



SCHUBERT | LISZT

Piano Sonatas

Jimin Oh-Havenith

Franz Schubert

**Piano Sonata No. 18
in G major, D. 894 ('Fantasia')**

- I. Molto moderato e cantabile *21:04*
- II. Andante *10:15*
- III. Menuetto. Allegro moderato *4:40*
- IV. Allegretto *9:23*

Franz Liszt

**Piano Sonata in
B minor, S. 178 *31:32***

Elective Affinities: Piano Sonatas by Franz Schubert and Franz Liszt

The program of this CD not only juxtaposes major piano works by Franz Schubert and Franz Liszt, but also provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between two great composers of the nineteenth century who were unable to meet in person, but who had much more in common than merely their first name.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Liszt's work is hardly imaginable without the influence of Schubert, even if Liszt saw and presented himself above all as the heir of Beethoven (and to a scarcely lesser extent, Bach). Beethoven is said to have baptized the child prodigy Liszt with a kiss on the forehead at one of his first public performances on April 13, 1823 in Vienna, while Schubert's reaction, if any, to Liszt's arrival has not been documented. But just ten years after Schubert's premature and untimely death, Liszt made and performed piano transcriptions of Schubert's songs that attest to his well-nigh symbiotic connection with Schubert's world. He arranged a large number of songs, including the two cycles *Die schöne Müllerin*, and *Winterreise* along with *Schwanengesang*, for solo piano, creating with these transcriptions – to this day more feared than beloved by pianists – a distinctly personal engagement with Schubert's music in which he alternately transcribed the songs, intervened in their compositional substance and, on several occasions, even merged two songs into a new whole.

But there is another aspect of Schubert's music that was to prove seminal for Liszt, namely its tonal and formal ambiguity; Schubert experimented with this above all in the sonata form with its different manifestations: the solo piece, chamber music, and the symphony. The first movement of the sonata was of particular interest, since its multi-part organization allows for different solutions. Due to the sonata's origins in the Baroque suite, the first movement was initially conceived and structured in two parts. The first part presents the exposition of the theme (which in a major key ends on the dominant, in a minor key on the tonic parallel in major), while the second part comprises the development and recapitulation ("reprise") of the themes and concludes in the initial key; in addition, both parts are repeated! This two-part form – the so-called "coupe binaire" according to the influential theory of the Bohemian music theorist and friend of Beethoven Antonín Reicha, who would become Liszt's teacher in Paris – changed considerably during the course of Viennese Classicism, largely thanks to Beethoven. His sonatas could be heard in three or four parts, since the development acquired a much greater importance; the exposition no longer necessarily had to be repeated, in the recapitulation the thematic material was significantly altered, and the coda could be transformed into a kind of second development. In his own way Schubert participated in this evolution by separating, in his later sonatas, the tonal from the harmonic recapitulation, thus creating two reprises, as it were.

In the *Wanderer Fantasy*, D. 760 (op. 15) from 1822 we find, for the first time, a highly innovative principle, later adopted and further developed by Schumann, Liszt, and César Franck, of superimposing the first movement form on that of the entire sonata, since the sonata's four movements, which follow one another without pause, correspond at the same time to the stages of exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda. What is more: in place of the traditional primacy of the tonal

relationships between tonic, dominant, and subdominant, we encounter a cyclical organization built on major thirds. Thus the four parts or movements form the circle of major thirds C-E-A-flat-C with a broadening of the second, slow movement via the parallel key of C-sharp minor. The example of Beethoven's last three sonatas, whose keys also yield this circle of major thirds (E major, op. 109, A-flat major, op. 110, and C minor, op. 111), is evident. The extremes of expression, too, of late Beethoven, alternating between lyrical rapture and heightened expressive intensity, are adopted by Schubert. Whereas with Beethoven, a final conception aimed ultimately at redemption or catharsis prevails until the end, with Schubert a distinctive sort of fatalism becomes more and more apparent. The final movements of the last three piano sonatas go around in circles – alternately harried (in the C minor Sonata, D. 958), pervaded by an underlying melancholy (A major, D. 959), and ironically fragmented (B-flat major, D. 960). In the String Quintet, D. 956, the optimism, built up laboriously, is destroyed with a single stroke at the end by the incisive minor second D-flat - C. It would then become a task of the subsequent generation of Romantic composers to find new answers to the problem raised here of an untarnished final apotheosis, among which the model of the “sonate cyclique” (cyclical sonata), first attempted by César Franck in the early 1840s, proved to be particularly attractive. The idea of creating a kind of guiding thread for the listener and staging an instrumental drama through the use of a superordinate theme or motif that recurs at different stages of the work would later dominate Liszt's B minor Sonata from the first to the final measure.

