

THE FIRM
2013



CONCERT TWO

**The Firm's annual concert seasons
are conceived, programmed, curated and directed by
composers Quentin Grant and Raymond Chapman Smith.**

**The Firm was founded in 1996.
This is our 98th concert.**

Schubert's music draws the listener in and has enduring lessons for composers and players. As Morton Feldman observed, "Schubert is the best example to get a sense of where to put it (the melody). It's not a question of periods, just where he places it is so fantastic with the atmosphere. It just floats. It's within our reach but it's someplace no one else would put the melody in terms of registration. There is a lot to learn in Schubert, just where he puts things. He is so effortless."

Alfred Brendel's characterization of Schubert vis-a-vis his near contemporary is well known: "In Beethoven's music we never lose our bearings, we always know where we are; Schubert, on the other hand, puts us into a dream. Beethoven composes like an architect, Schubert like a sleepwalker."

Elder Hall provides wheelchair access via the side (eastern) doors.

Toilets can be accessed in the foyer.

The Firm

presents

Marianna Grynchuk

solo piano

Franz Schubert

Ungarische Melodie

Philip Glass

Metamorphosis No.2

Raymond Chapman Smith

Untitled: Ultramarine

Quentin Grant

Cold Variations

- interval -

Franz Schubert

Sonata in C minor

Ungarische Melodie D.817 (Sept.2, 1824) Franz Schubert

The theme ... is a Hungarian song, which Schubert picked up in Count Esterhazy's kitchen; a Hungarian kitchenmaid was singing it, and Schubert, who was just returning home with me from a walk, heard it as he passed. We listened for a considerable time to the singing; Schubert had obviously taken a liking to the song, and continued humming it to himself for a long time as he went on his way...

Account by Karl von Schönstein,
a friend of Schubert



Metamorphosis, No.2 (1988)

Philip Glass

Metamorphosis was written in 1988 and takes its name from a play based on Kafka's short story. Numbers three and four are from Glass's incidental music to the play, which he wrote to fulfill separate but nearly simultaneous requests from two different theater companies. Numbers one and two use themes from Glass's soundtrack to the acclaimed Errol Morris film *The Thin Blue Line*, which depicts the true story of a man's wrongful conviction for the murder of a Dallas police officer. The touching melody of number two and the diatonic harmonies throughout provide an ironic counterpoint to the film's numerous reenactments of the shooting. The thrice repeated two-note theme (a descending minor third) in numbers one and five recalls the movie's pathetic litany of interviews and testimonies. Number five, which also draws on themes from *The Thin Blue Line*, was composed as a finale to the set.



Untitled: Ultramarine 12.3.'92

Raymond Chapman Smith

- I. Sostenuto e legatissimo**
- II. Teneramente, molto legato**
- III. Lentissimo e molto legato**

A composer, when asked what his music was 'about', replied, "perhaps it's about Schubert...about Schubert leaving me".



mark rothko untitled 1969

Cold Variations (1988)

Quentin Grant

in the end went down
down the steep stair
let down the blind and down
right down
into the old rocker
mother rocker
where mother rocked
all the years
all in black
best black

sat and rocked
rocked
till her end came
in the end came
off her head they said
gone off her head
but harmless
no harm in her
dead one day
no
night
dead one night
in the rocker
in her best black
head fallen
and the rocker rocking
rocking away
so in the end....

