

Schubert

Piano Sonata in A, D.959
6 Moments musicaux



Martin Helmchen
piano

HYBRID MULTICHANNEL



SUPER AUDIO CD

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Sonata in A, D.959 (Sept. 1828)

1 Allegro	11. 53
2 Andantino	8. 27
3 Scherzo – Allegro vivace	5. 08
4 Rondo (Allegretto)	12. 27

6 Moments musicaux, D.780 (Op. 94) (1823 -1828)

5 No. 1 – Moderato	5. 32
6 No. 2 – Andantino	6. 08
7 No. 3 – Allegretto moderato	1. 47
8 No. 4 – Moderato	5. 17
9 No. 5 - Allegro vivace	2. 02
10 No. 6 – Allegretto	8. 31

Martin Helmchen, piano

A co-production of PentaTone Music and Deutschlandfunk

Executive Producers: Maja Ellmenreich (Deutschlandfunk)

Job Maarse (PentaTone)

Recording Producer: Job Maarse

Balance Engineer: Jean-Marie Geijssen

Editing : Matthijs Ruijter

Recording venue : Deutschlandfunk Kammermusiksaal, Cologne, Germany (Oct. 2007)

Total playing time: 67. 18

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Pianistic swan song

In hindsight, it is not difficult to view all compositions by Franz Schubert dating from 1828 as his swan song. Schubert suspected that he did not have much time left. One time in particular at the beginning of October, some six weeks before his death, he wrote as follows to a Leipzig publisher: *"Among other items, I have written three sonatas for piano solo, which I would like to dedicate to Hummel. [...] I have performed the sonatas already in various locations to great acclaim."* But here the wish was father to the thought, as finally the works were not completed until September 1828. There was no reply to his offer. The three Sonatas D. 958 (in C minor), D. 959 (in A major) and D. 960 (B-flat major) were not published until 1839, more than 10 years after Schubert's death: they were issued in three volumes – with a dedication to Robert Schumann.

These three piano sonatas constitute their own category of works, or if one prefers it, their own cycle. Above

the fair copies is printed the numbers I – III. Furthermore, the manuscripts of the A-major and the B-flat-major sonata are closely interwoven. In the literature it is often mentioned that Schubert had moved away from the *"traditional canon of the sonata"* (Hilmar) with these three sonatas. Indeed, in various aspects, the works do break away from the traditional genre, which Beethoven had expanded hugely in his later works.

Beethoven, we always return to Beethoven. Not only in the symphonic genre did he carry out phenomenal pioneering work, which almost drove an entire generation of composers to despair, his 32 piano sonatas also constituted an utterly burdensome inheritance. When Beethoven died in March 1827, Schubert seems to have convinced himself that the "succession" might well be in his hands. Was he supposed only to continue down the path set out by Beethoven? Or should he strike out on a radically new path? Was he supposed to endorse Beethoven's formal and structural achievements? Or rather to turn everything upside down? Schubert avoided the distinctive thematic duality and the

excessive motivic-thematic passage-work, which distinguish Beethoven's works. In exchange, he went for a modern flow of melodies and harmonies, for spinning out the melodies, which did not primarily have to be subjected to thematic passage-work. On the contrary, here the levels of lyric and epic poetry are interwoven as closely as possible: pure lyrical poetry in the melodic layout, pure epic poetry in the extensive manner of narration.

Peter Gülke interpreted the three late sonatas as *"a description of the situation in which composition found itself following the death of Beethoven"*. Indeed, the works describe a search for what might have come not only after Beethoven, but also after Schubert. Not only close-fitting motivic combinations with and quotations from Beethoven's works, but also between the sonatas themselves: they cover a dense network running throughout the triad of sonatas – and throughout the "couple" (formed by) Schubert / Beethoven.

