more than 100 times. He works closely with tenor Mark Padmore in lied recitals around the world – they have recorded three Schubert song cycles together.

Awards & Prizes: Paul's numerous awards include the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year, two Edison Awards, three Gramophone Awards, the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik, the Premio Internazionale Accademia Musicale Chigiana and the South Bank Show Classical Music Award. He holds honorary degrees from Liverpool, Edge Hill and Southampton Universities and was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) during Queen Elizabeth II's 2016 Birthday Honours.



Paul Lewis CBE is represented by Maestro Arts, London.

Paul Lewis plays Schubert Piano Sonatas - Concert 1

Paul Lewis, piano

Saturday, May 11 2024, 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Piano Sonata No. 7 in E-flat major D. 568

Allegro moderato
Andante molto
Menuetto. Allegretto
Allegro moderato

(approx. 30 minutes)

Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor D. 784

Allegro giusto
Andante
Allegro vivace

(approx. 21 minutes)

INTERMISSION

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D major D. 850

Allegro vivace
Con moto
Scherzo. Allegro vivace
Rondo. Allegro moderato

(approx. 39 minutes)

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Program Notes - Concert 1

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata No. 7 in E-flat major D. 568

Schubert's E-flat major sonata is a youthful work written in 1817, when the composer was only 20 years old, and then later elaborated on and revised in the mid-1820s. This is a gently poached egg of a sonata, characterized by light moods, moderate tempos and muted dynamic levels – its outer movements drawing to a close *pp* and *ppp* respectively.

The work opens with a triadic theme of Mozartean stamp, each phrase of which seems to end in a question mark.



This harmonic coyness continues for a full 28 bars, with delay after delay, before Schubert decides he can let us have a right proper cadence on E flat, the ruling tonality of the movement. And even then, it's E-flat *minor!*

His second theme puts us square in the middle of a village feast, with dancing on the menu. This theme is a *Ländler* (the rural precursor to the waltz) but an understated one, delivered *pianissimo*. The trademark boisterousness of this dance is reduced to a little chromatic "hop" motive at the ends of phrases:



Meanwhile, the ever-faithful village band keeps a steady supply of oom-pahs pulsing in the ear to keep the mood merry and the toes tapping.

The communal spirit animating the proceedings is confirmed in the exposition's closing theme, a tune shared antiphonally between the left and right hands that smilingly muses over its own large leaps.

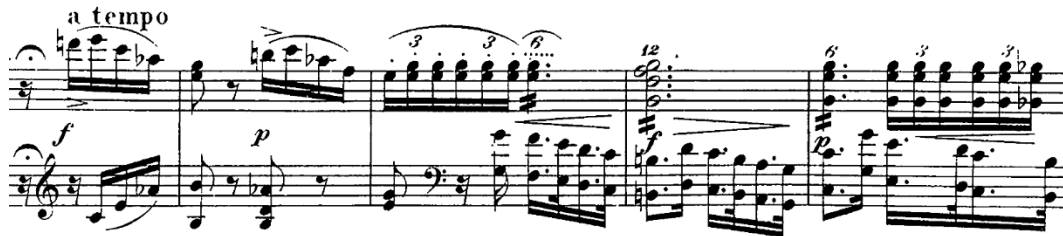


The development section puts its focus on this closing theme, but not before thoroughly interrogating the most trivial arpeggio figure from the end of the exposition and providing thereby a bit of forward-moving energy of a kind largely missing from the relaxed exposition. The recapitulation is almost a carbon copy of the exposition but enlivened with syncopations and melodic variation that accompany it to its tranquil ending.

By way of contrast with all this bonhomie, the *Andante molto* second movement opens with a somewhat stark aria tune in the minor mode, one that advances haltingly, in little two-bar phrases – answered by other little two-bar replies.



This shortness of breath only gets worse when the theme is interrupted, twice, by a melodramatic episode panting with triplet 16ths.



In contrast to the easy-breathing expressiveness of the first movement, this *Andante* movement's concerns are more neurotic, more locally focused at the level of the individual bar.

The *Menuetto* is a somewhat conflicted affair. It opens with a modest but gracious melody of small range, proceeding at a quarter-note pace in smooth stepwise motion.



But it soon discovers it would much rather stretch its legs and venture further afield in a pattern of steady dotted rhythms which, when continued into the Trio, makes the expected contrast between sections difficult to discern.



The main contrast, you see, is between the smooth opening melody and its perky continuation. And in this we catch a glimpse of how Schubert treats traditional formal principles as merely a structuring prompt for his own dream-like free associations.

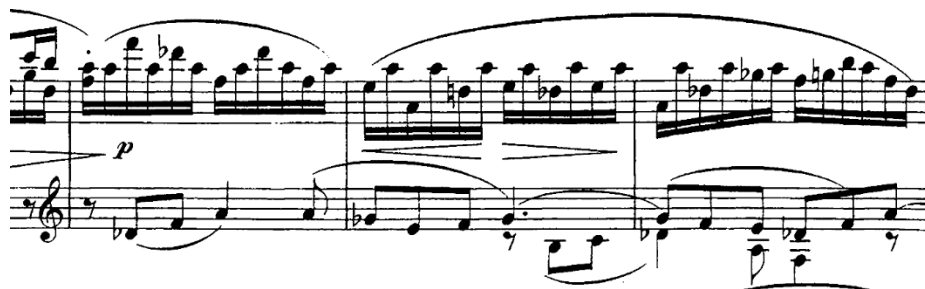
The finale is a sonata-form movement with an impish “call-and-response” opening theme that coyly leaves an 8th-note rest on the strong beat in the middle of its two-bar phrases to create a kind of “echo” effect.



But its more serious second theme, in a surprising B-flat minor, is all business and driving energy, its forward motion propelled by a churning cauldron of restless harmonies in the left hand:



This, of course, is just its opening bargaining position. So, when it slides into the relative major, D flat, and inverts the texture, it mellows into a glorious baritone tune, eminently suitable for husbands to hum in the shower while soaping their armpits.



And another surprise is in store in the development section, where a new theme, a waltz, breaks out, cleverly using the “gapped” echo motive of the opening as the “pah-pah” in its “oom-pah-pah” lilt.

This congenial movement often has a chiming “music-box” ring about it, since the right hand spends so much of its time twinkling up in the high register, in the second octave above middle C. But this only allows Schubert an excuse to balance the texture with richly-timbred left-hand melody-making in the mid-range.

There is no thought of a “triumphant” ending to this sonata. The delicacy of sentiment that this finale offers up ensures that its final quiet fade-away will be received by its listeners as a contented sigh.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor D. 784

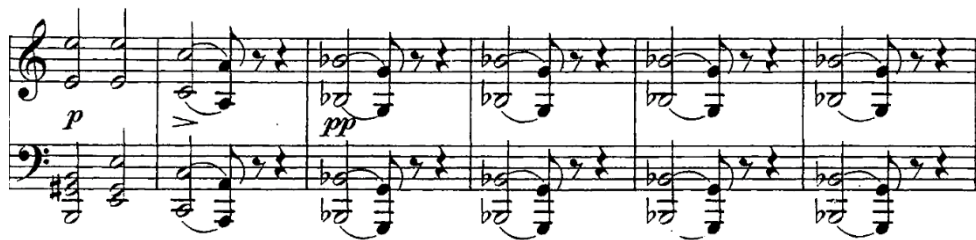
Schubert's life stopped cold in 1822 when at the age of 25 he was diagnosed with syphilis – a virtual death sentence, given the state of medical knowledge in 1820s Vienna. His ragingly emotional Sonata in A minor D. 784 was written in early 1823, during his painful recuperation from the disease's initial symptoms, and its effect on his compositional process can well be surmised.

The work surveys bleak emotional terrain with a bare-knuckled expressive rhetoric grounded in sparse keyboard textures that often seem to explode unpredictably into an orchestral weight of sound.

There is more than a hint of fatalism in the way the work opens, with a pair of rhythmically symmetrical phrases that each end in the same way: in a two-note “sigh motive” outlining a falling 3rd.



This falling-3rd motive, and the relentless “funereal” pace that it both encapsulates and reinforces, will haunt this movement from start to finish. Indeed, there are many places in which these two elements are the *only* thing happening at all.



Even the sweetly peaceful second theme, with its comforting pedal tone in the bass, moves forward with a symmetry of phrasing and a regularity of pulse that recall the inexorable rhythms of the opening.



The development section is eruptive and plaintive in turn, its first section raging over the “falling interval” motive, its second whimpering over the contrasting second theme – to the jangling accompaniment of insistent dotted rhythms in both sections.

