



CLEVELAND
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM NOTES

Richard Goode, piano
February 22, 2022 – 7:30 p.m.
Disciples Christian Church, UCC

Papillons, Op. 2

Robert Schumann

Born: Zwickau, Saxony, 1810

Died: Endenich, nr. Bonn, 1856

Composed: 1829-31

Although Schumann, Chopin and Brahms all cultivated the classical sonata, they had a particular love for shorter “character pieces” which became emblematic of Romantic piano music. The young Schumann was especially fond of stringing sets of miniatures together to create cycles where the different movements alternated in an unpredictable and whimsical fashion.

Papillons (“Butterflies”) is the first of many such cycles that Schumann wrote, and it shows the uncommon sensitivity and boundless imagination of this twenty-year-old youngster just starting his career. Schumann was an enthusiastic fan of Jean Paul, a German novelist who is hardly read today except by fans of Schumann (and of Gustav Mahler, whose First Symphony was also inspired by this writer). One of Jean Paul’s novels, *Flegeljahre* (translated as “The Awkward Age”), was a defining experience: the story of two twin brothers who are opposites in character, inspired Schumann to create two literary alter egos, the soft-spoken Eusebius and the fiery Florestan, who figure prominently not only in his prose writings but in his music as

well—most explicitly in *Carnaval*, in which the opening melody of *Papillons* is also quoted.

Jean Paul frequently used the butterfly as a symbol for transformation as well as elusive beauty. Following the writer’s lead, Schumann composed a series of short vignettes, mostly in the rhythm of the waltz or the polonaise, in response to a scene in *Flegeljahre* where the two brothers, and the girl they both love, attend a masked ball together. The atmosphere of the ball is unmistakable in these piano miniatures: the dance element is present almost from beginning to end, although there are contrasts between the individual movements, reflecting specific events in the novel. The last of the twelve episodes introduces a traditional melody, the so-called *Großvatertanz* (“Grandfather’s Dance”), followed by the return of the first episode as in a dream, gradually dissolving over a long-held bass note. The ending, where the notes of a chord drop out one by one, is a highly innovative touch, expressing the moment when the dream slowly fades, and the butterflies disappear.

Sonata in A minor, D. 845

Franz Schubert

Born: Himmelpfortgrund, nr. Vienna [now part of the city], 1797

Died: Vienna, 1828

Composed: 1825

The present sonata is far from being the first that Schubert wrote, but it was the first to be published. This fact is significant, as the sonata represents an important new stage in the composer's evolution as a writer of piano music. The “great” A-minor (we may call it that to distinguish it from two earlier sonatas in the same key) is not only longer than most of its predecessors, but also richer in its musical ideas and the elaboration of those ideas. It is the first of six great sonatas from Schubert's final years that mark the peak of his pianistic output.

In this work, Schubert broke completely free from the influence of Beethoven, his older contemporary and fellow Viennese resident. Schubert's themes tend to be more contemplative in nature; they linger in the moment instead of pressing relentlessly forward as Beethoven's themes, at least during his early and middle periods, often do.

The first movement is not an Allegro but rather a leisurely Moderato. Two motifs, a gentle unison melody and a march-like idea with *staccato* (separated) notes, predominate throughout, undergoing many surprising key changes and thematic transformations. The second movement is a theme with variations which was one of Beethoven's favorite forms; yet here, too, Schubert goes his own way. His personal voice can be heard in the way he introduces notes and harmonies from the minor mode into a major context. There is an impassioned variation written entirely in the

minor; afterwards the music does not return to the previous key as one might expect but explores more distant tonal regions in a stormy and virtuosic passage. The final variation is wonderfully serene:

commentator Philip Radcliffe perceived echoes of distant horns (suggesting forests and nature) in this music.

The Scherzo is perhaps the most Beethovenian of the sonata's movements—at least, the simplicity of its main theme and the sudden dynamic and harmonic changes could easily create that impression. Yet the unexpected appearance of a Ländler dance in the middle of the movement and the subtle games played with alternating major and minor tonalities are unmistakable Schubert fingerprints. The trio or middle section is rather understated: Schubert calls for the *una corda* (one string) pedal which creates a softer, more intimate sound. Radcliffe called this trio a mixture of a barcarola and a Ländler.

The finale is a rondo on a theme that proceeds in equal eighth-notes in the manner of a perpetual motion, with the eighth-notes grouped in phrases of irregular length. This theme, played *legato* (with connected notes) and *pianissimo* (extremely softly), is contrasted with some more dramatic episodes. After many a tonal adventure, the work concludes on a passionate note. While minor-key works frequently switch to major at the end, that does not happen this time; instead, the sonata concludes with a series of powerful chords, creating quite a dramatic effect.

Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs

Béla Bartók

Born: Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary [now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania], 1881

Died: New York, 1945
Composed: 1914-18

The *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs* are much more than simple folksong arrangements. The harmonic treatment of the individual songs shows the richness of Bartók's musical idiom as he was reaching his full artistic maturity during the years of World War I. As the composer stressed, what he added to the melodies is as important as the melodies themselves. The fifteen songs are organized into an overall structure somewhat reminiscent of a four-movement sonata: "Four Sorrowful Songs" are followed by a "Scherzo" and a "Ballad," and the work ends with an extended set of "Old Dance Tunes."

All the folksongs came from original field recordings made by Bartók between 1907 and 1918 and notated by him on individual sheets that formed the basis for his scholarly analysis of this vast material. In the piano cycle, he approached the songs from another angle: he explored their emotional world and invented modern harmonies to amplify the melodies, which were originally unaccompanied. All the songs belong to what Bartók defined as the "old style" of Hungarian folk music.

Three of the first four movements (Nos. 1, 3 and 4) exemplify the so-called *parlando rubato* style, in which the melody is delivered in free rhythm, without a steady beat; No. 2 is a slow dance. No. 5 is the first

example of a *tempo giusto* melody (in strict rhythm and relatively fast tempo). It was presumably the humoristic text about a slovenly wife that inspired Bartók to treat it as a scherzo; like the subsequent "Ballad" (No. 6), the original form of the tune is followed by several variations during which the tempo and the character are changed.

The centerpiece of the work is the "Ballad," a tragic story ending with the death of a pregnant girl and her lover. It is a haunting melody in an asymmetrical 7/8 meter, starting in a simple unison and concluding with some powerful dramatic accents.

About one-half of the entire piece is taken up by nine "Old Dance Tunes" (Nos. 7-15), seven of which are rhythmically rather similar to one another. One tune is slightly slower than the rest, and another is in a characteristic mixed meter, but for the rest, the rhythmic flow is unbroken. Two of the songs are marked "Trio," meaning that they are embedded between two stanzas of another song. As is fitting, the most virtuosic arrangement (also the longest movement) is saved for the end. The first fourteen pieces were all vocal melodies, but the last one was a bagpipe tune, and Bartók preserved the characteristic drone of the instrument in his arrangement, which he marked "quasi cornemuse" in the score.

Sonata No. 28 in A major, Op. 101 **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Born: Bonn, 1770
Died: Vienna, 1827
Composed: 1816

Like the late string quartets, Beethoven's last piano sonatas occupy a special place in his output, and—along with the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa Solemnis*—are

surrounded by a mystique all their own. In these visionary works, Beethoven went significantly beyond his earlier music in terms of innovation and structural freedom.

The A-major sonata, Op. 101, is the first in the group of five late sonatas. It was written during the summer of 1816 in what was otherwise a fallow period in Beethoven's creative life. Declining health and a protracted lawsuit with his sister-in-law over his nephew's custody kept Beethoven from writing major works for the better part of the five-year span between 1815 and 1820. Therefore, the A-major sonata stands as a new beginning at a critical juncture in the composer's life.

Musicologist Joseph Kerman wrote about the opening movement: "[It] begins quietly on the dominant as though the music were already in progress: an almost Schumannesque effect." Another Beethoven expert, Maynard Solomon, found that "the work is similar in design to the fantasy sonatas of earlier years," referring to the "Moonlight" and its companion piece in Beethoven's op. 27. The similarity lies in the fact that neither Op. 101 nor the two sonatas in Op. 27 begin with a conventional sonata allegro, and present other irregularities in their movement structure as well. The sensitivity of the harmonies and the calm poise of the music are, perhaps, more reminiscent of the "Pastorale" Sonata, op. 28. In any case, the way the opening movement of Op. 101 combines a relatively fast tempo (*Allegretto ma non troppo*) with a distinct slow-movement feel that is unique to this sonata.

The second movement is a lively *Alla marcia* with quite a few surprises,

harmonic and otherwise. Its "trio" is a curious canon for two voices, without a clearly defined tonal direction that characterizes so much of Beethoven's earlier music. There is a gradual, organic transition from the trio back to the march.

The finale is preceded by a brief *Adagio* introduction, played *una corda*. Intensely lyrical and melodious, it is soon interrupted by a cadenza that leads, through a momentary recall of the first movement's opening theme, to the massive final *Allegro*, the culmination of the entire work. A short and pithy idea is developed in a multitude of different ways, including an extensive fugue—one of many that appear in Beethoven's late works. In the A-major sonata, the fugue functions as the central development section of a sonata form, which ends with a dramatic and brilliant coda.

This sonata was dedicated to the Baroness Dorothea Ertmann, an outstanding pianist and former pupil of Beethoven's, who was one of the best interpreters of Beethoven's piano works during the composer's lifetime. Beethoven called her his "Dorothea-Cäcilia," naming her after the patron saint of music. Anton Schindler, Beethoven's assistant, felt she was a "conservatory all by herself." Her husband, who served in the army, eventually became a General and was transferred to Milan, where in 1831 she received a young Felix Mendelssohn and played Beethoven's sonatas for him the way she had learned them from the master.

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.