Recital 6: Program

Peter Bloom

Smith College, pbloom@smith.edu

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All proceeds from today’s concert will go to Hubei Charity Federation, to support people fighting the coronavirus in the epicenter of the outbreak.

Jiayan Sun shall report the amount of donations in public at the next Schubertiade concert on March 5.

Donations can also be made directly to:
Hubei Charity Federation
Bank of China, Hubei Branch, Wuchang Sub-branch
Bank account number: 5599 7000 3549
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Memo: Hubei coronavirus pneumonia

Schubertiade
Jiayan Sun, piano
Eight Recitals at 8 PM on Thursdays
Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall
Free and open to the public

Next Concert:
V. March 5, 2020 (rescheduled from February 6)
The Schwanengesang Poets: Rellstab, Heine, and Seidl
with William Hite, tenor

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

Schubertiade VI
Jiayan Sun, piano
Joel Pitchon, violin
Volcy Pelletier, cello

A Benefit Concert
To Support People Fighting the Coronavirus in Hubei Province, China

Thursday, February 27, 2020
8:00 PM
Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall
Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Rondeau brillant, in B Minor for Violin and Piano, op. 70, D. 895 (1826)
Andante – Allegro

Joel Pitchon, Jiayan Sun

Four Impromptus, op. post. 142, D. 935 (1827)
Allegro moderato (F Minor)
Allegretto (A-flat Major)
Andante (B-flat Major)
Allegro scherzando (F Minor)

Jiayan Sun

Intermission

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major, op. 99, D. 898 (1827)
Allegro moderato
Andante un poco mosso
Scherzo. Allegro – Trio
Rondo. Allegro vivace

Joel Pitchon, Volcy Pelletier, Jiayan Sun

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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

The recorded performances from A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas and Schubertiade are available on Smith ScholarWorks.
https://scholarworks.smith.edu/mus_facper/

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You might recognize the theme of the third Impromptu, in B-flat Major, here followed by five variations, because it has become almost synonymous with the composer’s name and image. It comes from the fifth of the nine numbers that Schubert composed as incidental music for the play by Helmina von Chézy, Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus, first performed at the Theater an der Wien in December 1823. Schubert used exactly the same theme—transposed from B-flat to C—in the second movement of the String Quartet in A Minor, D. 804, from early 1824, causing the work to become known as the “Rosamunde” Quartet. In the Impromptu, he returns the theme to its original key, but enlivens it by means of some short notes that give fizz to the piano. The first two variations obediently follow the lead of the theme (in form and harmonic underpinning) while delightfully varying the texture, first, with
flowing sixteenth-notes, second, with ornaments in the right hand and syncopations in the left. The third variation, in the minor mode, is still a true variation, with melodic structure and harmonic guideposts identical to those of the theme. The fourth variation, too, is real: it is in G-flat Major, harmonically “distant,” like the third, maintaining the same good-old phrases in units of eight bars each. In the fifth and final variation, the right hand twirls and spins like a ballerina. To bring the work to a close, Schubert returns to a more somber version of the opening of the opening theme.

The fourth Impromptu’s return to the opening key of F Minor suggests a larger cyclical construction; its dénouement sounds not like the ending of the single Impromptu but rather like the ending of all four. Indeed, for Alfred Einstein, following Robert Schumann, these four movements constitute not four separate pieces but four movements of one sonata.

The Piano Trio in B-flat Major, D. 898, like its companion piece in E-flat Major, which we heard on Jayan Sun’s second recital in September, is one of the great peaks in the range of Mount Schubert. It was written in late 1827 (but not published until 1836) and was Schubert’s first work in this category since 1812. It was surely conceived for performance by the ensemble led by Beethoven’s old friend, the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the celebrated exponent of Beethoven’s late quartets, and the dedicatee of Schubert’s earlier A-Minor Quartet. Indeed, it has been suggested that Schubert conceived the B-flat Trio precisely in order to capture Beethoven’s earlier Viennese public.

