

Zhiheng Guo

piano

Recital in partial fulfillment of the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree, 2025
Student of Bruce Brubaker

Saturday, February 24, 2024
8:00 p.m.
Williams Hall

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

Impromptu in A-flat Major, op. 90 no. 4

Sonata for Piano in C Minor, D. 958

Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto
Allegro

Sonata for Piano in B-flat Major, D. 960

Molto moderato
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo
Trio

This recital features three immortal works by Franz Schubert, the culmination of his compositional achievement, written in his final year, 1827. Schubert's trademark use of modal mixture, the references to Beethoven, and his legacy as a song composer, can be found in these three pieces.

The concert begins with the *Impromptu in A-flat Major, op. 90 no. 4*, in which Schubert demonstrates his use of modal mixture, one of his essential characteristics of composition. The alternation between major and minor keys helps Schubert to create a world of mystery, aided by the soft dynamic and quick broken chords in sixteenth notes, as if the snowflakes descend from heaven. In the middle section, the harmony of C-sharp minor and major creates an image of a dark and cloudy sky with the repeating chords and a single melody on the top.

Beethoven's shadow exists in Schubert's *Piano Sonata in C Minor, D. 958*. Its fiery opening in the key of C Minor in such a low register and the relationship of the key between the first and second movement (C Minor to A-flat Major) refers to the Beethoven "*Pathétique*" *Sonata, op. 13*. Its triple meter echoes the first movement of the Beethoven *Sonata, op. 10 no. 1*, another work in the key of C Minor. The second movement is in the double-variations form in which the lyrical and moving first theme and the unsettling second theme appear alternatively. After the minuet in a quite spooky atmosphere, the fourth movement is a ruthless tarantella with extreme energy and power. The rhythmic consistency prevails throughout this long movement until the movement reaches the climactic and tragic ending.

The *B-flat Sonata* is a work of immense depth, showing Schubert as a marvelous song composer. The calm and serene mood of the first movement's beginning could relate to Schubert's own art song *Am Meer* (the sea). The text of this song by Heinrich Heine, "The sea shimmered far and wide", is a perfect depiction of this sonata's opening. The melody of the second movement, a work of stasis filled with his premonition of death, is in double voices, as if the soprano and alto are singing together. The first four notes of the melody, G#-F#-A-G#, share the same singing quality with four identical notes that opens the Adagio movement of the *Cello Quintet in C Major D. 958*. A fixed rhythm pattern consisting of a bass on the downbeats and higher notes on the upbeats prevails throughout the opening and closing sections. This ostinato gives a feeling of the barcarolle, while the inner voices state the melancholic melody. The third movement is a scherzo, but an unusual one that gives a perspective of being far away. It has a trio in the tonic minor and two different layers of rhythm. The finale is a movement in sonata-rondo form. Its 2/4 meter and its emphasis on the dominant could be a reference to the last movement of the Beethoven *String Quartet, op. 130*. After the presentation of different themes in various characters, the sonata proceeds to a rapid and triumphant ending, concluding Schubert's last note for the genre.

With all these wonderful pieces of music, it is hard to believe that Schubert fought through illness and many heartbreaking experiences. This recital pays homage the composer and these masterpieces.

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