

“...among the best Schubert on the piano there has ever been... no one probes more hauntingly the music’s mysterious contemplative ecstasy, or creates such a sense of inspired improvisation”.

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Disc 1

Sonata in E flat major, D568 (no. 7 - 1817) [31:23]
6 Moments Musicaux, D780 Books 1, 2 (1823 - 28) [36:10]

Disc 2

Sonata in A minor, D537 (no. 4 - 1817) [20:03]
6 German Dances, D820 (1824) [8:39]
Sonata in A major, D664 (no. 13 - 1819?) [19:30]
12 German Dances (Ländler), D790 (1824) [15:20]

Disc 3

Sonata in D major, D850 (no. 17 - 1826) [38:10]
Sonata in A minor, D784 (no. 14 - 1823) [23:48]

Disc 4

Sonata in A minor, D845 (no. 16 - 1825) [37:43]
Sonata in B major, D575 (no. 9 - 1818) [26:12]

Disc 5

Sonata in C major, D840 ‘Reliquie’ (no. 15 - unfinished, 1825) [29:00]
Sonata in G major, D894 (no. 18 - 1826) [40:44]

Disc 6

Sonata in C minor, D958 (no. 19 - 1828) [31:04]
Sonata in A major, D959 (no. 20 - 1828) [41:54]

Disc 7

Sonata in B flat major, D960 (no. 21 - 1828) [44:47]
Drei Klavierstücke, D946 (1828) [26:13]

Disc 8

Four Impromptus, D899 (1827) [28:18]
Four Impromptus, D935 (1827) [37:19]

Recordings made on a 1962 Steinway at the Großer Saal, Musikverein, Vienna between September 1996 and August 2001. Produced by Erik Smith, engineered by Everett Porter and Roger de Schot.

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... When we come to look back over it, agreement will be widespread, I've no doubt, that Uchida's has amounted to a distinguished series, some of it among the best Schubert on the piano there has ever been. And I guess parts of it will continue to divide people. This last instalment is characteristic of her: highly inflected, even in the *German Dances*, every note thought about, the detail wonderfully wrought, the sovereign pianism and sound at the service of expression that has been felt, lived through, made quite personal. I do like that kind of Schubert playing, one to one, essentially intimate, which entices you to make a journey with a spellbinding guide who has a vision she wants you to share. Only the finest Schubert pianists find their way to Uchida's rhythmic control, enabling her to project the impression of a consistent tempo in a sonata movement while in fact there may be several, the changes nearly imperceptible as they follow the demands of the incident.

How characteristic of Uchida to make you want to celebrate the music, first of all. She inhabits it completely, and her preferred Steinway for Schubert, and this recording of it – at the Musikverein in Vienna, in the main auditorium – are at one with her endeavour, perfectly judged in what they bring to it, part of the focus. ... This is magnificent playing and I submit willingly and with wonderment to a presentation of these pieces with a richly detailed 'interior' quality and a proto-Mahlerian panoply of sound. But to enjoy her to the full you do have to accept Uchida's slow tempi and to a projection of the expression which is painstaking to the point (some might feel) of laboriousness, especially with all the repeats. No singer could push Schubert as far as Uchida does – but so what? A stunning record nonetheless, and perhaps one to feel quite possessive about.

As Japanese pianist Mitsuko Uchida continues her exploration of Schubert, we've been privileged to observe a kind of dual evolution: not only that of the composer, but the accumulated insights of a performer tapping into her, by now, exquisitely rare empathy. Some of the most intriguing results have centred around those flashes of the composer's early maturity from the mid-1820s, revealing what a wealth of musical innovation and variety Schubert had already explored before the highly revered last three sonatas. ... Uchida's execution of musical thought constantly disarms and captivates: whether in its sensitivity to harmonic colour or in its deft awareness of Schubert's rhythmic complexity and play.

“It sometimes seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all.” These alleged words of Schubert kept coming to mind as I listened to Mitsuko Uchida’s absorbed, deeply poetic reading of the B flat Sonata. At 21'53" (including exposition repeat) and 10'40" respectively, both movements are at once more leisurely and more pliant than from any of the rival pianists listed above; here and there, especially in the long-drawn-out closing theme of the first-movement exposition (from 4'17") and the lingering upbeats of the *Andante’s melody*, pliancy may come dangerously close to stasis. But Uchida’s concentration and inwardness are of a rare order. No pianist makes you so aware how much of the first two movements is marked *pp* or even *ppp*; and none conjures such subtlety of colour in the softest dynamics: listen, for instance, to her playing of the three unearthly C sharp minor chords that usher in the first-movement development (10'55"), or her timing and colouring of the breathtaking sideslip from C sharp minor to C major in the *Andante* (7'24"). Other pianists may find a stronger undercurrent of foreboding or desperation in these two movements – though Uchida builds the development of the initial *Molto moderato* superbly to its dramatic climax. But none probes more hauntingly the music’s mysterious contemplative ecstasy or creates such a sense of inspired improvisation. And her limpid cantabile sonorities are always ravishing on the ear. The recording finely captures Uchida’s subtle, pellucid sound world. In sum, a revealing disc from a Schubertian of rare insight and spirituality.

Including a 28-pages booklet with an essay by Misha Donat in English, Français and Deutsch.

Quote:

Techné #178 - Mitsuko Uchida plays Schubert

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