

audite

A portrait of pianist Andrea Lucchesini. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket over a dark shirt. He has curly, graying hair and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His right hand is raised to his chin, and his left hand is resting on a surface in front of him. The background is a dark, textured blue wall. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and hands against the dark background.

Andrea Lucchesini

SCHUBERT • LATE PIANO WORKS

VOL. I

Franz Schubert
Late Piano Works • Vol. I

Piano Sonata No. 20 in A major, D. 959

- I. Allegro 17:19
- II. Andantino 8:29
- III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace – Trio. Un poco più lento 5:23
- IV. Rondo. Allegretto 12:40

Piano Sonata No. 4 in A minor, D. 537

- I. Allegro, ma non troppo 8:18
- II. Allegretto quasi andantino 8:11
- III. Allegro vivace 5:36

Allegretto in C minor, D. 915 6:16

Schubert – Late Piano Works

“Over the last few years, Schubert has been my great love”, Andrea Lucchesini confesses: he is particularly interested in the “early” mature works of the composer who died so young, not least as a contrast to Schubert’s overwhelming contemporary. “Having studied Beethoven for a long time and performed his 32 sonatas, I now felt the urge to engage more closely with Schubert’s musical idiom. So I followed in the footsteps of the wanderer ... we are still travelling.”

Beethoven and Schubert – Andrea Lucchesini appears to perceive the two composers at the cusp of the romantic era as antipodes. And even if the famous dictum of “Who is capable of writing anything after Beethoven?” was not uttered by Schubert, he nonetheless preferred genres that his overpowering colleague had not predetermined in his typically dominant manner, such as songs, mass settings, operas and piano duets. It was not until 1815, when he had produced such masterworks as *Erlkönig* or *Rastlose Liebe*, that Schubert carefully felt his way around the genre of the piano sonata, and even then most of these forays remained fragmentary. At the age of twenty, when he had concluded his studies with Antonio Salieri, he also freed himself of his reserve towards the sonata and began systematically to experiment, “acquiring and reviewing formal and technical traditions, forming his own tonal language” (Walther Dürr).

The Departure

“Since Schubert did not have much time left”, Lucchesini explains, “his entire sonata oeuvre spans little more than ten years, yielding diverse results and solutions. Some works remained incomplete, others were later revised. 1817 saw him write his first **Sonata in A minor, D537**. The tune of the central movement, Allegretto quasi andantino, remained in the back of the composer’s head and makes another appearance in the final rondo of the A major Sonata, D959.”

The early Sonata in A minor was indeed a remarkable demonstration of his talent, and also an act of emancipation from Beethoven’s sonata model. From the very beginning, the thirds and dance-like touches feel Schubertian, softening the harsh, minor-mode theme reminiscent of Beethoven, without taking away from its rhythmic insistence. The secondary theme with its ostinato bass, pounding along into the development section, is also Schubertian. But here, in the traditional territory of motivic transformation and development, none of the previously introduced motifs continues to play a part. Schubert appears to enter the realm of dreams and improvisations, focusing entirely on a sighing motif which he treats in turn gently and violently, until he introduces a completely new melody – a technique which is reminiscent more of Mozart than Beethoven.

The second movement embeds the afore-mentioned melody (which reappeared eleven years later) into one of those allegretto movements that Schubert often preferred to an adagio. “It strides or wafts along like an idealised dance”, the pianist Alfred Brendel stated; Schubert, following rondo technique, employs the charming main theme as a frame for two contrasting central sections. Intriguingly, Schubert transforms the theme’s accompaniment and the harmonic ambience for each repeat. Andrea Lucchesini identifies this as a typical feature of Schubert’s musical language, “that is to say the careful choice of accompanying parts. For a productive

composer of songs like Schubert these were never secondary, but they underpinned the expressive content – he used them to intensify dramatic developments or to create elegiac counterparts.”

Schubert did not conceive a scherzo as an independent movement for the A minor Sonata, but opted to integrate it into the finale, which opens with vivid rhetoric: a question, charging forward three times, receives different responses each time after a short pause, until a mellifluous shift to a major key implies a continuation of the proceedings. However, despite the dance-like nature of the secondary theme, the piece ends with the pounding quavers from the first movement.

The Wanderer

For posterity, Schubert’s character is elusive – partly because there are many documents from his circle of friends, but hardly any insightful utterances of his own. The small number of writings from his pen that survive are letters to his friends and publishers, the enigmatic, psychological narration *Mein Traum* [My dream] of 1822 and an irregularly kept diary which contains thoughts such as this: “I have often heard writers say: The world resembles a stage where every person plays their role. Applause and rebuke follow in another world. – One role, however, has been abandoned, and who can tell whether it was played well or badly?” It is in such lines that one finds the almost adult composer in search of emancipation, of his role outside his father’s school which had been his home and place of work in his youth. Schubert never settled anywhere: the changes of residence during the final decade of his life were legendary. It is impossible nowadays to determine whether Schubert’s restlessness was down to shyness, latent homosexual tendencies or an infantile attachment disorder resulting in an inability to form long-term relationships.

