

A portrait of pianist Andrea Lucchesini, a man with curly hair, looking upwards and to the right. He is wearing a dark, high-collared shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him. The background is a dark, textured wall with a spotlight effect on his head and shoulders.

audite

Andrea Lucchesini

SCHUBERT • LATE PIANO WORKS

VOL. II

Franz Schubert
Late Piano Works • Vol. II

Piano Sonata No. 21 in B-flat major, D. 960

- I. Molto moderato 21:54
- II. Andante sostenuto 10:38
- III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza – Trio 4:11
- IV. Allegro, ma non troppo 9:05

Three Piano Pieces, D. 946

- I. Allegro assai 14:36
- II. Allegretto 13:08
- III. Allegro 5:16

“The sad «very last» one” – Schubert’s Sonata in B-flat major

“A musician visiting Vienna for the first time may well be amused for a while by the convivial hustle and bustle in the streets, and he will often stop in amazement in front of the tower of St Stephen’s Cathedral; but soon he is reminded of the city’s proximity to a churchyard which is more important to him than anything else the city has to offer, where two of the most magnificent of his fellow artists are laid to rest only a few paces from each other. So, like me, many a young musician may soon have wandered out after the first noisy days to the Währinger Kirchhof, to lay a floral offering on those tombs, even if it were a wild rose bush, as I found planted on Beethoven’s grave. Franz Schubert’s resting place was unadorned.”

No more than eleven and ten years respectively had passed since the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert when Robert Schumann visited the Währing cemetery in Vienna. But the traveller from Leipzig did not content himself with merely visiting the graves: Schumann also called on Ferdinand Schubert, who looked after a wealth of unpublished manuscripts by his brother Franz. For the first time Schumann was given the opportunity to lay his eyes on the “great” Symphony in C major, or the last three Piano Sonatas in C minor, A major and B-flat major, which Schubert had written in fair copy in September 1828. For Schumann this became the motivation to contemplate the relationship between art and death, as well as the character of the “late work”: “Whether he wrote them on his sickbed or not, I could not glean; the music itself seems to suggest the former. But it is also possible to see more, where the imagination is filled by the sad «very last» one with the thought of imminent departure.”

Schumann was surely referring to a passage such as the opening melody of the Sonata in B-flat major (D. 960), from which emanates, even for today’s listeners, the aura of the transfigured and inward-looking melancholy. Andrea Lucchesini, on the other hand, interprets this miraculous theme as a consequence of a development in Schubert’s late œuvre: transferring the art of the song onto the piano. “For me, the piano works are reflections of his vocal works: with him everything is conceived *cantabile*. In his songs, all sentences, even single syllables, translate directly into the music – word and sound are closely related. It therefore seems quite logical to me that Schubert also applied this technique in his music without words.”

As the surviving sketches prove, Schubert did not compose the famous theme in one great sweeping gesture, but instead worked intensively on tempo, articulation and harmony. Yet, towards the end of his life, Schubert treated passages of time in the sonata

more radically. Twice the comfortable main theme attempts to launch the piece: the first time it is prevented by a trill in the lowest bass register, followed by a pause. “These pauses,” according to Lucchesini, “are essential to Schubert. Instead of preparing the harmonic development correctly, he inserts a pause: a surprising caesura, after which almost anything could come.” Following the second trill, the music slips to G-flat major and finally starts flowing.

By way of creating such ruptures in the musical flow, Schubert creates new possibilities outside the classical rules of his craft – but he interrupts the music’s logic in a disturbing manner. And more so than in earlier works Schubert seems to suggest in the B-flat major Sonata a form of momentum of the music itself. Here, quite organically, a motif emerges from preceding material – as in the middle section, where an inconspicuous bass idea made up of three ascending notes is first transformed into a spiritualised song and then drives dramatic intensification. And the memory of the opening theme – this time together with the low register trills – is some of the most beautiful music that Schubert ever wrote.

Cantabilità is also the guiding principle for the main theme of the slow movement, a ballad-like melody whose accompaniment has such an unwaveringly steady walking rhythm that it evokes a funereal procession. However, Andrea Lucchesini maintains the flow of this *Andante sostenuto*, ensuring that both the arc and the breath of the vocal line are always preserved. The middle section, a reminiscence of the sonata’s opening theme, protrudes as an “earthly” intermezzo and remains perceptible in the repeat of the opening section. “Repeat”, however, is not the correct term as Schubert twice takes a surprising harmonic turn: initially into the distant and transfigured C major (in relation to the home key of C-sharp minor), and at the end by shifting to C-sharp major. Once again, one experiences small musical variants of great effect, for which Lucchesini uses the word “elevazione”: “I deliberately call this an «elevation», for it seems to me that Schubert touches heaven. Then suddenly a gap opens up through which paradise becomes visible.”

