

# Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

## Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960 (46:55)

- 1 I Molto moderato (22:43)
- 2 II Andante sostenuto (10:19)
- 3 III Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza (4:24)
- 4 IV Allegro ma non troppo (9:29)

## Moments Musicaux, D. 780 (30:04)

- 5 I Moderato (7:19)
- 6 II Andante (6:25)
- 7 III Allegro moderato (1:58)
- 8 IV Moderato (4:55)
- 9 V Allegro vivace (2:28)
- 10 VI Allegretto (6:59)

**Andrew Rangell, piano**

“Glory be to God for dappled things” begins Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “Pied Beauty”, continuing a few lines later, “for all things counter, original, spare, strange; whatever is fickle freckled (who knows how?) With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim...” Schubert’s music, more than any other, calls to my mind this poem, this poet. How often in Schubert one feels an ineffable sensation of hovering: between sorrow and consolation, danger and safety, volition and surrender, waking and dreaming, smiles and tears. (Most characteristically it is an exquisitely controlled harmony which conjures these ambiguities, moving magically between tonalities, or between major and minor modes of a given tonality.) And at times Schubert can seem even to touch upon the haunting proximity, or connectedness, of death and life.

## Sonata in B-flat D. 960

What Schubert created in the last year of his short life (1828) is something of a miracle. Written in white heat in September of that year his final three piano sonatas (C minor, A major, B-flat major) are brim full of vitality and inspiration – and, generally speaking, suggest anything but a mentality of leave-taking, or a premonition of impending death. But regarding the B-flat sonata, his last, a work of profound and supernal beauty, which seems to speak of final things – it is nearly impossible to separate one’s feeling for this work from the knowledge that Schubert was dead two scant months from its completion. Epic in its scope, it is intimate throughout. Resembling not at all Beethoven’s supremely unapproachable final sonata (Op. 111), it reveals more than a surface kinship with the ample lyricism of the older master’s “Archduke” trio. Noteworthy, without being obvious, is a subtle motivic sharing between all four opening themes (turn figure;

repeated notes) – and the very centered simplicity of those themes.

The opening *Molto moderato* is truly the defining movement of this work, its imprint overwhelming. Its journey enfolds worlds. It is huge, yet no note is wasted; diffuse yet supremely logical; complex in design yet transparent in every moment. The exposition, which contains three distinct segments, projects, overall, as a highly fluid, broadly spacious improvisation. The first theme – solemn, serene, quietly radiant – is punctuated by a mysterious and disquieting murmur, a long trill in the extreme low register. The ensuing rest is not a polite pause but a profound suspended stillness, a place of intense listening. Throughout this movement this poised trill will take on an evolving and emblematic presence, marking many critical junctures within a vast journey. The first section varies the opening theme twice again: once in the luminous key of G-flat and then, triumphantly, in the returned tonic B-flat, with a newly forceful triplet accompaniment. The triplet figure, and its momentum, is extended into a new theme – and a new section – precipitated by an explosive modulation to F-sharp minor. This is an area of new harmonic flux. At length, stability arrives – as the long-deferred dominant tonality (F major) is established. This last segment begins in a light scherzando mode, soon giving way to a long, closing process of fragmentation, a wonderfully expressive brake on the preceding animation.

Now, at a point of almost beatific resolution, Schubert presents a nine-bar first ending. Ordinarily a first-ending is supplied when a simple repeat sign is insufficient or undesirable, that is, when the composer requires separate musical paths, one leading back to a repeated exposition, and one moving forward into the development section. And ordinarily this is a facilitating mechanism, a sort of musical shunt. In this unique instance, the substance of these nine bars is of

such surprising matter and moment that it signifies as a defining episode in the story of the movement! In thirty seconds or so, the last three exposition chords are extended suddenly into an atmosphere of menace growing into violence, concluding with the low-register trill of the opening measures – this time at fortissimo intensity. Hardly a simple vehicle of return, this galvanizing event is Schubert's way, his invitation, to a transfixing (and transfiguring) restatement of the sonata's opening music – and particularly the low trill, now suddenly becalmed. There have been skeptics or naysayers regarding this first ending, mostly because it is inseparably linked to the larger (and high-stakes) issue of whether a repeated exposition can genuinely enhance the entire movement, given its enormous consequent length. The liabilities, the laws of diminishing returns, undertaken in a long repeat – these must, at least, be admitted. Finally, of course, words are not sufficient to bring interpretive issues of this kind to real resolution. My own position, not held until middle age (i.e., lately!) is "argued" in the present performance.