The recapitulation introduces some interesting textural and rhythmic variations in the presentation of its material, but in the end submits to the inexorable logic of the falling-3rd motive repeated over and over in the final bars.

* * *

The *Andante* slow movement offers no sustained relief from the bleakness undergirding the preceding movement. Instead of seeking contrast between formal sections, this slow movement gives us a single, self-contrasting theme, presented in various textural settings.

The contrast built into the theme itself resides in its eccentric juxtaposition of a broadly lyrical, nicely arched melody in the major mode and a faster, more narrowly focused little “turn” motive with minor-mode implications.



This worrying little “echo” is to be played *con sordini*, a kind of soft pedal once installed on Viennese pianos that muffled the sound of the strings, giving a distant ethereal timbre to the sound.

Schubert is playing with dynamics here, and this type of “sound theatre” continues throughout the movement, first in an explosion of full-fisted chords pulling sonorities from both ends of the keyboard and then more quietly in a series of seemingly gracious settings of the opening theme, decorated with triplet “drops of rain” in the high register.



What becomes increasingly clear, though, as the movement wears on, is that it is the ominous little minor-mode turn figure that holds sway and is determining where this music is heading.

* * *

The frenetic imitative scurrying between the hands that characterizes the opening of the *Allegro vivace* finale is hard to decipher, given the eerily unsettled emotional states of the previous two movements.



If tempted to read this sonata autobiographically, one might believe that it evokes the passage of time – time that Schubert feels slipping out of his life with each day that passes.

A more tranquil second theme would seem to promise lyrical relief from all this squirrely scamper but for the quavering mixed-mode, major-minor cast of its melody, a melody that keeps emphasizing the same fateful sigh motives that dominate the first movement.



This movement is structured as a sonata-rondo, with varying episodes of this second theme interrupting the opening refrain tune of running 8th notes.

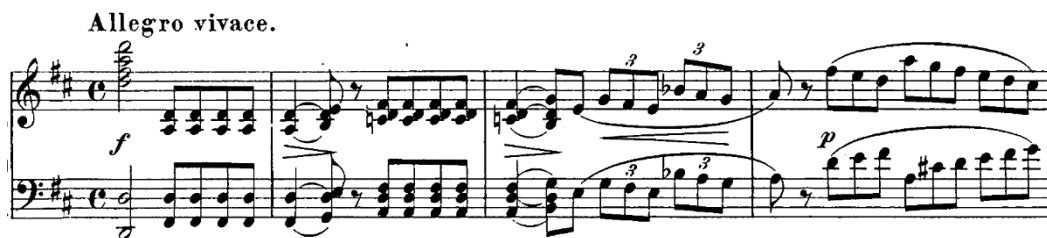
We have here a movement that seems never to be able to relax, perhaps a reflection of the composer's bewilderment over his recognition that he is now, officially, "a person who is dying." He was not to die for almost another six years, though, and the feistiness of his fist-shaking resolve to live on his own terms is perhaps best expressed in the resolute manner in which he ends this finale.



Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 17 in D major D. 850

The energizing, mood-brightening effects of an Alpine vacation are on full display in Schubert's "Gasteiner" Sonata in D major D. 850, written in the late summer of 1825 while the composer was relaxing in the spa town of Gastein in the Austrian alps. The peppy *vivace* tempo marking for both the first and third movements is notable in this regard, given Schubert's general preference for restrained tempo markings such as *moderato* in his piano works.

The first movement gets off and running with a bold orchestral fanfare that introduces the two contrasting motives that will comprise Schubert's opening "theme": a "drumbeat" of repeated 8th notes and a flowing pattern of running triplets.



These two motives, chattering away at each other in various keys and various registers of the keyboard, eventually give way to a less rambunctious but still bright and chipper second theme that some have compared to Alpine yodelling.



But even this theme gets swept up in the avalanche of the first theme's triplets that dominate the exposition, creating a series of ear-tickling textures wherever they roam.

The development section is entirely focused on the first theme's two contrasting elements: one punchy and emphatic in duple groupings, the other playfully flowing in triplets.

And while the fanfare's opening begins the developmental proceedings in high seriousness of purpose,



no amount of repetition and modulation can deny the appeal of the triplet figure, which, in the end, grabs the lead and takes us into the recapitulation. With all motivic elements now having been put thoroughly through the ringer, Schubert closes off with a race-to-the-finish coda to cap off this invigorating mountain-hike of a movement.

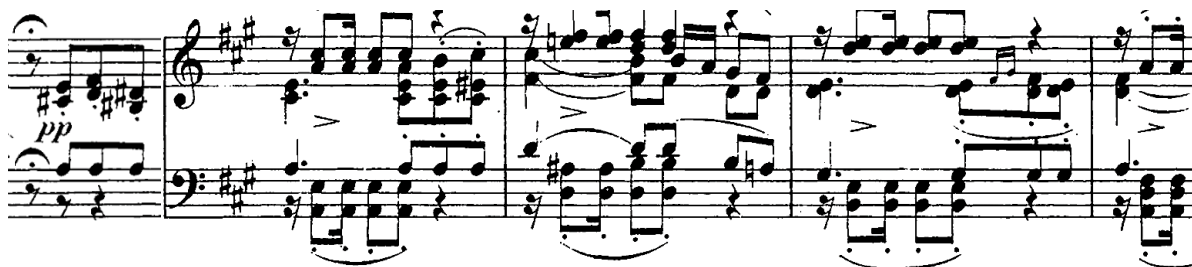
The pace slows down somewhat for the slow movement marked *Con moto*, but “rest” is not on the menu despite the wistful mood of its moderately paced opening theme.



Structured as a rondo in A-B-A-B-A form, this movement's B-section ups the rhythmic ante with a series of gently lilting syncopations that gather in importance as the movement progresses.



Despite the relative meekness of both themes, Schubert pushes his material to considerable heights of grandeur, and this is not a movement devoid of real drama, although peaceful co-existence seems to be the order of the day when the rhythmically straightforward first theme is presented for the last time cleverly accompanied by the lilting syncopations of the second theme.



Rhythmic vitality is the overarching quality of Schubert's scherzo movement. With its recurring use of *hemiola* (combining two triple-meter bars into one) it bears the classic rhythmic imprint of the Czech folk dance known as the *furiant*.



The dance-like character of this theme is kept alive by pervasive dotted rhythms, but the evenly paced Trio middle section strikes a different tone entirely.



Here, reverential uniformity of rhythm throws into relief harmonic changes that range from the traditional to the shockingly colourful.

The return of the opening material, however, does not lead to an ending commensurate with the energy and impetus of the opening. Rather, the movement ends softly, lilting its way off into the sunset to prepare us for the mild-mannered opening of the finale.

The finale is a rondo that opens at a relaxed walking pace, its footfall marked by a steady ostinato of quarter notes in the left hand supporting the most childlike of whistleable tunes in the right - perfect for a leisurely mountain stroll on a sunny afternoon.



The first episode that interrupts this chiming music box of an opening refrain is more energetic, animated with 16th-note runs eager for harmonic adventure and developmental elaboration.



The second episode strikes a more lyrical, but sleepier, tone. With its folk-like drone in the bass, it almost sounds like a lullaby.



And even though Schubert tries to create a modicum of drama by roughing it up a bit, the placid nature of this theme eventually wins the day. And in keeping with the general consensus, the final statement of the opening refrain rides to the movement's conclusion on the back of the first episode's pearly runs, chattering their way softly into the distance.



Program notes by
Donald G. Gíslason 2024

Paul Lewis plays Schubert Piano Sonatas - Concert 2

Paul Lewis, piano

Monday, May 13 2024, 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Piano Sonata No. 15 in C major D. 840

Moderato
Andante

(approx. 24 minutes)

Piano Sonata No. 13 in A major D. 664

Allegro moderato
Andante
Allegro

(approx. 22 minutes)

INTERMISSION

Piano Sonata No. 16 in A minor D. 845

Moderato
Andante poco moto
Scherzo. Allegro vivace
Rondo. Allegro vivace

(approx. 38 minutes)

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Program Notes - Concert 2

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata No. 15 in C major D. 840

Schubert did not always finish the piano sonatas he began writing, and in 1825 he was writing two sonatas in tandem: the Sonata in A minor D. 845 (the last work on this evening's program) and the Sonata in C major D. 840, of which only the first two movements were completed. These two movements were nonetheless published posthumously in 1861 under the somewhat grisly subtitle *Reliquie* ("Remains") in the mistaken belief that it was the last work the composer was working on when he died.

