



BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 23
'Appassionata'

SCHUMANN

Kinderszenen

THALBERG

Grande fantaisie sur
des motifs de
Il barbiere di Siviglia

LISZT

Totentanz

Valentina Lisitsa, Piano



BEETHOVEN • SCHUMANN • THALBERG • LISZT

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827): Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, ‘Appassionata’

23:12

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|---|--------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Allegro assai | 9:24 |
| 2 | Andante con moto – | 5:55 |
| 3 | Allegro ma non troppo – Presto | 7:53 |

Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856): Kinderszenen (Scenes of Childhood), Op. 15

19:39

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| 4 | I. Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples) | 1:35 |
| 5 | II. Kuriose Geschichte (A Curious Story) | 1:06 |
| 6 | III. Hasche-Mann (Blind Man’s Buff) | 0:31 |
| 7 | IV. Bittendes Kind (Pleading Child) | 0:50 |
| 8 | V. Glückes genug (Happy Enough) | 0:31 |
| 9 | VI. Wichtige Begebenheit (An Important Event) | 0:59 |
| 10 | VII. Träumerei (Dreaming) | 3:01 |
| 11 | VIII. Am Kamin (At the Fireside) | 1:11 |
| 12 | IX. Ritter vom Steckenpferd (Knight of the Hobbyhorse) | 0:35 |
| 13 | X. Fast zu ernst (Almost Too Serious) | 1:59 |
| 14 | XI. Fürchtenmachen (Frightening) | 2:20 |
| 15 | XII. Kind im Einschlummern (Child Falling Asleep) | 2:23 |
| 16 | XIII. Der Dichter spricht (The Poet Speaks) | 2:38 |

Sigismond THALBERG (1812–1871):

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| 17 | Grande fantasia sur des motifs de <i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i> , Opéra de Rossini, Op. 63 | 9:38 |
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Franz LISZT (1811–1886):

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| 18 | Totentanz, S525/R188 | 14:51 |
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Valentina Lisitsa, Piano

**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827):
Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, 'Appassionata'**

In 1792 Beethoven had arrived in Vienna from his native Bonn, fortified by recommendations to leading patrons among the aristocracy. He was to continue to rely on the support of influential members of Viennese society in the following years, particularly after increasing deafness brought an end to his appearances as a performer and a growing concentration on composition that would change the shape of future music in Europe. His *Sonata in F minor, Op. 57*, was considered by Beethoven to be one of his best. Its nickname '*Appassionata*', although not chosen by Beethoven, is an apt one, more relevant than Schering's suggested parallel with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Dedicated to Count Franz Brunswick, it was completed in 1805 and published two years later. As so often, this sonata proved a fertile source for imaginative speculation in the nineteenth century, writers finding in it grim spectres, heartfelt emotions, storms of passion and the ominous threats of Fate. The first movement allows a full exploration of the resources of the keyboard, its dramatic first subject contrasted with a simpler, expressive secondary theme. The D flat major *Andante con moto* presents the kind of slower melody that Beethoven knew so well how to write and play. The theme is subject to a series of variations. Fiercely repeated chords introduce the Finale, which, with its great technical and musical demands, ushers in a new world, before the coda, with its sudden reminiscence of the beginning of the movement.

**Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856):
Kinderszenen, Op. 15**

Robert Schumann's early ambitions were to make a name for himself as a pianist, but a weakness in his fingers, for whatever reason, made him turn his attention to composition. In the 1830s he wrote a great deal of music for the piano, but in 1840, the year of his marriage to his former teacher's daughter, Clara Wieck, a match strongly opposed by her father, he composed song after song. At the urging of his wife he then tackled more ambitious forms. The couple settled for a time in Dresden and in 1850 moved to Düsseldorf, where Schumann briefly held the position of director of music for the city, employment in which he proved increasingly inadequate. His attempt at suicide in 1854 was followed by final years in an asylum, where he died in 1856. His wife, Clara Schumann, continued her career as one of the leading pianists of her time. Schumann himself had strong literary interests and a number of his compositions, particularly the early piano pieces, reflect this in their titles and substance. He wrote his *Kinderszenen* (Scenes of Childhood) in 1836. As he told Clara, he had composed thirty little pieces and from these he selected a baker's dozen, all of them designed to express an adult's memories of childhood, or, as he said in a letter to Clara, a reflection of her comment that he sometimes seemed to her as a child. The music is technically undemanding, of ingenuous simplicity, the titles self-explanatory, an outstanding example of what Schumann was able to achieve in forms as limited as this.

Sigismond THALBERG (1812-1871):

Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Opéra de Rossini, Op. 63

One of the great virtuosi of the nineteenth century, Sigismond Thalberg, about whose birth and parentage there was some mystery which he seems not have discouraged, had his schooling in Vienna, where he studied with Simon Sechter and with Mozart's pupil, Hummel. In 1835, having already embarked on a career as a pianist that had taken him to London, he settled in Paris, then a city of pianists, where players including Kalkbrenner, Pixis, Herz, and, of course, Liszt, flourished. Rivalry between Thalberg and Liszt was fomented by the press, allowing enthusiasts to take sides one against another. The so-called revolutionary princess, Princess Belgiojoso, achieved a remarkable social coup when she persuaded the two virtuosi to compete at her salon, in a concert in aid of Italian refugees. As in other such contests, victory was tactfully shared between the two. Thalberg played his *Moses* fantasy, and Liszt answered with his new paraphrase from Pacini's opera *Niobe*. The Princess declared Thalberg the first pianist in the world, while Liszt was unique. Musical journalism has created a legend of Thalberg's defeat and departure from Paris and continuing rivalry between him and Liszt. An element of competition remained, although there seems to have been no open animosity and Liszt wrote a letter of condolence to Thalberg's widow, after her husband's death in 1871. Thalberg went on to enjoy a career of the greatest distinction, touring as far as the Americas, where Liszt never went, with recitals in Brazil and Havana and an extended stay, with the violinist Vieuxtemps, in the United States, where, in the space of two years, he gave 56 recitals in New York, with a repertoire chiefly but not entirely devoted to his own compositions. His career as a virtuoso continued until

1863, when he retired to Posillipo, near Naples, to occupy himself for his remaining years with his vineyards. He died in Posillipo in 1871.