The “wanderer” has therefore, with reason, become a symbol of Schubert’s conception of life and art – and Andrea Lucchesini, in his approach towards the late Schubert, also sees himself as a “viandante”. “Rediscovering his last works has demonstrated to me the difference between the artist who entertained his friends at social gatherings, and the composer working in solitude – without any prospect of publishing or performing his works, completely confined to his internal world where he felt many precipices. In that sense, studying the late Schubert also requires the ability to follow the ‘wanderer’ on his path, to take a plunge into his emotional labyrinth, not only to become intoxicated with his fabulous themes, but also to recognise their infinite variations which are the result of bold modulations or short extensions that take one’s breath away. This is how the work of a performer became a complete immersion for me.”

Schubert’s art of minimal variants and metamorphoses manifests itself even in a small occasional work such as the **Allegretto in C minor, D915**, which he wrote into the personal album of his friend Ferdinand Walcher, a lawyer and councillor to the archduke, in April 1827, shortly before Walcher travelled to Venice. The theme of the simple ternary piece is elegiac and song-like, reminiscent of the song *Wasserflut* (“Manche Trän’ aus meinen Augen ist gefallen in den Schnee” – “Some tears from my eyes have fallen into the snow”) from the *Winterreise* series which he was writing at that time. Although Schubert constructs the piece highly symmetrically, using only a few motifs, he manages to create a dense atmosphere between sorrow and a sense of departure (with a central section); the constant shifts between minor and major create a bittersweet note.

Arrival

Franz Schubert died at the age of thirty-one at his brother's apartment in the afternoon of the 19th of November 1828. The cause of death was probably a combination of a late stage of syphilis and typhoid fever. During the months before his death he had composed several major works, including the last three piano sonatas. "In Schubert's final years", according to Lucchesini, "illness, a premonition of death and hectic creativity had a magical effect on him – any day could have been his last day, maybe that is why he worked faster."

By no means, however, did Schubert throw the three sonatas together spontaneously – he prepared them by producing extensive sketches. Whilst the C minor Sonata in particular harks back to Beethoven's pathos, the **Sonata in A major, D959**, is entirely Schubertian from the outset. As in the final string quartet in G major or in the string quintet, the first seven bars feel more like raw material than a theme – this does not emerge until later, featuring characteristically springy contours, and it is followed by a *cantabile* secondary theme. Once the exposition has reached a standstill, Beethoven would have continued by developing his material. Schubert, on the other hand, proceeds differently once again, creating an almost independent piano piece within the sonata form by developing, in the central section, a variant of the secondary theme above pounding quavers. For Andrea Lucchesini this proves that Schubert, even in his late works, did not deviate from his own path: "Initially one is under the impression that Schubert, in his final three sonatas, returned to the established four-movement form. But in fact the old forms prove a perfect receptacle for his innovations. Perhaps the scherzo is the only quiet zone where one is reminded of the social evenings held by his friends. In the remaining movements Schubert, with unfailing inventiveness, portrays all moods from turmoil to tenderness, lyrical élan to precipitous sombreness, using bold modulations and unexpected ruptures."

According to Lucchesini, the best example of the Schubertian cosmos with its focus on the essential can be found in the andantino of the A major Sonata which opens with a simple, melancholy theme – "unembellished, almost skeletal, reduced to the substance of an inner monologue. Nonetheless, the power of this opening is at once painful and magical, with the piano sounding like a string quartet before transforming into an orchestra in the blustery central section." This quasi orchestra sparks a veritable tempest in the manner of Franz Liszt's storm depictions. At the end, everything flows into the repeat of the initial theme where the abating tremor is still perceptible.

The scherzo, written in *ländler* style, exemplifies Schubert's delicacy with its rhythmic wit, its perky outbursts and its perfect proportions. The finale, which deliberately ignores sonata form, replacing it with a potpourri-like rondo, uses the theme of the A minor Sonata of 1817, ending with a memory of the sonata's opening bars. The wanderer has reached his point of departure.



Andrea Lucchesini

Trained under the guidance of Maria Tipo, Andrea Lucchesini gained international recognition at a very young age when he won the *Dino Ciani International Competition* at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Since then he has performed throughout the world with leading orchestras under conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Dennis Russell Davies, Charles Dutoit, Daniel Harding, Vladimir Jurowski and Giuseppe Sinopoli.

In 1994 Andrea Lucchesini was awarded the prestigious *Accademia Musicale Chigiana International Prize* by European music critics, followed by the *F. Abbiati Prize* from Italian music critics in 1995.

Numerous recordings document his artistic career, among them Luciano Berio's concerto *Echoing Curves*, conducted by the composer himself. This marked the beginning of his close relationship with Berio, with whom Lucchesini witnessed the creation of the composer's final and challenging work for solo piano, *Sonata*. He performed the world premiere of this piece in 2001 and recorded it together with all other piano works of Berio. In recent years, Lucchesini has enthusiastically immersed himself in the Schubertian repertoire, e.g. with the recording of the *Impromptus*.

Since 1990 he has dedicated his attention also to chamber music exploring various formations and varied repertoire, including his close collaboration with cellist Mario Brunello and the Quartetto di Cremona.

In addition, Andrea Lucchesini is passionately dedicated to teaching. He currently teaches at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole where he was also artistic director from 2008 until 2016. He is frequently invited to give master classes at major music institutions throughout Europe and in New York.

He serves as a jury member at numerous international piano competitions and was appointed *Accademico di Santa Cecilia* in 2008.

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