

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 7 July 2025
7.30pm

Kristian Bezuidenhout fortepiano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasy in C minor D2e (1811)

I. Largo • II. Andantino • III. Allegro • IV. Largo

Allegretto in C minor D915 (1827)

Adagio in C D459a No. 1 (?1816)

Minuet in A minor D277a (?1815)

13 Variations on a Theme of Hüttenbrenner D576 (1817)

March in B minor D757a (1822)

Ungarische Melodie in B minor D817 (1824)

Minuet in C sharp minor D600 (?1814)

Valse in A from *Valses sentimentales* D779 (c.1823)

Adagio in D flat D505 (?1818)

Interval

Piano Sonata in E flat D568 (1817)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante molto •

III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Allegro moderato



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Though a more than competent pianist, Franz Schubert was no keyboard virtuoso à la Mozart and Beethoven. A friend once observed that 'the expression of the emotional world within him far outweighed his technique'. What he lacked in digital brilliance, he evidently compensated in poetic feeling. After he played his A minor Sonata, D845, in Kremsmünster in 1825, Schubert reported that his listeners told him that 'the keys became singing voices under my hands, which, if true, greatly pleases me, since I cannot stand the wretched chopping which even distinguished pianists indulge in....'

Vocally inspired cantabile was of the essence for Schubert, both in his own playing and the hundreds of works he wrote for keyboard. With the rise of domestic music making there was a flourishing market in Vienna for keyboard miniatures; and along with his songs, they formed the basis of Schubert's early fame. We can guess, too, that many of his waltzes, *Ländler* and *écossaises* were initially improvised at parties before being refined for publication.

In similar improvisatory vein is the earliest music in Kristian Bezuidenhout's programme, the **C minor Fantasy, D2e**. Composed around 1811 while Schubert was a student at Vienna's Stadtkonvikt, this is his first surviving keyboard music. Like so many works from his teens, it breathes the spirit of his idol Mozart, and specifically his C minor Fantasy, K475: both in the brooding C minor outer sections and in the Fantasy's centrepiece, an E major *Andantino* which spawns a set of four variations. A vast chasm separates this Mozartian pastiche from the **C minor Allegretto** of April 1827. Outwardly simple, this haunting miniature epitomises late Schubert in its mingled inwardness and quiet harmonic audacity.

The **Adagio in C D459a** (c.1816), also evokes Mozart, both in the ornamental opening, and in the minor-keyed pathos of the second theme. Mozartian, too, is the **Minuet, D277a** (1815), whose truculent outer section sounds like a simplified paraphrase of the minuet of Mozart's G minor Symphony, No. 40.

Two of Schubert's staunchest admirers were the brothers Anselm and Josef Hüttenbrenner, sons of a wealthy Styrian landowner. In 1815 Anselm had become a composition student of Salieri in Vienna. Two years later Schubert produced a **set of variations** on a theme from Anselm's recent First String Quartet. The theme itself, with its marching dactylic rhythms, echoes the A minor *Allegretto* of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, a favourite work of Schubert's. Following Classical tradition, the opening variations grow increasingly animated. Variation 9, in A major, dissolves the theme in a romantic haze, while the final variation transforms Hüttenbrenner's march into a 6/8 canter, with an echo of the first movement of Beethoven's Seventh.

With the Napoleonic Wars still a vivid memory, Schubert turned out numerous sets of marches for piano duet (a favourite domestic form), plus a smattering for piano solo. Among these is the **March in B minor, D757a** (1822), a vigorous *marche héroïque* whose stirring right-hand melody is underpinned by a Baroque-style running bass.

Like Haydn and (occasionally) Beethoven before him, Schubert enjoyed incorporating stylised Hungarian Romani music into his works for the salon. A case in point is the so-called *Ungarische Melodie* in **B minor**, composed in September 1824 while Schubert was engaged as music tutor to the young Esterházy countesses in Zseliz, Hungary. A friend of the Count's, Baron Karl von Schönstein, later recalled that Schubert had picked up the tune from a maid working in the Esterházy kitchen.

Dating from 1813 or 1814, the melancholy **C sharp minor Minuet D600** may have been intended for a piano sonata. Whereas this minuet remained unpublished in Schubert's lifetime, the 34 *Valses sentimentales* published in 1825 quickly became popular domestic fare. Many were doubtless danced by Schubert's friends at the music parties that became known as Schubertiades. Later arranged by Liszt, the A major waltz unfolds as a love duet for soprano and alto 'voices' against a soft 'oompah' accompaniment.

In 1815, aged 18, Schubert began and then abandoned two keyboard sonatas. Two years later, after moving into the family home of his affluent friend Franz von Schober, he returned to the genre with renewed enthusiasm, doubtless inspired by the presence of a six-octave piano in the Schober apartment. It was surely in the hope – vain, as it turned out – of immediate publication that he completed three sonatas, including one in the rare key of D flat, D567, and began several more during 1817 and 1818. One of these fragments was the Sonata in F minor, D625. It is probable that Schubert intended the **Adagio in D flat, D505**, as the slow movement to this unfinished sonata. Slipping from D flat to A major, the central section is full of Schubert's trademark audacious harmonic shifts.

We can only guess why Schubert revised the four-movement D flat Sonata, D567, of 1817 as the **Sonata in E flat, D568**. Perhaps he calculated that three flats rather than five would make it more attractive to the amateur market, though ironically the sonata was only published posthumously. The first movement – expanded from its D flat original – reveals Schubert at his most amiably Viennese, with a whiff of café music in the serenading second theme over a guitar-style accompaniment. In the minuet-like opening we are again reminded of Schubert's beloved Mozart, though, typically, he explores a bolder range of keys than Mozart would have dared so early in the movement.

The *Andante molto* hints at the loneliness and confessional pathos of Schubert's late slow movements. Mozart also lies behind the gracious, songful minuet (newly composed when Schubert revised the sonata) and lolling *Ländler* trio (retained from the D flat version), while the playful finale combines a catchy waltz lilt with the most harmonically adventurous development that Schubert had composed up to that date. Like so much of the music in this recital, the whole sonata unfolds as an effortless flow of lyric melody.

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