

A man in a dark suit, light blue shirt, and grey tie stands on a city street at night. He is wearing sunglasses and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred city street with warm lights and a car in the distance.

ANDREW BROWNELL

piano

SHADES OF NIGHT

 divine art

THE MUSIC

For more than a century now, artificial light has been no further away than the flip of a switch. To us, night is nothing more than that period of the day when the sun is not shining – a few hours' darkness overcome with the aid of technology.

Step back now to a time when the night was altogether more unknown, an antithesis to the clarity of illumined day. In the especially fertile imaginations of the 19th-century Romantic composers, this was a time when, shielded from the gaze of the Almighty, the world gave itself over to mystery and magic: lovers met for forbidden trysts, revelers drank and cavorted through the small hours, and spirits walked the earth. In this album, I hope to transport you out of our sterile, modern understanding of night and into the stranger, more interesting reality it must have been for most of human history.

Our journey begins with the first movement of **Beethoven's** second *Sonata quasi una fantasia*. The ornate title translates as “Sonata in the manner of a fantasy”, but the nickname “Moonlight” originates with a German poet who was reminded of light reflecting off the surface of a lake. The name stuck, but the lake in the critic's mind must have been an ominous one, whose softly undulating waters perpetually threaten to send some horror to the surface. I have followed this with the first of two **Chopin Nocturnes** on this album. Much lighter in tone than the Beethoven, it too has a constant flow of notes that suggest water, perhaps an evening ride in a Venetian gondola.

The **Nachtstück** (Night piece) from Hindemith's *Suite “1922”* is a nightmarishly beautiful movement written in the composer's early Expressionist style. The middle section is hypnotic, twinkling deliriously in the heights of the keyboard, while the return of the opening material builds to a dissonant, passionate climax in which motives from the middle section unexpectedly return to haunt the listener.

From German Expressionism in the 1920s we travel west, to what may be a Parisian café scene in Debussy's prelude "*Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*" (Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air). The music suggests a languid nighttime scene with a hint of intrigue about it, and Debussy's instruction to the pianist at the end to play like a horn call signals the end of an intoxicating evening.

Keyboard music of the French Baroque is replete with short pieces bearing descriptive titles; in *Le Rossignol-en-amour* (The Nightingale in Love), Couperin offers us a highly stylized imagining of a nightingale's song. In French poetic and musical tradition, any work with the word "love" in the title is understood to refer not only to the emotion, but the act as well, and there can be no doubt what the elaborate, climactic final trill in this piece represents. Its companion piece, *Double du rossignol*, is an elaborate variation meant to follow immediately, but I have given our birds a moment to regain their strength by interrupting the sequence with the dreamy fifth *Nocturne* of the American composer Lowell Liebermann. Composed in the mid-1990s, it may seem a strange bedfellow with the poised world of Couperin, but it provides a gentle contrast, transforming the return of the amorous nightingales into a reminiscence.

"*The Night's Music*", from Bartók's *Out of Doors*, is an evocative movement that manages to hold together some fairly disparate musical ideas. The outset might depict a swamp or river bank, whose stillness is intruded upon by a growing chorus of chirping crickets, belching frogs, and other noisy fauna. Eventually, a somber melody is heard in the distance, perhaps played by primitive wind instruments accompanying an arcane ritual. This becomes a lively dance, more reminiscent of Bartók and the Eastern European folk roots of his music, before the previous ideas reappear, coalesce, and finally evaporate.

Having explored the "otherness" of night and its potential for strangeness, we turn for the remainder of this album to selections that focus on passion, mostly from the Romantic period. Chopin's heated *Nocturne in C minor* is surely his most dramatic entry in the genre. While the other Chopin *Nocturne* on this album is mostly congenial, here the passion is real and emanates from a place of profound emotional depth. The central section transforms from a Wagnerian chorale into virtuosic cascades of

octaves, after which the restrained grief of the opening returns as a torrent of emotion. The end provides little relief, darting abruptly up the keyboard and leaving us with a few funereal chords.

