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Schubertiade, Jiayan Sun, piano

Music: Faculty Performances

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4-16-2020

## Recital 8: Program

Peter Bloom

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*Schubertiade*  
*VIII*

Piano Sonatas 3

Jiayan Sun, piano

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Thursday, April 16, 2020

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

# PROGRAM

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## Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata No. 9 in F-sharp Minor (1817)

Allegro moderato (fragment)

*followed by*

*Ungarische Melodie*, D. 817 (1824)

Allegretto

Sonata No. 17 in D Major, op. 53, D. 850 (“*Gasteiner*”) (1825)

Allegro vivace

Andante con moto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace – Trio

Rondo. Allegro moderato – un poco più lento

### *intermission*

Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major, D. 960 (1828)

Molto moderato

Andante sostenuto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza – Trio

Allegro ma non troppo

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

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

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The recorded performances from  
*A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas and Schubertiade*  
are available on Smith ScholarWorks.

[https://scholarworks.smith.edu/mus\\_facper/](https://scholarworks.smith.edu/mus_facper/)

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## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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The Sonata in F-sharp Minor, **D. 571**, is in fact only a fragment of a first movement—an extraordinary fragment, but a fragment nonetheless. We have no lengthy song-like lyrical themes to define the sections of a sonata exposition, only the hint of a tune at the beginning and a broken-chord or arpeggiated texture throughout—something that renders with conspicuous obviousness that the *form* of the sonata is essentially determined by the *harmony*. An opening section in F-sharp Minor is followed by a modulatory passage that eventually establishes, not the relative major, A, as one would expect, but rather the submediant major, D, as the principal contrasting tonality. It is important that the exposition of the sonata be repeated, here, because the second time around, as the exposition closes and the development begins, the progression that leads to E-flat Major is, even for Schubert, extraordinary. The development section soon breaks off on the dominant of B Minor, suggesting that Schubert might have set down a recapitulation beginning in the subdominant, something he often does elsewhere. But we simply *don't know*. This presents a problem to a pianist who wishes to remain faithful to the composer's score. András Schiff recorded the piece *as it is*, stopping cold where the manuscript breaks off, like a driver who runs out of gas, leaves his car in the middle of the freeway, and walks away. Another solution is to pause, to signal to the audience that what follows is not Schubert, then to complete the movement oneself, or with the notes supplied by the editor of the score. A third solution, which Jiayan Sun has adopted, is to fill in with other music by Schubert that begins in the right key, which is B. You shall hear, as the conclusion of the Sonata, D. 571, the *Hungarian Melody*, **D. 817**, from Schubert's stay in Hungary in 1824. You heard this music in a different state, during Jiayan Sun's December concert, in the *Divertissement à la hongroise*, **D. 818**, for piano four-hands.

The D-Major Sonata, **D. 850**, followed on the heels of the A-Minor Sonata, D. 845, which we heard on Jiayan Sun's recital of last November, and preceded the composition of the G-Major Sonata, D. 894, which we heard last September. Those three, the specialists believe, were conceived as a trilogy, even though it happened that they were brought out by three different publishers. The D-Major was completed in August 1825 (at the

time when Schubert's most grandiose project was what we now know as the "Great" C-Major Symphony), and published in April 1826 with a dedication to Carl Maria von Bocklet, the Czech pianist who had come to Vienna in 1821, who befriended Beethoven and Schubert, and who performed, among other works, Schubert's two late Piano Trios in B-flat and E-flat Major.

The dedication to a virtuoso pianist may explain the swiftly alternating pianistic textures, the racing triplets, and the repeated eighth-notes, that build the first movement's "standard" sonata structure, which takes us from D to A by means of a lot of fancy fingerwork, and which includes a curious insertion, marked *Un poco più lento*, in the momentarily distant keys of G and C. In the recapitulation, which is "regular" in that it repeats all earlier material as earlier set out, the *Un poco più lento* is now momentarily in C and F, the keys required by the principle of tonal symmetry: G is to A as C is to D. A coda, *Un poco più mosso*, rushes us to the end.

The opening of the second movement, an ABABA structure, is straightforward, almost plain. This is so because, as we learn when the A section returns, it is designed to be complemented with new lines, new ornaments, new rhythms. The B section is surprising: its syncopated rhythms render the strong beats difficult to perceive. If you listen closely to recordings of this movement by Artur Schnabel and Alfred Brendel (who presumably represent the grand Viennese tradition), you will notice that the second eighth-notes on the first beats of certain measures *are delayed*. This gives extra life to the measure, just as does the traditional way of playing a Viennese waltz in 3/4 time, where the second beat arrives *early* and the third beat arrives *late*. It has often been said that music and math go together. Perhaps. But music is not math, and meticulously metronomic playing is not music.

