

John
Damgaard
plays



Schubert
Sonatas *and*
Piano Works

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

CD 1 78:09

Sonata in A minor, D537 (1817) 18:12

- [1] Allegro, ma non troppo 6:37
- [2] Allegretto quasi andantino 7:16
- [3] Allegro vivace 4:14

Sonata in E-flat major, D568 (1817) 27:14

- [4] Allegro moderato 7:25
- [5] Andante 7:16
- [6] Menuetto. Allegretto 4:45
- [7] Allegro moderato 7:42

Sonata in A minor, D845 (1825) 32:18

- [8] Moderato 8:37
- [9] Andante, poco mosso 10:53
- [10] Scherzo. Allegro vivace 7:35
- [11] Rondo. Allegro vivace 5:10

CD 2 75:06

Sonata in B major, D575 (1817) 18:47

- [1] Allegro, ma non troppo 5:54
- [2] Andante molto 4:13
- [3] Scherzo. Allegretto 5:17
- [4] Allegro giusto 3:28

Sonata in D major, D850 (1825) 36:21

- [5] Allegro vivace 6:34
- [6] Con moto 12:08
- [7] Scherzo. Allegro vivace 8:14
- [8] Rondo. Allegro moderato 9:15

Sonata in A minor, D784 (1823) 32:18

- [9] Allegro giusto 9:24
- [10] Andante 4:37
- [11] Allegro vivace 5:28

CD 3 78:39

Sonata in G major, D894 (1826) 33:31

- [1] Molto moderato e cantabile 11:46
- [2] Andante 8:31
- [3] Menuetto. Allegro moderato 4:45
- [4] Allegretto 8:24

Sonata in A major, D664 (1821) 15:15

- [5] Allegro moderato 5:28
- [6] Andante 4:09
- [7] Allegro 5:34

Sonata in C minor, D958 (1828) 29:26

- [8] Allegro 8:28
- [9] Adagio 8:07
- [10] Menuetto. Allegro 3:14
- [11] Allegro 9:31

CD 4 77:42

Sonata in A major, D959 (1828) 37:39

- [1] Allegro 11:35
- [2] Andantino 9:13
- [3] Scherzo. Allegro vivace 5:09
- [4] Rondo. Allegretto 11:36

Sonata in B-flat major, D960 (1828) 39:47

- [5] Molto moderato 16:43
- [6] Andante sostenuto 11:06
- [7] Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza 4:08
- [8] Allegro, ma non troppo 7:44

CD 5 77:28

4 Impromptus D899 (1827) 29:07

- [1] I. C minor - Allegro molto moderato 10:35
- [2] II. E-flat major - Allegro 4:40
- [3] III. G-flat major - Andante 6:23
- [4] IV. A-flat major - Allegretto 7:12

4 Impromptus D935 (1827) 37:28

- [5] I. F minor - Allegro moderato 11:22
- [6] II. A-flat major - Allegretto 7:46
- [7] III. B-flat major - Andante 11:33
- [8] IV. F minor - Allegro scherzando 6:30

Drei Klavierstücke D946 (1828) 28:48

- [9] I. E-flat minor - Allegro assai 10:17

CD 6 79:12

- [1] II. E-flat major - Allegretto 12:36
- [2] III. C major - Allegro 5:43

Sonata in E minor, D566 (1817) 14:11

- [3] Moderato 6:20
- [4] Allegretto 7:50

Sonata in C major "Relique", D840 (1825) 23:51

- [5] Moderato 15:55
- [6] Andante 7:56

Sonata in F minor, D625 (1818) 22:10

- [7] Allegro 9:50
- [8] Scherzo, Allegretto 5:58
- [9] Allegro 6:24

John Damgaard, Piano

CD 1 - 4 Recorded 1998

*at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus
Re-issue of Classcd 244-49*

*CD 5 [1]-[8] + CD 6 [3]-[9] Recorded June
16/17 2002 at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus
Re-issue of Classcd 481-82*

*CD 5 [9] + CD 6 [1]-[2] Recorded February 2024
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Schubert's piano sonatas

Schubert's *Lieder*, his more than 600 songs with piano, constitute a brilliant chapter in the world of classical music, and for a long time his symphonies and chamber music have taken their rightful place in the concert repertoire. How then can one explain that relatively few of his piano sonatas are known to the large music public? And this despite the efforts of our century's greatest pianists to convince us of the sonatas' great musical qualities - from Artur Schnabel to Wilhelm Kempff (John Damgaard's teacher), to Alfred Brendel and Andrés Schiff, to name some of the best known artists.

