

Summary of Three Dissertation Recitals

by

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ABSTRACT

Three dissertation recitals were given to fulfill the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

The first dissertation lecture-recital was presented in Britton Recital Hall on December 16th, 2021. The event began with a lecture on Franz Schubert, Piano Sonata in Bb major (D. 960), which analyzed its musical styles and compositional techniques. The lecture was followed by a performance of the complete work.

The second dissertation recital was performed in Britton Recital Hall on February 1, 2022. The program included Franz Schubert, Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959; Domenico Scarlatti, Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 11, Piano Sonata in A Major, K. 65, and Piano Sonata in Bb Major, K. 529; Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Nutcracker Suite*, op. 71a, Nos. 1, 2, and 5 (transcribed by Mikhail Pletnev); and Franz Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody No. 4 in Eb Major, S. 244/4.

The third dissertation recital was given in Britton Recital Hall on March 23, 2022. It consisted of works in various genres: (1) Alexander Scriabin, Preludes, op. 11, nos. 1, 3, 4, and 6, and the Fantasy in B minor, op.28; (2) Frédéric Chopin, Piano Sonata No. 2 in Bb minor, op. 35, and (3) Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 57.

RECITAL I PROGRAM

Lecture Recital: Schubert Piano Sonata D.960 in B-flat major.

Piano Sonata D.960 in B-flat major (1828)

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

- I. Molto moderato
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Scherzo (Allegro vivace con delicatezza)
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

RECITAL I PROGRAM NOTES

Franz Schubert, born in 1797 until 1828, was an Austrian composer who bridged the late Classical and early Romantic eras. Although he died at age 31, he was a prolific composer with more than 600 Lieder, nine symphonies, and 22 piano sonatas.

The Piano Sonata D.960 in B-flat major was written in the last months of his life. The final version was probably finished by September 1828, a month and a half before his death at only 31. However, this piece was not published until about ten years after his death, around 1838–39. One of the reasons people ignored Schubert's piano sonatas for so long seems to be because they were considered not as good as Beethoven's sonatas structurally and dramatically. However, the last sonatas contain both distinctions and similarities to works by Beethoven.

Besides the influence from Beethoven, this sonata also contains musical elements from Schubert's other compositions, such as German Lieder. As Andras Schiff said, "As a melodist, Schubert is in a class of his own..... Someone who has spent most of his life writing for the human voice will always think vocally, even when the music is purely instrumental"¹.

There are two works I want to mention that inspired him to compose this sonata. The first one is the German Lied "*Der Wanderer*" D.489/D.493, written in 1816. The lyrics are taken from a German poem by Georg Philipp Schmidt. The Lied is in c-sharp minor, with a tempo marking *Sehr Langsam*, very slow. The song begins with a recitative, describing the scene: mountains, a steaming valley, the roaring sea. The wanderer is strolling quietly, unhappily, sighing, and asking the question: "where?" This song set the tone for Schubert's C-sharp minor in this sonata. You can also hear the opening of *Der Wanderer* in the development section of the first movement.

Another essential work I would like to introduce is the song cycle "*Winterreise*." It is one of Schubert's two song cycles, a setting of 24 poems by Wilhelm Muller, composed in 1827 and published in 1828, the same year Schubert started writing his last sonata. The theme of this set of poems is "lost or unrequited love," in which you could catch the presence of this feeling in this Sonata.

The first movement

The tempo of the first movement is extraordinary: *Molto Moderato*. *Molto* means "very," *moderato* is an indication to play at a reasonable, moderate tempo. But it is hard to identify how moderate it could be if they are being put together. The Austrian classical pianist Alfred Brendel has talked about this questionable tempo in his lecture "*Schubert's Last Three Piano Sonatas*." He mentioned that *moderato* is a term Schubert implies the calm flow of a measured *allegro*; *molto moderato* would correspond to a not too dragging *allegretto*. Schubert's avoidance of using *allegretto* may be because it is not only a certain speed but also a certain character.²

¹ Schiff, p. 204

² Brendel, p. 402

Like early classical sonatas, the first movement is composed in the traditional sonata form, including exposition, development, and recapitulation.

