

Music@Menlo LIVE

Creative Capitals (2018) disc 6.

The sixteenth edition of Music@Menlo LIVE visits seven of Western music's most flourishing *Creative Capitals*—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna. Each disc explores the music that has emanated from these cultural epicenters, comprising an astonishingly diverse repertoire spanning some three hundred years that together largely forms the canon of Western music. Many of history's greatest composers have helped to define the spirit of these flagship cities through their music, and in this edition of recordings, Music@Menlo celebrates the many artistic triumphs that have emerged from the fertile ground of these *Creative Capitals*.

The unique cultural identities of each of Music@Menlo's *Creative Capitals* are brought into stark contrast on Disc 6, which features music from Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna. Mozart's lighthearted *Andante and Variations* are juxtaposed with Schubert's stormy *Lebensstürme*, charting the evolution of the four-hand piano genre from casual, carefree enjoyment to music of great depth and intensity. Similarly, Saint-Saëns's delightful Piano Trio no. 1 is paired with Mendelssohn's brooding Piano Trio no. 2, which concludes the disc. The West Coast premiere performance of Shostakovich's Impromptu for Viola and Piano is also captured here for a brief but sweet visit to St. Petersburg.

- 1 ***Andante and Variations* in G Major for Piano, Four Hands, K. 501 (1786)**
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

WU HAN, GLORIA CHIEN, *piano*

- 2 **Impromptu for Viola and Piano, op. 33 (1931)**
DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

PAUL NEUBAUER, *viola*; WU HAN, *piano*

- 3–6 **Piano Trio no. 1 in F Major, op. 18 (1864)**
CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)
Allegro vivace
Andante
Scherzo: Presto
Allegro

WU HAN, *piano*; PAUL HUANG, *violin*; EFE BALTACIGIL, *cello*

- 7 ***Allegro* in a minor for Piano, Four Hands, op. 144, D. 947, *Lebensstürme* (1828)**
FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

GILBERT KALISH, WU HAN, *piano*

- 8–11 **Piano Trio no. 2 in c minor, op. 66 (1845)**
FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)
Allegro energico e con fuoco
Andante espressivo
Scherzo: Molto allegro, quasi presto
Finale: Allegro appassionato

WU HAN, *piano*; ARNAUD SUSSMANN, *violin*;
DAVID FINCKEL, *cello*

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2018

- WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
***Andante and Variations* in G Major for Piano, Four Hands, K. 501 (1786)**

Over the latter half of 1786, Mozart produced a significant amount of music featuring the piano, including the Piano Trios in G Major and B-flat Major, K. 496 and 502; the Piano Concerto in C Major, K. 503; the Kegelstatt Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, K. 498; and, for four-hand piano, the Sonata in F Major, K. 497, and the *Andante and Variations* in G Major, K. 501. In 1787, Mozart added to this last genre the Sonata in C Major, K. 521. Mozart (like Schubert a generation later) played a seminal role in elevating the piano-duet medium from light domestic entertainment to chamber music of substantial heft. The aforementioned sonatas in F major and C major certainly do the heavy lifting in this regard, but so does the delectable *Andante and Variations* merit its place in the four-hand literature. The set lasts not quite as long as just the first movement of either sonata yet sacrifices nothing of Mozart's characteristic formal elegance, textural clarity, and sheer melodic beauty.

The melodious *Andante* theme is an original tune (not, as was common, lifted from a popular aria) but would not be out of place in any of Mozart's comic operas. The first variation quickens the *Andante*'s easy eighth-note pace to flowing sixteenth notes. In the second variation, the secondo accelerates to triplets, pacing a modestly ornamented melody in the primo. Caffeinated thirty-second notes impel the third variation forward. The music turns introspective in the fourth variation: the tempo relaxes to the theme's *Andante* gait, but the music slides into morose g minor. The fog lifts for the ebullient fifth variation. After a flurry of virtuosic thirty-second-note runs, the work ends on a delicate note.

- DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)
Impromptu for Viola and Piano, op. 33 (1931)

This performance marks the West Coast premiere of Dmitry Shostakovich's Impromptu for Viola and Piano, op. 33, composed in 1931. The work, previously lost, was discovered in 2017 in the Moscow State Archives among the effects of Vadim Borisovsky, violist of the throughout his career. The manuscript bears a dedication to Alexander Mikhailovich, violist of the Glazunov Quartet. Music@Menlo is grateful to Irina Shostakovich for her assistance in securing permission to present this work in its West Coast premiere during the 2018 festival.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)
Piano Trio no. 1 in F Major, op. 18 (1864)

With the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 came a marked shift in Europe's balance of power. The Second French Empire under the reign of Napoleon III collapsed. The war brought about a newly unified Germany, which would claim the French territory of Alsace-Lorraine until the end of the First World War. This course of events inspired deep nationalist sentiments throughout France—a spirit that would be reflected as much in the country's musical activity as in other cultural spheres. In 1871, one year after France's military defeat, composers Romain Bussine and Camille Saint-Saëns formed the Société Nationale de Musique; three years later, the French conductor and violinist Édouard Colonne founded the Concerts de l'Association Artistique. For several decades leading to this point, lyric opera had dominated France's musical life; now, these fledgling organizations spurred a flurry of instrumental composition, laying the foundation for a strong tradition of French chamber music towards the turn of the twentieth century. This charge was led by some of France's most prominent composers, including Saint-Saëns, Ernest Chausson, César Franck, and others.

