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# SCHUBERT

Impromptus, D.899 and D.935



PETER KATIN

1832 Clementi square piano



## FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828): IMPROMPTUS

### Four Impromptus, D.899

①	No. 1 in C minor	<i>Allegro molto moderato</i>	[9:17]
②	No. 2 in E flat major	<i>Allegro</i>	[4:21]
③	No. 3 in G flat major	<i>Andante</i>	[5:29]
④	No. 4 in A flat major	<i>Allegretto</i>	[7:24]

### Four Impromptus, D.935

⑤	No. 1 in F minor	<i>Allegro moderato</i>	[11:08]
⑥	No. 2 in A flat major	<i>Allegretto</i>	[7:16]
⑦	No. 3 in B flat major	<i>Theme and variations</i>	[12:07]
⑧	No. 4 in F minor	<i>Allegro scherzando</i>	[6:56]

**total playing time (including pauses: [64:21]**

**TUNING:  $a' = 423$**

Standard pitch in this period varied from place to place according to local custom, a problem for many musicians of the time. The Vienna pitch of Mozart's time was  $a' = 421.6$ ; the Broadwood pitch in 1820 was  $a' = 433$ .

For this recording the 1823 Clementi piano was tuned in equal temperament to  $a' = 423$ .

*PLAYBACK LEVEL: To obtain a realistic impression of the sound quality of the square piano (basically a domestic instrument for modest rooms), it is suggested that a slightly lower volume level be used.*

**SCHUBERT:**  
**FOUR IMPROMPTUS,**  
**Op.90, D. 899**

The Impromptus formed Schubert's last collection of piano pieces and were written in 1827, the year before his death. Eleven in all, they were published in two sets of four, and a further set of three, called merely Klavierstücke. Each is, I think, something of a masterpiece, and each seems to convey the sense of inevitability that Schubert developed to such an incredible extent in such works as the great C major Symphony or the B flat Sonata. The first Impromptu from the D899 set has about it much of the haunted feeling so evident in "The Erlking", a feeling underlined by the use of a triplet figuration that persists throughout - the stormy, almost sinister atmosphere is accentuated by its key of C minor, Schubert's so-called "tragic" key, but unlike the song, it finally relents with a change to the major and a tranquil and distant ending. By contrast the E flat Impromptu is a sort of perpetual motion, its heavily rhythmic middle section having a distinct Hungarian flavour. Here the coda changes to the minor key, hinted at in the outer sections, and so the Impromptu concludes with a far more darkly dramatic feeling than that with which it began. The G flat major was once a favourite drawing room piece - to such an extent that

earlier editions transposed it into G major as the original key-signature of six flats was considered too daunting for the amateur! It is a wonderful example of Schubert's mastery of song, long phrases being linked together over changes of key and even mood, giving a total expression of peace which at the end steals away leaving the listener in an atmosphere of timeless enchantment. After this, the magical arpeggiando cascades in the right hand that begin the final Impromptu seem to come back from the distance where the previous one has left us; they are repeated in major and minor keys before ushering in a left hand theme of simple charm, a phrase often repeated yet never seeming merely repetitious. A darker feeling comes with the middle section in C sharp minor, but this finally relents and the piece ends with happiness.

**SCHUBERT:**  
**FOUR IMPROMPTUS,**  
**Op. Posth. 142, D. 935**

Of this set, I am greatly drawn to the B flat Impromptu as being probably the most inventive, Schubert having produced here a perfect little set of variations on a theme which would appear to be complete in itself, (it is of course recognised by its similarity to the Rosamunde Entr'acte)

and brought to them a great range of pianistic facets. But the other three have their own different and strong characters. The first, in F minor, begins with a commanding introduction to an animated idea which settles for a while in A flat major, but a simple yet effective question-mark of a phrase high on the piano leads to a sudden change to the minor key and a prolonged ruminative duet between the two hands. This again changes to the major and ushers in the first theme again and therefore yet another change to the minor, and the sequence is repeated before ending with this same theme - Schubert's command of the alternation of major and minor keys is totally effective in conveying conflicts in mood, as it does in the finale of the last B flat Sonata. On this recording I have included the repeat of a section that for many years was thought of as having been discarded by the composer; in fact this repeat was omitted by the earliest publisher, Diabelli.

At the end comes the other Impromptu in the same key, a strongly accented and spirited dance, the middle section of which consists largely of busy scale passages that heighten the feeling of energy. This excitement subsides and gives way to a quiet and mysterious page of staccato chords wandering up and down the keyboard accompanied by darker sustained octaves from

the left hand, before a whirlwind coda that brings everything to a sudden end.