The operatic paraphrase or fantasy remained an important element in the arsenal of any virtuoso pianist and Thalberg, like Liszt, made significant contributions to the genre. His *Grand Fantasy on Rossini's opera The Barber of Seville* was written in 1845. With various themes from the opera, not all immediately familiar and, in any case, transformed, Thalberg creates a work of musical substance in itself and a vehicle for display of his own command of the instrument.

Franz LISZT (1811-1886): Totentanz, S525/R188

Liszt was born at Raiding, in Hungary, in 1811. Encouragement from members of the nobility allowed him in 1822 to move to Vienna, for lessons with the famous piano teacher Czerny. From there he soon travelled to Paris, the base for a career as a travelling virtuoso, his own technical brilliance inspired by hearing the demon violinist Paganini. One of the most remarkable pianists of his time, he won adulation from audiences. A liaison with a married woman, the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult, who became the mother of his three children, led to extensive travel abroad, and after their separation to an important change of direction, when, in 1847, he settled in Weimar as Director of Music to the court of the Grand Duchy. There he found solace in the presence of a Polish heiress, Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, estranged wife of a Russian prince. Now he turned his attention to the development of a newer form of orchestral music, the programmatic symphonic poem, and, as always, to the revision and publication of earlier compositions. In 1860 Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein moved to Rome, hoping to have her first marriage annulled, as it had already been by the Russian Orthodox Church, and thus to be able to

marry Liszt. He followed in 1861, but, with final permission for marriage allegedly withheld, was able to settle in the city, lodging with a religious order, although not without some material comforts, and turn his attention to church music. For the last 25 years of his life Liszt developed a pattern of existence that he described as 'three-pronged'. In Rome he pursued his religious interests, returning to Weimar from 1869 to teach and advise a younger generation of musicians, and annually, now as a national hero, visiting Hungary, where he did much to foster national musical development. He died in 1886 while visiting Bayreuth, where his unforgiving daughter Cosima, widow of Richard Wagner, lived, concerned more with the continued propagation of her husband's music than with her father.

The source of Liszt's *Totentanz* (Dance of Death), a work described in the published subtitle of the work in its original version for piano and orchestra as a paraphrase of the *Dies irae*, the sequence from the

Requiem Mass, a *Danse macabre*, was pictorial rather than literary. In 1839 he had visited Pisa with Marie d'Agoult and there had seen the fresco of the *Last Judgement*, attributed to Francesco Traini, which has commonly been suggested as a possible source, while others have proposed Holbein's series of wood engravings, *Todtentanz*, to which Liszt refers obliquely in a letter to his son-in-law, Hans von Bülow, to whom the work is dedicated and who gave the first performance in The Hague in 1865. Liszt wrote *Totentanz* in 1849, revising it for later publication and performance, with versions for one or two pianos. It offers a series of five variations, following the opening statement of the theme, the *fugato* fifth of which leads to a finale that is itself a series of variations, all calling for considerable virtuosity in a performer.

Keith Anderson

Valentina Lisitsa



Valentina Lisitsa's performances have been greeted by enthusiastic audiences in the world's most prestigious concert venues; her recital début in Vienna's Musikverein Golden Hall (2008) received multiple standing ovations from Viennese listeners, known to be the toughest to please. She has a cult-like internet following, attracting millions of views on her YouTube channel. While possessing an extensive and varied repertoire (more than forty concertos and hundreds of solo works) she admits to have a special affinity for the music of Rachmaninov and Beethoven. In 2010 she recorded all the Rachmaninov *Concertos* with the London Symphony Orchestra (Michael Francis conducting) and is embarking on another ambitious project, recording Beethoven's *32 Piano Sonatas*. Future CD releases will include a disc with Rachmaninov's solo works including the neglected *First Sonata*, a complete set of Chopin *Etudes* and concertos by Brahms, Beethoven and Strauss. Born in Ukraine, Valentina Lisitsa lives in the United States, making her home in North Carolina's countryside.

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Described by critics as a 'bona fide angel playing' and an 'electrifying pianist', the young Ukrainian-born, North Carolina-based Valentina Lisitsa has been receiving rave reviews ever since her début in Avery Fisher Hall for the Mostly Mozart Festival. It would be hard to conceive of a more thoroughly Romantic or demanding programme than she presents here: Beethoven's radical '*Appassionata*' Sonata, via Schumann's musical expression of an adult's memories of childhood and Thalberg's fantastic transformation of themes from Rossini's most popular opera to Liszt's pianistic *danse macabre*, inspired by a fresco by the medieval Italian artist Francesco Traini.

BEETHOVEN • SCHUMANN • THALBERG • LISZT

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Valentina Lisitsa, Piano

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Producer and Editor: Michael Fine • Engineer: Wolf-Dieter Karwatky

Please see page 2 of the booklet for a detailed track list

Booklet Notes: Keith Anderson • Piano by Steinway (Technician: Gerd Finkenstein)

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