ANDRÁS SCHIFF

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SIR ANDRÁS SCHIFF
Biography

Sir András Schiff is world-renowned as a pianist, conductor, pedagogue and lecturer. Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1953, Sir András studied piano at the Liszt Ferenc Academy with Pal Kadosa, György Kurtág, and Ferenc Rados; and in London with George Malcolm.

He has performed cycles of complete Beethoven sonatas and the complete works of J.S. Bach, Haydn, Schubert and Bartók, which constitute an important part of his work. Having collaborated with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, he now focuses primarily on solo recital, play-conducting appearances, and exclusive conducting projects. In the 2022-2023 season, he was named Artist-In-Residence by the New York Philharmonic, with whom he performed nine concerts. His Bach has become an annual highlight at the BBC Proms, and he regularly performs at the Verbier, Salzburg and Baden-Baden Festivals as well as Wigmore Hall.

Vicenza is home to Cappella Andrea Barca, his own chamber orchestra founded in 1999, comprised of international soloists, chamber musicians and friends. He curates an annual festival in Vicenza at the Teatro Olimpico. Sir András enjoys close relationships with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Budapest Festival Orchestra, and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In 2018 he accepted the role of Associated Artist with the OAE, complementing his interest in performing on period keyboard instruments.

With a prolific discography, he established an exclusive relationship in 1997 with producer Manfred Eicher and ECM New Series. Highlights have included the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas recorded live from Zurich; solo recitals of Schubert, Schumann and Janáček; and J.S. Bach's Partitas, Goldberg Variations, and Well-Tempered Clavier. His most recent release features Brahms and Schumann Violin Sonatas with Yuuko Shiokawa, released in late 2024.

Sir András Schiff's many honors include the International Mozarteum Foundation's Golden Medal (2012), Germany's Great Cross of Merit with Star (2012), the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal (2013), a Knighthood for Services to Music (2014) and a Doctorate from the Royal College of Music (2018). He was awarded the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance in 2021 from The Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University. In 2024, he received the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art as well as the Bösendorfer Ring. He is an Honorary Member of the New York Philharmonic International Advisory Board.

FEBRUARY 2025 – AT THE REQUEST OF THE ARTIST –
PLEASE DO NOT ALTER THIS BIOGRAPHY

András Schiff

Critical Acclaim

"He is one of the most penetratingly serious masters of the keyboard before the public today. Full stop."

Boston Globe

“He found song where others find formula; he conveyed song where others play scales.”

Los Angeles Times

“But so successful was the evening that the critic can only throw up his hands, wish you had been there, and quote Ira Gershwin's endearing tombstone inscription: 'Words Fail Me.'”

New York Times

“His phrasing was both imaginative and thoughtful, with some exquisitely soft and refined passagework that sounded as if the keys were brushed with a feather, not struck with fingers.”

Seattle Times

“Among current piano titans, Andras Schiff is the Zen master. He is both utterly relaxed and absolutely awake; taken together, those qualities add up to an unbreakable focus. He is tireless and seemingly infallible, and his playing is window-clear. Listening to Schiff play is like looking into a running stream and seeing all the colorful, round pebbles beneath the water.”

San Jose Mercury

“There wasn't a moment in the intense recital not made to mesmerizingly matter.”

Los Angeles Times

“He cast a spell from which one could sense the entire hall subsequently awaken”

The Independent

“András Schiff's recital was one of the great musical events of the season.”

Washington Post

“Schiff went straight to the heart of the matter in a no-frill manner: with neither baton nor score, he shaped rather than conducted a beautifully detailed performance, indicating rather than dictating to the orchestra – more authentic than the authenticists.”

London Times

“He picks his words carefully as if he has a limited supply and doesn’t want to waste any, but he spreads them broadly. All without sheet music and without notes. But he is far, far funnier than you would ever expect, and again like Haydn, understands how to time a moment’s silence to perfection.”

Intermezzo

is rarely
textures
and great thundering chords, and his readings are as brainy as they are elemental."

San Francisco Chronicle

"Part of what makes Mr. Schiff's Beethoven so engrossing is that his interpretive approach eludes definition. An artful blend of intuition and analysis has gone into his preparation. Yet the results are constantly surprising."

New York Times

"Schiff's interpretations were beautifully conceived with an intimacy and insight that spoke of his own profound feeling for the music."

Daily Telegraph

"His *Appassionata* was among the great Beethoven sonata performances I've heard, live or otherwise. The performance transcended comparison."

Philadelphia Inquirer

"It was music of the highest order." ***Boston Herald***

"In Schiff's single encore, the last movement of Robert Schumann's 1836 Fantasy in C Major, he both made his case that Beethoven's experimentation led to and was continued in the Romantic era and played the work with such beauty and authority that I cannot imagine ever forgetting it."

Chicago Sun-Times

"The sheer beauty and clarity of his piano tone is what first strikes the ear, a deep-centered, warmly rounded solidity that never permits the slightest suggestion of a forced or unmusical sound."

New York Magazine

"Mr. Schiff coaxed a beautiful sound out of the instrument, combining an immaculately articulated approach with eloquently shaped phrases and singing lines."

New York Times

Features

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

June 4, 2021

A Pianist Comes Around on Period Instruments

Early in his career, Andras Schiff disdained historical authenticity. Now he embraces it, including on a revelatory new Brahms recording.

By David Weininger

On his new recording with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Andras Schiff (shown here in 2019) plays a piano made in 1859 — the year Brahms's First Concerto premiered.

For much of his career, the eminent pianist Andras Schiff, 67, disdained the use of historical instruments. He proudly played Bach on modern pianos; referred to fortepianists with an interest in Schubert as mere "specialists"; and told a New York Times interviewer in 1983, "I've heard some ghastly things done in the name of authenticity."

Time and experience, though, have brought about a wholesale change in his attitude, and Schiff has transformed into an eager evangelist for the use of historical keyboards. Several years ago he acquired an 1820 fortepiano, which he has used to make compelling recordings of Beethoven and Schubert.

In recent interviews, he has criticized the increasing homogeneity of piano performance, with modern Steinways used for repertoire of every era.

Schiff's latest venture in this arena is his most convincing yet: a vibrant new recording of Brahms's two piano concertos with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Aiming to recover the sound of this music when it was written, Schiff plays a piano made by Julius Blüthner in Leipzig, Germany, in 1859 — the year of the First Concerto's premiere. He also — a rarity in these works — serves as both soloist and conductor, leading an ensemble of around 50 players.

Schiff appearing with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, which plays on period instruments, in London in 2019.

Wiping away the historical grime, Schiff and the orchestra breathe air and vitality into pieces that, even in successful performances, can sound heavy and clotted; the drier instrumental palette instead conveys improbable elegance. Words like monumental have a way of attaching themselves to these concertos, but Mr. Schiff and the outstanding players make them sound intimate and human-scale.

Schiff spoke about these works and his interpretations in a recent phone call from London. These are edited excerpts from the conversation.

What changed your skepticism about historical instruments?

What converted me was when I first played Mozart's piano in Salzburg, in the room where he was born. This must have been the second half of the 1980s. It was the first time I met an instrument — an original instrument, not a copy — that was in wonderful condition. Subsequently, there were many occasions to find wonderful instruments. I'm now getting to a place where I will find it very difficult to play music on modern pianos.

But even as late as the 1990s, you were still saying in interviews that, for example, you wouldn't think of playing Schubert on a fortepiano.

I did say that, yes. I have to take it back, or I have to say that I was not well-informed, or plain stupid. One has to be flexible and one has to say, sometimes, I made a mistake; I was wrong.

Why was Brahms the next composer you decided to record in a historically informed way?

It was a logical step from Schubert. And also, I met this wonderful orchestra, the Age of Enlightenment, and we did the Robert Schumann concerto together at the Royal Festival Hall in London, which has something like two and a half thousand seats.

It's a very problematic hall. There are always seats where the piano is covered by the orchestra. And for the first time in my life, in the Schumann with this orchestra it was absolutely without any problems: the balance, the way the piano came across, the way the orchestral parts came across. So after the Schumann I thought, Let's try the Brahms.

Playing the Brahms concertos on a modern piano with modern orchestras, there were always balance problems. And I found, especially in the B-flat Concerto, that it was just physically and psychologically very hard to play. Somehow, with this Blüthner piano, the physical difficulties disappear. The keys are a tiny bit narrower, so the stretches are not so tiring, and the action is much lighter. So there is not this colossal physical work involved.

What were the challenges of doing the concertos in this way?

The challenge is, of course, to play and conduct and hold it together. And there are many, many places where your hands are busy, so you cannot conduct. Therefore, you need a real partner, because this is not accompaniment, but give and take. And so the orchestra has to anticipate and listen very carefully. It needs an orchestra where we know each other intimately, which has a chamber-music-like approach.

You achieve a remarkable level of audible detail in these performances.

That was our intention: transparency and clarity, and also just to get rid of the fat already associated with this music from, I would say, the 1930s. And in orchestral terms, for example, the gut strings make a huge difference.

I think that in any music you play, this heaviness also comes from — if you see,

let's say, a dotted half note or a long note, people just sit on it forever. The composer will not write a diminuendo on that long note, because Brahms, let's say, expected a musical person to do that automatically.

You're saying that he didn't write the diminuendo just because it would have been obvious to the performer.

Yes. This already happens all over in Mozart and Beethoven. With every orchestra, when I play and conduct, I have to tell them, endless times, "You wind players, please, attack the note, and then get softer," because with those sustained chords, you are covering all the detail that you spoke about.

Can you think of a particular passage in either of the Brahms concertos in which the use of these instruments allows the music to come across with unusual freshness?

For example, in the first movement of the Second Concerto, the development section can sound, in modern performance, very muddy and not clear, because there is so much counterpoint there. I'm very pleased to hear all those details.

But also, take the opening of the third movement, with the cello solo. If it's played with these instruments, next to the cello solo you hear all the other lower strings: the cellos and violas, and then later the oboe and bassoon. I just hear these layers of sound, instead of a general sauce.

You also write in the liner notes that "Brahms on the piano is definitely not for children." What do you mean?

I have a very strong view on this, what young people should play and what they should not play. They should not play the early Brahms, because of the enormous physical challenges, and they shouldn't, certainly, play the late Brahms, where they could manage the notes, but those pieces are the summary of a lifetime.

But they do it anyway. I mean, today, any kid comes to you with the "Goldberg" Variations or the last three Beethoven sonatas. Anything goes. And who am I to say? I'm not a policeman. It's a friendly piece of advice that when you are young, choose the right pieces. And wait with these until you are older.

In my ripe old age, I'm beginning now to reduce my repertoire. But I'm very happy to play now the late Brahms, and the last three sonatas of Beethoven. And then there is music, Bach and Mozart, that you start playing when you are very young, and they stay with you until the day you die.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

March 23, 2022

New York Philharmonic Names Pianist András Schiff as its 2022/23 Artist-in-Residence

The Hungarian pianist will make several concerto and solo recital appearances

Hungarian pianist Sir **András Schiff** has been named as the **New York Philharmonic**'s Mary and James G. Wallach Artist-in-Residence for the 2022/23 season.

The 68-year-old will play two programs that feature him as concerto soloist, as well as conduct the orchestra, perform a solo recital, and collaborate with the orchestra's players for a chamber music appearance. Schiff's residency will coincide with the orchestra's return to the newly-finished **David Geffen Hall**, which has been recently been revitalized.

At present, the New York Philharmonic has listed Schiff's appearances through to the end of April. One program includes Haydn's Piano Concerto in D alongside Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20, with Schiff conducting the orchestra in the overture from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Schubert's Unfinished Symphony.

A second program sees Schiff perform Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3, with **Ivan Fischer** leading the orchestra in Dohnányi's *Symphonic Minutes* and Mozart's Jupiter Symphony. Schiff will also give an Artist Spotlight recital on April 11, with the program yet to be announced.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1953, Schiff studied piano at the **Liszt Ferenc Academy** with **Pal Kadosa**, **György Kurtág**, and **Ference Rados**, and in London with **George Malcome**. He has performed cycles of the complete Beethoven sonatas, in addition to playing the complete works of J.S. Bach, Haydn, Schubert, and Bartók. Having collaborated with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, he now focuses primarily on solo recitals, play-conducting appearances, and exclusive conducting projects.

His many honors include the International Mozarteum Foundation's Golden Medal, Germany's Great Cross of Merit with Star, Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal, a knighthood for services to music, and a doctorate from the Royal College of Music.

You can view all the details of Schiff's residency **here**.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Telegraph

August 9, 2023

Pianist András Schiff: 'They threatened to cut my hands off – but I don't take these things seriously'

By Ivan Hewitt

András Schiff, the Hungarian-born, London-domiciled concert pianist is used to swimming against the tide. After all, this is a man who likes to wear a fob watch with his invariable three-piece suit, stoutly defends the now-suspect "canon" of dead white composers such as Mozart and Beethoven, and inveighs crossly against audiences' short attention spans.

All of which makes him sound a bit of a grump. But Schiff is, in fact, great company – charming, engaged and rather upbeat. Indeed, it seems that the doughty defender of the "great tradition" isn't so stuffy as you might imagine. We are talking about classical music's age problem, and the 69-year-old tells me: "As far as Europe is concerned, we hear a lot of lamentation about ageing audiences, but what's wrong with having an older audience? I love old people! Nobody complains there aren't enough old people in the pubs or at the disco."

But of course those audiences are going to want to move on from the dance floor. Will they necessarily be heading to the concert halls?

"I agree with those who say the classical concert is very rigid," says Schiff. "It has become a very rigid and predictable ritual, wouldn't you say? I think we musicians and organisers should think about that and make it less predictable. My friend the conductor Iván Fischer [who's conducting the two Proms Schiff is appearing in next week] thinks a great deal about these things. He's trying to create new forms of concert where the audience can actually choose what they hear, like an à la carte menu. I think young people would appreciate this."

Schiff admits that, regarding the future of classical music as an art form, "there are worrying signs of a decline, but one positive example I could give you is South Korea, where the audience for classical music is extremely young, and the halls are really full," he says. "Also, a lot of people are learning the piano and other instruments."

Schiff's Proms menu isn't à la carte, but promises to be one of the highlights of the season. He is one of those rare musicians who never plays to the gallery, and startles with a huge contrast or caresses the ear with a liquid piano sound only when he wants to make an expressive point. He has a deep feeling for the historical style and culture lurking behind apparently abstract music such as Bach's Preludes and Fugues, which is why he can play all 48 in a single marathon concert and make every one seem engrossing. As well as Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Major, he will be taking on the Third Piano Concerto of his fellow Hungarian Béla Bartók, another exile.

"His concerto is more a farewell to the Hungarian homeland he knew he would never see again, because he was dying of leukaemia. Bartók was an atheist all his life, and yet in the last movement of this

concerto there's a passage marked Andante Religioso, and that's something a performer must pay attention to."

It becomes clear that Schiff reveres his great compatriot for reasons that are more than musical. "Bartók offers a wonderful ideal as a human being. He was very courageous to leave Hungary in 1940 and go into exile in the USA. He didn't have to go, he was not Jewish, he was not a communist, so he would not have been persecuted. It's just that his conscience could not allow him to live in the atmosphere of Hungary in 1940, which was becoming more and more anti-Semitic."

This inevitably leads us to the troubled relationship Schiff has with the country of his birth, where the political climate is worryingly similar to 1940. Schiff is very careful not to apply the word "fascist" to Hungary, but he's made his disapproval of the Viktor Orbán regime plain by refusing to perform in or even visit the country. "I have no hopes of returning in the near future," he says. "I'm afraid this government is here to stay for a very long time because Orbán has rewritten the constitution in such a way that the opposition party would need to get a huge majority to take power, which is practically impossible. And there's a lot of propaganda about how Hungarians are the bastion of Christian Europe against the migrant hordes, which has proved very popular."

As a Hungarian Jew, does he feel personally threatened by all this? "They are very clever about it. They say, 'Look, we have festivals of Jewish art here, how can you say we are anti-Semitic?' But I remember whenever I got into a cab in Budapest the driver would start complaining about how everything is the fault of the Jews."

Schiff pauses and then adds, "Actually, the real victims of this regime are the gypsies of Hungary, who are really persecuted, much more so than the Jews."

Has he ever feared for his own safety? "Well, on social media someone said I and other prominent Hungarian Jews were described as human excrement, and someone else promised to cut off my hands if I ever came to Hungary. But I don't take these things seriously."

Schiff actually seems more concerned about the fate of Britain (he lives in London for part of the year with his wife, the violinist Yuuko Shiokawa). "I love this country for the way it has made me welcome, but I feel sorry for young people who don't have opportunities that the previous generation had. As a musician, I feel sorry for British musicians now, especially the ones whose livelihood depends on touring, because this has become so difficult and bureaucratic and costly.

"It's a shame, because when I first arrived here in the 1960s it felt like the centre of the world for musicians. Think of the many people who settled here like Alfred Brendel, Daniel Barenboim, Vladimir Ashkenazy. That would not happen now."

Despite his lively mind, there is a sense of wistfulness to Schiff, a sense perhaps of a life well lived.

"I am learning the value of slowness," he tells me. "Because as you get older you are closer to the end of your life. So I have less time, and yet the strange thing is that in music I feel I have more time. I don't rush the tempo, because what's the point? When we are young, we tend to exaggerate speed and brilliance and all that, but being slower gives the listener more time, as well as me."

Schiff also finds his taste turning to intimate works that don't impress with pianistic fireworks. "That's why I think I may stop playing concertos soon, because they are very public and very virtuoso," he says.

That seems an odd remark for a genuine virtuoso with an impressive technique. But Schiff never set out to dazzle, even when he was young. He's essentially modest, regarding music as something to be enjoyably savoured as much as felt and pondered. That is what makes him one of the finest pianists around.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE VIOLIN CHANNEL
World's #1 Classical Music News Source

August 9, 2021

Sir András Schiff Awarded 2021 Jean Gimbel Lane Prize

Awarded by the Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, this biennial prize honors pianists at the highest level of international recognition

Established in 2005, the award for 2020 was delayed by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the 2021 recipient, Schiff will receive a $50,000 cash award, perform public recitals, and take part in two residencies at the **Bienen School of Music**.

An internationally renowned pianist, conductor, pedagogue, and lecturer, Schiff was born in Budapest in 1953 and studied piano at the **Liszt Ferenc Academy** with Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág, and Ferenc Rados; and in London with George Malcom.

"It is a great honor to receive the **Jean Gimbel Lane Prize**, and I am looking forward to my visits to the Northwestern campus in April and October 2022," said Schiff. "After suffering through long absences during the pandemic, it is a joy to return to live audiences and in-person lessons."

"We are honored that **Sir András Schiff** has accepted our invitation as the 2021 recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance," said **Toni-Marie Montgomery**, dean of the Bienen School of Music. "Our students and faculty look forward to welcoming him to Northwestern for two exciting in-person residencies."

Previous winners of the award include Richard Goode, Stephen Hough, Yefim Bronfman, Murray Perahia, Garrick Ohlsson, Emanuel Ax, and Marc-André Hamelin.

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ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Boston Globe

February 18, 2021

András Schiff makes a virtual return to Boston, with music and politics front of mind

By David Weininger

On Jan. 7, András Schiff sat alone on the stage of London's Wigmore Hall, playing to an empty venue and a virtual audience he could not see. If he was fazed by the empty seats in the hall, he did not show it. Schiff is a musician whose refinement at the instrument is matched by the eloquence of his musical commentary, and he spoke about each work in the all-Bach recital casually yet with insights deriving from decades of study and performance.

"How can Bach say so much with so few notes in just over two minutes?" he observed of the F-minor Sinfonia. "You have almost all of the 'St. Matthew Passion' [here]."

Toward the end of the recital it became clear that Schiff was preoccupied by more than musical matters. Before playing the Overture in the French Style, he noted that Bach was "a German composer but not nationalistic," and that for all the references to national styles in the titles of his works — English and French Suites, the Italian Concerto — the word "Deutsch" appears nowhere in his oeuvre. He pointed out that the overture contains French, German, Spanish, and Scottish dances.

"We have here the perfect example of Europe," he said. "Let's not forget that. We should be proud of that."

The remark, of course, was of more than musical relevance. In the past few years, Schiff has become more outspoken about the rise of far-right populism and the fate of Europe. He has been especially vocal in his criticisms of Hungary's Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of his home country, where he has not set foot for more than a decade in protest.

It was no accident that his comments about Bach as the cosmopolitan citizen of Europe came in one of London's finest concert halls. Speaking by phone from his home in Basel a few weeks later, Schiff noted that the recital took place just six days after the United Kingdom's European Union exit became operational.

"I find that Brexit is the single worst idea that has ever been implanted," he said bluntly. As with Bach's amalgamation of dance styles, "the beauty of Europe is that all these countries and nations contribute to it something invaluable. And they are also different, so they can keep their national identities. But together in a unity we are much stronger."

Brexit, he went on, "weakened [Europe] very much. And I think that Britain has disqualified itself. It will become a second- or third-rate culture because of this, but they don't want to admit it."

For most of his career Schiff has been known almost exclusively for his command of the pianistic literature stretching from Bach through Brahms. But he's adamant that a life in culture must not preclude attunement to the wider world. "We musicians and people in the arts, we should not be living in ivory towers," he said during the interview. "We have to keep our eyes, our ears, our minds, and hearts open."

Nor has his exalted stature in the music world spared him the misery so widely experienced during the pandemic. "Pretty awful," was his answer to the question of how the previous year has been for him. He was in Japan when the March shutdowns hit, yet was still able to play for masked concertgoers. A few small, socially distanced concerts in Europe over the summer have been his only performances before live audiences. The Wigmore was his first livestream concert. Another recital — a program of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann that was recorded in Zürich on Dec. 20 — will be streamed to Celebrity Series of Boston audiences beginning Friday.

Yet Schiff admitted that it's been hard to stay engaged, even as he acknowledged that others have had it much worse.

"It's a very strange feeling that we are in good health, but we cannot really call it a life," he said in a slightly weary voice. "It's good to have the time, and probably we have been doing too much traveling before. But this is not a solution.

"It's not just the lack of contact with people and with audiences," he went on, "but the lack of motivation. How can I put it? It's just really difficult to force yourself to even get out of bed." While it's been good to have time to explore new repertoire, "even for that, it's difficult to find the adrenalin."

The conversation brightened when it turned to his most recent release: Impeccably warm and fluent readings of Brahms's clarinet sonatas (ECM), two autumnal masterpieces from the composer's final years. Schiff's partner is the clarinetist and composer Jörg Widmann, with whom he has played for the last 15 years.

"We played these Brahms sonatas in concert several times, and we played almost everything else for clarinet and piano," he said. "And we understood each other perfectly, because the secret of a good relationship in music is, the less you have to talk, the better."

Between the two sonatas, Schiff plays a set of intermezzi composed for him by Widmann — atomized pieces that not only evoke the darkness and melancholy of Brahms's musical language but contain audible references to the composer's late piano works. It also constitutes a rare venture into contemporary music by a pianist normally content to remain within a resolutely traditional idiom.

Schiff admitted that "I may be too conservative. Very often I think I should be doing more [contemporary music].

But I'm just being realistic that I don't want to do anything that I'm not convinced about just to be a good chap."

Much closer to his core repertoire is a piece Schiff has been learning during his pandemic-induced downtime: "The Art of Fugue," the imposing, treatise-like work that Bach left unfinished at his death, and for which he never specified an instrumentation. While it may seem surprising that a pianist so devoted to Bach had never performed the piece — as with Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, which Schiff did not play publicly until he had mastered all 32 of the composer's sonatas — he felt unready to approach "The Art of Fugue" until this point in a career spent roaming through the composer's works.

"This is the opus magnum, the crowning achievement," Schiff said of Bach's unfinished work. "He's not just a composer; he's like a scientist who gives himself a new task and tries to solve it at the maximum. And this is something [for which] I find you have to be familiar with his entire output. Not just fugues, but everything else.

"It is like the greatest book ever written, that shouldn't be read," he continued. "And yet, the greatest book should be read, somehow."

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE NEW YORKER

December 10, 2018

Sleepless Nights with András Schiff and Beethoven's Sonatas

By Gail Koplewitz

András Schiff's series of lecture-recitals on Beethoven's piano sonatas suffuse a well-worn repertoire with new warmth and nuance.

Long after most of my grandmother's memories had faded, she would occasionally sit down at the piano bench, pull a yellowing score from a nearby shelf, and begin to play. Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" were simple favorites, but it was Beethoven's piano sonatas that were most dear to her. Before dementia overtook her, she could describe in detail the points in her life at which she had studied each piece. The "Appassionata," for example, was the first sonata she had attempted on her own, without the guidance of her legendary teacher, Ms. Berlin. She was in her early twenties, and the sonata became the leitmotif of my grandfather's courtship: he continued to whistle its theme to her for decades, on walks in their leafy Jerusalem neighborhood.

I cannot claim the same visceral connection to Beethoven, though his music has always resonated with me more deeply than that of most composers. Still, I could never quite put my finger on why—until, recently, in a more solipsistic musical encounter than

the one my grandparents shared, I spent a spate of sleepless nights listening to András Schiff's lecture-recitals on the composer's piano sonatas.

In the mid-two-thousands, when Schiff performed the full cycle of sonatas at Wigmore Hall, in London, each of his eight concerts was preceded by a separate lecture-recital, in which he explored and reflected on the works more deeply before his audience (Wigmore Hall has since posted the lecture-recitals on its Web site). As Schiff opened the first evening of his lectures, which covered sonatas one through four, he advised that, ideally, music should be experienced directly—not picked apart or overanalyzed. Talking about music, he added, qualifying his own endeavor, is "really not my métier." Still, since Alfred Brendel's retirement, a decade ago, Schiff has arguably become the éminence grise of Beethoven piano performance. (Murray Perahia and Daniel Barenboim, both in their seventies, are close contenders.) So, métier or not, Schiff's attempt to "put a few ideas into words," as he phrases it, is well worth a listen—even for those who know the sonatas backward and forward.

As a verbalizer of music, Schiff has neither Leonard Bernstein's easy charisma nor Glenn Gould's charming eccentricity. Outwardly, he is, indeed, most like Brendel, a fellow Central European who is a generation older but shares aspects of Schiff's ironic wit and demeanor. (With their clear blue eyes and shocks of receding white hair, the two even look alike.) A serious scholar of Beethoven, Schiff nevertheless cautions against making too much of the investigations of musicologists. Instead, he is a literalist, who insists on focussing on the "musical calligraphy": ideally, a manuscript, or a first edition if a manuscript has not survived.

Some of Schiff's commentary, then, is inevitably highly technical. During the final session, for example, he discusses the controversial interpretation of a specific tempo notation in the fugue of the Sonata Op. 110, which was the subject of a heated, lengthy debate in *The New York Review of Books* in the nineteen-nineties between Brendel and Charles Rosen, the pianist and writer. (Brendel accused Rosen of scholarly "misreading"; Rosen, in response, suggested that the "Wagnerian resonance" of one of Brendel's metaphors "can be applied to Beethoven only with a certain lack of tact." Schiff seems to agree—he says Rosen"won with a knockout.") With regard to a particularly challenging trill in the third movement of the "Waldstein" sonata, Schiff notes that Beethoven himself allowed pianists to "leave certain notes out" if they were not up to the task. Still, Schiff isn't all serious—there are even some gags running through the series, like Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny and his "terrible etudes."

For anyone who's not a concert pianist, the deeper value of the lecture-recitals comes when Schiff conveys his emotional intuition for the flow of a piece, or points out moments of particular beauty; when he accentuates how naturally one movement grows from the low murmur that ended the previous one, or when he encourages listeners to hear an orchestra in the piano, with trills as flutes and the bass line as a cello. (At the same time, Schiff audibly shudders at the thought that the sonatas ever be transcribed for another instrument.) On the startlingly beautiful opening of the intimate Sonata Op. 109, he says, "To me, the miracle of this movement is that it does not begin. It continues, it comes from somewhere. There is no distinct beginning . . . it just floats." It is Schiff's ability to suffuse a well-known repertoire with new color, to point out fresh vistas into Beethoven's work, and to draw out those passages that only Beethoven could have written that I found most gripping.

Sharing in Schiff's single-minded focus on the work at hand, in his act of extreme attention, is perhaps the main attraction of the lecture-recitals. His approach to Beethoven is deeply devotional: the listeners' experience is

not so much about learning Schiff's "trade secrets" as it is about marvelling at his musical and scholarly dedication to every bar. It lies in partaking, if only for a brief moment, in Schiff's heightened awareness of all the warmth and nuance that normally escape most of us.

Schiff is now well into his sixties, and in recent years his devotion to his repertoire—particularly to its German core—has, if anything, intensified. On a Thursday night at Carnegie Hall, in April, he performed Schumann's Variations on an Original Theme, Brahms's Three Intermezzi, Mozart's Rondo in A Minor, and Brahms's six "Klavierstücke" in an unbroken sequence, with no warning to the audience, who could barely clap or cough in the thin interims. The *Times* reviewer wrote of the event that it had been "an amazing feat of physical stamina and mental concentration for the 64-year-old Mr.

But, Schiff's formidable powers aside, the question remains: What is it about Beethoven that makes him particularly suitable to this form of examination? The standard answer, which Schiff, too, relates, has to do with Beethoven's humanity: whereas Mozart's brilliance allows for one true, pure interpretation, Beethoven leaves some room for the pianist to deviate from the orthodoxy. In many ways, though, the lecture-recitals tell us as much about Schiff's idiosyncratic, decades-long relationship with the composer's music as they do about Beethoven himself. In the first session, Schiff shares the quip, attributed to the Austrian conductor Josef Krips, that Mozart came from heaven, while Beethoven goes to heaven. The tremendous achievement of Schiff's lecture-recitals lies in pulling Beethoven back to earth, and into the workshop—where the pianist's craft is as joyous to observe as that of the composer he interrogates.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Telegraph

August 31, 2017

András Schiff interview: 'Music should be an integral part of our lives'

By Ben Lawrence

András Schiff performing at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2015

When András Schiff appears at the Proms next Thursday, it will mark 40 years since he first appeared on the Royal Albert Hall stage. Since that time, the Hungarian pianist has become one of the world's greatest pianists – with a cogent, dazzlingly cerebral approach to the works of Bach and Beethoven that nevertheless speaks to the heart.

His latest undertaking at the Proms will see Schiff tackle JS Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier – a collection of 48 preludes and fugues, encompassing a wide range of styles. Schiff will play it on the piano rather than the traditional clavichord and will perform the entire work from memory.

