

# Murray Perahia, piano

Sunday, April 7, 2002, 3 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## PROGRAM

- Ludwig van Beethoven 32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor,  
WoO 80
- Franz Schubert Sonata in A major, D. 959  
Allegro  
Andantino  
Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: Un poco più \  
lento  
Rondo: Allegretto

## INTERMISSION

- Frédéric Chopin Ballade No. 2 in A minor, Op. 38  
Mazurka in B-flat minor, Op. 24, No. 4  
Mazurka in D major, Op. 33, No. 2  
Étude in E minor, Op. 25, No. 5  
Étude in A-flat major, Op. 25, No. 1  
Étude in G-sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 6  
Nocturne No. 17 in B major, Op. 62, No. 1  
Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major, Op. 47

Cal Performances 2001/02 Recital Series has been generously supported by Dr. A. Jess Shenson.

This afternoon's performance by Murray Perahia is sponsored, in part, by Sherman Clay & Co.

Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
and the Zellerbach Family Fund for their generous support.

Cal Performances receives additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts,  
a federal agency that supports the visual, literary, and performing arts to benefit all Americans,  
and the California Arts Council, a state agency.

32 Variations on an Original Theme  
in C minor, WoO 80  
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Beethoven spent the summer of 1804 in Döbling, an elegant suburb of Vienna nestled in the foothills of the Wienerwald north of the central city. He wrote to his brother Johann, a prosperous apothecary in Vienna, "Not on my life would I have believed that I could be so lazy as I am here. If it is followed by an outburst of industry, something worthwhile may be accomplished." The country air and fizzy Heurigen wine of Döbling must have been true inspiration to Beethoven, because during the ensuing three years he produced a series of masterpieces unmatched anywhere in the history of music: the "Waldstein" Sonata (Op. 53), the Piano Sonata in F major (Op. 54), the "Eroica" Symphony (Op. 55), the Triple Concerto (Op. 56), the "Appassionata" Sonata (Op. 57), the Fourth Piano Concerto (Op. 58), the three "Razumovsky" Quartets (Op. 59), the Fourth Symphony (Op. 60), the Violin Concerto (Op. 61),

and the Coriolan Overture (Op. 62). In the autumn of 1806, Beethoven penned a set of 32 Variations in C minor that were written, according to the composer's pioneering biographer Alexander Wheelock Thayer, "as if for amusement and recreation after the fatigue of severer studies." Beethoven had just returned to Vienna from summering at the ancestral Hungarian estate of his patron and friend Count Franz von Brunsvick at Martonvásár, where the Count's sisters, Therese, Josephine, and Caroline, were also in residence. Thayer spread the rumor that Beethoven and Therese got engaged that May, and, indeed, the lady did present the composer with a fine oil portrait of herself that she inscribed, "To the rare genius, the great artist, the good man, from T.B." She would almost certainly have accepted a proposal of marriage from him at that time, but he seems also to have harbored strong feelings for her sister Josephine, recently widowed at age 26, and a woman who exerted a strong sensual appeal for the composer that was very different from the spiritual attraction of Therese. Beethoven, as always, was stymied in this affair of the heart, and remained a bachelor, sublimating his passions into his work—the Fourth Symphony, the quartets of Op. 59, the Violin Concerto, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the "Appassionata" Sonata, and the Variations in C minor were all completed by the end of the year. "There could be room enough in his life for only one of the two things he most cared for: music and love. And, being the most purposeful of composers and the most vacillating of lovers, can we wonder that his decision went in favor of his art?" wrote Eric Blom.

