

Sonata A-major D 959 Op. Posth Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Franz Schubert was not only a prolific song writer but also the creator of 12 finished piano sonatas and a considerable number of sonata fragments. He also wrote the widely known 8 Impromptus and about 400 dances for piano. Though only a modest pianist ("the devil shall play this," he remarked about his fiendishly difficult Wanderer Fantasy), his sonatas in their demands belong to the most important works written for this genre.

The sonata in A-major D 959 belongs to Schubert's last three posthumously published sonatas for piano, all written in the year of his death in 1828. The A major work has more of a 'positive' mood than the dark and turbulent c-minor Sonata or the melancholic B-flat sonata.

After an outstandingly evocative and atmospheric ending of the first movement, the affinity of this work with other late works (such as "Winterreise" – a bitter statement of delusion – and the String Quintet in C major with its ethereal slow movement) becomes clear in the second movement.

After a deeply moving, melancholic first section, unforgivingly strict in its rhythm, chaos erupts in the middle section. There is no more form or structure, the piece explodes into violent outbursts, and there is no resolution until finally the lament of the beginning returns and the movement ends in total darkness. It is in this movement that we can catch a glimpse of the personal abysses Schubert was facing.

The next two movements in their innocent and playful manner create a wonderful contrast to this dark world. In order to create a coherent structure, Schubert repeats in the last bars of the ending the beginning motif, reminding the listener of the distinctive beginning bars.

Sepuluh Jari Gareth Farr (1968 -)

New Zealander Gareth Farr wrote *Sepuluh Jari* in 1996. In the foreword the composer states:

From a recently-unearthed letter, apparently in the hand of J.S. Bach:

“...and here it is, my recently completed toccata, *Sepuluh Jari*—it means ‘ten fingers’ in the native language here on the island of Bali. I'm forever grateful to you for persuading me to take leave from my position as church organist and spend a year in the Hindu lands of India and Bali. I have found the rhythms and scales of the music here so inspirational that I could not stop them from creeping into this piece. “You must forgive me, though, if it gets a little crazy at times; a strange potion offered me from a coconut shell may be to blame—it made me feel quite queer...”

It is indeed a very inspired Toccata, which in its bravura writing reminds us of the Bach Toccatas, though the Gamelan adds a distinctive Farr flavour to this highly original and unusual piece of relentless energy. The piano is partly used as a percussion instrument, creating unusual sound effects and exotic timbre.

-- Interval --

CARNAVAL OPUS 9

SCHUMANN (1810 – 1856)

Carnaval Opus 9 (or *Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes* – Little Scenes on Four Notes) was composed from 1834-1835. It consists of a collection of short pieces representing masked revellers at Carnival, a festival before Easter. Schumann gives musical expression to himself, his friends and colleagues, and characters from improvised Italian comedy (*commedia dell'arte*).

For Schumann, the four notes were encoded puzzles, and he predicted that "deciphering my masked ball will be a real game for you." The 21 pieces are connected by a recurring motif. In each section of *Carnaval* there appears either one or both of two series of musical notes called Sphynxes.

In his wayward, highly ingenious imagination Schumann created a firework of emotions and characters. There is often no "sane" middle; everything is extremely charged with passion and extreme statements. The two characters within himself, which he called Florestan (fiery, passionate) and Eusebius (sentimental, sensitive), battle along here and the piece culminates in the truly mad "Marche de Davidsbündler contre les philistines," a piece where artists and bureaucrats have it all out!

Carnaval was composed during Schumann's most productive early period, where he wrote nearly exclusively works for the piano from 1832-1839. The shadows of the future, his manic depression, and the more convoluted later works are not yet to be sensed here. It is one of his most outgoing, colourful creations, a bravura display of romantic piano writing in all its excesses and eccentricities.

Concert paraphrase on Johann Strauss

"Wine, Women and Song"

Leopold Godowsky (1870 -1938)

Leopold Godowsky was the enfant terrible of the Golden Age of piano playing. Born in Russia (now Lithuania) he emigrated in his teens to the US, where he pursued a highly successful career as a pianist. >From 1900-1914 he lived in Berlin but emigrated back to the US at the beginning of World War I, becoming one of the most influential and revered pianists of his time before suffering a stroke in 1930 that damaged his career irrevocably.

Writing almost exclusively for the piano he excelled in creating extremely complicated and demanding transcriptions of other composers' works, among them the infamously difficult 53 studies on Chopin's Etudes.

His piano writing is notable for its counterpoint, interwoven melodies, and the care with which they are designed to fit the hand.

His writing is also notable for demanding the utmost from the interpreter. The Fledermaus Paraphrase for example has 3 themes from the operetta sounding simultaneously, a considerable problem for any performer! "Wine, Women and Song" was written probably around 1907, and he uses the Waltz of Johann Strauss as a vehicle for his own musical ideas. In its dreamlike sequences and its perfect realisations of the sonorities of the piano as an instrument, it displays perfectly the imaginative possibilities within Strauss's waltz.

Michael Endres

Julliard- and London-trained German Pianist Michael Endres is considered one of the world's top Schubert interpreters. He was a prize winner at the Geza Anda and International Schubert Competition in Switzerland and Germany; his extensive (and multiple-prizewinning) discography includes the complete sonatas of Mozart, Schubert, Weber and Bax, and complete solo works of Ravel and Schumann; and he has appeared throughout the US, Europe and Asia in such exalted venues as Carnegie Hall, the Berlin Philharmonie, Musikverein Vienna, and Suntory Hall. Endres accompanied legendary Baritone Hermann Prey for many years, and has appeared in major festivals in the US and Europe. Since 2009, he has resided in the South Island of New Zealand with his New Zealand-born wife. He is Professor of Piano at the University of Canterbury.