The fun and games continue in the Scherzo, in D Major, as the principal melody accentuates the normally weak third beat (delayed by Brendel, among others, as per the convention I just mentioned). Metric matters are simplified in the trio, but are taken up again in the return of the Scherzo, written out and outfitted with a gentle coda. The finale is another Schubertian rondo, ABABA, with a refrain that sounds like a toddler's tune: it matures on each of two subsequent presentations, but in the final bars, by

means of a short citation from the beginning, Schubert harkens back to its apparent naïveté. It is difficult to imagine that the man who wrote this music was anything but healthy and happy.

The great B-flat Major Sonata, **D. 960**, from the unhealthy and unhappy days of the composer's final year, explores melodic and harmonic ideas in the same key as the great B-flat Major Piano Trio, D. 898, which we heard on Jiayan Sun's recital in February. Does the choice of the key effect the character of the work? The correct answer is: *of course*. But the correct answer to the second question—*how so?*—is less obvious. To my way of thinking (I believe someone named Mozart said something similar), the composer's choice of key is tantamount to the painter's choice of medium (pen-and-ink, watercolor, oil) or to the sculptor's choice of material (clay, wood, marble). Which makes the answer to the second question: *in every way possible*.

This is Schubert's final instrumental composition, completed, after the C-Major String Quintet and the two piano sonatas in C Minor and A Major, only one month prior to his demise. For Sviatoslav Richter, who plays it more slowly than is humanly possible, the B-flat Sonata, in beauty of sound, is Mount Everest. The tender first theme—in two halves of four and five bars—gives evidence, with an ominous trill, on a low G-flat, that something unusual is afoot. Sure enough, in his characteristically tri-partite presentation of the opening thematic material, the middle rendering occurs in G-flat Major. Because Schubert renders it apparent, you will *hear* the gentle descent from B-flat to G-flat, from sky-blue to royal blue, and you will hear the return to B-flat, made obvious by repeated, anticipatory triplets. I underline the business in G-flat and the triplets because, at the point of recapitulation, Schubert will shift gears and transform something that on the first go-around is really striking into something that, on the second, is really thrilling. More generally speaking, the richness of the harmonic fabric, here and throughout the mature Schubert, turns on the point I made in the notes for Jiayan Sun's first recital: Schubert's perception of *major* and *minor* and their tonal relatives as subsets of one and the same main character.

Despite the heartfelt sentiment of the opening movement, the slow

movement of the final sonata, *Andante sostenuto*, in C-sharp Minor, is the heart of the matter. Its design, ABA', is similar to that of the slow movement of the String Quintet, which is another expressive miracle. In the Quintet, the string instruments can sustain the notes of the chords to the "heavenly lengths" they require. In the Sonata, the pianist must attempt give the *illusion* of sustaining, using the crisp accompaniment figures that softly punctuate the bass to urge forward what are perhaps the most perfectly tragic and tragically perfect forty-two bars in all of Schubert's music for the keyboard. The middle section, in A Major, not *furioso* like its counterpart in the Quintet, gives hope, gently, majestically, joyfully, then sorrowfully, as it leads to the return of the A section, in C-sharp Minor, now with a new, heartbeat-like accompaniment figure that darkens the tragedy. And yet, in the last bars, in a gesture that a religious person might call a benediction, Schubert gives us C-sharp *Major*. At the end of this movement, it is difficult to remain... dry-eyed.

The world could have ended there. But a sonata has four movements and Schubert was not about to abrogate the contract. The scherzo-trio-scherzo is the work of a past master, a clever delight. It is an argument against too tightly linking life and art, since it is difficult to imagine a dying man writing such a living work. The same could be said of the finale, a rondo whose structure looks like abracadabra (ABCADABCA), a music that is amiable, energetic, but not without anxiety (such as that of the camouflaged opening in what can sound like the "wrong" key). Still, this is a "final message" more by chronological happenstance than by design. Some scholars take it as a given that Schubert was aware of his imminent demise, but the evidence is mixed, and may simply speak to every sensitive soul's awareness of his or her mortality—and to the incontrovertible fact that the presence of death, for nineteenth-century artists, was something they lived with nearly every day.

Last year, at the conclusion of Jiayan Sun's excursion through Beethoven, I pleaded for a silent pause. This year, the closing clause will clearly cause immediate applause.

—Peter Bloom  
*Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus*

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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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, the 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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