"Some say I do this to show off," shrugs the 63-year-old. "Playing from memory is not a prerequisite for me, but when I am performing in front of an audience, it is essential because using a score puts up a barrier."

We are sitting in the living room of Schiff's mews house near Paddington, surrounded by mountains of books (two grand pianos stand impassively on the floor below). He is wearing blue slippers with crown motifs stitched on the front that slightly jars with his status as an éminence grise. His pale blue, faraway eyes belie a sharp intellect and he speaks fluidly, his Hungarian accent still strong despite more than four decades away.

Schiff is an Anglophile and that, he says, is born out of gratitude – "I arrived in Britain as a refugee, I became a citizen and received a knighthood." He is also an ardent supporter of the Proms. "It's like Wimbledon," he says. "It's unique,

not just here but unique in the whole world. I like the fact that there is no conflict between young and old at the Proms. The young are very well represented there. But where are they at all the other concerts during the year?"

Most importantly, he says, we have to care about the quality of the audience. "That can only be achieved through education and that is a problem across the whole world, except perhaps in China and South Korea where they have young listeners who are attentive and enthusiastic.

"Today, music is taken off the curriculum because it is not considered a priority, but it should be an integral part of our lives. An integral part of our lives," he repeats, shifting the emphasis of the word integral correctly from the second to the first syllable – a sign of his exacting nature, which you can imagine he applies to the complex fingerings in Bach's works.

Schiff was born in Budapest in 1953, the only child of two Holocaust survivors. He began studying piano at the age of five, and later attended the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. "Life in general was terribly sad and grey in the post-war world and, of course, there were limitations. One could not travel or get consumer goods. But my musical education – it was like going into a temple after living in the desert. One could forget about the outside world."

Nevertheless, life at the Franz Liszt Academy was tough. One of Schiff's teachers was Ferenc Rados, the famous Hungarian pianist, who seems to have given the teenage Schiff what can only be described as tough love. I wondered if Schiff ever cried. "Well, I was not so robust," he chuckles. "So yes, there were so many tears. Although I would never show him my tears. But you know, he was sincere. He prepared me for life."

It was at this point that Schiff realised that his musical talent could provide a physical escape as well as a psychological one. He was also starting to feel politically engaged. As a Jew, he was deeply troubled by the rule of Hungary's Fidesz party with its openly anti-Semitic sentiments, as well as its xenophobia. He has received threats online, one of which stated that both of his hands would be cut off if he returned to Hungary. Does he think he ever will? "I won't say never ever, but this regime will not change quickly. One day it will - maybe in my lifetime or maybe not - but something much more fundamental needs to happen in Hungary. The government is there because the majority of Hungarians have elected it, but something in the minds of the people has to change. You cannot change history, but you have to look into the mirror and acknowledge the past.

"With Hungary and their part in the Holocaust and those years... It is very easy to say, 'we have nothing to do with it, that the Germans did it all and that we're all victims'. This is what the Hungarians are saying and the Poles and the Austrians. Only the Germans have faced history and tried to see what they have done wrong to make sure that this will not happen again."

Before he took up residency in the UK at the start of the 21st century, Schiff lived in Austria where he became a vehement opponent of Jörg Haider's far-Right regime. He looks slightly embarrassed when I mention the reaction of his compatriot, the great Hungarian conductor Iván Fischer, to Schiff's political protest there, that "András Schiff sets moral standards for the world".

"You can only do things for your own conscience," he says. "I cannot expect other people to react as I react. In Austria, Arnold Schwarzenegger joined me. He had the courage to say he didn't agree with Right-wing extremism, but all the classical musicians said let's not mix politics and culture." Schiff pauses. "Perhaps if my mother were still alive today, I would be quieter."

There is something Eeyorish about Schiff, a sense that his beliefs make him a beast of burden. Music must therefore be a brilliant refuge. He still tours extensively (often accompanied by his wife, violinist Yūko Shiokawa), has developed an enthusiasm for teaching and is also a conductor of some renown. The experience has made him aware of

considerable cultural differences. "The Germans are very bad sightreaders. With British orchestras, the first rehearsal is almost perfect but with Germans the first rehearsal is always a disaster and then they start to improve. They end up the same because British orchestras say: 'We played it well the first time, so what else do you want?' The answer is I want to go under the surface and develop things further."

Indeed he is known to be exacting. Ragnar Bohlin, director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, described him as "Toscanini in a velvet glove." Schiff sort of denies this. "When I conduct I also play something so that the musicians sense you are not just telling them what to do. The Toscanini days of screaming and shouting are over and that's no bad thing. One should never scream and shout."

Sitting beside this compact, rather frail-looking man I can believe his days of screaming and shouting are over. But with so much more music to master, not to mention so much political turmoil to rail against, I can't imagine András Schiff will stay quiet for long.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

October 22, 2015

Andras Schiff Holds Forceful Convictions in a Velvet Glove

By James R. Oestreich

I know my place and my limits," the Hungarian-born pianist Andras Schiff said in a recent interview. We should all be so limited.

The versatile Mr. Schiff, 61, was speaking from California and referring, actually, to conducting. He had just led the San Francisco Symphony in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27, from the keyboard, and in Haydn's "Lord Nelson" Mass, and played in a post-concert recital of Schubert lieder. And he was about to lead the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Mozart's Concerto No. 25 and Haydn's "Mass in Time of War," and then again accompany Schubert songs.

"Despite his easygoing, supportive, soft-spoken way, there was never any doubt about what he wanted," said Ragnar Bohlin, the director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. "He was Toscanini with a velvet glove."

Mr. Schiff's account of the experience was not so grand. "It's good for a little Jewish boy to do Catholic Masses," he said. "I love them. Sacred choral music brings out the best of most composers. It's something they clearly want to do, partly out of belief."

He has also performed other Masses: Bach's B minor (Roman Catholic in form, if not intent), Schubert's E flat (D. 950) and Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis."


Andras Schiff circa 1980.

In choral as in symphonic music, he chooses only composers for whom he feels a real affinity.

"You won't see me conducting Mahler or Stravinsky, much as I love them," Mr. Schiff said. "But Bruckner is not out of the question." By the same token, you won't see him playing knuckle-busting composers like Liszt and Rachmaninoff. It is partly a matter of physical limitations (un-Rachmaninoffian hand size), as he has said before, but also of temperament. Though something of a showman in his own understated way, he has little taste for virtuosic display.

He turns again and again to his favorite composers — restudying, he says, not recycling — as in the recital of piano sonatas that he recently played in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles and will repeat at Carnegie Hall on Friday, Oct. 30: Haydn's Sonata in E flat (Hob. XVI:52); Mozart's, in D (K. 576); Beethoven's, in C minor (Op. 111); and Schubert's, in B flat (D. 960). This program completes a series of three, surveying the composers' late sonatas, and each one here is its composer's last.

Missing from the program is Mr. Schiff's favorite composer, Bach, whose keyboard works are of a different sort. But Mr. Schiff filled that gap when he gave the same recital at the Verbier Festival in the Swiss Alps in July. Having concluded the demanding program with an ethereal performance of the Schubert, he added Bach's Partita No. 1 in B flat, all seven movements of it, as a typically generous encore. The audience's delight may not have been his entire reason for playing it.

Mr. Schiff, who speaks English with a laid-back drawl and is quick to laugh, is fiercely intelligent and deadly serious about his work, yet he is not above an occasional mischief. He was well aware — he now admits, though he did not at the time — that the august pianist Grigory Sokolov was to open his Verbier recital the next night with the same work. What Mr. Schiff will not admit was that he was trying to twit or upstage Mr. Sokolov, who is something of a cult figure in Europe.

"I just felt like staying in B flat," he said. For some 17 minutes, evidently.

To support his capricious streak, Mr. Schiff can call on a capacious memory and seemingly endless stamina, so his choice of encores is often intriguing. Bach is always a lively possibility, since Mr. Schiff has repeatedly performed all of Bach's keyboard works from memory, and many are undoubtedly still lodged in the recesses of that big brain. He spends two or three hours a day at the piano when he can, one of them devoted to Bach.

What might he be contemplating as an encore for Carnegie? "Maybe I won't do one," he said, unconvincingly. "Maybe something by Bach. Or maybe the last big piano piece by Schumann, the 'Ghost' Variations, which are in E flat, like the Haydn sonata."

That the works on the program are final sonatas does not necessarily mean that they are late works in the usual sense. Haydn and Mozart were writing at the heights of their careers (1794 and 1789), probably with no notion of finality.

Mr. Schiff sees the Beethoven sonata (1822), with its two-movement structure and mystical cast, as a farewell to the genre, though the composer's death was still five years off. But the Schubert (1828), written mere months before his

Andras Schiff performing a program of Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert at Carnegie Hall in March

demise, suggests a full awareness of his mortal plight.

"The first two movements are about death," Mr. Schiff said. "The third is a kind of hallucination of life after death." He sees in the tumult of the finale and the alternation between C minor and B flat major an ambiguity between death and life.

In the interview, Mr. Schiff seemed fixated on Schubert and Beethoven. He played Schubert sonatas often for a time, he said, then let them rest while concentrating on Beethoven. He returned to Schubert two years ago and found that something had changed. His Schubert playing had gained gravity. (Listeners can judge for themselves in his new Schubert CD from ECM.)

"That was something I didn't have 20 years ago," he said. "Beethoven, who often writes for two fists, taught me that." Beethoven is "a hard nut to crack, and I'm still cracking it."

And he's still cracking heads, as needed, which George Li found out the hard way. Scarcely had Mr. Li, an astonishingly gifted American pianist, then 19, pocketed a silver medal at the 2015 Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow, in July, when he ran into a buzz-saw-like Mr. Schiff in a master class at the Verbier Festival.

Mr. Li's first mistake was choice of repertory: the same Beethoven sonata (No. 32 in C minor) that Mr. Schiff was to perform. Mr. Li played through the piece, showing remarkable technique. But Mr. Schiff was looking for soul.

"I played that when I was 50, after I had played all the other 31 sonatas," Mr. Schiff said to Mr. Li (and the assembled crowd). "I would not give you this piece, but we are here, so we'll do it."

And so they did, with agonizing deliberation. Mr. Schiff demanded that Mr. Li plumb virtually every phrase for its "spiritual message." There seemed almost a calculated cruelty to Mr. Schiff's approach, and if so, he had come by it rightly, having studied in his youth at the Liszt Academy in Budapest with the fearsome Ferenc Rados. "There was never a positive word from him," Mr. Schiff said of Mr. Rados in a public interview before the class. "Everything was bad, horrible. But it instilled a healthy attitude, an element of doubt."

Mr. Rados, it happened, was also in Verbier, and Mr. Li played for him in a master class the next day. Unable to attend, I asked Mr. Li afterward whether Mr. Rados had been as hard on him as Mr. Schiff had. "Even more so," Mr. Li said. "But it was exactly what I needed."

Mr. Schiff lives with his wife, Yuuko Shiokawa, in London; Florence, Italy; and Basel, Switzerland. He has been an outspoken opponent of the government of Viktor Orban in Hungary and has not set foot in the country since the death of his mother in 2010, vowing that he would do so only if there was a radical political change. He is not optimistic.

"Tolerance levels are extremely low," he wrote in a 2011 letter to The Washington Post. "Racism, discrimination against the Roma, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, chauvinism and reactionary nationalism — these symptoms are deeply worrying. They evoke memories that we have hoped were long forgotten."

The situation in Hungary has been exacerbated by the migration crisis in Europe, Mr. Schiff said: "Now the No. 1 priority is to build a huge wall." What Mr. Orban says, Mr. Schiff maintains, is "not all nonsense, but the way he's doing it is really disgusting."

"He is probably the most hated politician in Europe," Mr. Schiff adds, "and that is quite an achievement."

The Hungarian conductor Ivan Fischer, who has worked with Mr. Schiff often, spoke of his "human and moral values" in an interview from Berlin: "He's a very rare example of a musician who sets moral standards for the world."

Mr. Fischer said he agrees with Mr. Schiff about the political climate in Hungary, but his situation, as the music director of the Budapest Festival Orchestra, is different. “I am responsible for the orchestra and for thousands of subscribers for whom music means everything,” he said. “I cannot abandon them. Andras and I are using different ways to achieve the same thing.”

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE NEW YORKER

November 2, 2015

The Trill of Doom

The pianist András Schiff's revelatory study of Schubert's final sonata.

By Alex Ross

Schiff says of the B-Flat Sonata, "What other work is so full of silence?"

The other day, I sat with Sir András Schiff, the Hungarian-born, British-based pianist, in a practice room at Walt Disney Concert Hall, in Los Angeles, contemplating a great musical mystery: the trill in the eighth measure of Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-Flat, D. 960. "It's the most extraordinary trill in the history of music," Schiff said, peering at my copy of the score. Sixty-one years old and an undisputed master of the Germanic repertory, Schiff has earned the right to make this sort of pronouncement, although he delivered the remark softly and haltingly, with a sense of wonder.

Schiff had played the B-Flat Sonata at Disney the night before, as part of a multi-year series of concerts called "The Last Sonatas," in which he has explored late-period music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. The recital also included Haydn's Sonata No. 62, in E-Flat; Mozart's Sonata in D, K. 576; and Beethoven's Sonata in C Minor, Opus 111. The program was a mammoth one, lasting nearly two and a half hours. Schiff, far from exhausted at the end, offered as an encore Schumann's cryptic farewell, the "Ghost Variations." This week, having led the Los Angeles Philharmonic in works of Mozart and Haydn (he has lately been more active as a conductor), Schiff will repeat the four-sonatas program at Carnegie Hall and at Orchestra Hall, in Chicago.

The B-Flat Sonata, which Schubert completed two months before his death, in 1828, is a work of vast dimensions and vertiginous depths. It has long struck listeners as a kind of premature communication from the beyond, and it is the trill more than anything that supplies the otherworldly atmosphere. At the outset, a theme rotates serenely in place, with lyric phrases wafting through the right hand and an eighth-note figure purring in the left. It comes to rest on an F-major chord, whereupon the trill steals in, beginning on a low F and trembling between the notes G-flat and A-flat. The flat notes darken the major-key tonality, and the sudden move into

the bass is destabilizing. The trill—a gesture that formerly served a decorative function—becomes a sign of the uncanny.

Various metaphors come to mind for this remarkable event: shadow, tremor, shudder, groan. Schiff, contemplating the sonata's opening bars, thinks of the sea—in particular, the sea depicted in Schubert's song "Am Meer." There a spacious major-key theme gives way to an ominous tremolando, reflecting a contrast in the Heinrich Heine text: "The sea shimmered far and wide. . . . The fog rose, the water surged." Schiff imagines a similar vista in the sonata. "I see a broad horizon, a calm ocean," he told me. "It's beautiful how often Schubert writes about the sea, even though he never saw it. Then the trill—a very distant murmuring, maybe of an approaching storm. Still very far, but approaching. It is not a pleasant noise, this murmuring. Maybe it is also the approach of death. And then silence. What other work is so full of silence? And then the original melody resumes. This is only speculation—I cannot say what it really means."

Schiff has been performing the B-Flat Sonata for decades, and has recorded it twice: first in 1995, for the Decca label, and earlier this year, for ECM. But he is still working through its enigmas. Lately, he has found a different way to play the trill. In 2010, he acquired an eighteen-twenties Viennese fortepiano, lighter in action and crisper in sound than a modern piano. He used it on the ECM recording. The instrument has four pedals, including a "moderator" pedal that causes a piece of cloth to be inserted between the hammers and the strings. "When I use that pedal on the trill, I get a very different sound," Schiff told me. "The notes are distinct. You can translate the effect onto a modern instrument, but only if it is very well voiced. Before, I used more sustaining pedal. Now I like it light. The pedal is actually quite damaging. You see that dot on the final eighth note? It needs to stop quickly. It's like a word that ends with a consonant, not a vowel. Without pedal, you can cut it off."

Schiff gave a demonstration at the piano. First, he played the trill with the pedal, producing a low, grim blur. "Just a big rumble," he said, shaking his head. "I don't think that's what Schubert meant. Also, you could never do that on the fortepiano." Then he executed the trill in accordance with his current thinking. The component pitches were more perceptible, and the final F made a pinpoint sound, like a stone dropping into water. Schiff paged ahead and pointed to a reappearance of the trill at the end of the exposition, just before the repeat. "Here it's marked fortissimo," he explained. "It becomes something scary, demonic. The sonata goes always between the two poles. In this of all pieces, you must take the repeat, because if not, among other things, you will lose this incredible shock." (If, as many pianists do, you skip the repeat of the exposition, you must also skip the nine preparatory bars that lead into it, ending with that trill of doom.)

Needless to say, Schiff had taken the repeat at his performance the previous night, at which he played a modern Hamburg Steinway. The first movement went on for almost twenty minutes, nearly assuming the proportions of a Bruckner or a Mahler movement. But Schiff is not one to emphasize the cosmic hugeness of the conception, as Sviatoslav Richter did in his notoriously—though enthrallingly—slow readings of the sonata. In the first movement, Schiff maintains an even, walking tempo, holding the eighth-note pulse steady throughout. Likewise, he keeps the slow movement flowing at a pace appropriate to Schubert's indication, "Andante sostenuto." Schiff resists the current fashion, undoubtedly influenced by Richter, for recasting the Andante as a desolate Adagio.

This is not to imply that Schiff's reading lacked intensity. A couple of decades ago, his Schubert performances could be elegant to a fault. These days, even as he applies lessons learned from the lighter action of the fortepiano, he makes uninhibited use of the full symphonic power of the modern grand. The fortissimo trill in the first movement ricocheted unnervingly within the

hypersensitive Disney acoustics. The climactic presentation of the main theme in the recapitulation had brassy strength. In short, Schiff is eager to maximize Schubert's contrasts, which are indeed extreme.

Schiff brought the same freedom to other pieces on the program. I've recently heard some high-octane accounts of Beethoven's Opus 111—notably, Igor Levit's precocious rendition at the Park Avenue Armory, last year—but Schiff has a particular ability to glory in Beethoven's contradictions. One moment, he was pounding out the raucous syncopations of the so-called boogie-woogie variation; in the next, crystalline chains of thirty-second notes materialized above his piano, weightless and luminous. In the Haydn, esoteric games were intercut with shivers of chromatic unease. Mozart seemed the odd man out: I wondered whether he belonged in this late-style gallery, since death came on him relatively quickly, when he was in his prime.

With Schubert, of course, the spectre of death is omnipresent, and not only because of prevailing Romantic preoccupations: syphilis had marked him for an early demise. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the B-Flat Sonata is how to carry the narrative past the first two movements, both of which are poised at the edge of the abyss. Schiff rejects the conventional notion that Schubert's inspiration faltered in the brighter-toned Scherzo and Finale; rather, he sees them as further stages in a negotiation with death. His avoidance of mystical excess at the outset results in a more balanced structure. On the ECM recording, the tangy sonorities of the fortepiano make the finale a complex delight.

"These last two movements are like a hallucination of a new life," Schiff told me. "They are what the dying person might experience on the threshold. The coda has a wonderful, chaotic joy in it: this rushing out, this looking for the final exit, this last flourish. Schubert is saying yes to life. There is still hope." But the trill has sounded.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Los Angeles Times

October 23, 2015

A busy Andras Schiff says Haydn's 'Mass in Time of War' has relevance in today's world

By Rick Schultz

Pianist Andras Schiff conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic during Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major at the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

In life and in art, the past is never past.

Just ask Hungarian-born pianist-conductor András Schiff, who conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic from the piano in Mozart's Concerto No. 25 (K.503), and then leads the orchestra and L.A. Master Chorale, along with four hand-picked vocal soloists, in Haydn's "Mass in Time of War" at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Schiff, 62, an internationally acclaimed interpreter of Bach's keyboard music on modern piano, said earlier this month in San Francisco that years of practicing and recording on period-instruments have enhanced his musicianship in large and mysterious ways.

A case in point is Schiff's all-Schubert two-CD set from ECM, which includes the composer's "Moments musicaux" and Sonata in B-flat (D.960).

Schiff performs on an 1820 fortepiano built in Vienna by Franz Brodmann, giving listeners a chance to get closer to how Schubert himself heard these great scores.

In performance, Schiff mostly plays modern pianos. He said the Brodmann's action and lower tuning conjured a tenderness and melancholy that have become significant in his evolving

interpretations — on the podium and at the keyboard — of his classical repertory of works by Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert.

"My experiences with the old piano has somehow changed my life," Schiff said, "changed the way I look at this music, and when I play it on a modern piano, it's always in the back of my mind. Shades of soft and softer dynamics, for example. That is what makes Schubert's music so special. There's huge drama in it."

There's huge drama of a different kind in Haydn's stirring "Mass in Time of War," which Schiff called "very relevant" to our own anxious and troubling times.

Haydn's 1796 choral masterpiece was first performed in Vienna as Napoleon's army was consolidating its occupation of Northern Italy by defeating Austria at Rivoli.

The Philharmonic last played the piece at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in 1996 with Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting.

"The work is so [contemporary], war and its message," Schiff said. "Politicians preach peace but are supplying the armaments to Syria. We don't know how this will all end, but the Mass ends with a wonderful, hopeful Dona nobis pacem ('give us peace')."

For Schiff, the two works on the Disney Hall program make a good pairing.

"The tonalities of the Mozart Concerto go with the Haydn Mass, because both are in C major," he said, "but also there is something military in the opening movement of the concerto. It reminds us of the Marseillaise."

"The military in the 18th century had a different meaning from now," he added. "To these people, there was something glorious about it."

For Schiff, conducting is a natural extension of his piano playing. At his part-time home in London (Schiff became a British citizen in 2001 and was knighted last year), he practices on a Model B Steinway from 1880, once owned by conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. "It has the original hammers and strings and sounds phenomenal," he said.

"I don't look at myself as a conductor, but I love it and learn from it," he said. "I've done many times all the Schubert symphonies. So I hear all those trombones in the 'Great' C major symphony, and I try to translate those orchestral sonorities onto the keyboard."

Schiff first conducted the Philharmonic musicians at Disney Hall in 2005.

"These American orchestras are incredibly good," he said, "and very disciplined. The discipline is much worse in Germany. The sight reading is worse.

"Also, instrumentally — technically — they are better here," he continued. "You have to work on style, but a good American orchestra is like a great car. You can shape a score any way you want. They can do whatever you ask."

Schiff also played a recital of the last piano sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert in Santa Barbara recently and last Sunday at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Incidentally, after all three of Schiff's orchestral concerts this week, he's offering a post-concert Schubert recital featuring his four vocal soloists and the L.A. Master Chorale. Grant Gershon conducts, with Schiff accompanying at the piano.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Shanghai Daily
上海日报

October 21, 2016

A maestro's masterful musical interpretations

By Zhang Qian

Shanghai audiences love Andras Schiff. When the 63-year-old British pianist first visited Shanghai in 2013, the audience demanded no less than 10 encores. On his second visit, an equally enthusiastic audience heard Schiff and the NDR Radiophilharmonie perform Beethoven's concerto "Emperor," his "Bagatelle Op. 126" and Schubert's "Impromptus No. 2" at the Shanghai Symphony Hall.

Schiff is very appreciative of Shanghai audiences. "Audiences here are so enthusiastic," he says, speaking of his 2013 concert. "I've never played as many encores as I did in Shanghai — I could have played 20, but I got tired! It's so different in the UK, where audiences are more passive. I want a reaction from my audience, otherwise why play? My last experience in Shanghai was wonderful. That's why I wanted to come back as soon as possible."

Born to a Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary, Schiff is the only child of two Holocaust survivors. He began piano lessons at five at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, and later studied with Gyorgy Kurtag, who was a great influence.

"In my first lesson with Kurtag, he covered tone quality, harmony, articulation and counterpoint for Three Part Invention by Bach in E major, and I learned that music is not just a matter of life and death. It's much more important than that," says Schiff.

Schiff is one of the most renowned interpreters of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann both in live performance and recordings. A passionate advocate for the composers and the music he loves, he is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Grammy Award, the Mozart Medal, and the Royal Academy of Music Bach Prize. Schiff has also been knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to music.

Yet this gifted musician waited until he turned 50 before playing the 32 Beethoven sonatas, and only moved on to Beethoven's final piano work — the

Diabelli — after performing 20 complete cycles of the composer's sonatas.
Schiff talked with Shanghai Daily recently about composers, music and life.

Q: What are your thoughts on Beethoven's "Emperor?"
A: It is a wonderful work. Beethoven is one of the greatest humans that has ever lived, and not just for his music. This is particularly true of the period when "Emperor" was composed. He was going through a particularly difficult time then, battling ill health and deafness. The piece has a strong sense of struggle, yet it is a very positive piece of music — to me, it is a victory of the human spirit over all these difficulties, a piece with great depth and great poetry, not just heroism.

Q: Did you do any particular preparation for the piece?
A: Yes, I studied it very seriously. When I study any piece, I return to the original manuscripts. Interpretation, for me, is always done with the utmost respect for the composer and for the music itself. I am merely the composer's servant in presenting the music live — I'm not the composer.

Q: You were very cautious about playing Beethoven's works. Why is that?
A: Beethoven is recognized as a great composer, but his work is difficult — not in terms of the skill required, but in terms of the philosophy that lies behind it. I only understood Beethoven when I was 50. I played the "Emperor" concerto when I was 20, and I played it very badly. I knew what the message was, but I needed life experience to interpret it correctly. Some of Beethoven's early works may be suitable for young people, but middle and late Beethoven are not for children. There is a great deal of deep philosophy in these works, and you don't want a child to give you a lecture on philosophy.

Q: You mention Bach repeatedly as one of your favorite composers. How does Bach figure in your musical career?
A: Bach is the center of my life. Today, as I do every day, I started my day with Bach in the morning. I play one hour of anything by Bach, and then I feel fine. His works give me perfect satisfaction on every level: spiritual, emotional, and intellectual.
I think I understand his works better with age. That's why I re-recorded Bach's works 20 years after I first recorded them. The message is the same, but age gives you the big picture. When you're young, you are often occupied with the small details. They are important. But with the advantage of experience with life and music, you get the big picture along with the details.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Seattle Times

October 9, 2015

Pianist András Schiff brings 'something very cosmic' to Benaroya Hall

By Jason Victor Serinus

Not many pianists would attempt to pair the final sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert in a single program, as András Schiff will do in Benaroya Hall on Oct. 12. Nor would they be able to perform them from a perspective informed by playing all four masterpieces on period instruments whose sound and touch match what the composers themselves expected to encounter.

Schiff has not only played Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven on instruments that they owned, but he also owns and sometimes records on a Viennese fortepiano from the 1820s that he finds "perfect" for Beethoven and Schubert. His recent revelatory recordings for ECM of many of the two composers' works for solo piano, which are available both on CD and as high-resolution downloads from HDTracks, reflect a deep understanding of both the intimacy and grandeur they wished to achieve.

"The period pianos I've played are very different," Schiff said. "They have different timbres, and there are very different registers between middle, top and bottom. With those experiences in the back of my mind, I try to translate them into performance on a modern piano, and try to find a different world of sound for each composer and each piece."

Schiff acknowledges that his approach to the sonatas has matured over the years. Schubert's sonatas, for example, he played when he was younger. Then he put them aside to learn the Beethoven

sonatas, and perform them in 25 cycles all over the world.

"When I went back to Schubert by way of the Beethoven experience, it somehow felt that it had much more gravity," he says.

"Schubert was very influenced by Beethoven, whom he worshipped. This is clearly audible in all his music. But his is a very different nature from Beethoven's. Beethoven may have been deaf and suffering from health problems, but he was not dying. Schubert's three sonatas were written just a few months before his death, and the struggle with death is clearly apparent and audible. They are like a testament. His last sonata is from a different sphere."

In the first movement of Schubert's final piano sonata, No. 21, D. 960, as well as in the transcendent adagio of his string quintet, D. 956, one encounters a series of mysterious, low rumblings in the bass. Sometimes they are soft. But in the sonata's first movement repeat, the rumblings surface as a frightening, almost violent outburst.

"All this trilling in the bass is very mysterious," says Schiff. "I think these sounds are about death. They are very scary."

Beethoven's final sonata (the No. 32), too, seems to occupy another plane. It was far from the last thing he wrote; he lived for another five years, and continued to produce a lot of great music, including the final string quartets, the Ninth Symphony, the Diabelli Variations for piano, and the Missa Solemnis. Yet the final piano sonata seems to reach for the beyond, as if there is nothing more to say. The frequently repeated, glistening treble notes in its second and final movement are like a shower of stars, and so brilliantly illumined (at least in Schiff's hands) as to literally take one's breath away.

"It is one of the most extraordinary pieces in all music," Schiff affirms. "It is a metaphysical experience. It's not real. It's somehow out of space.

"I feel the first movement is like the inferno, like the hell of the 'Divine Comedy' of Dante. But the second movement is the purgatory and the paradise put together. I experience something very cosmic toward the end that is also incredibly human."

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE
CONCERTS. ARTISTS. CRITICAL REVIEWS.

September 23, 2015

Schiff Builds on the 'Four Pillars of Viennese Classicism'

By Janos Gereben

When András Schiff plays a recital and leads three concerts in Davies Hall next week, he will bring to conclusion an extensive, ambitious, multi-city, multi-year program, which he tells *SFCV*:

... the end of my project of "The Last Sonatas" consists of three programs based on the final three piano sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, the four pillars of Viennese classicism. The first two of these programs were played in San Francisco during the last season and the concluding one is presented now.

The recital consists of Haydn's Piano Sonata No. 62, Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32, Mozart's Piano Sonata in D major, and Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat major.

In the concerts conducted by Schiff, he also will be the soloist in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27; he will lead Haydn's Lord Nelson Mass, with Ragnar Bohlin's S.F. Symphony Chorus, and soloists Anna Lucia Richter (soprano), Britta Schwarz (contralto), Werner Gura (tenor), and Robert Holl (bass). Additionally, they will perform Schubert lieder.

Schiff says "To hear the creations of these four masters next to each other, to observe the similarities and the differences, is most fascinating," adding about the composers:

This extraordinary range of music was written in a period of roughly 40 years, between 1788 and 1828, mostly — with the exception of the Haydn pieces that were composed in London — in the city of Vienna. Haydn and Beethoven were relatively old, while Mozart and Schubert died at a young age.

However, it's not the number of years that are interesting. Mozart and Schubert had reached incredible maturity within a short span of life. Of the four composers, Mozart and Beethoven were virtuoso pianists, Haydn and Schubert were not. Beethoven studied with Haydn, and this is obvious in his motivic technique and in his treatment of the variation form. Schubert worshiped Beethoven but his nature and melodic talent are much closer to Mozart's.

