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Recital 3: Piano Sonatas 2: Program

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Schubertiade III

Piano Sonatas 2

Jiayan Sun, piano

Thursday, October 24, 2019

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata No. 6 in E Minor, D. 566 (1817)

Moderato

Allegretto

Sonata No. 16 in A Minor, op. 42, D. 845 (1825)

Moderato

Andante poco moto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace – Trio. Un poco più lento

Rondo. Allegro vivace

intermission

Sonata No. 20 in A Major, D. 959 (1828)

Allegro

Andantino

Scherzo. Allegro vivace - Trio. Un poco più lento

Rondo. Allegretto

Josten Performing Arts Library has created a LibGuide to facilitate access to literature and resources on Schubert's life and work.

<http://libguides.smith.edu/schubertiade>

Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices before the performance.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In the great Smith College music library, to which no other undergraduate institution can hold a candle, there are some gently-penciled notes, in the old Breitkopf & Härtel edition of *Franz Schubert's Werke*, in the hand of the celebrated German musicologist, Alfred Einstein, a cousin of $E=mc^2$, who taught at this hallowed institution from 1939 until 1950. (Among Einstein's many publications is *Schubert: A Musical Portrait*, published in German and in English in 1951; he wrote it here.) Turning the pages of that old edition is as close to Einstein as I shall ever get.

In fact the pages of the E-Minor Sonata, **D. 566**, from 1817, are little touched, because the work, from the composer's twentieth year, is little heard. And yet it is a perfectly charming piece, with intimations—inventive harmonic niceties—of the Schubert who was to come, as well as signs—some clunks at the ends of the exposition and recapitulation—of the man's relative inexperience in the genre of the sonata. The E-Major second movement, also in the sonata form, avoids such sudden jolts. The autograph manuscript that contains these two movements also contains a scherzo, which could, conceivably, belong to the E-Minor Sonata: Alfred Einstein seems to have thought so, because his penciled note refers to the journal in which that scherzo was first published. But the scherzo is in A-flat Major—and you do not have to be Einstein to know that A-flat (four flats), for the youthful Schubert, would normally have been a key too far from E Minor (one sharp) and E Major (four sharps) to fit a work in E. Furthermore, as Schubert surely knew, Beethoven, three years earlier in 1814, wrote a two-movement sonata in E Minor, Op. 90, whose second movement, too, is in E Major. In the notes I wrote for Jiayan Sun's performance of that work last spring, I called Beethoven's movement "Schubertian," because of its lyricism. Perhaps we are justified in accusing Beethoven of what a distinguished musician-friend of mine has dubbed "anticipatory imitation."

Schubert wrote three sonatas in A Minor, more than in any other key, and the third of them, from 1825, **D. 845**, which we hear this evening, is a very imaginative piece indeed. It may well be the composer's first truly mature sonata, which I say on the evidence of his having had the

confidence to publish it, in 1826, as his *Première Grande Sonate*, with a dedication to Beethoven's greatest and most demanding patron, the Archduke Rudolf.

In the traditional sonata exposition, the thematic materials are put forth sequentially: unless it is immediately repeated, a main tune will not usually recur *in extenso* until the development and, later, in the recapitulation. But here, after moving as expected from the tonic minor, A, to the relative major, C, Schubert repeats the haunting first theme—its unison setting suggests an effort to *say* something (and Schubert did later associate the same melodic gesture with wind blowing upon a weathervane in “Die Wetterfahne,” from *Winterreise*)—before closing out the first part of the form. In the second part of the form, we hear “developed” all of the materials of the first; in the third part, the recapitulation, we hear the earlier material treated with what is for Schubert surprising compaction.

The second movement is constructed on the age-old principle of theme and variation. The theme is in two parts of eight bars and sixteen bars; both parts are repeated. The variations follow this structure: they are “variations” precisely because they vary the tunes and textures while maintaining the phrase-lengths and the pivotal harmonies of the theme. Here you will hear five variations (counting while listening can be fun), and a coda. Schubert surely had an eye on Beethoven, in the spring of 1825, during the writing of this piece; this variation movement is a sign of his vision.

In the scherzo, the counting is not easy, as Schubert, like Beethoven in a rapid ternary meter, here plays games with off-beat accents and irregular phrase lengths. The trio, in strong contrast, is a lullaby. The finale, which gives the impression of a *perpetuum mobile*, takes the shape of a rondo, with regular returns of the refrain. For the musicologist there are textual problems here, because two early prints of the piece differ in supplying trills to passages that are otherwise entirely parallel. (There are textual problems in the other movements as well.) The question you might find interesting is whether we ought to apply to eighteen-twentyish Schubert our twenty-twentyish notions of *consistency*, or whether we ought rather to consider Schubert's inconsistencies (of which there are many) instances of *spontaneity*.

To conclude the recital, we come to the second member of the final sonata trilogy, the work in A Major, **D. 959**, from the autumn of 1828 and the autumn of Schubert's short life. Like the two other sonatas in C Minor and B-flat Major, this one, too, was not published until a decade after the composer's demise, in 1839, by Anton Diabelli (whose little waltz, you may remember, would cause Beethoven considerable travail). Indeed, Diabelli's Schubert publication was a step in the direction of broadening Schubert's reputation, up to then based essentially upon his songs.

