Sir András Schiff, piano

Friday, October 16 | 8 pm | The Folly Theater

HAYDN
Sonata No. 62 in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI:52
Allegro
Adagio
Finale: Presto

BEETHOVEN
Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111
Maestoso; Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

INTERMISSION

MOZART
Sonata in D Major, K. 576
Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

SCHUBERT
Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960
Molto moderato
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza
Allegro, ma non troppo

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Last March, András Schiff performed sonatas by Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert on this series, choosing repertoire from each composer’s maturity. That recital was a foretaste of this season’s theme, which is late works by great masters. This evening Mr. Schiff presents a complementary program comprising the same composers’ final piano sonata. These masterworks have their own individual stories, and, of course, each piece reflects a distinctive musical language and keyboard style. Collectively, the four sonatas take us from the elegance and balance of the high classic era (via Haydn and Mozart) to the cusp of romanticism (Beethoven and Schubert).

Ironically, both Mozart and Schubert were young – 32 and 31, respectively – when they composed this marvelous music. Their sonatas remind us how richly their genius flowered at such a tender age. Conversely, we must be grateful that Haydn and Beethoven lived as long as they did, so that each of them could achieve the glories of his later style.

**Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI:52**  
**Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

Haydn wrote solo keyboard works throughout his lengthy career. As with his symphonies and string quartets, his style shifted considerably as what we call the galant and rococo periods evolved into the pristine classicism of the late 18th century. Haydn’s early piano sonatas are well-mannered, transparent pieces suitable for student pianists. By contrast, the late E-flat Major Sonata that opens Mr. Schiff’s program is big, brash, and aggressive. Its dramatic chordal opening demands attention. Only the most gifted pianists master this sonata’s technical challenges. Two principal factors affected the striking advances in Haydn’s keyboard writing: English fortepianos and the German-born pianist Therese Jansen.

Although Haydn’s principal instrument was the violin, he could make his way around keyboard instruments and was a competent pianist. When he arrived in London in the 1790s, his acquaintance with keyboards was limited to German and Austrian harpsichords and fortepianos. London was a center of innovative piano manufacturing. Haydn was delighted with the new English instruments, particularly those made by the firms of Longman & Broderip, and Broadwood. Their fuller sonority and capacity for rapid repeated notes influenced his keyboard writing throughout the 1790s. Eventually he ordered a Broadwood piano for his personal use in Vienna.

Haydn met Therese Jansen during his first trip to London and admired her playing. He composed at least two (and probably all three) of his last solo sonatas for her, and later dedicated three piano trios to her as well. They apparently became good friends, for he served as a witness at her wedding to Gaetano Bartolozzi in London in May 1795.

If the E-flat Major Sonata is any indicator, Miss Jansen (as she is identified in Haydn’s correspondence) must have had a formidable technique. The sonata bristles with big chords, extended phrases in parallel thirds, rapid repeated notes, octave passages, crossed hands, and brisk passage work demanding evenness of touch. Dynamics change rapidly. One needs both pianistic control and a responsive instrument.

The heroic opening to the first movement is an outgrowth of the French overture. That, and the theatrical gestures that follow, make a statement that this is very public music. That stated, the sonata’s three movements are startlingly different in character, warranting wholesale gear-shifting to accommodate the music’s personalities.

One would expect a classical sonata in E-flat major to have a slow movement either in B-flat major or in C minor. Haydn’s Adagio is in the astonishing tonality of E major, a startling key change accompanied by a total change of mood. It requires an interpreter who can meld rhythmic precision with intense expressivity. The rhythms are complex and detailed, sometimes with florid ornamentation that foreshadows Chopinesque flights of fancy. Haydn uses unisons effectively, their unexpected spare sound adding to the eloquence.

The finale is Haydn at his wittiest, teasing us even as to what key we are in at the beginning. Repeated notes, sudden stops, and broken chords that dart between the two hands add to the sparkle. Power, delicacy, and moments of lingering expressivity all manifest themselves in this sonata. The boldness of its harmonic relationships and the blazing celebration of high classic technique mark it as perhaps Haydn’s greatest keyboard composition.
Beethoven's Op. 111
In Literature and Criticism

Thomas Mann’s novel Doktor Faustus (1947) relates the saga of a fictitious composer, Adrian Leverkühn, whose life is loosely modeled on the career of Arnold Schoenberg. The novel takes place in early 20th century Germany, spanning the decades from the twilight of Imperial Germany to the Nazi era.