In seeking a reason, one does not have to dig too deeply before meeting the first and greatest name, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, undisputed master of the classical piano sonata. In no other genre did Schubert come so close to Beethoven as in the piano sonata. When the A minor sonata D845 was published in 1826, the connection was clearly sensed by an admiring reviewer, who wrote that the sonata "within the defined framework moves so freely and unusually, so boldly and now and then strangely, that it could really be called, not without justification, a fantasy. In this last respect it could be compared with the greatest and freest of Beethoven's sonatas".

It is obvious enough that Beethoven's piano sonatas were a source of inspiration for Schubert; had they not been would be almost inexplicable. But it is equally clear that the young Schubert tried to free himself from the big models in order to go his own way. When one looks at the works he wrote in that field, it quickly becomes clear that it was not the easiest route to take. John Damgaard's recording comprises all Schubert's completed sonatas, eleven in all. But there are just as many sonatas that were left unfinished, for one reason or another. And these incomplete works contain a wealth of musical jewels that are a delight to hear, yet another example of the composer's abundant ability to write a tune. Which other composer could have afforded to let such an overwhelming amount of material lie unused?

Having written a series of Mozart-inspired piano fantasies as a 13-14-year-old, the 18-year-old Schubert began to write his first piano sonata (D157 in E major) in February 1815. But something went wrong in the first movement; a week later he revised it considerably and wrote two more movements, but apparently never started the finale. He got going again in September 1815. This was to be Sonata I, he wrote on the manuscript; but again a last movement is missing. When today we allow ourselves to say that a movement is missing, it is not only because it is uncommon to end with a minuet movement, as these two sonatas do, but more because both works end in a different key from that of the first movement, something that never happens in any of Schubert's complete sonatas.

A third sonata, from 1816, also breaks off, this time in the second movement. But this was evidently finished later because, together with the first movement, it forms part of the *Fünf Klavierstücke*, published in 1843.

It may seem remarkable that Schubert the pianist could leave three piano sonatas unfinished during a period in which he had already composed five symphonies, four masses, five operas and operettas, a dozen string quartets, and several hundred songs.

But the picture changed in 1817, the year that was simply Schubert's piano sonata year. He started eight of them and, even though several ended as fragments, the year saw his first fully completed sonatas: *D537 in A minor*, *D568 in E flat major* (see below), and *D575 in B major*. How should one explain this sudden burst of activity? Can it have had something to do with Schubert's coming to the end of his eight years of theory lessons (counterpoint) with Salieri?

Salieri celebrated the 50th year of his coming to Vienna on 16 June 1816 with a jubilee concert to which his pupils contributed, including of course Franz Schubert. Beethoven was also a pupil of Salieri's at one time, but he had been written off long before as an unapproachable eccentric, whose music was as bizarre as the man himself. In his diary for 16 June, Schubert used the festive occasion to formulate the thoughts concerning Beethoven of the entire circle around Salieri, and he regretted the musical "bizarrerie, which seems to prevail among the majority of present-day composers and for which one of our greatest German artists is alone responsible"