The development section is ushered in by three hushed chords in C-sharp minor (the entire second-ending). It contains another long arc of motivic and harmonic activity, embracing briefly all main themes of the exposition, and also presenting a new idea, introduced in D-flat major but presently re-stated austere in the key of D minor. Upon this wintry plateau, three phrases from the movement's opening idea are heard, all marked by murmuring trills in the low bass. Moments later, after a long and suspenseful unaccompanied, scalar descent, the section comes to a gossamer conclusion: now its low G-flat trill is in its perfect element. This astonishing approach to the recapitulation is, for me, the distant cousin of the altogether opposite approach to the same music experienced long earlier in the first-ending music. The recapitulation passes through

the exotic keys (relative to a B-flat tonic) of A major and B minor as it makes its way home. "Home" in this case is a last, touchingly introduced variant of the opening hymn – and its questioning trill. Now answered by a simple V-I cadence. Amen.

The slow movement in C-sharp minor is a song of sorrow, perhaps the sorrow of angels. Hypnotically accompanied by the heartbeat of a pedal tone, which oscillates through four octaves below and above the melody, the music seems at first held, almost frozen, in lament. In the middle section, a hopeful melody (in A major, with passing similarities to the opening theme of the sonata!) flows forward, with accompaniment shifting between duples and triplets. New and important in the first theme's return is a subtle and telling change in the accompaniment – the addition of a three-note upbeat figure expressively evolving until the very end. In a subtle and delicious move, Schubert takes his familiar material temporarily to C major, descending without modulation from C-sharp minor. A magic moment within a magical movement!

Following upon two inordinately long intimate movements, the quicksilver animation – buoyant and restless – of the scherzo movement is a welcome redirection of mood. Deft harmonic change is here the order of the day. The central trio, a passing interruption of this scintillating flow, is a strangely clouded little dance in B-flat minor whose sad lurching gait (the product of expressive syncopation in the bass) is droll and affecting.

The opening music of the final movement – a rondo with sonata properties (second theme area; development section) – is a heraldic G octave and questioning phrases which suggest C minor before moving to the actual tonic key of B-flat. There is a very Schubertian wistfulness in this recurrent figure – trying always to begin again: this tentativeness is, I think, the reason for the “ma non

troppo” of this allegro. In fact the longer episodes of the movement attain and sustain much greater sweep and stability. Yet the fateful octave always awaits. At the end, as if to finally explain the “wrong key” confusion of the opening theme, this octave is gradually and tenderly lowered through G-flat to F, setting the stage for a short, brilliant and wonderfully affirming coda.

## Moments Musicaux D. 780

Continuing an emerging (early nineteenth century) tradition of poetic character pieces, whose first proponents were the Bohemian composers Voriscek and Tomaschek, Schubert's six *Moments Musicaux* (D. 780) form a bonded unity comparable instead to Beethoven's last bagatelles. Finally and felicitously arranged so that the three shorter pieces in the minor mode are enfolded by more expansive meditations in the major, it seems certain that these works, composed between 1823 and 1828, were not actually conceived as a larger entity. Yet this collection of modest and intimate gems – each substantially smaller than the composer's multi-sectioned *Impromptus* – is truly a major work in the aggregate.

### Moment #1:

The form is ABA; the mood amiable and thoughtful. Depictive touches of a pastoral character have been observed by other commentators: a yodeling quality of the graceful opening unison; a cuckoo-like accompaniment figure which follows later; finally a resemblance (in the B material) to the “by the brook” section of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. It might be pointed out, additionally, that the sections meld together, de-emphasizing their contrasts of key and substance, to suggest the gradually evolving changes in scenery on a walk through nature.