Early in the novel, Thomas Mann devotes a chapter to Beethoven’s Op. 111 piano sonata. The hero and his friend Serenus Zeitblom are still in high school. Their composition teacher, Wendell Kretzschmar, spends an entire hour discussing the sonata’s compression to two movements and Beethoven’s reasons for not composing a third. He rhapsodizes on the sonata’s aesthetic glories. Nothing, of course, could follow the Arietta and its variations.

Mann is the most celebrated novelist to dwell on Beethoven’s final sonata. Many musical scholars have commented eloquently on this sublime music, particularly its second movement, the Arietta. Denis Mathews writes of “the celestial calm of the theme.” The venerable English pianist and critic Sir Donald Francis Tovey described “an infinite variety of quivering ornament” in these variations. Biographer Maynard Solomon notes that the variations are “located in unspecifiable regions, seemingly outside space and time, beyond the frontiers of ordinary experience.”

Igor Stravinsky famously called the riotous third variation the “boogie-woogie variation.” Many musicians consider that Beethoven anticipated jazz by nearly a century in this extraordinary segment. American pianist and writer Charles Rosen stated, “The slow movement of the Op. 111 succeeds as almost no other work in suspending the passage of time at its climax.” In the event, Beethoven takes us to an intensely personal place of almost unbearable beauty.

Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

In his late works, Beethoven sought utmost compression. Op. 111, completed in January 1822, telescopes the expansive four movements of earlier sonatas to two movements. The C Minor Sonata consists of a sonata-allegro movement, followed by a variation movement built on a transcendent theme that furnish maximum contrast on several levels. Storms and angularity in the first movement yield to reverence and floating calm in the second. Beethoven’s dichotomy has prompted many analogies: the real vs. the spiritual world, earthly struggle vs. heavenly experience, dark vs. light. At the end, we have the ultimate resolution of conflict.

From the ominous, rocky shores of Beethoven’s introduction, we move to an angular main theme that seems destined for fugal treatment, but that does not happen. This was Beethoven’s final statement in C minor, a key that had inspired him to write some of his greatest compositions. The movement is proto-romantic in its harmonic volatility and angular melodic leaps.

Listen for diminished seventh chords – tonal music’s most unstable sonority – and pregnant trills. They add to the tempestuous nature of this first movement, and set the stage for the Arietta, Beethoven’s sublime variations.

He now moves to C major, the Viennese key of sunlight. The theme is reverent and hymnlike. Having established that mood, Beethoven proceeds to undo it by means of increased rhythmic complexity and subdivision of the beat. More notes give the false sense that the music has gotten faster. In fact, the pulse is the same. Only our pulses have accelerated. It takes an extended coda and a delirium of trills to arrive at the final peroration. Your heart may still race, but you will find yourself holding your breath.

Meditative variations surface elsewhere in late Beethoven, notably in the Hammerklavier and Op. 109 Piano Sonatas, the Ninth Symphony, the superb Diabelli Variations, and the String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131. These late variations transport us to a realm suspended between
heaven and earth, luminous and transfigured. In this final piano sonata, his progression from the uncompromising disturbance of the first movement to the celestial transcendence of the finale is one of music's great journeys.

**Sonata in D Major, K. 576**  
*Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)*

As is well known, Mozart's financial situation see-sawed between precarious and desperate in the late 1780s. Compounding his difficulties were Wolfgang's and Constanze's near-chronic health problems. When Prince Karl Lichnowsky invited Mozart to accompany him on a journey through Prague, Dresden, and Leipzig in spring 1789, Mozart seized the opportunity, hoping to secure commissions and perhaps royal patronage to improve his circumstances.

He performed for the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II in Berlin that May. The appearance resulted in the apparent commission of six string quartets (the King was an accomplished cellist) and possibly a set of six piano sonatas for the King's eldest daughter, Princess Friederike, then 22-years-old. Our knowledge derives from one of the heartbreaking pleas for money Mozart wrote to his Masonic friend Michael Puchberg. In this one, dated July 14, 1789, he speaks of his "wretched condition."

"Owing to my unfortunate illness I have been prevented from earning anything. You know my present circumstances, but you also know my prospects. . . Meanwhile, I am composing six easy clavier sonatas for Princess Friederike and six quartets for the King, all of which Kozeluch is engraving at my expense."

Mozart only completed three of the quartets and a single sonata in D major, which proved to be his last. There is no formal record of the royal commission for the keyboard works, and Princess Friederike never received the sonata, which remained unpublished until after Mozart's death.

