BEETHOVEN  Sonata in E major, Op. 109

Vivace ma non troppo; Prestissimo
Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

SCHUBERT  Six Moments Musicaux, Op. 94, D. 780

Moderato, C major
Andantino, A-flat major
Allegro moderato, F minor
Moderato, C-sharp minor
Allegro vivace, F minor
Allegretto, A-flat major

WAGNER  Prelude to Act I of Tristan und Isolde
(arr. Kocsis)

LIZST  Sonata in B minor, S. 178

Notes on the Program
by DAVID WRIGHT

Sonata in E major, Op. 109
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Born about December 16, 1770, in Bonn
Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

In 1822, in the midst of work on his Missa solemnis and the first sketches of the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven finished his last three piano sonatas, Opp. 109, 110, and 111, completing a list of 32 works that have defined the genre ever since. The piano was Beethoven's most intimate medium, and Joseph Horowitz has called his piano sonatas "the most vivid, most detailed self-portrait by any composer in a single genre." Considering the seismic changes Beethoven's art underwent during his career--i.e., the famous "three periods," which subdivide into many smaller but significant stages in his development--32 sonatas seem barely enough to portray it all. They don't, of course, but they come close.

The great final trilogy opens with a work that is predominantly lyrical in tone, begins with a striking combination of tenderness and energy, and ends in radiant benediction. This love song is addressed not to a young lady in a Viennese salon,
but to beauty, art, and things that transcend this mortal existence. The lifetime that led up to it included two works that influenced not only later generations of composers, but apparently Beethoven himself: the fantasy-sonatas of Op. 27, No. 1 in E-flat major and No. 2 in C-sharp minor ("Moonlight"). In their subjectivity, unity of themes, and elimination of the breaks between movements, the Op. 27 sonatas provided the model for the older Beethoven's searching explorations in Op. 109.

The first movement of Op. 109 seems to begin with a lively but orderly sonata exposition--but after only eight bars, in a gesture unprecedented in sonatas to that time, a forte diminished chord and a sudden tempo change to Adagio espressivo shatters the old form and opens up a new world of rhapsodic expression. Thereafter, with extraordinary freedom, Beethoven conducts a dialogue, in alternating tempos, between the lyrical and the transcendent--at least until the harsh intrusion of the section marked Prestissimo. Although this music may sound like a separate movement--similar to the scherzo of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, Op. 106, which is also based on an acerbic parody of the work's opening theme--Beethoven makes no punctuation in the printed score, not even a light double bar, between the E minor Prestissimo and what precedes it. This fiery coda, if that's what it is, does eventually come to a firm close, leaving the listener exhilarated but in suspense as to the sonata's final outcome.

The answer is, as so often in late Beethoven, a theme and variations. Like the Prestissimo, the chorale-like theme strongly recalls the sonata's opening measures, and the transformations it then goes through reflect the polarity between the rational and the ecstatic that was established in the first movement. But because these are variations, not simply the alternation of two themes, Beethoven's expressive canvas is enormously widened, and he can take us through regions operatic, rhapsodic, athletic, pastoral, fugal, and finally ablaze with light before returning us gently to earth with a simple--but somehow transformed by the experience--restatement of his gentle theme.

Six Moments Musicaux, Op. 94, D. 780
FRANZ SCHUBERT
Born January 31, 1797, in Vienna
Died November 19, 1828, in Vienna

As a freelance musician, Schubert depended on publishers for his livelihood, and in the 1820s--the "Biedermeier" period in Viennese art--light and undemanding entertainment was the order of the day. Even some of Schubert's sonatas came out under the title "Sonatina" or "Fantasy," to avoid intimidating prospective buyers. Fortunately for Schubert, his lyrical muse also inspired many a perfect miniature, be it a song or a piano piece. During his lifetime, publishers were only too happy to bring out collections of character pieces for piano that were, somewhat arbitrarily, dubbed "Impromptus" (two sets, Opp. 90 and 142) or
"Moments Musicals" (Op. 94; many editors now write "Musicaux," correcting the publisher's French). The latter work in particular (published in 1828) can be compared to Chopin's mazurkas, since they are often propelled by dance rhythm, yet are among his most poetic and venturesome pages of music.

The outer sections of the Moment Musical No. 1 in C major toss a variety of ideas against each other in counterpoint, while the smoother triplets of the middle section provide more scope for Schubert's unique way with harmonic modulations. No. 2 in A flat major again contrasts an articulated, almost speech-like melody with longer lines over persistent triplets, this time to more dramatic effect. No. 3 in F minor is the earliest music in the set, an "Air russe" ("Russian tune") that Schubert composed in 1823; its structure is also the simplest of the set, a melody in two contrasting strains with a coda.