The 32 Variations in C minor (which shares its impassioned key with the Fifth Symphony, the Third Piano Concerto, the "Pathétique" Sonata, the Coriolan Overture, and some half-dozen of Beethoven's chamber compositions) seems to have been written to fulfill a publisher's demand for such works—the score was issued by the Viennese firm of Kunst und Industrie-Comptoir in March 1807, just a few months after it was completed. Beethoven did not regard the composition highly enough to trouble with assigning it an opus number (it was designated WoO 80—"Werk ohne [without] Opuszahl [Opus Number]"—in the standard Kinsky-Halm catalog), and he later scoffed at having written it. When he heard the daughter of the piano maker Andreas Streicher practicing the piece one day, he reportedly asked, "By whom is that?" "Why, by you," came the reply. "Such nonsense by me? Oh Beethoven, what an ass you were!" The composer seriously underestimated his work, which exhibits both the powerful, unsettled emotions associated in his music with the key of C minor and a strong formal logic. The compact theme is only eight measures long, but Otto Klauwell observed that it is "very pregnant harmonically. In each of its measures there is a definite change of harmony, and after the second and fourth measures an implied modulation." Because the individual variations upon this aphoristic melody unfold almost without pause, the work takes on the character of a chaconne, the ancient Baroque form built upon a recurring harmonic pattern that reached the pinnacle of its development in Sebastian Bach's awe-inspiring example in the Partita in D minor for Unaccompanied Violin (BWV 1004). Klauwell concluded his analysis of the Variations by noting that Beethoven's mutations of the theme were "so rich in relations and so meaningfully interconnected in their various parts that despite the absence of changes in modulation, key, and time signature, the hearer's interest is captured undiminished, even increased, down to the very end. We see from this work how Beethoven always kept approaching the problem of the variations form from a new side and how his primary aim, in contrast to the stereotypes of an earlier period, was to give his sets of variations individuality and raise them to the level of his other works."

Sonata in A major, D. 959

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

In the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna on March 26, 1828, immediately after completing his magnificent Symphony in C major, Franz Schubert gave the only public concert entirely of his works held during his lifetime. The event was a significant artistic and financial success, and he used the proceeds to celebrate the occasion at a local tavern, pay off some old debts, acquire a new piano, and buy tickets for Niccolò Paganini's sensational debut in Vienna three days later. Despite the renewed enthusiasm for creative work that this concert inspired in him, and encouraging signs that his music was beginning to receive recognition outside of Vienna, Schubert's spirits were dampened during the following months by the perilous state of his health. His constitution, never robust, had been undermined by syphilis, and by the summer of 1828, he was suffering from headaches, exhaustion, and frequent digestive distress. In May, he received invitations from friends to summer in both Graz and Gmunden in order to refresh himself with the country air, but he had to refuse his hosts because he lacked money to pay for the transportation. He settled instead for a three-day excursion in early June with the composer-conductor Franz Lachner to nearby Baden, where he wrote a Fugue in E minor for organ, four hands (D. 952, his only work for organ), which he tried out with his companion on the instrument in the 12th-century Cistercian abbey at neighboring Heiligenkreuz on June 4th. Between his return to the city a few days later and August, he composed the Mass in E-flat, made a setting in Hebrew of Psalm 92 for the City Synagogue of Vienna, created a number of short pieces for

piano, wrote all but one of the 13 songs published after his death in the collection *Schwanengesang*, did extensive work on what proved to be his last three piano sonatas (D. 958–960), and began his String Quintet in C major.

At the end of August, Schubert felt unwell, and his physician advised that he move for a time to a new house outside the city recently acquired by the composer's brother Ferdinand. Though Ferdinand's dwelling was damp and uncomfortable, Franz felt better during the following days, and was able to participate in an active social life. He also continued to compose incessantly, completing the three piano sonatas on the 26th, and performing them at the house of Dr. Ignaz Menz the following day. On October 31st, Schubert fell seriously ill, his syphilitic condition perhaps exacerbated by the typhus then epidemic in Vienna, and he died on November 19, 1828, at the age of 31. He had originally intended that the three sonatas be dedicated to Johann Hummel, a pianist, composer, student of Mozart, and important supporter during his last years, but when Diabelli published them in 1838 as "Schubert's Last Compositions: Three Grand Sonatas," Hummel was already dead, so the pieces were instead inscribed to another champion of Schubert's music, Robert Schumann.