She might have struggled with it, for the only 'easy' thing about it is Mozart's ingratiating manner. This must be one of the most counterpoint-aware pieces that Mozart composed. We know he was keenly interested in Bach and Handel in the late 1780s. The D Major Sonata abounds with canonical ideas and two-part imitation. Its opening unison fanfare has given rise to the sometime nickname of 'Trumpet' Sonata (it is also sometimes called the 'Prussian' Sonata).

That fanfare lends itself well to imitation and more complex counterpoint. Mozart explores his options with consummate skill, interspersing dazzling passage work, occasionally in both hands at once. The first movement provides the classic contrast of sonata form, with a second subject that is a model of lyricism and grace.

Mozart's central *Adagio* in A major is a masterpiece of tasteful ornamentation. Both intimate and elegant, it shares the emotional depth of the great B Minor *Adagio*, K. 540, of the previous year. The finale is radiant and relaxed. Bold triplets accompany the *forte* restatement of the main theme. Triplets dominate the virtuoso figuration of the finale, precluding the need for a cadenza. The glorious workmanship of K. 570 provides a perfect synthesis of galant style and stringent counterpoint.

**Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960**  
*Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828)*

The opening measures of Schubert's final piano sonata bear a startling resemblance to the beginning of Beethoven's *Archduke* Trio. They share not only the key of B-flat major, but also a sense of spaciousness, serenity, and nobility that verges on the sublime.

Whether consciously or not, Schubert paid homage to Beethoven in other ways in this sonata. The most obvious is form: four traditional movements, complete with a *minuet/trio* inserted between the slow movement and the finale. Schubert's musical *modus operandi* is a different matter, however. Where Beethoven emphasized motivic development and architecture, Schubert's building blocks were melodies and a startling sense of tonal migration. He was first and foremost a composer of songs. His gift for melody informs all his instrumental music. This piano sonata has an embarrassment of melodic riches that links it to Schubert's *Lieder* – and it alludes to several of his songs.

The work has excellent company among Schubert's instrumental compositions. The B-flat Major Sonata dates from September 1828. During that month, Schubert completed two other magnificent piano sonatas – the C Minor, D. 958 and the big A Major, D. 959 – and the String Quintet in C Major. All four compositions are bulwarks of the repertoire and brimful of gorgeous themes. This effusion of great music took place when the symptoms caused by Schubert's syphilis were worsening. Seven weeks after he finished the B-flat Major Sonata, he was dead.
ABOUT THE MUSIC

The spacious Molto moderato opens with its theme of Beethovenian “Archduke” nobility. After the initial, partial statement, a sepulchral trill interrupts in the lowest register of the piano. At first it seems like a throwaway gesture. Is it just mysterious, or a trifle ominous? The lyrical theme resumes, and Schubert carries us off on the harmonic adventure of unexpected modulations that marks his music as his own. Interplay between the home tonality of B-flat major, the submediant of G-flat, and D minor recurs with some regularity. And that bass trill – “like a distant roll of thunder,” as Denis Matthews has observed – recurs at key moments during the movement.

After the expanse of an opening movement in relaxed tempo, Schubert was courageous to proceed with an Andante sostenuto: another eleven minutes at an even slower pace. It is a remarkable feat of musical wizardry that he succeeds. Introspective, even private, this movement vacillates between C-sharp minor and A major in music both solemn and profound. Some listeners consider this movement the summit of Schubert’s piano writing. John Gillespie calls it “a marvel of introspection with its strains of pathos and resignation.”

The Scherzo provides both contrast and welcome relief. Bright, brisk, chirpy, and short, it is the ideal tonic at this juncture. Its central trio, in minor mode, benefits from lopsided syncopations that keep us waiting for resolution.

Schubert’s finale is a synthesis of rondo and sonata. After a clarion call on an octave sounding two Gs, he launches into a false statement that implies C minor. (Beethoven used the same ploy in the last movement of his String Quartet in B-flat, Op. 130, the movement that replaced the Grosse Fuge.) Soon enough, B-flat major emerges as the principal key center. Jovial dialogue alternates with a couple of explosive outbursts, but good humor prevails. Recapturing the unhurried pace of his opening movement, Schubert ties it all together in this satisfying finale, even adding a brisk coda for an exciting close.

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SCHUBERT’S SONATAS AND POSTERITY

Schubert’s bread and butter were his songs. What little money he earned came almost exclusively from his Lieder. Yet he cultivated almost every instrumental genre, writing enormous quantities of music in large and small forms. For whatever reason, he returned repeatedly to the piano sonata, composing twenty-one of them between 1815 and 1828. The few that garnered any attention were compared unfavorably to Beethoven’s sonatas.