The announcement of the first theme group of the A-Major Sonata is majestic, but the music almost immediately becomes lyrical. A transitional passage—not without intimations of other keys far and wide—takes us to the expected destination of the dominant, E Major. But not for long, as the second theme group wanders widely before coming to rest. In mature Schubert, we speak of development “on the spot”: the composer does not always wait for a development section, as Beethoven tends to do, before repeating, varying, segmenting, and reworking his melodic materials; he sometimes does so right away. The exposition is repeated (some players chose not to follow the indication), then moves into the development section “proper,” in which Schubert, as is often his wont, takes up not the opening but the closing theme of the exposition, and makes use of it for the harmonic explorations of the next sixty-seven bars. The preparation for the recapitulation is lengthy, Schubert seems to hope that we will hear it; and after it occurs, the transition that earlier took us to the dominant is here lengthened by four bars in order to take us away and back to the tonic. He also hopes that we will hear the coda, because he begins it with the sonata's opening gesture, now, surprisingly, in *pianissimo*.

This quiet ending suggests that what has really been at stake is an introduction to the main attraction, the slow movement, whose expressive lexicon, like that of the slow movements of the other two members of the trilogy, is rich, and mournful. The first of the movement's three parts is a desolate instrumental song in the somber key of F-sharp Minor. The second part is a volcanic outburst of an improvisational character, with intimations of the opera-like recitative that Beethoven tended to employ in the later instrumental works. This is one of the oddest moments in all of Schubert. It calms down only at the end, leading with heartbreaking sorrow to a repeat,

now contrapuntally enhanced, of the sad and now nearly exhausted opening song.

The ensuing scherzo-trio-scherzo brings new life, as does the leisurely sonata-rondo-form finale, both suggesting that, despite the bleak message of the slow movement, life is still worth living, worth a smile, worth a dream. (Jiayan Sun is not including in his series the A-Minor Sonata, D. 537, from 1817, but if you were to hear its second movement, you would recognize the literal source of the theme of this finale.) The message of hope is in a sense confirmed by the return, at the end of the finale, of the majestic gesture we heard at the outset of the first movement: this rounds out—renders cyclical—the *form*. When form takes precedence over content, to the extent that the two are separable (the matter is never simple), to that extent, we are not drowned by a romanticism that is heart-on-sleeve, but boosted by a classicism that is one of jolly good-cheer.

—Peter Bloom

Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Praised by the *New York Times* for his “revelatory” performances, and by the *Toronto Star* for his “technically flawless, poetically inspired and immensely assured playing,” pianist Jiayan Sun has performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Chinese and RTÉ (Ireland) National Symphony Orchestras, the Fort Worth and Toledo Symphony Orchestras, the Toronto and Aspen Concert Orchestras, the Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, and he has conducted from the keyboard the Meiningen Court Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast by the BBC, the RTÉ, China Central Television, and classical music radio stations in North America. He has performed at and participated in the Verbier Festival, the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Aspen Music Festival, the Sarasota Music Festival, and PianoTexas. Under the mentorship of Sir András Schiff, he was invited to give a number of solo recitals in Europe as part of Schiff’s “Building Bridges” project for the 2017–2018 season.

Jiayan Sun has been awarded prizes at many of the major international piano competitions, including third prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, second prize at the Dublin International Piano Competition, fourth prize and the audience prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, first prize at the inaugural CCC Toronto International Piano Competition, and others. Playing early keyboard instruments and studying historical performance practice have played a significant role in his musical activities, with critically acclaimed appearances with the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall.

Hailing from Yantai, China, he received Bachelor’s, Master’s and the Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Yoheved Kaplinsky and Stephen Hough. His other mentors include pianists Malcolm Bilson, Richard Goode, Robert Levin, and harpsichordist Lionel Party. His devotion to the art of composition led him to study with the composer Philip Lasser. As the Iva Dee Hiatt Visiting Artist in Piano at Smith College, he presented Beethoven’s complete piano sonatas in chronological order in the 2018–2019 season.

For more information, please visit <http://www.jiayansunpianist.com>.

Schubertiade

Jiayan Sun, piano

Eight Recitals at 8 PM on Thursdays

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall

Free and open to the public

I. September 12, 2019

Piano Sonatas 1: C Major, D. 840;

G Major, D. 894; C Minor, D. 958

II. September 26, 2019

Four Impromptus for Piano, D. 899;

Piano Trio in E-flat Major, D. 929

with **Joel Pitchon**, violin &
Marie-Volcy Pelletier, cello

III. October 24, 2019

Piano Sonatas 2: E Minor, D. 566;

A Minor, D. 845; A Major, D. 959

IV. December 5, 2019

Music for Piano Four-Hands

with **Judith Gordon** and
Smith student pianists

V. February 6, 2020

The *Schwanengesang* Poets:

Rellstab, Heine, and Seidl

with **William Hite**, tenor

VI. February 27, 2020

Four Impromptus for Piano,

D. 935; Piano Trio in B-flat
Major, D. 898

with **Joel Pitchon**, violin &
Marie-Volcy Pelletier, cello

VII. April 2, 2020

Piano Music for Two-Hands and
Four-Hands

with **Monica Jakuc Leverett**,
Graf Fortepiano

VIII. April 16, 2020

Piano Sonatas 3: F-sharp Minor,

D. 571; D Major, D. 850; B-flat
Major, D. 960

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