"All three of the last sonatas are works in which meditation, charm, wistfulness, sadness, and joy are housed in noble structures," wrote George R. Marek. Though each follows the traditional four-movement Classical pattern of opening sonata-allegro, lyrical slow movement, scherzo (minuet in the Sonata in C minor), and lively finale, this is music less concerned with the titanic, visionary, long-range formal structures of Beethoven (whom Schubert idolized) than with the immediately perceived qualities of melody, harmonic color, piano sonority, and the subtle balancing of keys—what Hans Költzsch in his study of Schubert's sonatas called "the nascent present." This characteristically Schubertian predilection is particularly evident in the development sections of the opening movements, which eschew the rigorous thematic working-out of the Beethovenian model in favor of a warm, even sometimes dreamy, lyricism whose principal aims are to examine fragments of the movement's melodies in different harmonic lights and to extract the instrument's most ingratiating sonorities. The Sonata in A major begins with a heroic gesture immediately balanced by airy falling arpeggios—the opposed states of vigor and languor are juxtaposed throughout much of the movement. The Andantino is the most dramatic movement in the last three sonatas. Its outer sections exude barren bleakness, an uncommon emotion in Schubert's music but one he had distilled perfectly the year before in his stunningly desolate setting of Wilhelm Müller's *Der Leiermann*, the closing song of the cycle *Die Winterreise*; the movement's central portion rises to peaks of true passion. The work is rounded out by a gentle Scherzo and a supple Rondo.

Ballade No. 2 in A minor, Op. 38

Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major, Op. 47

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

A "ballad," according to the Random House Dictionary, is "a simple, narrative poem of popular origin, composed in short stanzas, especially one of romantic character and adapted for singing." The term was derived from an ancient musico-poetic form that accompanied dancing ("ballare" in medieval Latin, hence "ball" and "ballet"), which had evolved into an independent vocal genre by the 14th century in the exquisitely refined works of Guillaume de Machaut and other early composers of secular music. The ballad was well established in England as a medium for the reciting of romantic or fantastic stories by at least the year 1500; it is mentioned by Pepys, Milton, Addison, and Swift, often disdainfully because of the frequently scurrilous nature of its content. The form, having adopted a more elegant demeanor, became popular in Germany during the late 18th century, when it attracted no less a literary luminary than Goethe, whose tragic narrative *Erlkönig* furnished the text for one of Schubert's most familiar songs. Chopin seems to have been the first composer to apply the title to a piece of abstract instrumental music, apparently indicating that his four ballads hint at a dramatic flow of emotions such as could not be appropriately contained by traditional Classical forms. (Such transferal of terms between artistic disciplines was hardly unknown during the Romantic era. Liszt, the first musical artist in history with enough nerve to keep an entire public program to himself, dubbed his solo concerts "musical soliloquies" at first, and later gave them the now-familiar designation, "recitals." "How can one recite at the piano?" fumed one British critic. "Preposterous!") Brahms, Liszt, Fauré, Grieg, Vieuxtemps, and Frank Martin all later provided instrumental works with the title "Ballade."

The Ballade No. 2 (A minor, Op. 38) was the product of 1838, when Chopin had retreated to Majorca with George Sand; it was published by Breitkopf und Härtel two years later. The composer thought highly enough of the piece to include it on his recital at the Salle Pleyel on April 26, 1841, the first time he had played in public in six years. The composition was dedicated to Schumann, whose review ("Hats off, gentleman! A genius!") of the 1827 Variations on Mozart's "Là ci darem la mano" was among the earliest recognitions of Chopin's talent. Schumann claimed that the music was based on Mickiewicz's *Le Lac de Wallis*, though Herbert Weinstock could find no such title in the poet's catalog. Undeterred by the lack of a firm literary foundation, the Russian pianist and pedagogue Anton Rubinstein

erected upon the Second Ballade the following slightly lurid program, so characteristic of the 19th-century quest to invest mere musical notes with visual import: “A field flower, a windstorm, the wind caressing the flower, stormy fight of the wind, pleading of the flower—the flower lies broken. Or, paraphrased, the flower can be regarded as a country lass, the wind as a knight.”

The Ballade No. 3 (A-flat major, Op. 47), one of Chopin’s best-loved creations, was composed during the quiet and happy period he spent with George Sand in Paris in 1840–1841. Upon its publication in 1841, it was dedicated to Mlle. de Noailles, whom Antoine-François Marmontel, in listing Chopin’s pupils, referred to as one of the composer’s “disciples affectionnées.” The work was said to have been derived from Mickiewicz’s *Ondine*, which Laurent Cellier paraphrased: “On the shores of a lake, a young man pledges fidelity to a young girl. Doubting the faithfulness of men, despite the protestations of her lover, she disappears and returns in the bewitching form of a water sprite. As soon as she tempts the young man, he succumbs to her charms. To expiate his sin, he is dragged to the bottom of the water and condemned to a breathless pursuit of the sprite, whom he can never catch.” Irving Kolodin wrote of the Ballade in A-flat major that “a certain underlying strength may be overlooked in the seductive appeal of its soft-contoured surface. Feminine it may be said to be also, but only if the female in question is possessed (as more than a few have been known to be) of a whim of iron.”

