

# Paul Lewis | Schubert IV

Tuesday 19 March 7.30pm

## Schubert

Piano sonata No 19 in C minor, D958

Piano sonata No 20 in A, D959

## Interval

Piano sonata No 21 in B flat, D960



## Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata No 19 in C minor, D958

Piano Sonata No 20 in A major, D959

Piano Sonata No 21 in B flat major, D960

Following the publication of *Erlkönig* and his 36 *Original Dances of 1821*, Schubert began to build a reputation as a composer of lieder and *gemütlich* piano music. But his dreams of recognition for his more ambitious works were to be continually frustrated by the indifference of publishers whose commercial interests were drawn to satisfying public demand for what he contemptuously dismissed as 'Miserable Mode-Waare' ('wretched fashionable stuff'). Only after his death did he gain acknowledgement for his chamber and symphonic music, due initially to the advocacy of Robert Schumann from the 1830s. The celebrated String Quintet in C received its first performance only in 1850, and of Schubert's twenty or so piano sonatas just three were published during his lifetime. Given the poor

prospects for his large-scale piano works, it is not surprising he left several incomplete movements and numerous torsos probably belonging to unfinished sonata projects.

While his sonatas have never achieved the same stature as Beethoven's, they offer their fair share of technical challenges and possess emotional depths as intense as anything by the Bonn-born composer. Sonata composition occupied Schubert for over a decade, beginning with some dozen works written between the years 1815-19. There came four more sonatas between 1825-26, each conceived on a grand scale, and in the autumn of 1828 he completed his three last works, each regarded as unqualified masterpieces. Despite the ravages of his terminal syphilis, Schubert's final year was extraordinarily fruitful: it saw the completion of his Ninth Symphony (March), the Fantasy in F minor (April), the Mass in E flat (begun in June), *Schwanengesang* (August), and these three final piano sonatas (September). Little wonder Benjamin Britten described Schubert's last phase as the 'richest and most productive eighteen months in music history'.



## **Emily Sun & Anna Tilbrook** *Mozart & Modern Women* **Sunday 19 May 7pm**

Captivating violinist Emily Sun and one of Britain's most exciting pianists, Anna Tilbrook intertwine Mozart with works by trailblazing female composers Amy Beach and Pauline Viardot.

### **Piano Sonata No 19 in C minor, D958**

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Adagio
- 3 Menuetto
- 4 Allegro

Exhausted from feverish work and in ever-more deteriorating health by September 1828, Schubert moved away from central Vienna to its leafy suburbs, a move designed to alleviate his condition. But dampness and poor sanitation at his brother's house merely hindered any possibility of relief from his symptoms. It was within this unhealthy environment and amid a background of acute headaches that his last three sonatas were completed on September 26th.

Of Schubert's final essays in sonata form D958 is the most dramatic; its red-blooded energy a recurring presence most notably in the opening 'Allegro', a movement paying homage to Beethoven not just in its choice of key, but in its emphatic, almost defiant, initial gesture. A restless transition yields to a more disarming lyricism for the second subject proper, now in E flat. Schubert's harmonic palette broadens in the central development where a fresh idea, more of a wriggling worm, adds to the drama. Chromaticisms duly find resolution in the return of the opening material with further echoes of Beethoven (three resolute quavers) bringing this tension-filled movement to a close. The 'Adagio' in A flat major (Beethoven's preferred slow-movement key within C minor) is a rondo-like structure, each embellished return of the main theme forming an other-worldly foil to the harmonic probing of the two episodes, both marked by fist-shaking eruptions. A flowing 'Menuetto' brings variable phrase patterns, impulsive accents and running chromaticisms,

all subdued in the faltering 'Trio'. Only in the wild leaps and bounding arpeggios of the closing 'Allegro' – a tarantella – does Schubert appear to bring a ray of optimism to its periodically tempestuous proceedings. Yet any hint of a major key reconciliation suggested by shifting minor/major juxtapositions are denied and the movement closes in an unambiguous C minor.

### **Piano Sonata No 20 in A major, D959**

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Andantino
- 3 Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: Un poco più lento
- 4 Rondo: Allegretto

With a dedication to Schumann, the Sonata in A is cast in four movements and forms an expressive traversal, its underlying restlessness interleaved with passages of lyrical composure variously tender and resigned. The opening 'Allegro' is built on two principal ideas: a spacious first, with an answering capricious figure, and a relaxed, charming second. Rather than explore further this stately opening gambit, Schubert extends the movement with a series of tumbling arpeggios, chromatic scales and a recurring pair of incisive chords, bringing cohesion to its expansive design. A freewheeling development derived solely from the secondary idea ushers in a brief sunlit mood until the return of the earlier material. But Schubert has not quite abandoned the noble opening, its return at the close now shorn of earlier confidence. The closing bars set the mood for the wonderful 'Andantino' (now in F sharp minor), an affecting song without words over a tolling left hand and framed by a tumultuous central panel with

unruly interjections. The first signs of tension arrive with shadowy chromaticisms, coloured by agitated trills and startling scalic passages, its drama subsiding for rumination and a poignant key change to C sharp major for one last appearance of the song, its heartbreak unmistakable.