Suffering from that comparison, Schubert’s piano sonatas never became fashionable. Nineteenth century virtuoso pianists did not consider them suitable material for the concert hall. If they played Schubert at all, they chose the character pieces: the Impromptus, the Écossaise, the Moments Musicaux. Among his larger works, only the Wanderer-Fantasie attracted the high-profile pianists.

After the Schubert centennial in 1928, the piano sonatas began to draw more attention, gradually leading to their advocacy by some of the mid-century’s greatest pianists. Schubert’s sonatas have now worked their way into the standard repertoire. The B-flat work on this evening’s program became a signature piece for many of the 20th century’s legendary artists, including Artur Schnabel, Clifford Curzon, Wilhelm Kempff, Dame Myra Hess, and Alfred Brendel. Today, D. 960 and several of the other Schubert sonatas are central to the keyboard literature, beloved by both pianists and audiences.

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András Schiff, the world-renowned and critically acclaimed pianist, conductor, pedagogue and lecturer, was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1953. Mr. Schiff started piano lessons at the age of five with Elisabeth Vadász. He continued his musical studies at the Ferenc Liszt Academy with Professor Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados, and in London with George Malcolm.

Indisputably one of the most prominent proponents of the keyboard works of J.S. Bach, Mr. Schiff has long proclaimed that Bach stands at the core of his music making. Over the past two seasons, András Schiff performed The Bach Project, comprised of six recitals and a week of the orchestral music of Bach, Schumann and Mendelssohn. The Project was performed with the San Francisco Symphony, LA Philharmonic, and the New York Philharmonic. Repertoire for The Bach Project recitals included The Complete Partitas and The Goldberg Variations and Mr. Schiff’s final recitals in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Toronto, and New York will feature a unique program with Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations following the Goldberg Variations. Mr. Schiff played this monumental program in London’s Wigmore Hall to celebrate his 60th birthday.

Since 1997, Mr. Schiff has been an exclusive recording artist for the ECM’s New Series and has already recorded the complete solo piano music of Beethoven and Janácek, two solo albums of Schumann piano pieces, his second recordings of the Bach Partitas and Goldberg Variations, The Well Tempered Clavier, Books I and II and Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations.

While András Schiff has worked with most of the major international orchestras and conductors, he now performs mainly as conductor and soloist. In 1999 he created his own chamber orchestra, the Cappella Andrea Barca, which consists of international soloists, chamber musicians and friends. He also works every year with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Since childhood he has enjoyed playing chamber music and from 1989 until 1998 was Artistic Director of the internationally praised "Musiktag Mondsee" chamber music festival near Salzburg. In 1995, together with Heinz Holliger, he founded the "Ittinger Pfingstkonzerte" in Kartause Ittingen, Switzerland. In 1998, Mr. Schiff started a similar series, entitled "Homage to Palladio" at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza.

For more information visit: www.andrasschiff.com

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Schubert originally intended to dedicate the three piano sonatas to Johan Nepomuk Hummel. Anton Diabelli – yes, that Diabelli, the same one who wrote the insipid little waltz on which Beethoven composed his splendid Diabelli Variations – had engraved the sonatas by 1831. Inexplicably, he delayed publication until 1838. Ironically, Hummel had died in October 1837. Diabelli issued the sonatas with a dedication to a composer who did more than anyone to further Schubert’s posthumous reputation in the mid-19th century: Robert Schumann.

It was Schumann who coined the phrase “heavenly length” in praise of Schubert’s music. He was thinking about pieces like the “Great” C Major Symphony, the two piano trios, and this B-flat sonata. At nearly forty minutes, the sonata unfolds on a symphonic scale. With the repeat in the exposition, the opening Molto moderato is a proto-Mahlerian 14 minutes long – one of Schubert’s lengthiest movements. Yet there is not a moment of boredom. Schubert’s magical patterns of modulation, his elegiac atmosphere of calm resignation, and the profusion of themes sustain and nourish the listener. Biographer John Reed calls this “the most personal and poetic of all (the piano sonatas).”

One simply needs to surrender to the flow. The music is not virtuosic. Schubert was primarily a string player of both violin and viola. He also played piano his entire life and regularly accompanied singers in the salons known as Schubertiades; however, his piano writing in the solo works is often awkward. This makes them difficult rather than flashy. That stated, the music is also gorgeous, with a spiritual quality enhanced by Schubert’s fluid tonal landscape.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2015

Found a word or phrase that you are unfamiliar with? Check out our extensive Glossary beginning on page 118 to discover the meaning.