There are two main factors in the exposition of this movement that we should concern ourselves with: a certain innovation of the structure setting and the role of the mysterious trill on G-flat in the first subject. Unlike the previous classical sonatas, Schubert writes three main subjects in the exposition— B-flat major, F-sharp minor, and F major, in which the F-sharp could be regarded as a transitory subject. This three-subject exposition extends the length of this section, in which some pianists would prefer not to play the repeat from the beginning again, considering the extreme length of the work.

The first subject is a lyric warming melody, moving closely around the tonic. It recalls the opening of Beethoven's Archduke Trio op. 97, which starts with a tempo marking “Allegro moderato.” Although Beethoven begins on the downbeat with a brighter and more motivic melody, both of them share the same key and nearly the same pacing and characters. The first phrase is interrupted by a mysterious trill on G-flat at the end, which sounds like thunder in the far distance. It is the first appearance of G-flat, which is an important note throughout the whole piece. This G-flat also indicates the key of the following subject: F-sharp minor. F-sharp is the enharmonic equivalent of G-flat – which intensifies the meaning of the G-flat trill. This enharmonic switching also recurs in the third movement, measure 38 and measure 50.

The exposition section finally arrives on the dominant F major. However, the key immediately turns to the c-sharp minor once it goes to the development section. It is also the main key of the second movement. Schubert gives us the first taste of the c-sharp minor with the same thematic material here. It is not a coincidence that Schubert chose c-sharp minor for the development. The middle section of development recalls his Lied “Der Wanderer” D.493, which is also set in the key of C-sharp minor.

The main theme comes back after the far-away G-flat trill, where the recapitulation starts.

The second movement

The second movement is in c-sharp minor, borrowing the key from the first movement development section. The tempo marking is *Andante sostenuto*. It refers to the “walking” speed, which is supposed not to be slow. In this case, the speed of this movement must be slower because of the word “sostenuto,” sustained.

The whole movement is divided into three sections, ABA'. The A or A' section is built up with a continuous monotonous ostinato accompaniment in the left hand. Above that, two singers are singing together.

The B section is in A major. It is an anthem for the pianists, grand and sacred. The arch shape theme recalls the opening of the first movement, thematically and texturally.

A' comes back in the same key and same melody, but with a different rhythm for the ostinato. It sounds like a death knocking on the door. The end of the second movement is very quietly going to the C sharp major key, the major tonic key. It is an intimate expression of Schubert's inner feeling: Schubert already knew that he was mortally ill with syphilis, so he has been waiting for this moment. Death, to him, is a savior, is welcoming.

The third movement

It is a form of Scherzo-trio. Scherzo means a joke, pulling us out of the heavy and dark moods. The tempo marking is Allegro vivace con delicatezza. Vivace means "lively", con delicatezza, very delicate. This mvt contains two sections: scherzo and trio, filled with dancing characters.

The right hand in the trio section features the Mazurka dancing style, with syncopated left hand disturbing the right-hand melody.

The fourth movement

The last movement goes back to the tonic B-flat major. But it starts in a "wrong" key, with a bell-ring G octave. Beethoven's works. Another inspiration is Beethoven's string quartet in b-flat major, op.130, alternate finale, the last piece.

Coincidentally, these two works share the same tonic keys, and for the final mvt, they also share the same way of starting the piece and modulating. And also, even though it is only a quick appearance in the left hand, the G-flat recalls the unique trill in the first movement.

