

## **Notes on the Program**

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### **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Fantasia in C minor, K. 475; Sonata in C minor, K. 457**

In 1781, after multiple attempts and complications, Mozart finally succeeded in leaving his position with the Archbishop of Salzburg and moved to Vienna to work as a freelance composer. According to musicologist Stanley Sadie, it was not long afterwards that he "had established himself as the finest keyboard player in Vienna." Moreover, Mozart's ability as an improviser was unsurpassed. In 1785, Johann Friedrich Schink writes:

“And his improvisations, what a wealth of ideas! What variety! What contrasts in passionate sounds! One swims away with him unresistingly on the stream of his emotions.”

Though Schink's reaction is not directly attributed to this Fantasia, how apt it certainly would be. This work, presented in six contrasting sections, begins with a solemn melodic line in octaves. While its chromatic underpinnings recall the character of Bach's Musical Offering, its drama certainly foreshadows Beethoven's "C minor mood." Mozart is able to provoke a sense of inevitability with his use of contrasting ranges, silences, and a descending chromatic bass line. What follows is an oasis of D major, but the moment is short-lived. A dark and stormy passage is soon unleashed with fast tremolos in the right hand. Mozart eloquently and masterfully ties together all the vacillating emotions and wandering keys with a recapitulation of the opening section.

The beginning of the Sonata parallels very much the Fantasia in both its use of stark octaves, as well as the corresponding "sighing" gestures, harmonized and contrasting in register. As a predecessor to his Piano Concerto in C minor, the Sonata holds many similarities beyond its obvious key, drama, and chromaticism. The first movement's brief development is followed by a recapitulation and a coda restating the opening theme in imitation between the two hands.

The second movement introduces a serene theme with a number of elaborate variations. In the middle, there is an A-flat major section which clearly shares similarities in terms of melodic line, range, and expression with the famous middle movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata.

According to scholar William Kinderman, the last movement *Allegro assai* is marked with more extreme contrasts than any other movement in Mozart's sonatas, perhaps not unlike the mercurial moods of the corresponding Fantasia in C minor. The movement opens with a breathless melody marked by syncopations and followed by an alternation between *tutti*, fanfare-like music and a solo, quiet response. In the last return of the main theme, Mozart writes rests and fermatas between each phrase, writing *a piacere* (as the performer pleases). The coda quite incredibly includes the main theme of the Fantasia (C-Eb-F#-G-Ab) as a culminating line.

While the Fantasia and Sonata can stand alone (and it is known that Mozart sometimes performed them separately), this culminating line at the end of the sonata clearly demonstrates its coherence. Moreover, Robert Levin, Katalin Komlos, and others have noted that the destabilization of the ending of the Fantasie, namely the deceptive cadence four measures from the end, as well as the large outburst in the last measure, creates the perfect conditions for the Sonata to follow. Musicologist Mario Mercado alludes to the pairing of the two pieces as being a Classical analogy to the baroque Fantasy and Fugue; the fantasy brings about improvisation and freedom that contrasts with the well-known structure of the sonata.

## **Arnold Schoenberg: Five Piano Pieces Op. 23**

Perhaps no other composer in the twentieth-century shaped the future of classical music as much as Schoenberg did with his approach to composition. The composer, mostly self-taught, saw himself as the direct heir to Brahms and Wagner's legacy but felt he could not express himself the way he wished with the traditional means available. Since the beginning of the century, Schoenberg had been exploring new grounds and experimenting with expanding

tonality. The highly chromatic lines and lack of key signatures of his String Quartet No. 2 (1908) already marked a departure from tonality to a chromatic expressionism, lacking a tonal center. The creation of his groundbreaking method of composing called “twelve-tone technique” came at the height of these experiments in the early 1920’s. Between 1920 and 1923, Schoenberg was occupied with shorter pieces, including Five Piano Pieces, Op. 23, Serenade, Op. 24, and his Suite for Piano, Op. 25 (his first forays into purely twelve-tone writing where the entire series of twelve notes are repeated only after the whole set has been heard).

Op. 23 contains five distinctly different pieces and lasts a total of roughly ten minutes. The lyrical expressivity of the first piece masquerades a sense of humor which become more apparent in the later pieces. Additionally, Schoenberg makes use of his “developing variations” technique borrowed from Brahms. This can be heard in the return of the theme: as the pitches remain the same, the rhythms, the shape, and the tessitura all vary. The second piece has often been described by scholars as being in sonata form. The third piece of the set is sometimes referred to as a fugue and making use of the variation technique with a series of five tones. The fourth piece hints at dance whereas the last piece is the only fully serial piece in the set, which he labels a waltz. According to musicologist Johanna Frymoyer’s recent article, “The Musical Topic in the Twentieth Century: A Case Study of Schoenberg’s Ironic Waltzes,” there is a constant dissonance between form and content in the fifth piece.

