

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

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PREVIEW
NOTES

Paul Lewis, piano

November 12 – 7:30 PM

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

The Late Piano Sonatas of Franz Schubert

Born: January 31, 1797

Died: November 19, 1828

Piano Sonata in C Minor, D. 958 (1828)

Duration: Approx. 35 minutes

Schubert's late piano works, composed in the last few years of his life, are some of the most profound and emotionally complex pieces in the piano repertoire. During this period, Schubert combined classical forms inherited from Beethoven with a deeply personal, lyrical voice. Written in the key of C minor, a key often associated with Beethoven's dramatic works (such as his *Pathétique* Sonata and the *Fifth Symphony*), Schubert's D. 958 displays some of Beethoven's influence, particularly in its bold, energetic first movement. However, Schubert brings his own voice to the music through his lyrical themes and harmonic shifts. The second movement's lyrical, song-like melody unfolds in a way that feels almost like a narrative, moving through moments of sadness, reflections, and serenity. The third movement is a Menuetto, which contrasts lightness with darker, more forceful moments. While the minuet is a classical dance form, Schubert adds a sense of weight to this movement, which creates a more serious tone than typical minuet movements. The Finale is both virtuosic and tense, giving the sonata a powerful conclusion. Schubert combines rhythmic vitality with sudden shifts in dynamics and harmony, creating a sense of urgency and restlessness.

Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959 (1828)

Duration: Approx. 40 minutes

Another major work from the last year of his life, the D. 959 sonata is known for its grandeur and expressive intensity. The second movement, in particular, stands out for its stark

contrast between a serene melody and sudden, violent outbursts. Paul Lewis stated in an interview and live recording session at WGBH radio's studio in Boston "*There is no real feeling of calm in the slow movement. There's a feeling of something about to explode below the surface... It's not quite stable.*" This perhaps mirrors Schubert's inner struggles, as his health was failing due to syphilis, and he was acutely aware of his mortality.

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960 (1828)

Duration: Approx. 40 minutes

Despite his failing health, Schubert's creativity during the last months of his life was extraordinary. Along with the three sonatas, he composed the *String Quintet in C Major, Winterreise*. These works are often viewed as some of the most profound expressions of his inner world, blending beauty, sorrow, and a sense of existential reflection. The final sonata was completed on September 26, and two days later, Schubert played the sonata trilogy at an evening gathering in Vienna. Like the rest of Schubert's piano sonatas, they were mostly neglected in the 19th century. By the late 20th century, however, public and critical opinion had changed, and the sonata trilogy is now considered among the most important of the composer's mature masterpieces. Each one of the three sonatas is cyclically connected by diverse structural, harmonic and melodic elements tying together all movements as well as interconnecting all three sonatas together. This technique, though used in various ways by earlier composers like Beethoven, takes on a unique form in Schubert's music. In this sonata, Schubert reuses certain thematic ideas or moods across movements, creating a sense of reminiscence or connection between different sections of the work.