But Schubert, now 20 and no longer under Salieri's direct influence, may well have felt that it was time to challenge the tradition stemming from Beethoven, who had then completed 28 of his 32 piano sonatas. Many fragments, often experimental, have survived from the following years as witness to the considerable effort of composition demanded by this challenge. Apart from *D664 in A major*, composed perhaps in 1819 (the manuscript has not survived, and the composition year may be 1825) and *D784 in A minor* from 1823, we have to go to 1825 before Schubert continues seriously in the genre. His problems in these years concerned not only piano sonatas; there are the incomplete string quartet in C minor (*Quartettsatz*) from 1820, and the symphony in B minor (*The Unfinished*) from 1822. But he must have felt that he had at length attained his goal. He was sending the sonatas straight off for printing, and began a new system of numbering: "Première Grande Sonate" (*D845 in A minor, op. 42*), "Seconde Grande Sonate" (*D850 in D major, op. 53*), "Troisième Grande Sonate" (*D568 in E flat major*, originally composed in D flat major in 1817, considerably revised for publication in 1826, but first printed in 1829 as *op. 122*), and "IV. Sonate fürs Pianoforte allein" (*D894 in G major, op. 78*). In 1828, Schubert's almost unbelievably productive last year of life, he completed the last three great sonatas, all with four movements and certainly thought of as a coherent series: "Sonate I" (*D958 in C minor*), "Sonate II" (*D959 in A major*), and "Sonate III" (*D960 in B flat major*). This sonata trilogy bears comparison with Mozart's final symphonic achievement, the three symphonies of 1788.

Schubert's nearest friends were already aware of his extraordinary musical gift, and also his personal way of composing. His friend Josef von Spaun wrote that "Schubert did not revise his

compositions, did not polish them later, so here and there are some deficiencies, but nevertheless they have something original and fresh about them, which is often lost with too much editing". It is not correct that Schubert never "revised his compositions", but Spaun's observation is characteristic of posterity's views about Schubert's compositions, particularly about the instrumental music. The so-called *sonata form* had been developed to still greater perfection during the classical Viennese period, reaching an absolute peak with Beethoven. Of crucial importance for musical progress in this movement form is the tension and subsequent release that are created by virtue of the tonal system. Every detail of composition must subject itself to this development, including the harmony, rhythm, subject matter, etc. No theme in a Beethoven sonata, however delightful, appears for its own sake; everything forms part of the overall process.

Measured by these norms, it was quickly found out that Schubert's sense of form left much to be desired. His movements were too long, there were too many repeats, too many diversions instead of goal-oriented development of the thematic material. This criticism has held sway right up to our own time, but it is nevertheless wrong.

The way to Schubert's sonatas does *not* go through Beethoven. And the way *through* Schubert's sonatas takes a route completely different from Beethoven's. We do not find the goal-oriented, steadily progressive movement in Schubert, but rather a lyric-epic narrative, a forward progress in a musical landscape, in which new, often surprising experiences meet us at every turn. Schubert's tunes were *not* created primarily with thoughts of thematic development; they have their own unmistakable beauty, highlighted en route by a wealth of harmonic nuances and differences in shading. Notions of time have an entirely new value in this musical universe. The fascinating cultivation of ever new possibilities of musical expression not only justifies but even asks for repeats, and at the same time explains the lengthiness of the movements that have been resented by so many people, as expressed in Schumann's friendly-ironic reference to the "heavenly length" in the finale of the C major symphony. However, what was not understood by the critics and the theorists was adopted by later generations of composers; one has only to think of Bruckner and Mahler, two great symphonists. While admiring the young composer who had the courage to introduce an alternative to Beethoven's awe-inspiring sonata art, we can be unreservedly glad that he reached a solution that fully justified his unique ability to write a *tune*.

The unfinished sonatas

Apart from the eleven complete piano sonatas, Schubert, as mentioned above, left just as many unfinished ones. John Damgaard has chosen three of them that form a worthwhile supplement to the complete works, even though they consist only of fragments.

The *Sonata in E minor D566* was composed in 1817 – *Schubert's piano sonata year*. It has three movements, of which the third, a scherzo and trio, is noteworthy in both length and key, A-flat major. In

order to achieve tonal unity, several editors have chosen to supplement the three movements with a finale, namely the *Rondo in E major D506*. John Damgaard has chosen another model. Like many other Schubert interpreters, he has paid attention to the fact that the first two movements of the E minor sonata (Moderato in E minor and Allegretto in E major) remind one strikingly of Beethoven's E minor sonata op. 90, which was published in Vienna in 1815 and which consists of only two movements, E minor and E major. No-one would dream of thinking up a continuation of the two movements of Beethoven's op. 90, and perhaps Schubert should also have followed his great predecessor in that respect?