The turbulent figurations of No. 4 in C-sharp minor might have been influenced by J.S. Bach's Prelude in C minor from Book I of The Well-Tempered Clavier; but it is typical of Schubert to discover in those figurations a tune that he can turn to advantage in the major-key middle section, and to recall both sections in the briefest of codas. Schubert's favorite dactylic rhythm (long, short-short) drives the passionate No. 5 in F minor, even through the mysterious modulations of its pianissimo middle section. In his Scenes of Childhood, Robert Schumann titled the last piece "The Poet Speaks," and Schubert could have done likewise for the sixth and last piece in this set; indeed, Schumann's harmonic language and turn of phrase are uncannily anticipated in this gentle postlude.

Prelude to Act I of Tristan und Isolde
RICHARD WAGNER
Born May 22, 1813, in Leipzig
Died February 13, 1883, in Venice

Richard Wagner was a man of the theater through and through; his life was dedicated to the blending of poetry, music, drama, and spectacle into the Gesamtkunstwerk, the unified work of art. In his music dramas, he avoided arias, overtures, and the other traditional operatic elements that could be easily excerpted for performance in a concert. He also composed almost no music that was intended for the concert hall. And yet the influence of his musical ideas was so potent that not even the composers of symphonies and chamber music could avoid them. Except for Brahms and his neoclassical disciples—and maybe not even them—it seemed as though all European composers of the late nineteenth century were measured by how their compositions measured up to those of the master, or by how effectively they were able to thumb their nose at the great musical emperor. Despite the difficulty of snipping music out of Wagner's lengthy works for concert performance, conductors did so anyway, because they believed this music had to be heard, even by people who didn't attend the opera. This custom continued robustly until well past the mid-point of the twentieth century.

How did Wagner become the pivotal musical figure of his era,
as Beethoven had sixty years before? By drawing together the elements of Romanticism—the fairy-tale operas of Weber, the tragic passion of Goethe's Werther, the harmonic innovations of Chopin and Liszt, to name a few—and giving them a mighty shove toward the twentieth century. The fashionable despair of Romantic youth became, in Wagner's later operas, a prophecy of human love broken on the rack of war, politics, and the industrial age. The musical metaphor for this vision was the dismantling of the centuries-old system of tonal harmony, which was already under way in 1860, when Wagner made it the hallmark of his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. This story of doomed love, set (like so many Romantic operas) in medieval times, was set to rootless yet passionate music that expressed unfulfilled yearning as nothing has before or since. Tristan became the rallying cry for exponents of the "Music of the Future," and Wagner became a sort of rock star to his generation.

For longtime concertgoers or record collectors, the phrase "Prelude and Liebestod" rolls easily off the tongue, as the orchestral passages most often excerpted from Tristan. In fact, one might as well refer to "Page 1 and Page 883" of some great novel, since that music consists of Wagner's musical preparation for, and foreshadowing of, the drama to come, coupled with (several hours later in the opera) the drama's tremendous conclusion, the joining of Isolde with her lover Tristan in death. At this concert, we hear, and appreciate on its own, the Prelude: a bundle of yearning chromatic modulations that, quiet as they seem to be, have kept many harmonic analysts (and maybe also psychoanalysts) awake at night. In the piano solo arrangement by the distinguished Hungarian pianist and conductor Zoltán Kocsis, one can easily imagine the music's original instrumentation: The famous opening gesture, in which a strong phrase in the cellos is answered by another that trails off in the oboe, is pregnant with conflict and chromaticism, and yet one also hears the lovers' arms outstretched toward each other. As this pair of ideas is developed in a steady crescendo, a new, bolder theme in the cellos introduces the idea of Tristan's honor and manly passions. At the end, the descent from fortissimo to pianissimo is fairly brief; there is, after all, still an entire opera left to go.

Sonata in B minor, S. 178
FRANZ LISZT
Born October 22, 1811, in Raiding, Hungary
Died July 31, 1886, in Bayreuth

Thoughtful musicians in the nineteenth century—and Liszt was certainly one of them—could see that the Romantic rediscovery of spontaneity and emotional immediacy had been a costly achievement. The ability to think long thoughts in large forms, to compose with discipline and organization, to sustain and develop a musical idea for more than five or ten minutes at a time, was beginning to seem like a lost art. This concern was in Schumann's mind when he called Mendelssohn "the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the most illuminating of musicians, who sees
more clearly than others through the contradictions of our era and is the first to reconcile them." But the new music of that time needed more than the "classicizing" of even so fine a mind as Mendelssohn's; truer to the spirit of the age are the feelings of wonder and exploration one hears in Beethoven's piano sonatas, especially the early fantasy sonatas of Op. 27 (including the "Moonlight") and the last five, Opp. 101, 106, 109, 110, and 111.