Saint-Saëns was one of his country's most highly regarded musical figures over the latter half of the nineteenth century. A child prodigy who attracted considerable attention in his youth, he continued to be regarded in his maturity as an excellent technician in all parts of his craft. In addition to being a prolific composer in every prevalent genre of French music during his time, he was also a gifted pianist and organist and was often compared during his lifetime to Mozart. By the time of the Société Nationale de Musique's founding, Saint-Saëns had already produced a respectable corpus of solo and chamber instrumental music. One of the finest among these is the Piano Trio no. 1 in F Major, op. 18, composed in 1864 and published three years later. Though the piano-trio literature was a rich one indeed, spanning works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, et al., Saint-Saëns had virtually no French models in the genre.

While the Opus 18 Trio might betray the influence of Mendelssohn's two piano trios, the work more so reveals Saint-Saëns to possess a distinct—and distinctly French—voice. The trio, composed in Saint-Saëns's thirtieth year, attests to French music historian Henry Prunières's appraisal of the composer: "His style, precise, nervous, and clear-cut, is absolutely characteristic and also essentially French; it recalls that of eighteenth-century French writers, particularly of Voltaire—nothing is superfluous, everything has its place. Order and clarity are supreme." Following a four-measure curtain-raiser, the *Allegro vivace* presents the theme that flows through much of the movement: a jaunty ascending figure, answered by gleeful staccato eighth notes.

This theme, offered in turn by cello, violin, and piano, illustrates the very delicacy and lightness of touch that, over subsequent generations, would become so strongly associated with French music. Its effervescent air lends credence to early biographers' suggestions that the trio was inspired by a holiday in the Pyrenees. The movement is dominated by the central theme and remains brisk and sunlit throughout. The piano presents a double-dotted rhythmic ostinato in pallid octaves to begin

the *Andante* second movement. The violin accompanies this solemn, folk-like tune with an eerie octave drone, redolent of the *clavecin-vielle*, a type of hurdy-gurdy common in the French mountain regions. Saint-Saëns steadily elevates these rustic strains to chamber music of the utmost elegance, as when refashioning the double-dotted *vielle* tune into a rhapsodic melody, floating atop an undulating piano accompaniment.

A winsome scherzo follows. A playful repartee between string pizzicati and offbeat piano chords turns into a blithe gallop that propels the movement forward. The trio concludes with a cheerful *Allegro finale*. It begins in an unassuming fashion: violin and cello trade plain, two-note utterances, accompanied by gently rippling sixteenth-note figurations in the piano. But this music quickly escalates to a more vigorous ado, accented by an occasional melodic zoom, like a car speeding by. Saint-Saëns soon displays a cunning sleight of melodic invention. What had previously seemed to be ornamental filigree—the piano's opening sixteenth notes—is revealed to be the movement's primary theme. The music quiets to a *pianissimo* and the melody emerges, unadulterated, in a prayerful whisper. The speeding car persists, but now in hushed tones. The piano reverts to rippling sixteenth notes, with the strings now clarifying the previously concealed melody. The clarity and brilliance of this music, representative of Saint-Saëns at his finest, sustain the finale to its radiant conclusion.

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
***Allegro* in a minor for Piano, Four Hands, op. 144, D. 947,
Lebensstürme (1828)**

Franz Schubert's musical life was as ephemeral as it was remarkable. He took gravely ill in 1823, contracting what almost certainly was syphilis, and died five years later at the age of thirty-one. But despite the great physical suffering and psychic anguish at the end of his life, Schubert remained incredibly prolific. In his final year, Schubert completed the two piano trios, the Ninth Symphony (appropriately known as *The Great*), the Cello Quintet, and the last three piano sonatas, among numerous other keyboard, vocal, and orchestral works—all told, an imposing set of masterpieces, miraculously concentrated within a deeply trying twelve months and unequaled by many composers over entire lifetimes. The *Allegro* in a minor, known as *Lebensstürme*, is one of three outstanding works for piano duet composed during this remarkable period at the end of Schubert's life, alongside the f minor Fantasie and the *Grand Rondeau* in A Major. Each of these impresses for its sheer breadth—they rival full-blown symphonies in their expressive aspiration, if not quite in length—in a medium traditionally associated with quaint, domestic musicales.

