



**Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**  
**Drei Klavierstücke, D. 946**

*Composed in 1828.*

Schubert was among the first practitioners of the so-called “character piece,” the species of compact, single-movement, sharply etched piano composition designed for the burgeoning home music market of the early 19th century. There grew to be a virtual musical tidal wave of these popular miniatures in the years after Schubert’s death in 1828—the masterful examples by Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Fauré, Grieg, and others occupy the heart of the piano literature—but the form was still new when he took it up around 1815 to provide keyboard entertainment at the convivial local gatherings known as “Schubertiads” that featured his music and performances. Beginning in 1824, during what proved to be the last years of his pitifully brief life, Schubert created a fine and characteristic series of character pieces that parallel his superb late sonatas. First among this group were the endearing *Moments Musicaux*, whose six movements occupied him between 1824 and 1827. During the last six months of 1827, he composed eight pieces he called *Impromptu*. Schubert sold his *Impromptus* to Haslinger in Vienna, who agreed to publish them in small lots to test their acceptance. He issued the first two numbers of the series in 1828 as Schubert’s Op. 90, Nos. 1 and 2 with some success, but the composer’s death on November 19th of that year halted the project, and the remaining pair of Op. 90 *Impromptus* was not published until 1857 or 1858; the four others were issued at the end of 1839 by Diabelli as Op. 142.

It seems likely that the three piano pieces Schubert wrote in May 1827 were intended as the nucleus of a third set of *Impromptus*, though their manuscripts bear neither title nor number. When Johannes Brahms edited them and oversaw their initial publication in 1868, he labeled them simply “Drei Klavierstücke” (“Three Piano Pieces”). Perhaps the most remarkable quality of these character pieces is the manner in which

Schubert leavened their inherent pianism with his incomparable sense of melody, a situation for which Kathleen Dale proposed the following explanation: “Schubert’s continued experience of song-writing had by now so strongly developed his wonderful natural gift of apprehending the spirit of a poem and re-creating it in music, that when he turned from songs to write for piano solo, he inevitably composed works which, though specifically instrumental in character, are so truly lyrical in essence that each is a poem in sound.” *A Poem in Sound*—music that is flowing, evocative, reflective of the rhythms of the heart and the soul and of life itself. Such is the gift that Schubert left the world.

The *Drei Klavierstücke* are arranged according to a pleasing tonal plan: E-flat minor, E-flat major and C major. They are in simple three-part structures (the second adds an additional intervening episode: A–B–A–C–A), and almost opulent in the warmth of their sonority and harmony. No. 1 (E-flat minor) opens and closes with an anxious strain whose febrile quality is enhanced by layering its duplet melody upon a triplet accompaniment; the central *Andante* is, by way of expressive balance, quiet and meditative. No. 2 (E-flat major) is based on a tender theme that Schubert borrowed from the chorus that opens Act III of his 1823 opera *Fierrabras*; the movement’s two contrasting episodes are unsettled and mysterious. No. 3 (C major) exhibits a teasing rhythmic ambiguity reminiscent of a Slavic dance that is countered in its middle region by a rather stolid paragraph in block chords.

**Jörg Widmann (b. 1973)**  
**Idyll and Abyss: Six Schubert Reminiscences**

*Composed in 2009. Première on April 24, 2009, at the Allerheiligen Hofkirche in Munich by Siegfried Mauser.*

German composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann was born in Munich in 1973 and studied clarinet with Gerd Starke at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich and with Charles Neidich

at the Juilliard School in New York. After winning the Carl Maria von Weber Competition, Competition of German Music Colleges and Bavarian State Prize for Young Artists, Widmann was appointed professor of clarinet at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg in 2001; he continues to be recognized as one of his generation’s finest clarinetists. His parallel interest in composition began when he started lessons with Kay Westermann in Munich at age eleven, and continued with his studies with Hans Werner Henze, Wilfried Hiller, and Wolfgang Rihm; in 2009, he was also named to the Freiburg Hochschule’s composition faculty. Widmann’s residencies include those with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, German Radio Orchestra of Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern, Cleveland Orchestra, Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Cologne Philharmonic, Vienna Konzerthaus, Oxford Chamber Music Festival, Dortmund Konzerthaus, Essen Philharmonic, and Heidelberg Spring Festival. Among his many distinctions as a composer are the Stoeger Prize of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Arnold Schoenberg Medal, Belmont Award for Contemporary Music of the Forberg-Schneider Foundation, Schneider-Schott Music Award, Honorary Award of the Munich Opera Festival, Paul Hindemith Prize, Ernst von Siemens Foundation Encouragement Award, Composition Award of the Berlin Philharmonic Academy, and Kaske Foundation Music Award, and election to membership in the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin, Bavarian Academy of the Fine Arts, Free Academy of the Arts in Hamburg, and German Academy of the Dramatic Arts. Widmann’s creative output includes a large number of chamber compositions (many featuring clarinet), the 2003 opera *Das Gesicht im Spiegel* (“The Face in the Mirror”) and other music theater works, and several large-scale orchestral scores.