Mazurka in B-flat minor, Op. 24, No. 4

Mazurka in D major, Op. 33, No. 2

The mazurka originated in Chopin’s home district of Mazovia sometime during the 17th century. Rather a family of related musical forms than a single set type, the mazurka could be sung or danced, performed fast or languidly and, when danced, given many variations on the few basic steps of the pattern. By the 18th and 19th centuries, when its popularity spread throughout Europe, the mazurka was characterized by its triple meter, frequent use of unusual scales (often giving the music a slightly Oriental quality), variety of moods, and occasional rhythmic syncopations. Of Chopin’s 56 mazurkas, 41 of which were published during his lifetime, G.C. Ashton Jonson wrote, “In his hands, the mazurka ceased to be an actual dance tune, and became a tone poem, a mirror of moods, an epitome of human emotions, joy and sadness, love and hate, tenderness and defiance, coquetry and passion.” The expressive range of these pieces is wider than that of any other group of his compositions; it is said that he never played any of them the same way twice. They contain Chopin’s most intimate thoughts, and are moving reminders that this famous Polish émigré lived virtually his whole adult life away from his native soil.

The four mazurkas of Op. 24, composed in 1834–1835 and published late in 1835 in Paris and Leipzig, were dedicated to Count de Perthuis, aide-de-camp and music director to King Louis-Philippe, and one of Chopin’s most devoted patrons. In October 1839, Perthuis arranged for Chopin to play a recital for the royals at the Palace of St. Cloud, west of Paris. Chopin’s friend and competitor Ignaz Moscheles, with whom he shared the program, reported being “convinced that Chopin’s playing, full of fire and élan that did not weaken for a moment throughout the performance, had a very stimulating effect on the listeners.” A few years later, when Chopin was experiencing financial difficulties, Count Perthuis sponsored a special subscription concert at the Salle Pleyel for the composer’s benefit. The Mazurka in B-flat minor, Op. 24, No. 4, with its subtle harmonic shifts, its sinuous chromaticism, its rhythmic spirit and its large scale, is one of Chopin’s most ambitious and sophisticated such works.

The four numbers of the Op. 33 set, composed in 1837–1838, were dedicated to Chopin’s former student the Countess Rose Mostowska, who had helped the young composer-virtuoso produce his last concert in Warsaw before leaving his homeland in 1830. James Huneker characterized the popular Mazurka in D major, Op. 33, No. 2 as “bustling, graceful and full of unrestrained vitality.” Its swaying rhythms, simple harmonic underpinning, and unaffected melody evoke an open-air revel in the Polish countryside.

So infectious is the work’s theme that the French mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot-Garcia arranged it as a vocal selection that enjoyed a considerable success in the salons of Paris.

Three Études, Op. 25, Nos. 5, 1 and 6

Chopin’s first set of twelve études was published as his Op. 10 in 1833, though the individual pieces were written two and three years earlier, around the time that the young composer left Warsaw for Vienna and Paris. The étude originally grew from the need for study pieces focusing on one aspect of keyboard technique, but Chopin’s examples lifted the genre from that of a simple pedagogical vehicle to a richly expressive concert form with a single, sustained mood. These are the first works in which Chopin’s fully formed genius is evident. His second set of études, Op. 25, appeared in 1837, with a dedication to the Countess Marie d’Agoult, Liszt’s mistress and mother of Cosima, later Richard Wagner’s

second wife. The English pianist and writer on music Robert Collet explained why these works are among the most characteristic and perfect of Chopin's creations: "Here, Chopin's more obvious limitations, his lack of sense of the monumental, either seem to be unimportant or to be positive virtues; in these works, he never attempts anything basically unsuited to his natural genius. They are in some ways the most universal of his works; to an unusual degree, they transcend barriers of time and nationality.... It is difficult to think of any music of the decade around 1830 that has dated less."

