

PAUL LEWIS

PIANO Schubert Series III

Friday 5 July 3pm – 5pm St John's Church

Paul Lewis CBE, internationally regarded as one of the leading musicians of his generation, has won numerous awards, including the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year, two Edison awards, three Gramophone awards, the Diapason D'or de l'Année, the Premio Internazionale Accademia Musicale Chigiana, and the South Bank Show Classical Music award. He holds honorary doctorates from Southampton University and Edge Hill University and in 2016 was appointed a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. He performs regularly as soloist with the world's great orchestras and is a frequent guest at international festivals.

Piano Sonata No. 4 in A minor, D537

1. *Allegro ma non troppo*; 2. *Allegretto quasi andantino*; 3. *Allegro vivace*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

In 1817, one of his less productive years, Schubert began a number of piano sonatas, only a few of which he actually finished. D537 is the first, and the earliest of his piano sonatas to survive complete.

The first movement's opening theme is built from a downward-driving idea, a corresponding rise, and a flurry of quick notes falling again. The opening rhythmic figure then precipitates a lengthy descent, which breaks off abruptly, followed by a moment's silence. A new rising theme is kept grounded by the repeated-note bass line, which also maintains the momentum. The mood remains generally truculent, Schubert heightening the tension at significant moments with further brief silences.

A moderately-paced rondo follows, whose song-like opening theme Schubert was to re-use as the main theme in the finale of his Sonata in A, D959, (included in Series IV on 6 July). Here, it unfolds over the kind of walking left-hand figuration that became a Schubert characteristic. One of his typically abrupt changes of key brings a contrasting, more flowing episode. The opening theme eventually brings the movement to a gentle conclusion.

The finale balances the energy of its initial upward-rushing figure with a plaintive reply, and echoes the first movement in its sudden pauses and silences, which add to the opening's hesitant feel. A change from minor to major brings a playful-sounding new theme, but hesitations creep in here, too, until the music eventually runs out of energy. Only the repeated-note figures in the bass provide any sense of movement, as the music's vitality drains away, leaving the emphatic last chord to act as a gesture of defiance.

Piano Sonata No. 9 in B major, D575

1. *Allegro ma non troppo*; 2. *Andante*; 3. *Scherzo. Allegretto*; 4. *Allegro giusto*

This is the last of the sonatas Schubert completed in 1817, though it was not published or performed until 1846, long after his death.

It begins with a crisply rhythmic theme having something of Beethoven's pugnacity. But this has no sooner come to rest than the music takes what writer Philip Radcliffe calls a 'flying leap' into the distant key of G major; flying leaps of this kind would become one of Schubert's defining characteristics. The new theme rises and falls gracefully, before giving way to a playful new idea. The Beethovenian theme from the start dominates the central section, becoming even more stark and forthright. By not exploring his more lyrical material to any extent Schubert adds to the movement's bluntness, underlined by its oddly terse ending.

More unconventional key-changes give the second movement's opening section a somewhat unsettled feel. This comes to a head in the middle section, a powerful outburst underpinned by staccato patterns in the left hand which cast a shadow over the rest of the movement. The Scherzo lightens the mood, with its lively dancing character and



limpid quality. The central Trio section is a brief interlude based on a continuous running figure for the right hand.

The pair of three-note figures that launch the finale are not just introductory, but have a role to play in driving the music forward. The tone is generally relaxed and easy-going, including a theme described by Philip Radcliffe as 'engagingly undignified'. But something of that earlier unsettled feel still seeps through in places, and the ending, like that of the first movement, is remarkably compact.

INTERVAL

Piano Sonata No. 18 in G major, D894

1. *Molto moderato e cantabile*; 2. *Andante*; 3. *Menuetto. Allegro moderato*; 4. *Allegretto*

By the time Schubert composed this sonata, in October 1826, the genre had begun to lose popularity in favour of shorter character pieces. When it was published in 1827, it was with the title 'Fantasie, Andante, Menuetto and Allegro', to suggest four separate pieces.

The leisurely-paced first movement opens in profound calm, with a gently swaying theme which gives little hint of the powerfully eruptive outbursts Schubert will produce from it later. A more waltz-like rhythm underpins the second main theme, but otherwise the effect is more of continuity than contrast. It is in the central section that Schubert begins to crank up the tension, with some explosive loud passages that cast long shadows over the rest of the music, even after the tranquil opening has returned.

As originally planned, the Andante was very different from the movement as it now stands. The softly plaintive opening was to have been followed by a song-like new theme in B minor, but Schubert replaced this with the present turbulent central episode. Its startling vehemence is eventually assuaged by a return of the opening, and a brief, gentle coda.

He called the B minor third movement a minuet, and it is certainly a dance of some kind, though its energy has a bluntness once again reminiscent of Beethoven. The aloof calm of the central section is a response from one of those unattainably peaceful regions of the mind that haunted Schubert's imagination increasingly in his last years.

The concluding Allegretto faces the storms of the previous movements with stoic equanimity, even light-heartedness, and the ending is one of Schubert's most magically understated.