It is not known for sure why Schubert failed to complete this sonata, but we can readily surmise what might have made him lose heart in the project. While the second movement *Andante* is a real gem, the first movement, in sonata form, is a bit of a clunker, with less-than-memorable themes and uninventively developed and unsatisfying textures awkwardly "orchestrated" for the keyboard.

The opening theme is a collection of disparate musical motives, only the first six notes and closing four notes of which are used to any real musical purpose at all throughout the movement.



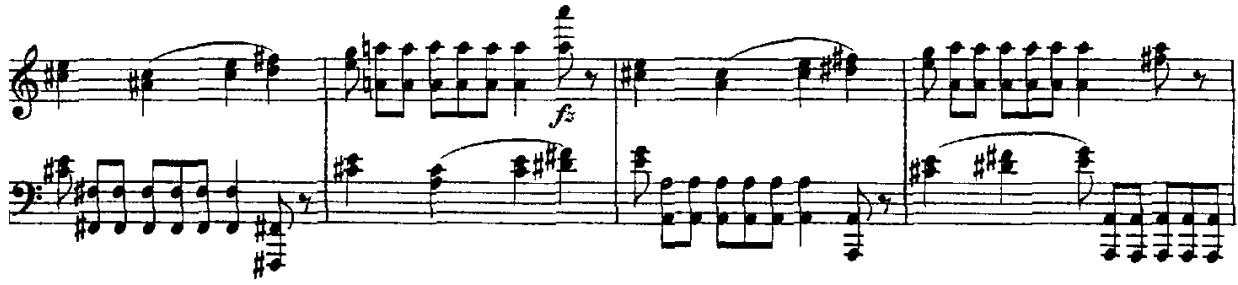
And used they are, over and over again. The first motive is proclaimed and re-proclaimed, at length, but never really "takes" in the musical imagination since its melodic steps and gaps don't add up to a satisfying whole, being rather rhetorically conceived, like an abstract fugue subject. And the frequent use of unharmonized bare octaves often leaves the texture threadbare and lacking warmth, while the repeated-note motive, rhythmically offset, is overused as a drumbeat "echo" to practically everything that happens in the entire movement.



In this syncopated form the repeated-note motive becomes the left-hand accompaniment to the strangely triadic second theme in the minor mode (which itself is patterned after the rhythm of the movement's opening six notes).



And the development section, in Beethovenian style, unrelentingly makes the same point, over and over and over again, using just these two motives.



Repetition, repetition and more repetition seems to have been the stopgap measure that Schubert employed when treating his musical material in the absence of any more compelling notion of what to do. The most extreme example is to be found in the movement's ending, a paean to the key of C major that seems to foreshadow minimalist composer Terry Riley's *In C*.

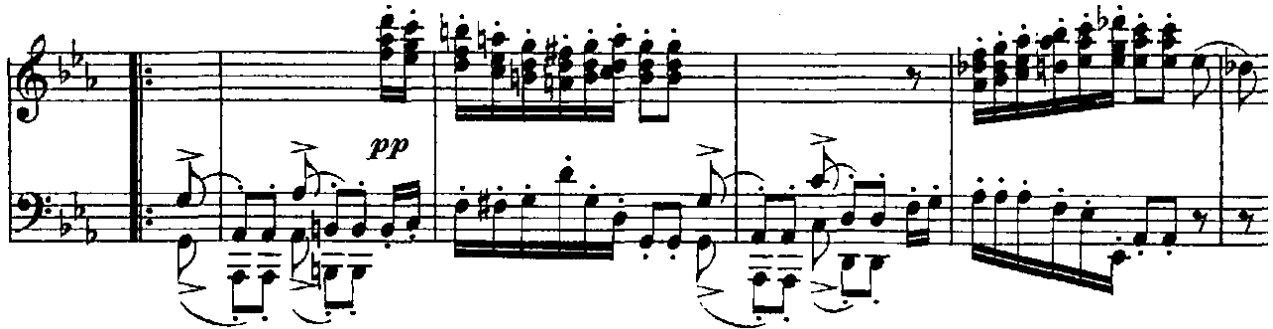


While Schubert's gifts are not well represented in this movement, it must be remembered that it was an overly enterprising publisher's decision, not Schubert's, to put this draft of a movement out for public consumption as if it were a mature work.

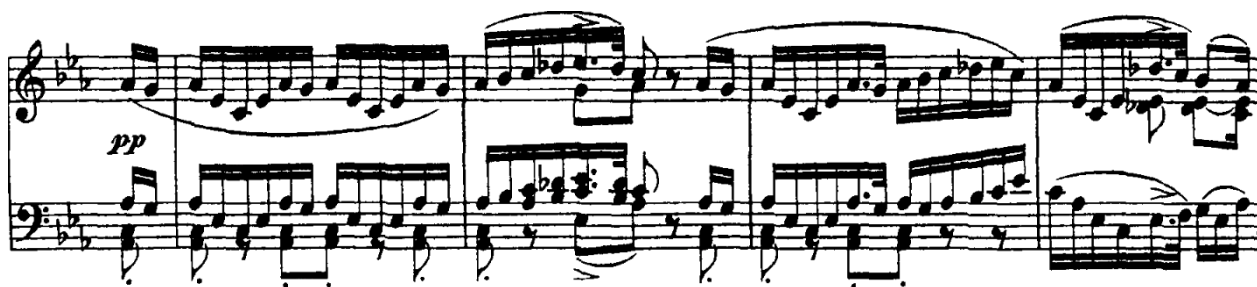
Fortunately, however, the *Andante* slow movement arrives to repay the listener's patience many times over. This movement is structured A-B-A-B-A as a kind of rondo that opens with a plaintive, beautifully balanced little tune in the minor mode.



And curious as the falling 7ths are in the continuation of the theme, this unusual motive works beautifully because it is so effectively balanced by the response of "Mendelssohnian" chordal chatter that follows.



The flowing 16ths of the “episode” theme in this movement pour soothing oil over whatever slight element of worry the minor-mode “refrain” theme might have engendered.



And further welcome signs of reconciliation between these two themes come when Schubert combines them in a spirit of chumminess and pals-y cohabitation.



In this movement Schubert’s songful inspirations are perfectly balanced with his creative notions of formal design.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 13 in A major D. 664

Schubert’s wonderfully relaxed and lyrical Sonata in A major D. 664 was composed in 1819 during a summer sojourn in Steyr, a riverside provincial town set amid the rolling hills of Upper Austria some hundred miles or so west of Vienna.

Lacking a minuet or scherzo, this three-movement work is the shortest of Schubert’s completed piano sonatas. It comprises three moderately paced movements, each of which breathes an air of untroubled songfulness. The extremely wide range of the keyboard over which it is scored, however, shows it to be distinctly pianistic, rather than vocal, in conception.

The leisurely opening theme of the *Allegro moderato* first movement is a carefree melody that one could easily imagine being whistled on a woodland walk. It unfolds innocently over a rich carpet of rolling left-hand harmonies that ripple over the space of several octaves.

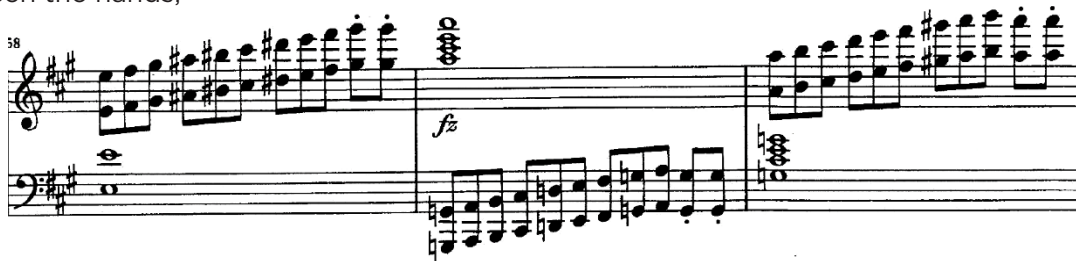


Riding sidecar to this opening melody is a complementary thematic motive marked by the dactylic rhythm (TAH-tuh-tuh, TAH-tuh) that Schubert favoured in so many of his works – an *homage*, perhaps, to the Allegretto from Beethoven’s seventh symphony.



In the course of the movement, this thematic and rhythmic idea emerges as the most important counterbalance to the opening melody.

The development section brings more muscular pianistic writing to the fore with its rising scales in octaves traded between the hands,



but musical conflict and argument find little place to grow in this most congenial of sonata movements. And so, mediated by the dactylic motive, the recapitulation arrives like a ray of sunlight between parting clouds.

