András Schiff, piano

Sunday, March 17, 2002, 3 pm
Zellerbach Hall

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven
Sonata quasi una fantasia in E-flat major, Op. 27, No. 1
  Andante; Allegro
  Allegro molto e vivace
  Adagio con espressione
  Allegro vivace

Leos Janá?cek
Sonata, I.X. 1905, “From the Streets”
  The Presentiment: Con Moto
  The Death – Adagio

Beethoven
Sonata quasi una fantasia in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2, “Moonlight”
  Adagio sostenuto
  Allegretto
  Presto agitato

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann
Fantasy in C major, Op. 17
  Adagio – Im lebhaften Tempo. Im Legendenton.
  Maßig – Durchaus energisch.
  Langsam getragen, durchweg leise zu halten.

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Sonata quasi una fantasia
in E-flat major, Op. 27, No. 1
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

The time of the two Op. 27 sonatas—1800–1801—was an important period in Beethoven’s personal and artistic development. He had achieved a success good enough to write to his old friend Franz Wegeler in Bonn, “My compositions bring me in a good deal, and may I say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition, I can count on six or seven publishers and even more, if I want them. People no longer come to an arrangement with me. I state my price, and they pay.” At the time of this gratifying recognition of his talent, however, the first signs of his fateful deafness appeared, and he began the titanic struggle that became one of the gravitational poles of his life. Within two years, driven from the social contact on which he had flourished by the fear of discovery of his malady, he penned the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” his cri de cœur against this wicked trick of the gods. These sonatas stand on the brink of that great crisis in Beethoven’s life.

The Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 27, No. 1 (the famous “Moonlight” Sonata is Op. 27, No. 2) was completed by the end of 1801 and published by the Viennese house of Cappi on March 3, 1802. The work was dedicated to Princess Josephine Sophie von Liechtenstein, née von Fürstenberg, wife of General Field Marshal Prince von Liechtenstein; she was one of Beethoven’s pupils and most important patrons at the time. The composer remained on friendly terms with her at least until 1805, when he asked her to assist his student Ferdinand Ries, who had been conscripted into the army and was about to leave Vienna penniless. In noting the experimental nature of the form of the Op. 27 sonatas, Beethoven specified that they were written “in the manner of a fantasy” (quasi una fantasia). The Classical model for the instrumental sonata comprised three independent movements: a fast movement in sonata-allegro form; an Adagio or Andante usually arranged as a set of variations or a three-part structure; and a closing rondo in galloping meter. In the Op. 27 sonatas, Beethoven altered the traditional fast–slow–fast sequence in favor of an innovative organization that shifts the expressive weight from the beginning to the end of the work, and he made the cumulative effect evident by instructing that the movements be played without pause. (Harold Truscott pointed out, however, that “the Romantic element in Beethoven’s Op. 27 does not lie in the movement order but rather in the passion and use of sudden mood changes behind the movement shapes.”) Maynard Solomon wrote that, by 1801, “Beethoven had gained the high ground of the Viennese tradition; he was now faced with the choice of endless repetition of his conquests or casting out in an uncharted direction. . . . One of these [new paths] lay in the direction of Romanticism, toward the loosening and imaginative extension of Classic designs and the consolidation of an internal, probing, transcendent style.” The Op. 27 sonatas are among the earliest manifestations of Beethoven’s soaring heroic manner, which was to change forever the course of Western music.

The Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 27, No. 1, opens with an episode of child-like simplicity in moderate tempo that some later musicians (notably Hans von Bülow) thought unworthy of Beethoven; Sir Donald Tovey noted that the bass motive here moves “like a kitten in pursuit of its tail.” Beethoven knew very well what he was about, however, since the deliberate shifting of emotional and formal weight from the beginning to the end of the sonata requires just such a low level of tension as the platform upon which to build the successive movements. (The slow, dreamy music that begins the “Moonlight” Sonata accomplishes the same formal purpose in that work.) A sudden Allegro outburst erupts in the middle of the movement, but the calm of the opening soon returns. The second movement, which follows almost without pause, is an attenuated scherzo in C minor whose haunted mood presages that of the scherzo of the Fifth Symphony. An abbreviated slow movement (Adagio con espressione) of great stillness and introspection leads by means of sweeping cadenza-like figures to the brilliant finale, whose vibrant impetuosity is interrupted on the work’s penultimate page by a recall of the quiet music of the Adagio before the closing dash to the end.

