

SIR ANDRÁS SCHIFF, PIANO
Virtual Performance for Friends of Chamber Music
March 17 - 24, 2021

PROGRAM NOTES

Johann Sebastian Bach: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903

This virtuosic piece is improvisatory in nature, and its longevity as a keyboard masterwork is evidenced by the number of pianists over the decades who have performed it, including Alfred Brendel, Glen Gould, Alexis Weissenberg, and Sir András Schiff. It has been transcribed for various instrumentation, including for solo viola by the Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, no. 2 “Tempest”

This sonata, written in 1801, represented a new phase in Beethoven’s compositional style. Longer and more dramatic, it was a clear departure from his previous works composed in the style of Mozart and Haydn. Indeed, the first movement opens with a dramatic arpeggiated chord, followed by a virtuosic faster section with hands crossing. When asked by a friend about the first movement, Beethoven alleged that “...the piano must break.” The work was not assigned its title by Beethoven, though he purportedly made a passing reference to the Shakespeare play to an associate. Beethoven named only one of his sonatas, the “Hammerklavier.”

Bach: Capriccio on Departure of His Beloved Brother, BWV 992

Bach was in his late teens when he wrote this work. There is some dispute about the meaning of the title. For many years, scholars speculated that Bach wrote this work when his older brother departed to perform in the military band of King Charles of Sweden. However, Bach’s leading biographer, pointing out that the German word for “brother” also could mean “close friend” or “colleague,” has noted that Bach wrote this when he graduated from school in Lüneburg and parted from friends that he made there. The movements of the work relay a simple story of a departure, including the general lament at the loss of friends and a warm farewell.

Beethoven: Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major, Op. 81a, “The Farewell”

Written between 1809 and 1810, the title of the Sonata and its movements suggests a clear programmatic nature. The sonata is inscribed at the beginning with the words *Le-be-wohl*, or Fare Thee Well in German, and its first publication offered this dedication: “On the departure of this Imperial Highness, for the Archduke Rudolph in Admiration.” When Beethoven was composing this work, the army of Napoleon had just arrived on the outskirts of Vienna and the Archduke, one of the Beethoven’s patrons, was forced to leave the city.

Robert Schumann: Arabeske in C Major, Op. 18 (Encore)

Schumann wrote this piece when he was 29 years old. He was visiting Vienna, where he hoped to make his future home with Clara Wieck, an extraordinary young pianist. Sadly, her father was deeply opposed to the union to the degree that Clara and Robert were petitioning the courts for permission to marry.

The Arabeske is a lovely example of Schumann's miniature piano works and is in the rondo form, with the recurring theme alternating with sections of contrasting character. There is a yearning, nostalgic and sometimes declarative quality to the interludes, perhaps reflecting the uncertainty at that time in Schumann's personal life.