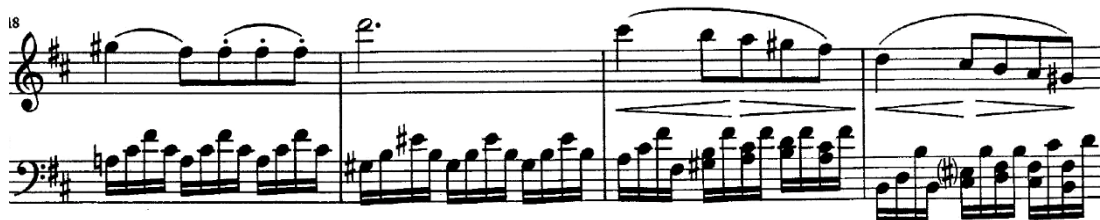
Worthy of note is Schubert's anachronistic indication that *both* halves of this movement – comprising the exposition section *and* the development and recapitulation – are to be repeated. This practice, abandoned by the early 19th century, relates to the origins of sonata form in binary movements such as those common in Baroque dance suites.

* * *

Contrasting with the expansive lyricism of the first movement is a second movement *Andante* of limited dramatic scope but great intimacy. It takes as its only theme this sequence of wistful sigh motives:



This movement is motivated by the single rhythmic idea encapsulated in this theme – a long note followed by several short notes – a pattern which is evident even when a seemingly contrasting idea is presented in the minor mode.



Or, later on, in triplets.



By inventively varying the textural setting Schubert keeps a single musical idea afloat for the whole movement.

* * *

Schubert's sonata-form finale simply oozes charm from every bar, starting with its carefree opening theme that tickles the ear with a combination of 16th-note runs and repeated 8th notes, over a folk-inspired drone bass.



There is a toe-tapping quality to this theme that makes it just beg to emerge as full-on dance music. And the movement's second theme is happy to oblige, with "oom-pahs" aplenty and a dance melody merrily twinkling with the occasional mordent.



The whole structure of the movement, though, is glued together with exhilarating passages of 16th-note runs and arpeggios that, no matter how exuberantly virtuosic, never really depart from the playful spirit of the movement as a whole.



In this way, Schubert manages to conclude his sonata in the same good-natured mood with which it began and with more than a little tonal "glitter" as well.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 16 in A minor D. 845

Schubert was generally known only as a composer of lieder until the success of his first published piano sonata, the Sonata in A minor (1825), a work that prompted one reviewer in Leipzig's *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* to breathlessly proclaim that "it can probably be compared only with the greatest and freest of Beethoven's sonatas."¹

The reviewer's comparison was likely prompted by the sonata's strong sense of musical characterization, especially in its outer movements, and by its very Beethovenian variation movement and its "roughhousing" rhythmic scherzo.

The work opens *pianissimo*, in an eerie veil of mystery, with a pair of theme statements, each consisting of two radically contrasting elements:



(1) a wide-ranging unharmonized melody whispering *pianissimo* as it circles smoothly around a single chord, followed by

(2) a series of harmonically active chords, announced *mezzo forte* in a steady marching rhythm of staccato quarter notes, with a virtually static melody line.

There is a resemblance, noted by many commentators, between this spooky, hushed opening and a remarkably similar unison passage in a lied by Schubert composed around the same time. This lied is the dark and ominously moody *Totengräbers Heimweh* (Gravedigger's Homesickness). There is a case, then, to be made that this is Death speaking to the composer, who in 1825 knew that he was dying of syphilis.

This mysterious opening, with the downbeat of its bare-bones melody cynically "ornamented" with a mordent, recurs like a ghostly apparition at various moments in the movement, impassive and otherworldly: the very image of Death looking over the composer's shoulder as he writes.

But that's not the whole story. Schubert creates a counterbalancing second musical idea, an idea of life-affirming force, derived from the first.

This second idea is constructed by replacing the opening part of the first theme with a lively repeated-note "drumbeat" motive while still keeping the "marching" second part intact.



But here the dynamic values are reversed. It is the opening gesture that is louder and more emphatic, almost crying out: "But I want to live, damn it!"

These two versions of the same musical material evoke a bifocal view of Life: either as otherworldly premonition of The Beyond or as alert, focused awareness of The Present.

¹ Eva Bradura-Skoda, "The Piano Works of Schubert", in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* (ed. Larry Todd), p. 124.

And these two musical representations of reality will duke it out in the course of this movement, occasionally even confronting each other side-by-side, as at the end of the exposition:



The development section opens in “haunted house” mode, giving the spooky opening melody free rein to send chills down our spines:



But its procedure is typically Beethovenian, based on the fracturing of thematic material into its component parts. And the return of the opening material is masterfully disguised: the recapitulation is underway before you are even aware of it.

Arguably the moment of highest drama is saved for the end, when the composer stares Death right in the eye, a Death no longer whispering but brutally hammering out its fateful message: “You’re coming with me!”



* * *

Recoil as we might from this grim message, Schubert helps us recover with a bit of lighter fare: an *Andante* theme and variations movement patterned very much on the Beethoven model.

The initial theme appears inspired by the aria from the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata in C minor Op. 111, in the same C-major key and same triple meter, with the same repeating pitch, G.

Andante poco moto.



The process of variation is largely carried out by means of progressive rhythmic subdivision of the theme's constituent parts.

First, the bass is set free to roam chromatically beneath the repeated melody in the first variation, and then in the second variation the treble melody frolics shameless to ear-tickling effect in the high register in cutesy little two-note groupings over a jovial “oom-pah” bass pattern.

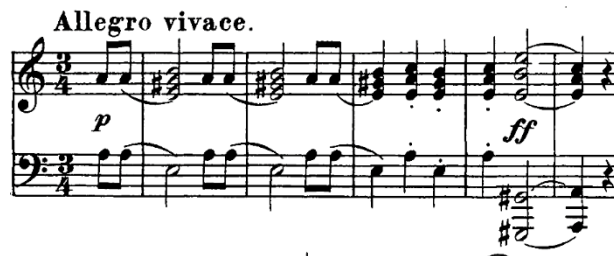


Real drama ensues in the grinding dissonances of the third variation in the minor mode, but a sunny mood returns in the exuberant fourth variation in running passages like these:



A gradual cool-down in rhythmic activity then takes the movement step-by-step back to the quiet, deliberate pace of the opening.

Schubert’s third-movement *Scherzo* for this sonata is a muscular affair and is also very much in the Beethovenian mold, with its concentration on a very few motives and its sudden dynamic changes, irregular phrase lengths and off-beat accents.



Add to that Schubert’s favourite tonal “flavouring” device – switching modes from minor to major and back again – and you have the perfect set-up for a contrasting Trio section that is nowhere near as raucous and chaotic.



With its comforting drone pedal in the bass, stable rhythms and tranquil two-note sigh motives – contrasting so vividly with the punchy two-note motives of the preceding section – it provides the perfect respite from the wild acrobatics of the opening section.

Not enough, of course, to prevent that section from returning for another run at jangling our nerves.

The rondo finale presents a few mysteries to the listening ear. Its opening refrain is a *moto perpetuo* with undeniable forward momentum.



But why is it presented in such an understated manner, barely murmuring *pianissimo*, as if expecting to be a mere sonic background to other, more important musical material?

That might be the key, since some of the contrasting episode themes, like the bold climbing-scale figure in the bass from the first episode



end up carpooling with the opening refrain on their way to the final coda.



And this is a coda that, despite the meek origins of its *moto perpetuo* chatter, races in a furious *accelerando* to conclude this sonata defiantly on its own terms.

Program notes by
Donald G. Gíslason 2024

Paul Lewis plays Schubert Piano Sonatas - Concert 3

Paul Lewis, piano

Wednesday, May 15 2024, 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Piano Sonata No. 4 in A minor D. 537

Allegro ma non troppo
Allegretto quasi andantino
Allegro vivace

(approx. 25 minutes)

Piano Sonata No. 9 in B major D. 575

Allegro ma non troppo
Andante
Scherzo. Allegretto
Allegro giusto

(approx. 25 minutes)

INTERMISSION

Piano Sonata No. 18 in G major D. 894

Molto moderato e cantabile
Andante
Menuetto. Allegro moderato
Allegretto

(approx. 40 minutes)

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Program Notes - Concert 3

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata No. 4 in A minor D. 537

In 1817 Schubert might be forgiven for thinking that his career was going rather well. As a precocious teenager he had virtually *invented* the German art song – himself. But then, with more than 250 lieder under his belt, he turned his attention to the piano sonata. And here he stumbled.

