

SAGE
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SOCIETY

Schubertiade II

Joel Pitchon, violin
Marie-Volcy Pelletier, cello
Jiayan Sun, piano

September 26, 2019

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, op. post. 162, D. 574 (1817)

Allegro moderato

Scherzo. Presto – Trio

Andantino

Allegro vivace

Joel Pitchon, Jiayan Sun

Four Impromptus, op. 90, D. 899 (1827)

Allegro molto moderato (C Minor)

Allegro (E-flat Major)

Andante (G-flat Major)

Allegretto (A-flat Major)

Jiayan Sun

intermission

Piano Trio No. 2 in E-flat Major, op. 100, D. 929 (1827)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzando. Allegro moderato – Trio

Allegro moderato

Joel Pitchon, Marie-Volcy Pelletier, Jiayan Sun

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>

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

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The “Grand Duo,” the nickname of the four-movement Sonata in A Major, **D. 574**, was composed by the twenty-year-old Schubert in August 1817. The opening movement provides a good example of a procedure conspicuously associated with this composer’s handling of the sonata form, and that is the “three-key exposition”: before reaching the expected destination—the dominant (in A Major, this means E)—Schubert lingers in an intermediate key (here, G Major), thereby gently expanding the language of tonality as it was spoken by his illustrious predecessors. There follow a jolly scherzo-trio-scherzo (the trio, in a distant key, requires a tiny codetta to bring us “home”), a brief and amiable Andantino (in the distant key of the trio and thus an element of the work’s large-scale unity), and a lively finale with an opening gesture which (speaking of unity) reminds some listeners of the opening of the scherzo.

In 1827, his very fertile penultimate year, Schubert composed eight *Impromptus*. We shall hear the fifth through the eighth of these on Jiayan Sun’s sixth recital, on February 27, 2020. Of the four we hear this evening, **D. 899**, only the first two were published during the composer’s lifetime (he assigned to them the opus number 90). The second two were published in 1857, almost thirty years after his death—one of them *in the wrong key*: Schubert wrote the third *Impromptu* in G-flat Major: six flats! This *looks fussy*, which is why the publisher decided to put it out in G Major, with one little sharp. In fact, for the hands, G-flat is fine.

The C-Minor *Impromptu* has some of the disruptive C-Minor-isms of the C-Minor Sonata we heard on Jiayan Sun’s first recital, and it deals with some five-bar phrases, which at the time were daring enough. But dissonance and disproportion are dissipated at the end (of what is a large ABABA structure), as Schubert displays to us both the major and the minor modes before closing in the discreet charm of C Major.

You are probably familiar with the E-flat Major *Impromptu*: it is a test of the capacity of a pianist’s right hand—and of the piano’s capacity to respond to it. The structure is, to simplify, ABAB. The A section, in E-flat Major, smiles; the B section, in B Minor and E-flat Minor, growls. What surprises here is that Schubert does not end with whipped cream and a cherry on top; he rather concludes with a snarl.

You are certainly familiar with the G-flat Major *Impromptu*: it is a perfect example of a perfectly beautiful piece. A profound bassline, a fluently flowing middle voice, an exquisite melody. Why exquisite? Were I to try to answer that question, I would point to repeated notes, to essentially conjunct (or stepwise) motion, and to judiciously rare expressive leaps—characteristics also found in

Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" and Bernstein's "Maria." But what makes the melody expressive, here, is the underlying harmony, the chords and the keys that, when I mention them in these notes, cause some to say "there he goes again." Just one thing: at the apex of his great melody, Schubert slides down to C-flat Major, seven flats, up with more than which a key signature will not put.

The fourth *Impromptu*, in A-flat, a large ABA structure, begins in minor, then migrates (no visa, no wall) to the major. The middle section, in C-sharp Minor, then wanders far and wide. It is not that the "romantic era" *required* more color than form, as some students like to say; it is rather that Schubert's colorful harmonic palette became a definitional element of what we like *to call* the "romantic era."

What, (not exactly) by the way, *is* an "impromptu"? The word was new to music in the eighteen-twenties—so what you have *just heard* gives it its meaning. It seems to have come into French before it came into English, from the Latin *in promptu* ("in readiness"), and has come to designate something extemporaneous or improvisatory: those words do not quite match the reality of the famous works in the category, by Schubert and Chopin, which, though relatively brief, are just as premeditative as their more weighty sonatas.

Schubert is not the inventor of the *Impromptu*, but he is its first great practitioner. The first great practitioners of the trio for violin, cello, and piano, were Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. In this category, as in the category of the sonata, Schubert found himself pouring new wine into an old bottle: in the Gospel of Mark, "the bottle breaks and the wine runneth out"; in the vessel of Schubert, the bottle shines anew and the wine is sweeter than honey. The Piano Trio in E-flat Major, **D. 929**, because it was published in 1828 in a print run of over a thousand copies, became the principal representative of Schubert's chamber music for some years to come. Indeed, for years, the E-flat Trio was better known than the symphonies, the sonatas, and the string quartets.

The first movement of the Trio follows the plan of the traditional sonata form: an exposition offers a muscular opening melody, melodies of a transitional character (one of them, with repeated notes that unite the composition as a whole, will close the movement), and melodies of a more lyrical character, as we modulate from the tonic, E-flat, to the dominant, B-flat. The score indicates that the exposition is to be repeated: this ensures that that modulation is *heard*. But today's audiences have less patience than Schubert's; today's performers do not always take the repeat. The development section lingers over a lyrical melody from the second theme group and prepares via a lengthy pedal on the dominant—you will feel the rising expectation—for the recapitulation, in E-flat, of the primary

materials. Tonal details have to be realigned in order for E-flat to remain and predominate, and a short coda ensures that it does.