Beethoven and Schubert had both worked on their final sonatas simultaneously, they have been conceived as triptychs. The three Beethoven sonatas form a wonderful program on their own. In my opinion, the three last Schubert sonatas do not work as a program, they are enormous and they tend to weaken each other. Therefore I decided to make these program Haydn and Mozart on one side, Beethoven and Schubert on the other, light and shade, Apollonian and Dionysian.

Schiff has been receiving extravagant praise everywhere, but improbably in addition to these series and many other recent performances, Schiff — who plays everything without a score — a month ago also performed Bach's monumental Goldberg Variations at the BBC Proms, where, reports *The Guardian*, he "was alone at the piano in the centre of the Albert Hall stage, and a capacity audience [of 5,200] remained silent and spellbound throughout the 70-minute piece."

Before that concert, Schiff — a man with well-developed sense of humor — made fun of the question about "using a modern piano, which is the wrong instrument for Bach, in this enormous hall" by answering:

You are absolutely right. Bach states it clearly on the title page of the first edition (alas the manuscript has not survived): Aria with 30 variations for a harpsichord with two keyboards. Purists should only listen to it on that instrument. And not at the Albert Hall.

According to Johann Nikolas Forkel's biography (1802), Bach had written this work for Count Keyserling, formerly Russian ambassador to Saxony. The count was suffering from insomnia and on sleepless nights would summon his court harpsichordist, Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, a pupil of J.S. Bach, to "play me one of my variations" to soothe his agony.

Historically speaking, then, the ideal venue for this piece is a drawing room, with one player and one listener.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

June 19, 2014

András Schiff Knighted

Pianist Sir András Schiff has been awarded Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the 2014 Birthday Honours. With regard to the recent announcement, BBC News commented, "Schiff has been hailed as the greatest musician Hungary has produced since the composers Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly. Alongside his brilliance as a pianist, he has a reputation as one of the great musical thinkers. His lectures on Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas remain a central tenet of music broadcasting."

A British citizen since 2001, Sir András Schiff, was recently awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal in December 2013 and the International Classical Music Award 2012, in the category "Solo Instrumental Recording of the Year" for his recording of "Geistervariationen" with works by Robert Schumann (ECM). Recitals and special cycles, such as the major keyboard works of J.S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann and Bartók, form an important part of his activities. Since 2004 he has performed complete cycles of the 32 Beethoven Piano Sonatas in 20 cities, and the cycle in the Zurich Tonhalle was recorded live.

Beginning in February 2015, his next project in the United States will be the final sonatas of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert presented in the cities of New York, Washington, DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, and Ann Arbor.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Deutsche Welle

December 27, 2013

Pianist Andras Schiff at 60

Showmanship is alien to him; Andras Schiff is regarded as a master of the soft touch - as a thinker among star pianists. Faithfulness to the score is his top priority, but he can make even well-known works sound fresh.

By Marita Berg

He isn't a "modern man." Andras Schiff recently said as much himself, adding that he can't drive a car and that technology makes him nervous. Instead, he is committed to tradition and has expressed a love of making the great masterpieces of the past come back to life. For the Hungarian pianist, the works of Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Schubert are favorites.

But when it came to Beethoven, the pianist long had his reservations, saying that it's difficult to make one's own mark in a Beethoven tradition defined by talents such as Schnabel, Kempff and Arrau.

"You just can't ignore this heritage. To do that would be foolish. To play Bach, Mozart, Schubert, to a certain extent you do that from birth. Beethoven on the other hand you have to learn. The 32 sonatas were like a suit for me; something I had to grow into," he told German daily "Tagesspiegel" in a 2005 interview.

It's a suit that now fits like a glove.

Spiritual cleansing with Bach

Andras Schiff was born in Budapest on December 21, 1953, and, at 14, began studying under György Kurtag at the Franz Liszt Music Academy before continuing his studies in London with harpsichordist George Malcolm. It was from Malcolm that he came to know and love the music of Johann Sebastian Bach - a love that has never left him.

Bach is for him the alpha and omega of music and sets the pace for the day: "Every day starts with an hour of Bach. It's a ritual. Preludes, suits, fugues; it doesn't matter what. Bach's music is complete, it's everything. It's like a spiritual cleansing."

This is especially true of the "Goldberg" Variations, a particular favorite of Schiff's. "When I was studying at the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest, pirate versions of Glenn Gould's first

Bach sets the pace for Schiff's days

recordings were doing the rounds. We were all excited by it. I fell in love with it the first time I heard it. It's certainly one of the most difficult pieces. That's something I need to know but not the listener. The music shouldn't come across as an effort. It ultimately means: play the piano. What's often missing for me in classical concerts is a sense of playfulness."

Schiff has been an outspoken critic of Hungary's politics

Politics and art as inseparable

Andras Schiff may feel obliged to honor traditions, but he also lives in the here and now. Politics have become an important part of his public persona. In his view, artists, as sensitive individuals who comment on society, cannot be separated from political affairs.

Schiff himself has been outspoken about his grievances in his native Hungary and elsewhere. When Hungary took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2011, Schiff asked in the Washington Post if his homeland was really suitable to take on the role, writing, "Tolerance levels are extremely low. Racism, discrimination against the Roma, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, chauvinism and reactionary nationalism - these symptoms are deeply worrying. They evoke memories that we have hoped were long forgotten. Many people are scared."

Since issuing such statements, Schiff has been denounced as a traitor by some in Hungary and was even threatened with having his hands cut off. The star performer says he has no desire to go back home but still plays the music of a favorite fellow Hungarian, Bela Bartok.

Schiff's latest achievement: tackling Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations

A birthday present courtesy of Beethoven

After the 2008 release of his complete recordings of Beethoven's sonatas, Schiff was asked if he thought he could go even further with the project. He responded with a grin that his dream would be recording the "Diabelli" Variations, Beethoven's last major works for piano. It's a dream he has since fulfilled and is arguably the best present to have given his fans for his 60th birthday.

On the new issue, he scores something of a double whammy playing both a Bechstein grand piano from 1921 and a Brodmann pianoforte from Beethoven's era, a bold experiment in sound which had never been attempted before.

"I'm never looking for a typical Schiff sound, but rather for a sound that fits the composer and the work I am playing. That's why I always choose an instrument based on these criteria," he said.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Boston Globe

October 31, 2013

Pianist pairs Beethoven's Diabelli, Bach's Goldberg variations

By David Weininger

András Schiff © Yutaka Suzuki

"And then I just thought, why not put the two together?"

This casual account of decision making, an explanation without an explanation, was offered by pianist András Schiff during a recent conversation. He was referring to two pillars of the piano repertoire: Bach's Goldberg Variations and Beethoven's Diabelli Variations. They are the two greatest sets of variations for keyboard, and because of their complexity and their length — the Bach anywhere from 40 to 80 minutes, the Beethoven around an hour — each tends to dwarf whatever else joins it on a program.

But Schiff, whose depth of experience with both composers is nearly unrivaled among performers today, has done something startling. He has brought them together on the same program, part of his two-season Bach Project. The pairing makes for a mammoth program he is playing in only a few cities, Boston among them. (This Friday's Jordan Hall performance is sold out.)

"Of course it's a gigantic program," he said by phone from Chapel Hill, N.C. "But it makes perfect sense." While no conclusive proof exists that Beethoven knew the Goldberg Variations, there is a network of connections between the two, none more significant than the sheer scope and complexity of the works. Beethoven wrote variations throughout his career, in sonatas, quartets, and symphonies, as well as standalone piano works. "He used variation form like a fish in water," Schiff said. "But he never attempted anything on this scale. And I think he did it because of the Bachian challenge."

Schiff has played the Goldberg Variations throughout his career and recorded them twice. And for decades he has played all 32 Beethoven sonatas. But the Diabelli Variations — a late masterpiece inspired by a rather banal waltz theme from the Austrian music publisher Anton Diabelli — Schiff learned only a few years ago.

The delay was necessary, he explained, because while each sonata has a single character — playful, tempestuous, melancholy — the Diabellis are a kind of *summa* of his art. "His whole personality and all the different sides of his character [are there]. I would call it his most Shakespearean creation. Only Shakespeare can do this: to have the dramatic, the lyrical, and the comic united."

Schiff's recording of the Beethoven is as atypical as his programming. In the past he has been uninterested in historical instruments, in part, the result of an unhappy experience in the 1970s recording on Beethoven's own piano. Recently, though, Schiff acquired a fortepiano, made by Franz Brodmann in Vienna in 1820, exactly the time Beethoven was writing the Diabellis. It made him an enthusiastic convert.

"It has very distinct registers," Schiff said of the instrument. "It's not an even sound. People today are so proud of a Steinway piano that is absolutely even from top to bottom. But that's not how Beethoven or Schubert composed. They wrote for these instruments which have registers, different tonal qualities in top, middle, and bass."

Around the same time, Schiff heard a 1921 Bechstein piano, on which the German pianist Wilhelm Backhaus used to give recitals. Its sound was completely different from the cool precision of a Steinway, our ideal for how a modern piano should sound. The Bechstein was warmer and had a softer edge, reminding him of the piano tone in the Beethoven and Schubert recordings of the great Artur Schnabel.

Schiff was so excited by his discoveries that he proposed to his label, ECM, recording the Diabellis twice — once on the fortepiano, once on the Bechstein. To fill out the 2-CD set, he included two other late Beethoven works: the last piano sonata, Op. 111, played on the Bechstein piano, and the Bagatelles, Op.126, played on the fortepiano. The results offer at least a mild shock: Both instruments make the Diabellis sound intimate and almost delicate in a piece known for brash extroversion.

"I want this intimacy," Schiff said. "I think that this 'fighting Beethoven' is almost a cliché. . . . That's how people like to see him. But I think that the majority of this composition is very intimate and very inward-looking. And very soft."

Schiff's broader polemical point is a dissatisfaction with what he called "the globalization of piano music. I would really like to challenge the listening public to be more curious. Because they have become very complacent, accepting the fact that, yes, with the Steinway piano, music will be listened to on a Steinway regardless of the composer or the composition."

Asked what he was playing on his current tour, Schiff admitted that he was playing a Steinway at each concert.

"Well, look, one has to be pragmatic," he said. "I cannot carry those instruments with me everywhere." But, he added, "after these experiences of having played those instruments I do approach a Steinway differently, and I try to reach different sonorities on it."

Just before the end of a conversation, Schiff mused about the Pilgrim's Progress his program creates. He pointed to the endings of both works: the Bach with the repeat of the aria which begins the piece, the Beethoven with a graceful minuet that distantly recalls its waltz theme.

"We have, as human beings, a longing for a homecoming experience. We want to wander and we travel a lot, but we like to return home. And both of these works, they give you this sensation. After so much adventure and so much turbulence, what we really look for is peace. And these works, they give it to us."

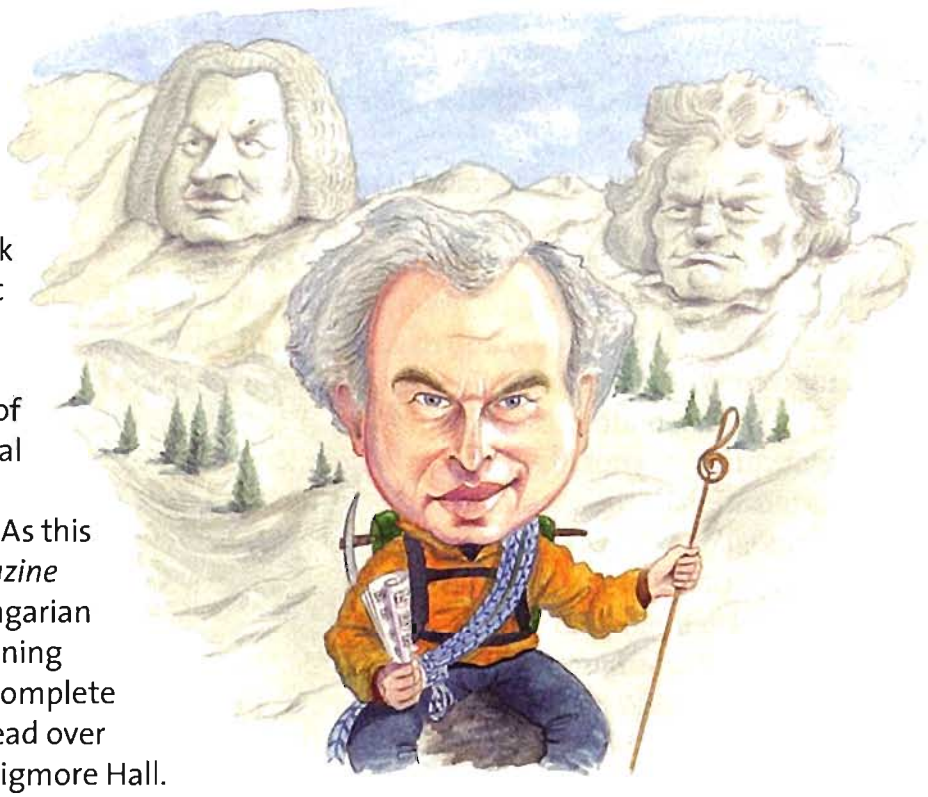
ANDRÁS SCHIFF

BBC music MAGAZINE

January 2013

You summit, I'll play it

András Schiff eyes up twin peaks of the piano repertoire



As Benjamin Britten seizes the limelight in 2013 (had you noticed?), many of us will find ourselves conjuring up images of the flat Suffolk landscape that his music inevitably evokes. For András Schiff, however, it's the lofty challenges of two other mighty musical Bs that will be largely occupying his thoughts. As this issue of *BBC Music Magazine* hits the shelves, the Hungarian pianist will be just beginning his concert cycle of the complete Beethoven Sonatas, spread over seven appearances at Wigmore Hall. Said cycle finishes in the spring... just in time for Schiff to then embark on a six-concert series of the complete keyboard works of JS Bach. As our very own Ivan Hewett says in the *Daily Telegraph*, this is 'the musical equivalent of climbing two Himalayan peaks one after another'. Schiff's double ascent reaches its twin summit on his 60th birthday on 21 December 2013, when he plays Bach's *Goldberg* and Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations in one Wigmore Hall recital.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

October 26, 2012

Pianist Spins the Color Wheel

By Zachary Woolfe

Andras Schiff performing at Carnegie Hall in February.

In the beginning, according to the searching, deeply feeling pianist Andras Schiff, there was innocence.

He thinks of the key of C, the one with no flat notes and no sharp ones, the one that uses only the white keys on the piano, as the innocent, pure and untouched one. And when he plays Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" — which moves from C major through all 24 musical keys, one prelude and one fugue for each, then goes through the whole cycle again — Mr. Schiff hears the color of C major as snow-white.

That is easy enough, as is thinking of B minor, the final key each time around, as a deathly pitch-black. Less obvious is his designation of C sharp as yellow, albeit a slightly less intense yellow than C sharp minor. Or D sharp minor as pale blue. Mr. Schiff, 58, has lately been giving a lot of thought to each of the musical keys and the colors he associates with them as he embarks on the Bach Project, a large-scale tour of North America over the next year that will include all that composer's major keyboard works, played from memory.

Mr. Schiff arrives on Saturday night at the 92nd Street Y, his first New York stop on the tour, to play Book 1 of "Well-Tempered Clavier." Then he returns on Thursday for Book 2. The stop is well timed: his brilliantly crisp, elegant new

recording of that capacious work, on the ECM label, was released last month.

Bach has been one of Mr. Schiff's preoccupations throughout his career. He first recorded the 48, as the series of preludes and fugues is known among pianists, in the mid-1980s.

"It's inevitable that you change and grow as a person and as a musician," he said in a recent telephone interview from San Francisco, where he was playing "Well-Tempered Clavier" in recital and two of Bach's keyboard concertos with the San Francisco Symphony.

"You play the works in question in live performance many, many times," he added, "and you play other things, and things happen to you in life, and it's a growing process. So people said that I should do another version of the 'Well-Tempered Clavier,' because I play now very differently than 25 years ago."

Since that first recording Mr. Schiff has re-evaluated his approach to the music, calming some of his faster tempos and eliminating entirely the use of the sustaining pedal, which he no longer believes should be used in Bach. And he has added those idiosyncratic associations between the cycle of keys and the color wheel.

Mr. Schiff explained that he does not insist on this intermingling of color and sound for everything he plays. Sometimes his associations are architectural or literary. In this case he sees the color scheme as one more way to bring people into the music, and the 92nd Street Y is cleverly using it as an educational and marketing device on its Web site for Mr. Schiff's project.

"Your playing should be sufficient to give ideas to the listeners," he said. "Yet I think we live in times when people expect a few words and information. And maybe it's not such a bad thing."

"This color scheme is also a necessity, because Bach has been played and taught in a very academic, dry way," he said. "We do not associate Bach's music with colors. It's played in a very monotonous way, whether on the harpsichord or piano because of a lack of imagination and diverse articulation. So I felt that these colors would help me certainly. Whether to me E major is light blue and to you it's orange, it's absolutely legitimate. I don't want to suggest to people to come on my wavelength there."

It is true that music theoreticians of Bach's time described the musical keys as having individual characters, if not colors. "And certainly for Bach tonality did matter," Mr. Schiff said. "If he has a violin concerto in E major, and he makes a keyboard concerto of it and transposes it to D major, it's deliberate. These transpositions of Bach's are never mechanical."

If there remained any fear that Bach's music was mechanical, it would be assuaged by Mr. Schiff's new recording of "Well-Tempered Clavier," distinguished by its balance and eloquence. Even in the seemingly simple two-voice E minor Fugue from Book 1 the furious flood of notes has both impetuous energy and exacting restraint. (Its color, by the way, is dark blue.)

His elimination of the sustaining pedal, which lifts the dampers on the piano strings and allows all the notes in a series to keep sounding together until the pedal is released, places far more emphasis on rigorously and sensitively shaping the line.

"I don't want to be dogmatic," he said, "but at this stage of my life I really feel that I don't want to use pedal in Bach, because it's a kind of cosmetic. I don't feel that it brings anything. You can have arguments about it, and I've had arguments about it with some very distinguished colleagues who say you have to use pedal in Bach, because all the great pianists have used pedal in Bach. To me that's not an acceptable argument."

He notes that there was no sustaining pedal on the clavichord, an intimate keyboard instrument that Bach used for practice and composition. ("Well-Tempered Clavier" was originally written as a collection of student pieces.) Nor was there one on the harpsichord or

on the organ, where the pedals have a different function.

“So for all those instruments,” he said, “if you want to produce articulation or you want to produce a passage in legato, you have to achieve that with your fingers. Modern pianists very often cannot do that, because it’s very difficult. It’s a musical but also a technical problem. And when you push down the pedal, you create legato, and it covers up for it, and this is what I’m opposed to.”

For Mr. Schiff, there are no such shortcuts. “I think that the sustain pedal is used even in later music, like Chopin, in a very indiscriminate way. They think it’s like an automobile, and your right foot is on the gas pedal permanently. It’s the same mistake as string players who vibrate every single note.”

Mr. Schiff returns to New York in April to play the Keyboard Concertos in D and F minor with the New York Philharmonic, and the French and English Suites at Alice Tully Hall. The tour will conclude a year from now, when he will play the Keyboard Partitas and the “Goldberg” Variations at Carnegie Hall. Yet it is appropriate that he begins here with “Well-Tempered Clavier,” which sums up, like no other work, Bach’s deceptive straightforwardness and complexity.

“I think the 48 preludes and fugues are somehow justly called the Old Testament of music,” he said. “Hans von Bülow called it that, because it’s influenced so much the later generation, all the great composers, whether Mozart or Beethoven or Schumann. Chopin would not have written his 24 preludes without them, and Chopin played all the time the 48. And later Debussy’s preludes or Bartok’s music or Shostakovich’s preludes and fugues. I think this is a quintessential piece.”

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Washington Post

October 25, 2012

András Schiff launches the Bach Project

By Anne Midgette

(Sheila Rock) - Andras Schiff

When we last saw the pianist Andras Schiff in Washington, he was focused on Robert Schumann. Before that, he was involved in a multiyear project of recording and performing the sonatas of Beethoven. But to say he is returning to Bach is a misstatement; he never left it. "I have been playing Bach every day," he says. "That is how I start my day. Usually the preludes and fugues. Before I do anything else, I play an hour of Bach."

That's really the way to hear Bach, too: played at home, in the clean light of morning before the day has been muddied by outside activities, through the tiny voice of a clavichord, Bach's preferred instrument, precise and modulated and so small that, Schiff says, "it can only be enjoyed by the player and maybe a handful of listeners." What better way to experience a sequence of pieces that were written partly as instruction, from a father to his children, and partly as a composer's exploration of the possibilities of a set of instruments that were still being invented: the harpsichords and clavichords and organs and other keyboard instruments collectively known as "claviers"?

But modern concert life doesn't allow this kind of intimacy. So Schiff is performing this sequence of 48 preludes and fugues, collected into two books as "The Well-Tempered Clavier," on a modern piano in concert halls around the country, as part of a "Bach Project" that continues through November 2013. The whole project comprises performances of the English and French Suites, the Partitas, the Goldberg Variations and both books of "The Well-Tempered Clavier," a Bach hexathlon of the monuments of the composer's keyboard oeuvre. San Francisco is one of three cities that will get to experience the whole thing. Washington is not so lucky; Schiff offers only one of the concerts here, the second and arguably most challenging book of "The Well-Tempered Clavier," which he will perform at the Music Center at Strathmore on Oct. 30.

Cue the hyperbole: Schiff is one of the

great Bach pianists of our time; Bach is the greatest master of Western music. Such phrases get worn smooth with overuse until they seem the jargon of program books and season brochures. But it's a musician's calling to take well-worn things and make them seem new. At 58, Schiff still has traces of the elfin youth in his serene otherworldliness, the distant expression in his pale eyes, the light honest touch of his fingers quietly illuminating the keyboard. He has the reticence of the true musician, someone who is a lot more interested in the composer himself than in putting across his own persona.

As for Bach, "I find that he's on a different level," Schiff says. "And I think all the others who came after him, they all looked at him as the father figure of music. He was the inspiration." In a conversation with writer and musician Stuart Isacoff that's been released as a video on YouTube, he notes Bach's universal appeal: "Most people would agree," he says, with a smile. "If you really dislike Bach, you keep quiet about it."

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

IN CONCERT: Back to the Scene of the Bach - Internationally acclaimed pianist Andras Schiff returns to the Lobero Theatre

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent

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April 19, 2013 11:47 AM

IN CONCERT

Andras Schiff, playing

Bach's 'English Suites'

When:

8 p.m. Fri.

Where: *Lobero Theater, 33 E. Canon Perdido*

Cost: *$48 and $63*

Information: *963-0761, lobero.com*

Birgitta Kowsky photo

Andras Schiff, the great Hungarian-born pianist, has covered a fairly wide swath of composers' work in his time, but what some might call a mystical connection links Mr. Schiff to the profound world of J.S. Bach's keyboard music. Although a consummate virtuoso, technically poised and undaunted by challenges, Mr. Schiff's greater and deeper gift is his ability to burrow inside of the music, particularly Bach's music, with an approach both finely detailed and wisely broad. This can be sensed in the pianist's most recent album, a ravishing and meditative four-disc set of the "Well-Tempered Clavier," Books I and II, on the ECM label.

Tonight, as a cerebral closing event of the current CAMA concert season, Mr. Schiff, currently entrenched in Bach mode, will return to the Lobero Theatre. He has given memorable recitals here in the past, including a stunning reading of the "Goldberg Variations" in 2004. (For the record, he also played the Goldbergs in the Santa Barbara High School auditorium in 1985, in the old "Masterseries" concert series, which was folded into CAMA). The Lobero, a venue well suited to his subtle pianism, also benefited from Mr. Schiff's reading of Beethoven Sonatas in an appearance there in 2007, that appearance timed with another compleatist recording project, a Beethoven Sonatas series for ECM.

Born in Budapest in 1953, and now based in London, the pianist continues to solidify his reputation as one of the world's greatest living piano masters. Recent honors include his being granted the prestigious "Perspective Artist" position at Carnegie Hall during the 2011-12 season.

As part of the larger "BACH PROJECT" he is undertaking in the 2012-13 season, at the Lobero, Mr. Schiff will keep his focus on a particular body of work, Bach's "English Suites," the earliest of the composer's many keyboard suites. Though not nearly as well — known or widely played as the "Well-Tempered Clavier" or the "Goldberg Variations," the "English Suites" is a luminous musical world unto itself, whether heard in pieces or as an epic, evening-length whole. Mr. Schiff won one of his Grammy awards for his 1990 recording of the Suites.

This week, Mr. Schiff took a bit of time out of his busy work and travels this season to offer some insights into his ongoing life with music and the outside world, and, of course, his special and evolving relationship with Bach.

News-Press: I must play the fan and confess up front that, hearing you play the "Goldberg Variations" at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara several years ago was one of the most profound musical experiences I've had in this town. I wonder if you have a recollection of that performance, albeit just one of countless recitals you've given?

Andras Schiff: Of course I remember this concert well, as all the ones that I've done in your beautiful town.

NP: You have made a high — and highly focused — art form of the piano recital. Has that long been a calling for you, to channel much of your artistic energy into the recital medium?

AS: Recitals can be enormously satisfying-both for the listeners and for the performer-the solo piano repertoire is huge and so full of wonderful masterworks. Of course one is rather lonely on the stage — unlike in a concerto with an orchestra-but one is also alone responsible for the music. There are less compromises.

NP: This time around, you will be taking on (if that's the right phrase) Bach's grand English Suites this time around. Is there a special and refreshing quality in performing a work such as this, inasmuch as it's not as popular and well-known as the Goldberg Variations or even the "Well-Tempered Clavier," which you have recently recorded? Is there more a character of surprise or discovery involved — for yourself as well as the listener?

AS: The English Suites are marvelous works, not very well-known. Pianists occasionally program one of them but never the whole set. Bach never intended them to be performed together — there were no concerts in Bach's time — but they almost cry out for public performances. They represent a younger Bach, quasi "Sturm und Drang," not the mature old master of the Goldberg Variations.

NP: You have also recorded extensive and/or complete works of Beethoven and Schumann and other composers, in addition to much of Bach's keyboard work. Is there a particular depth of feeling or concentration you get in delving into a singular composer's body of work, as compared to just dipping in more casually or in a more

piecemeal fashion? Does that immersive process give you a clearer picture of your interpretive voice in the matter?

AS: To me it's a matter of curiosity. Playing one English Suite is not possible without knowing the other six. Playing all six is not possible without knowing all the other keyboard works. All those are closely related to the Cantatas, the Masses, the Passions. ... It never ends.

NP: Over many years now, you have built up a very impressive discography of recordings for the ECM New Series label. Is that relationship, and the connection with Manfred Eicher, something unique in your experience as a recording artist?

AS: My relationship with ECM and Manfred Eicher is deeply satisfying. It's a very lucky collaboration, in these distracted times. I would not like to work with any of the "big" record companies.

NP: You have been unabashed in your commentaries about unsavory political and racist conditions in Austria and Hungary in recent years. Do you sense a frightening shift in tolerance and social interactions in those countries, and elsewhere, in the current era?

AS: The political situation in Hungary is alarming. Ideas like fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, chauvinism — we are confronted by them again. Of course not all of the people support these ideas, but a lot of them do.

If Hungary cannot be stopped on its slide to the abyss then other countries will follow suit. This should be one of the main worries of the European Union, instead of concentrating exclusively on the economy.

NP: Would you say you're sensitive to both the harsh realities of the outside world and the internal realities of the realm of music, and is there a delicate balance there?

AS: Music and art are never independent of politics and of the outside world. In great art we find the ideal balance between freedom and order that the "real life" is trying to achieve.

NP: To look back over the arc of your musical life so far, has it worked out in a way that satisfies on multiple levels? Is it what you might have imagined as a starry-eyed youth?

AS: Yes, I have been very fortunate, but I was never lazy. And it still goes on, a work in progress.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

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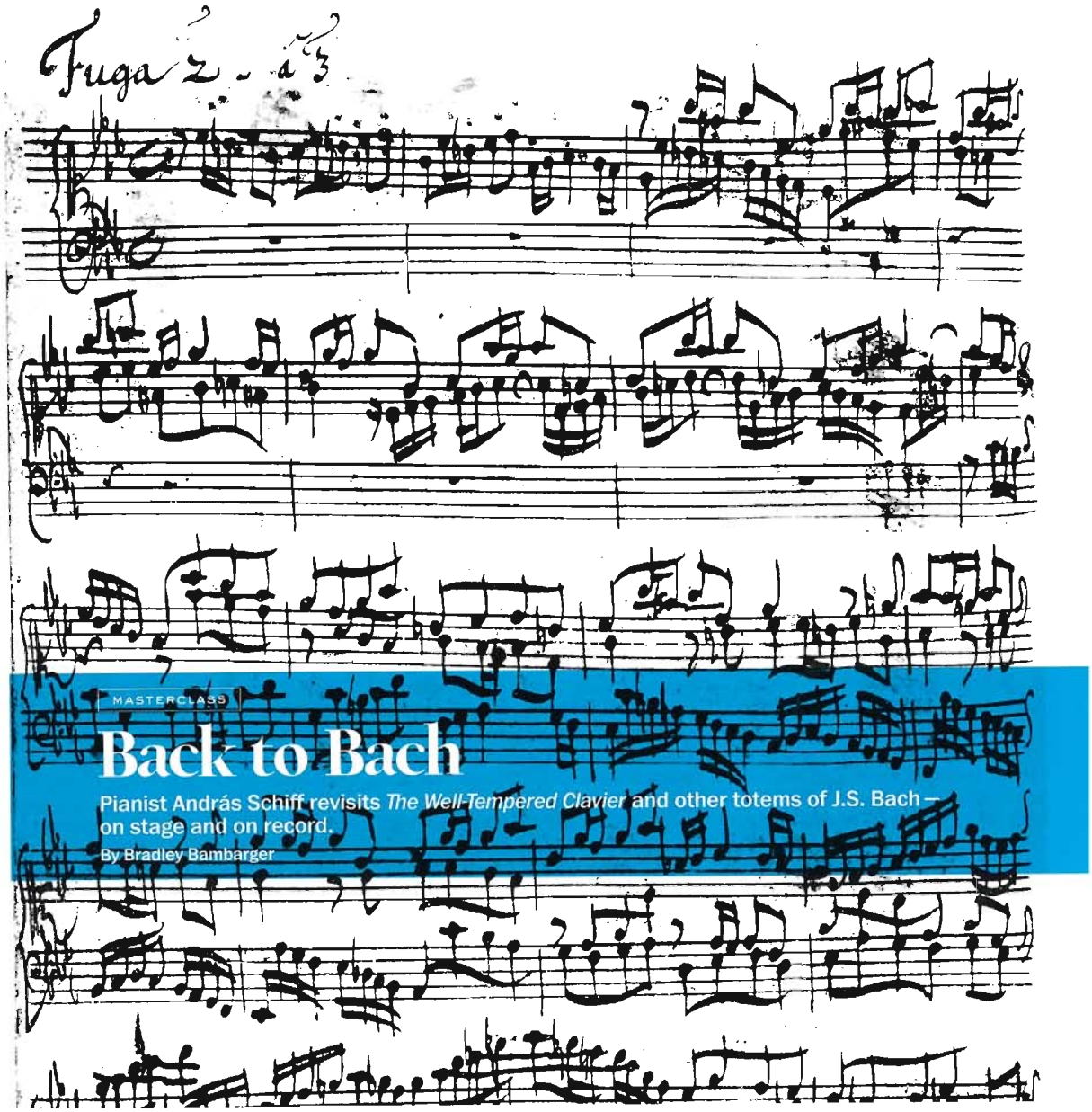

MASTERCLASS

Back to Bach

Pianist András Schiff revisits *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and other totems of J.S. Bach—on stage and on record.