Sorrow turns to scintillation for the 'Scherzo' built on skipping gestures that dart around the keyboard, and soon undercut by an unpredictable edge. A structural imbalance (16 bars in the first section and 62 in the second) adds a further layer of instability. Halting rhythms and the shifting major/minor harmonies of the central 'Trio' continue the sense of insecurity. Far removed from earlier uncertainties, calm acceptance permeates the *Finale*. While there are passing moments of fire and fury, this amiable movement more often seeks to assuage rather than take up arms and concludes a sonata of unfailing individuality and imagination. Always an admirer of Schubert, Schumann was to write after his death 'He has sounds to express the most delicate of feelings, of thoughts, indeed even for the events and conditions of human life'.

### **Piano Sonata No 21 in B flat major, D960**

- 1 Molto moderato
- 2 Andante sostenuto
- 3 Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- 4 Allegro ma non troppo

An unequivocal calm begins Schubert's final work in the medium, but its gentle, songlike opening theme is soon disturbed by an ominous trill low in the left hand. Local commentators have indicated this might suggest a distant rumble of thunder over the nearby Wienerwald, that Schubert would have heard on late summer days during the work's composition. An oft-cited description of this Sonata as the 'pianist's Hamlet' is also

pertinent; for beneath the unruffled surface of Schubert's opening phrase lurks a tortured soul to be revealed over the course of its four movements. At a more prosaic level, the trilling G flat anticipates the shift from B flat to G flat major for a leisurely variant of the theme. After the theme's grand restatement, the mood briefly darkens (F sharp minor), before resuming earlier serenity. Minor key rumination signposts the central development, with more portentous trills adding to the prevailing sadness, until the opening theme emerges now sublime and introspective. However, it is more a sense of resignation rather than radiance that permeates the remainder of this expansive movement.

Only in the sombre tones of the C sharp minor 'Andante', with its tolling bell left hand, might one think Schubert was reconciled to his fate. Combining ethereal beauty and contemplation, the mood of this gentle leave-taking is unmistakable. At its heart it hides a more hopeful theme in A major, its thrumming accompaniment recalling the gentle beat of the Sonata's opening movement. Nowhere in Schubert is a celestial peace more transparent, the composer seemingly smiling through tears. Its rapt stillness is abandoned for a chirruping 'Scherzo', its marked disproportions interrupted for a sober 'Trio' that casts a brief pall over proceedings. The concluding rondo begins with a held unison G (recurring intermittently with a bell-like insistence) that triggers a dancing melody exhaustively explored and interrupted by two extended episodes each inhabiting passages of storm and stress. For all the underlying tensions within this 'endless farewell', its closing 'Presto' seems determined to cheat death and wipe away the memory of the menacing trill that began this transcendent work.

**David Truslove, 2024**



### **Did you know that Turner Sims turns FIFTY this year?**

As our big birthday approaches, we want to know about your favourite Turner Sims concert! What was your best-ever live musical experience with us - and why? Email us at [info@turnersims.co.uk](mailto:info@turnersims.co.uk) and let us know!



**Paul Lewis** is one of the foremost interpreters of the Central European piano repertoire, his performances and recordings of Beethoven and Schubert receiving universal critical acclaim. He was awarded CBE in 2016 for his services to music, and the sincerity and depth of his musical approach have won him fans around the world.

This global popularity is reflected in the world-class orchestras with whom he works, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, London Symphony, Philharmonia, Bavarian Radio Symphony, NHK Symphony, New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw and Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestras. His close relationship with Boston Symphony Orchestra led to his selection as the 2020 Koussevitzky Artist at Tanglewood.

With a natural affinity for Beethoven, he took part in the BBC's three-part documentary *Being Beethoven* and performed a concerto cycle at Tanglewood during summer 2022. He has performed the cycle all over the world, including Boston Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, Melbourne Symphony,

Orquestra Simfonica Camera Musicae, São Paulo State Symphony and Royal Flemish Philharmonic orchestras, and was the first pianist to play the complete cycle in a single season at the BBC Proms in 2010.

Between 2022 and 2024, Paul Lewis has embarked on a four programme Schubert piano sonata series presented at Turner Sims and over 25 other venues and festivals around the world.

Beside many award-winning Beethoven and Schubert recordings for Harmonia Mundi, his discography also demonstrates his characteristic depth of approach in other Classical and Romantic repertoire such as Haydn, Schumann, Mussorgsky, Brahms and Liszt.

In chamber music, he is a regular at Wigmore Hall, having played there more than 100 times. He works closely with tenor Mark Padmore in lied recitals around the world – they have recorded three Schubert song cycles together.

Lewis is co-Artistic Director of Midsummer Music, an annual chamber music festival held in Buckinghamshire, UK. He is a passionate advocate for music education and the festival offers free tickets to local schoolchildren. He also gives masterclasses around the world alongside his concert performances. He himself studied with Joan Havill at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London before going on to study privately with Alfred Brendel. In 2021 Paul Lewis became an Irish citizen.

**Awards:** Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year; two Edison awards; three Gramophone awards; Diapason d'Or de l'Annee; South Bank Show Classical Music Award; honorary degrees from Liverpool, Edge Hill and Southampton universities; appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours.

info@turnersims.co.uk

[turnersims.co.uk](https://turnersims.co.uk)

**Box Office**  
023 8059 5151



Media Partner

**GRAMOPHONE**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

Turner Sims is part of the University of Southampton and gratefully acknowledges the support of Arts Council England



University of  
**Southampton**