In the *Scherzo*, a fast-flowing dance in triple time, Schubert comes back down to earth and even strikes a fierce note à la Beethoven in the “trio” with its gruff offbeat accents. The theme of the finale, an imaginatively intricate rondo reminiscent of the finale of the “Trout Quintet” of 1819, is also dance-like. Again and again the musical flow is interrupted by an unmovable chime on the note G; not only does this announce the return of the rondo theme, but also seems, whilst pausing, to be posing the fundamental question of meaning. The last pause is finally swept away by a *presto stretto*.

From Schubert's workshop

Robert Schumann surmised that, besides Schubert's "real" sonatas, the composer's cycles of the *Impromptus* and *Moments musicaux*, and even some of the single piano pieces of his late period, might be sonatas in disguise. However, the romantic idea of meaningful poetry, bringing everything together, probably did not take into account the money-oriented music market of the time. Schubert's *Moments musicaux* are, for the most part, self-contained character pieces, whilst the *Impromptus* (another rather flowery title that does not communicate very much) could indeed contain larger sonata movements – but without reaching the narrative consistency and density of an entire sonata.

In May 1828, i.e. before embarking on his last three piano sonatas, Schubert apparently worked on a third cycle of *Impromptus*, for which he completed only three (instead of the usual four) pieces. The autograph of the three piano pieces D. 946 is by no means a fair copy for the printer: each movement bears corrections and slips of the pen, and in the first piece Schubert even deleted an entire *Andantino* section. The posthumous first edition of these pieces, thought to have been published by Johannes Brahms, nonetheless includes this *Andantino*, and it has since mostly been played (as in the present recording) or occasionally omitted. At any rate, Schubert took the reasons for his decision to his grave.

The main theme of these pieces is contrast: as well as the moods, tempi, keys, dynamics and pianistic requirements also change. At the same time, Schubert contents himself formally with simple changes: in the first piece, the outer section rushes off with panache but keeps being held up by chord blocks, its dramatic minor hues shifting into lighter major tones. The two cosy middle sections create a different mood – they appear as idyllic images or memories in a restless life. In the second piece of the D. 946 set Schubert creates a reverse dramaturgy, depicting an E-flat major idyll in the outer sections, whilst the middle movements consist of an agitated character piece, taking up the frosty atmosphere of the *Winterreise* song cycle, followed by a contrasting "Song without Words". Finally, the third piece makes do with just one middle section: the rhythmically staggered chords of its main section come closest to emulating a true sonata scherzo.

Michael Struck-Schloen
Translation: Viola Scheffel



Andrea Lucchesini

Trained under the guidance of Maria Tipo, Andrea Lucchesini gained international recognition at a very young age when he won the *Dino Ciani International Competition* at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Since then he has performed throughout the world with leading orchestras under conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Dennis Russell Davies, Charles Dutoit, Daniel Harding, Vladimir Jurowski and Giuseppe Sinopoli.

In 1994 Andrea Lucchesini was awarded the prestigious *Accademia Musicale Chigiana International Prize* by European music critics, followed by the *F. Abbiati Prize* from Italian music critics in 1995.

Numerous recordings document his artistic career, among them Luciano Berio's concerto *Echoing Curves*, conducted by the composer himself. This marked the beginning of his close relationship with Berio, with whom Lucchesini witnessed the creation of the composer's final and challenging work for solo piano, *Sonata*. He performed the world premiere of this piece in 2001 and recorded it together with all other piano works of Berio. In recent years, Lucchesini has enthusiastically immersed himself in the Schubertian repertoire, e.g. with the recording of the *Impromptus* and the three-part Schubert cycle on audite.

Since 1990 he has dedicated his attention also to chamber music exploring various formations and varied repertoire, including his close collaboration with cellist Mario Brunello.

In addition, Andrea Lucchesini is passionately dedicated to teaching. He currently teaches at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole where he was also artistic director from 2008 until 2016. He is frequently invited to give master classes at major music institutions throughout Europe and in New York.

He serves as a jury member at numerous international piano competitions and was appointed *Accademico di Santa Cecilia* in 2008.



audite

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