By Bradley Bambarger

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Great music is far greater than its performers. We try our entire lives to unveil its secrets and to convey its unique message. Even if we never quite reach the imaginary goal, our many performances give us experience and knowledge that were hidden from us years ago. We form a better understanding of its structure and inner workings. Horizons broaden before our eyes."

Pianist András Schiff made this observation in an introduction to his 2007 live recording of J.S. Bach's six Partitas, underscoring his reasons for recording this music a second time. Schiff, born in Budapest in 1953, first recorded the Partitas — and the other major Bach keyboard works — for Decca in the 1980s; the albums were considered milestones in the interpretation of Bach on the modern piano for their stylistic balance and purity of sound. Made as part of his subsequent, long-term relationship with ECM Records, Schiff's 2007 recording of the Partitas followed the release of his second version of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, a concert recording made in October of 2001. Blending live energy with seasoned perspective, both remakes reflect the pianist's humility before the music and his quest to be ever truer to it.

The twenty-first century has seen momentous projects from Schiff, not least of which was his live recording of all thirty-two of Beethoven's piano sonatas. This fall he begins his major revisiting of Bach's music, both on stage and on record. Schiff's newest ECM release is a four-disc set of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* Books I and II. Long described as the Old Testament of the classical keyboard literature (with Beethoven's piano sonatas as the New Testament), the forty-eight preludes and fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* were a totemic, law-giving influence on Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms and virtually every composer since. Across some four hours, the two books balance the horizontal (melodic) with the vertical (harmonic) and the sacred with the secular; they contain sublime math and deep soul, bountiful joy and aching melancholy.

Schiff's "Bach Project" will include concerts across the U.S. from this October through November of next year, beginning with *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and extending to the French Suites, English Suites, Partitas and *Goldberg Variations* (plus keyboard concertos with the San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic). To herald the new recording and the concerts, Schiff joined Stuart Isacoff (author of *Temperament* and *A Natural History of the Piano*) at Lincoln Center's Kaplan Penthouse in May to discuss Bach in front of an audience. Schiff set the tone at the piano, playing a Three-Part Invention in F minor of grave beauty. Why that piece? "Because I love it," Schiff said. "And you can hear the essence of Bach in two minutes. Many composers talk too much. This music is a great example of how to say a lot in a very short span of time. There's not one unnecessary note.

"It's also a deeply spiritual piece," Schiff added. "That's one of the fascinating things to me about Bach — the sacred and the secular go hand in hand. This instrumental piece for keyboard could be in the middle of the *St. Matthew Passion*. And vice versa: in the B minor Mass, there are movements based on dances."

Asked by Isacoff to speak to the universality of Bach, Schiff replied: "I know people who don't like Shakespeare, don't like Rembrandt, don't like Bach — but it's not something to be proud of."

Schiff noted that despite its emotional and intellectual demands there remains plenty of joy and "sophisticated humor" in Bach's music.

"Take the Quodlibet in the last variation of the 'Goldbergs,'" said Schiff, "where he uses popular old German songs with naughty words. People of the time would've known what the words to those melodies were. Today, we don't. So we just think that when we hear the 'Goldbergs,' we're listening to something holy — which it is, in parts. But then here comes" — and he steps to the piano to play the jaunty Quodlibet tune and sings along with the folk-song lyrics — "'cabbages and turnips have driven me away.' It's not exactly sacred, is it? From things like this comes the humor in Haydn, the humor in Beethoven. Humor is important. But you have to know how to tell a joke. If you play the Quodlibet like this" — he plays the tune in a po-faced manner — "it's not very funny. It's also wrong. If you know its folk-song background, you would know to never play the music this way. It's not a matter of taste. There are things in interpretation that are matters of personal taste, and there are others that are not."

When the discussion shifted to the question of the most authentic instrument for performing Bach's keyboard music today, Schiff pointed out that while the two-manual

'It can be an advantage of age that you don't feel the need to impress or entertain anyone else. You know this is a great piece of music that can speak for itself.'

harpsichord is ideally suited to works Bach wrote expressly for it, such as the *Italian Concerto*, the harpsichord can't compete with the modern piano's ability to reproduce the loud–soft dynamic of vocal-like appoggiaturas in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Book I is a collection of various preludes and fugues Bach had written in the years preceding its publication, and Schiff conceded that the composer must have had the organ originally in mind for the A minor Fugue of Book I because it demands an ending pedal note that a pianist can't produce without turning to the sustaining pedal. "This A minor Fugue is the only example in all of Bach where I must use the pedal," he said. "The pedal can do damage in Bach, destroying the voice leading, clarity of the counterpoint. Clarity is essential in this music. In Beethoven, it is different. He was the first to use the sustaining pedal creatively, in the beginning of the last movement of the 'Waldstein' Sonata. But he wanted the blurred effect."

On the issue of legato versus staccato in Bach, Schiff admitted that he had once been "rather ignorant and critical" about the period-performance movement in early music. "But now I know there is a lot to learn from it.

Bach on tour. András Schiff's "Bach Project" will include concerts across the U.S. from this October through November 2013.

For example: varied articulation. If there is a phrase of, say, four sixteenth notes, you can play them all legato or all staccato or two one way and two the other, or whatever combination. Bach seldom gives you an indication of which. You have to use your imagination and your knowledge of style, and there are many possibilities." He then played a phrase of Bach in the watery, nineteenth-century all-legato style, and commented, "It's nonsense." He then played it clipped in the all-staccato manner of the 1920s New Objectivity: "Another kind of nonsense, and very ugly." Finally, he varied the articulation with a mix of legato and staccato, and the music suddenly made perfect expressive sense.

Markings for tempo are scarce in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, but there are rare indications for the final prelude and fugue of Book I, in B minor — not that this tells a pianist exactly what to do. "The fugue is marked 'Largo,' so this is slow, indeed," Schiff said. "And it is so chromatic, by the way, with all twelve tones in the first two statements — it's unbelievably modern music. But, yes, here is a rare tempo marking in Bach. Yet adagio in Bach is different from adagio in Bruckner. This is why it's important to know the instruments of the time and what they were capable of. The same goes for Beethoven, for Schubert. If you've ever played a fortepiano from Schubert's time, you'll know what the speed limits are, what is a slowness that is just not possible. The sound just dies. These things give us parameters for our interpretive choices."

Asked about his exemplars in Bach on the piano, Schiff offered the Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer, who made the first complete recording of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, in the 1930s for EMI. "I adore Edwin Fischer, and he has inspired me enormously. The older I get, the closer I feel to him. Despite my admiration for Glenn Gould and his mastery of counterpoint, I get further and further away from him. The vocal ideal in Bach, which is so important and comes from his cantatas, is very present in Fischer's playing, as is the spiritual sense. In the pieces of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* that have this Lutheran chorale, cantata-like quality, often in a minor key, Fischer is absolutely right. Gould, however, makes a parody of these pieces. This I cannot forgive. Yes, music is subjective, but as I said before, it's not totally subjective."

Then there was the question about what Schiff heard in his earlier Bach recordings that he could improve upon. "There were touches of sentimentality that I didn't consider sentimental at the time — and I don't like sentimentality," he said. "Perhaps you become more secure with age — you don't feel a need to be 'interesting.' Even what's interesting to you changes. When I was young, I thought Switzerland was a very boring country. Now I find it highly interesting. Maturity can mean you don't always need to be entertained. Likewise, it can be an advantage of age that you don't feel the need to impress or entertain anyone else. You know that this is a great piece of music that can speak for itself. All you have to do is not ruin it, and that's already a lot to achieve." ▬

ANDRÁS SCHIFF
BBC music
April 2012

THE JAMES NAUGHTIE INTERVIEW

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

As our everyday world increasingly demands more time from us, explains the formidable Hungarian pianist, we must strive ever harder to uphold the significance of high art within our lives

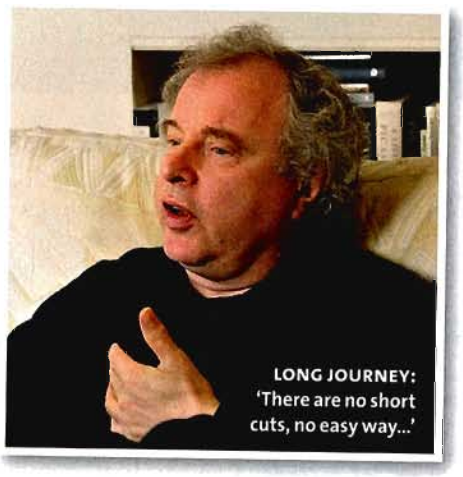
PHOTOGRAPHY ROB SCOTT

I ask András Schiff whether he thinks Beethoven would have liked our modern pianos. 'No.' Why? 'The first question he would ask would be – why are they all black?'

He reflects for a few moments on the funereal seriousness of modern instruments to the eye, then turns to what Beethoven would have made of their sound. 'He would wonder why all the registers seem to have the same quality, and not different characters. Where were all the colours? Because that was what he wrote for.'

That leads us on to talk about his own taste in pianos. He is famous for preferring Bösendorfer to Steinway, though is careful to praise the quality of the piano that dominates the concert platform. 'The thing is that Bösendorfer is right for the music of Vienna… it is mellow, singing. A Steinway is wonderful, but it is very objective. Yes, objective. But I enjoy playing Bach on a Steinway.'

This is a good introduction to a conversation with Schiff as he is a deeply serious man without ever sounding dull or predictable. His commitment to the importance of music is absolute, and he proves it by thinking aloud the whole time, sounding as if he is reconsidering every statement, or trying out some new thought. Like his own musicianship, which places him in the highest rank of pianists with very few companions on



LONG JOURNEY: 'There are no short cuts, no easy way…'

that topmost peak, it is perfectly considered but always full of life and freshness, as if he is never satisfied, always questing. I ask him how he enjoyed writing his introductions to the 32 Beethoven Piano Sonatas – the *Guardian* lectures are still available for download and are absorbing from start to finish. 'It was a life-forming experience,' he says, 'a reminder that there is no easy way.'

That becomes a theme for our conversation, beginning with my mentioning that I'd heard Anne-Sophie Mutter suggest recently that even in Germany and Austria, the beating heart of the classical tradition, there was a declining place for serious music in national culture. 'I am afraid that you are right. I feel this very strongly, the sense of decline – a belief that music is not that important any more. In certain places it may not be true – in Russia, for example. I was there a couple of weeks ago and I felt that in Russia it really mattered. Things like reading poetry in Russia – they still matter. Though Russia has changed more dramatically than most other places – and some of that is hideous – I was happy to find that feeling still there. I don't think it is even there in Hungary now. It has changed too much.'

His reference to his home country carries some pain with it. He has been a public political advocate for a more liberal regime in the new Hungary, joining other prominent countrymen in regretting a discriminatory culture which he sees growing. He understands the dangers, having become an Austrian citizen because of the difficulties of being a Hungarian Jew; and then renouncing that allegiance, when he saw a sharp rightward shift among some Austrian politicians, to become a British citizen. His feeling for the preservation of personal freedoms and civilised values is profound, and inseparable from his commitment to music as the best revelation of human feeling. That assumption is woven into every observation, and emerges as the driving force of a personality that is striving for a perfection that is, he knows, unattainable. ▶

RESIDENT PIANIST: András Schiff at his home in London

TRAVEL ADVICE: after a visit to the US, Schiff will rest a week

We speak about reminding people of how difficult the practice of art is. 'It is fashionable to say how difficult it is for young people these days. Well, in some ways yes – but in other ways I think it is too easy. They take things for granted that they shouldn't take for granted. I always remember this – there are no short cuts, no easy way.' Take his study of the Beethoven Sonatas, which he recorded in a complete cycle for the first time deliberately late, when he was about 50 (10 years ago), and which have confirmed his place as one of the great interpreters of the music. 'You can take Beethoven as the best example of this, that there are always difficulties and you always need time. He was a slow developer, and so he is a very good role model. It is a lesson for me.

'You try to go in that way, slowly, and to understand these pieces logically and gradually – because they do form a logical sequence – and you climb from mountain to mountain as well as you can. It was such an achievement. You have to remember when you are working on the Late Sonatas that the early pieces are still there. He could not go on to write better Sonatas, only different Sonatas.'

The theme of time begins to shape our conversation. He speaks about globalisation, and his feeling that the world is perhaps becoming *too* small, and about the efforts that are required to combat the speed at which everything has to operate. He recalls that although Mahler was a workaholic when he went to the United States he would have time to rest, because the journey by sea took so long. Now, you are expected to perform soon after getting off a transatlantic flight. He can't. 'I need a few days after I arrive before I am ready.' And coming back, the bit that we all dislike the most? 'I have a rule. I need a day to recover for each hour of time difference.' So after a visit to the United States he will give himself a full week before he believes he is back at full power.

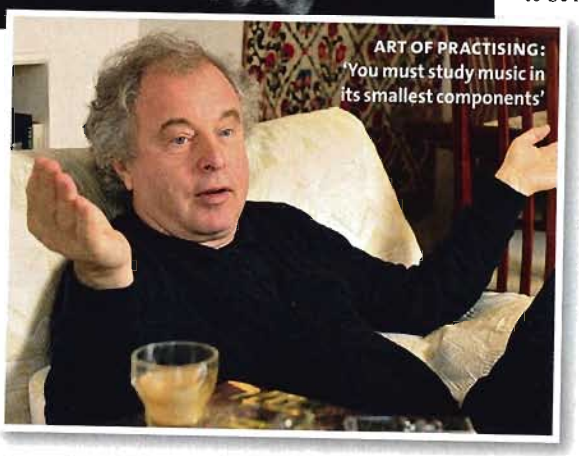
> 'Beethoven was a slow developer, so he is a very good role model'

The commitment to slowing down, acknowledging how slow and steady any productive work has to be, is the stamp of Schiff's character. He admires patience and meticulous study, revelling in his return to original manuscripts, even of composers whose work he has known intimately for decades, and speaks of how his study of the last Sonata, Op. 111 in C minor, is nowhere near complete. He played it hundreds of times, then came back to it after a few years and found that, like all masterworks, it had matured for him in his absence. 'I would say,' he says, with a twinkle, 'like a very great wine.' That attitude is, in part, a declaration of humility – but it is also a feeling for struggle as being part of the world to which music gave him an entrée.

As we talk, he raises the name of Béla Bartók. 'He is a person for whom I have the greatest respect, as a musician but also as a man, a humanitarian. He could not stay silent about what was happening in Hungary and found that he must leave. He did not have to – he was not a Jew – but he could not compromise, though for him going away was basically committing suicide.'

Schiff is preparing, when we meet, for a Carnegie Hall programme that includes Bartók's Third Piano Concerto, written in exile in the United States, and completed after ▶

TWO'S COMPANY: András Schiff (left) and Murray Perahia indulge in a little light duetting



ART OF PRACTISING: 'You must study music in its smallest components'

his death by his pupil Tibor Serly, and he speaks with feeling about Bartók's unhappiness, chronicled in a memoir – 'My Father' – by his youngest son Peter, which Schiff finds 'heartbreaking'. His admiration for the composer springs, of course, from a shared Hungarian heritage with which Bartók shaped his masterpieces, and a reverence for the human bravery that he showed.

In one other respect, Bartók is not the most obvious lodestar for Schiff. Bartók, after all, was a pupil of a pupil of Liszt. Yet Liszt is not in the line of composers with whom Schiff most obviously identifies. 'I agree with the terminology used by Hans von Bülow – that Bach is the Old Testament and Beethoven the New Testament. It is as simple as that. For me, everything comes from Bach. It is why, for example, I cannot really respond fully to the music of Berlioz or Liszt. They are different. For me Bach's music is the highest expression of Western civilisation – no less than that – and it is that inheritance that moves me most.'

A few weeks ago, Nicholas Kenyon chose Schiff's recording of the *Goldberg Variations* as his *Building a Library* choice on *CD Review* on Radio 3 as the best recording on a modern instrument (edging out Murray Perahia 'by a whisker' in a true battle of the giants). As I talk to Schiff, it is as if Bach is always present. Speaking about students, and the need to be patient, he tells of how young players could be taken through some early preludes, then the pieces from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena*, then the two-part Inventions, before finally confronting the 48 Preludes and Fugues in all their variety, complexity and genius. 'They were, of course, revolutionary – to deal with all the tonalities in the way that he did was extraordinary.' He has worked on an edition of the '48' with his own fingerings and, once again, found that he was engaged on an exploration that threw up new discoveries, different insights. He is a student at heart.

> 'Bach's music is the highest expression of Western civilisation'

Indeed, he is at pains to illustrate how respectfully even a soloist of his vast experience should approach masterworks, and with what patience. He speaks of passages in Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata which have to be played at a fiendish speed. 'It is obvious, surely. You must play them slowly at first. You must study the music in its smallest components – the phrase, and gradually learn to play them a little faster, and then a little faster and so on, until you are there. It cannot happen quickly. This needs productive study.'

The key word is productive. He has not much time for pianists who may spend twelve hours a day at the keyboard, but indulge in repetitive, mechanical practice. 'This is no good, counterproductive. Proper rehearsal must be productive; it must involve thought. That is our duty.'

Duty is a good word to apply to Schiff, though it should not be thought to imply anything grim in his demeanour or outlook. He is not stern, being resolutely gentle by nature, nor dismissive of others. His seriousness consists of the ever-present sense of awe which began to be instilled in him as a boy in Hungary (the composer György Kurtág was a teacher who had a profound influence), and by a rigour about the place of music in any culture worth its name. He confesses to one regret: that he believes himself to be incapable of being a composer, which he considers the highest calling of all, but speaks of the obligations that are taken on by any serious musician with the enthusiasm of an artist whose appetite for proselytising will never fade.

Schiff talks about the importance of the start of a performance – he once told me that he would visit a concert platform the night before a recital and sit alone at the piano to imagine the moment when silence turned into the first note. He attaches huge importance to that opening encounter with the audience, believing that the integrity and power of a performance depends on getting it right. He makes it clear that the duty on the performer is matched by the duty on an audience. 'If someone rushes from a train, then falls into a seat just before the performance begins, how can it work? There is no time to prepare for what is about to happen; no time to think; no time to get ready. That is the way to lose everything.'

It's appropriate that such a thought comes to him as we finish our absorbing conversation, as if returning to the theme that is always there – the danger of the originality and inspiration of great music being compromised when it can be protected. It's true of governments, true of musicians who rush things, true of a world that demands that we run too fast, and of conductors who are forced to have shorter rehearsals. The true musician's task is to fight against all that, to fight for time.

You cannot speak to András Schiff for long without being reminded that no one should pretend that it is easy. ■

András Schiff's new recording of Books I & II of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier will be released in the autumn on the ECM New Series label.

Disc Reviews

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

International Piano

November 22, 2024

Sir András Schiff's complete Decca recordings

By David Thrasher

Shortly after I received this handsome set, Sir András Schiff withdrew due to injury from his appearance at this summer's BBC Proms, at which he had been due to perform *The Art of Fugue*. These late-night Bach concerts have become something of a mini-tradition over recent years, exploring repertoire that Schiff has also revisited on record in a series of high-profile recordings for the ECM label. They also boast the slightly mystical aura that has come, to a certain extent, to accompany the man himself. Always an independent (and occasionally outspoken) thinker – on matters that go beyond the merely musical – he has fed this image through his increasing penchant for not announcing his concert programmes until the last minute, for accompanying his performances with impromptu commentaries and for playing on an array of modern and period instruments that ranges far beyond the standard Steinway.

Still, this substantial box of delights should cheer Sir András's spirits while he recovers from his broken leg. The presentation is attractive and the contents comprehensive, to the extent of supplementing the domestic catalogue with recordings of Beethoven's violin sonatas (with Sándor Végh) that were previously available only in Japan. Schiff made his first recordings for Decca in 1979 and was associated with the label for a decade and a half. The result is a hefty box of no fewer than 78 discs, tracing his musical concerns over this period as solo pianist (discs 1-31), concerto soloist (discs 32-51), chamber musician (discs 61-74) and song accompanist (discs 52-60); the last four discs cover his first significant encounter with 18th-century instruments as he explored Mozart's solo, duo and chamber works on the composer's own piano.

Bach naturally figures prominently. During the early 1980s, when Schiff recorded a number of the larger works and sets, arguments over the suitability of the piano for Baroque music raged more fervidly than they do today. Early reviews took Schiff to task for a romantic – and even 'Schumannesque' – approach to Bach, lingering over phrases and applying a degree of rubato that some thought inappropriate. It's unashamedly pianistic, make no mistake, as is a sole disc of Scarlatti sonatas. The passage of time, though, has broadened our perceptions of Bach

performance practice to the extent that the impression today of Schiff's Bach is not of anachronism but of intellectual clarity warmed by genuine love for the music. The counterpoint is never obscured and a generous policy of repeats gives rise to telling and generally tasteful ornamentation. As for the concertos, Schiff's collaboration with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe offers a prime choice for modern-instrument readings, even if the two- and three-keyboard works with Peter Serkin, Bruno Canino and Camerata Bern lay all too bare the problems of matching Bach's music to a congregation of concert grands.

Mozart and Schubert figure as significantly as Bach in Schiff's Decca discography. Among his earliest recordings for the label were the Mozart sonatas, joined a few years later by a disc's worth of smaller works. Schiff recalls the sonata sessions as notably happy ones, and the audible pleasure he took in these works is similarly evident in a leisurely cycle of the concertos. Recorded balance improved in later sessions, so that a somewhat recessed piano on the 1984 disc of Concertos Nos 17 and 18 becomes a touch more present in the mix by the time of, say, the 1988 *Jeunehomme*. One particular bonus in this cycle – quite apart from Schiff's stylish pianism – is the beauty and sensitivity of the wind-playing: Sándor Végh's Salzburg Camerata Academica was primarily a string ensemble, so the presence of wind and brass guests such as Aurèle Nicolet, Heinz Holliger and Radovan Vlatković adds extra lustre to this desirable concerto survey.

A collaboration with Georg Solti and Daniel Barenboim in the three-piano K242 yielded less sympathetic results but there are further treasures in a supremely classy Quintet, K452 (Holliger, Elmar Schmid, Klaus Thunemann, Vlatković), here recoupled with Beethoven's Op 16 Quintet, and a cherishable *Ch'io mi scordi di te* with Cecilia Bartoli. Later on Schiff revels in the colours he is able to draw from Mozart's own fortepiano, not only in a selection of sonatas and solo works but also in some dramatic violin sonatas with his wife, Yuuko Shiokawa, piano duos with George Malcolm, thrillingly pushing the poor Walter to the very threshold of its abilities, and piano quartets with Shiokawa, Erich Höbarth and Miklós Perényi.

Schiff trailed his Schubert sonata survey with a pair of discs of shorter works, in which the lyrical impulse that lies behind so much of his playing is on full display, despite some occasionally flouncy ornamentation. It is in the sonatas, though, that traces of what some perceive as a certain degree of mannerism or preciousness creeps in, which seems at times to impede the flow of the music. The value of this sonata cycle, played on a luminous Bösendorfer Imperial, lies primarily in its comprehensiveness and the inclusion of a generous handful of unfinished and fragmentary works. Nevertheless, the more established later works are better served by the more recent ECM remakes.

It's interesting to note what music Schiff chose *not* to incorporate into his recording repertoire at this time. There's conspicuously no solo Beethoven: Schiff got round to the concertos in 1996 with Bernard Haitink (on Teldec) but was adamant that he wouldn't record a sonata cycle until he turned 50 (in 2003). He held to his word, setting them down for ECM in instalments following extensive tours and over the following five years produced a sequence as stimulating and provocative as any made this century. The violin sonatas with Végh were clearly a labour of love for the two musicians, although the violinist was coming to the end of his playing career and lapses in intonation and coordination make this cycle one with appeal only to completists.

Perhaps surprisingly for a Hungarian-born musician, there is no Liszt, apart from a song selection recorded early on with soprano Sylvia Sass. Nor is there any solo Schumann or Chopin, although, once again, there is a disc of Schumann lieder with bass-baritone Robert Holl, in which Schiff proves himself – as throughout all nine discs of songs here – an acutely responsive and sensitive

accompanist. Concertos by Schumann and Chopin (No 2) with the Concertgebouw under Antal Dorati don't catch fire as readily as a Brahms First with the Vienna Philharmonic playing on the edge of their seats for Solti. Rounding out the concerto section of the box, Schiff dazzles in Dvořák's Piano Concerto, advocating fervently for the notoriously challenging original version in a live performance from the Musikverein with the Vienna Philharmonic under Christoph von Dohnányi. The coupling here is a glowing Schumann *Introduction and Allegro appassionato*, while Schiff and Solti deadpan through an effervescent reading of the *Variations on a Nursery Theme* by Dohnányi *grand-père*.

Haydn, too, is absent from the solo section of the box, although there are two discs of piano trios, perceptively played by Schiff and Shiokawa with cellist Boris Pergamenschikow in performances linked to the Musiktage Mondsee, the festival the pianist founded and ran for a decade from 1989. Also connected to Mondsee are a valuable selection of solo and chamber works by Janáček – music in which Schiff appears to be ideally at home, returning to the Sonata and solo works a couple of decades later for ECM. At the other end of the scale, a selection of Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* finds Schiff on graceful, unfussy form in an enchanting pendant to his frothy pair of concertos with Charles Dutoit in Munich.

The Mondsee musical encounters gave rise to a series of relaxed chamber recordings through the 1990s. Earlier still, though, three-quarters of the young Hagen Quartet joined Schiff and bassist Alois Posch for a *gemütlich*, unhurried *Trout* Quintet, while players from the New Vienna Octet collaborated in Brahms's Clarinet and Horn Trios. In all Schiff's chamber music-making there is a sense of intimacy, of music genuinely being shared among friends. Occasionally this translates into a slight lack of momentum, of tempos that linger when they might usefully press on. Not so, though, in a driven Dohnányi pairing of the First Piano Quintet and Piano Sextet with the Takács Quartet and friends – a nearly all-Hungarian exercise that was an important stage in the wider public appreciation of the composer's chamber works. Schiff and the Takács also get fully to grips with the strenuous passions of Brahms's Piano Quintet.

Two discs of Bartók present warm, affectionate performances of the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion with Bruno Canino, the two violin sonatas with, respectively, Shiokawa and Lorand Fenyves, and *Contrasts* with clarinettist Elmar Schmid and violinist Arvid Engegard. Holliger's presence gave rise to a somewhat knottier and less characteristic excursion into more recent music: the oboist's own Quintet for piano and winds alongside Elliott Carter's equivalent and more rebarbative counterpart, and works by Dorati (*Duo concertante*) and Britten (*Temporal Variations* and *Two Insect Pieces*) specifically showcasing Holliger's own blazing musicianship.

Then there are the songs. The calibre of Schiff's collaborators – Bartoli, Sass, Holl and Peter Schreier – tells its own story, and it was with Schreier that Schiff shared the *Gramophone* Solo Vocal Award in 1991, for their highly regarded recording of *Die schöne Müllerin*.

The 78 discs come in original-jacket cardboard sleeves. The glossy and substantial booklet contains not only comprehensive track-listings and recording information but also an interview between Schiff and Misha Donat brimming with candidness and insight, as well as some revealing session photos. Considered as a whole, this set is testament to a musician who should without demur be considered among the leading pianists of our age.

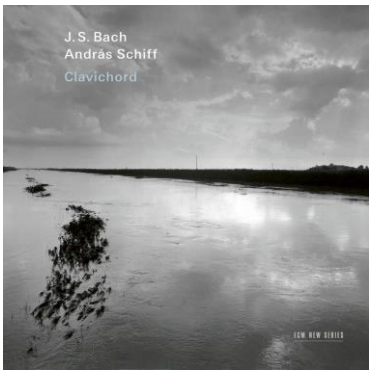
ANDRÁS SCHIFF

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

March 2023

JS BACH 'Clavichord' (András Schiff)

By Michelle Assay



The booklet note to Schiff's latest early keyboard venture with ECM offers factual and circumstantial arguments for Bach having a preference for the modest clavichord, which by the time of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* had gone through some important technical improvements, the new unfretted instrument allowing the performer to play in all major and minor keys and to achieve a variety of articulations. All this is fascinating, but the real case for the suitability of clavichord is Schiff's own performances of a programme that explores the range of its possibilities, using a 2003 replica of a 1743 Specken instrument.

The lower tuning (roughly a semitone) makes it, for me, ideal for the intimate storytelling of the sublime *Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo*. At the other extreme the instrument is resourceful and responsive enough to cope with the dazzling exuberance of the *Chromatic* Fantasia and offering pristine transparency to the knottier textures of the Fugue.

The didactic Duets, Inventions and Sinfonias are more commonly associated with the domestic nature of the clavichord. A few exceptions apart, especially in the Sinfonias, Schiff's tempos are very much consistent with his 1983 recording on modern piano (Philips, 9/85). The melancholic E flat major and the intensely contemplative F minor Sinfonias are somehow more compact on the clavichord, whereas the effervescent B minor takes on a more mellow hue.