Widmann wrote of his *Idyll and Abyss: Six Schubert Reminiscences* of 2009, part of a trilogy in which he also paid homage to Robert Schumann (*Eleven Humoresques*) and Johannes Brahms (*Intermezzi*): “On hearing Schubert’s music, tears pour out of the eyes without ever

having moved the soul, so literally and real does his music enter us.’ This statement from 1928 by the influential German philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno captures the essential phenomenon of Schubert’s music. In my compositions in homage to Schubert, the *Lied für Orchester* (2003, rev. 2009), the Octet (2004) and now these six brief piano pieces, my objective is to capture in my own personal fashion this constantly precarious flight between heaven and hell, paradise and the very depths of anxiety, between idyll and abyss.” The *Reminiscences* range from ethereal to angry, from playful to tragic, with tone clusters in the penultimate movement that may be intended to evoke “the abyss” answered by the sense of loss in the finale, which quotes Schubert’s transcendent Sonata in B-flat major, his last work for piano.

Pianist Shai Wosner said of *Idyll and Abyss*, “Its six short, dreamy miniatures are like fragmented sketches that use images and gestures familiar from Schubert’s musical language—echoes of distant horn calls, half of a forgotten *Ländler*. It is as if Widmann is trying to delve into the psyche of Schubert’s sound world and the contrasting elements of which it is made—the naïve, the tragic, the nostalgic, and the foreboding.”

**Schubert**  
**Sonata in No. 13 A major, D. 664**

*Composed in 1819.*

Early in July 1819, Franz Schubert left the heat and dust of Vienna for a walking tour of Upper Austria with his friend, the baritone Johann Michael Vogl. The goal of the journey was Steyr, a small town in the foothills of the Austrian Alps south of Linz and some eighty miles west of Vienna in which Vogl was born and to which he returned every summer. Schubert enjoyed the venture greatly, writing home to his brother, Ferdinand, that the countryside was “inconceivably beautiful.” In Steyr, Vogl introduced the composer to the village’s chief patron of the arts, Sylvester Paumgartner, a wealthy amateur

cellist and an ardent admirer of Schubert's music. Paumgartner's home was the site of frequent local musical events—private musical parties were held in the first floor music room and a large salon upstairs, decorated with musical emblems and portraits of composers and housing his considerable collection of instruments and scores, was used for concerts. It was for Paumgartner that Schubert composed his evergreen "Trout" Quintet.

While in Steyr, Schubert, then 22, met Josephine von Koller, 18, the daughter of one of the town's music lovers introduced to him by Paumgartner. On July 19th Schubert excitedly reported to Ferdinand, "She is very pretty, plays the piano well, and is going to sing some of my songs." It was for Josephine that he wrote one of his most genial piano works, the Sonata in A major (D. 664). Schubert returned to Vienna the following month and Miss von Koller slipped from the pages of his biography. The music, however, remains a lovely testimony to a halcyon summer junket and a pretty young girl who once graced Schubert's life.

The brilliance and lyricism of the A major Sonata speak well of Josephine's technical skill and musicianship. Though the first movement follows Classical sonata structure, Schubert eschewed the dramatic possibilities of that form, which Beethoven exploited so mightily, in favor of tunefulness and tender sentiments. Only in a passage of rising scales in the brief development section does he touch on any darker emotions, and these are soon assuaged by the lyricism of the recapitulation. The *Andante*, with its simple, three-part construction (A–B–A) and its flowing melody, is, quite simply, a song without words. The finale, another of Schubert's incomparably lyrical sonata forms, is buoyed by its rippling grace and dancing vivacity.