The remaining Impromptu (No.2) is in A flat, a simple and moving piece with a thoughtful chordal theme for its outer sections, and a trio in smoothly flowing triplets, its climax being reached in the surprisingly remote key of A major. These first two Impromptus caused Schumann to speculate whether or not they were intended to form the first two movements of a Sonata; certainly Schubert intended the set to be played complete.

The fascination of performing these Impromptus on a square piano lies, for me, in the fact that throughout my career I have played them on modern instruments with their particular dynamic and tonal structure. The change to the very different qualities of a square piano has made me aware of yet further possibilities in tonal colouring, which in turn has inevitably had an effect on my interpretation. It is not a matter of compromising simply because the square piano has a considerably smaller basic sound than a modern one, as compromise is out of the question when interpreting. It is necessary to understand that here is a different and special sound-world, and the player has to understand that an equally valid interpretation is possible within that sound-

world. Perhaps I should add that it seems to be a general practice to record "authentic" instruments in highly reverberant acoustics. The results might belie the fact that square pianos were not designed for large halls but for a rather more intimate atmosphere. This is why I decided to record the Impromptus in my own studio, where I had previously recorded some Clementi Sonatas. I am convinced that this gives a more accurate "feel" of the piano in the environment for which it was intended.

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### **THE INSTRUMENT**

The piano of today is very much a standard instrument, so that a pianist giving a series of concerts in New York, Sydney and London would expect the concert grands in each venue to be more or less identical.

This was not the case, however, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. There were grand pianos, square pianos and upright pianos. Some had single action, some double action, some had the English grand action and others the Viennese action. Added to this, makers wanted their instruments to be individual, so much so that if one selects one group, the English square piano, makers such as Clementi,

Broadwood, Stodart or Tomkison produced instruments with a characteristic tone and touch, each make noticeably different from the other.

At this time a concert artist such as Mendelssohn travelling the continent could expect to use, for instance, Viennese pianos when in Germany and English instruments when in England. In concert halls or large houses he would require a grand, while in an ordinary domestic setting he would be more likely to play a square.

The instrument used on this recording is a six-octave square piano of c.1832 by Muzio Clementi & Co. It was manufactured in London and has English double action with the added refinement of "checks" to catch the hammers on their return.

The square piano had become popular in England in the 1760s and developed rapidly from the small five-octave fortepianos with their bright tone reminiscent of the timbre of the harpsichord or spinet to the subtle and sophisticated instrument as heard here. These later square pianos have a full, singing tone of great beauty, enabling us to hear these Impromptus as music lovers of the period could have expected them to sound. It is an interesting consideration that, as all piano music of this period was played on

what we now term "early pianos" and as the majority of early pianos were squares, it was this sound with which most people would have been familiar.

© Andrew Lancaster 1994

### **PETER KATIN**

"There exists no pianist of deeper sensitivity."  
- *The Times*

"The high point of the concert was Peter Katin, who offered Mozart's A major concerto with the utmost sensitivity, making the slow movement unforgettable". - *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Katin's faith in music and its composers is ageless. It seems to be his whole reason for playing" - *The Daily Telegraph*

Peter Katin is one of Britain's most distinguished pianists. His London debut in 1948 started him on a career that has taken him throughout the world. Early successes included performances of Beethoven's G major concerto at both the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Festival Hall. Not long afterwards a performance of Rachmaninov's third concerto at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert drew critical declaration

that he was a born virtuoso. His repertoire interests have always been very wide and as well as maintaining a span from early classical to late romantic and impressionistic schools, he has lately been drawn to the attractions of authentic period pianos.

His interest in such pianos resulted in a recording of five Clementi sonatas (ATH CD4), an outstandingly successful venture which was greeted by critical superlatives, and he continued his series of square piano recordings with these two sets of Schubert Impromptus.

[Peter died after a tragic accident at his home in 2015]

Recorded at Peter Katin's studio on 18, 19, 21  
and 22 December 1993

Piano: Clementi & Co (1832) restored by Andrew  
Lancaster

Producer: Joanna Leach

Engineer: Mike Beville

Piano Technician: Martin Ness

An Athene Recording Original issue: Athene  
ATHCD5

Cover photo: The Clementi piano (courtesy of  
Mike Beville, Athene Records)



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Peter Katin 1930-2015