But that's where the comparisons end. This is not just a pianist changing medium and still sounding like a pianist (an example of that would be Gulda's remastered mono recording of the *Chromatic* Fantasia and Fugue on clavichord – Berlin Classics, 9/18). As with his previous period-instrument ventures, Schiff opens up a new world and thoroughly adjusts his temperament, his 'pianism' and his artistry to it. If on the modern piano he brings Bach to us in all his reflectiveness and majesty, on the clavichord he invites the audience as it were to eavesdrop on Bach himself, as if sitting in the same room, or 'a quiet oasis', as Schiff puts it in his notes. My only complaint would be that he makes it hard for me to go back to hearing these works on the modern piano, or least on the piano with any other player.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Sequenza 21/

January 27, 2023

András Schiff – Clavichord on ECM

By Christian Carey

He was the best organist in Europe and a mean harpsichordist too, but Johann Sebastian Bach loved playing the clavichord. The intimacy of its soft dynamic range, supple tone, and the ability to have an aftertouch with a slight vibrato made the instrument a distinctive one, ideal for small rooms: for practice or to be played for a few listeners. András Schiff has distinguished himself as one of the premiere Bach pianists of our time, making a convincing case for the music to be realized on a concert grand. He has recorded extensively for ECM's New Series, the Goldberg Variations (2001) the Six Partitas (2007), and both books of the Well-Tempered Clavier (2012). On *Clavichord,* he turns to the smaller instrument, playing a double CD recording of works eminently suited for it. In the program notes, Schiff says that he always begins his day with Bach. While he used to do so on the piano, it is now the clavichord that occupies his early hours. The period instrument used for the recording was built by Joris Potvlieghe in 2003 and is a replica of the unfretted Specken clavichord of 1743.

The clavichord thrives in contrapuntal textures of two or three voices. Thus Schiff has assembled a number of pieces without the thickened textures of the largest fugues. The standouts of the recording are the 2-part Inventions and 3-part Symphonias. Schiff adopts tempos that often are more deliberate than his renditions on the piano, reflecting the action of the clavichord. One can still play quickly, however, as he demonstrates with a fleet-fingered rendition of the F-major Invention. The architectural shaping of pieces like the E-flat major Sinfonia elucidates its form with consummate elegance. The Sinfonias in D and E both adopt dance rhythms, which are performed with verve.

Four Duets (BWV 802-805) demonstrate that even in a two-voice texture, Bach could create considerable contrapuntal interest and spicy chromatic inflections. Schiff plays these with a period-informed sense of fluidity of tempo. The Capriccio BWV 992 has a characteristic flair, with subtitles that detail a person being entreated by his friends not to undertake a journey. This is something we would more likely see from Beethoven or Schumann. The variations, on the tune *Lontanza del fratello dilettissimo,* include multiple arias and finish with a jaunty "Fuga al posta " – a postcard from abroad!

Clavichord includes two particularly imposing pieces. The *Ricercar á 3* is from the Musical Offering, the composer's late career gift to Frederick the Great. The Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue (BWV 903) is a virtuosic masterpiece. Schiff digs in, relishing every moment and showing us the full capacity of the clavichord as an instrument that should be better known.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Guardian

December 16, 2021

Unearthing gems: the best classical releases of 2021

By Andrew Clements

9. András Schiff: Brahms Piano Concertos
We said: "Schiff makes his interpretative points without exaggeration or over-assertiveness. The performances cast new light on two of the greatest piano concertos in the repertoire." Read full review.

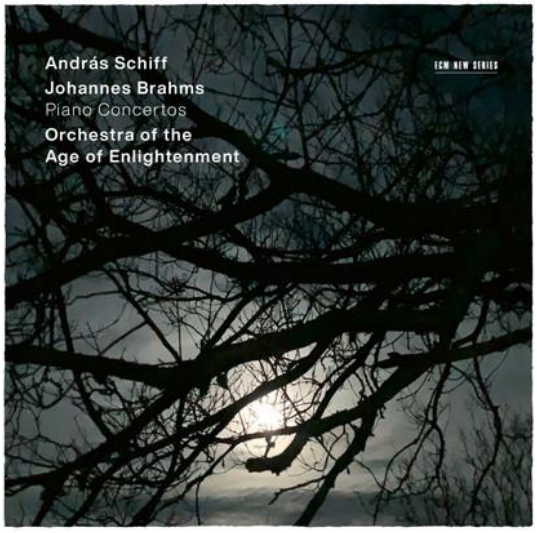
ANDRÁS SCHIFF

BBC music MAGAZINE

June 20, 2021

Brahms: Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2

By Michael Quinn



Brahms was a beardless young Romantic aged 25 when he launched his stormy D minor Concerto to an ungrateful Hanover audience in 1859, but a securely established master by the time he premiered his more discursively laid-back B flat major Concerto in Budapest in 1881, to immediate acclaim. The heroic tensions of the Concerto No. 1 reflected the young composer's long struggles to cast its material first as a sonata, then as a symphony, whereas No. 2 accumulated its ample four-movement course over three years of relaxed summer holidays. Between them, these works greatly expanded the symphonic scope of the 19th-century concerto. And now Hungarian pianist András Schiff, who has loved them all his life, has sought to recapture something of the conditions in which they were first heard.

Numbering just 50 period instrument players, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment features natural horns – which Brahms always preferred to more modern valve horns – and string playing without vibrato. Schiff conducts from the keyboard – as Hans von Bülow sometimes did in early performances of these works – securing crisp ensemble and cogent longer-term grasp of structure in his forward-moving tempos, while delivering the often horrendous difficulties, particularly of Concerto No. 2, with eloquence and grace.

The wiry tone of his restored circa-1859 Blüthner grand may initially disconcert, but the clarity of its bass enables many orchestral details to come through that one rarely hears in latter day battles between big orchestras and thicker-toned Steinways – a clarity enhanced by the slightly dry but immediate Abbey Road recording. Enlightening indeed.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

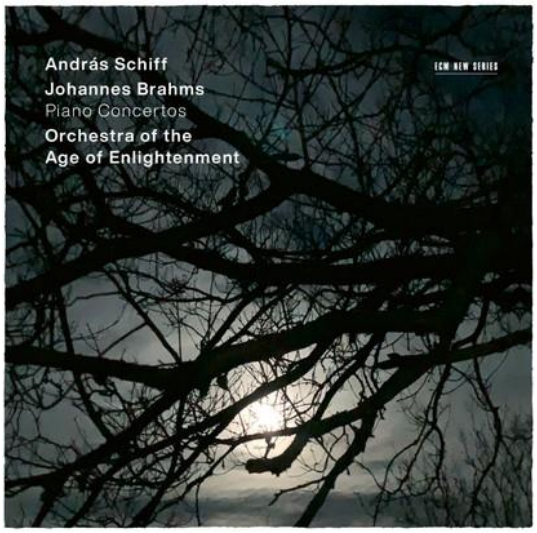
The Guardian

June 3, 2021

Brahms: Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2 review – wonderfully rounded and mature performances

Having gone back to the original manuscripts, Schiff's work belongs in the front rank of recent recordings

By Andrew Clements



With the present recording we have tried to recreate and restore the works, to cleanse and detoxify the music", writes András Schiff in the liner notes for his new Brahms disc. "To liberate it from the burden of the – often questionable – trademarks of performing tradition." By playing the two concertos on a restored Blüthner piano made in Leipzig around 1859, together with the gut strings and 19th-century wind of the 50-strong Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Schiff's aim was to get to back to the sound and scale of the performances that the composer himself would have expected. One of Brahms's favourite orchestras, apparently, was Hans von Bülow's band in Meiningen, which had just 49 players. In his essay Schiff also reveals it was the two piano concertos that first drew him to Brahms, but while he has known and performed the first concerto for many years (he recorded it in the 1980s with Georg Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic), he took much longer to get to grips with the B flat work. As you would expect from Schiff, though, the performances of both works are wonderfully rounded and mature.

He has gone back to the original manuscripts to check details of his performances, discovering, for instance, that Brahms had attached a metronome marking to the first movement of the D minor concerto that is significantly slower than we usually hear today, but which was omitted from the printed editions. It's a shock to begin with but Schiff makes it convincing, gradually building the tension through the movement as the sound of his Blüthner – with its much less overpowering lower register than we are used to hearing from modern Steinways – blends beautifully with the soft grained OAE strings, while in the slow movement, it's the wonderfully mellow woodwind that come into their own.

The transparency of the orchestral playing pays dividends in the B flat Concerto too, with Schiff able to make his interpretative points without exaggeration or overassertiveness. The performances certainly cast new light on two of the greatest piano concertos in the repertoire but the competition on disc is fierce; if they don't quite sweep all the competition aside, they certainly belong in the front rank of recent recordings.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

LIMELIGHT

December 2019

INSTRUMENTAL

Schubert
Sonatas & Impromptus

András Schiff *p*
ECM 4817252 (2CD)

FORTEPIANO MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Sir András Schiff's born again Schubert guarantees impromtu revelations aplenty

András Schiff's purchase of a fortepiano in 2010 transformed a long-held fascination with the instrument into a full-blown love affair that has blossomed into admired recordings of Beethoven and Schubert, to whose late piano sonatas he returns on disc. He's playing no ordinary fortepiano: a Franz Brodmann model dating from around 1820 – perfect for late Schubert – it once belonged to Karl I, the optimistically titled last ruler of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Schiff describes it as having "something quintessentially Viennese in its timbre, its tender mellowness, its melancholic cantabilità", qualities that come to the fore time and again in these fascinating, quietly ravishing, insightful and often moving performances.

We're deep in Schubert's last months here, but Schiff steadfastly avoids retrospective comment on a life soon to be cut short. To the fore is a magisterial freedom of expression abetted by the elastic technique of Schiff's fleet, fluid fingers and agile pedal work in performances of considered intelligence, sensitive emotional engagement and penetrating musicality. Brodmann's fortepiano is a thing of bracing beauty, its signature sound crisply articulate.

Schiff himself seems reborn, or at least fully persuaded by the fortepiano's antique attractions, putting them to expressive use in a traversal of familiar works that produces one fresh, revealing insight after another. **Michael Quinn**

"SCHUBERT HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY CLOSE TO MY HEART. THE KLAVIERSTÜCKE, AND THE IMPROMPTUS WERE PART OF MY STUDENT YEARS. OF COURSE, THE LAST SONATAS CAME MUCH LATER, THEY ARE NOT REALLY FOR CHILDREN."

Sir András Schiff

the LIMELIGHT RECORDING of the YEAR 2019

Schubert
Sonatas & Impromptus

András Schiff *p*
ECM 4817252 (2CD)

SCHUBERT RE-IMAGINED

Schubert has always been very close to my heart. One of the first concerts I ever attended – sitting in my mother's lap – was Sviatoslav Richter playing the *Klavierstücke*, unforgettable. These and the *Impromptus* were part of my student years. Of course, the last sonatas came much later, they are not really for children.

I used to be more than resistant to the fortepiano. In the 1970s Hungaroton had asked me to make a recording on Beethoven's own Broadwood fortepiano housed in the National Museum in Budapest. It wasn't a happy experience because the instrument wasn't in good condition. What changed my mind was Mozart's own Walter fortepiano in Salzburg. This was like a dream. Since then I have come across magnificent original instruments in perfect condition.

On the fortepiano you are much more "naked". There's nowhere to hide. The action is much lighter, the keys are somewhat narrower, so there is much less physical effort involved. What's wonderful is the singing tone, the different registers, the perfect balance. The bass never overpowers – that can be a huge problem with a modern piano. And the soft, softer and softest dynamics – so essential to Schubert – are much more evident. Also, the fortepiano always suggests to you the correct tempo of a piece. You can't play too fast or too slow.

Schubert's health had started to deteriorate as early as 1821 and this can be clearly heard in the *Unfinished* Symphony. He had always had a unique relationship with death. For him death is a friend, not an enemy. When Schubert modulates from a minor key to a major one we feel an almost unbearable sadness in the major. Nevertheless the middle section of the Andantino of the A Major Sonata, D959 is the most terrifying piece of music I know. It reminds me of Goya's black paintings. **Sir András Schiff**

"THERE'S A MAGISTERIAL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PERFORMANCES OF INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND PENETRATING MUSICALITY. IF YOU ONLY KNOW SCHUBERT ON THE PIANOFORTE, THESE MARVELLOUS ACCOUNTS OPEN UP ENDLESSLY FASCINATING NEW VISTAS."

Michael Quinn, *Limelight*, July 2019

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

LIMELIGHT
AUSTRALIA'S CLASSICAL MUSIC AND ARTS MAGAZINE

July 22, 2019

SCHUBERT: SONATAS & IMPROMPTUS (SIR ANDRÁS SCHIFF)

Schiff reborn guarantees revelations aplenty.

★★★★★

By Michael Quinn

András Schiff's purchase of a fortepiano in 2010 transformed a long-held fascination with the instrument into a full-blown love affair. One that has blossomed into admired recordings of Beethoven and Schubert, to whose late piano sonatas he returns on disc after a four-year interval with a masterly feel for both instrument and music.

He's playing no ordinary fortepiano: a Franz Brodmann model dating from around 1820 – perfect for late Schubert – it once belonged to Karl I, the optimistically titled last ruler of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Schiff describes it as having "something quintessentially Viennese in its timbre, its tender mellowness, its melancholic cantabilità", qualities that come to the fore time and again in these fascinating, quietly ravishing, insightful and often moving performances.

Recorded in the intimate acoustic of its permanent home, the Beethoven Haus in Bonn, Brodmann's six octave-spanning instrument is surprisingly nimble and nuanced under Schiff's eloquent fingers. Its lack of unifying sound (relative to the later pianoforte) delineates and emphasises instead the different timbres of its bass, middle and treble voices, its four pedals enabling greater delicacy of shading and mood – all of which Schiff makes dexterous use.

We're deep in the last months of Schubert's life here with the D899 Four Impromptus and bright vivacity of the D946 Three Pieces prefacing the C Minor and A Major Sonatas, but Schiff steadfastly avoids retrospective comment on a life soon to be cut short. There's poignancy, certainly, in the aching Andantino of the A Major and the pensive Adagio of its C Minor sibling, but a dancing effervescence, too, redolent of a composer in his prime, in the infectiously vibrant forward motion of the C Minor's dashing finale.

To the fore throughout is a magisterial freedom of expression abetted by the elastic technique of Schiff's fleet, fluid fingers and agile pedal work in performances of considered intelligence, sensitive emotional engagement and penetrating musicality. Brodmann's fortepiano is a thing of bracing beauty, its signature sound crisply articulate, pleasingly translucent.

Schiff himself seems reborn, or at least now fully persuaded by the fortepiano's antique attractions, putting them, with quiet, compelling virtuosity, to expressive use in a traversal of familiar works that produces one fresh, revealing insight after another. If you only know Schubert on the pianoforte (Schiff's nine-disc set on Decca is as good a place to start as any) these marvellous period-instrument accounts open up endlessly fascinating new vistas on music richer and more intriguing than we yet realise.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

June 2019

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 19, D958; No 20, D959. Four Impromptus, D899. Drei Klavierstücke, D946

Sir András Schiff *pf*

ECM New Series Ⓕ ② 481 7252 (124' • DDD)

Here's an analogy for András Schiff's second disc in his survey of Schubert's late works on his Brodmann fortepiano. Imagine a dark room that you're used to seeing illuminated by electricity and whose every corner you believe you know – that's Schubert's C minor and A major Sonatas, the D899 Impromptus and the D946 *Drei Klavierstücke*. Now turn the light off and hold a candle – or perhaps better a chandelier, since András Schiff's instrument is a six-octave pianoforte with four pedals – step into the same room and observe how everything seems to take on a new shape, colour and meaning, without having changed in essence. Yes, it takes a while for the eyes (ears) to get used to the new light (timbre) and its many subtle variations, and above all to forget about modern lightbulbs. You might never fully get used to the experience; but if you do, you may find yourself moved to tears and wish you could be surrounded by that aura for ever. The second of the *Drei Klavierstücke* alone should be enough to convince you to dwell here enraptured.

It is hard to speak here of drama and a sense of journey in the way that, say, Uchida's readings evoke. And the colours are more or less dictated by the instrument, which, although it allows for softer-than-soft shades and provides some solutions for some of the most awkward of Schubert's instructions, cannot match the quasi-orchestral textures offered by a modern piano. But instead what magical melancholy, and above all modesty, it enables. Schubert never cries loudly; his tears flow quietly. Schiff is a true master of the instrument and knows how to connect its resources to his individual, yet never mannered, Schubertian vision. Nor does he force anything beyond what the instrument allows, not even in the most famously turbulent episodes of the two sonatas. These remain intimate confessions of a generous soul.

Schiff is essentially a more private, less Beethovenian exponent than his principal fortepiano rival, Andreas Staier, and he cultivates a more pronouncedly 'olden' timbre. Both pianists are generous in their application of the sustaining pedal but Schiff's instrument seems to have more distinct registers and variety of timbre. So if you are allergic to the fortepiano, perhaps Staier offers an easier transition; but if your concern is for emotional Schubertian truth, uniquely illuminated, Schiff's new discs are boundlessly rewarding.

Michelle Assay

Sonatas – selected comparison:
Staier (7/97R) (ELAT) 2564 60442-2

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

BBC music

August 2017

BUILDING A LIBRARY

THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER

Johann Sebastian Bach

Kate Bolton-Porciatti travels through all the major and minor keys on her journey to find the finest recordings of Bach's extensive sets of preludes and fugues for solo keyboard

BBC music CHOICE

András Schiff (piano)
(2012)
ECM New Series 476 4827

THE BEST RECORDING ANDRÁS SCHIFF

ANDRÁS SCHIFF'S TWO VERSIONS of the '48' remain timeless classics. The first, a Decca recording from the 1980s, is poised and lyrical, if occasionally verging on the self-indulgent; the later, 2012 version on ECM would be my desert island choice. Schiff's mature vision is more abstract, less sentimental: as such, we hear Bach's music distilled to its essence, rather than the pianist's personality. Informed by the spikier sound of the harpsichord, Schiff avoids the temptation to smudge Bach's textures with the piano's sustaining pedal. Instead, thanks to his impeccable technique and instinctive grasp of the music's architecture, he floats the sound, spinning *cantabile* melodies with the fingers alone (and with a little help from ECM's glossy recording). Contrapuntal lines are sharply etched, so that even the most highly wrought fugues sound transparent as cut glass.

Schiff is unrivalled in his ability to delineate voice parts with subtle weighting and a conversational interplay that ranges from spirited repartee to reflective discourse. Discernible, too, is his synaesthetic perception of keys: A minor he sees 'as red as blood'; D major as brassy gold; C major is the white of innocence; B minor is black, the colour of death. These readings span the gamut of human experience, from the exuberance of youth to the introspection of old age.

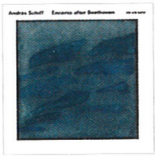
ANDRÁS SCHIFF

GRAMOPHONE

February 2017

'Encores after Beethoven' G

JS Bach Keyboard Partita No 1, BWV825 – Menuet; Gigue. Prelude and Fugue, BWV867 **Beethoven** Andante favori, WoO57 **Haydn** Keyboard Sonata, HobXVI/44 **Mozart** Eine kleine Gigue, 574 **Schubert** Allegretto, D915. Allegro assai, D946 No 3. Hungarian Melody, D81
András Schiff *pf*
ECM New Series Ⓟ 481 4474 (52' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Tonhalle, Zurich, March 2004 – May 2006



I've enjoyed this enormously. The recordings – all live at the Zurich Tonhalle, with applause – are issued for the first time as a collection of the 'encores after Beethoven' András Schiff gave during a cycle of the 32 sonatas between 2004 and 2006. At 52 minutes they amount to a feast of distinguished playing at the classical end of the pianist's repertory – from Bach, Haydn and Mozart through Beethoven to Schubert – and the CD is available as a 'bonus' in the new box collecting together his ECM sonata cycle or as a freestanding single disc. If you think of encores as lightweight, think again. These composers wrote many characteristic pieces that are less ambitious than full-dress sonatas but are not to be dismissed as miniatures. Shorter compositions, yes, but with long thoughts behind them.

The delightful essay in the booklet is by Schiff himself. What to play after an evening of, say, five Beethoven sonatas? Nothing, many pianists would insist. And Schiff is in the ranks of those who, after the last Sonata of all (C minor, Op 111), would regard the addition of anything other than silence as a terrible error of judgement. Yet while not minded to bully people to think as he does, he feels with a why-not attitude that there's no reason to deny an enthusiastic public a few more offerings provided they're related to the previously heard sonatas. Not trifles of course, and not too many, but something.

They range in length and scope here from Mozart's little Gigue in G major, K574 (1'42" and so treacherous to play) to Haydn's two-movement Sonata in G minor (No 44 in Hoboken) that has prompted the attention of several great players, Sviatoslav Richter included (13'37", including all repeats). As a makeweight to Beethoven's two Op 49 Sonatas, designed to be within the reach of amateurs and always included in cycles of the 32 (but where?), it's an inspired choice. So little is vouchsafed by Haydn as to dynamics and expression, and yet this sonata is clearly an exceptional inspiration for an interpreter with Schiff's insights. Listen to him, and indulge me please for banging on about Haydn's piano music yet again.

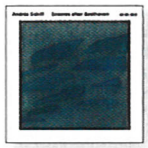
As he suggests, playing Beethoven's *Andante favori* within hailing distance of the Waldstein Sonata – it was originally conceived as the Sonata's middle movement – isn't a bad idea. Nor is the B flat minor Prelude and Fugue from Book 1 of Bach's '48' a contentious choice as an envoi to the *Hammerklavier* Sonata. The '48' was Beethoven's bible, as it had been for Mozart and has been for every composer since. Schiff would like us to accept that his other Bach pieces and especially his three Schubert items are also closely related to the Beethoven given just before. If you know the sonatas well and are perhaps a keen player yourself, listen with surprise and delight to the connections, which will assuredly be more acute if you have the music under your fingers. Don't worry, however, if you haven't. Schiff regards the public as 'a vitally important part of the proceedings' and wants to share the music with all of us.

He tells a story against himself when, aged 23, on his debut at the Vienna Musikverein, he returned to the stage after performing Bartók's Third Concerto with János Ferencsik and played something of Haydn. 'Young man', said Ferencsik, waiting in the wings, 'mark my words. There is nothing worse than a prematurely given encore.' Advice Schiff says he has never forgotten. Did you ever hear the piano sound like a cimbalom? For a last delectable sample of his 'documents of a long journey', let me suggest Schubert's *Hungarian Melody* in B minor, D817. These days he never returns to his homeland and fulminates against it. How lucky we are to have him here. **Stephen Plaistow**

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

BBC music

February 2017



ENCORES AFTER BEETHOVEN

Works by Schubert, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and JS Bach
András Schiff (piano)
ECM 4814474 51 mins

'Young man, mark my words. There is nothing worse than a prematurely given encore.' A 23-year-old András Schiff had just given his Vienna Musikverein debut, and, encouraged by the applause, had decided to return to play some Haydn. But as off he came off stage, the evening's conductor, János Ferencsik, gave him this bit of, in Schiff's words, 'humiliating and unexpected … but at the same time golden advice'.

Fast forward a few decades to when Schiff gave a Beethoven sonata cycle at the Tonhalle in Zurich from 2004 to 2006 (newly released as a box-set, see p101), and the story was quite different, of course. Here, each encore was carefully chosen, seriously dispatched and – we can assume from the applause –warmly welcomed (and not at all premature). This rewarding recording brings them together; if ostensibly this is a series of offcuts, it adds up to a far more satisfying experience than that suggests.

You won't be surprised to learn there's nothing musically flashy or flippant here; no bumble bees flying, for instance. Instead Schiff has put each of his sonata programmes under the microscope to find motifs, moods and models that point to other canonical composers. So we have Schubert, Haydn, Mozart and JS Bach, as well as more Beethoven. The programme ranges from Mozart's slight *Eine kleine Gigue* in G (after Opp. 10 and 13) to Haydn's complete Sonata in G minor (after Opp. 14, 22 and 49) and Schubert's substantial *Allegro assai*, D946. It is played with all the understated but insightful wisdom and natural ease we've come to expect from Schiff, recorded in clear sound by ECM. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

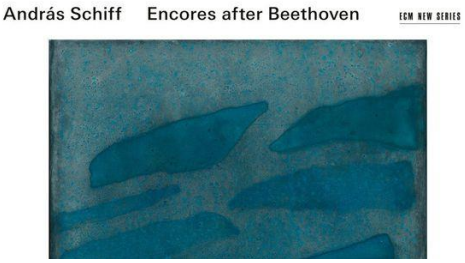
ANDRÁS SCHIFF

New Zealand Herald

February 12, 2017

Andras Schiff, Encores after Beethoven

By William Dart



During the past few years, ECM has released, CD by CD, Andras Schiff's extraordinary performances of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas.

Recorded live, in Zurich's Tonhalle, they represent what the pianist has described as a "stupendous journey," through music that's the equivalent of a vast mountain range, like the Himalayas.

ECM has now made these recordings available as a handsome nine volume set, including a bonus disc, *Encores after Beethoven*, that is also available separately.

After Schiff's highly individual interpretations of familiar Beethoven, including a particularly mist-laden *Moonlight Sonata*, his choice of encores is far from arbitrary. The pianist's eloquent booklet essay reflects on the psychology of performance and audience, including a plea for us to remember that musicians are not machines or jukeboxes.

This is no collection of conciliatory bonbons. All 11 tracks had been planned to extend the music that preceded them, as when Beethoven's popular Andante favori, the original slow movement of the *Waldstein Sonata*, followed the playing of that work.

A meltingly beautiful Bach Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor must have astonished Zurich concertgoers in 2006 when it emerged in the wake of the spectacular fugal finale of the *Hammerklavier Sonata*.

Yet the music on *Encores after Beethoven* also functions as a thoughtful and exquisitely delivered recital in its own right.

Those accustomed to hearing Schubert on Schiff's favoured fortepiano will be surprised at the new sonorities that he draws from a modern instrument for three pieces by that composer; they may even be startled when a final chord takes 10 whole seconds to die away before the audience can applaud.

The ornamentation of two Bach Minuets seems even lighter and wittier than when it first delighted us in 2007 and a briskly adventurous Mozart Gigue makes its piquant point in well under two minutes.

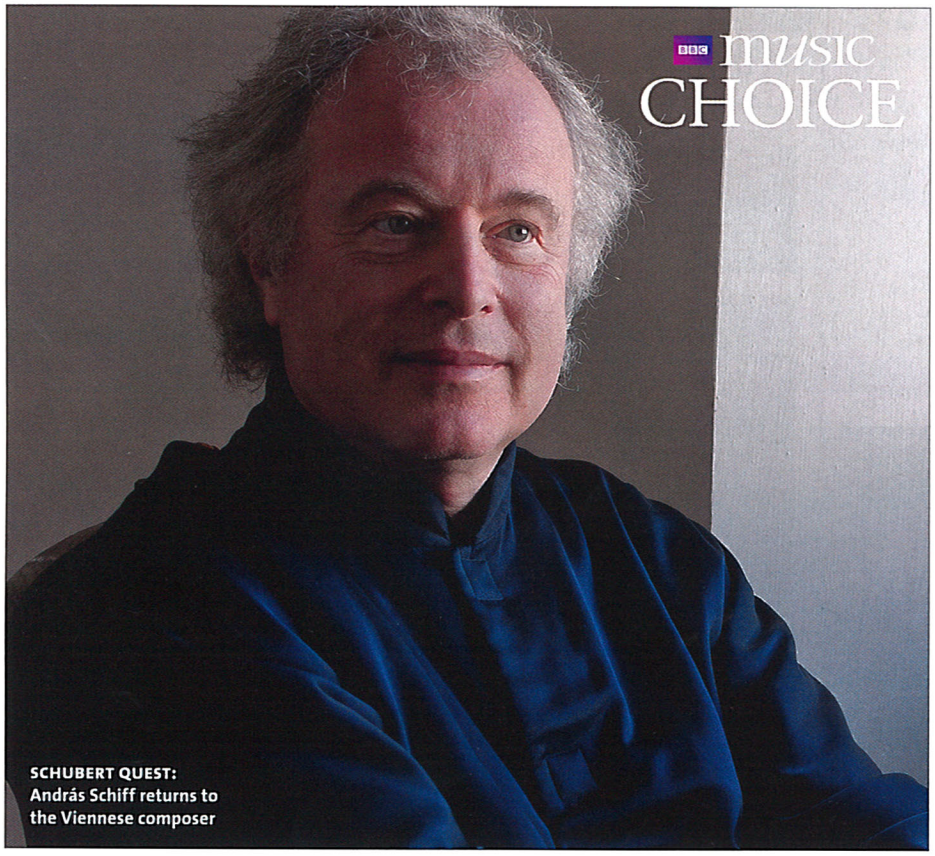
Most revealingly, when Schiff offers a Haydn sonata he first recorded in 1999, its exquisitely modulated textures and phrasing suggest another significant life-journey that this artist has made.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

BBC music

July 2015

RECORDING OF THE MONTH



SCHUBERT QUEST: András Schiff returns to the Viennese composer

The subtle sounds of Schubert

András Schiff turns to fortepiano with fascinating results, says *Erik Levi*

SCHUBERT

Hungarian Melody, D817; Sonata in G, D894; Moments musicaux, D780; Allegretto, D915; Four Impromptus, D935; Sonata in B flat, D960

András Schiff (fortepiano)

ECM New Series 481 1572

150:23 mins (2 discs)

Available at arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

In a series of recordings made for Decca during the 1990s, András Schiff established himself as one of the pre-eminent interpreters of Schubert's piano music. He earned such an accolade largely through performing this repertory on a modern instrument. Here, however, Schiff has decided to present a judiciously varied mixture of sonatas and character pieces on an 1820 Viennese fortepiano made by Franz Brodmann. The results are totally captivating and shed new light on such familiar music.

Schiff justifies his reasons for performing Schubert on the fortepiano not on the basis of historical correctness, but rather because this particular instrument's technical characteristics and mellow sonorities seem exceptionally well attuned to the composer's style.

