

Great Artists Series:

Emanuel Ax, piano

Sunday, March 26, 2023 - 7:00 P.M.
E. Desmond Lee Concert Hall, 560 Music Center

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Annual Carlin Event

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Opus 3 Artists
presents

Emanuel Ax, piano

Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 664, Op. posth. 120 (1819)

Allegro moderato

Andante

Allegro

Franz Schubert
(1797 - 1828)

Four Songs (trans. 1833 - 1846)

Aufenthalt

Liebesbotschaft

Der Müller und der Bach

Horch, horch! Die Lerch

Franz Schubert
transcribed by Franz Liszt
(1811 - 1886)

Années de pèlerinage I, S. 160: No. 6. *Vallee d'Obermann* (1848 - 1854) Franz Liszt

INTERMISSION

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960 (1828)

Molto moderato

Andante sostenuto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza — Trio

Allegro ma non troppo

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 664, Op. posth. 120 by Franz Schubert

Nearly 200 years after his death, Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828) still remains a staple of the Western concert music tradition, with his symphonies, string quartets, and song cycles still being performed regularly across the globe. Tonight's performance features the "little" Sonata in A Major, D. 664 (so termed "little" to differentiate it from Schubert's other Sonata in A Major, D. 959), which Schubert wrote in the summer of 1819, but was released after Schubert's death. During this period of his life, Schubert's spirits were quite high as he reveled in his growing command of his compositional voice and a rise in popularity among Viennese patrons. Schubert found inspiration for the sonata while spending time in the landscapes of North Eastern Austria. While here, Schubert admired the young Josephine von Koller, a woman whom he described as "very pretty" while also noting that she "plays the piano forte well." In addition to writing music for von Koller to perform, Schubert also dedicated the Sonata in A Major to her.

One can hear the influence of the summer of 1819 on Schubert's composition. The themes found throughout the work are lyrical and pastoral. Rather unusually, all three movements are in *sonata-allegro* form, where two principle themes are presented as separate entities but then are developed together. The second movement features a lovely "sighing" theme. The third movement features many virtuosic scalar runs interspersed between a dancing main theme. In this sonata, one can hear Schubert's emerging (if not fully emerged) mastery of the early-Romantic idiom and his own unique compositional voice.

Four Songs by Franz Schubert/Franz Liszt

During his life, Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886) developed a reputation as both a premiere pianist and composer. Even as a young child, the Hungarian virtuoso was able to dazzle audiences with his fluid technique, improvisational abilities, and vast command of the modern repertoire. By the age of 11, Liszt had also begun composing, with many of his works having lasting impacts on the piano canon. Given the public fawning that Liszt received, one would assume Liszt would have developed a grand sense of self. However, stardom did not lead to an inflated musical ego. Liszt was a staunch champion of many of his peers, and used his fame to help introduce fellow composers such as Richard Wagner and Hector Berlioz to wider audiences. Although Franz Schubert did not need Liszt's sign-off, Liszt arranged numerous versions of Schubert's art songs for solo piano.

The songs performed tonight were all written by Schubert but arranged by Liszt and revolve around the narrative theme of waiting. The first piece, *Aufenthalt* (trans. *Resting Place* and written by Schubert in 1928 then arranged by Liszt in 1938 - 39), describes a man sitting in nature, tortured by the age-old sorrows that haunt him. Schubert and Liszt demonstrate this torment with a fast, moody minor melody. The second selection, *Liebesbotschaft* (trans. *Love's Message*, written by Schubert in 1928 and arranged by Liszt in 1938 - 39) then re-shifts the focus of the narrator's sorrow. In this song the singer waits, again in nature, to hear a lover's response to their declaration of love. The composer's treatment of the flowing melody perfectly captures the anxiousness of the narrator awaiting the lover's response. Following these two selections comes Liszt's arrangement (1846) of Schubert's *Der Müller und der Bach* (trans. *The Miller and the Brook*) from his famed song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823). In Schubert's original song cycle, this song describes the Miller's ultimate suicide as he is scorned by his lover. Given the narrative evoked by tonight's selection, this seems to cast our narrator as fearful of a coming rejection, again trapping him in the sorrowful confines of nature. However, crisis is averted in the final song, *Horch, horch, die Lerch* (trans. *Hark, Hark the Lark*, composed by Schubert in 1826 and arranged by Liszt in 1938 - 39) as we hear a triumphant melodic presentation of the lines "Du süsse Maid, steh auf! Steh auf; steh auf!" (trans. "My sweet lady, arise! Arise; arise!"). The sounds of nature now fill the narrator's heart with joy as they, presumably, hear their love is requited.

