

Zhiheng Guo
piano

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

Saturday, February 22, 2025
8:00 p.m.
Brown Hall

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

Sonata for Piano in A Minor, D. 784
Allegro giusto
Andante
Allegro vivace

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Sonata No. 31 for Piano in A-flat Major, op. 110
Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
Allegro molto
Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro ma non
troppo

Franz Schubert

Impromptu in C Minor, op. 90 no. 1, D. 899

Franz Liszt
(1811–1886)

Sonata for Piano in B Minor, S. 178

*This recital expresses my deepest thanks and gratitude
to my piano teacher Bruce Brubaker
and my advisor Richard Giarusso.*

The recital features four prototypical works of the 19th century. These four compositions focus on the idea of struggling against adversity and striving toward salvation, one of central themes in the Romantic Era.

The concert begins with **Schubert's** Piano Sonata in A Minor, D. 784, composed in the last five years of his life. The first movement's theme consists of parallel octaves in pianissimo, expressing emptiness and tragedy. The gesture of minor second conveys a premonition of death and appears throughout all three movements. After the tempestuous outburst of the first theme's reiteration, the second subject is a hymn of heavenly beauty in major mode, as if Schubert longed for a vision of potential redemption and healing. The pastoral second movement begins in F major, the same key that was used in the development section of the first movement. The melody is lyrical and songful, though the sense of uneasiness does not vanish completely as the flow of the melody is constantly interrupted by the figure of a minor second in triple piano. The Rondo Finale features tempestuous triplets in perpetual motion. The second theme is in a serene mood but still embedded with the minor second figure. The potential redemption is shattered as the movement ends with fury and tragedy in triple forte with four straight minor chords.

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major is a composition that has the theme of struggling against his illness and striving toward healing. It is one of his four late sonatas composed between 1819 and 1822. The lyrical first movement possesses simple and moving quality which is unusual among his late sonatas. The Scherzo movement has its own unique treatment as Beethoven features two German folk songs in the principal melody: "Unsa kätz häd kaz'ln g'habt" ("Our cat has had kittens") and "Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich" ("I am a draggle-tail, you are a draggle-tail"). The third movement is much more contrapuntally complicated compared to the simplicity of the first two movements. Beethoven was seriously ill when he composed the piece. The form of the piece could be an autobiographical representation of his own experience. Introduced by an improvisatory overture and recitative, the movement is in double-variation form in which the arioso theme and fugue appear alternatively. The arioso is a possible representation of Beethoven's illness, and the fugue is Beethoven's process of healing and recovering. The third movement ends with a passionate climax in A-flat major, symbolizing Beethoven's triumph over his illness.

Franz **Schubert's** Impromptu op. 90 no. 1 is a piece with no featured autobiographical elements. However, the concept of struggle against the adversity and the hope of healing is evident in the piece as expressed in the lonely c minor principal theme and the lyrical and consoling second theme.

Liszt's Piano Sonata in B Minor is one of the monumental works in the piano repertoire of the 19th century. Although Liszt himself never gave a hint of the work's

program, there are three possible programmatic interpretations for these sonatas. It could be Liszt's own autobiographical struggle or the struggle between God and Lucifer based on the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or it tells the story of Faust. However, it cannot be denied that this work deals with struggle and redemption and presents us with a journey of tender, wild, angry, and sublime moments. In order to enhance the continuity of the music and make the story-telling more effective, Liszt uses the one-movement sonata form in which several movements of music occur. It inspires composers of later generations to write similar sonata-form works based on such a formal structure such as in Alban Berg's Piano Sonata, op. 1.

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