



BRONFMAN & MCDERMOTT
THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2020

GERALD R. FORD AMPHITHEATER

CONCERT 7 PM

Yefim Bronfman, piano
Anne-Marie McDermott, piano

SCHUBERT

Marche Militaire in D major for Piano, Four Hands, D. 733, No. 1 (5 minutes)

SCHUBERT

Fantasy in F minor for Piano, Four Hands, D. 934 (19 minutes)
Allegro molto moderato — Largo — Allegro vivace — Tempo I

BRAHMS

Sonata in F minor for Two Pianos, Op. 34b (35 minutes)
(piano version of the Quintet for Piano, Two Violins, Viola and Cello, Op. 34)
Allegro non troppo
Andante, un poco adagio
Scherzo: Allegro
Finale: Poco sostenuto — Allegro non troppo

Marche Militaire in D major for Piano, Four Hands, D. 733, No. 1 (1818)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

In June 1816, when he was nineteen, Schubert received his first fee for one of his compositions (a now-lost cantata for the name-day of his teacher, Heinrich Watteroth), and decided that he had sufficient reason to leave his irksome teaching post at his father's school in order to follow the life of an artist. He moved into the Viennese apartments of his devoted friend Franz von Schober, an Austrian civil servant who was then running the state lottery, and celebrated his new freedom by composing incessantly, rising shortly after dawn (sometimes he slept with his glasses on so as not to waste any time getting started in the morning), pouring out music until early afternoon, and then spending the evening haunting the cafés of Grinzing or making music with friends. Those convivial *soirées* became more frequent and drew increasing notice during the following months, and they were the principal means by which Schubert's works became known to the city's music lovers. In September 1817, Schober's brother returned from Paris, and the penniless composer reluctantly removed himself from his room in the city to his father's home and school in the suburbs. Schubert remained with his family until the following summer, when he eagerly accepted a temporary post as music tutor to the daughters of Count Johann Esterházy in Zseliz (now Zeliezovce in Slovakia), 150 miles east of Vienna. "Thank God I can live at last," he wrote to a friend over the prospect of being on his own.

At Zseliz, Schubert was charged with teaching piano and singing to the two countesses, Marie (aged sixteen) and Karoline (twelve), and to provide musical entertainment for the family and their guests. He apparently liked instructing the young countesses ("nice children," he called them), got along well with the staff, and enjoyed the rural surroundings, and the creativity that had been temporarily stunted by returning to the paternal home in Vienna was again unleashed. Several works for piano four hands suited to the requirements of his appointment at Zseliz followed: the Sonata in B-flat, D. 617; a set of German Dances, D. 618; the Variations on a French Song, D. 624; and the *Trois Marches Militaires*, D. 733. The *Marches Militaires*, published in 1826 by Diabelli, are delightful souvenirs of the convivial, drawing-room self-entertainment that was the principal form of music-making in 19th-century Europe.

Fantasy in F minor for Piano, Four Hands, D. 934 (1828)
Franz Schubert

On March 26, 1828 in the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, Schubert gave the only public concert entirely of his works held during his lifetime. The event, prompted and sponsored by his circle of devoted friends, was a significant artistic and financial success, and he used the proceeds to celebrate the occasion at a local tavern, pay off some old debts, acquire a new piano, and buy tickets for Niccolò Paganini's sensational debut in Vienna three days later. The first important composition Schubert completed after that milestone in his career was the Fantasy in F minor, the most poetic of his creations for piano duet (i.e., four hands at one keyboard). The work was finished in April, but apparently had been sketched soon after the beginning of the year, since Schubert offered it for publication to Schott in February 1828 along with the Quartets in G major and D minor ("Death and the Maiden"), three operas, Mass in A-flat, E-flat Piano Trio and several dozen songs. His proposal was refused, and the score for

the Fantasy was not issued until Diabelli of Vienna brought it out in 1829, a year after the composer's death. On May 9, 1828, Schubert and Franz Lachner performed the piece for their friend, the writer and Schubertian Eduard von Bauernfeld, who recorded in his diary, "Today Schubert (with Lachner) played this new, wonderful four-hand Fantasy to me." The score was dedicated to Countess Caroline Esterházy, a young student of his upon whom the bachelor Franz seems to have had a crush — he once told her that everything he wrote was secretly dedicated to her, though the Fantasy is the only one of his compositions to bear her name.

Schubert was skilled as a violinist, violist and solo pianist, but his favorite form of participatory chamber music was the piano duet. He wrote some sixty works for this convivial medium, though most date from his younger years, before he took up his bohemian existence in central Vienna when he was twenty. The Fantasy in F minor is his last and greatest contribution to the four-hand repertory, which, according to Maurice Brown in his study of Schubert, "has, in the highest degree, all those characteristic qualities of the composer that have endeared him to generations of music lovers." The Fantasy is spread across four continuous formal sections, the first and last spawned from the same thematic material so as to unify the overall structure. The opening portion, with its delicately rocking accompaniment and precisely etched melody, achieves a haunting blend of mystery and nostalgia that only Mozart could rival. Sterner motives are introduced for the sake of contrast. The following *Largo* section uses dramatic dotted-rhythm figurations at its beginning and end to frame the more tender melody that occupies its central region. A brilliant triple-meter *Allegro*, the pianistic analog of the Scherzo in the contemporaneous C major Symphony ("The Great"), forms the dancing heart of the Fantasy. The themes of the opening section return in heightened, often contrapuntal settings to round out this masterpiece of Schubert's fullest maturity.

