



Vesselin Stanev
Piano

Programme

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Seven Bagatelles, Op. 33 (1802)

No. 1 in E-flat major Andante grazioso, quasi allegretto

No. 2 in C major Scherzo allegro – Minore – Trio

No. 3 in F major Allegretto

No. 4 in A major Andante

No. 5 in C major Allegro, ma non troppo

No. 6 in D major Allegretto quasi Andante. Con una certa espressione parlante

No. 7 in A-flat major Presto

32 Variations on a Theme in C minor, WoO 80 (1806)

Allegretto – Variations I–XXXII

Rondo a capriccio in G major, Op. 129 (between 1795 and 1798)

“Rage Over a Lost Penny”

Allegro vivace

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata in B-flat major, D 960 (1828)

Molto moderato

Andante sostenuto

Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza – Trio

Allegro ma non troppo

Rage, Whimsy, and Trance

Even if this does not quite seem to conform to the idealised image of classical composers, Ludwig van Beethoven possessed a sometimes merciless appreciation of the comic side of life. He gave free rein to this tendency in his seven *Bagatelles*, Op. 33. Beethoven dissects and “deconstructs” familiar musical types and cadences, from dance, folk song, and pastoral to human speech. He ascends or dives into the extreme registers of the piano, bringing specific pieces to a near-nonsensical end. With the *Seven Bagatelles*, Op. 33, Beethoven was writing experimental music in 1802: they encompass whimsical and abrupt, even shocking moments — and now, more than 200 years later, sound as fresh and outrageous as when they were new. And that is certainly no trifle.

Beethoven’s pupil Carl Czerny recommended performing his 32 Variations in C minor, WoO 80, “for a thinking audience.” It is no coincidence that these Variations from 1806 are calculated down to the microscopic level in their compositional details. The piano playing itself — the discipline required of the hands — is treated in a fascinatingly systematic manner, as if these were a condensed collection of etudes. Yet the audience is scarcely allowed a chance to step back and reflect during the course of these Variations. Beethoven uses an austere, Baroque theme at the outset, but already with the first variation, the music starts at once to move restlessly, in thrilling waves of intensity, until it seems in the end to dissolve in shimmering figures, in pure sound, in sheer frenzy.

One of the quirkiest pieces that Beethoven came up with in his younger years became known as the *Rondo a capriccio* and, more famously, by the distinctive title “Rage Over a Lost Penny.” It was with this name and description that the piece was published after Beethoven’s death — and, to the still greater befuddlement of posterity, with the improbably high opus number 129. In fact, Beethoven

wrote this rondo as early as the mid-1790s, labeled it “Leichte Kaprize” (“light caprice”), and prefaced it with the tempo and performance designation “Alla Ingharese quasi un Capriccio.” That is, the music was to be played in a fiery Hungarian manner, which at the time would have meant with a primitive wildness. And with rage, no matter what its cause.

In 1828, then in his early thirties and in what turned out to be the last summer of his far-too-short life, Franz Schubert composed three piano sonatas, in C minor, A major, and B-flat major, respectively, which might be likened to a three-part opus from the Baroque era. Deathly forebodings, even deathly longings, world-weariness, and fantasies of redemption can already be found in Schubert’s works from an even younger age. But once he was diagnosed with a venereal disease, which entailed horrific and ominous procedures that were used in the attempt to cure the patient, hospital stays and treatment with mercury, darkness descended on Schubert’s music — the blackest despair — from which there was no escape but to immerse himself in a feverishly overheated state of productivity or to dream his way to the other side of reality: namely, in the last of this sonata trilogy, the B-flat major Sonata, D960, which seems to move as if in a trance, slow and subdued, guided by strange voices, signs, shouts from the depths, lured into those depths.

Schubert managed to complete the B-flat major Sonata a few weeks before his death. Although he at once tried to publish it, almost a decade passed before the Viennese publishing house of Anton Diabelli & Co. published the three sonatas posthumously, in the spring of 1838, as “Franz Schubert’s very last composition,” with a dedication to Robert Schumann. And Schumann knew only too well: “Time, though it produces much that is beautiful, will not soon produce another Schubert.”

Wolfgang Stähr