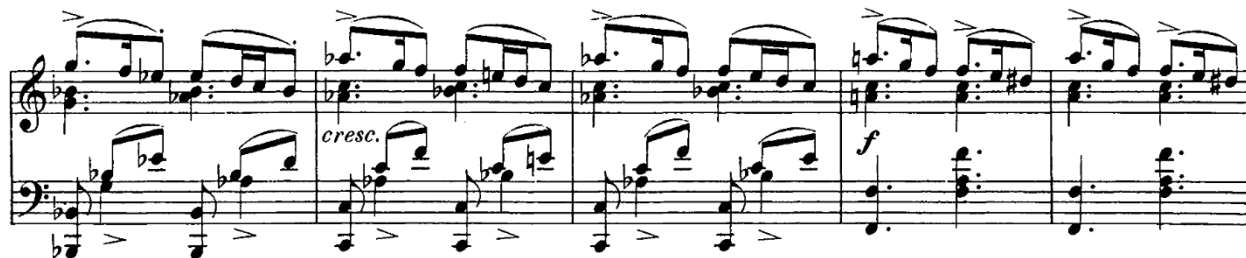
Three sonata projects from that year remained incomplete before the creative breakthrough came: the Sonata in A minor, D. 537, Schubert’s very first completed piano sonata. And he was just 20 years old.

This early work sits somewhere between the heroic quasi-military style of Napoleon-era Beethoven and the Romantic-era lyricism for which Schubert would later be best known.

As the work opens, though, there is more than a whiff of gunpowder in the air as a rhythmic cannonade of piano sonority explodes from the keyboard to rest painfully on a dominant minor 9th harmony before another cannonade arrives.

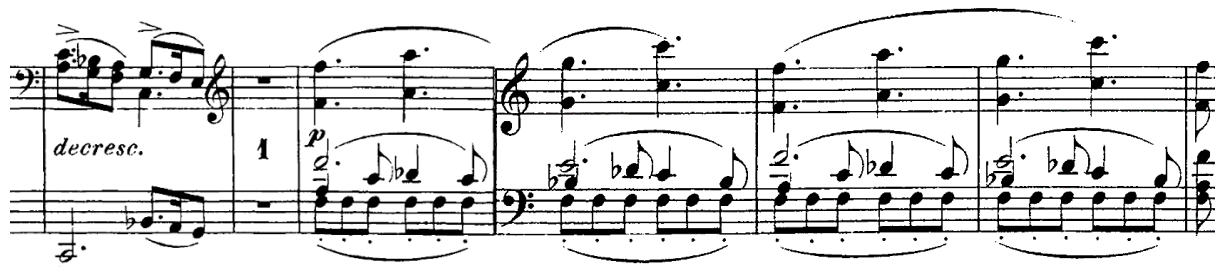


But even this early in his career we see how Schubert can’t really stay focused on angry emotions for long, and soon the dotted rhythms of the opening salvos are changed into lilting dance rhythms.



Notable here also is Schubert’s use of shameless repetition when he knows he has an engaging melodic motive and a winning harmony underneath to carry the passage forward. This kind of repetition is a prominent characteristic of the first movement.

Another is his frequent use of dramatic pauses – either mere empty bars or full-on “goose-egg” fermatas – to transition to new material, as in the lead-in (or lack of it) to the placid second theme with its pulsing pedal tone in the bass.



This pulsing figure leads directly into the development section, which, in deference to a by-then archaic practice, is repeated just as the exposition is.

The development is divided sectionally by means of pause figures and can't decide whether it wants to pulse gently and dance, riding atop the second theme's throbbing bass drone, or fly up to the heavens in exuberant imitation of the first theme's opening gestures.

So it finds a way to do both.



After a fairly orthodox recapitulation, Schubert ends with a coda that reviews in quick succession the most important thematic elements we have followed throughout the movement.

Schubert's slow-ish movement is a five-part rondo with an opening refrain tune that could easily be mistaken for Haydn's *St. Anthony Chorale*, so similar are the harmonies of the first two phrases. This is a theme Schubert would later re-work for the opening of the finale to his Sonata in A major, D. 959.



The first episode spins a flowing web of melodic lines that provide both hands with interesting musical things to do.



And left-hand interest is the dominant feature of the strangely subdued but clearly march-like second episode.



As it turns out, this movement is longer than the one it follows, largely due to Schubert's indulgence for these two episodes.

Schubert's finale is a sonata-form movement without a development section. It opens with even more swagger than did the first movement, with a series of defiant runs. But he then thinks better of it and ends with a more tender phrase with a feminine ending.



After a bit of noise and circumstance, this second element in the opening turns out to be the foundational element of the gently rocking second theme.



And once again we hear Schubert falling so much in love with his own figuration that he repeats it over and over again, just to hear the harmonic colours change.



And that goes on for a full 24 measures. But then, who's counting?

This sonata represents a polished effort by the young Schubert, revealing a strong musical personality and vivid powers of expression. And while he was not to know it before his death in 1828, his reputation on the concert stage was to be founded as much on his works for piano as on his lieder.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 9 in B major D. 575

The Sonata in B major is another product of Schubert's 1817 year of piano sonata projects. And while it is a youthful work, it presents us with the composer's individual voice fully formed, displaying already many of the wilfully wayward tendencies that defined his daring Romantic-era departures from established Classical-era ideals.

Prominent amongst these is his fascination with presenting contrasts *within* his themes rather than *between* them, as displayed in this sonata's opening

Allegro ma non troppo.



The image shows the first four measures of the piano sonata's opening. The music is in 2/4 time and B major. The first measure starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The second measure transitions to piano (p). The third measure returns to forte (f). The fourth measure ends with pianissimo (pp). The key signature changes from two sharps (B major) to three sharps (C# minor) in the second measure and back to two sharps in the fourth measure.

which goes from *forte* to *piano* in the space of a single measure, then back to *forte* again before ending at *pianissimo* - all while moving harmonically from B major to C# minor and back again.

This promiscuity of key relationships will become one of the defining traits of his architectural plans for larger-scale works. Note how he goes from B major to the relatively remote key of C major by means of a few trivial melodic skips.



The image shows the first four measures of the first secondary theme. The music is in 2/4 time and C major. The first measure starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The second measure has a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The third measure has a fortissimo (ff) marking. The fourth measure ends with a fortissimo (ff) marking. The key signature changes from two sharps (B major) to one sharp (C major) in the second measure.

All this, of course, is in aid of getting to G major for the first of his three (!) secondary themes, the first of which shamelessly flirts in both its melodic and accompaniment lines with G minor's B flat and E flat.



The image shows the first four measures of the second secondary theme. The music is in 2/4 time and G major. The first measure starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The second measure has a piano (p) marking. The third measure has a piano (p) marking. The fourth measure ends with a piano (p) marking. The key signature changes from one sharp (C major) to two sharps (G major) in the second measure. The accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand.

This then leads, by a process of free association (presumably riffing on the dotted rhythm of the upbeat) to a more traditional secondary theme in E major,



The image shows the first four measures of the third secondary theme. The music is in 2/4 time and E major. The first measure starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The second measure has a piano (p) marking. The third measure has a piano (p) marking. The fourth measure ends with a piano (p) marking. The key signature changes from two sharps (G major) to three sharps (E major) in the second measure. The melody is marked dolce.

which then morphs almost imperceptibly into the most song-like melody of all, which is given a gloriously lyrical texture of combined melody-making between left and right hands, in F# major.



With this profusion of material to draw on, Schubert begins his development section at the beginning, with the movement's bold opening gestures, making the drama even more exciting with even bolder, wilder leaps.



But from then on it is hard to know exactly which theme is being treated because the dotted rhythm in every bar could apply to any theme at all in the movement, so pervasive is this rhythmic feature throughout.

Most surprising of all, from a structural point of view, is how Schubert ends the movement exactly as the exposition had ended: quietly off-hand, *diminuendo*, with the nonchalance of a small child leaving the room to get a glass of milk.



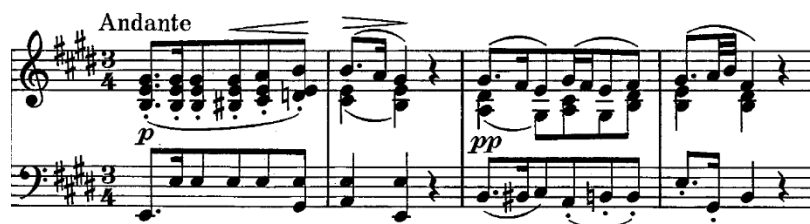
So there is the first movement, in all its kaleidoscopic variety. Welcome to Schubert, ladies and gentlemen!

* * *

Schubert's musical imagination is found working at full tilt in his sometimes placid, sometimes stormy slow movement.

