

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

April 17, 2023 12:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Greg Hartmann, piano

Sonata in A Minor, D. 784 (1823)

Allegro giusto

Andante

Allegro vivace

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

The Spirit's Journey (2023)

Bradley Harris
(b. 1988)

Sonata in B Minor, S. 178 (1853)

Franz Liszt
(1811–86)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.
Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Notes on the Program

Franz Schubert: Sonata in A Minor, D. 784

Franz Schubert's posthumously published **A minor sonata** was composed in 1823. All indications suggest this was a tumultuous time in the young composer's life: in mid-1822, he wrote a letter to his brother that suggested "Schubert was grappling with fundamental issues of family, belonging and otherness."¹ By February 1823, Schubert was already ill enough that he was unable to leave the house. Schubert would die in 1828 from an unnamed malady, today presumed to be syphilis.

This sonata could perhaps be read as Schubert's response to his declining physical state and his feelings of loneliness and isolation. It immediately calls to mind Mozart's Sonata K. 310, also in A minor, which Mozart composed around the time of his mother's death. If these sonatas represent Mozart's and Schubert's responses to tragedy or grief, they are nonetheless quite different. Where K. 310 is agitated, D. 784 is pensive, where Mozart is distressed, Schubert is disconsolate.

The large first movement of D. 784 is severe in its sparseness. The prevalence of double octaves throughout creates an unsettling starkness. Further, the two-note, strong-weak falling motive introduced in the fourth measure is omnipresent and imbues the movement with a sense of inevitability and dread. Even the second theme, in major mode, maintains a certain melancholy, while *fortissimo* interruptions remind the listener that calmness never lasts.

At first blush, the second movement seems as if it will be a straightforward slow movement. The opening four-measure phrase in F major establishes a *cantabile* melody and a gentle mood. This is suddenly subverted by a mysterious, *pianississimo* interjection. This interruption, with its serpentine turns about a chromatic neighbor-note ($\hat{5}-\sharp\hat{4}-\hat{5}$), recalls the opening two measures of the first movement. (This realization may, in turn, point one to notice that the unique rhythm of the opening of the second movement originated in the development section of the first movement.) The juxtaposition of serene music with the interruption of a foreign element creates an unsettling atmosphere, as in the second theme of the first movement.

The final movement is a Rondo in A minor. Of the three movements, the simmering agitation here perhaps comes closest in character to Mozart's K. 310. Once again, the musical drama is created by the contrast between the unsettled and the lyrical, as the main theme and the *ländler* second theme respectively. When in its third appearance the second theme finally appears in the tonic major, the listener might hope for a happy ending, but alas, it is not meant to be. The music collapses back to the minor mode and finishes with a fatalistic, *fortissimo* statement of the main theme with both hands in thundering octaves.

¹ Maurice J.E. Brown, Eric Sams and Robert Winter. "Schubert, Franz". Grove Music Online. January, 2001. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25109>

Bradley Harris: *The Spirit's Journey*

Composer **Bradley Harris** says that “almost all of my pieces involve some sort of journey”. In this particular piece, the journey is not a physical one, but one of the inner self. The work is in two main sections: the first section is slow and introspective while the second section is fun, resilient and hopeful. The first section, inspired by the texture and mood of Chopin’s nocturnes, features a clearly singing melody with arpeggiated accompaniment. It is spacious, meant to represent the time that we spend reflecting on our spirit’s journey. The second section is faster and more rhythmically complex, with lots of syncopation. The harmonic language is also different between the two sections. The first section is warmer and more open, with more conventional harmonies. While the second section is usually diatonic and has a pitch center, the harmony is less functionally tonal.

Though stylistically the two sections are quite different, Harris’s individual voice shines through in both. One thread that remains constant between the two sections is Harris’s penchant for continuous rhythmic motion at some level—there is virtually always a rhythmic layer with a constant pulse. In the first section, there is an unbroken stream of accompanimental eighth notes throughout. Even in the more complex rhythms of the second section, there is usually a certain layer of the texture that emphasizes a consistent pulse. For instance, in many phrases, chords punctuate every third sixteenth note, though the overall meter is 4/4.

For years Harris has played piano for ballet rehearsals and often works with dancers. Choreographers frequently ask him if he has any new music that they could use for dance. Because of this, he says “actually, when I was writing this, I also wrote with the idea that it will probably be danced to”. Bearing this in mind while listening may help appreciate the work—the listener might even be encouraged to imagine what a dance to the music would look like, and how this would differ between the lilting and gentle first section and the angular and funky second section.