The *Sonata in F minor D625* has survived as an incomplete copy, with corrections by Schubert's brother Ferdinand. "Sonate von Franz Schubert September 1818" is written on the title page. The reprise of the first movement is missing (a typical "sin of omission" for the surviving fragments), while the second movement, a scherzo in E major, is written in full. The third movement reprise is also unfinished, but the entire melody line is present, so this section could be reconstructed without many difficulties. The last work in the sequence of unfinished piano sonatas is the *Sonata in C major D840*. Like the six following ones, this sonata was planned to have four movements, but only the two first were completed. The third movement ends at bar 80 with the remark "etc. etc." (!), and the finale ends at bar 272. The original manuscript, which once belonged to Robert Schumann, is today spread all around and partly lost. The sonata was published in 1861 with the title "Reliquie. Letzte Sonate (unvollendet) für das Pianoforte von Franz Schubert". The word Reliquie might indicate that, in the publisher's opinion, Schubert had already more or less achieved the status of saint. The label "Letzte Sonate" is directly misleading; "Last published sonata" would have been more correct.

The impromptus

Schubert's eight *Impromptus* comprise the most important part of his one-movement piano pieces. They are divided equally between op. 90 (D 899) and op. post 142 (D 935) and were all supposedly composed in 1827. Schubert did not write a title on the original manuscript of op. 90, just numbering them I-IV; it was apparently his publisher, Tobias Haslinger, who thought of giving them that title. At any rate he wrote "Impromptu. No. 1. in C minor" on the first piece in Schubert's manuscript. He was less fortunate when he wrote the following instruction to the music printer on nr. 3, the wonderful impromptu in G-flat major: "Im ganzen Takt und in G-dur um zu schreiben", i.e. in simple alla breve time and transcribed to G major, which unfortunately was adopted by Haslinger's son at publication 30 years later. It was obviously to make the piece easier to play for amateurs, but nevertheless it was the worst sort of musical deception. Schubert himself titled the pieces "Four Impromptus" on the original manuscript of op. 142, dated December 1827. They are numbered 5-8, obviously in continuation of op. 90. The eight impromptus were composed during the period between the great piano sonatas of 1825-26 and the final sonata trilogy of 1828 (see above).

The inspiration to compose lyrical piano pieces may have come from the publishers' repeated request for easily understood piano music, for which there was a steadily increasing need (and sale!) among the large piano playing public. Schubert's impromptus are indisputably the first masterworks in the genre, and they inspired countless later composers. The title "Impromptu" probably appeared for the first time in a collection of pieces by the Bohemian composer Jan Václav Voříšek, published in Vienna in 1822. Though the word gives associations with improvisation, all Schubert's impromptus are not only immediately attractive, they are carefully worked out with respect to movement form. The intense preoccupation with the sonata has left obvious traces, as already expressed by Schumann in his review of opus 142: "The first impromptu is so patently the first movement of a sonata, so perfectly worked out and finished, that there cannot possibly be any doubt about it". The sequence of keys in the four impromptus could well fit a sonata: F minor, A-flat major, B-flat major, F minor. Schubert himself, in his letter to the publisher, was open to the question: "Four Impromptus, which can be printed separately or all four together."

We have evidence from Schubert's own music that the one-movement piano piece was replacing the classical sonata. When the publisher brought out Schubert's "IV. Sonate fürs Pianoforte allein", he deliberately avoided the word sonata and wrote instead: "Fantasie, Andante, Menuetto und Allegretto für das Piano-Forte allein".

Thus, we can conclude that it was not only Beethoven's piano sonatas, as previously thought, that helped to relegate Schubert's sonatas to the status of Sleeping Beauty for the best part of a century; Schubert's own lyrical piano pieces were also partly responsible.

Jens Østergaard / translation John Anderson

The Danish pianist **John Damgaard** (1941-) studied at Eastman School of Music (New York), The Royal Danish Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen with Georg Vasarhelyi and later with Ilona Kabos in London and Wilhelm Kempff in Italy.

From 1969-1984 John Damgaard was assistant professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Music and 1979-81 guest professor at Musashino Academia Musicae in Tokyo, Japan. From 1984-2005 he held the academic position of professor at The Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus.