## Schubert

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

*Composed in 1828.*

In the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna on March 26, 1828, immediately after completing his magnificent C major Symphony (justifiably dubbed "The Great" by later generations), Franz Schubert gave the only public concert entirely of his works held during his lifetime. The event, prompted and sponsored by his circle of devoted friends, was a significant artistic and financial success, and he used the proceeds to celebrate the occasion at a local tavern, pay off some old debts, acquire a new piano, and buy tickets for Nicolò Paganini's sensational debut in Vienna three days later. Despite the renewed enthusiasm for creative work that that concert inspired in him, and encouraging signs that his music was beginning to receive recognition outside of Vienna, Schubert's spirits were dampened during the following months by the perilous state of his health. His constitution, never robust, had been undermined by syphilis, and by the summer of 1828, he was suffering from headaches, exhaustion and frequent digestive distress. In May, he received invitations from friends to summer in both Graz and Gmunden in order to refresh himself with the country air, but he had to refuse his hosts because he lacked money to pay for the transportation. He settled instead for a three-day excursion in early June with the composer-conductor Franz Lachner to nearby Baden, where he wrote a Fugue in E minor for organ, four hands (D. 952, his only work for organ), which he tried out with his companion on the instrument in the 12th-century Cistercian abbey at neighboring Heiligenkreuz on June 4th. Between his return to the city a few days later and August, he composed the Mass in E-flat, made a setting in Hebrew of Psalm 92 for the City Synagogue of Vienna, created a number of short pieces for piano, wrote all but one of the thirteen songs published after his death in the collection *Schwanengesang*, did extensive work on what proved to be his last three piano sonatas (D. 958–960), and began his C major String Quintet.

At the end of August, Schubert felt unwell, complaining of dizziness and loss of appetite, and his physician advised that he move for a time to a new house outside the city recently acquired by the composer's brother Ferdinand. Though Ferdinand's dwelling was damp and uncomfortable and hardly conducive to his recovery, Franz felt better during the following days, and he was able to participate in an active social life and attend the premiere of a comedy by his friend Eduard von Bauernfeld on September 5th. Schubert also continued to compose incessantly, completing the three piano sonatas on the 26th and performing them at the house of Dr. Ignaz Menz the following day. The C major Quintet was finished at that same time; it and the sonatas were the last instrumental works that he completed. On October 31st, Schubert fell seriously ill, his syphilitic condition perhaps exacerbated by the typhus then epidemic in Vienna, and he died on November 19, 1828, at the age of 31. He had originally intended that the three sonatas be dedicated to Johann Hummel, a pianist, composer, student of Mozart and important supporter during his last years, but when Diabelli published them in 1838 as "Schubert's Last Compositions: Three Grand Sonatas," Hummel was already dead, so the pieces were instead inscribed to another champion of Schubert's music, Robert Schumann.

"All three of the last sonatas are works in which meditation, charm, wistfulness, sadness and joy are housed in noble structures," wrote George R. Marek. Though each follows the traditional four-movement Classical pattern of opening sonata-allegro, lyrical slow movement, scherzo (minuet in the C minor Sonata) and lively finale, this is music less concerned with the titanic, visionary, long-range formal structures of Beethoven (whom Schubert idolized) than with the immediately perceived qualities of melody, harmonic color, piano sonority and the subtle balancing of keys—what Hans Költzsch in his study of Schubert's sonatas called "the nascent present." This characteristically Schubertian predilection is particularly evident in the development sections of the opening movements, which eschew the rigorous thematic working-out of the

Beethovenian model in favor of a warm, even sometimes dreamy, lyricism whose principal aims are to examine fragments of the movement's melodies in different harmonic lights and to extract the instrument's most ingratiating sonorities. The B-flat Sonata, generally regarded as Schubert's greatest achievement in the genre, opens with a movement of breadth and majesty based on one his most ravishing melodies. The *Andante*, music such as it is given to only the greatest masters to compose, seems almost freed from earthly bonds, rapt out of time. "It is," concluded Alfred Einstein, "the climax and apotheosis of Schubert's instrumental lyricism and his simplicity of form." The playful *Scherzo* that follows serves as the perfect foil to the slow movement. The finale balances a certain seriousness of expression with exuberance and rhythmic energy.

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Marca Borggren

Pianist **Shai Vosner** has attracted international recognition for his exceptional artistry, musical integrity, and creative insight. His performances of a broad range of repertoire from Beethoven and Mozart to Schoenberg and Ligeti, as well as music by his contemporaries, communicates his imaginative programming and intellectual curiosity. Mr. Vosner's virtuosity and perceptiveness have made him a favorite among audiences and critics alike.