How to continue along the path that Beethoven marked was a question that perplexed the Romantics. Schumann's own works titled "Sonata" consist of free-spirited music dressed up in too-tight classical clothes. His finest sonata, in effect, is his C major Fantasy, Op. 17, a three-movement work whose form was dictated by a hidden program and by Schumann's poetic instincts.

Schumann dedicated that piece in 1838 to Liszt, who played it privately, but apparently considered it too introspective to succeed with the public. Not so Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasy, an 1822 piano solo work that Liszt arranged in 1851 for piano and orchestra and performed to great effect. The following year, Liszt began composing a piano sonata, with the Schubert Fantasy as his most immediate model. Both the Schubert work and Liszt's Sonata in B minor are one-movement pieces in several sections that follow roughly the fast-slow-fast movement plan of many classical sonatas; each work is unified by a single theme, whose constant change and development is the engine that drives the piece. (Beethoven's preoccupation with theme-and-variation form in his late works may have suggested this route to Schubert and Liszt.) Each work's final section begins with a brilliant fugue-like passage, for which Beethoven's late sonatas and quartets provide the precedent (looking back, in their turn, to the culminating power of Bach's keyboard fugues).

Returning a compliment, and acknowledging an artistic debt, Liszt dedicated the Sonata to Schumann. (It must be noted that, while Liszt was playing the Sonata for its dedicatee, the sensitive Schumann retreated to the farthest corner of the room.) Schumann's symphonies provided examples of cyclical form, with one theme reappearing in later movements of a long work. As for Schumann's Fantasy, its formal freedom is certainly a precedent for Liszt's Sonata, and so, perhaps, is its secret program. The unadorned, abstract, generic title "Sonata" (unique in Liszt's works) gives no hint of programmatic content; nevertheless, the idea of a Faust scenario has followed this piece around from the beginning. The pianist Claudio Arrau, who studied with a pupil of Liszt, asserted that this interpretation "was taken for granted" in the master's studio. Liszt's fascination with the Faust legend inspired many works, most notably the "Faust" Symphony (1857). It is not hard to hear, in the transformations of the main theme, the machinations of the busy, gleeful, sarcastic and endlessly mutable Mephisto. Against this are set the ecstasies of the lovers Faust and Gretchen, their pleas for divine mercy (in a section marked "Recitativo"), and the grandeur of the Almighty (in the broad "Grandioso" theme).

The Faust legend is a useful metaphor, especially for pianists studying the piece, but it is hardly necessary for an appreciation of the sonata's brilliance, imagination, shirt-
grabbing emotion, and (amid all the extravagance of technique and feeling) thematic economy. Liszt's manuscript of the work is full of deletions, as if he were cutting out empty passagework and leaving only the measures that shed new light on his themes. Nothing is wasted, from the brooding descending scale that opens the work to the ascending "Grandioso" theme over throbbing chords. But the bulk of the work--this single movement that takes nearly half an hour to play--is derived from two motives that leap up, Mephisto-like, from the initial gloom: one bounding around the keyboard, the other hammering a repeated note. By turns aggressive, whimsical, and fulsomely lyrical, these thematic cells seem able to express a universe of emotions. No wonder Wagner admired this above all Liszt's other works. In fact, Wagner's Tristan und Isolde (1856-60) marks the next advance in this transformation technique.

Liszt's harmonic language was also a strong influence on Wagner. Whereas Chopin and Schumann used chromaticism for harmonic coloring within a definite key, Liszt's entire Sonata is conceived so chromatically that its tonality is anybody's guess; this so-called Sonata in B minor begins in a sort of modal G minor and ends in B major. Both of the principal motives outline harmonically ambiguous diminished chords, and Liszt makes us wait for fully resolved harmonies until the lyrical Andante sostenuto section, an oasis of comfort amid all the diabolical goings on.

Sixty years later, thanks largely to Wagner, transformation of themes and highly chromatic harmony no longer sounded to most listeners like the work of the devil. They carried, instead, an agreeably floating and sensual connotation. "Late Romantic" is in some ways a curious term for such twentieth century masterpieces as Alban Berg's Piano Sonata (1908) and Arnold Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony (1922), but in their structure and harmonic language these are the Liszt Sonata's legitimate offspring.

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