

**PAUL LEWIS, CBE**  
piano

**FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)**

**Piano Sonata No. 7 in E-flat major D568**

Allegro moderato

Andante molto

Menuetto. Allegretto

Allegro moderato

(approx. 30 minutes)

**FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)**

**Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor D784**

Allegro giusto

Andante

Allegro vivace

(approx. 21 minutes)

Intermission

**FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)**

**Piano Sonata No. 17 in D major D850**

Allegro vivace

Con moto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace

Rondo. Allegro moderato

(approx. 39 minutes)

## Franz Schubert

### Piano Sonata No. 7 in E-flat major D568

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.

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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.

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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.

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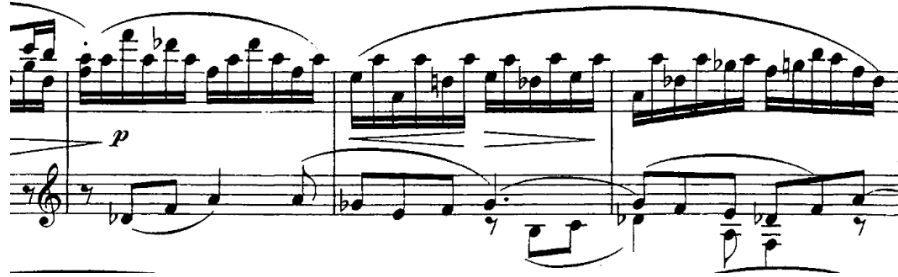
The finale is a sonata-form movement with an impish “call-and-response” opening theme that coyly leaves an 8th-note rest on the strong beat in the middle of its two-bar phrases to create a kind of “echo” effect.



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 D784

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 D784 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.

**Allegro giusto.**

The image shows the first few measures of the Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor, D784, by Franz Schubert. The tempo is marked "Allegro giusto." and the dynamics are "pp". The score is in 3/4 time and features a falling 3rd interval as a "sigh motive".

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.

The image shows the second theme of the Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor, D784, by Franz Schubert. The score is in 3/4 time and features a steady pulse with a comforting pedal tone in the bass.

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 image shows the first few measures of the second theme of the Piano Sonata No. 14 in A minor, D784, by Franz Schubert. The score is in 3/4 time and features a steady pulse with a comforting pedal tone in the bass.

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.

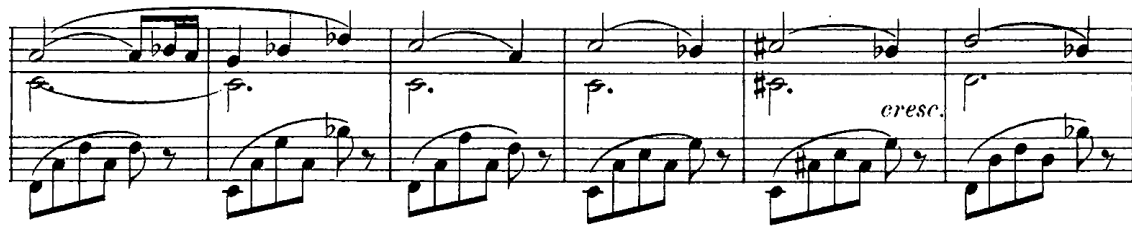
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The frenetic imitative scurrying between the hands that characterizes the opening of the *Allegro vivace* finale is hard to decipher, given the eerily unsettled emotional states of the previous two movements.



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 D850

The energizing, mood-brightening effects of an Alpine vacation are on full display in Schubert's "Gasteiner" Sonata in D major D850, 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.

Allegro vivace. (Komponiert im Jahre 1825.)



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.

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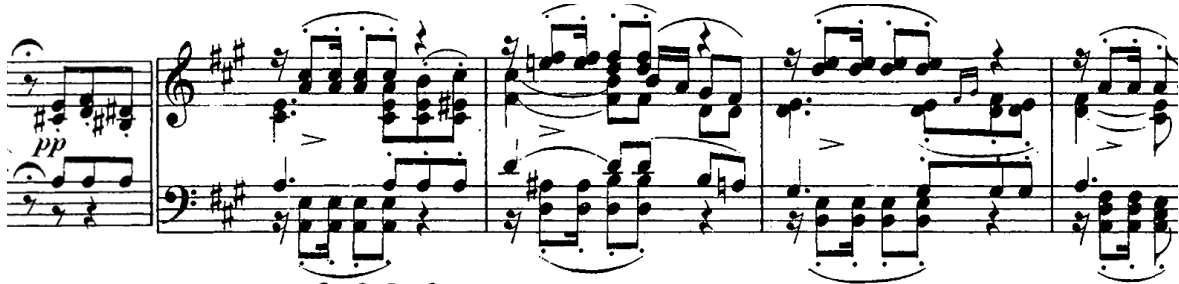
The pace slows down somewhat for the slow movement marked *Con moto*, but “rest” is not on the menu despite the wistful mood of its moderately paced opening theme.



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.



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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.

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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.

