Schubert

PIANO SONATA IN A MAJOR

IMPROVIMENT IN C MINOR
Op. 90 No. 1 (D. 899)

LUDWIG OLSHANSKY pianist
Ludwig OLSHANSKY Plays SCHUBERT

PIANO SONATA in A Major, (Op. Posth.) D. 959

The first and only public concert consisting entirely of Schubert's works held during his lifetime was given on March 26, 1828, the first anniversary of Beethoven's death. Schubert had just turned thirty-one and, with the encouragement of a small circle of devoted friends, he had organized the event not only to boost his depleted funds but to boost his morale. True, he had some fame, primarily for his songs which the distinguished artist, Michael Vogl, had introduced beginning with "Erkönig" in 1821; but the reputation he wished to acquire for his instrumental works had entirely eluded him. It was not easy to be a young composer in Vienna walking in the shadow of the great master who himself had not had an easy time of it with "enough grey close to Beethoven's. The small circle of friends who had never heard performed. Nor was he destined to, for once his latest songs or sonatas, had not the slightest idea of one so young. The fact is that even they, who had been so intimate a part of his life, who had been participants in the triumphs, in the tears of genius of one so young. The fact is that even they, who had been so intimate a part of his life, who had been participants in the sonata's poetry predominates, form becomes secondary. Schumann, in his essay on the last three sonatas (of which the Sonata in A Major, D. 959 is one), finds them "impressive in a different way from his others by virtue of a much greater simplicity of invention, a voluntary resignation to brilliant novelty ... and by the spinning out of certain general musical ideas instead of linking episode to episode with new threads as he does elsewhere." The first movement of the Sonata in A is at once both introspective and majestic, filled with a profundity of ideas that require close attention. In his own novel way Schubert develops his theme utilizing his characteristic quick shifts from major to minor and back again. The Andantino in F sharp minor, marking the second movement, is a most beautiful and haunting melody that has an almost arioso quality as if in idea, at least, it is echoing the arioso of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110. The same melancholy persists until suddenly and sharply interrupted by a surge of life-power introducing a mixture of turmoil and hope, but returns at the close to the lilt of its quiet, elegiac gloom. The scherzo that follows, along with its contrasting and charming trio, at once becomes grayier, more light-hearted, though it, too, is once again wrenched from major to minor and to the plaintiveness of the Andantino, only to be wrenched back again to the more exuberant mood of the opening theme. In the finale some scholars see a very close resemblance to the rondo of Beethoven's Sonata in G, Op. 31, No. 1. Its flowing lyricism and grandiose strength tie the movements together, giving them a unity that distinguishes this sonata as one of Schubert's finest.

Notes by Arthur White

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