Schubert biographer Christopher H. Gibbs writes of Schubert's late works for four-hand piano: "[They demonstrate the composer's] quest to transcend the confines of the salon... Schubert's music for piano duet is among not only his greatest but also his most original. Such innovations may explain why his attraction to the medium continued even after his energies shifted increasingly to large-scale instrumental works. Indeed, the audacious harmonic and structural adventures in his finest keyboard duets may have pointed the way to orchestral projects that he did not live to realize...[T]he late piano duets exquisitely

merge Schubert's lyrical gifts with daring formal structures." As with much of Schubert's music, the *Allegro* in a minor was not published until years after the composer's death, in 1840, at which time the publisher Anton Diabelli christened it *Lebensstürme* ("the storms of life"). This overly trite sobriquet does little to prepare the listener for the depth of what is in store.

Harmonic and structural adventures are indeed afoot, creating subtleties of light and shade and the emotional complexity characteristic of Schubert's music. The melodic ideas themselves appear straightforward, as if subjects in a representational painting: it's an apple; it's an old man—but Schubert's harmonic daring casts these subjects in nuanced lighting, suggesting that the truth is more elusive than it may seem. The work begins with a thundering salvo of surly a minor chords. This opening statement arrives at a pregnant silence, from which emerges an introspective legato melody, paced by murmuring eighth notes in the *seondo*—still in the unsmiling key of a minor, a different aspect of the same agita.

The second theme is a warm, pianississimo chorale that seems to leave behind any previous anxiety—yet Schubert has led the ear to remote territory. A sonata-form movement in the key of a minor would typically modulate to the relative key of C major or perhaps to the minor-dominant (e minor). Instead, this chorale appears, weirdly, in the distant key of A-flat major. All may seem well, but something is amiss. Though the music remains placid, the harmonies continue to shift, the ground ever unsteady beneath our feet. The exposition closes with a transfiguration of the opening theme, now in buoyant C major. But the path to C major was dubious. In light of the harmonic chicanery that preceded it, one is unsure whether this optimism can be trusted. The development section charts further terrain, focusing exclusively on the first theme, which makes a furious return to a minor at the recapitulation. The chorale takes the music to radiant A major, presenting a clearer duality of light and dark—before stormy a minor ultimately wins the day.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847) Piano Trio no. 2 in c minor, op. 66 (1845)

Mendelssohn completed the second of his two piano trios, the Opus 66 Trio in c minor, in 1845, six years after the first. Though he presented the work as a birthday present to his sister Fanny, the published score bears a dedication to Mendelssohn's friend and colleague Louis Spohr. In addition to his compositional renown, Spohr was known as one of the leading violinists of the day and took part himself in numerous performances of Mendelssohn's Trio in c minor with the composer at the piano. Like its elder sibling, the c minor Trio exudes Romantic pathos immediately from its opening strains. A serpentine piano melody rises to a forceful cadence, only to return to a nervous whisper in the strings. Mendelssohn extends this theme to another upward arching musical idea in the violin and cello; a frenzy of sixteenth notes in the piano underneath inverts the contour of the theme, quietly sinking lower and lower. The movement's second theme, introduced by the violin, could be the doppelganger of the first—the heroic counterpart to the tortured opening measures.

The *Andante espressivo* is a vintage *Lied ohne Worte*: this music encapsulates Romanticism at its most deeply heartfelt. Of the quicksilver third movement, marked *Molto allegro, quasi presto*, Mendelssohn yielded that the perilously fast tempo might be "a trifle nasty to play." Among the compelling narrative threads of Mendelssohn's life and legacy is his complicated relationship with religion. He was born into a prominent Jewish family—his grandfather was the distinguished Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn—but Felix's father, Abraham, insisted that the family convert to Christianity as a means of assimilating into contemporary German society. The hyphenated surname often used in reference to the composer, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, was likewise insisted upon by Abraham Mendelssohn, on the premise that "there can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius."

Though it does not bear any explicit program, the Opus 66 finale might nevertheless be heard as reflecting somewhat the nuanced role that religion played in Mendelssohn's life and artistry. The movement begins with a dance-like theme whose shape and articulation (and opening melodic interval of a minor ninth) suggest Jewish folk music. Later in the movement, Mendelssohn unexpectedly introduces the Lutheran hymn "Gelobet seist Du, Jesu Christ" ("Praise Be to You, Jesus Christ"). While the piano offers the hymn, the strings play fragments of the opening theme. Music scholar Robert Philip has likened this juxtaposition to "two diminutive figures speaking in hushed tones as they enter a great cathedral." Extending this juxtaposition of musical ideas—indeed, ultimately reconciling the two—the movement escalates to an ecstatic climax. A radiantly transfigured version of the opening dance-like melody gets the last word, propelling the trio to a riveting final cadence.

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