The *Étude* in E minor, Op. 25, No. 5, is delicate and nimble, with many broad arches of melody that sweep up the keyboard and back down again. Clara Schumann wrote that the *Étude* No. 1 (A-flat major) embodied the playing of Chopin himself: "Imagine that an Aeolian harp possessed all the musical scales and that the hands of the artist were to cause them all to intermingle in all sorts of fantastic embellishments, yet in such a way as to leave everywhere audible a deep fundamental tone and a soft continuously singing upper voice, and you will get the right idea of Chopin's playing." The *moto perpetuo* stream of parallel intervals in the right hand of No. 6 (G-sharp minor) has earned it the nickname "Study in Thirds."

Nocturne No. 17 in B major, Op. 62, No. 1

Contemporary accounts of Chopin's piano playing invariably refer to the extreme delicacy of his touch, the beauty of his tone, and the poetic quality of his expression. These characteristics are faithfully reflected in the 21 nocturnes that he created between 1827 and 1846. Chopin derived the name and general style for these works from the nocturnes of John Field, an Irish composer-pianist. Both composers were influenced in the rich harmonies and long melodic lines of their nocturnes by the *bel canto* operatic style that was popular at the time, though Chopin's examples exhibit a far greater depth of expression and a wider range of keyboard technique. The introspective moods of the nocturnes pierced to the heart of the Romantic sensibility, and, along with the waltzes, they were Chopin's most popular works during his lifetime.

Chopin's cycle of nocturnes closes with the two numbers of Op. 62 that he wrote in the summer of 1846, during his last stay at Nohant, George Sand's country house near Châteauroux. His relationship with the flamboyant Sand, who had been lover, nurse, and muse to him for almost a decade, was then beginning to unravel, and their split the following year marked the virtual extinction of his creative career. The Op. 62 nocturnes were published in Paris in September 1846 by Brandus et Compagnie and in December in Leipzig by Breitkopf und Härtel with a dedication to Mlle. R. von Könnertitz, a pupil of Chopin whose collection of early publications of her teacher's works, corrected in his own hand, were later invaluable in preparing authentic editions of the music. The Nocturne in B major, ripe in its dreamy nostalgic sentiment, exhibits the freedom of melodic line, the rich, sometimes unpredictable harmony, and the glowing keyboard sonority that mark the creations of Chopin's last years.

—© 2002 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Murray Perahia (piano), in the more than 30 years he has been performing on the concert stage, has become one of the most sought-after pianists of our time. He performs in all of the major international music centers and with every leading orchestra. In September 2000, he was appointed principal guest conductor of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, with whom he toured as conductor and pianist through the United States in March of 2001. He will similarly perform with them in Japan and Southeast Asia later this month.

Murray Perahia's other orchestral engagements in the 2001–02 season include performances of all five Beethoven concertos with the Israel Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta, and with the Philadelphia and Philharmonia Orchestras, both conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch. His recital schedule includes appearances at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, and in Los Angeles, Berkeley, Vancouver, Paris, London, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Singapore.

Perahia has a wide and varied discography. He continues his special association with the music of Bach with the recently released recording of Bach Keyboard Concertos No. 1, 2, and 4 with the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. His recording of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" received two Grammy nominations and won the 2001 Gramophone Award for Best Instrumental Recording. In 1999, he won a Grammy for his recording of Bach's English Suites (Nos. 1, 3, and 6), and in 1995 and 1997, he won Gramophone Awards for albums of Chopin ballads and music by Handel and Scarlatti. Other recordings include Mozart's complete piano concertos, in which he conducts from the keyboard, the

complete Beethoven concertos, and Schumann's complete works for piano and orchestra. In 1998, Sony Classical released a four-disc set commemorating 25 years of his recordings issued under this label.

Born in New York, Perahia started playing piano at the age of four, and later attended Mannes College. He spent summers in Marlboro, where he collaborated with such musicians as Rudolf Serkin, Pablo Casals, and the members of the Budapest Quartet. He also studied with Mieczyslaw Horszowski. In 1972, Perahia won the Leeds International Piano Competition. In 1973, he gave his first concert at the Aldeburgh Festival, where he worked closely with Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears; he was also co-artistic director of the Festival from 1981 to 1989. Perahia is an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music.