Sonata, I.X. 1905, “From the Streets”

Leos Janá?cek (1854–1928)

By the turn of the 20th century, the Habsburg dynasty had ruled central Europe for over six centuries. Rudolf I of Switzerland, the first of the Habsburgs, confiscated Austria and much surrounding territory in 1276, made them hereditary family possessions in 1282, and, largely through shrewd marriages with far-flung royal families, the Habsburgs thereafter gained control over a vast empire that at one time stretched from the Low Countries to the Philippines and from Spain to Hungary. By the mid-19th century, following the geo-political upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars, the Habsburg dominions had shrunk to the present territories of Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, a considerable reduction from earlier times but still a huge expanse of land encompassing a great diversity of national characteristics. The eastern countries continued to be dissatisfied with their domination by the Viennese monarchy, however, and the central fact of the history of Hungary and Czechoslovakia during the 19th century was their striving toward independence from the Habsburgs. The Dual Monarchy of 1867 allowed the eastern lands a degree of autonomy, but ultimate political and fiscal authority still rested with Emperor Franz Joseph and his court in Vienna. It was not until 1918, following the ravages of World War I, that the centuries-long Habsburg rule over central Europe finally came to an end.

Leos Janá?cek was among those many Czechs who longed for freedom for their native land from the Habsburgs. The son of a village school master, Janá?cek became a chorister in Brno at age 11, before going to Prague, Vienna, and Leipzig for advanced musical training. He did much to further the musical life of his country, founding the Brno Philharmonic Society in 1881 and later serving as professor at the Prague Conservatory. In addition, Janá?cek not only gave much time to collecting folk music, which he considered an indispensable component of his country’s national character, but he also developed a specifically Czech vocal style based on the sounds, rhythms, and inflections of the local spoken dialects, comparable to that achieved by Mussorgsky in Russia. (The opera Jenufa—his first international success, at age 50, in 1904—solidified his unique style, and was followed by a remarkable series of stage works that contain some of the most powerful music drama ever conceived: Katya Kabanova, The Cunning Little Vixen, The Makropoulos Affair, and From the House of the Dead.)

Just as he wanted a music free from Germanic domination, so Janá?cek wanted his country politically free from the Habsburgs. It was therefore both painful and infuriating for him when a rally in Brno on October 1, 1905, by Czech students demanding the establishment of a university that was Czech in both its outlook and its language, was forcefully put down by Austrian troops. A 20-year-old student, Frantisek Pavlik, was killed in the demonstrations, and Janá?cek was fired to memorialize the young man’s death in a deeply felt piano work which he titled for the fateful date, according to the European fashion: Sonata 1.X.1905, “From the Streets.” He prefaced the score with lines summarizing the terrible incident:

> The white marble steps of the Beseda in Brno—
> Frantisek Pavlik, a humble worker, sinks down covered in blood—
> He came, his heart filled with passion, for the university,
> And was struck down by brutal
> murderers.

Janá?cek originally included three movements in the sonata, but he destroyed the last one before Ludmilla Tucková premiered the work in Brno on January 27, 1906. After hearing the piece performed, Janá?cek tossed the two remaining movements into the river Vltava, but Tucková had already secretly copied them. She preserved her score, and presented it to the composer in 1924, when he was 70 years old. He thanked her for her foresight, and allowed the sonata to be published.

The movements’ titles—The Presentiment and The Death—are eloquently realized by the music itself, among the earliest of Janá?cek’s works to display the powerful, individual, and disturbing idiom that was to become his characteristic musical speech. The “presentiment” occurs in the fourth measure of the first movement, when a sharp, strident motive breaks into the peaceful, folkish melody of the opening. These two contrasting ideas are played out, structurally and emotionally, as the movement proceeds through its sonata form. Though the second movement is called The Death, it evokes not Pavlik’s murder in Brno, but the grief afterwards. Its only significant thematic material is the little arch-phrase of the “presentiment” in the first movement, now freighted with sorrow and regret, from which it weaves a moving threnody.

