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LLŶR WILLIAMS
SCHUBERT
VOL.3

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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 C MINOR, D. 958

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto: Allegro
- IV. Allegro

Schubert's last three piano sonatas, written between the spring and autumn of 1828, the last year of his life, are often considered as a group, sharing many elements of structure and form. He performed the three sonatas at a concert for his friends on 28 September 1828, and in October offered them to his publisher, Probst, who was not interested. Schubert's health, already weak, rapidly deteriorated and he died on 19 November 1828, at the age of 31.

The Sonata in C minor, like the others in the group of three, is strongly influenced by Beethoven, at whose funeral the previous year Schubert had been a pall-bearer. The opening of the Allegro first movement of this sonata is very close to the theme of Beethoven's 32 Piano Variations on a theme (catalogue WoO 80), which is also in C minor. There are also reminiscences of Beethoven's Pathétique sonata, No. 8 Op. 13, again in C minor. The second subject is a chorale-like tune in E flat major, the relative major to C minor.

After the repeat of the exposition section, the development continues chromatically, exploring distant keys. At the recapitulation there is a return to the tonic, and the coda dies away in reminiscences of the development section.

The second movement, Adagio, is in A flat major, and structured A-B-A-B-A. Its tranquil opening theme is developed in a way that gives it

a darker quality, and in the B sections there is intense chromaticism and forceful, emotion-laden chords. The second appearance of the A and B sections is a semitone higher than before.

The third movement is a menuetto and trio, but far darker and more sombre in mood than the usual classical minuet. The menuetto is in C minor, in two parts, each repeated, the second part containing two bar-long rests that give a disquieting feeling that persists to the end of the movement. The trio is in A flat major, structured A-B-A, with the B section in E flat major.

The sonata-form final movement, Allegro, is again in C minor, and has a rapid, racing 6/8 rhythm reminiscent of a tarantella or a moto perpetuo. The first theme moves from C minor to C major, while the second moves towards C sharp minor. A new theme enters in the development section, progressing to a climax which introduces the recapitulation in which the first theme reappears in shortened form. The wild leaps and bounding arpeggios give the movement a liveliness that is offset by its predominantly minor key colouring, and leave something of the flavour of a dance of death.

SONATA IN C MAJOR, OP. 53 D. 850

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- IV. Rondo: Allegro moderato

Franz Schubert wrote his Piano Sonata in D major, D. 850 while staying at the Austrian spa resort of Bad Gastein, due south of Salzburg, in

August 1825. Bad Gastein was - and remains - a popular holiday spot, where the spa waters (later discovered by Marie Curie to contain radon) were thought to have therapeutic qualities. Schubert travelled there with his friend the baritone Michael Vogl, for whom he wrote many of his songs. Schubert wrote in a letter that he felt 'imprisoned' by 'the incredibly high rocky walls...and the fearful depths below.' Vogl had picked on Gastein as he was suffering from gout, and had decided that this spa town was the best place to take the cure. He also met his friend the poet Pyrker, two of whose poems Schubert set during his stay.

The sonata is in four movements, and has been noted for its Alpine qualities, both in melody and rhythm. The first, *Allegro vivace*, opens with a fanfare, immediately repeated in the minor, later developed in characteristic Schubertian manner in an exposition that wanders through many remote keys. The second subject has been compared to the sound of Austrian yodelling, and has some similarity with Schubert's setting of Pyrker's *Das Heimweh*. The second movement is in A major, and is in ABABA form, with a faster tempo than is usual in Schubert's second movements of piano sonatas. The triplet figure that is so marked in the first movement reappears here. The second subject has some violent syncopation, which then merges with the more meditative opening subject as the movement comes to its conclusion. The third movement is a scherzo and trio in G major, with a lively, dotted quality to the scherzo and a steady lyricism to the trio. The last movement, again in D major, is a rondo in ABACA form, the main theme being a military march, repeated with variations and divisions, and interspersed with contrasting episodes, leading to a quiet coda.

Notes by Simon Rees

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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