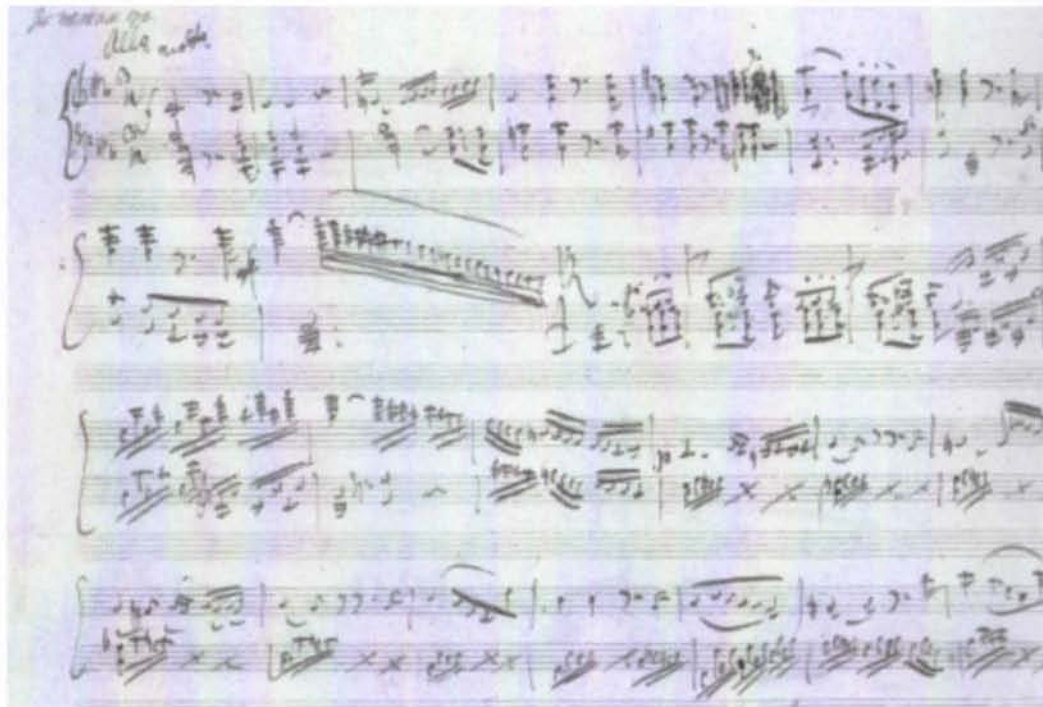
dead one night
in the rocker
in her best black
head fallen
and the rocker rocking
rocking away
so in the end.

Samuel Beckett, *Rockaby*

Sonata in C minor D.958 (Sept.1828)

Franz Schubert

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro
- IV. Allegro



Schubert composed his last three piano sonatas, in an astonishingly short time, in September 1828, the last year of his life. He had intended to dedicate them to Hummel, arguably the greatest pianist of the day. Schubert numbered

them Sonatas I, II, III, perhaps seeing them as part of a new start, and positioning himself as the successor to Beethoven who had died the previous year.

The sonatas were eventually published posthumously by Diabelli in 1839, as 'Franz Schubert's Last Compositions: Three Grand Sonatas'. All three are marked by length and a spacious grandeur of conception, each with characteristics of its key: the C minor D.958 sombre and turbulent, the A major D.959 flowing and lyrical, and the B flat major D.960 serenely contemplative.



Schubert and the piano

For Schubert's friends, his presence at their gatherings was vital for their cheerfulness, and he played on his keyboard dances for them, many no doubt improvised on the spot and written down later. Then there were piano duets — sociable music, and well-designed to spread Schubert's fame. But he was not to be remembered mainly as a composer for piano. Only his Impromptus and Moments Musicaux became part of standard piano repertoire — these were 'character' pieces such as the romantic era took readily to its heart. Amateur pianists have complained that Schubert does not lie easily under the hands, and is difficult to bring off effectively. His piano sonatas were long neglected. In 1928, the centenary of Schubert's death, Rachmaninov, when asked if he played any Schubert sonatas, supposedly admitted he didn't know there were any. At this very time Artur Schnabel, whose influence on piano repertoire was immense, and other pianists, especially Eduard Erdmann, were beginning the re-introduction of Schubert sonatas into the standard repertoire. The last sonata, in B flat, has become virtually a staple, performed and recorded by most of the great pianists.