This mvt is in a sonata rondo form with a coda:
[A B']exp - [A C"]dev -[A B]recap -[A D]coda

The character of the last movement represents the lifestyle during that time: The Biedermeier period. The Biedermeier period was an era in Central Europe between 1815 and 1848. It began with the congress of Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and ended with the onset of the Revolutions of 1848. The effect was for artists and society, in general, to concentrate on the domestic and the non-political. Writers, painters, and musicians began to stay in safer territory. The emphasis on home life for the growing middle class stimulates a new style of furniture design and interior decoration to grow up,

The last movement is applied to the music in a simple, delightful mood. The second theme is a good example to prove this. Even though some parts are stormy or angry sections in this movement, it always comes back to the easy life, just like the music ends on a major key.

RECITAL II PROGRAM

Piano Sonata in A Major, D.959 (1828)

1. Allegro
2. Andantino
3. Scherzo: Allegro vivace-Trio: Un poco piu Lento
4. Rondo: Allegretto-Presto

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in C minor, K.115

Piano Sonata in A Major, K.65

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, K.529

Domenico Scarlatti
(1685-1757)

Nutcracker Suite (1892)

1. March
2. Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy
Pletnev
5. Trepak (Russian Dance)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)
arr. Milkhail

Hungarian Rhapsody no.4 in E-flat Major, S.244/4 (1847)

Quasi Adagio alteramente-Adantino-Allegretto

Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

RECITAL II PROGRAM NOTES

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) **Piano Sonata in A Major, D.959 (1828)**

Schubert's Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959 was composed within the last months of his life, September to October 1828 - when he also wrote the C Minor (D. 958) and B-flat (D. 960) piano sonatas. Today, these three sonatas are now considered among the most important and mature compositions throughout his life. However, they were neglected when Schubert passed away. His brother sold the manuscript to the publisher Diabelli after his death, but the sonatas were not published until 1839 and dedicated to Schumann, a keen advocate of Schubert's music.

In the 1820s, Schubert had begun to experiment with cyclic composition. The motifs or themes established in the very opening occur in other sections or movements to intensify the relationship between each movement. The cyclic device is not only applied in each sonata, but the primary theme of the last three sonatas also shares the same musical ideas in different keys. That is why people regarded the last three sonatas as a trilogy.

The A major sonata starts with a grand, majestic subject introducing one of the movement's most characteristic features: ascending third chords in the right-hand inner voice. According to Charles Fisk, it is a good example of "Schubert's most Classical, '*multum in parvo*' gesture, neither lyrical nor immediately passionate, but instead abstract and pregnant with motivic possibilities."³ The thirds motif occurs elsewhere in different ways, such as the beginning of the transition in measure 16. The ascending thirds motif appears in the left hand beneath the lyrical and beautiful octave melody on the top. The second theme arrives in E major in measure 55, with a serene and calm theme. It creates another important motif that is cyclically used in other sections and movements, scale as 5-3-6, 5-4-2. The development borrows this motif and modulates starting on C major. After hovering between C major and B major, the music finally modulates into C minor and goes back to A major by passing through A minor in between. The first movement ends with a Coda, recalling the primary theme again in extreme *pp*, contrasting the grand opening.

Starting from the pitch, which melodically closes the first movement, the second movement in F sharp minor, Andantino, is the wildest and most violent movement in Schubert's piano sonatas. The whole movement is simply divided into three parts in structure: A-B-A'. A section starts with a sigh motif A-G# which recalls the end of the first phrase in the first movement. From measure 5-8, the second phase recurs the second theme motif in the first movement: 5-3-6, 5-4-2. B section begins with an aria, filled with appoggiaturas around an f-sharp minor triad chord, which intensified the music as a forewarning of the storm. The A' section starts with the opening theme by adding a bell ring on the top. The end of the second movement recalls the thirds at the beginning of the first movement. Backward, however, arrives from V to i.