The original title of the Sonata in G major, published by Haslinger in 1827, is “Fantasy, Andante, Menuetto, and Allegretto for Piano Alone,” and thus did not contain the designation “sonata” at all. The fact that this is not merely a collection of four separate pieces, however, is immediately revealed by the decidedly classical arrangement of the movement types and keys. The first movement is in the principal key of G major, the Andante in the dominant of D major followed by a D minor middle section; the minuet (with trio) retains the key of D major, and the last movement returns to G major. This conservatism, which Schubert – in contrast to Beethoven – never completely relinquished, is set against entirely new organizational principles. These are already present in the magical beginning of the opening movement, in which we at first hear a pure, static chord before it is soon called into question and drawn into the gloom of B minor. The initial measures present pianists with paradoxical tasks similar to those posed by the solo beginning of Beethoven's Piano Concerto in G major, op. 58, since here it is necessary to simultaneously express the present moment and an intimation of what is to come, timelessness and the emergence of something new. It would probably not be going too far to read the entire sonata as a meditation on and interpretation of the mood of this beginning. A hovering atmosphere, repeatedly clouded over or coming to a halt, permeates all the movements and tonal manifestations in admirably transparent piano writing.

The parallels between this sonata and Liszt's B minor Sonata are thus quite evident, even if on the surface the differences appear enormous. The B minor Sonata, published in 1853, is an exceptional composition of a different kind, an epochal work that has decisively changed the history of the piano sonata and, both technically and musically speaking, has remained a reference work for pianists to this day. It is possible to admire the sonata, as many great interpreters have done since the

pianist of the premiere, Hans von Bülow, or despise it, like Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms – the latter, reportedly, by demonstratively falling asleep during the private first performance by Liszt himself! – but indifference is not an option. The Sonata long remained something of a Mount Everest among works of its kind, replacing Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” Sonata, which was itself first publicly performed by Liszt (in 1836 in Paris). He dedicated the B minor Sonata to Robert Schumann as a gesture of thanks for his dedication to him of the Fantasie in C major, op. 17. The Fantasie was first published in 1839, but Schumann had since become one of Liszt’s critics, the latter composer being reproached by conservative detractors for betraying the idea of absolute music. It is characteristic of the generosity of Liszt’s personality that this estrangement, which led in 1860 to the so-called partisan dispute between the New German School (represented by Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner) and the classicists (led by Brahms, Joseph Joachim, and Clara Schumann), did not diminish his regard for Schumann – a fact that was certainly also related to Schumann’s contributions to the rediscovery of Schubert, which culminated in the posthumous premiere, led by Mendelssohn Bartholdy, of the great C major Symphony in Leipzig in 1839. By this time Liszt had completed the above-mentioned Schubert transcriptions, in which he developed the pianistic armory of the Sonata; but in contrast to their exuberant virtuosity, in the Sonata technical means and musical purpose are brought into an admirable, almost classical balance. And a glimpse at the Sonata’s architecture also reveals a consummate and innovative mastery of form in which Liszt expanded on the ideas of both Beethoven and Schubert. The former inspired Liszt in his conception of a dramaturgy that is as varied as it is concentrated and in which, in the space of half an hour, an extremely dense succession of contrasting characters unfolds. From the latter, Liszt undoubtedly adopted the multi-functional idea of a multi-part single-movement form, while heightening its ambiguity even further: for example, the “slow movement,” the Andante sostenuto in F-sharp major, is a complete sonata form in miniature, while it remains open whether the “recapitulation” (or the final movement) begins already with the Fugato or more than 100 bars later. And finally, in the coda we can perceive a tendency toward mirror symmetry, with the main themes or motifs now appearing in reverse order. Thus we hear the mysteriously indeterminate descending scale of the introduction once more at the end, like a portent. Liszt had originally planned a brilliant final passage ending in fortissimo; the quiet conclusion is all the more ingenious, whose sequence of harmonies condenses, as in a magnifying glass, the entire sonata, before the low B leaves us with the uncertainty of whether it signifies redemption or resignation.

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Translation: Aaron Epstein

Jimin Oh-Havenith



Jimin Oh-Havenith was born in Seoul, South Korea. In 1979 she began her piano studies with Jin-Woo Chung at the Seoul National University. From 1981 to 1984 she continued her studies with Aloys Kontarsky at the Musikhochschule Köln. In addition to her concert activities as a soloist, radio and CD recordings, she also performed as a piano duo with her late husband Raymund Havenith (†1993).

Jimin taught at the Hochschule für Musik, Mainz and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, Frankfurt am Main. Since 2013 she is active as a soloist again.





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