In a letter to Clara, his muse and wife-to-be, Schumann wrote that he perceived in his “*In der Nacht*” (In the night) a depiction of Hero and Leander, the doomed couple of Greek mythology. Hero, a priestess of Aphrodite, dwelt in a tower on the European side of what is now the Dardanelles and was seduced by Leander, who would swim across the strait for their nightly encounters. Angered that Leander had taken Hero’s virginity, the gods raised a storm and drowned him on one of his swims; Hero, stricken with grief, threw herself from the tower.

Samuel Barber’s *Nocturne* is nominally an homage to the Irish composer John Field, who essentially invented the piano nocturne, but it seems more akin to the spirit of Chopin. Composed in 1959, the piece marries Chopin’s dramatic sweep and florid, serpentine melodies with Barber’s eclectic sound world to create a piece that is both beguiling and vaguely unsettling.

The slow movement of Brahms’ *Sonata No. 3 in f minor* is, in my view, possibly the most ravishing expression of love in the piano literature. In the score, Brahms precedes the movement with three lines of poetry by the German writer C.O. Sternau:

The evening falls, the moonlight shines;
There, two hearts are united in love
And hold each other in blessed embrace.

Most of the movement is tender and strikingly intimate; in the final section, however, Brahms unexpectedly changes gear, introducing a new theme that builds to a moving climax.

Debussy’s *Clair de lune* is one of his best-loved pieces. The title is derived from a poem by Paul Verlaine – a frequent source of inspiration in Debussy’s early music – that speaks of masked revelers beneath a “sad and beautiful moonlight” as a metaphor for the soul.

While the music is undoubtedly peaceful, Debussy balances this tranquility with a distinctly French melancholy.

And so, our journey ends where it began: under the light of the moon. But has the moon not been with us all this time, shedding its rays upon each moment of this nocturnal odyssey? Our bustling, modern world generally takes no heed of it, but on some evening, having taken this journey, perhaps you may gaze upon it anew and think of the reverie, mystery, and passion of the night.

– Andrew Brownell



THE PIANIST

Described by *Musical Opinion* as “potentially one of the most significant pianists of his generation”, Andrew Brownell won 2nd Prize at the 2006 Leeds Competition and 2nd Prize *ex aequo* at the 2002 International J.S. Bach Competition (Leipzig). Since winning 1st Prize at the 2005 J.N. Hummel Competition (Bratislava), he has achieved widespread recognition as “one of the foremost Hummel interpreters of our time” (*Hudobný Život*).

Brownell’s performances have been seen and heard on BBC radio and television, Classic FM, NPR, CBC, ORF, and RBB KulturRadio. He has been soloist with orchestras such as the Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and Calgary Philharmonic.

An enthusiastic collaborative artist, Andrew Brownell has appeared in concert with principals of orchestras such as the Philharmonia, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and Vienna Philharmonic. His teachers have included Nancy Weems, John Perry, and Joan Havill.



Andrew Brownell piano

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ANDREW BROWNELL - SHADES OF NIGHT

1	L. van Beethoven	Adagio sostenuto, from Sonata quasi una fantasia, Op. 27 No. 2 ("Moonlight")	5:42
2	F. Chopin	Nocturne in D-flat, Op. 27 No. 2	5:39
3	P. Hindemith	"Nachtstück" from Suite "1922", Op. 26	6:57
4	C. Debussy	"Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir" from Préludes, Book I	3:44
5	F. Couperin	"Le Rossignol-en-amour" (The Nightingale in Love) from 14ème Ordre	3:30
6	L. Liebermann	Nocturne No. 5 in D, Op. 55	6:47
7	F. Couperin	"Double du rossignol" from 14ème Ordre	3:51
8	B. Bartók	"The Night's Music" from Out of Doors	4:40
9	F. Chopin	Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1	5:40
10	R. Schumann	"In der Nacht" from Fantasiestücke, Op. 12	4:25
11	S. Barber	Nocturne, Op. 33	4:10
12	J. Brahms	Andante, from Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5	10:32
13	C. Debussy	"Clair de lune" from Suite bergamasque	5:27
Total time			71:18