Sonata in F minor for Two Pianos, Op. 34b (1862-1863)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

When Brahms ambled into his favorite Viennese café one evening, so the story goes, a friend asked him how he had spent his day. "I was working on my symphony," he said. "In the morning I added an eighth note. In the afternoon I took it out." The anecdote may be apocryphal, but its intent faithfully reflects Brahms' painstaking process of creation, which is perhaps seen nowhere better than in the Sonata for Two Pianos in F minor.

Brahms began work on the piece as a string quintet with two cellos, the same scoring as Schubert's incomparable C major Quintet, in early 1862, and by August he had the first three movements ready to send to his friend and mentor Clara Schumann. On September 3rd, she replied, "I do not know how to start telling you the great delight your Quintet has given me. I have played it over many times and I am full of it." When she received the finale in December, she wrote, "I think the last movement rounds the whole thing off splendidly.... The work is a masterpiece." The violinist Joseph Joachim also received a copy of the new String Quintet from Brahms. At first he was enthusiastic, writing to the composer on November 5, 1862, "This piece is certainly of the greatest importance and is strong in character." After playing through the

composition several times over the ensuing six months, however, Joachim began to have reservations about it. "The details of the work show some proof of overpowering strength," he noted, "but what is lacking, to give me pure pleasure, is, in a word, charm. After a time, on hearing the work quietly, I think you will feel the same as I do about it." Brahms tinkered with the score to satisfy Joachim's objections, and had it played privately in Vienna, but decided that medium and music were still unhappily coupled.

By February 1863, the String Quintet had been recast as a Sonata for Two Pianos, which Brahms performed at a concert in Vienna on April 17, 1864 with Carl Tausig, a musical ally for whom he had written the *Paganini Variations* the year before. The premiere met with little critical acclaim. Clara continued to be delighted with the work's musical substance, but thought that "it cannot be called a Sonata. Rather it is a work so full of ideas that it requires an orchestra for its interpretation. [Those were the years before the First Symphony appeared, when Clara pestered Brahms repeatedly to write something in that grand genre.] These ideas are for the most part lost on the piano. The first time I tried the work I had the feeling that it was an arrangement.... Please, remodel it once more!"

One final time, during the summer of 1864, Brahms revised the score, this time as a Quintet for Piano, Two Violins, Viola and Cello, an ensemble suggested to him by the conductor Hermann Levi. The Quintet was published by Rieter-Biedermann in 1865, and given its formal public premiere in Paris on March 24, 1868. Unlike the original strings-only version of the work, which he destroyed (Brahms was almost pathologically secretive about his sketches and unfinished works), he also allowed the Sonata for Two Pianos to be published in 1872. Shortly before its appearance, he had played the Sonata with Clara for the Princess Anna von Hessen, who was enthralled by it. As a result, Brahms dedicated both versions of the work to the Princess, who purchased for the composer the manuscript score of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor as a token of her gratitude.

The opening movement — tempestuous and tragic in mood, not unlike the D minor Piano Concerto, completed in 1859 — is in a tightly packed sonata form. The dramatic main theme is stated immediately in unison, and then repeated with greater force. The complementary theme, given in C-sharp minor above an insistently repeated triplet figuration, is more subdued and lyrical in nature than the previous melody. The closing theme achieves the brighter tonality of A-flat major to offer a brief respite from the movement's pervasive strong emotions. The development section treats the main and second themes, and, also like the First Piano Concerto, ushers in the recapitulation on a great wave of sound.

The outer sections of the three-part form (A-B-A) second movement are based on a gentle, lyrical strain in sweet, close-interval harmonies, while the movement's central portion uses a melody incorporating an octave-leap motive.

The Scherzo is one of Brahms' most electrifying essays. The Scherzo proper comprises three elements: a rising theme of vague rhythmic identity; a snapping motive in strict, dotted rhythm; and a march-like strain in full chordal harmony. These three components are juxtaposed throughout the movement, with the dotted-rhythm theme being given special prominence, including a vigorous fugal working-out. The central trio grows from a theme that is a lyrical transformation of the Scherzo's chordal march strain.

The Finale opens with a pensive slow introduction fueled by deeply felt chromatic harmonies, exactly the sort of passage that caused Arnold Schoenberg to label Brahms a “modernist.” The body of the movement, in fast tempo, is a hybrid of rondo and sonata forms, a formal technique that finds its roots in the music of Haydn. Despite the buoyant, Gypsy flavor of the movement’s thematic material, the tragic tenor of the work is maintained until its closing page.

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