The first movement of the Sonata in A major, D. 959 is introduced by a massive theme of chords. After the lyrical second theme, an inten-

sive development evolves from the smaller motivic units from the first theme – but this is situated in the final group. Consequently, there is no longer any room for a real development, rather in its place Schubert introduces a D-major section. In the three-part, F-sharp-minor Andantino, a dynamic, passionate middle section, harmonically far removed from the tonic, is flanked by two outer sections, in which the melody is carried along on wings of song (a simple yet enormously effective double alternation of tonic and dominant in the first four bars). In the A-major Scherzo one can hear clear quotes from Beethoven's Op. 2 No. 2, but also reminders of the massive chords from the first movement. The Finale is an almost endless Rondo full of elaborate melodic ideas, a clear quote from the second movement of the Sonata D. 537, as well as very close thematic references to the first movement. One can also see that Schubert placed an increasingly high value on the combination of the movements amongst themselves in his later works (essentially, a rather absurd concept considering the composer died so young!), thanks to the quote from the

first theme from the first movement at the end of the Finale.

The collection of *Moments musicaux* D. 780 contains six quite short piano pieces dating from 1823, 1824 and 1828, and was published the year Schubert died (with the grammatically incorrect title of “Moments musicaux”). Whereas it took a long time for Schubert’s contributions to the sonata genre to be taken seriously, his lyrical piano pieces were always considered the exception. The *Moments musicaux* form, as the title already suggests, a momentary musical picture, each with a highly distinct character, as far as piano technique is concerned, rather less difficult, and regarding the structure, they tendentiously follow the three-part Lied-form A-B-A. Here again, we have an excellent example of Schubert’s typical alternation between major and minor in his piano works. There are unexpected mood changes, which often leave the listener with a feeling of astonishment. These character pieces prove that Schubert was not just a composer of the “heavenly, drawn-out passages”. They are as long as is necessary and as short as possible. Or perhaps the other way

around? In any case, they always represent expression in the highest concentration.

Franz Steiger

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Martin Helmchen

Martin Helmchen was born in Berlin in 1982. He received his first piano lessons at the age of six. From 1993 until graduating from school in 2000 he was a student of Galina Iwanzowa at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin. After 2001, he studied with Arie Vardi at the “Hochschule für Musik und Theater” in Hannover. His career received its first major impulse after winning the Clara Haskil Competition in 2001.

Orchestras with which Martin Helmchen has performed include: the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, Bamberg Symphoniker, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Royal Flemish Philharmonic, BBC Symphony

Orchestra, and the chamber orchestras of Zurich, Amsterdam, Vienna, Lausanne, Cologne and Munich. He has worked with conductors such as Marek Janowski, Philippe Herreweghe, Marc Albrecht, Vladimir Jurowski, Jiri Kout, Bernhard Klee, and Lawrence Foster.

Martin Helmchen has been a guest at the Ruhr Piano Festival, Kissinger Summer Festival, the Festivals in Lockenhaus, Jerusalem, Spoleto (Italy), the Rheingau Music Festival, the Spannungen Chamber-Music Festival in Heimbach, the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, the Schwetzingen Festival, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, as well as the Marlboro Festival in Vermont (USA).

Chamber music is a highly valued part of Martin Helmchen's life, which he always includes in his performance programme. For years now, he has collaborated closely with Boris Pergamenschikow till his decease in 2004; at present, he regularly gives concerts and recitals with Heinrich Schiff and Danjulo Ishizaka. Furthermore, he has partnered Gidon Kremer, Christian Tetzlaff, Isabelle Faust, Daniel Hope,

Antje Weithaas, Tabea Zimmermann, Sharon Kam and Lars Vogt.

The young pianist Martin Helmchen has already been awarded two of the most important prizes in the music scene: the Crédit Suisse Young Artist Award and the ECHO Klassik. He received the Crédit Suisse Award in September 2006. The prize included his début with the Vienna Philharmonic under Valery Gergiev, performing Schumann's Piano Concerto during the Lucerne Festival. He was awarded the ECHO prize jointly with cellist Danjulo Ishizaka, as "Nachwuchskünstler des Jahres" (= up-and-coming artist of the year).

Martin Helmchen has signed an exclusive contract with the Pentatone Classics label.



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Polyhymnia International a été fondé en 1998 suite au rachat de l'ancien Philips Classics Recording Center par ses cadres.

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Schubert - Piano Sonata, D.959 - Moments musicaux - Helmchen

Martin Helmchen, piano



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Deutschlandfunk

A co-production of
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Executive Producers:
Maja Ellmenreich
(Deutschlandfunk)
Job Maarse (PentaTone)

Recording Producer:
Job Maarse

Balance Engineer:
Jean-Marie Geijssen

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