Franz Liszt: Sonata in B Minor

Though it can be hard to imagine today, **Franz Liszt’s Sonata in B Minor** was not universally acclaimed at the time of its composition. Johannes Brahms apparently fell asleep during one of the first performances of the work. And Clara Schumann wrote of the piece: “this is nothing but sheer racket – not a single healthy idea, everything confused, no longer a clear harmonic sequence to be detected there!” In spite of this initial reception, Liszt’s B minor sonata has gone on to be one of the most highly-regarded works in the entire repertoire.

One of the incredible accomplishments of the piece is the way it seamlessly blends Romantic compositional techniques with Classical formal construction. There are four main motives which are constantly developing and interacting throughout the piece, not unlike Wagnerian leitmotifs. The first three are introduced immediately: the piece opens with a mysterious, tonally ambiguous descending scale figure. An upward explosion of leaping octaves announces the intrusion of the second motive, dramatic in character, with its characteristic leaps and downward diminished-seventh arpeggio. Thirdly, an ominous, diabolical repeated-note motive enters in the bass.

After these three motives are introduced, the music finally establishes the tonic key of B minor. This tonic key arrival corresponds with what we could call the Primary Theme zone of the Sonata, which blends material from all three of the motives. Eventually this leads to the fourth and final motive, a grandiose and majestic theme that sings out above triumphant repeated chords.

Throughout the work, each motive undergoes transformation. As one example, the ominous, diabolical third motive is transformed into a sweet, singing melody:²



This process happens constantly with all of the different motives. Indeed, virtually every measure in the piece has material that derives from the four main motives.

In addition to the process of development that occurs at the level of the motive, the large-scale construction of the piece is also fascinating and complex. When one speaks of sonata form, there are two things that might come to mind:

- the form of a single movement which includes an exposition, development, and recapitulation
- a piece comprised of three or four movements, probably including an allegro movement, a slow movement, optionally a scherzo or minuet, and a finale

The B minor sonata unfolds both of these forms simultaneously. That is, the entire thirty-minute work can be divided into exposition, development, and recapitulation or into four movements, played *attaca*.

Stephen Hough says that this work, “does what a masterpiece needs to do: it appeals equally to the head and to the heart.”³ Upon first hearing, most listeners are probably taken by the emotion and sweep of the music. This is romanticism at its finest: soaring virtuosity, unbridled tempestuousness, gentle sweetness, as well as longing, anger, and love. Further, the piano as an instrument is used to its fullest potential. There are cascading runs of notes, singing melodies hidden inside of ornamental filigree, and a plethora of powerful double octaves. But for all that is dazzling and instantly attractive about this piece, its true value, at least in the eyes of this performer, derives from how it stands up to close scrutiny. This is a piece that rewards repeated listening and deep study, the true test of a masterwork.

² MacDonald, Hugh. “Transformation, thematic” in Grove Music Online. January, 2001. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.28269>

³ “Sonata in B minor - Why is the Sonata in B minor a masterpiece?”. Classical Music Reimagined. March 4, 2016. <https://youtu.be/6MmEDsZYVvY>

About the Artist

Pianist Greg Hartmann is currently a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Center, CUNY, as a student of Julian Martin. Greg has won first prize in the 2023 Knoxville International Piano Competition, first prize in the 2018 Memphis International Piano Competition, second prize in the top division of the 2021 Schubert Club Scholarship Competition, third prize in the 2021 William Knabe International Piano Competition, third prize in the 2019 Thousand Islands International Piano Competition, and third prize in the 2018 High Point University Piano Competition, among others. He has performed concerti with the New Albany Symphony Orchestra, Rochester Symphony, Lakeshore Wind Ensemble, Concord Chamber Orchestra, and Waukesha Area Chamber Orchestra.

Also an accomplished composer, Greg won the 2018 Paula Nelson-Guenther Young Composer Competition with his orchestral work *Requiem for a Memory: Nocturne for Orchestra*. Interested in the power of music to do good for society, Greg founded the New Impromptu Project (www.newimpromptu.com/about). He maintains an interest in music theory, and recently presented a paper of his at the 2020 conference of the Society for music theory. Greg has participated in music festivals including the Aspen Music Festival and School, Pianofest in the Hamptons, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, the Sejong International Music Festival, Euro Music Festival and Academy, and the Gijón International Piano Festival.

Greg's doctoral dissertation focuses on the relationship between music performance and music theory, with a particular emphasis on Schenkerian analysis, rhythm and meter, and phrase-level form. In his free time, Greg enjoys tennis, running, and ping pong.