András Schiff is one of the pre-eminent Schubert interpreters

His Brodmann offers a much more strongly defined treble, middle and bass registers than the modern grand. It also boasts a more subtly varied range of pedals including the familiar soft and sustaining pedals and ones known as the bassoon and moderator pedals which, with the use of different types of cloth to dampen the strings, modify the sound to striking effect. Inevitably the dynamic range is more constricted, allowing far less opportunity to unleash those sudden volcanic outbursts of anger that characterise late Schubert. At the same time, the long stretches of reflective music which predominate here provide him with a far greater possibility of effecting a much more intimate and subtly nuanced sound. Such passages as the gently insistent opening of the G major Sonata, or the ambiguous major/minor key

FURTHER LISTENING

András Schiff

BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 32; Diabelli Variations; Bagatelles, Op. 126

ECM 481 0446 148:55 mins (2 discs)

Available at arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

'Schiff's passion for this music, and his ability to communicate it, is apparent in every bar. He manages the most violent contrasts of texture and harmony, finally reaching the elegant bliss of the closing minuet.' *Christmas 2013*

JS BACH

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Books 1 & 2

ECM 476 4827 243 mins

Available at arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

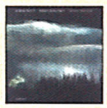
'Schiff's Bach sings and dances, and has a clarity derived from a mesmerising touch and an aversion to the sustain pedal. The crucial organic relationship he establishes between prelude and fugue, meanwhile, remains unimpeachable.' *December 2012*

SCHUMANN

Sonata; Fantasie in C; Papillons; Kinderszenen; Waldszenen

ECM 476 3909 138:11 mins (2 discs)

Available at arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic



'If you want the living definition of virtuoso pedalling, listen to Schiff in the "Aria" movement of Schumann's F sharp minor Sonata. Somehow he manages to create an eerie hallucinogenic sheen around the lines and harmonies, yet the textures never blur.' *November 2011*

juxtapositions that punctuate the first of the *Moments musicaux*, are particularly mesmerising here. It's also fascinating to hone in on Schiff's miraculous control of timbre and his capacity to draw out a wealth of interesting detail from inner parts.

The two discs are cleverly devised to offer mini recitals in their own right, juxtaposing a late sonata with a set of character pieces. Each one opens with an aperitif. In the first, the relatively unknown *Hungarian Melody* sets the scene, its softly strumming harp-like sonorities creating a particularly haunting impact. The second CD brings us the lively yet dark-hued *Allegretto* in C minor, projected with a winning mixture of charm and bittersweet regret, before launching into the later set of Impromptus. Throughout, Schiff encompasses a striking range of moods, most effectively epitomised in the contrasting set of variations that make up the Third Impromptu. But undoubtedly the most revelatory music-making comes in the achingly beautiful account of the B flat Sonata.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

ON THE PODCAST
Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the **BBC Music Magazine podcast**, available free on iTunes or at ***www.classical-music.com***

Q&A

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The pianist tells REBECCA FRANKS *why turning to historical instruments has opened up a new world to him*

This 1820 fortepiano seems ideal for Schubert. Did its sound shape your choice of repertoire?
I've also recorded Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* on it, but I find it's best suited to Schubert really. One could do any Schubert on it, but I wanted to concentrate on the later music from the time of the instrument. I didn't want to do music before 1820. There will be a second part to the recording next year, where I will do the other two posthumous Sonatas, the C minor and the A major, the other set of Impromptus, and the three Klavierstücke.

What possibilities did this instrument open up for you?
There is plenty of tragedy and drama in this music, sometimes even apocalyptic outbursts, but what dominates is the soft and even softer dynamics. On modern pianos, people want brilliance and loudness. Intimacy and softness are not credentials that matter much. The moderator, which modern pianos don't have, allows one to reproduce the softer dynamics marvellously. I did these recordings in a very small hall. There's no point taking a fortepiano into, let's say, the Barbican or the Royal Festival Hall. Schubert's last sonatas are so universal that they can take a large venue, but they are also intimate and confessional.

Will you be exploring other instruments for other composers?
Yes, definitely. This is a new road for me. I want to look for the ideal instrument for everything I play. Chopin, for example, when played on a good Pleyel from his time is completely different. I've already recorded Mozart on his Walter fortepiano, and I would like to explore others, even Brahms, Debussy and Bartók. Bartók had an early 1900s Bösendorfer at home. The cliché today is that his piano music is percussive, but on his own recordings he never played an ugly sound. It was beautiful and transparent. Debussy wanted a piano without hammers, and the colourful Blüthner he had at home really sounds like one.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

GRAMOPHONE
THE CLASSICAL MUSIC MAGAZINE

June 2015

Recording of the Month

Schubert Piano Sonatas Nos 18 & 21, etc

Sir András Schiff *pf*

(ECM New Series)

'Schiff's instrument of choice here – a fortepiano of *c*1820, and one rich in different tones, well captured by ECM – lends a remarkably detailed transparency and intimacy to his fascinating interpretation of these Schubert works.'

SCHUBERT Sonatas, Impromptus & Moments Musicaux

By Stephen Plaistow

This is something special and I urge everyone interested in the discography of Schubert's piano music to hear it. Unsure about the old instrument? Could it really be adequate to encompass the sonorities and range of expression in this wide selection of works, including two of Schubert's greatest sonatas? I would say, do not hold back.

Schiff himself says he was a slow convert, from the times some 30 years ago when people took up embattled positions about 'authenticity', for and against, and arrogance and dogma prevailed. 'Are you one of us?' as Mrs Thatcher might have enquired. Schiff, on the outside looking in, saw that many of the instruments then were not in prime condition and he kept a beady eye too on the practitioners, who were often not awfully good.

But curiosity kept him interested and the joy he has always taken in playing on wonderful instruments, whatever their provenance and pedigree, with each of them individual in character, sustained him. He believes, I am sure, that there is the closest connection between an instrument and the music written for it; and while he does not deny himself the pleasure of playing Schubert on the modern piano, he counts it as important to retain the illumination and inspiration that are to be gained from the Viennese fortepiano of Schubert's day.

There were more than a hundred makers in the city and the instrument here, from around 1820, is by Franz Brodmann, brother of the better known Joseph whose apprentice Ignaz Bösendorfer took over the firm in 1828. It came into the possession of the Austro-Hungarian imperial family, and the last Austrian emperor and Hungarian king took it with him when he was exiled to Switzerland after the First World War. Its restoration in 1965 was carefully done and András Schiff acquired it in 2010; since then its home

has been the Beethoven Haus in Bonn, on loan, where this fine recording was made a year ago. Whenever he plays Schubert, he says, its sweet tone and its sound in a small hall will always remain in the back of his mind.

Its basic speaking tone is *piano* and of course it cannot match a modern instrument in strength and brilliance. Yet its dynamic range is wide and when the 'moderator' pedal is in action – there are four pedals in all – the softest *ppp* passages, which are not rare in Schubert, can be realised as a nuance distinct from the *pianissimos* produced by the soft pedal. In the other direction it is capable of a degree beyond *fortissimo* as well, and at all dynamic levels the sound carries, with a tender mellowness of timbre as the norm. Concert-goers found that, with a master pianist, it easily inhabited the space of the Wigmore Hall, where Schiff gave acclaimed recitals on it at the beginning of this year. If you're quick you may be able to catch him in Oxford in August.

As we heard in his earlier recording for ECM of the Beethoven *Diabelli* Variations and the last set of Bagatelles (12/13), this Brodmann is no shrinking violet. It encompasses Schubert's mighty climaxes and dramatic eruptions as well as those passages of inwardness and quietude when this composer touches us 'like nobody else'. The point to be stressed is that nothing is lacking: instrument and music are one, ideally matched, convincing us that the one couldn't have been written the way it is without the other. Try the exquisite Allegretto in C minor, D915, once memorably recorded by Schnabel, for a vivid sample of the world of sound that the Brodmann opens up (disc 2, tr 1); or the first-movement exposition of the B flat major Sonata, D960, for a picture of how it matches the ambition of Schubert's writing on the broadest scale (disc 2, tr 6).

Let us not forget the messenger! I have long counted András Schiff as one of those artists able to surprise as well as delight – only the best do that. In his favoured repertories of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert (and his Haydn, Schumann and Bartók must not be overlooked), he has shown a continual deepening of response together with many new insights, and he has kept his music-making fresh. What we have here, which is hugely welcome, has come about through work done following a realisation that his former knowledge of historical keyboard instruments had been perfunctory. I cannot think of anyone of his calibre who has mastered the fortepiano as well as the modern piano and shown such distinction on both. In Schubert he has a claim to be considered sovereign among today's players, carrying forward the reading and interpretation of him into areas that others have not fully explored. I would not be without the recent achievements of Mitsuko Uchida, Imogen Cooper, Paul Lewis and others; nor of course of Alfred Brendel. Schiff is, perhaps, Brendel's successor.

I like above all the way he conveys Schubert's wonderful instinct for the sound of the instrument. This side of the composer has not perhaps been celebrated as well as it might. These days we do better at understanding how dramatic the sonatas are and the part that dark forces play in them. Certainly we underestimate Schubert if we regard him as a permanent lyricist. And I don't believe his sonatas are bounded by the poetic melancholy and air of resignation that some players give us to excess. It's astounding that he developed a range of piano sound in the way he did, given that he was not a virtuoso player and didn't even own an instrument for periods of his life. This was born, surely, out of deep love for the piano of his time such as this lovely example, with its transparency as well as fullness of sound, the distinct characters of its registers – treble, middle and bass, not homogenised – and its capacity to place the elements of melody and harmony in new relationships of colour and balance. What a lot he added to piano writing. Savour and enjoy it here.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

GRAMOPHONE
December 2013

Schiff plays major works on two pianos

Beethoven

Diabelli Variations, Op 120 (two recordings). Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111. Six Bagatelles, Op 126
András Schiff *pfs*
ECM New Series Ⓜ ② 481 1446 (149' • DDD)

Diabellis and more on two pianos from Schiff

The discography of the *Diabelli* Variations is already distinguished but here's a remarkable addition to it. Two performances are offered, one on an original piano of the early 1820s (by Franz Brodmann, a little-known Viennese maker), the other on a modern grand by Bechstein, built in 1921, that has survived to our day without major restorations. Why? Because, in Schiff's words, it's always a joy to play on wonderful instruments, and in the course of studying Beethoven's work he saw an opportunity to capitalise on good fortune by presenting views of it in two different sound worlds. So, take your pick: the Brodmann, if you want the experience of a lovely *Hammerflügel* from near the work's source; or the beautiful Bechstein from the interwar years when concert and recording artists could enjoy a greater variety of piano sound than has existed since. I do like Schiff. He brings an agenda with him (and why not?), but throughout the double CD he delights with insights and a feast of fine playing, excellently recorded; and his focus on the music never wavers.

It's been said that there's no other work that contains so many different features of Beethoven's genius. The *Diabelli* Variations are a tough call, and of course one wants to hear as many fine versions as one can. Brendel's, for me, has long been a benchmark, in particular for his wondrous ease in conveying the 'profound levity' of late Beethoven. But Schiff's mastery of the early piano enables him to bring to the fore another important aspect that concert performances today often overlook: their intimacy. The Viennese fortepiano, even a sophisticated example such as this, was essentially a domestic instrument. When quite close to it you can be invited to overhear the performer, and I'm sure this was Beethoven's intention, not infrequently. In the modern concert hall, which he never knew, we tend to expect, as a norm, a projection of his piano music in terms of a constant dramatic articulation. A falsification? Well, it can be; but it never is here, and I'll risk the suggestion, too, that Schiff's immersion in Bach is a good direction to come from when attempting the heights and depths of these variations. Sample the 'homage to Bach' Fughetta (Var 24 – tr 27 on the Bechstein version on disc 1, and tr 25 on the Brodmann on disc 2). Praise be as well that appropriate acoustics have been taken into account: the chamber music hall in the Bonn Beethovenhaus is ideal for the fortepiano and the Bechstein resounds perfectly in the Auditorium of Swiss Radio in Lugano.

And there's more. Disc 1 is completed by a fine account of Beethoven's last sonata, the C minor, Op 111, that touches high distinction in the Arietta second movement; and the recital on the Brodmann concludes with Beethoven's last thoughts for the piano, the Six Bagatelles, Op 126. These fit the 1820s piano like a glove, their 'open pedal' effects not excepted, and they glow with a range of colour, light and shade that Schiff modulates expertly.

Do not hold back. I started out with feelings of uncertainty as to the fortepiano's adequacy to encompass the ranges of expression and sonorities explored by Beethoven in these late works. They reach out, after all, to the limits of known territory in his day. Unimportant passing reservations aside, I've been convinced of the success with which pianist and both instruments inhabit everything undertaken here and meet its challenges. It's an impressive achievement. **Stephen Plaistow**

Diabelli Vars – selected comparison:
Brendel (8/90) (PHIL) 426 232-2PH

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

November 13, 2013

Classical Playlist: Andras Schiff

BEETHOVEN: Diabelli Variations

Andras Schiff, piano

(ECM)

The predictably penetrating, intense playing of the mighty Diabellis on this disc is to be expected from Andras Schiff, but there's a twist: he does them twice, first on a 1921 Bechstein and then on a Hammerflügel fortepiano from Beethoven's era. The result is a primer on pianism, rounded out by Beethoven's final piano sonata and the Opus 126 Bagatelles. *(Zachary Woolfe)*

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ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Guardian

October 3, 2013

Beethoven: Piano Sonata Op 111; Diabelli Variations; Bagatelles Op 126 – review

András Schiff
(ECM, two CDs)

By Andrew Clements

★★★★★

There are two sets of Diabelli Variations in András Schiff's collection of Beethoven's last three piano works, both in their very different ways period performances. On the first of the two discs, which also includes the C minor Sonata Op 111, Schiff plays the instrument he used for his memorable Beethoven cycle at the Wigmore Hall last season, a Bechstein, made in 1921, on which Wilhelm Backhaus regularly gave recitals and made recordings. On the second, which follows the Diabelli with the Op 126 Bagatelles, he plays a fortepiano made in Vienna by Franz Brodmann around 1820; Schiff now owns the instrument and has lent it to the Beethoven-haus in Bonn, where the recordings were made.

Both discs are enthralling. In the sleeve notes Schiff makes an eloquent case for resisting what he sees as the "globalisation" of piano music, in which everything is played on a Steinway. "In the right hands [it] is a marvellous piano," he says, "but not for everything. Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert require something more than power, brilliance and cool objectivity." Anyone who heard the Wigmore recitals will recognise the cool clarity of the sound the Bechstein makes and the elegance Schiff achieves with it, whether in the transcendence of the last movement of Op 111 or the quicksilver changes of mood in the variations, but it's the version of the Diabelli on the 19th-century instrument that is the more remarkable.

That performance revels in the very lack of homogeneity in the soundworld of the instrument itself, with its distinctly different character in each register, and with the ability to change those characteristics using the four pedals. Balances and perspectives shift constantly within the music, and Schiff exploits the effects quite wonderfully – thinning the sound to a silvery thread with the una corda pedal, producing a wonderfully veiled quality in the middle registers with the moderator, or a snarling buzz in the bass with the bassoon. The whole world of the variations opens out, and though it is worlds away in sensibility from the whistles and bells of the extrovert fortepiano version by Andreas Staierthat came out last year, Schiff's account is at least as revelatory.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

November 23, 2012

Musical Performances Given, Now to Give Again

Classical Music on Disc, on DVD and in Books

A classical music collection can grow in fits and starts as enthusiasts discover and rediscover the performances of favored composers by favored artists, sometimes long after they've been recorded. The classical music critics of The New York Times might be of help. They have compiled this list of gift ideas culled from CDs, DVDs, boxed sets and books newly out or newly appreciated.

BACH: 'THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER,' BOOKS 1 AND 2 Andras Schiff, pianist. (ECM New Series 2270-73, four CDs, $54.82.) Those who weren't lucky enough to attend Mr. Schiff's recent performances of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" at the 92nd Street Y can enjoy his masterly interpretation on a new ECM release. Mr. Schiff's playing is all the more remarkable, since he uses no pedal at all, a feat requiring impressive control and legato. Playing with crystalline clarity and a rhythmic buoyancy that highlights the works' dance elements, Mr. Schiff reveals the contrapuntal brilliance and the joy, wit and melancholy of these 24 preludes and fugues. - **Vivien Schweitzer**

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

October 7, 2012

CD review: András Schiff plays Bach

By Joshua Kosman

Classical

BACH
THE WELL- TEMPERED CLAVIER
ANDRÁS SCHIFF
ECM NEW SERIES (4 CDs)
$56.97

Pianist András Schiff arrives at Davies Symphony Hall on Sunday afternoon to begin a four-recital residency devoted to Bach's keyboard music. The first two installments cover "The Well-Tempered Clavier," and if you need added incentive to get a ticket, this sleek and extravagantly beautiful new recording should do the trick. Schiff has long been an eloquent interpreter of Bach on the modern piano, bringing out the music's contrapuntal texture with extraordinary clarity. But his treatment of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" adds a level of tenderness and lyricism that hasn't always been so pointedly in evidence. Each prelude and fugue brings with it not a new key, but a new expressive sound world, by turns reflective or forthright, aggressive or languorous. And through it all, Schiff keeps a spotlight - not too starkly, but without letting any details slip - on the interplay of individual melodic lines that is the essence of Bach's fugal writing. The result is at once a brilliant structural essay and a rhapsodic display of warmth and tact.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Boston Globe

October 6, 2012

Reviews: Recently released classical music CDs

By David Weininger

BACH: THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER

András Schiff, piano

(ECM)

András Schiff recorded much of Bach's piano music for Decca in the 1980s, including both books of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Those versions were sonically exquisite but oddly inert; Schiff made the piano sound beautiful but there was little dramatic intensity to the playing, and his habit of spotlighting particular voices in the textures seemed precious rather than musically enlightening.

More than a quarter-century later, Schiff has returned to Bach's 48 preludes and fugues for ECM, and the differences are startling. His tone has become earthier, less glossy. According to the liner notes, he uses no pedal at all on the new recording, yet the piano timbre has more resonance than Glenn Gould's ultra-dry sound. More important, each individual piece has a clear narrative shape, and the tonal beauty and contrapuntal precision are now at the service of the form. This gives each part of Bach's mosaic a forward momentum and spontaneity that was lacking in the earlier version.

Picking highlights seems somewhat silly in a project this vast, but the entries in C-sharp minor, E major, and B minor in both books show the power of Schiff's new conception: Tempos are perfectly chosen, the counterpoint is sharply defined, and with the entry of each voice, the music seems to strive for some greater, mysterious power.

According to ECM, Schiff will perform Bach's "Goldberg Variations" at Jordan Hall in November 2013.

Reviews

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

bachtrack

March 25, 2025

Sir András Schiff and Cappella Andrea Barca get to the heart of Bach

By Nahoko Gotoh

When was the last time I listened to Bach's keyboard concertos performed on a modern grand? To be honest, I can't remember, as most orchestral Bach I hear these days are on period instruments. Which was why I was slightly apprehensive about this concert by Sir András Schiff and Cappella Andrea Barca (a group he formed with friends a quarter of a century ago), one of the programmes they are presenting during their current (and farewell) Asian tour. Any qualms were dispelled within the first few seconds. Schiff and his trusted musicians transcended such distinctions and got to the heart of Bach's music.

Often with harpsichord performances of these concertos, the balance between soloist and ensemble is problematic, but there were no such worries here. The Bösendorfer was placed in the centre (rather than in front) of the ensemble. It was a fairly large formation – 9-8-5-4-2 (violins and basses placed antiphonally – which filled the resonant 2000-seater vineyard-style Muza Kawasaki Concert Hall easily. But despite the size, their playing was like enlarged chamber music. There was no hierarchy – everyone breathed together, trusted each other and made music symbiotically. Essentially the players are all chamber musicians, and several are also experts in historically informed performance, including Leader Erich Höbarth, so stylistically they combined the best of modern and period playing.

Schiff played all six concertos (BWV1052-56 and 1058) from memory, which for someone who begins every morning with a dose of Bach is probably nothing special, but remarkable all the same. All the virtues of his Bach playing was evident here: clarity of touch and warmth of tone, meticulous but natural phrasing and articulation, classical poise, and sense of direction. In other words, every note was where it should be, with hardly any pedalling. In these works, which are more in the concerto grosso style than the subsequent piano concertos, the keyboard is often part of the orchestral fabric, and Schiff seemed just as content playing continuo as solos. The cellos, who often would share the bass line with the left hand part, seemed like the extension of Schiff's left hand.

Four concertos were performed in the first half. The D major concerto (transcription of the E major Violin Concerto) was sunny and joyful, the F minor concerto had gravitas, the G minor and the E major concertos featured lively dialogues between soloist and ensemble. Interestingly, Schiff provided harmonic links between the concertos in the form of a chorale-like passage leading us into the next key – a

harmony lesson. The A major and the majestic D minor concertos followed in the second half. Basically, every movement was a gem, but in particular, there were moments of breathtaking beauty and elegance in the slow movements including the *Largo* of the F minor concerto, a cantabile melody unfolding over gentle pizzicato strings, and the Siciliano in the E major concerto featuring some juicy, almost jazzy, chromaticism. The concluding D minor concerto, possibly originally an organ concerto, was the most virtuosic and majestic.

And as if Schiff hadn't played enough (he doesn't do things by halves!), he offered the first movement of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto as an encore, with Höbarth and flute colleague Wally Hase as fellow soloists. With reduced strings forces, this too was an intimate and convivial performance, including the expertly played keyboard cadenza. And for the fervent Japanese fans, he gave one final encore – his signature piece – the Aria from the *Goldberg Variations*.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

ludwigvan TORONTO

November 7, 2023

SCRUTINY | Sir András Schiff Makes A Stunning Return To Koerner Hall

By Joseph So

Brilliant. Mesmerizing. Idiosyncratic. Mercurial. Four adjectives that come easily to mind when describing the great Hungarian pianist Andras Schiff — oh yes, add *great* to the list. Having attended many of his recitals, I can honestly say a Sir Andras recital is never boring. He is now called Sir, as he is a knighted British citizen of Hungarian parentage.

Schiff can be unpredictable. I was in the audience many years ago when he stunned everyone by walking off-stage in the middle, only to return with a bottle of water for a front-row gentleman whose coughing was bothering the pianist. Others have seen him telling the audience off for making too much noise or walking in and out.

Thankfully, his return to Koerner Hall on Sunday was all sunshine and smiles. It was a full house, packed to the rafters including the choir loft and stage seats. Sold out concerts are rare in post-Pandemic times, and tickets for this concert were quite pricey. Yet there was no a seat to be had, a testament to his drawing power.

There was zero programme information before the concert. I was expecting at least an insert, but there was absolutely nothing. It turned out that Schiff wanted to introduce each work to the audience — and I paraphrase: "...some people plan the programme two years in advance, very predictable...I want spontaneity!" At times, I felt like I was in a musicology course I took as an undergraduate!

His first piece, the Bach Prelude and Fugue from the Well tempered Clavier Book 1, didn't have his customary

refined expressivity and sheen. I thought to myself — hmmm, what's happening? It was foolish of me to worry, as he was just warming up. For the rest of the recital, it was vintage Andras Schiff. I was blown away by his Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, played more romantically than I have ever heard.

All in all, it was an extraordinarily generous programme of Bach, Haydn, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Schubert. After having played for nearly an hour in the first half, he announced his next piece was Schumann's Davidsbündlertänze. I thought he was just doing a selection, but he played all 30 minutes of it. The first half ending up nearly an hour and a half.

The second half was a bit shorter, but just as marvellous, beginning with Mendelssohn, whom he called "underrated," an adjective he also applied to Haydn. He played Mendelssohn's Variations sérieuses with clarity and economy, quite a contrast to the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue. In fact, everything he did this afternoon was just exemplary — I was totally blown away by the Beethoven "Tempest" sonata, a felicitous balance of power and lyricism. When Schiff is on, nobody can beat him.

After such a huge programme, the grateful audience gave him tidal waves of ovations. He rewarded us with Schubert's Hungarian Melody in B Minor — including the little aside that "…Schubert was no Hungarian…" That said, he probably would agree that Schubert captures beautifully the folksy spirits of Hungarian Gypsies. A marvellous end to a recital destined for the memory bank.

Schiff has already played in Koerner Hall half a dozen times. Despite looking a bit superannuated both in appearance and body language, Schiff is only 69 and still at the height of his pianistic powers. Let's hope he'll continue to return for another half a dozen times at least, and entertain us with his brilliant artistry and inimitable stage persona.

bachtrack

November 6, 2023

"Life's too short for bad music": Sir András Schiff returns to Toronto's Koerner Hall

By Michelle Assay

Just ten minutes longer and Sir András Schiff's epic concert at Koerner Hall – his seventh in the 14 years the Hall has been open – would have beaten the production of *King Lear* I attended a week earlier in Stratford, Ontario. Schiff's programme may not have contained as many deaths and tribulations, but it was certainly full of drama and surprises, especially as these days the soon-to-be 70-year-old refuses to announce his programme prior to his recitals. "Since Covid, I've acquired a new habit of trying to refresh classical music," he explained from the stage, claiming that concerts have become very predictable. "You wouldn't like to know what you are having for dinner in two years' time…"

In the absence of a programme and programme-notes, Schiff turned the event into something akin to a lecture-recital – epic in length but also intimate in tone – wherein each piece was preceded by his explanatory remarks, contextualising and even introducing musical snippets at the piano. The exception was the opening Bach C major Prelude and Fugue, which was also the only part of the concert that felt a little flat. Was this Schiff simply warming up or trying to emulate the limitations of the clavichord, an instrument he has come to love in recent years? Whatever the cause, by the time of the Fugue, freedom and spontaneity, paired with his hallmark contrapuntal intelligence, had properly settled in, and these qualities continued to impress in the two

following Bach pieces: the charming early *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother* and the formidable *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*.

Reviewing Schiff's recent Bach recording on the clavichord, which includes both latter works, I compared the experience to the opening up of a new world, courtesy of a master-cleanser who unclogs our minds and ears from the burden of overtly statement-making performances. Schiff was equally revelatory on the modern full-sized Bösendorfer, his favourite "Viennese accent"-ed instrument, as he put it, with its warm, mellow middle and bass range that perfectly suited his pianism and (most of the) programme. For the *espressivo* questionings of Haydn's *Variations in F minor*, Schiff told us that for him, "If Mozart composed in poetry, Haydn did so in prose." Yet this was the most poetic prose imaginable.

Haydn's dramatic contrasts – symbolic of Earth and Heaven, according to Schiff – then gave way to Schumann's whirlwind face-off between his two alter-egos in *Davidsbündlertänze*. Here the extrovert Florestan was tempestuous without being weighed down, whimsical without being sarcastic; but it was the hypnotic dreamlands of Eusebius that stole the show, an object lesson in Schumann's requested *Innigkeit* (inwardness). Only occasionally did the instrument's under-powered mid-treble register get in the way of clarity.

Among other things, this was a masterclass in efficient, minimal pedalling, which enabled translucency even in the midst of complex counterpoint, as in Mendelssohn's feverish, Bach-inspired *Variations sérieuses*^. That made it all the more remarkable when the pedals were deployed for expressive effect in Schumann and Beethoven. Schiff carefully used the words "supposed to" about the contested Shakespeare-related genesis of the "Tempest" Sonata. Yet the sheer freedom and inventiveness, the dramatic power and structural depth of each movement, the mesmerising mysteries of the finale (all too often reduced to an étude) certainly deserved the label "Shakespearean".

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

La Scena Musicale®

November 6, 2023

András Schiff's Incredible Korner Hall Performance

By Paula E. Robinson

I first met András Schiff in 1984. I was privileged to be the conductor when he came to play Mozart with the CJRT Orchestra at Massey Hall. At the time I was struck by his astounding musicality – he seemed to know everything and couldn't stop talking about it – but also the ebullience of his personality and his great sense of humour.

It didn't hurt that we both loved Chinese food too. And I couldn't help but be reminded of a certain physical resemblance to the Mozart we see in his brother-in-law Joseph Lange's unfinished portrait. We had a great time making music together, and András returned three years later for another Mozart concerto. Now, almost 60 years since that first encounter, Sir András Schiff was in Toronto for a recital at Koerner Hall. And it turned out to be among the most memorable concerts one could ever hope to hear.

Ticket buyers were probably surprised to learn that Schiff had not announced any program for this concert. They were told he would announce the program from the stage. And so he did with comments that were both witty and enlightening. By way of explanation, Schiff told the audience that concerts had become very predictable and needed to be refreshed. He added that he found it off-putting to see people in the audience reading program notes while he was playing the piano. It must be noted that there are very few classical artists who could fill a hall today without announcing a detailed program in advance. It is an indication of Sr András Schiff's stature that there are plenty of people in Toronto prepared to buy a ticket to hear him play *anything*.

Schiff began the afternoon by walking to the piano and, without comment, playing the opening Prelude and Fugue from Bach's Well-Tempered Klavier. In

recent years Schiff has devoted much of his time to the music of Bach, so it was not surprising to hear him say Bach was "the greatest composer of all times." He proceeded to demonstrate why in wonderfully-crafted performances of the Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother and the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue.

Schiff turned next to Haydn's Variations in F minor after noting that Haydn is one of the most under-appreciated composers. His 1793 Variations are a remarkable and neglected masterpiece, and Schiff surely played it as the composer might have wished: with skill and affection. In his introductory comments to the piece, Schiff also confessed that in his youth he had been "stupid" and often criticized the proponents of historically informed performance. Only later did he come to appreciate what could be learned from playing the fortepiano and the clavichord. He now owns several such instruments himself.

Schiff closed the first half of the concert with a long, infrequently-played work by Robert Schumann: Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6. In his introduction, Schiff talked about how Schumann had created a League of David, essentially a group of his friends, to meet at a coffee house in Leipzig to talk about music. The members of the group saw themselves as 'progressives' in music as compared to the conservative 'Philistines' who they aligned themselves against. Schumann also invented two characters, Florestan and Eusebius, who represented two sides of his own personality. Florestan was the wild and impetuous side while Eusebius was the milder more poetic side of his nature. In Davidsbündlertänze, each of the dances or character pieces is ascribed by the composer to either Florestan or Eusebius – or both. It is delightful and multifaceted music that Schiff brought to life with appropriate vehemence and lyricism, but not before drawing our attention to its ending: twelve low Cs played softly and indicating the coming of midnight.

After intermission came Mendelssohn's Variations sérieuses Op. 54. Even though this piece was written as part of a campaign to raise funds for a bronze statue of Beethoven in Bonn, Schiff drew attention to the influence of Bach in the music, especially the famous Chaconne for solo violin. It was an interesting observation and helped illuminate the performance.

Finally, Schiff played Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor Op. 31 No. 2, "The Tempest." Beethoven didn't give the work its nickname, but one cannot help but be struck by its ferocious outbursts. On the other hand, as Schiff pointed out, it is the only Beethoven piano sonata in which each of the three movements begins and ends "pianissimo." Before playing it, Schiff also discussed Beethoven's unconventional use of the sustaining pedal in the opening bars. As we all know, Beethoven became increasingly deaf during the course of his life. Yet he had a remarkable sense of what a difference the pedal could make to artistically blur contrasting harmonies on the piano. Schiff took generally slow tempi in his performance, but made extensive use of rubato to fully reveal the inner life of the music.