Sonata quasi una fantasia in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2, “Moonlight”
Beethoven

Beethoven fell in love many times, but never married. The source of his infatuation in 1801, when he was 30 years old and still in hope of finding a wife, was the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, who was 13 years his junior, rather spoiled, and reportedly something of a vixen. She seems to have been flattered by the attentions of the famous musician, but probably never seriously considered his intimations of marriage; her social station would have made wedlock difficult with a commoner such as Beethoven. For his part, Beethoven was apparently thoroughly under her spell at the time, and mentioned his love for her to a friend as late as 1823, though by then she had been married to Count Wenzel Robert Gallenberg, a prolific composer of ballet music, for two decades. A medallion portrait of her was found among Beethoven’s effects after his death. The Sonata in C-sharp minor was contemporary with the love affair with Giulietta and dedicated to her upon its publication in 1802, but the precise relationship of the music’s nature and the state of Beethoven’s heart must remain unknown; he never indicated that the piece had any programmatic intent. It was not until five years after his death that the work’s passion and emotional intensity inspired the Romantic German poet and music critic Ludwig Rellstab (whose verses Schubert set in 1828 as the first seven numbers of his Schwanengesang) to describe the sonata in terms of
“a vision of a boat on Lake Lucerne by moonlight,” a sobriquet that has since inextricably attached itself to the music.

Instead of opening with a full symphonic-style, sonata-allegro essay, the “Moonlight” initially falls upon the listener with a somber, minor-mode Adagio of the greatest introspection. Next comes a subdued scherzo and trio whose delicacy is undermined by its off-beat syncopations. The expressive goal of the sonata is achieved with its closing movement, a powerful essay in full sonata form filled with tempestuous feeling and dramatic gesture about which John

N. Burk wrote, “It is the first of the tumultuous outbursts of stormy passion which Beethoven was to let loose through the piano sonatas. It is music in which agitation and urgency never cease.”

Fantasy in C major, Op. 17
Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

“Ruins,” he called it, “the most passionate thing I have ever written—a deep lament for you.” Thus did Robert Schumann explain the content and genesis of the Fantasy in C major to his beloved Clara Wieck following a bitter period of separation imposed by the girl’s tyrannical father in 1836. Friedrich Wieck of Leipzig was one of the most renowned piano pedagogues of his day, eagerly sought out for the discipline and efficacy of his teaching by talented students, including Schumann, who placed himself under Wieck’s stern gaze in 1829. Schumann showed such promise that Wieck took him into his household for full-time instruction, and there the 20-year-old musician worked up not only the obligatory scales and études, but also an infatuation for young Clara, whom Wieck was grooming for the life of a piano virtuoso. Love developed slowly but steadily between the couple—Clara was nine years younger than Robert—and it was sufficiently advanced by the mid-1830s to cause Papa Wieck serious concern. Schumann by that time had abandoned hopes of a career as a concert pianist, and had turned instead to composing and editing the fledgling music journal Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, endeavors which Wieck judged offered slim prospects for producing an appropriate marriage partner for his daughter, who was just then beginning to establish her international reputation.

Early in 1836, Wieck shipped the still-underage Clara off to Dresden to get her away from Schumann, but Robert followed his beloved there, and won a declaration of mutual love from her. When Wieck learned of this development, he retrieved Clara to Leipzig, and forbid her further contact with Schumann in person or even by letter; Wieck filled the void by spawning unfounded rumors of new liaisons intended to make the lovers distrust each other. Schumann, referring to the volatile emotions that troubled him throughout his life, later wrote to Clara about those days, when he was afraid not just of losing her, but even his reason: “Being unable to learn anything about you, I wished, with all my might, to forget you. It was at that time that we had become strangers to one another. I was resigned. Then my old suffering burst out afresh, and made me wring my hands. Often at night I would implore God: ‘Grant me at least one night of tranquillity in which my mind would not give way.’” Despite the unsettling anxiety of those months, Schumann’s creativity was fiercely fired by the mingled pain and hope, and in June 1836, he began the superb Fantasy in C major, into whose opening movement, which he titled Ruins, he wove a quotation from Beethoven’s song cycle An die ferne Geliebte—“To the Distant Beloved”—to summon the vision of the cloistered Clara. He inscribed a poem by Friedrich Schlegel at the head of the score as a message to her: “Through all the tones/In earth’s many-colored dream/There sounds one soft long-drawn note/For the one who listens in secret.” Clara and Robert remained faithful and determined through those difficult months, and by early the next year, they had resumed their correspondence. They were engaged in August 1837—by surreptitious letter—and finally married three years later, on the eve of Clara’s 21st birthday, having weathered Friedrich Wieck’s ceaseless barrage of litigation to keep them apart.

