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LLŶR WILLIAMS
SCHUBERT
VOL.1



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INTRODUCTION

"In a word I feel myself the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair over this ever makes things worse and worse instead of better ...but I have tried my hand at several instrumental things ... in fact, I intend to pave the way towards a grand symphony in this manner."

These extracts from a letter of 1824 epitomise to me the paradox of Schubert, the manic-depressive composer. On the one hand his music has that world-weary element of profound grief - 'the most wretched creature in the world' - and on the other a life-affirming exuberance bordering on the manic that characterises the *Wanderer-Fantasie* and parts of the D major sonata D.850.

While Schubert's later piano music has a range of emotions that rivals Beethoven's last sonatas, in the beginning of his career he perhaps lacked the assurance of the older composer, and he was less fastidious about destroying sketches and fragments. As a result there are a large number of unfinished works and, therefore, the pianist has to make a decision about where to start the Schubert odyssey. Schubert himself made no effort to try and publish any of his sonatas before the great A minor D.845 of 1825. I decided to start slightly earlier with the B major of 1817 where one senses an assurance and

boldness of tonal experiment not found before in his piano music. Perhaps the three earliest sonatas (on Disc 6) manifest the journey into Schubert's maturity: two pieces of a generally sunny disposition followed by the A minor D.784, written shortly after he discovered he was suffering from syphilis and one of the most desolate of all his works.

My Schubert recitals at Cardiff also featured several of his Lieder as transcribed by Liszt which we have put together on CD 7. The transcription, especially that of 'great' music such as Schubert's remains one of the few genres that is still frowned upon by serious musicians even in the twenty-first century. I would urge these people to consider Schubert's own variations for flute and piano on '*Trockne Blumen*', one of the most profound songs in *Die schöne Müllerin*, and which he turns into one of the most outlandishly virtuosic things ever. Liszt's versions are often admirably restrained by comparison. The songs I have chosen tend to be either those where Liszt employs the full resources of his pianistic prowess to enhance the narrative - *Erlkönig*, *Die Forelle* - or those where he manages to turn the piano from percussive machine into the most glamorous of singing instruments - *Litanei*, *Ave Maria*.

Llŷr Williams, 2019

SONATA IN A MAJOR, D 959

- I. Allegro
- II. Andantino
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- IV. Rondo: Allegretto

The Sonata No 20 in A Major was written in 1828 and is Schubert's penultimate sonata, completed only a few months before his death. He wrote his last three piano sonatas between the spring and autumn of 1828, and seems to have intended them as a set, as there are thematic resemblances both within the individual sonata movements and between the three sonatas themselves. These sonatas were not published until ten years after Schubert's death, and took a long time to be accepted as the late masterpieces they are, alongside the Quintet in C major and the songs later collected as *Schwanengesang*.

The first movement is in A major, marked Allegro, and opens with declamatory chords over an A pedal, followed by downward-tumbling arpeggios. The second subject is song-like, harmonised in four parts. As is usual in classical sonata form, the second subject exposition is in the dominant, E major. The development section moves between C major and B major, and is based on a version of the second subject. The recapitulation returns to the tonic, and visits the tonic minor, before the coda builds on the opening theme, played more quietly, and the movement ends with delicate, pianissimo arpeggios ascending and descending the length of the keyboard.

The second movement, Andantino, is in F sharp minor (sharing a key signature of three sharps with A major) and opens with a plaintive, melancholy theme, where the descending seconds sound like a sigh.

The movement is in ABA form, and the middle section is a turbulent fantasia, wandering through distant keys and punctuated by crashing chords concluding in C sharp minor. A recitative-like, declamatory passage broken by dramatic pauses leads back to the A section, now modified by ornamentation in its accompaniment.

The Scherzo is back in A major, and opens with brisk, broken chords that are a continuation of those that ended the previous movement, thus linking the two together. There is something barcarolle-like in the lively sextuplets of the Scherzo's B section, which ends with a falling C sharp major scale for which Schubert gives no harmonic preparation. The D major trio is also in ABA (ternary) form, and uses hand-crossing to set up its own contrasting texture before the movement concludes with a reprise of the Scherzo.

The final movement is a lyrical Rondo, and its melody has been described as an answer to the question posed by the sonata's opening theme. It takes the form ABA - development - ABA - coda, and is therefore in rondo-sonata form. During the development, Schubert returns to C sharp minor which has already made several appearances in the sonata, another element that links the movements together. The coda brings back a broken version of the first subject, again broken up by dramatic full-bar pauses, followed by a presto section. The sonata ends in a reverse of its opening, with an ascending arpeggio followed by the declamatory chords played in reverse.

SECHS MOMENTS MUSICAUX, OP. 94, D. 780

- I. Moderato
- II. Andantino
- III. Allegro moderato
- IV. Moderato
- V. Allegro vivace
- VI. Allegretto

Schubert's *Moments musicaux* were published by Leidesdorf in Vienna in 1828, the year of Schubert's death, and are among his most popular pieces of solo piano music. The first moment begins with a unison statement, and goes on to develop this in triplets, in an ABA form. The second, Andantino, has the mood of a lullaby, in 9/8 time. The third, Allegro moderato, begins in F minor and ends in F major, with a brass-band-like bass line heralding the dance theme.