We see here an early example of what would become a frequent pattern in his slow movements: a serene outer shell masking a roiling internal middle section.

The set-up is this sweet little harmonized tune that begins the movement.



But don't get too settled in your easy chair, because out of nowhere, it seems, comes this emotional outburst of a composer in high dudgeon.



Things settle down pretty quickly after that, as Schubert extracts the important bit from this theme – the pattern of staccato notes in the left hand – in order to eventually present them in a middle voice in combination with the opening theme to end this three-part movement in a spirit of peace and reconciliation.

52

pp staccato *pp*

The third-movement *Scherzo* seems more a dance than a “joke” (the original meaning of the Italian *scherzo*). With its repeated notes on the first and second beats of many bars, it seems like an invitation to dance a stomping country *Ländler*, the rural antecedent to the urban waltz.

Allegretto

p *f* *p* *cresc.*

And while the middle-section Trio is dominated by flowing 8th notes, the dance-like character is not eliminated, only transformed into a gentler lilt.

85 **Trio**

p *mf*

Schubert’s sonata-form finale is a mild-mannered movement meant to bring a smile to the face of its listeners, so permeated is it with gentle humour and cutesy musical manoeuvres.

At the outset it presents us with a stiffly formal dance tune with a stern air of decorum and propriety,

Allegro giusto

mf *f*

the dignity of which is then immediately undercut with a buffoonishly limping “oom-pah” tune when the clowns come into the room.

fp *p*

The second theme takes a triplet figure from the opening and expands lyrically on it while maintaining the dance-like rhythm already established.



With the first and second themes so interpenetrated with the same motives and the same basic rhythm, the development simply continues the dance without a thought for increasing the drama of the proceedings, and the recapitulation does the same.

* * *

What Schubert shows in these last two movements is that lighter music, of the sort that the Viennese public enjoyed in their daily lives, is a worthy subject for inclusion in the formerly “stuffy” genre of the piano sonata.

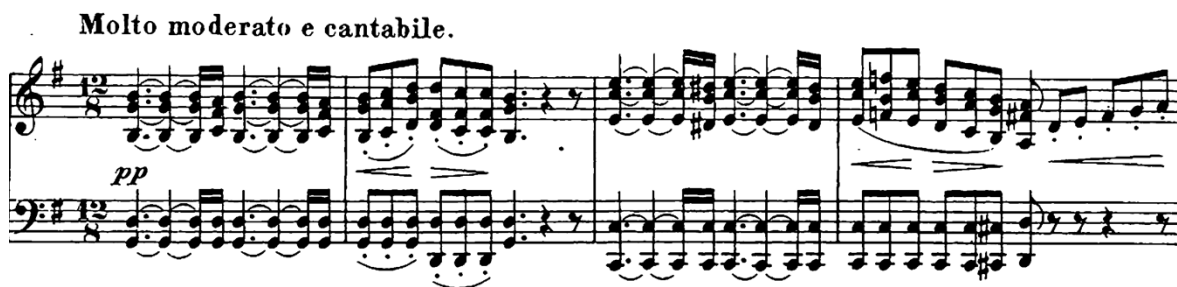
Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 18 in G major D. 894

Schubert’s Sonata in G major, D. 894 was written in 1826 and must surely count as the composer’s most intimate work in the piano sonata genre. None of its four movements is end-weighted, as each tapers to a conclusion at either a *pp* or a *ppp* dynamic level. Its expressive rhetoric is gentle and unforced, with pulses of repeated notes softly animating most of the work’s themes in all but the *Andante* second movement.

This pervasive use of repeated notes, almost a Schubertian “tic” in the piano sonatas, may explain why Schubert prefers moderate tempos for his movements: because at these tempos the passages animated by repeated notes can be allowed to “speak” more clearly on the keyboard and not get lost in the ongoing flow of piano sonority.

This, however, is certainly not the issue in the unusual opening of the G-major Sonata, which many commentators have compared to the opening bars of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58.

At the outset, Schubert plants a series of bright chordal sonorities in our ears, allowing each to shift in place, and then quietly moves them around but with minimal movement in the bass, which is to say in the harmony.



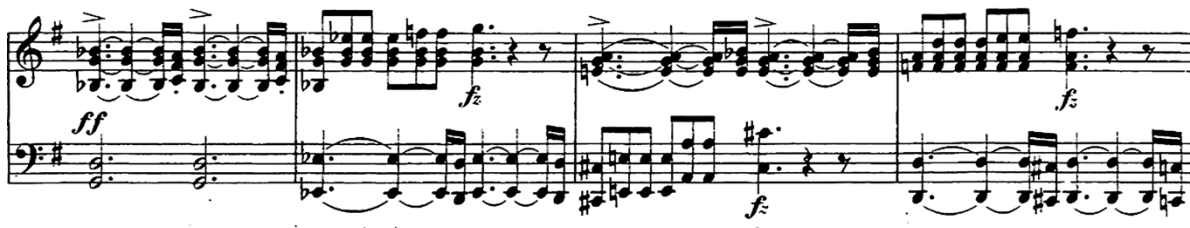
These serene, long-held chordal sonorities make the passage of time seem to be suspended so that even the slightest movement becomes a major event. And you end up thinking that this is music that is, itself, *thinking*.

Schubert’s second theme provides a measure of contrast but only in its playful dancelike rhythm.



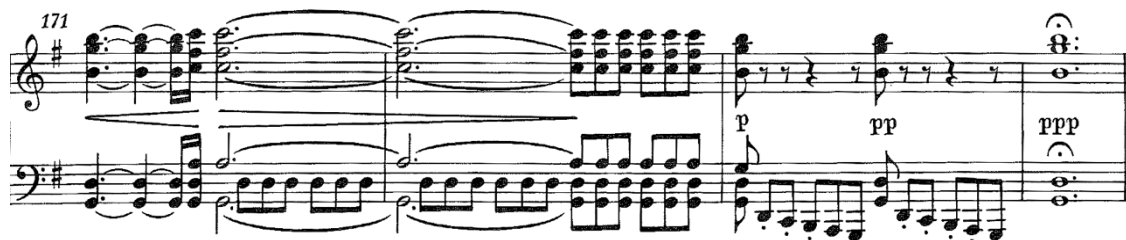
What passes unnoticed are the many motivic connections to the first theme. These include the repeated-note triplets, the rising scale figure and, above all, the long-static drone anchoring the bass on A for a good 11 bars in succession. Both the first and second themes, then, are of the “sleepy-time” variety.

But in the development section Schubert wakes us up with a new, rather menacing version of the opening: in the minor mode, harmonically fast-moving and defiant rather than reassuring in its repeated-note gestures.



This new “take” on the opening material alternates with fond recollections of the second theme, as if the music were unsure of its emotional allegiances. But crucially, there is no sense of struggle between these musical ideas, merely indecision.

The recapitulation is shockingly orthodox – at least for Schubert – with no surprises. There is merely a final farewell to the opening and a slow fade into nothingness, with the repeated notes back in their role as comforting pulses and the rising scale figure changed to descending scale figures.



* * *

Where thematic sections of wildly different character are more abruptly juxtaposed is in the *Andante* slow movement. This kind of contrast is almost a trademark of Schubert’s slow movements in many of the piano sonatas.

The movement opens with a dainty little theme, moving almost entirely by step. Its first phrase ends with a deferential feminine cadence, a precursor to the many sigh motives populating the theme as it moves forward.



But unexpectedly, the mood changes in an instant as we encounter a vehemently disruptive section of wide sonorities and insistent rhythms.



This alternates with a softer passage with a more pleading melody, but the disruptive section keeps returning until finally the opening melody comes back, in an embellished form, to reconcile all parties. It does so by cleverly including elements from the stormy middle section as part of its melodic ornamentation. This 32nd-note figure is a good example.

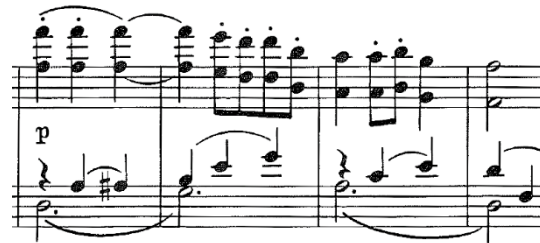


* * *

The third-movement *Minuet* is the only movement that begins at anything other than *p* or *pp*. Its shoulder-poking opening theme sounds aggressive and domineering.



But of course, Schubert can't stay that way for long, so within a couple of phrases he mixes in a more dancelike section that will, more than once, temper the impetuosity of the opening.



