

Alfred Brendel

plays

Schubert

Piano Sonata No. 19, D.958

Piano Sonata No. 15, D.840

German Dances D.783



alto

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata in C Minor, D. 958

1	I. Allegro	8:03
2	II. Adagio	8:16
3	III. Menuetto - Trio	3:32
4	IV. Allegro	9:08

Piano Sonata in C Major, D. 840 "Unfinished"

5	I. Moderato	10:39
6	II. Andante	9:24

German Dances, Op. 33, D. 783

7	No. 1	0:47	15	No. 14	0:41
8	No. 2	1:02	16	No. 9	0:26
9	No. 3	0:32	17	No. 10	1:11
10	No. 4	0:34	18	No. 11	0:26
11	No. 5	0:40	19	No. 12	0:28
12	No. 7	1:00	20	No. 15	0:48
13	No. 8	0:29	21	No. 16	0:30
14	No. 13	0:37	22	No. 6	0:34

Alfred Brendel, *piano*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) left his *Piano Sonata in C* D840 (composed during April 1825) unfinished and the autograph score was later in the possession of Robert Schumann. It was finally published in Leipzig in 1861 and given the title '*Reliquie*' (Relic). This sonata contains examples of what Elisabeth Norman McKay calls the 'demonic element', a phrase used by her to describe sudden rage shattering a mood of quiet reflection as in the second movement of the *Great C minor Symphony*. This was the first sonata Schubert had attempted since the grim *A minor Sonata* of 1823, by which time he knew he had syphilis.

The first two movements of the D840 were completed on paper, the third was almost finished (it presumably was in his head), but he never returned to complete the work. What survives is epic in character, a departure from his previous work, and the first movement is 'wayward and unconventional in its tonal schemes' (Newbould), its dramatic nature suggesting a narrative, (hardly surprising as he was working concurrently on some settings of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*), the opening building very gradually from a monotone to an immense climax followed by music of similar length subsiding to a deathly calm. The obvious scenario suggests a battlefield and the resulting bleakness following the battle (one would love to hear this orchestrated by Brahms or Bruckner!). The *Andante* slow movement is an abridged *Rondo* ABABA which seems segmented into bite-sized pieces. A similar scenario to the epic first movement is probable in the unfinished third movement (not included in this recording), for which Schubert wrote a *minuet* adding a trio. Hitherto the composer would simply repeat the first subject as written but here Schubert repeated it in an unrelated key, an entirely original musical development. For the reprise following the second subject he reverts to the original key. The finale was also unfinished. Upon abandoning the work Schubert immediately began work on another sonata, *D845 in A minor* and also soon afterwards began his *Ninth Symphony* whilst on an extended summer excursion around various beauty spots including Gastein and Gmunden.

The last months of Schubert's life were astonishingly prolific, as he produced much of high quality, almost as if he was aware that there was little time remaining. Although we have no means of knowing, it is possible that Schubert had in fact been told of the seriousness of his condition, but he discussed neither his illness nor its prognosis with his friends who were in fact well aware that he had contracted syphilis. The final groups of songs, the *String Quintet* and the last three piano sonatas (D958-960 which Schubert had planned to dedicate to Hummel), are all dated September 1828 but it is likely that he worked on *D958 in C minor* in the previous spring. He never had the chance to hear any of these final works in performance for he died on 19 November 1828. The *Sonata in C minor* is a 'dynamic, probing and highly original work' (Newbould) although it has been said that his model in this first movement was Beethoven's *32 variations in C minor*. The second movement, marked *Adagio*, in A flat major begins solemnly but after a slight pause begins to develop outside its home key. The third movement is a straightforward *Minuet* with a *Ländler* as trio. The final movement is full of vitality and incident: indeed for the listener it is impossible to make out its form with any degree of confidence.

It is reasonable to assume that the *16 German Dances* D783 (1823 – 4) are written down copies of dances improvised at parties. Certainly Schubert made use of these occasions to try out various compositions by playing them himself to his friends, who sometimes accompanied. These miniatures, full of vitality, are a joy to listen to, with some delightful twists in harmony.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Alfred Brendel, born in 1931 in the present-day Czech Republic, is a man of many parts. At the time of his first solo recital in 1948, a gallery in Graz was exhibiting his paintings. He has also published a number of essays on diverse subjects and refreshingly has posed questions as to the need for classical music to be taken entirely seriously. His family moved to Zagreb when he was three and it was there that he began his studies in piano and composition, later moving to Graz. He later studied with Paul Baumgartner and attended masterclasses given by Eduard Steuermann and Edwin Fischer, whilst developing his understanding of the instrument by collecting recordings of Cortot, Kempff and Schnabel.

Having won a prize at the Busoni Competition in Bolzano (1949) he embarked upon his busy international career in which recordings (extending from Bach to Schoenberg) play a pivotal role. Many of his finest recordings stem from the 1960s when he first became known to a wide audience through his excellent performances on the Vanguard and Vox labels, and he became the first artist ever to record the complete piano works of Beethoven. He has also twice recorded the complete sonatas for Philips as well as recorded an acclaimed cycle of the Mozart piano concertos alongside Sir Neville Marriner.

In addition to winning numerous awards for his recordings Brendel has also received honorary doctorates from Oxford and Yale Universities and in 1989 was awarded the KBE. For some years he has made his home in Britain.

Although regarded as British by the Brits, Brendel has always remained an Austrian and he has chosen to make the Musikverein in Vienna the scene of his final concert appearance on 18 December 2008, sixty years after his debut recital, when he will play Mozart's '*Jeunehomme*' *Piano Concerto*. During his farewell solo tour Brendel has featured the works of the Viennese masters with which he has become most associated: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert.

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