For an encore Schiff offered Schubert's Hungarian Melody. This was Sir András Schiff's seventh appearance at Koerner Hall and I doubt that it will be his last. There are few artists who can play the classics from Bach to Brahms and Bartók with anything like comparable mastery. And fewer still who can speak about music from such a depth of knowledge and experience and with such an obvious love for communicating the joy of music.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

ConcertoNet.com

April 11, 2023

The Art of Recital or When Heavenly Length Needs Not to Equal Hellish Boredom

By Roman Markowicz

Sir András Schiff has been one of the regulars who has graced us with his incomparable art year after year. Alas, he didn't appear in New York for several years; first there were cancellations caused by the pandemic and then–worse yet–health problems that prevented the ever-reliable artist to cancel his engagements here. This spring, Sir András appears in our city as an artist-in-residence of the New York Philharmonic performing a slew of concerts and acting as recitalist, soloist and conductor with the orchestra, then as a soloist as his friend leads the NY Phil, and finally as a chamber musician, a part that alas, he performs in New York far too seldom.

His recital is presented as part of series called "Artist Spotlight," offered to musicians of special importance, who curate their own vision of how the program should be developed and delivered. Over the last few years, Sir András has "re-imagined" the way he presents his recitals–a trend started during the pandemic for many musicians. As he indicated in an interview and also from the stage, he was not happy to play a program he agreed on several years in advance, as is often the case with famous musicians. He claimed he preferred the artistic freedom to play a program he feels like playing. Sometimes he also refers to the creation of his programs in culinary terms, naming them as music "à la carte," as in the case of a superb restaurant where a chef prepares dishes of high quality, but without announcing them in advance to the patrons.

Nowadays Sir András also announces his sections from the stage. He was never averse to addressing his audiences (in the past it was sometimes a plea to the patrons to allow music to be audible past their coughing...); his BBC lectures on Beethoven Sonatas, or his concert-length commentaries on Bach's *Goldberg* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* here in NYC, dwell in memory to this day. His comments are delivered in a manner similar to everything else he does: they are never obtuse, they are precise and informative without being too detailed, they contain an appropriate dose of his sometime understated, sometimes biting humor, and they illustrate the thinking process of this remarkable musician. Maestro Schiff has mastered another very important lesson which is: he knows when to stop. It is not as common among the talking-musicians as one would have imagined.

As for the repertory, in recent years he stays close to his favorites: Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert, and as he slyly declares, "why not play the

best music there is?" For this New York Philharmonic-sponsored recital, he stayed close to the composers presented in the orchestra's program: Haydn, Mozart and Schubert. Of course, we didn't know the works in advance. The piano used for this recital was a splendid Bösendorfer Grand rather than the usual Steinway that our pianist often favors. It was easy to understand his preference; this Viennese-made instrument produced not only a gorgeous sound–YES, the pianist's fingers surely helped!–but also quite distinct registers for the top, middle and particularly rich but not thunderous bottom, and in the repertory we heard, it made a huge difference.

When Mr. Schiff appeared on stage, he went straight to the piano and commenced to play the Aria from, what he refers to, as the "so-called Goldberg Variations." When he picked up his microphone and greeted the audience, he declared that it was an encore, and the reason for playing the encore at the beginning of the program rather than at the end was connected to the work he is playing at the end, after which one should not play one more note. In his usual self-effacing, droll manner he informed his audience that this evening he will play only the great works since life is too short to play bad music. As far a choice of composers, the program was devoted to Haydn, Mozart and Schubert: the same ones whose works would be presented at his orchestral concerts with the New York Philharmonic just three days later.

First however, he returned to the music of his idol J.S. Bach, and offered us his early work, *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother*, which is a short suite of six short segments, each illustrating the parting procedure. As he talked us through this charming piece, he illustrated with one hand–the other holding the microphone–its themes and motifs, which included even the sound of a neighing horse. The concluding jaunty fugue is based on the coachman's bugle and if it sounds familiar even to the people who are not acquainted with this Capriccio, it might be because it bears a strong resemblance to the other quite famous work, Glenn Gould's witty parody called *So you want to write a fugue?* (which is actually a very well-written takeoff on a real fugue). It may be my imagination, but Sir András' typical style of Bach playing, to which we have been accustomed for decades, might have changed a bit: what remains is his incredible clarity and delineation of voicing, lively spirit and a sense of dance; what seemed to be different is a slightly softer, more caressing touch, which might be attributed to the Maestro's daily practicing on the clavichord, known for its soft sound, and no need to use any force. Altogether it was an admirable rendition of a work Schiff champions quite frequently. The work is in the key of B flat Major and our artist remained with that tonality for the next work, Mozart *Sonata K.570*.

Schiff's Mozart playing is also the stuff of legends but there are some salient characteristics that seem to be always present. In matters of tempo, he follows the example of two other great pianists, Polish Mieczyslaw Horszowski and German Wilhelm Kempff; they were quite strange soul mates, and I always thought that Schiff's penchant for the tempo choices is influenced by those two. Therefore, the allegros are never too fast, and each note is delineated and has meaning, and the adagios are never dragging and never lose the pulse–their vocal line couldn't be vocal if one was not able to sing it! The opera is never far away from any Mozart composition, and creating the operatic climate is never far

away from Schiff. So we had some playful change of characters in the opening Allegro, some operatic cantilena in Adagio, and playfulness in finale Allegretto. In the past, when commenting on Schiff's Mozart's interpretations, I always mentioned his art of playing fast notes in a melodic manner, of not allowing any blurred notes, and of delivering melodic lines that sing and speak in the vocal manner.

The other important aspect of Mozart performances is the manner in which the ornamentation is applied. Ornamentation is nothing more than embellishing the melodic line, and serves the same purpose as traditional make-up: skillfully applied, it enhances one's appearance, but poorly applied...well, we have a different, less appealing, outcome. Sir András' idea of ornamenting baroque or classical scores seems to be that less is more. Thus he was quite judicious in applying added notes to a Mozart sonata: when he did, it was always in impeccable style. In *Sonata K.570*, he added just a bit in the 1st movement, a bit more in vocal lines of the Adagio and he went ahead in the finale Allegretto. One could say that it was a master class in understatement.

The next pair of works was again by J.S. Bach and W.A. Mozart, and here Sir András provided us with a fascinating narrative. He stressed that Mozart's interest in improving his counterpoint skills was related to the visit at the important private collection belonging to the Baron van Swieten and studying scores of J.S. Bach, who by that time was practically forgotten. One may recall van Swieten as one of the characters in the legendary film *Amadeus*. From that point, Mozart's compositions, in the words of our narrator, gained a new dimension, and became more complex and interesting. Then Sir András showed us perhaps the most remarkable thematic relation between the opening themes of J.S. Bach Ricercare from *Das Musicalische Opfer* and that of Mozart's *Fantasia in C Minor*. The theme of Mozart is a carbon copy of Bach's theme, first used when the Kantor from Leipzig visited the German town of Potsdam and there, the story goes, he met the celebrated King Frederick the Great. That enlightened ruler was also an excellent flutist and quite a decent composer. He presented Bach with the theme–Schiff called it "the royal theme"–to improvise a fugue, which Bach apparently did so skillfully that he came back home significantly richer. Bach's own dissatisfaction with the original improvisation called for the theme to be reworked into a large-scale, several-movement composition based on that "royal" theme, or a theme "to fit the King". As for Mozart's Fantasia often combined in piano recitals with the Sonata bearing the same key, Schiff sees in it an operatic scene, a mini *Don Giovanni* squeezed into under 10 minutes. He demonstrated the themes that would/could belong to Don Ottavio, Donna Anna or Leporello. Even if it might not have been Mozart's own intention, Maestro Schiff makes a compelling case for his own purpose. Incidentally Bach's *Ricercare a Tre* (three-part fugue) was the only work the New York audiences had not heard previously, as it is in a relatively new position in the pianist's vast repertory. Fantasia received an appropriately dramatic rendering with the opera references illuminated nicely.

We stayed with the key of C Minor for the next major work of the program, Haydn's *Sonata in C Minor*, which this time our pianist referred to as the first great piano sonata, a statement with which I have no intention of disagreeing; it is also a very dark,

proto-Romantic and proto-Beethovenian work in three movements. There is more room for drama than elegance and it has more rustic character than one coming from aristocratic salons. András Schiff was Haydn's champion for the longest time: if today he regrets that this composer is still underappreciated, my own regret is that Sir András abandoned this master more than two decades ago; wouldn't it be splendid if he went back to the recording studio and continued the extraordinary cycle that he prematurely abandoned in the late 90s?

Just as we thought that the time of intermission arrived, Maestro treated us to yet another exemplary, consummate interpretation of Haydn's *Variations in F Minor*: that work that sometimes seems to lead nowhere or sound just boring under the hands of less capable pianists, sounded revelatory as presented by Schiff. In particular, it gave this listener a new appreciation for this complex work, whose trajectory eludes most performances, with the result of degradation into monotonous sobriety. Not in this case: I felt like I was hearing aspects of the composition that I had never previously encountered. And thus 110 minutes after we started, we arrived at the end of the first segment of the program. Did I mention that all of those works Maestro performed without the score, which also applied to second half of the program, itself an hour in length.

Sir András commenced the second "smaller half" with words of thanks to the audience for staying. Well, the fault was not entirely of the folks that were misled by the announcement in the program booklet that the concert will be offered without an intermission. So some folks left unintentionally and God, did they miss some fantastic playing! For the second part of his recital, Sir András planned only two works: one again by Mozart, his incomparable *Rondo in A minor* and to stay in the key of A, Schubert's penultimate *Sonata in A major*, which Schiff declared as Schubert's greatest. His performance left no room for disagreement.

The *Rondo*, Mozart's late work, is perhaps his most "Chopinesque" and most decorative of all his piano music. If you play the opening measure of this work and Chopin's *Waltz in A Minor op.34 No.2*, a listener who knows neither of those two works may conceivably get confused. Here Schiff again showed his mastery of legato playing, beautifully illuminating the upper voice and not covering it with the difficult accompaniment played by the same hand. The tempo was brisk, but one never experienced a feeling of rushing. There is a harmonic relation of the closing section of the *Rondo* and a section in the last movement of the sonata: they are both relying on the so called "Neapolitan chord," as Beethoven did in the closing moment of the 1st movement of *Sonata in C sharp minor*, known as the "Moonlight."

In the last four decades of attending András Schiff's New York recitals, I have heard him play the *Sonata in A Major* several times, most recently during his three-recital traversal of the last three sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert at Carnegie Hall some five years ago. I don't recall ever being as moved and impressed by his performance as I was this time. As always, I was taken by the narration; the discreet, subtle tempo fluctuation; by the declamation of vocal lines; by the creation of beautiful, ringing sound in the upper register, balanced with the richness of the bass line; by the finely etched and illuminated details.

When talking about the 2nd movement Andantino, Sir András called it an apocalyptic depiction of the Last Judgement. I always regarded the middle section of that movement as one of perhaps the most hallucinatory, demented, delirious, nightmarish moments of all the music of that era, though Berlioz in his *Symphonie fantastique* came pretty close. Under Schiff's hands, that oft enigmatic and explosive segment conveyed a sense of catastrophe, yet it carried an unbending logic. The Scherzo was unusually lightweight and charming with the middle episode dancing nicely, and the Finale flew by luxuriously and sang its tune with a delicate affection. Our master created an incredible tension in the last few measures and held the last low A for what seemed like an eternity. Luckily, the audience allowed him to conclude the piece in total silence. As promised, in spite of several callbacks by the highly appreciative audience and a prolonged standing ovation, Sir András kept to his word and played no post-concert encore. For once, one could subscribe to his logic: the memory of the conclusion of the Schubert was the perfect close to a truly epic event–one that no attendee will soon forget. Once in a blue moon, one attends a concert or recital where there prevails a dominating feeling of satisfaction: everything we listen to seems just right, there are no comparisons coming to mind or critical thoughts where one would wish this or that was executed in a more perfect manner. This recital was just such an occasion; one allowed oneself to sit and listen and also to recognize that music making doesn't come much better.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

INDEPENDENT

December 8, 2023

His whimsical manner and fluency of touch make this Christmas concert unforgettable

By Michael Church

Is classical music a niche art for an ageing audience that will soon be gone? Plenty of people in the media think so, which is why its coverage is often relegated to obscure corners, turning it into a dutiful filler rather than something to celebrate. And when the head of Arts Council England defends the decision to kill off one of London's two major opera houses – opining that it's not needed, and that the future of opera lies in car parks and pubs – denizens of the classical music world need to hold their nerve.

And they should cheer themselves up by dropping in at the Wigmore Hall, in its discreet building behind Oxford Street. This hall is dedicated to small-scale events, but its standards of music-making are stratospherically high. Founded in 1901, it has always attracted the world's top musicians, and its programme is anything but fossilized, having diversified of late into jazz and children's concerts, as well as into outreach work with homeless people, and sufferers from dementia.

Last week I went to a recital by the British pianist Paul Lewis, a Wigmore regular who was going to play three Schubert sonatas, well-known works he'd been playing for decades. And I did wonder a bit about the size of the audience, because this event was both specialised and predictable. I needn't have worried, because the hall was sold out, with as many students as grey heads on view, and with the concluding ovation setting the seal on a musically revelatory evening.

One of the hall's strengths lies in the loyalty of a handful of star performers, most notably Sir András Schiff, whose recitals are so sought-after that he has to repeat each of his programmes to cope with the demand for tickets. His personal magnetism is unique: born and brought up in Hungary, where many members of his extended Jewish family were murdered by the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators, he's emerged as a vociferous campaigner against the far-right bigots who now rule that country.

Hungary's loss has been Britain's gain, for this is where he now lives, decorated with a British knighthood. In 2013, he received an anonymous threat saying that if he were to return to Hungary, both his hands would be cut off. "Even without that threat," he commented, "I would find it difficult to play in Hungary. Art and politics cannot be disentangled."

His platform manner is avuncular, and of late he's taken to not divulging his programmes in advance. Rather than being put off by this, his followers are keener than ever to see what Uncle András has in store for them.

So what was it to be in his Christmas concert? As so often with him, a surprise. Without a word he sits down to the piano and launches into a playful piece I've never heard before but which sounds like early Haydn – which is what it turns out to be. After telling us the

comic story of its creation, he asks if we mind if he plays it again, which he then proceeds to do.

A weird way to begin a concert? Certainly, but also a very effective one, because second time round we listen with more educated ears, as was his intention. It now emerges that the evening will consist of wall-to-wall Haydn, a great composer who in Schiff's opinion is still not being given his due.

Each work is preceded by a commentary at once comic and serious. Always generous with his time, Schiff gives us two solid hours, after which we will never again listen casually to this composer's brilliantly intricate music. Even when illustrating bits of his talk, Schiff still produces a lovely silken sound; the leisurely whimsicality of his manner, and the light fluency of his touch, turn this pop-up masterclass into an unforgettable experience.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Washington CLASSICAL REVIEW

December 20, 2021

Top Ten Performances of 2021

By Charles T. Downey

To say 2021 has been quite a year is an understatement. Coronavirus vaccines became available in January, in the midst of a classical music season with events that had been canceled or adapted virtually for months. By May many presenters were announcing a return to live performances as the pandemic seemed to fade in the U.S. at the start of the summer. Another wave soon emerged, peaking in September, but with strict policies on masking and proof of vaccination, the music has largely returned. As we appear to be facing another bad coronavirus winter, it is time to give thanks for the music we could hear.

7. **András Schiff. Washington Performing Arts**. There are few things one can count on, but one is that Washington Performing Arts will invite András Schiff to the area for a recital every few years, as the presenter has done regularly since 1984. Although the eminent pianist's performance was canceled in the spring, we were able to watch a sublime recital he recorded last December, for a small, socially distanced audience in St. Peter's Church in Zurich. With a curator's expertise, he selected music centered on the two piano sonatas Beethoven composed in the key of A-flat major.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE TIMES

January 8, 2021

Andras Schiff review — elegant, incisive and uplifting

By Geoff Brown

From Bach biography through Brexit and tennis to the joke about a Hungarian cardiologist, every word of Andras Schiff's linking commentary in this penetrating and uplifting piano recital was as elegant and incisive as his mastery of his Steinway grand. He was so relaxed in manner too; again, just like his playing of Bach, the only composer on the programme and for Schiff the greatest composer who ever lived.

Not for Schiff the neurotic displays of more romantic pianists. Even when Bach's harmonies grew tortuous, as in the F minor Sinfonia, BWV 795, he stayed supremely calm and collected, feet well off the pedals, although you could never call his approach disengaged. When Bach was in jaunty mood at the end of the Italian Concerto all reserve was shaken off. If piercing tenderness was needed, as in Schiff's well-chosen encore, the Goldberg Variations Aria ("without the variations, don't worry!" he added), each note and hesitation shimmered delicately in the air. Although the video cameras sometimes surveyed from far away, including the platform ceiling, never in this 90-minute recital did the hall seem almost physically empty, for magnificent music and artistry occupied every inch.

Schiff offered wise programming as well, mixing some of Bach's medium-sized keyboard peaks (the majestically complex D minor Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, the courtly Overture in the French Style) with a teenage miniature such as the Capriccio written to wave goodbye to his departing elder brother, Johann Jakob, bound for Sweden. Its six contrasted movements sped by in about ten minutes, with illustrative details lovingly relished, like the post horn calls built into the final fugue or the clip-clop of the coachman's horse. Through speech and music Schiff effortlessly created a rounded portrait of Bach the human being as much as the composer of genius.

And all alongside, this recital of music from the European melting pot — given, as he said, by a Hungarian Jew — told another story, of world fellowship and the importance of culture and civility. Schiff is not just a pianist; he's a beacon of hope in disordered times.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Washington CLASSICAL REVIEW

April 24, 2021

Playfulness and tragedy blended with mastery in András Schiff recital

By Charles T. Downey

Washington Performing Arts first presented a recital by András Schiff in 1984. He returns to the area every few years, but this spring his appearance was canceled by the pandemic. On Friday night, the presenter streamed a recital he recorded last December, for a small, socially distanced audience in St. Peter's Church in Zurich.

The program featured the four composers for whom the Hungarian-born pianist is best known. As expected of this *éminence grise* of the piano, Schiff curated the selections with a savant's care, centering the recital on the two piano sonatas Beethoven composed in the key of A-flat major.

Bach's Three-Part Invention No. 9, set in the related key of F minor, made a severe introduction to Beethoven. Schiff expertly unwound the triplex strands of this piece at a somber pace, giving independence to Bach's melodic ideas, all charged with chromatic inflection. Bach runs these motifs through all three voices, in every conceivable combination with each other and sometimes themselves.

The young Beethoven gave his Piano Sonata No. 12 an unconventional opening, a charming set of variations on a chipper triple-meter theme. Schiff traced this alluring melody with his exacting touch in each variation, as it popped out of increasingly complex textures. Only the rueful third variation, set in the parallel minor, echoed the tragic character of the Bach piece and hinted at the heart of this sonata, the "funeral march on the death of a hero."

Schiff gave the little Scherzo movement, in the second position, a lightly pedaled, devilish air. The funeral march then grew from a hushed opening into a solemn procession of orchestral sweep, also delineated with thoughtful precision. Its ultimate turn back toward A-flat major segued with almost no pause into the finale. That movement's running theme, in constant streams of sixteenth notes, added a comic note to this enigmatic sonata.

Tragedy returned with the piece that came between the two Beethoven sonatas, Mozart's masterful Adagio in B Minor. As he did with the Bach Sinfonia, Schiff moved slowly through the piece, carefully detailing each melodic turn. Mozart wanders through many chromatic vagaries, all connected and

intertwined by this master technician of nuance. (Schiff also expounded on the form and deeper meanings of the piece in a brief post-concert lecture.)

Schiff gave the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31 a whimsical feel, taking his time with the many light arpeggiated figures that adorn the piece. The interpretation was shot through with joyful introspection, answered by a mischievous second movement. Beethoven quoted two humorous folk songs in this rather compact Scherzo, again outlined with studious care by Schiff.

The crux of the recital, a conflict between tragic reflection and playful silliness, reached its full expression in the complex finale of this sonata. As the almost trivial Scherzo faded in its enigmatic ending, Schiff took his time unpacking the meaning of each note of the curious recitative that linked it to the sad arioso at the core of the finale. Because of the careful programming, its strains of A-flat minor recalled the funeral march of the earlier sonata.

In a delightful touch, Beethoven forces the tonality back into the major mode with a playful fugue that interrupts the tragic mood twice. The second time the fugue comes back in an inverted form, a contrapuntal wink from Beethoven that Schiff relished with a gentle touch, underscoring a countermelody that echoes one of the folk songs from the Scherzo, "Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich."

The choice of encore seemed to reinforce the notion of whistling past death, tragedy made lighter by humor. Schiff rendered Schubert's Impromptu in A-Flat Major (Op. 142, no. 2) as if improvising it, effortless and spontaneous in its melodic innovation, not concerned with trying to impress through speed or virtuosity.

As Schiff certainly knows, Schubert likely derived the melody of this piece from the main theme of the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 12. With his own clever programming elbow nudge, Schiff brought this pandemic recital full circle—back to Beethoven's amiable variations and not the funeral march.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

bachtrack

November 16, 2020

Beethoven, Barenboim, Schiff and Prospero in Berlin

By Laurence Vittes

There was something deeply human and rejuvenating in watching two men in the Prospero phases of their careers expressing in the most magical and grand terms music by Beethoven – not written in the Prospero phase of his. The Fourth Piano Concerto was one of those performances where the performers are invested to such a degree in a vision of the music that they can indulge their own pleasures which reside mostly in absenting themselves from interpretive decisions except to let the music unfold at a leisurely pace appropriate at a time where suddenly consolation is paramount. Everything András Schiff touched turned into beauties that often seemed unexpected as if he himself were hearing them in some profoundly new sense for the first time. He unpacked every trill with wonder.

His first movement cadenza was a thing of fleeting thoughts and impulses and yet as the cadenza wore on Schiff sternly asserted control with a sweetness that made the rendezvous with the orchestra all the more meaningful, Schiff's velvety bright Bösendorfer taking precedence over the self-effacing winds and rich solid strings before keeping the pedal down after the last chord, like at the end of the Triple Concerto.

Daniel Barenboim's gruff Staatskapelle Berlin introduction led to a true *Andante con moto* which made the final argument leading into the pianist's downward spiral all the more poignant, not deconstructed notes but a pleading human voice. Schiff did something wonderful again with trills on the main theme of the reasonably lively *Vivace*, closer to a turn. The clarity of the interplay between Schiff and the orchestra at the moderate pace allowed the various sequences to have special personal consequences, with Schiff's evanescent pearl-like runs perfectly appropriate to those interludes of lyrical beauty between the forces of energy and exultation. After triumphantly negotiating the hazards of the cadenza, Schiff was greeted by especially sweet-toned pairs of clarinets and bassoons before the surge of power at the end.

Barenboim's *Eroica* was methodical in its insistence on structural points, less interested in endearments and sentiment along the way, hammering away at the first movement's main theme in the cellos and basses like he was forging a Leitmotif. An unusual sense of dread was punctuated by a shattering timpani roll. The setup may have been ponderous at times, and couldn't help but be predictable, but the payoff as everything came together was overwhelming. This was not Beethoven the radical. This was Beethoven supremely in command of a great modern orchestra which had been understandably respectful of Schiff in the Concerto, and was let loose in the Symphony. The horns in the Trio were for heraldry more than hunting.

After the performance an unmasked Barenboim bumped elbows with the leader and several other unmasked Staatskapelle members. On a somber Berlin stage they had created moments of consoling beauty.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Boston Globe

October 18, 2019

With rigor and fantasy in equal parts, pianist András Schiff returns to the BSO

By Jeremy Eichler

Don't let the elegant tails and cufflinks, the measured gait and the courtly bows, fool you. Yes, outwardly the pianist András Schiff appears to be the quintessence of Central European charm and gentility. Onstage he carries himself with the air of a Viennese aristocrat who has wandered out of another century. It is the look of a classical musician as ordered up by central casting.

But once Schiff sits down at the piano, all thoughts of image instantly vanish. He is one of the most penetratingly serious masters of the keyboard before the public today. Full stop. The high purpose of his music-making instantly focuses the mind. Decorousness is not the point. Why, you wonder sheepishly, were you even thinking about how he looks? We are here for an event in sound.

Schiff made a rare appearance in Symphony Hall on Thursday night to conduct and perform as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. What will linger in my mind is the extraordinary depth and vibrancy of his Bach, as most purely distilled in his solo encore from Bach's Italian Concerto. In Schiff's hands the music leapt off the stage with a seemingly impossible combination of rigor and fantasy. But the moments of lyric freedom in fact found meaning precisely because they were wedded to a profound structural grasp of the music. Schiff's insights have been patiently

accumulated over the course of a lifetime, excavated from the music's depths. Here was Bach's own exuberance, as if illuminated from within.

The night had begun with Bach's F minor keyboard concerto (BWV 1056). With a modest complement of BSO strings fanned out around the piano, the brisk outer movements were pointed and lively, if not always impeccably tight from an ensemble perspective. The Largo sang out with a touching simplicity.

Following the Bach came a superbly weighted, brilliantly imagined performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1. By anchoring basslines with the unfailing articulateness of his left hand, Schiff conferred on the music an extra sense of spaciousness and dimensionality. He was even attuned to moments of dry wit in the sprawling cadenza. Someone in my row stifled a laugh. I took it as the highest compliment.

For the second half of Thursday's program, the Bösendorfer was rolled away and Schiff stepped onto the podium to lead a warmly embracing account of Brahms's "Haydn" Variations and a sparklingly atmospheric reading of Bartók's "Dance Suite." Some prominent soloists later in their careers pick up the baton as a function of ambition, a drive for a brighter spotlight. But as a conductor Schiff affects no airs; his gestural vocabulary feels of a piece with his pianism. Both originate in an underlying musicality that exists somewhere prior to its expression through any particular instrument.

The "Dance Suite" with which Schiff closed the program was Bartók's celebratory tribute to Hungary itself, written for the 50th anniversary of the unification of Buda and Pest in 1923. Bartók studied deeply his native country's folk music, and the "Dance Suite" is full of his own creativity as filtered through a kaleidoscope of folk styles. The music's polyglot effervescence seems to bubble up from every corner of the orchestra. Beyond its manifest entertainment value, this music in its day may have also spoken with a political edge. The BSO's Robert Kirzinger rightly describes the work's sweeping compendium of folk styles as "a defiant refutation of the increasing call for ethnic purity in Central European in the 1920s."

That same call, it must be said, is resounding again in today's Hungary. It was hard not to wonder whether, for Schiff, programming this Bartók may also have been a subtly political act. Born in Hungary as the child of two Holocaust survivors, Schiff firmly rejects the dangerous cliché of music as a realm apart from politics. He has been an outspoken and principled critic of his homeland's rightward tilt, the nationalistic fervor of prime minister Viktor Orban, and the cover it has given for intolerance and hate in Hungarian society to move alarmingly into the open. These days, Schiff lives in a self-imposed exile, refusing to return to Hungary even for performances. In another context, Thomas Mann, also in exile, famously declared: "Where I am, there is Germany." For those few minutes onstage, there too was Schiff's Hungary, Bartók's Hungary — no less momentarily vivid for being countries of the mind.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Guardian

December 1, 2019

Schiff/Budapest Festival Orchestra/Fischer review – no finer Beethoven playing

Barbican, London

Beethoven's 250th anniversary celebrations began with two perfectly articulated concertos offering exciting new insights

By Andrew Clements

Surprises and delights … Iván Fischer conducts the Budapest Festival Orchestra with pianist András Schiff.

Next year's concert schedules are already filled with events to mark the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. But the Barbican's celebration is already under way, and the first two in a series of four concerts in which András Schiff will play the Beethoven piano concertos with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer were part of it.

Fischer is framing the concertos with Dvořák, and here each programme began with a sequence of miniatures: one of the Op 59 Legends and a Slavonic Dance, together with one of the Op 29 Choruses, for which the orchestra laid down their instruments and turned into a highly competent a cappella choir. It ended with a symphony, the troubled D minor Seventh, and the ebullient G major Eighth. It was all immaculately, lovingly presented, even if the orchestral sound sometimes seemed rather insistently bright, but it was the Beethoven that made the concerts truly memorable.

Schiff had chosen to begin the series with the last two concertos, the Fourth and Fifth. Neither is exactly unfamiliar, but these performances reinvented them. Every morsel of the piano writing seemed to have been rethought, yet there was nothing didactic or perverse about the results. Each perfectly articulated bar brought its own surprises and delights, fresh insights into works one thought one knew so well, especially from Schiff's wonderfully eloquent left hand, and seemed to encourage Fischer and his orchestra to find new things, too.

There were encores – after the Fourth concerto the orchestra became a choir again as Schiff accompanied them in a part song by Haydn, Die Beredsamkeit, while after the Fifth, the Emperor, there was more Beethoven, the first movement of the Waldstein Sonata Op 53 in a wonderfully fleet performance as minutely nuanced as the concertos had been. If we hear better Beethoven playing during the next year, we will be very lucky indeed.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

INDEPENDENT

May 13, 2019

Piece after piece emerges in unexpected and often brilliant colours

The world-famous pianist reveals a new way of listening to Bach's Partitas at London's Wigmore Hall

By Michael Church

Sir Andras Schiff – the honorific suits him better with every year that passes – is on a roll. After demonstrating in concert the suitability of the fortepiano for Schubert's works, he has just brought out a CD (*Franz Schubert – Sonatas & Impromptus*) which drives the point unarguably home: to call this performance of the final two sonatas revelatory is nothing less than the truth, because the sound-world on his immaculately restored 1820 Brodmann up-ends all our expectations of these mysterious works; a Steinway, for all its sonic splendour, suddenly seems wildly inappropriate.

Now Schiff is showing us a new way of listening to Bach's Partitas, and if the aural readjustment is less dramatic than the one with Schubert, it's no less fundamental. As is usual with Schiff recitals, the Wigmore is getting him to repeat the performance to cope with the demand for seats, and if they'd scheduled further repeats those too would have been filled to capacity. Nobody else fills the hall the way this Hungarian-born pianist – now gratefully British – routinely does.

He's played these works many times before, but as he admits in a quizzical little preamble, never all six in one fell swoop, "and in the wrong order". But first he explains why his Bösendorfer is in flamingly ruddy mahogany rather than the usual lacquered black. Why, he asks, should all the other instruments of the orchestra come in natural browns and russets, while the piano is a funereal black box? He's commissioned the creation of this beautiful beast as a protest.