Though the opening movement of the Fantasy, which Schumann instructed should “be interpreted in a fantastic and passionate manner,” is founded upon traditional sonata form (with a nostalgic central episode marked Im Legendenton—“In the Style of a Legend”—replacing the conventional development section), the distinguished pianist and scholar Charles Rosen noted in his book on The Romantic Generation a revolutionary structural-emotional process here that moves beyond the customary dynamics and balances of the traditional Classical form: “[The movement] begins with great tension, descends toward resolution and is frustrated, moves to a point of greater tension, and initiates the process over and over again. The structure is like a series of waves, starting with the climax, losing momentum each time, and then beginning again. . . . Schumann’s radical innovation was a new large sense of rhythm conceived as a series of waves, crucial to later composers like Wagner and Strauss.” The second movement is an assertive and technically demanding march, which Liszt greatly admired and Clara said made her feel “hot and cold all over. . . . Many images are evoked. . . . It strikes me as a victory march of warriors following a battle, and the [more subdued] central theme makes me think of young maidens in a village, all dressed in white, each with a wreath in her hand to crown the warriors kneeling before them.”

The finale is a spacious, serene slow movement of exquisitely subtle light and shadow that seems to suspend time itself.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

András Schiff (piano) was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1953. He began piano lessons at age five with Elisabeth Vadász and continued his musical studies at the Ferenc Liszt Academy with Professor Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág, and Ferenc Rados. He also worked with George Malcolm in London. Each season, he collaborates with the major orchestras of Europe, North America, Japan, and Israel, and appears regularly at the festivals of Salzburg, Vienna, Lucerne, Ansbach, and Feldkirch. Recitals and special projects take him to all of the international music capitals and include cycles of the major keyboard works of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Bartók. Between 1999 and 2005, Schiff will perform all of Mozart's piano concertos at the Mozartwoche of the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum in Salzburg; he has created his own ensemble, the Cappella Andrea Barca, for this project.

During the next few seasons, the focus of Schiff's orchestral activities will be conducting programs of Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart from the keyboard. For the Bach celebration year in 2000, he gave many Bach recitals and conducted Bach's St. Matthew Passion and other compositions. In 2001, he directed concert performances of Mozart's Così fan tutte in Vicenza and at the Edingurgh Festival. From 1989 to 1998, Schiff was founder and artistic director of Musiktage Mondsee, an annual chamber music festival near Salzburg. He is presently joint artistic director of the Festival of Ittingen, a chamber music festival he founded in Switzerland with Heinz Holliger in 1995. Schiff is also artistic director of a series titled Homage to Palladio, at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza.

András Schiff has established a prolific discography, including recordings for ECM New Series, Teldec, and London/Decca. He has received several international recording awards, including two Grammy Awards for Best Classical Instrumental Soloist (Without Orchestra) for the Bach English Suites, and Best Vocal Recording with tenor Peter Schreier for Schubert's Schwanengesang.

Among other honors, András Schiff was awarded the Bartók Prize in 1991 and the Claudio Arrau Memorial Medal from the Robert Schumann Society in Dusseldorf in 1994. In March 1996, Schiff received the highest Hungarian distinction, the Kossuth Prize, and in May 1997, he received the Leonie Sonnings Music Prize in Copenhagen. He makes his home in Florence, Italy.

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