And yet... perhaps our forebears had a point. Schubert's most accessible piano music may well be in those Impromptus, in his chamber music, and above all in the unequalled variety and resourcefulness of the accompaniments of his songs. No-one ever complains about those! The late sonatas are for people whose main interest is music, not the piano. Schnabel was fulfilling his teacher Leschetizky's prophecy: 'You will never be a pianist; you are a musician.' Probably the main stumbling block to appreciation of the last three piano sonatas, composed in the last year of Schubert's life, is their vast scale. This is a musical unfurling mostly unspectacular, by contrast with, say, Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata. Schumann, who realised

that this aspect of Schubert needed defending, called the length 'heavenly'.

These three sonatas, in their variety of expression, and their length and discursiveness within an overarching coherent framework, are a supreme test for the pianist's powers of interpretation.



Piano Sonata No. 10 in C minor, D.958

In 1828, the year after Beethoven's death, Schubert saw himself as appointed to continue that composer's legacy. Of the three piano sonatas which turned out to be Schubert's last, the one in C minor seems most like Beethoven. Its declamatory opening strongly recalls the theme of Beethoven's 32 Variations in the same key, C minor. But Schubert extends his theme, exploding into a downward-rushing scale, with a freedom very different

from Beethoven. Beethoven's themes have capacity for strict variation or development, whereas Schubert's themes are more lyrical and chromatic. The lyricism here lies in the extensions and repetitions of the themes, and in the more meditative second theme in the relative major key. The chromaticism, the colouring of the music by shifting harmonies, and semitone intervals, appears especially in the middle of the movement, where there is a mysterious theme, under unceasing semiquavers, entering like a new character in the drama. This pattern of free associations, wandering into distant harmonic realms, climaxes in chromatic runs, *pianissimo* at first, in the upper reaches of the keyboard. Under these, the characteristic rhythm of the declamatory idea is heard once again, presaging the recapitulation. The chromatic theme, and the atmosphere of mystery it brings, has the last word.

Among the three last sonatas of Schubert, this one is the least often played. Perhaps that is because, of the three, it seems the least characteristic of Schubert the lyrical harmonic visionary. Yet the writer counts himself fortunate that this was the first of the three sonatas he got to know. Its minor key and sombre tone made it striking, and its echoes of Beethoven made it intriguing. But there is something quite distinctive here — an almost magical and unpredictable invention quite unlike Beethoven, seeming to well up out of the unconscious: what led pianist Alfred Brendel to call the Schubert of these sonatas a 'sleepwalker'. And Schubert's darkness and sternness are quite unlike Beethoven's.

The second movement begins with a theme like a hymn or a prayer, but the second idea is more fraught, almost a lament. This soon leads to outbursts, semiquaver rhythms giving unity to this part of a rondo structure. After an elaborated return of the opening, and a magical modulation, the music rises to

intense climaxes, and animated motion invades all the musical material, before the relative calm returns.

In spite of the title Minuet, the third movement has the character of a scherzo, from its subtly varied phrase lengths, the continuing dark, C minor colour, and the telling pauses. The trio, in A flat, is a Ländler of wistful tone, but with a Viennese lilt.

The finale is the longest movement in Schubert's sonatas, measured by bar numbers, not by duration. The pace is a not-too-fast allegro, to allow the harmonic adventures to register, and the excursions into remote keys. The ostensible model is the finale of Beethoven's piano sonata Op.31 No.3, but the real affinity is with the finale of Schubert's own D minor string quartet, 'Death and the Maiden' (D.810), in which some find a dance of death. A 'haunted and breathless gallop', this finale confirms the view that the three last sonatas are associated in Schubert's mind with ideas of death. But the ride is exhilarating, and makes us grateful that Beethoven had so original a successor.



The piano on which Schubert wrote his final three sonatas.

You are warmly invited to join us after the
concert for complimentary drinks and a
selection of Tortes by Gabriele.

Forthcoming concert:

8pm Monday, 2 September 2013

Robert Macfarlane *tenor* **Leigh Harrold** *piano*

FRANZ SCHUBERT	<i>'Wanderer' Cycle</i>
QUENTIN GRANT	<i>Rilke Songs</i>
GRAHAM DUDLEY	<i>New work</i>
RAYMOND CHAPMAN SMITH	<i>Herbstklavier</i>

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