John Damgaard has given concerts in USA, Canada, Mexico, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, France, Belgium, Japan, Australia, primarily with classical, romantic programs, but almost always including Danish piano works. He has performed more than 31 different piano concerti. For many years John Damgaard was a member of the piano trio Tre Musici.

He has made more than 30 CD's - among other the complete piano works by Ravel on 2 CDs,

the complete finished sonatas by Schubert on 5 CDs and Beethoven's 3 last sonatas...

Besides giving Master classes at Scandinavian Conservatories and in Japan he has been guest professor at ANAM (Australian National Academy of Music) in Melbourne.

John Damgaard has translated Alfred Cortot's book *Principes Rationnels de la Technique Pianistique* into Danish as well as Josef Lhevinnes book *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing*. (see: www.johnd.dk)

American Record Guide "Record of the Year 1999" Franz Schubert: The Complete Finished Sonatas

Before getting this set I had never heard of John Damgaard, and I must say that I am very impressed. Born in Denmark and, judging from his photo, still a comparatively young man, he studied at the Eastman School of Music and the Royal Danish Conservatory (where he later served for three years as assistant professor of music). His private teachers included Wilhelm Kempff, and his playing shows it. Like Kempff, who also recorded all the Schubert sonatas (but he included the seven unfinished ones), Damgaard is a miniaturist and a lyricist. He is concerned with melody, line, and harmony and eschews everything that smacks of going for the big effects. The result is playing of great beauty, purity, and inner strength-in short, playing of great communicativeness. Damgaard can float and sustain a musical line with the best of them. A subtle pianist, he is sensitive to inner voices, pedals judiciously, produces a rich singing tone, and is scrupulously attentive to dynamics and accents (always important in Schubert).

I listened to these five discs non-stop into the wee hours and came back for more in the morning. This is great Schubert playing-moving and stirring but also disturbing and, sometimes almost terrifying. Damgaard immerses you in Schubert's unique sound-world - a sound-world that reveals, perhaps more directly and palpably than any other composer's, the intimate interconnections between joy and sorrow, cheerfulness and gloom, striving and resignation, turmoil and repose. He is unfailingly sensitive to Schubert's incessant mood shifts-typically accomplished by sudden dynamic changes, alternations between major and minor keys, or repetitions of a melody (or melodic fragment) in a higher register (often in octaves).

Damgaard's Schubert also sings. Listen to any of these sonatas at random and you will immediately find yourself luxuriating in the melodic projection, the linear clarity, the tonal warmth, and the formal cohesiveness.

Since limitations of space prohibit detailed documentation of these claims, a few examples must suffice. D 664 is as good a place as any to start. Damgaard's interpretation is on the same level as Richter's old Angel version. Like Richter, he is a great lyricist who not only captivates us moment by

moment but also infuses us with the sure sense that we are going somewhere. Incidental beauties are always subordinate to structural considerations—phrase, line, and musical architecture. Damgaard's D894 is also very fine. It is not as slow as Ashkenazy's, but it is just as probing—sounds just as much as if it is on the threshold of a great discovery, the unveiling of a deep mystery. Only, like Eliot's Prufrock, "do not ask what it is". Such things cannot be uttered. The discovery must be found in the music and, having been found, cannot be handed over to someone else. Damgaard's D960 does not equal Schnabel's (could anyone's?), but it approaches it. And that is saying a lot. In the first movement there is the same grasp of monumental form, the same sense that there is something inexhaustible in this music especially the main theme, which, however profoundly explored or ingeniously developed, will never fully give up its secret. I could go on.

Whether you know these sonatas well or are totally unfamiliar with them, you owe it to yourself to hear this set. Schubert playing like this is rare. In July/August I reviewed two recent Schubert discs by Stephen Hough and Malcolm Bilson. Both were well played and well recorded. But I now feel constrained to add that in spite of their many individual virtues as Schubert interpreters, they are light years removed from Damgaard. This set (with its magisterial playing and even better sound) will surely be my "Record of the Year". I am grateful to the editor for bringing it to my attention. If I can bring it to the attention of others, I will have done some good in the world.

American Record Guide November/December 1999

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