The Trio middle section provides even more contrast, being cast in the minor mode, but an infinitely charming minor mode, with chiming high pedal tones in the treble and twinkling mordents in an inner voice.



* * *

The rondo finale presents a great variety of moods and musical genres in its mix. It opens with a pert and alert but unhurried little melody that seems wide-eyed and curious about its surroundings. Its first phrase pulses with rhythmic animation, sharing as it does the same four-repeated-note pattern as was used in the *Minuet*.



This four-note motive will be “knocking at the door” as an accompaniment figure during much of the opening refrain section.

The urge to dance in this movement is irresistible, so the first episode brings us to the village square with a lilting *Ländler*, buoyantly supported by the same kind of repeated note accompaniment.



The steady stream of 8th-note action, chuckling along at a merry pace, is an absolute delight in this section.

The refrain then returns, with the melody in the left hand this time, leading to the second episode – and it’s another dance tune!



This episode has its own more lyrical middle section, first presented in the minor mode



and then cheerfully delivered in a major key.

* * *

In this finale Schubert presents an astonishingly wide variety of tunes and moods, but all are subsumed under the congenial banner of dance music or dance-adjacent merriment. And given how much our toes are tapping, we end up not missing a bang-up ending when the movement closes in a whisper.

Paul Lewis plays Schubert Piano Sonatas - Concert 4

Paul Lewis, piano

Friday, May 17 2024, 7:30 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Piano Sonata No. 19 in C minor D. 958

Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto. Allegro
Allegro

(approx. 30 minutes)

Piano Sonata No. 20 in A major D. 959

Allegro
Andantino
Scherzo. Allegro vivace
Rondo. Allegretto

(approx. 35 minutes)

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Piano Sonata No. 21 B-flat major D. 960

Molto moderato
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza
Allegro non troppo

(approx. 40 minutes)

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Program Notes - Concert 4

SCHUBERT'S LAST SONATAS

Schubert's last three piano sonatas, all completed in the fall of 1828, are the product of a composer in his prime, one whose tragically early death in November of that year deprived him of a true "late" period.

But the wretched state of Schubert's health in the last months of his life stands in marked contrast to the vitality of his creative output in this period. Between August and October of 1828, he composed not only his last three piano sonatas but also the song collection *Schwanengesang* (Swan song), the monumental *C major String Quintet* and the lied *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (The shepherd on the rock).

But the shadow of Beethoven hangs heavy over Schubert's musical legacy. And the argumentative force of the great composer's musical vision might almost seem to relegate Schubert to the margins of musical greatness by comparison.

But then again, Schubert is not arguing with you. The prize-fight atmosphere of Beethoven's most compelling sonata movements, with their motivic combatants duking it out for keeps in the musical boxing ring, is hardly comparable to the imaginative flights of fancy that make Schubert's piano sonatas much closer to *My Dinner with André* than to *Rocky*.

Beethoven represented the logical extension of an outgoing rationalist Classical age. Schubert, by contrast, represented the intuited beginnings of a



Portrait of Franz Schubert, by Gabor Melegh (1827)

new Romantic age, an age in which formal models, previously held together by patterns of key relationships and by motivic manipulation, would find coherence in a new kind of structural glue based on the psychological drama of personal experience.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Schubert's approach to the Classical era's pre-eminent formal structure, the sonata. Like a good tailor adjusting an old suit, he lets out the seams of strict sonata form to allow it to breathe with the new lyrical air of his age. Concision and argumentative density are replaced with timeless daydreaming and lyrical breadth.

Schubert's sonata movements often contain three major themes instead of the standard two, arrived at and departed from by way of unexpected, sometimes startling modulatory surprises. By this means he blunted the expectation that a sonata-form movement would be about resolving large-scale tonal tensions.

Rather, he directed the listener's attention to the moment-by-moment unfolding of melodic contours and harmonic colours. And yet even these moments are frequently punctuated by thoughtful pauses. In the end, what Schubert aims to create is a balanced and satisfying collection of lyrical experiences within the formal markers of the traditional sonata: exposition, development and recapitulation.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 19 in C minor D. 958

Of the three last sonatas that Schubert wrote in September 1828, just a few months before his death, it is the Sonata in C minor which most reveals his “Beethovenian” side.

The key chosen for the sonata, C minor, is synonymous with Beethoven’s most turbulent musical thoughts, as expressed in the Pathétique Sonata, the Fifth Symphony and the last piano sonata, Op. 111, as well as in the famous 32 Variations in C minor, after which Schubert’s defiant opening statement is rhythmically and harmonically patterned.

The *Allegro* first movement begins boldly with a series of punchy gestures



that channel the second-beat emphasis and chromatically descending voice-leading of the theme from Beethoven’s 32 Variations:



Schubert has not lost himself entirely, however, in Beethoven’s musical personality, and when the turmoil of this serious opening material subsides, a more familiar pose emerges – that of Schubert the keyboard colourist – in his choice of a second theme.



This theme is pure Schubert, a lovingly affectionate little hymn with chiming, bell-like pedal tones that drum reassuringly from the bass or ring in the treble.

It is also a theme that Schubert somehow manages to transform into a merrily skipping dance by dividing the theme’s 8th notes into 16ths.



These 16th notes then provide the propulsive “churn” and dramatic impetus for the development section, which is quite skilfully constructed. In its latter half, a mysterious neighbour-note motion in the bass gnaws away ominously at our nerves while chromatic scales carelessly trickle down from above until the aggressive one-two punches of the opening theme bubble up to the surface to announce the recapitulation.

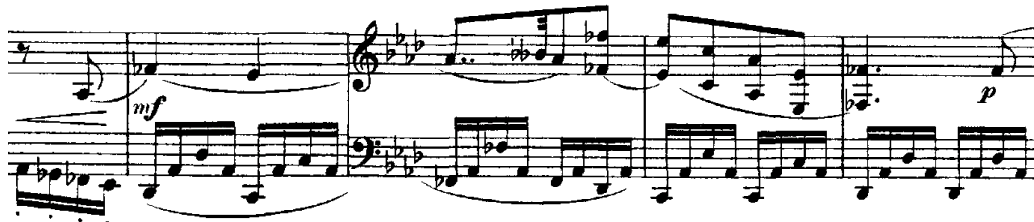
And in true Beethovenian style, there is a coda that reprises the neighbour-note figures from the development to extend the mood of mystery to the final bars of the movement.

Schubert's second movement is something of a rarity. It is a real *Adagio* from a composer whose lyrical instincts tended to emerge at a more moderate pace.



In its concentrated lyrical tone, the halting expressive demeanour of its opening and its style of melodic decoration, it owes much to the slow movement of Beethoven's C minor Sonata, Op. 10, No. 1.

The movement is structured in five alternating sections of lyrical repose and emotional turmoil. The turmoil is provided by a darkly coloured second theme in the minor mode.



The course of this movement is marked by a progressive intensification of the accompanimental and contrapuntal structures surrounding these two themes.

In this regard, the pulsing triplets that bring the movement to its expressive climax



appear to have been patterned after those in the *Adagio* slow movement of Beethoven's Pathétique Sonata in C minor, Op. 13.

There is an anxious, worrying quality about the *Menuetto* that it is hard to put your finger on. While lacking neither elegance nor grace, it evokes little by way of a light-hearted mood; rather, it appears strangely conflicted as to whether it actually wants to be a dance at all.



Sustained lyrical merriment seems impossible as each successive idea seems undermined by a flickering doubt, expressed in its highly irregular phrase lengths, sudden changes in dynamics and its mysterious pauses that imply a flow of emotion cut off in mid-thought.



The Trio, although more regular in its phrasing, is equally noncommittal with respect to its mood



and only adds to the mystery of this ghostly little minuet.

* * *

And ghostly is a good description of the *Allegro* finale, in which Schubert unleashes his inner playful demon with wicked glee. This movement is a whirling *moto perpetuo*, its dancelike tarantella rhythm likely having been patterned after the finale of Beethoven's Sonata in E flat, Op. 31, No. 3.



This movement is both thrilling and dark, reminiscent of the night ride in Schubert's famous *Erlkönig*. The keyboard writing is brilliantly effective, especially in the galloping second theme,



with its cross-handed texture of melodic fragments jockeying between high and low register, leaping across a steady horse-hoof pulse in the middle of the keyboard.

This finale is a sonata rondo with its central episode playing the role of a development section. And this section is the most exuberant of all, its little tarantella "hops" having been transformed into giant octave leaps.



The sheer size of this last movement indicates the weight which Schubert intended to give to it, inspired as he was by Beethoven's example.

Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 20 in A major D. 959

Schubert's Sonata in A Major, D. 959 displays in its four vivid movements all the qualities that make this composer so hard to pin down as either an inheritor of Classical-era forms or a brilliant pioneer of the new Romantic movement with its emphasis on psychological reality as a structuring element in music.

Characteristic of this pianistically challenging work is its unusually wide emotional range. Its moods run the gamut from the heroic to the playful, featuring outbursts of musical vehemence that alternate with moments of poetic reflection. This span of emotional states is at its widest in the slow movement which constitutes the dramatic centrepiece of the sonata.

The first-movement *Allegro* opens with a stern, assertive theme featuring a climbing bass pattern beneath an immovable treble driving to a firm cadence, musically emblematic of resolve and inner strength of character.



No sooner has this theme been stated than Schubert begins to vary it, giving in to a penchant for immediate development that will dominate the exposition of this movement. His second theme is a simple, soothing melody



that also finds itself wandering into developmental territory, thanks to a chromatically rising bassline figure with fugal aspirations that keeps interrupting the proceedings. But it is eventually a little “tag” figure, representing the second theme in diminution



that catches Schubert's attention at the end of the exposition.

Indeed, the “chiming music box” of a development section speaks of little else. In classic Schubertian fashion it features a steady stream of pulsing harmony chords shadowing this little “tag” figure as it wanders through an enchanted forest of colourful modulations.



And the build-up to the recapitulation is stirring and suspenseful. You can hear it coming from a long way off.

A Beethovenian coda looks nostalgically back at the work's opening theme with an eye to perhaps developing it more but thinks better of it and, abandoning motivic concerns entirely, simply ends the movement with a number of great washes of tonal colour sweeping softly but majestically across the keyboard.

Where Schubert sets his sights on the sublime is in the following *Andantino*, a tour de force of compressed emotional energy that explodes into near-chaos in its middle section. It opens with a simple lament, a sad little barcarolle that circles aimlessly around itself, rocking mournfully on the waters of its own interior reflections. Its shockingly spare texture and fretful obsession with the same few notes lend a hypnotic quality to its melodic self-absorption.



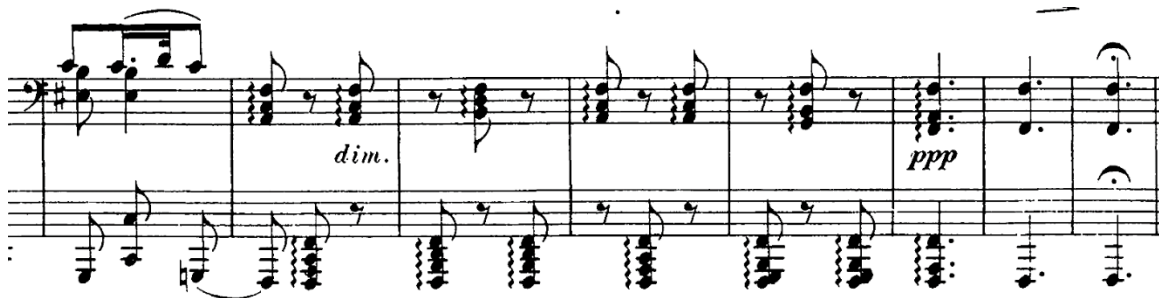
After some 70 bars of harmonic stasis in the key of F# minor, it drifts into a fantasy world, as rhythmically and melodically free as the opening section was monotonous, repetitive and claustrophobically contained. This middle section's wide-ranging harmonic ravings lead to a tempestuous outburst of unexpected violence unprecedented in Schubert's previous piano works.



When the hypnotic world of the movement's bleak opening returns, it finds itself shadowed by an eerie "knocking-on-the-door" motive, softly echoing in the treble above like a distant chime.



The movement ends in stark simplicity with a quiet murmur of arpeggiated chords deep in the bass, chords that would "murmur" more easily on the lighter-acted fortepiano of Schubert's time than on a modern concert grand.



* * *

Another personality entirely inhabits the third movement **Scherzo**, an energetic, acrobatically playful diversion that hops from register to register with breezy abandon. This movement is often dancelike, always impish.



Schubert's mischievous sense of fun is most evident in the cascading runs that unexpectedly interrupt the proceedings at regular intervals.

Its contrasting Trio is much more of a home body, staying put in the centre of the keyboard, stabilized by a recurring pedal tone.



This Trio is on its best behaviour, the soul of harmonic stability. But perhaps the appearance of civility is only tongue-in-cheek, its gentle hand-crossings a witty parody of the register hops of the Scherzo's opening section.

* * *

Schubert's sonata-rondo finale has many fathers. In structure it is patterned after the finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 31, No. 1. Its opening theme is reworked from the *Allegretto quasi andantino* movement of Schubert's own Sonata in A minor D. 537, a theme which itself is strangely reminiscent of the *St. Anthony Chorale* attributed to Haydn.



In this context, its subsequent elaboration in florid counterpoint, with the melody in the tenor, comes as no surprise.

This movement is full of melodies, many of them set against a burbling accompaniment in triplets, as in the tuneful second theme, a songful pianistic creation that delights in the rhythmic bounce of its repeated notes.



Schubert's inventiveness in creating ear-tickling piano textures is quite extraordinary in this movement and is especially noticeable in the exuberant development section.



The movement ends with a series of thoughtful pauses, followed by a race for the sunset in a whirlwind *Presto* coda that in its final chords pays tribute to the work's opening bars.



Franz Schubert Piano Sonata No. 21 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 softly whispered melody, humbly small in range and accompanied by a repeated pedal tone in the left hand, like a pulsing human heartbeat.



This opening theme has a sweet, yearning quality that gives it an ineffable, almost nostalgic charm, a charm that is glowered over, however, by a mysterious trill at the bottom of the register.



But despite such a premonition, this first theme still goes on to burst more fully into song.

A second theme introduces a tentative note of worry, but Schubert's constant harmonic wavering between the major and minor modes prevents the emotional tone from becoming seriously downcast.



A third theme of a triadic stamp hops around like a troupe of bunny rabbits over the full range of the keyboard, in both hands, to re-establish a more naively buoyant emotional tone.



The repeated exposition is separated from the development by that same low trill in the left hand that recurs within the movement to act as a sectional marker.

This movement is centre-weighted and the development is where all the action is. Schubert first begins by clouding his dreamy opening theme with dark minor-mode colouring.



He then passes his melodic material, all three themes, through a harmonic colour wheel, building to an intense climax that acts as a rare moment of sonic emphasis in the dead centre of what is, essentially, a movement of delicate shades of nuance.

The recapitulation has the pleasure of repeating these three themes once again and ends with a nostalgic last lingering memory of the quiet lyrical impulse that motivated the movement's opening bars.

The second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is surreal in its starkly spare texture of layered sonorities. It features a sombre but halting melody in the mid-range surrounded on both sides by a rocking figure that quietly resounds like the hollow echo inside a vast empty stone tomb.



Only Schubert could create such a melody, one that combines sad elegy, tender reminiscence and pleading prayer in a single expressive utterance.

This eerie mood is relieved by the nostalgic strains of the movement's songful middle section. With its anthem-like melody, richly harmonized in full chords, it sings out its message of comfort in the "fatherly" baritone range.



And when transferred to the soprano range it prefigures a texture later to be used in many a Mendelssohnian *Song Without Words*.



It is hard not to think of this more "psychologically healthy" middle section as an attempt to take heart, 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 the "roughhouse" antics in Beethoven's scherzo movements.



More typically Viennese in its subtlety, it generates good-natured humour and merriment with its frequent changes of register and twinkling grace notes. A steady interchange of material between the hands creates the impression of a dialogue between two real musical "characters".



The contrasting Trio in the minor mode is much more sedate, but very much alive with subtle rhythmic interest.



While sitting put in the middle of the keyboard it shifts its weight around in gentle syncopations that outline two contrasting hemiola patterns, in the right hand and the left, that are out of sync by one bar.

* * *

Still in a humorous frame of mind, Schubert begins his ***Allegro ma non troppo*** rondo finale with a mock “mistake”. Starting off with a winking sense of drama in the minor mode,



he then “remembers” that he wants to be in a major key and makes a mid-course harmonic correction at the end of the first phrase to bring him back to the major mode.



This joke of changing dramatic masks from the serious to the comedic is played out frequently during the movement, with intervening episodes of songful respite in between, as in this rondo's first episode.



But hold on! What's this?

A dramatically forceful new motive in a dotted rhythm 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.

This is a finale filled with congenial joking of the most sophisticated kind, created by a true Viennese pianistic “sit-down comic”.

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