The most traditional elements of the exposition section of the first movement are the establishment of the home key, B-flat, and the subsequent modulation to the dominant, F. The surprising element is the phrase structure of the opening theme, which is an entity in two parts of five and seven measures. The glorious second theme, more regular (as four plus six), is announced by the cello in its mezzo-soprano range (oh, to be a cellist in this piece!). The closing theme, a reminiscence of the first, very cleverly turns both back, for the repeat, and forward, for the development. The latter gives us more of that “glorious” second theme, gently revised and reworked by the composer but with no lessening of its heart-breaking lyricism. We soon arrive at what sounds like a return presentation of the opening material: this is a “false” reprise because we are not in the “home” key of B-flat but four flats away in the “distant” key of G-flat. Only after another false start, in D-flat, do we arrive at the true beginning, in B-flat, of the true return.

In the second movement, Schubert the song composer gives us an impassioned love duet (or perhaps, with the piano, a ménage à trois). Exquisite harmonies, E-flat Major, ABA form, melodies beyond words. The trio of the Scherzo that follows looks back to the love duet, but is otherwise a regular dance (so the heart throbs less). The finale, too, is a typical Schubert rondo, although two middle sections in 3/2 meter point literally to something that is elsewhere less explicit in this piece, and that is the composer’s interest in irregular phrase structures, which, less obviously than his characteristically daring tonal excursions, add new colors to his compositional palette.

Unlike the E-flat Trio, the B-flat offers no return, in the finale, to the music of the opening. In his musical “portrait” of Schubert, the great musicologist Alfred Einstein, writing on the third floor of this very building, did not mention this small difference, but he did quote Robert Schumann’s comparison of the B-flat Trio and the E-flat Trio we heard in September:

“One glance at Schubert’s Trio [in B-flat]—and the troubles of our human existence disappear and all the world is fresh and bright again. Yet some ten years ago [Schumann is writing in 1837] a Trio by Schubert [in E-flat] passed across the face of the musical world like some angry portent in the sky. It was his hundredth opus and shortly afterwards, in November 1828, he died. This recently published Trio [in B-flat] seems to be the older of the two works. There is absolutely no evidence of any earlier period in its style and it may well have been written just before the familiar E-flat Trio. Yet the two works are essentially and fundamentally different. The first movement, which in the E-flat Trio is eloquent of extreme anger and passionate longing, is here a thing of grace, intimate and virginal; the Adagio, in the E-flat Trio, a sigh, rising to spiritual anguish, is here [in the B-flat Trio] a blissful dream-state, a pulsating flow of exquisitely human emotion. The Scherzos are very similar to each other; yet to my mind, that of the B-flat Trio is superior. I will not attempt to choose between the two last movements. To sum up, the Trio in E-flat is active, masculine, dramatic, while the B-flat is passive, feminine, lyrical.”

Please note, dear reader, that I am quoting Robert Schumann, whose constellation of “passive, feminine, and lyrical,” objectionable today, was common enough in the eighteen-thirties, in the nineteen-thirties, and remains common today in such enclaves as 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue… In fact Robert Schumann struggled long and hard to obtain the hand of the woman who finally became his wife in 1840, Clara Wieck Schumann, one of the most formidable pianist-composers of her generation. As for Franz Schubert’s regard for women, we know very little. If we knew more, would it matter for our understanding of his music? This is one of the questions that the interested parties will debate forever.

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Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Rondeau brillant, in B Minor for Violin and Piano, op. 70, D. 895 (1826)
  Andante – Allegro

Joel Pitchon, Jiayan Sun

Four Impromptus, op. post. 142, D. 935 (1827)
  Allegro moderato (F Minor)
  Allegretto (A-flat Major)
  Andante (B-flat Major)
  Allegro scherzando (F Minor)

Jiayan Sun

Intermission

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major, op. 99, D. 898 (1827)
  Allegro moderato
  Andante un poco mosso
  Scherzo. Allegro – Trio
  Rondo. Allegro vivace

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