³ Fisk, Charles.p.274

The third movement is one of Schubert's most delightful and bouncy movements, following the two severe movements. This movement includes two parts in the ternary form: scherzo and trio. The scherzo starts in A major and features a joyful octave leaping in the right hand, which is reminiscent of the opening of the first movement left-hand opening. The B section starts on C major and is suddenly interrupted by a stormy descending scale in C sharp minor, recalling the abrupt descending scales towards the C sharp minor in the B section of the second movement, measures 107-108. The C major comes back in the A' section, more tonally integrated into A major surroundings this time. The Trio in D major imitates the first movement's opening, rhythmically and harmonically.

The fourth movement is tempo as Rondo-Allegretto. Same as the last movement of D.960, it is in Rondo-sonata form with a coda in the end. It opens with a rising A major arpeggiation, which seems to arise from the descending arpeggiation in the ending of the third movement. Besides the similar echoing between the opening of each movement and the end of previous movements, the keys in the second movement emphasize the more substantial relationship with the earlier movements. The second theme in E major first goes to the F sharp minor in measure 56, reflecting the second movement tonic key. It modulates to the D major in measure 71, echoing the musical climax of both the second and the third movement. Another important key in the second theme in C major in measure 92 is the primary key of the development in the first movement. The coda of the last movement is the most significant part, which absorbs all the musical elements from the fragmented motives in other movements, such as the triplet arpeggios from the first movement, the violent modulation from the second movement, etc. Especially the last phrase, in which Schubert retrograde the order of the opening chords towards the grandest tonic note: A!!!

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) **Piano Sonata K.115, 65&529**

The keys of the three Scarlatti sonatas are the same as the three keys of Schubert's last three sonatas, presenting my highest respect for this genius composer.

Domenico Scarlatti is an Italian composer in the Baroque period whose music greatly influenced the development of classical music. He was one of 10 children in a professional musical family (his father Alessandro Scarlatti was also a renowned musician). Under the advantage of being well-educated in music, Domenico Scarlatti got decent work- serving in Portugal and Spanish royalty families. His keyboard music, thus, was not to educate but to entertain the people.

Domenico Scarlatti is a prolific composer with over 550 keyboard sonatas. Most of his works are in binary form- AB section- with both sections repeated. Besides the difference between the tone colors, you could also hear multiple style characteristics between three of them, such as the sonorous broken chord in the left hand, which imitates the sounds of guitar strumming; the huge leaps and the hand crossings in both A and B flat major sonatas; the repeated chords accompaniment in the c minor sonata, etc.

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) arr. Mikhail Pletnev
Nutcracker Suite (1892) No. 1, 2& 5**

This piano suite, transcribed by Mikhail Pletnev and performed at the Tchaikovsky Competition (Moscow) in 1978, is extracted from the opera music composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky during 1891-1892. The story of The Nutcracker is based on the E.T.A Hoffman fantasy story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. It talks about the girl who befriends the nutcracker prince that comes to life on Christmas Eve and fights against the evil Mouse King.

The plot for the music composition was being simplified by the director of Imperial Theater, Ivan Vsevolozhsky, who commissioned Tchaikovsky to compose the music for both opera and ballet, co-working with the choreographer Marius Petipa. The ballet debuted in December 1892 in St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre, together with Tchaikovsky's another one-act opera: *Iolanta*. Unfortunately, the ballet was not successful. According to the letter from Tchaikovsky to his friend: "Apparently the opera gave pleasure, but the ballet not really; and, as a matter of fact, despite all the sumptuousness it did turn out to be rather boring."⁴ However, the responsibility for the failure did not belong to the composer. Petipa's assistant for his illness altered the ballet choreographer; the scenery and the costumes were criticized as tasteless, and the ballerina who danced the Plume Fairy was widely criticized. Tchaikovsky didn't see success during his lifetime, but it's now being used frequently in different places, especially during Christmas.

**Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Hungarian Rhapsody no.4 in E-flat Major, S.244/4 (1847)**

The Hungarian Rhapsody S.224 is a set of 19 piano pieces composed by Franz Liszt during 1846-1853, based on Hungarian folk themes. The form of each Hungarian rhapsody is influenced by the Verbunkos, one of the Hungarian music and dance genres in the 18th century. It includes multiple parts with different tempos for each of them. Liszt preserved the two main structural elements: the *lassan* (slow) and the *friska* (fast) within these rhapsodies. No.4 in E-flat major is dedicated to Comte Casimir Esterhazy. It is a reworking of the No.7 from his *Magyar Dallok*, Volume II. Same as other rhapsodies, it starts from the *lassan* section with the *verbunkos* melody of unknown origin and eventually comes to the virtuosic and challenging octave section in the end.

⁴ Schwarm, B. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Nutcracker>

RECITAL III PROGRAM

Preludes, op.11 (1888-1896)

Alexander Scriabin
(1872-1915)

No.1 in C Major (1896, Moscow)

No.3 in G Major (1895, Hedelberg)

No.4 in E Minor (1888, Moscow)

No.6 in B Minor (1889, Kyiv)

Fantasy in B Minor, op.28 (1900)

Alexander Scriabin
(1872-1915)

Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat Minor, op.35 (1837-1839)

Frederic Chopin
(1810-1849)

1. Grave- Doppio movimento
2. Scherzo
3. Marche funebre: Lento
4. Finale: Presto

Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, op.57 (1806)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

1. Allegro assai
2. Andante con moto
3. Allegro ma non troppo

RECITAL III PROGRAM NOTES

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Preludes, op.11, No.1,3,4&6 (1888-1896)

The 24 Preludes, op.11, composed by Alexander Scriabin, is a set of preludes composed during 1888-1896. With his twelve Etudes, Op.8, one of the first published works with publisher M.P. Belaieff in 1897 in Leipzig. Influenced by Frederic Chopin, the entire set of preludes used Chopin's twenty-four preludes op.28 as a model, including the key settings, characteristics, and composition technique. Scriabin did not compose the twenty-four preludes chronologically. In fact, the No.4 is the first output written in 1888, in Moscow, when he was sixteen years old. I would like to introduce these four preludes chronologically.

The No.4 in E minor, tempo marking as Lento, starts with an unusual meter 6/4. It was 3/4 originally. However, Scriabin changed it to 6/4 when it was published. The prelude is formed by two parts with a similar opening and a coda: A (mm.1-8)+A'(mm. 9-19)+ Coda (mm.20-24). It contains three layers of musical elements: the descending chromatic line, the counter melody, and repeated chordal accompaniment, just like Chopin's prelude Op.28, no.4 structurally and harmonically.

No.6 prelude in B Minor is the second one he composed in Kyiv, which is nice to introduce the next piece on the program: Fantasy, op.28. This prelude is composed in an etude-like style based on a melody as B minor ascending or descending scale. The main notes of melody altered within the long-note octaves in both hands. Like many other preludes, this prelude is in the ternary form: A(mm.1-16)- B (mm.17-34)-A'(mm. 35-58). It is similar to Chopin's prelude Op.28, no.22 in g minor.

Like Chopin's No.3 prelude in G major, Scriabin also composed a Chopinesque prelude, using the same characteristics under the similar tempo marking: *Vivo*. Distinct from Chopin, Scriabin uses a more complex rhythm: duplets against triplets. The form structure is also the same as Chopin's No.3 prelude: A (mm.1-16)-A'(mm. 17-36)-A''(mm. 37-46). Three sections share the same opening but modulate as a prolongation of I-V-I.

The prelude No.1 in C major was composed in Moscow in 1896. The entire piece is based on a single idea. A quintuplet figure consistently cuts across the bar-line by starting two eighth notes before the downbeat, except the last section (mm.19-25), where the quintuplet is against the triplet. In that case, the downbeat note in the left hand should play after the right hand downbeat. The contrary motion between two hands recalls Chopin's prelude No.1. this prelude is also in the ternary form: A (mm. 1-8)-B (9-18)-A' (19-25).