The fourth movement, in C sharp minor, has a running, accompaniment in semiquavers in the A sections, while the central B section releases the tension. Like the third movement, the Allegro vivace begins in F minor and ends in F major, with passionate chords and a rapid movement. The final movement, in A flat major, has a superficial simplicity that reveals greater depths of emotion and meaning.

DREI KLAVIERSTÜCKE, D. 946 NO. 3 IN C MAJOR

Two months before the publication of *Moments musicaux* in July 1828, Schubert completed the first two of what were to become his *Drei Klavierstücke*. The third is thought to have been written

the previous year, although it is not known if the three pieces were intended to form a distinct group. These works, like his two volumes of *Impromptus* (D.899 and D.935) dating from 1827 and *Moments musicaux* (D.780), written periodically between 1823 and 1828, all belong to a group of character pieces which in varying degrees approach the status of full-scale sonata movements.

Just as all but three of his piano sonatas were published posthumously, so too these *Klavierstücke* had to wait until Brahms issued them for the first time in 1868, forty years after Schubert's death. Perhaps the neutral title of *Klavierstücke* (piano pieces) has prevented their better acquaintance, yet while these works are less celebrated than his other character pieces they are as substantial and searching as any of his late sonatas and are among the composer's most forward-looking creations.

No. 3 is in a bright C major and is the shortest and yet most virtuosic of the group, sharing its ABA structure with No. 1, otherwise inhabiting a markedly different character. To the Third's ebullient outer sections, with its five bar phrase patterns, offbeat accents and forte outbursts, Schubert adds a jubilant coda which hurtles along to a bracing close. But a central panel in D flat major (a semi-tone key shift previously applied for the slow section of the "Wanderer") provides an emotionally remote hymn-like foil, its insistent pulse and repeated rhythmic shapes bordering on the hypnotic.

*Notes by David Truslove (Sonata in A & Klavierstücke 3)
and Simon Rees (Sechs Moments Musicaux)*

LLŶR WILLIAMS

Welsh pianist Llŷr Williams is widely admired for his profound musical intelligence and the expressive and communicative nature of his interpretations. He has worked with orchestras including the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, Hallé Orchestra, Sinfonia Cymru, I Pomeriggi Musicali, Meininger Hofkapelle, Berner Kammerorchester, and the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg. A regular performer in the Wigmore Hall's main piano series, Williams has also appeared at the BBC Proms in London, Gilmore International Keyboard Festival in the USA, Piano aux Jacobins in Toulouse and the Edinburgh International Festival. He is a regular performer at the East Neuk Festival in Scotland and is currently Artist-in-Association at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Artist-in-Residence at the Cowbridge Festival in Wales.

Williams is an acclaimed performer of Beethoven with several complete piano sonata cycles under his belt. Following a successful first cycle in Perth, Williams subsequently performed a complete cycle during an epic two-week marathon in Edinburgh that won him the prestigious South Bank Show Award. He later completed two cycles as a nine-recital project at the Wigmore Hall and the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff between 2014 and 2017. In January 2017 he completed a successful collaboration with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in performances of all five Beethoven piano concerti.

The 2018-19 season included his debut with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, and returns to the Royal Philharmonic and BBC National Orchestra of Wales as well as a highly successful Canadian recital debut

at Salle Bourgie in Montreal, with the critic of *Le Devoir* describing Williams as 'un secret trop bien gardé'. The 2019-20 season sees Llŷr Williams continuing his collaboration with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*, as well as his debut with the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne. Williams also returned to the Edinburgh Festival in August 2019, while for the Beethoven anniversary season he will offer a complete sonata cycle at the Festival Cultural de Mayo in Guadalajara, Mexico and partial cycles in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

Llŷr Williams' eclectic taste is reflected in his discography. April 2018 saw the release of 'Beethoven Unbound', a 12-CD Box set of the Wigmore Hall Beethoven cycle, also on Signum Records, which was BBC Music Magazine's 'Recording of the Month' in August 2018. His previous critically acclaimed CD, 'Wagner Without Words' (Signum, August 2014) reflects Williams' intimate relationship with operatic music. Other recordings by Williams include two solo albums for Signum, as well as William Mathias' second Piano Concerto with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales on Welsh label Tŷ Cerdd.

Born in Pentrebychan, North Wales, Llŷr Williams read music at The Queen's College, Oxford and went on to take up a postgraduate scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music where he won every available prize and award. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and in 2017 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Wales. He was an active member of the Live Music Now! scheme for several years, was selected for the Young Concert Artists Trust in 2002. From 2003-2005 he was a BBC New Generation Artist and in 2004 received a Borletti-Buitoni Trust award.



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