

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Jonathan Biss, *piano*

Thursday, April 27 – 7:30 PM

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

Four Impromptus, D. 935

Franz Schubert

Born: January 31, 1797, Vienna, Austria

Died: November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1827

Duration: 34 minutes

When applied to these works, the term Impromptu is doubly misleading. None of Schubert's works in the genre suggest the salonesque, extemporaneous quality that the term connotes; quite to the contrary, these are tightly knit, structurally cohesive works, often of great lyric intensity. There is a markedly greater degree of overall unity among these Impromptus than we find in the more disparate first series, and Schumann's observation is further strengthened by the unmistakable motivic associations between Nos. 1 and 4 -- a quality often associated with the opening and closing movements of a sonata.

Ghost Variations, WoO 24

Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856, Endenich, Germany

Composed: 1854

Duration: 11 minutes

In his declining years, Schumann found himself more and more challenged by the encroaching dementia that tormented him and ultimately led to his confinement in an asylum from 1854 until his death. Convinced that he was taking dictation from angelic voices, he wrote down a theme that was in fact his own, used earlier in his little-known Violin Concerto. Among his very last works is this set of variations on that theme, known as the *Geistervariationen* (Ghost Variations).

Rondo in A Minor, K. 511

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1787

Duration: 10 minutes

This darker work was composed shortly after Mozart returned from a trip to Prague. There is little doubt that the composer was expressing feelings of grief here, but the source of them remains a matter of speculation.

(speak to me)

Amy Beth Kirsten

Born: 1972 in Belleville, Illinois

Composed: 2010

Duration: 14 minutes

"(speak to me) is a three-part dramatization of the Echo and Narcissus myth. In the first movement (Deceit), we get a very real sense of how the charismatic and fast-talking Echo spins one of her animated stories; we, her captive audience, are left bewildered while trying to keep up. In the second movement (Curse), the pianist vocally portrays two characters at once - the terrified Echo (high breathy sounds) and the vengeful Juno (deep notes) - as Juno casts the spell which leaves Echo without the ability to speak. The first two movements feature both piano and the pianist's voice, but the last movement (Longing) is for piano alone - reflecting Echo's forced silence as she wanders the empty forest alone. The last movement is woven out of musical material featured in the first two movements - especially the pitches assigned to the words "Can you hear in my voice?" Played over and over those pitches form a motive that yearns for a way to reach out and be heard."
—Amy Beth Kirsten

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110**Ludwig van Beethoven*****Born:** December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany****Died:** March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria****Composed:** 1821-1822****Duration:** 20 minutes*

Beethoven's piano sonatas grew in complexity and depth as the cycle of 32 progressed. The last dozen or so could be called absolute masterpieces of piano music, with the latter half of that group rising to a level that often inspires awe and wonderment. This work, though sometimes overshadowed by the mighty "Hammerklavier" Sonata, and the last, the C minor, Op. 111, seems quite as impressive as these better-known works. This unusual work, thematically threadbare at the outset, is a great and deeply profound composition, whose fugal finale achieves the highest keyboard art.