

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Jonathan Biss, piano

Friday, November 1 – 7:30 PM

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

Four Impromptus, D. 935: No. 1 & No. 3

Franz Schubert

Born: January, 31 1797

Died: November 19, 1828

Composed: 1827

Duration: 11 minutes

The impromptu is a small-scale instrumental genre that originated in the early 19th century and is part of a larger group of pieces known as character pieces. The word 'impromptu' suggests spontaneity, and one can imagine Schubert creating these gems as he extemporized at the keyboard. However, their sophistication indicates that considerable thought went into them. The scope of the D. 935 Impromptus, especially the first, contributed to the delay in their publication, as publishers preferred shorter, easier, and therefore more marketable piano pieces. This resulted in several contrasting ideas, masterfully interwoven to showcase the brilliant, dreamlike, and often conversational nature of Schubert's writing.

In the third Impromptu, Schubert borrows and slightly alters a simple theme he had used twice before—in his incidental music for *Rosamunde* and the slow movement of his A minor String Quartet—and treats it to five variations. Lighthearted for the most part, the variations take an impassioned turn in the third, minor-key variation and conclude with a pensive variant of the theme.

Bed-Stuy Sonata

Alvin Singleton

Born: December 28, 1940

Composed: 2024

Duration: 15 minutes

Co-commissioned for Jonathan Biss by San Francisco Performances, the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Alvin Singleton's *Bed-Stuy Sonata* toggles between extremes of tempo, character, and even language. In a recent Facebook post promoting his premiere tour of the sonata, Biss shared: *"Every day I understand it a little bit better—every day I'm a little bit clearer about how those character shifts work, about why they happen."*

Sonata in A Major, D. 959

Franz Schubert

Born: January, 31 1797

Died: November 19, 1828

Composed: 1828

Duration: approx. 35 minutes

Composed in the final months of his life, Schubert's A Major Sonata is one of his last three great piano sonatas. This expansive work, both lyrical and dramatic, reflects the full breadth of Schubert's mature style. The first movement opens with a bold, majestic theme that soon gives way to more introspective passages, showcasing Schubert's gift for melodic invention. The second movement, marked *Andantino*, is particularly striking for its profound emotional depth, with a middle section of intense, almost tempestuous character. The third movement is a lively scherzo, full of rhythmic playfulness, while the final rondo brings the sonata to a triumphant and eloquent close. D. 959 is a masterful blend of virtuosity and expressiveness, standing as one of the pinnacles of the piano repertoire.