Années de pèlerinage I, S. 160: No. 6. Vallee d'Obermann by Franz Liszt

Années de Pèlerinage, French for "years of pilgrimage," were a set of three piano suites composed by Liszt. The first of these suites, from which tonight's selection comes, was written between the years of 1848 - 54 and published in 1855. The work is based around two aspects. First, Liszt used these pieces to both reflect and romanticize his travels to Switzerland. To accomplish this goal, Liszt engages with many famous Romantic authors. The works take their title from Goethe's second published novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795 - 96), a work that explores the themes of self-realization and actualization while staring down the face of a rapidly modernizing world. Liszt, trying to encapsulate this intense and highly romantic affect in his music, places the following Byron quote in his manuscript of the 6th movement:

Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me, -- could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe -- into one word,
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;

But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

When writing *Vallee d'Obermann*, Liszt took influence from French author Étienne Pivert de Senancour's novel *Obermann*, which tells the story of a figure, who despite his heroic stature, still finds himself baffled by his suffering and longing. Musically, Liszt matches this sense of confusion through the use of a slow and sorrowful main theme. Liszt transforms this theme by modulating into numerous surprising and distant key areas. This thematic development leads to a climatic build up with chords played in the piano's lowest register against agile scalar passages.

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960 by Franz Schubert

To conclude tonight's program, we will hear Schubert's piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960, which was composed in 1828. This work, the last piano sonata that Schubert wrote, demonstrates many of Schubert's personal signatures. Even in the first movement one hears moments that could only come from Schubert's pen. The lengthy exposition features lovely singing melodies, all evocative of Schubert's vocal music. There are three major themes (as opposed to the more traditional two), a hallmark of Schubert's formal blueprints. Further, the exposition features numerous wanderings into harmonically distant territories, what Francis Tovey, the famous British musical critic, poetically referred to as Schubert's "purple patches."

The second movement in C-sharp minor is a tender, melodic piece that features numerous ear-catching modulations, where the listener is transported at the seeming blink of an eye from one key to a distant second key almost out of nowhere. The third movement, which like the first movement is also in B-flat, is an agile *scherzo*. True to the titular name, the piece is light and playful as Schubert navigates a bouncy 3/4 time. Finally, the sonata concludes with a 5-part *rondo* built around two main theme areas. In between each of the fast-moving themes are numerous dexterous scale runs and arpeggios that demonstrate Schubert's command of the piano.

Varun Chandrasekhar student in Music Theory, Washington University in St. Louis

Biography



Born to Polish parents in what is today Lviv, Ukraine, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. Mr. Ax made his New York debut in the Young Concert Artists Series, and in 1974 won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. In 1975 he won the Michaels Award of Young Concert Artists, followed four years later by the Avery Fisher Prize.

In fall 2021 he resumed a post-COVID touring schedule that included concerts with the Colorado, Pacific, Cincinnati and Houston symphonies, as well as Minnesota, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Cleveland orchestras. 2022/23 will include a tour with Itzhak Perlman "and Friends" and a continuation of the "Beethoven For 3" touring and recording project with partners Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma, this year on the west coast.

In recital he can be heard in Palm Beach, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Chicago, Washington D.C., Houston, Las Vegas, and New York, and with orchestras in Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, San Francisco, San Diego, New York, Naples, Portland, OR, Toronto, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland. Touring in Europe in the fall and spring includes concerts in Germany, U.K., Switzerland, and France.

Mr. Ax has been a Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987 and following the success of the Brahms Trios with Kavakos and Ma, the trio launched an ambitious, multi-year project to record all the Beethoven trios and symphonies arranged for trio of which the first two discs have recently been released. He has received GRAMMY® Awards for the second and third volumes of his cycle of Haydn's piano sonatas. He has also made a series of Grammy-winning recordings with cellist Yo-Yo Ma of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. In the 2004/05 season Mr. Ax contributed to an International EMMY® Award-Winning BBC documentary commemorating the Holocaust that aired on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In 2013, Mr. Ax's recording *Variations* received the Echo Klassik Award for Solo Recording of the Year (19th Century Music/Piano).

Mr. Ax is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates of music from Skidmore College, New England Conservatory of Music, Yale University, and Columbia University. For more information about Mr. Ax's career, please visit www.EmanuelAx.com.

Photo credit: Lisa Marie Mazzucco

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by Eugène Ysaÿe (1858 - 1931)

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by J. S. Bach

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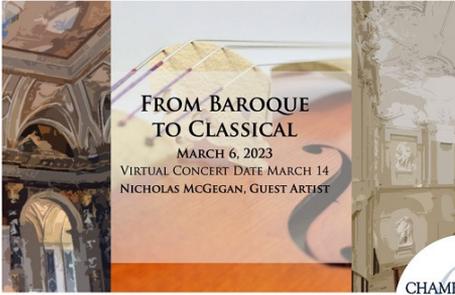
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