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)
Fantasy in B Minor, op.28 (1900)

It is an extreme virtuosic piano work that represents his mysticism composition. Compared with the previous preludes in his early period, this Fantasy is a complicated piece, requiring fast passagework, hands that can play massive chords, and the interpretive control of tone colors. Featuring grand Romantic themes and rich harmonies, it follows the traditional sonata-like form in a single movement: an introduction with a blurry and mysterious atmosphere, an exposition with two contrasting themes, a development which modulates based on the second theme, a triumph recapitulation fulfilled with constant jumping chords in the left hand, and a coda with a mysterious bustling bassline.

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)
Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat Minor, op.35 (1837-1839)

Regarded as one of the greatest piano compositions of 19th century piano literature, the second piano sonata is also the first mature sonatas compared with his other three sonatas. It is a large-scale work composed in 1837-1839. The whole piece is centered on its famous third movement: *Funeral March*. Later on, Chopin wrote three other movements, completed the entire sonata by 1839, and published it in 1840 in London, Leipzig, and Paris.

Since the entire sonata is centered as the third movement, the motif of each movement all relates to the third movement. The first movement is clearly in sonata form except for the dismissal of the first theme that comes back in the recapitulation. The first movement, tempo as Grave for the first four measures introduction, and then turns into a breathless, agitated first theme which is twice faster than the beginning tempo, marked as *Doppio movimento*. The primary theme: Db-Bb-C-Db-Bb, which is the retrograde version of the melody line in the third movement, starting from the third beat in the third measure: Bb-Db-C-Bb-Db. Meanwhile, the chord modulation at the end of the first movement also recalls the opening of the third movement: the alternation between i and iv.

The scherzo section in E flat minor opens with a furious repeated octave in both hands. The second movement is in conventional Scherzo-trio form. Unlike the classical sonatas, Chopin switched the order and put the slow movement to the third one.

The third movement, *March funebre*, is one of the most famous compositions of Chopin and also frequently arranged for orchestra. Franz Liszt, one of the best friends of Chopin, described this movement as of “such penetrating sweetness that we can scarcely deem it of this earth.”⁵

The last movement is concise, lasting about 1 minute, with both hands parallelly rushing into the end. It is marked as *Presto* in 2/2 meter, a *Perpetuum mobile* in a binary form. It borrows the motifs from the first movement seventh interval at the beginning or the minor second interval from the third movement.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) **Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, op.57 (1806)**

One of the three piano sonatas of his middle period, this piece was composed in 1806. It was published in Vienna one year later, dedicated to Count Franz von Brunswick. Unlike his entitled work, such as “*Pathetique*,” the title “*Appassionata*” was not named during his lifetime. The publisher labeled it in 1838, over ten years after his death. The entire sonata consists of three movements. *Allegro assai*'s first movement starts with a severe but mysterious parallel arpeggiation in both hands, with an unusual meter of 12/8. The second phrase unexpectedly starts on the Neapolitan key of F minor. This key modulation becomes the basis of the main theme that reprises in the third movement's opening. Unconventionally, the first movement goes straightforwardly without repeating exposition.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, is a set of variations in D \flat Major based on a choral-like theme. Like the original theme, the first variation put the left hand on the off-beat. It continues with the second variation, which embellishes the right-hand melody with sixteenth notes. Eventually, the main theme turns into a vivid thirty-second running note in the left hand and leads the whole movement into the climax. It suddenly returns to the main theme by a rapid descending scale.

The second movement goes directly into the third movement without stopping, connected by a diminished seventh chord of F minor. The last movement, structured as ternary form, is a “*Perpetuum mobile*” movement with several common ideas from the first movement, including the Neapolitan sixth relationship.

⁵ Liszt Franz, *Life of Chopin* (Leypoldt & Holt, 1863), p. 25.

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