In the second movement—you may recognize it from the soundtrack of Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* of 1975—we walk with Schubert towards the setting of the sun. This sublime march—not retrospectively funereal, like Beethoven's, in the *Eroica*, Chopin's, in the second sonata, or Wagner's, in *Götterdämmerung*, and unlike those hallowed works in that it keeps us moving along at a moderate pace—forms a kind of slow rondo (ABABA), with the main material (like the “truth” in “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”) varied on each recurrence. That main material pays tribute not to a fallen hero but to a folksong from Sweden, “Se solen sjunker,” which Schubert may have heard sung by his close friend and sometime roommate, who was half-Swedish, Franz von Schober: “See the sun is setting fast behind each mountain peak. / Ere night comes with dark shadows, you flee, sweet hope now bleak. / Farewell. Farewell.” You can find this folksong on YouTube. Listen to it, and, as I was, be surprised by the elements in it that obviously impacted Schubert.

At the close of the movement, in what may be seen as an ironic smile for those in the know, Schubert does briefly but definitively allude to the close of the funeral march of the “*Eroica*.” It may also have been with an ironic smile that he arranged for the first performance of this piece to take place on March 26, 1828, precisely the day, one year earlier, on which Beethoven closed his eyes forever.

The characteristic repeated notes of the second movement find reflection in the third, which is in the conventional form of minuet-trio-minuet. Here Schubert moves with easy mastery from music that disturbs the soul to music that comforts it. The repeated note gesture finds its place in the finale, too, so much so that when the magnificently portentous music of the second movement returns, on three occasions, as three separate episodes in the larger episodic structure, it comes not as an intrusion but as an inevitability. This is one of several reminiscences in this piece that constitute the “organic unity” found here and elsewhere, including in Beethoven's mature works, that is a defining element of the “romantic era” of which I spoke earlier, which stretches from the death of Beethoven to the First World War.

Schubert's E-flat Piano Trio is an entertainment even longer than Beethoven's greatest contribution to the category, the “Archduke,” in B-flat, Op. 97, of 1811. This did not prevent the Schubert from becoming one of the pieces of which his greatest advocate, Robert Schumann, became particularly fond. But it did cause Schubert to authorize several cuts, especially in the last movement, in order to satisfy the shady fellow who was his Viennese publisher, Heinrich Probst. In fact, Probst was a musician—he is known to have played four-hand music with

Schumann—but he was uncertain, in 1827, of the commercial value of Schubert’s merchandise. (Today, at Sotheby’s, a few pages of a Schubert autograph can go for \$50,000.) As I write these words, I am hopeful that tonight’s artists will avoid Schubert’s cuts. If, in the finale, the “farewell” music from the second movement returns on two occasions rather than three, you will know what the artists did with my hope.

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

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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>.

Joel Pitchon, soloist, concertmaster, chamber music player, and Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at Smith College. Mr. Pitchon studied with Lewis Kaplan, Oscar Shumsky and Joseph Fuchs and received his degrees from The Juilliard School. He has served as the concertmaster for numerous orchestras, including the Orquestra Ciutat de Barcelona (Spain), the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Ottawa Symphony and the EOS Chamber Orchestra. As a soloist and collaborator, Mr. Pitchon has recently performed with the Berkshire Bach Society in their New Year's Bach Brandenburg celebration. The New York Times noted his playing in the EOS Orchestra's production of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* as "superb." He has recorded two CDs for the Gasparo label: *Four Sonatas* for violin and piano, with the composer Clifton J. Noble, Jr. and *New England Legacy*, works by Quincy Porter, Walter Piston, and Amy Beach with pianist Jonathan Bass. *Sun Threads*, the chamber music of Augusta Read Thomas, was made with the Walden Chamber Players for ARTCD. This fall, 2019, Mr. Pitchon anticipates the release of a new CD of piano trios, works by Piston, Bernstein and Perera, on the Bridge label. Mr. Pitchon is currently co-director of the Sage Chamber Music Society and chair of the Smith College Music Department.

Marie-Volcy Pelletier, cellist, is a native of Paris. She received the Premier Prix in Cello and Chamber Music from the Conservatoire National de Région de Boulogne-Billancourt, France, where she studied with Michel Strauss. Ms. Pelletier was a member of the Lyon Symphony at the age of 21, and won a Fulbright Scholarship to study with Bernard Greenhouse, cellist of the renowned Beaux Arts Trio, at the New England Conservatory. She has been the acting principal cellist of the Orquestra Ciutat de Barcelona in Spain. While living in London Ms. Pelletier frequently participated in concerts of the London Symphony Orchestra and was a member of the BBC Orchestra. She has been featured in chamber music concerts and given recitals on both sides of the Atlantic.

Pelletier was a founding member of the Concert Players String Trio in London, the Forster String Trio and the Kinor Quartet in New York City. She was also a member of the Laurentian String Quartet, which held a residency at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. She has performed at the Monadnock Music Festival in New Hampshire; the Light House Chamber Players in Cape Cod, Mass.; the Mohawk Trails Concerts; and the Manchester Music Festival in Vermont. Soon to be released on the Bridge label, Ms. Pelletier may be heard on a CD of piano trios by Piston, Perera and Bernstein. Recognized as a highly effective teacher, Pelletier is a Lecturer in Cello Performance at Smith College. She is currently a member of the Sage Chamber Music Society.

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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