### **Moment #2:**

Also leisurely in tempo but interior in character, this *Andantino* exhibits stark contrasts between its sections (ABABA) whose respective tonic keys are A-flat major and F-sharp minor. And the reprise of B, this time with no preparatory modulation, opens with a sudden outcry of great intensity. This harshness subsides quickly; and the A material again provides a final balm for the troubled soul.

### **Moment #3:**

This winsome little dance in F minor, the most famous of the set, is tender and sad – and smiling in its F major conclusion. It contains no contrasting middle section – as is the case with its violent F minor counterpart, #5, which also ends in a major mode!

### **Moment #4:**

A veiled, dark-hued, delicately contrapuntal moto perpetuo – it has a suggestion of mist or rain about it. Its subtle harmonic passing tones are quintessential Schubert. A dance-like (Bohemian?) trio, by contrast, features a wonderful and confusing displacement of the downbeat – as it dispels previous haste. But at the end, a powerful ambiguity is present in a sudden expiration – in the minor mode, after a brief hint of major.

### **Moment #5:**

This insistent allegro establishes a single-minded ferocity which does not abate until the last section – with a change to the major mode. As in #4 the rapid harmonic shifts are (characteristically) extraordinary.

### **Moment #6:**

The concluding *Moment*, perhaps the most introspective of the six, moves haltingly between questioning and solace. The doubts are somewhat assuaged in a lovely and good natured trio (in D-flat), yet the poignantly prepared cadence which concludes the entire work closes in the minor mode, on a cold unharmonized A-flat. The fourth time in six pieces that a sudden change of mode and mood prevails!

~ Andrew Rangell, 2004

Born in Chicago and raised in Colorado, **Andrew Rangell** is a graduate of the Juilliard School, earning a doctoral degree in piano under Beveridge Webster. He made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists Guild and has since performed throughout the United States, and in Europe and Israel. From 1977 to 1985 he was resident artist and principal piano instructor at Dartmouth College, and a frequent guest with many of New England's foremost performing groups and festivals. Mr. Rangell's recital repertoire has reflected a breadth of interest and affinity. From 1984 to 1985, he gave a five-concert series of Bach programs at Boston's Gardner Museum which included keyboard concertos, the six partitas and the *Goldberg Variations*. His many New York recitals have included works from all periods, from Orlando Gibbons and Johann Froberger to Luciano Berio, Carl Nielsen, Arnold Schoenberg, George Enescu, and the two epic sonatas of Charles Ives. Mr. Rangell's gifts as an extraordinary interpreter of Beethoven received high acclaim during three successive seasons (1986-89) devoted to the performance, in a seven-concert sequence, of the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas. This period saw ten traversals of the complete cycle (including Boston presentations at both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall, and at New York's 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y) as well as a debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and the award of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Of Mr. Rangell's most recent (2002) New York recital,

Charles Michener of the New York Observer wrote: "For me, the great discovery of the series has been Andrew Rangell . . . Mr. Rangell is an individualist. And such was his intensity—like the late Glenn Gould, he seemed to be propelled by an irresistible force—that the listener's attention was riveted to the music."

Andrew Rangell's extensive discography, on the Dorian label, includes Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Beethoven's final five sonatas, two diverse collections entitled "A Recital of Intimate Works" (vol. I & II), and a pairing of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. A two-disc set of Bach's six partitas released in November, 2001 was cited in both *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Phoenix* as one of the best recordings of 2001. Mr. Rangell's performances of the complete Chopin mazurkas joined the Dorian catalogue in 2003 and were characterized, in *Gramophone Magazine*, as "taking the humble mazurka to new heights of variety and sophistication."

1998-99 marked Andrew Rangell's first active concert season following a long hiatus due to a serious hand injury. Since that time he has steadily reclaimed and expanded his performance and recording career. Mr. Rangell was recently honored to perform a solo recital in the 2003 Venice "Biennale," Italy's foremost contemporary music festival. Next year, Mr. Rangell's pen and ink illustrations will embellish a new publication of Bruce Adolphe's *Piano Puzzlers* (as heard on National Public Radio). And in Paris, his first children's book, *Sammy Snake's Lucky Day*, will be published.

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~ Andrew Rangell

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