### **Pierre Boulez: Piano Sonata No. 3**

*Formant II – Trope – Texte*

*Formant II – Trope – Parenthèse*

*Formant II – Trope – Commentaire*

*Formant II – Trope – Glose*

*Formant III – Constellation Mirroir*

After composing his first two piano sonatas in 1946 and 1948, Boulez went on a piano-writing hiatus, focusing his compositional efforts on orchestra, string quartet and voice. His interest in writing for piano however, was renewed after hearing Stockhausen's first four *Klavierstücke*. The two composers had numerous discussions

about the piano and how they could apply their ideas to the instrument. Boulez, who was quite familiar with French literature and with the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé rooted one of his ideas in the poet's work. Inspired by the line, "*un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*" (a throw of the dice will never abolish chance), Boulez took the concept of chance and decided to apply aleatoric elements to the structure of his Third Piano Sonata, allowing the performer to build his own form by assembling pieces together like lego blocks. In literature and more specifically Mallarmé's 1885 poem, this type of "open-form" functioned in a similar fashion where all the possible outcomes were written down and the performer had to make some formal choices about the order of the text. The goal was to have a work that was familiar upon each hearing, yet renewing itself every performance.

Early on in the compositional process, Boulez settled on organizing his piece into five movements: a central one that would be preceded and followed by two movements. However, since the term "*movement*" had implied associations with rigid classical forms, he decided to label them "*formant*" to emphasize the open-ended structure. In physics, at a given frequency, "*formants*" represent the partials of a sound at their strongest and are responsible for the tone qualities of a sound. Analogous to the functionality of *formants* for sound, Boulez saw the structure of his work as a result of unfolding elements that derived from one initial structure being constantly renewed.

Boulez premiered the piece in 1958 in Cologne with a repeat the following year in Darmstadt, but was not fully satisfied with some of the *formants*. Over the next few years up until 1963, he made changes and elaborations to the piece but only two complete *formants* (i.e., *Trope* and *Constellation-Miroir*) out of the five (i.e., *Antinomie*, *Trope*, *Constellation-Miroir*, *Strophe*, *Sequence*) were published.

In the second *formant*, *Trope*, the performer is given four sections labeled (*Parenthese*, *Commentaire*, *Glose* and *Texte*) and given the choice of their order without being allowed to repeat any of them.

With the third *formant*, “*Constellation-Miroir*” Boulez takes on a slightly different approach to structure. The music fragments that formed *Constellation-Miroir* are separated on multiple pages carefully labeled either “*points*” or “*blocs*” depending on their structural role. The “*blocs*” and “*points*” are to be played in alternation, with “*blocs*” being a selection that could work as an even number selection and “*points*” as an odd number selection.

The other three incomplete *formants* exist in various form and stages but are not usually performed and considered unfinished. The third most complete *formant* is called “*Antiphonie*.” The fourth *formant*, “*Strophe*” has never been published and is the least developed of all *formants*. Finally, the fifth *formant*, “*Sequence*” exists in facsimile form based on the manuscript. Boulez also envisioned additional formal complexity on the larger scale that would arise in a complete performance setting by allowing to interchange the order of some of the *formants*.

Boulez's unfinished third sonata is like a window into his life's work. It was not uncommon for the composer to continually revise his pieces over the course of his life. For Boulez, a piece or work of art that had meaning was ever expanding, always in progress or in other words, infinite.

## **Schubert Sonata: E-flat Major, D. 568**

The year 1815 marked a great outpouring of creativity from Franz Schubert. Like Mozart, Schubert had recently seized the opportunity to give up his job (teaching, which he quite disliked) in order to spend all his time as a freelance composer. The composer accepted an invitation to live at the home of a wealthy lady, who's son was Franz von Schober, an aristocrat of many talents. At this time, there was an ever-increasing demand for piano music to be played by the general public in their homes and it thus meant that there was a higher chance to turn in some profit. As such, 1817 saw the output of six piano sonatas. Among the more successful of the six works was the Piano Sonata in D-flat major, D. 567 presented in three movements with the third movement being but a mere fragment. Schubert must have felt the potential of the sonata and reworked it

into another sonata almost a decade later in 1826. The composer added a fourth movement, slightly embellished some of the phrases, and transposed the piece to Eb, although the piece was published posthumously (in fact, only three piano sonatas were published during his lifetime). The Eb major Sonata features four movements all in E-flat major except for the second movement in G minor.

The first movement begins with a Mozartean gesture, characterized by a melody outlining a chord. It begins in unison and *Allegro moderato* not unlike a number of his other sonatas. The textures are lean and the music exudes a Viennese elegance. The second theme is *ländler*-like, reminiscent of the Austrian folk-dance. The revised version of the first movement has an extended development, while the recapitulation is also elaborated.

According to pianist Vladimir Feltsman, the theme of the *Andante* is the predecessor to his *Arpeggione* Sonata. It was transposed into G minor from C-sharp minor and is in A-B-A-B-A form.

During Schubert's transpositions, he added a charming *scherzo* movement and trio, the latter which he would reuse in the middle of his *Scherzo* D. 593 #2 as noted by Feltsman.

The *Allegro moderato* finale architecturally counterbalances the first movement in both length and scope. The opening statement is a reworking of the theme from the beginning of the sonata. A flow of sixteenth-notes that traverse the entire movement lends itself to modulations and themes of graciousness, agitation, and ultimately contentment. To the keen listener, one hears references to his Impromptu D. 935, No. 3 as well as runs that find origin from the last movement of his "small" A major sonata, D. 664.