Mr. Vosner has been widely praised for his interpretations of Franz Schubert's solo works, both in concert and in recording. He continues to present Schubert works in recital throughout the 2013–2014 season, with performances at Cal Performances, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, in Fresno, California, and Schenectady, New York, at Wigmore Hall in London, and at the Festival Internacional de Música de Cámara in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Mr. Vosner's most recent recording, released by Onyx in October 2011, features a selection of solo piano works by Schubert that incorporate elements of folk music. Mr. Vosner's 2010 debut recording, also released by Onyx, juxtaposed works by Brahms and Schoenberg. His next recording, with frequent recital partner violinist Jennifer Koh, featuring works by Janáček, Bartók and Kurtág, will be released by Cedille Records in fall 2013.

This season, Mr. Vosner's orchestral engagements include Mozart piano concertos with the Hamburger Symphoniker conducted by Jeffrey Tate, the BBC Scottish Symphony led by Andrew Manze, and the Discovery Ensemble led by Courtney Lewis at Boston's Jordan Hall. He plays Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Pasadena Symphony conducted by Jajha Ling

and the German premiere of Michael Hersch's concerto *Along the Ravines* (a work he commissioned and premiered with the Seattle Symphony in 2012) with the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken led by Tito Muñoz. Additional highlights include a performance with the Miró Quartet at Baltimore's Shriver Hall; a duo recital tour with violinist Veronika Eberle, including a performance at Wigmore Hall; a duo recital with cellist Matthew Barley at the Concertgebouw, featuring standard repertoire as well as free-form improvisation; and a third Wigmore Hall concert with cellist Ralph Kirshbaum.

Mr. Vosner made his highly acclaimed subscription début with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2010 and was invited to return later that year to perform with the orchestra at the Ravinia Festival. He has appeared with numerous major orchestras in North America, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, the Orpheus, Saint Paul and Wisconsin chamber orchestras, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Berkeley, Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco. He performed with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in a concert that was broadcast on American Public Radio. In Europe, he has appeared with the Bournemouth Symphony, Staatskapelle Berlin, LSO St. Luke's, Gothenburg Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Orchestre National de Belgique, and Nieuw Sinfonietta Amsterdam, and at Cardiff's Hoddinott Hall, among others. In 2006, he debuted with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in Salzburg, during the 250th anniversary celebrations of Mozart's birth. He has worked with such conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Jiří Bělohlávek, James Conlon, Alan Gilbert, Gunther Herbig, James Judd, Zubin Mehta, Peter Oundjian, Donald Runnicles, and Leonard Slatkin.

Mr. Vosner is widely sought after by colleagues for his versatility and spirit of partnership. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with numerous esteemed artists including Martin Fröst, Lynn Harrell, Dietrich Henschel, Cho-Liang Lin, Christian Tetzlaff, and Pinchas Zukerman. He is a former member of Lincoln

Center's Chamber Music Society Two and performs regularly at various chamber music festivals, including Chamber Music Northwest, the Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, the Oregon Bach Festival, the Piano Aux Jacobins festival in France, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Recent chamber music engagements include a duo recital with baritone Wolfgang Holzmair at the 92nd Street Y in New York, a performance with members of the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall, a performance of the Mozart concerto for three pianos with Joseph Kalichstein and Alon Goldstein and the New York String Orchestra with Jaime Laredo at Carnegie Hall, and collaborations with the Tokyo, Miró, and Parker string quartets. He has performed at such summer festivals as Ravinia, Hollywood Bowl, Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart, Bridgemanpton, Grand Teton, and Bravo! Vail Valley. For several consecutive summers, Mr. Vosner was involved in the West-Eastern Divan Workshop led by Mr. Barenboim and toured as soloist with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

Mr. Vosner is a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, as well as a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award. He was in residence with the BBC as a New Generation Artist, during which he played frequently with the BBC orchestras, including appearances conducting Mozart concertos from the keyboard with the BBC Scottish Symphony. He also returned to the BBC Scottish Symphony in both subscription concerts and performances at the Proms with Donald Runnicles, and appeared with the BBC Philharmonic in a broadcast from Manchester's Bridgewater Hall. His various performances continue to be broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Born in Israel, Mr. Vosner enjoyed a broad musical education from a very early age, studying piano with Emanuel Krasovsky and composition, theory, and improvisation with André Hajdu. He later studied at the Juilliard School with Emanuel Ax. Mr. Vosner now resides in New York City with his wife and two children.

For more information about Mr. Vosner, please visit his fan page on Facebook or go to [www.shaivosner.com](http://www.shaivosner.com).