His reason for reordering the works is no less intriguing. The first opens with a perfectly tranquil prelude. "At the beginning of a concert I am anything but calm, and the tranquillity of the first Partita makes me even less calm." So instead he launches with crisp forcefulness into the "Praeambulum" of *Partita No 3*. As these works unfold – each one a series of dances – it becomes clear that Schiff's focus is on pattern and style rather than on emotion, and on how Bach manages to create masterpieces out of seemingly trivial ideas. It all has a vernal freshness, and Schiff's touch is light and playful.

If he also compels disagreement at times, that's no bad thing. Piece after piece emerges in unexpected and often brilliant colours, but I would prefer "Sinfonia" in the *Partita No 2* to have had orchestral grandeur rather than his drily perfunctory treatment, while his eschewal of emotion in the Sarabandes seems perverse.

But in the final Partita – which absolutely had to come last – Schiff brings the house down, starting with a majestic "Toccata" followed by a fluently nimble "Corrente" and a "Sarabande" which cries to the heavens. Then comes the mightiest and craziest fugue Bach ever wrote, turning its subject inside out, upside down, and back to front until

we're dizzy with disbelief. But not Schiff, who strolls away from this immaculate feat of memory and transcendent artistry as though nothing could have been simpler.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Telegraph

March 20, 2019

OAE/Schiff, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1

★★★★★

By Ivan Hewitt

Sir András Schiff is a man of high principles in every sphere of life. He refuses to play in his native Hungary while the right-wing extremist Viktor Orbán is Prime Minister there, and has suffered for his outspokenness. One angry nationalist threatened to cut off his hands. He plays only the loftiest masterpieces – Bach fugues, Beethoven sonatas, Brahms concertos. He's always exquisitely turned out, wears a fob watch, and speaks with a slow precision flavoured with a very fruity Hungarian accent, an enticing mingling of sensuousness with intelligence.

But it's more than just show. Through stealth, the 65-year-old Schiff has emerged as the greatest pianist of his generation and proved this last night with an astonishing feat of all-round musicality in the first of two concerts with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in which the centrepieces are the two immense piano concertos of Johannes Brahms.

What makes Schiff special is that deep immersion in the classical canon which has been ripening inside him for half a century, combined with a pianism which has the arc of the phrase and the whole form in view, and doesn't fuss too much over each tiny nuance.

The lordly quality in his playing would suggest an impregnable ego but Schiff has always nurtured younger players (for whom he is an inspiration) teaching at the Barenboim-Said Academy and curating a concert series which showcases younger performers. In recent years he's taken up conducting and, like his slightly older peer Daniel Barenboim, takes on both roles in one concert – with everything performed from memory (previously shown to to impressive if somewhat austere effect in his recent recitals of Bach such as The Well-Tempered Clavier at the Proms).

The first thing that struck me last night was the almost demonic energy lurking inside this dapper little man. But it's not the energy of speed or hurry. The tempos in this concert, were nearly always on the grand, spacious side.

The concert began with a terrific performance of Schumann's Konzertstücke (Concert Pieces), rarely heard because it requires four horn players of dizzying virtuosity. That might be a problem for some orchestras, but not the OAE. Watching Roger Montgomery, Martin Lawrence, Gavin Edwards and David Bentley execute their vertiginous leaps was the musical equivalent of watching pole-vaulting. In the slow movement, Schiff's unusually slow tempo made the music's glowing romanticism shine out.

Then came Schumann's Fourth Symphony. The transition from the sombre slow introduction to the main fast movement was like the sun breaking out, but Schiff didn't drive the music hard to a breakneck fast tempo. This is a natural tendency with period instrument orchestras, as their more transparent, leaner sound favours generally faster speeds, but Schiff refused to give way to it. The tempo here was gracefully spacious, which allowed Schiff to engineer a very slow acceleration to a really thrilling finish.

As for Brahms's 1st Piano Concerto, it felt almost threateningly huge. Schiff played on an 1860 Bluthner piano rather than the usual Steinway, and he made full use of its seductively wide palette, especially the golden haze it can produce with the sustaining pedal depressed. But whereas a younger pianist might have fetishised that quality, bringing it out at every moment,

Schiff just took it as read as if his mind was on bigger things. He doesn't deal in ingratiating softness, and here played with an almost careless grandeur, utterly unsentimental, with a tone that was huge but never hard.

The evening's most telling moment came at the very end, in a performance of Brahms's late Intermezzo in A major. Some players bend over the keyboard, teasing out every last ounce of nostalgia, but Schiff made the music seem almost breezy and relaxed in its tenderness – which was very refreshing.

Like Barenboim, Schiff has an ease makes him seem like the living embodiment of a culture, rather than just a fine pianist playing the notes, but he does it – dare I say – with more finesse, and certainly more right notes. Bravo to the OAE, for giving us the chance to witness something so extraordinary.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

New York CLASSICAL REVIEW

March 8, 2019

Worlds converge in Schiff's thoughtful program of Schumann and Janáček

By George Grella

At the start of the second half of his recital Thursday night at Carnegie Hall, pianist András Schiff picked up a microphone and told the audience that "It's not a good idea to talk about music."

Rather than leave the whole of criticism and musicology in the lurch, Schiff went on to offer some insight into the two composers whose works he was playing, Janáček and Schumann. After saying that they "had nothing to do with each other" in history, he added that they were "kindred spirits," both drawn to language. For Janáček, that meant the spoken word—specifically, according to Schiff, the dialect of Moravia—and literature for Schumann.

Schiff had already demonstrated how well the music of the two fit together, playing *On the Overgrown Path*, Book I by Janáček and Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* on the first half. After his brief words, he finished the concert with Janáček's Sonata *1.X.1905*, "From the Street" and the Piano Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor, by Schumann.

Even with the mini-lecture, Schiff's performance was in no way didactic, and this program showed the pianist at his best. A subtle artist who uses his thinking to find the key elements of beauty and expression in what he plays, he took the obvious tack with two composers who both went against convention and made them sound like two sides of the same coin.

Both were storytellers—Schumann no less concerned with bringing his own imagination about himself to the listener than Janáček, who was so often driven to make music that showed how he felt about the world around him.

On the Overgrown Path is explicitly about language, built from Moravian folk melodies. This series of vignettes is full of speech-rhythms and speech-melodies, some, like "They Chattered Like Swallows," almost onomatopoeic. Janáček grounded these with new harmonies, elements like the sinuous bass line in "Our Evenings." Schiff played this with great freedom and the music sounded less like melody and harmony than two singers with different and complementary ideas about the same song.

While *On the Overgrown Path* translated the stories of others into music, *Davidsbündlertänze* was Schumann's original collection of fiction. Fundamentally inspired by the literature of Jean Paul and E.T.A. Hoffmann, the music is a kind of meta-fiction—the Davidsbündler was an imaginary music society, and the "dances" are a sort of debate between Schumann's invented alter-egos, Eusebius and Florestan.

While other pianists put the emphasis on the "tänze," Schiff got down to the fundamentals, playing the music like it was a narrative. Relaxed and lyrical, this was charming in the extreme—gentle moments like "Einfach" had a cleansing loveliness to them.

There was much more weight to the second half, driven by the depth of the music. The Sonata *1.X.1905* was Janáček's response to the death of a young worker, who was part of a protest calling for a Czech language university, at the hands of the Austro-Hungarian police. Without manner, Schiff pressed at the tragedy in the music, like a thumb on a bruise, and brought out the physical quality in the music. There was an agitation that was layered with something close to breathing, with artful swells and descents.

One relished the opportunity to hear Schumann's First Sonata—the second is played far more frequently. Also attributed by the composer to Eusebius and Florestan, the piece was dedicated to Clara Wieck, as of the date of publication not yet Schumann's wife, and it uses a bit of her own music in the first movement.

After Janáček's storytelling, this was a superb choice, beautifully played. The relatively free, dream-like structure is much closer to a written narrative than the abstract one of sonata form. The call and response between the two hands that keeps returning in the first movement sounded, via Schiff, like Schumann reinforcing his own determination to forge on through music and through his secret relationship with Wieck—perhaps it was the voices of Eusebius and Florestan urging him on.

The Aria movement was a microcosm of the concert as a whole. Schiff's playing was gentle and simple. Yet that was deceptive, as what he did was to pull back a curtain on the full, sublime depths of the music.

Called back, the pianist played an encore, what he called a "real sonata," Beethoven's Op. 78 F-sharp major sonata. His touch was light, devil-may-care, sociable. Called back again, he let Schumann say good night with "The Happy Farmer."

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

bachtrack

February 19, 2019

Bach-inspired Mendelssohn from Sir András Schiff and the San Francisco Symphony

By Edward Sava-Segal

There is no doubt that, during a decades-long interpretative career, with quite a large repertoire as a pianist and a limited one as a conductor, Sir András Schiff has always returned to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. He did so again for his subscription series with the San Francisco Symphony.

All three works selected were representative for the secular vein in Bach's output and can be associated with his involvement with Leipzig's Collegium Musicum. There were few conducting gestures during the two concertos that Schiff led from the keyboard, but the reduced orchestra and its Assistant Concertmaster, Wyatt Underhill, followed, supported and interacted with the piano without any hiccups. Barely using the pedal, only in the slow middle parts, Schiff displayed his usual confidence in handling multiple intersecting voices and in bringing to light the Italian influences that permeate this music. If you closed your eyes, instead of a Bösendorfer you could hear the violin or the *oboe d'amore*, the solo instruments for which these compositions were originally written, before Bach arranged them for the harpsichord.

The version of Bach's *Orchestral Suite no. 3 in D major* was clearly *comme il faut*, the conductor underlining the dance character, the French flavor of each and every movement. But there were no special sparks flying around.

Bach's shadow was more than evident in the lengthy *Lobgesang* (*Hymn of Praise*) played after the intermission. This doesn't come as any surprise, Felix Mendelssohn having been a great admirer of Bach's oeuvre. The first performance of the *Lobgesang* took place in Leipzig (the town were Johann Sebastian was Thomaskantor for the last 27 years of his life) in June 1840. The occasion was a festival celebrating 400 years since Gutenberg invented the movable type printing system and, by extension, the Gutenberg Bible and Martin Luther's translation of the scriptures. When *Lobgesang* was published, a year later, the printed score was adorned with a Luther quotation: "Rather I wished to see all the arts, especially music, serving Him who gave and created them" (Mendelssohn always felt he needs to reaffirm his good Lutheran credentials…)

After the composer's death, the score was published as *Symphony no. 2 in B flat major*, filling a gap in the catalogue, between the First and the Third ("Scottish"), even if this was never the name that the composer himself used. Nowadays, this musical hybrid, a "Symphony-Cantata on the Words of the Holy Bible" is considered more of a sacred vocal work than a symphonic one. Beethoven being the other musical God in Mendelssohn's pantheon, the structure is obviously inspired by the choral Ninth. The first three parts are purely orchestral. The equivalent to the

"Ode to Joy" is a fully-fledged cantata in nine movements, mostly separated by minimal *caesurae*. The source of inspiration is not only Bach but also Handel (via Haydn's *The Creation*). Its focal and most original point is the aria "Stricke des Todes", rendered with enveloping warmth by tenor Michael Jankosky. His duet with soprano Jennifer Mitchell in "Drum sing ich mit meinem Liede" was well balanced. The latter displayed a powerful, rounded, voice, occasionally shrill in the upper register. Mitchell's other duet, "Ich harrete des Herrn", (with mezzo Margaret Lisi) was full of gravitas. More than any of the soloists, the Symphony Chorus, prepared by Ragnar Bohlin, was the shining light of this performance, especially in "Nun danket alle Gott". Guided by Schiff's experienced hand, the chorus and the orchestra demonstrated a full mastery of Mendelssohn's intricate contrapuntal tapestry. If the orchestral part of *Lobgesang* seemed a tad long, it had its beautiful moments, particularly in the *Allegretto* where Schiff brought forward hints of Mendelssohn's delicate and glittering music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The composer's intent was to unify the entire opus around a declamatory motif, perfectly heralded by the SFS trombones and reappearing many times. Nevertheless, there is little sense of the "cantata" organically growing from the "symphony" and that's probably the biggest weakness of the work.

In retrospect, many works of art have had a meandering "life" with respect to their public appreciation. Listening to *Lobgesang*, it seems hard to understand why this opus is not included in the standard repertoire of major orchestral ensembles (this week's performances were the first in SFS' history). In a musical climate where there is a general feeling that posterity has not been very generous to Mendelssohn's oeuvre, we should be truly grateful to Sir András Schiff for drawing our attention to a meritorious score.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Sydney Morning Herald

October 21, 2018

Andras Schiff rare gems, a tour of genius

By Clive O'Connell

Musica Viva's contribution to this year's festival finished off its serious music content in style through a recital from a great artist, a link to the rich years of 20th century European pianism. Schiff makes few popular gestures and Saturday night's program proved no exception; the names were familiar enough – Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Brahms, Bach – but the works were rarities; if you wanted familiar pieces, you had to wait until a lavish chain of encores including Bach's B flat Capriccio and *Italian* Concerto.

Not even Schiff's sympathy and skill could make Mendelssohn's F-sharp *Fantasy* more appealing, its muted activity and sequence chains providing fine salon music and an amiable warm-up. Continuing the prevailing tonality theme, the pianist then played Beethoven's Sonata No. 24, two movements of compressed emotional breadth managed with remarkable control and superb phrasing.

Schiff concluded his pre-ordained offerings with Bach's *English Suite* in the night's second half harmonic D minor cast: rigorous in shape, the repeats differentiated, a master-class in linear definition. But the night's revelations came with two Brahms brackets: the Op. 78 *Eight Pieces* and the *Seven Fantasias*, Op. 116. Here was rich music-making, each movement intense in its demands on your concentration, very few virtuosic flashes interfering with the rambling, meditative progress of these miniatures. For more than 20 minutes each time, we were taken on a tour of the great composer's genius, a focused yet sprawling collection of gems that encapsulated moving self-revelations from both Brahms and Schiff, whose insightful clarity graced each passing page.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE INDEPENDENT

August 31, 2018

A musical meditation for our troubled times

A thoughtful, sober, and understated performance

★★★★★

By Alexandra Coghlan

Imagine an actor playing Hamlet. Then imagine him also taking every other role in the play as well – from memory, without an interval, alone on stage in front of an audience of thousands. That is what it means for a pianist to perform the complete Book II of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* at the Proms.

24 Preludes and Fugues – almost three hours of intricate, inventive, elusive music – played as a single, continuous gesture is an almost unthinkable feat. But if we fetishize the spectacle of the thing, the musical circus, we miss the point of this thoughtful, sober, even understated performance by Andras Schiff.

This isn't the Hungarian-born pianist's first solo Bach experience at the Proms. Last year he introduced Book I to the festival audience for the first time, and before that performed the complete *Goldberg Variations*. But Book II is a different beast. Harder, longer, knottier both in conception and execution, pushing the pianist still further. You only have to listen to the difference between the C major Preludes that open each book; the untroubled waters of Book I are ruffled and agitated in Book II, our starting point for this epic musical journey suddenly unclear.

Playing a bright, resonant Steinway rather than his usual Bosendorfer (a concession to the vast space of the Royal Albert Hall), this was Bach with more boom and bloom than we're used to from Schiff, but there was no expressive indulgence or romanticising to go with this broader tone. He used the pedal only sparingly – to give us the organ-like splendour and sonority of the E major Fugue, for example – and rhetorical intervention still more so – just the tiniest of flexibility in the aria-like C sharp minor Prelude offered a contrast to the unfussily metronomic delivery that dominated.

As the cycle progressed and harmonies convulsed and coiled more tightly, rhythms shifting left of centre in fugues that straddle precariously across the beat, Schiff found new energy and clarity, always offering his audience a string through the musical maze. There was seriousness, undisguised complexity here, but also play – the ingenuous, nursery-rhyme innocence of the F major Fugue, the trickling sweetness of the G major Prelude. Here was all of life, and it was exhilarating, confronting and, ultimately, consoling – a musical meditation for our troubled times.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

April 7, 2018

A Pianist's Seamless Flow, Nothing Short of Astounding

By James R. Oestreich

Andras Schiff, 64, offered an amazing feat of physical stamina and mental concentration at Carnegie Hall.

Of the two evenings of varied repertory that the pianist Andras Schiff presented at Carnegie Hall this week, the first, on Tuesday, was mightily impressive; the second, on Thursday, was nothing short of astounding.

Both were cut from the same fabric, each representing a cross-section of Mr. Schiff's typical fare but centering on a relatively new preoccupation: the late piano works of Brahms, aphorisms seemingly packed with late-night thoughts, mellow or melancholy, haunted or serene.

On Tuesday Mr. Schiff surrounded the pieces of Brahms's Opuses 76 and 116 with works by Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Bach of a similarly reflective cast. Closely considered key relationships led from one composer to another.

On Thursday, he went a considerable step further, actually connecting one utterance to the next. He played the first half of the program — Schumann's Variations on an Original Theme, Brahms's Three Intermezzos (Op. 117), Mozart's Rondo in A minor (K. 511) and Brahms's six "Klavierstücke" (Op. 118) — in a seamless hourlong flow. Prior harmonies seemed to hang in the air, coloring new ones.

It was an amazing feat of physical stamina and mental concentration for the 64-year-old Mr. Schiff, and it demanded some of the same from listeners, who were caught unawares. The program book gave no hint of this bold stroke; nor did Mr. Schiff, who has an impish streak and likes to surprise, say anything from the stage.

Most listeners seemed as enthralled as I was by what amounted to a tour of Mr. Schiff's capacious yet crowded mind, which houses all of Bach's keyboard music and much by many others. For him, individual works must jostle up against one another like this all the time. True, the audience thinned out a bit at intermission, and many of those remaining refused to play along when Mr. Schiff tried to run the Prelude and Fugue in B minor from Book I of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" into Brahms's three "Klavierstücke" (Op. 119), interrupting at length with applause. It's hard to blame anyone for enthusiasm or for wanting to relieve the tension of a long and intense musical evening.

Mr. Schiff concluded with a brilliant performance of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 26 ("Les Adieux"). Well, almost concluded. He also likes to surprise with generous encores. On Tuesday he added all of Bach's Italian Concerto and Brahms's posthumous "Albumblatt" in A minor. On Thursday he offered a Beethoven bagatelle (Op. 126, No. 6) and Bach's "Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother."

One final encore was both jokey and poignant: the familiar little tune "The Happy Farmer" from Schumann's "Album for the Young." In keeping with the late-Brahms theme, Mr. Schiff opened Thursday's program with the last work of Schumann, Brahms's great mentor: his unfinished Variations on an Original Theme, a piece, as Harry Haskell's program notes say, "intimately connected" to Schumann's "rapidly deteriorating mental condition."

To revert — after the increasingly clotted textures of that work, which even Mr. Schiff's dancing dexterity seemed hard put to clarify — to the simple, unclouded delight of "The Happy Farmer" was almost painful.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Philadelphia Inquirer

April 1, 2018

Pianist András Schiff is a master of detail at the Kimmel

By Peter Dobrin

For his recital Saturday night at the Perelman Theater, pianist András Schiff had his Bösendorfer turned slightly, the better to see his hands at work upon the keyboard. The unusual angle struck me as something of a joke, since, really, there is little in the way of physical evidence pointing to what makes him such an unusual musician.

The magic, in fact, was more discernible if you averted your eyes altogether. Schiff, probably the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society's most starry name this season, brought a program similar to the one he plays Tuesday night in Carnegie Hall. The audience-friendly keyboard angle did allow him a measure of control over his listeners. Hands were suspended in the air after each piece, dropping for the next work after a nanosecond, preventing applause and creating two seamless program halves.

A substantive connection between pieces was debatable. But the two solid panels of music did create an immersive experience, a kind of musical altarpiece – to Schiff. And the audience was rapt. The pianist rewarded them with an 11-minute encore: Bach's *Capriccio on the Departure of his Most Beloved Brother*.

Schiff wove a program of standards – Schumann, Brahms, Beethoven and Mozart – and his own playing gathered interpretive depth as it went on. The *Three Intermezzos, Opus 117* of Brahms had a glassy beauty, and the third in the set was delicately rendered. But it was all within a certain expressive range. In Mozart's *Rondo in A Minor, K. 511*, you wondered what a composer would have to write to get a rise out of Schiff, so carefully controlled it was. Schiff was more tip-toe diplomat than prodding interrogator.

His way with the *Six Piano Pieces, Opus 118* by Brahms was decidedly not ecstatic in the opening, but the chill of death was upon the last of the pieces in a way I won't soon forget.

No one has worked out the details of a piece the way Schiff has, a quality that swelled intensity by several degrees in the program's second "set." Listening to Bach's *Prelude and Fugue No. 24 in B Minor* was like watching a multi-dimensional puzzle being assembled in real time. Schiff's sense of voicing (creating a hierarchy from among simultaneous multiple musical lines) dovetailed in a gorgeously complex way with the Bösendorfer's colors: plummy French horns in the middle register, muted trumpets above, tuba below. Brahms' *Four Piano Pieces, Opus 119* were studies in the power of articulation and textures to conjure character. The waltz-like music in the second was as a gauzy dream.

The last piece seemed to arrive as an apotheosis. Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in E Flat Major, Opus 81a, "Les Adieux,"* is a concentrated experience, and Schiff's meticulous detailing was firmly in place, but always at the service of fluidity and those incredible moments of helium where a phrase lifts off. Schiff pointed to ideals and values well beyond the page, to liberation itself. Here was music most ecstatic.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Chicago Tribune

November 3, 2017

Schiff moves with conviction from piano bench to CSO podium

By John von Rhein

We know the insightful Hungarian pianist Andras Schiff to be a man of firm political convictions. The son of Holocaust survivors, in 2011 he declared his opposition to political developments in his native country and later suffered personal attacks from Hungarian nationalists because of it. To this day he refuses to perform in Hungary, a fact that leaps out of his artist bio.

Thursday night at Symphony Center, where Schiff — Sir Andras, if you will — took command of a split-orchestra version of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as both pianist and conductor, we were reminded that he holds firm musical convictions as well.

With some hyphenated performers, a pronounced talent at the keyboard doesn't easily transfer to the podium, where powers of leadership and individual artistry combine. That is not a problem with Schiff. He has been presiding over chamber orchestras, on and off the piano bench, for decades, and his skills have deepened considerably since his rather tentative CSO debut in that dual capacity in 1991.

On Thursday you could see as well as hear the easy rapport he enjoyed with the CSO musicians in chamber orchestra guise, in an attractive program of classical and baroque works. Two concertos were led from the Boesendorfer 280VC concert grand piano he employs for his U.S. engagements, two purely orchestral pieces from the podium. There were smiles all around, and the music smiled as well.

For Haydn's Symphony No. 88, Schiff employed a complement of 31 strings, to which were added flute, timpani and pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets. It was the right size band for the wit and joviality of one of Haydn's greatest symphonies to emerge with springy rhythms, crisp accents and a judicious balance of strings and winds.

Conducting without baton and without score, Schiff gave the music shape and flow but, above all, clarity. The outer movements took on a vivacity that never felt forced, the oboe-cello line of the slow movement rested comfortably atop the strings, and you could hear dancing peasants in the rustic third movement.

Turning to a major work by his fellow Hungarian, Bela Bartok, Schiff used the same-sized string body to dig into the folkish melodies and rhythms of the 1939 Divertimento for String Orchestra. His knack for keeping textures spotless, rhythms sharply etched, yielded an idiomatic rendition of Bartok's mid-20th-century take on the baroque concerto grosso. I liked the way he brought out the spiky dialogues between solo and tutti groups, also the atmospheric intensity of the central *molto adagio*.

The second half of the concert found Schiff in his more familiar guise as pianist-conductor.

The mellow sound of the Boesendorfer, less beefy than that of a Steinway, suited his approach to both J.S. Bach's

keyboard concerto No. 5 in F minor (BWV 1056) and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major.

His immaculate Bach playing has long served as a hallmark of the pianist's artistry, and his F minor concerto stood as a model of how to make music written for clavier work convincingly on a modern instrument. A few bobs of his head were sufficient to keep the ensemble playing tidy and flowing.

Schiff's Beethoven was very much in the post-Mozartean mode: classical in sound and style, rather than looking ahead to Beethoven as ringleader of the Romantic revolution. His performance mixed strength, lucidity and elegance in equal proportion, a civilized musical conversation in which the pianist functioned more as *primus inter pares* than soloist, as Beethoven surely intended.

Rather than merely conducting from a seated position throughout, Schiff seized on every opportunity when the piano part falls silent to jump up to shape and invigorate the music with both hands. This was a happy reminder of what Daniel Barenboim and the chamber CSO achieved on behalf of the Mozart concertos during his tenure as music director.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

ConcertoNet.com

October 27, 2017

So what makes a great conductor?

By Roman Markowicz

New York
David Geffen Hall, Lincoln Center
10/19/2017 - & October 20, 21*, 2017
Joseph Haydn: *Symphony No. 80 in D minor*
Béla Bartók: *Divertimento for String Orchestra*, BB118
Johann Sebastian Bach: *Keyboard Concerto in A major*, BWV 1055
Robert Schumann: *Piano Concerto in A minor*, opus 54
New York Philharmonic, Sir András Schiff (pianist and conductor)

It must have been more than fifteen years ago when I played for two of my friends a bootleg recording of the Schubert *Symphony No. 8 in B-minor*. At that time one of them was a violinist in the famed Met Opera Orchestra, the other was composer; in other words, both were highly professional. They both recognized immediately that the orchestra is excellent (it was, after all, the Philadelphia Orchestra) but were not able to guess the conductor. All the famous names were mentioned, both those still alive and those no longer with us. To their enormous surprise the name of the conductor was András Schiff, as yet not yet knighted and not yet enjoying the conducting career he has nowadays.

Of course that led us to a discussion on the subject of conductors and what, in the end, makes a successful, memorable performance. Is it baton technique alone? Is it the ability to show the proper clues? Is it the ability to explain what one wants? To a degree all of those aspects are important, but in my mind there was one quality in Sir András' music making more important than the others. At that time he definitely didn't possess the baton technique of Lorin Maazel (not many conductors have equaled it before or since) neither was his knowledge of symphonic literature all-encompassing (to this day he declares that some composers, such as Mahler, will not soon be listed in his programs).

What I thought of that makes Sir András an important and respected conductor both then and even more so today is his vision and imagination. In order to achieve something you first need to know what you want to achieve. His recent subscription concert with the New York Philharmonic, already his second time there as a conductor and pianist, proved my point beyond doubt.

As always, both in recitals and in the symphonic repertory, he opted for a fiercely demanding and ultimately very rewarding program.

The first work performed, Haydn's *Symphony No. 80*, is seldom heard. It is a quirky work, full of surprises and humor, all of which suited our maestro quite well. Generally he approached the symphonic Haydn in a manner similar to his piano performances. With the exception of Bartók's *Divertimento*, he conducted all the scores by heart; that alone must have made a huge difference to his colleagues in the orchestra. I purposely use the word "colleagues" because it was both audible and visible that he treats them as equals and the whole program had that unmistakable feeling of chamber music, of which I will talk a little later. Even his bows to the audience are taken from the stage level, not from the conductor's podium: a small detail but telling. Just as he eschews the use of "period instruments" in an "historically-informed manner", here he used the full orchestra, even in the Bach concerto and Bartók *Divertimento*, works which often are performed with fewer players. As some European conductors do, Sir András positioned the double basses and cellos to his left and spread first violins and second violins antiphonally. As always, he also observed all the repeats, which led the audience to burst into applause before the end of Haydn's symphony. It was big-boned Haydn, vigorous, robust, and when necessary, charming. This symphony could definitely find itself on the list of works best illustrating the idea of "humor in music", notably the long rests which purposely disorient and amuse the listener and the irregular rhythms and syncopations which open the *Finale: Presto*. Its off-balance rhythms create a mischievous character that makes the music oscillate between madcap stop-and-go and constant dynamic extremes, all of which make the listener smile. Listening to this symphony, I wondered if Beethoven knew that symphony when he wrote the finale to his own *Sonata in D major opus 10 No. 3*. As with his piano playing, Maestro Schiff brings out the dance qualities whenever he hears them in any music. Here we observed them in the rustic *Menuetto*, later in the outer sections of Bartók's *Divertimento*. In those moments our conductor – not unlike another maestro, who for many years stood in front of this beloved ensemble and whose 100th anniversary we celebrate this year, Leonard Bernstein, of course – danced together with the music.

At the end of every work, Maestro Schiff made sure to thank each section of the orchestra and shake hands with as many musicians as possible. I guess that alone encouraged them play their hearts out for him, and that evening the whole group was in damn good shape.

As I indicated, in the Bartók Maestro Schiff utilized the whole string section. But this work is conceived as interplay between the whole ensemble and its first desk players as soloists, not unlike the interplay in a Baroque concerto grosso.

It should come as no surprise that we heard a masterly conceived version, since for András Schiff, pianist and conductor, Bartók is one his idols and therefore certain characteristics of Schiff's own piano playing were evident in his reading of the *Divertimento*. I

mentioned earlier that great attention – in practically anything he interprets – is paid to the element of dance; here we also witnessed a tad more deliberate tempo which allowed for more swagger and elegance. The slow movement, a dirge-like *Molto Adagio*, was incredibly touching and it stood in dramatic contrast to the lighter-vein outer movements.

The second half of the program featured Maestro Schiff at the piano. His ensemble for the Bach *Keyboard Concerto in A major* was quite large and here I would question whether the full-size string section is really an ideal partner even for the large piano, which on this occasion was new model of Bösendorfer. Luckily for this concert our soloist avoided a mistake that many pianists-conductors make – positioning their pianos with the keyboard facing the audience and the lid off. This time the instrument was placed a bit askew, which allowed for the soloist to see more of the orchestra and for the audience to see a bit more keyboard. The piano had a bright enough sound but I was not totally convinced that a good German Steinway would not sound equally well. However, the comfort of the artist is paramount and apparently this instrument was sufficiently liked that it was even mentioned in the program booklet.

But as expected, this was a masterly interpretation, the only hand-gestures given, those at the entrances to each of the three movements. With Schiff at the keyboard, immaculate finger work is almost taken for granted, but what impresses even more is a varied range of articulation and that ever-present sense of a dancing left hand. The piano sang beautifully in the slow movement *Larghetto*, which convinced this listener that the oboe d'amore was indeed an original solo instrument for that concerto.

And then came the Schumann *Piano Concerto* which I have never seen played and conducted by the same person. When asked a few days earlier about the difficulties of conducting this work from the piano, Sir András gave a rather puzzling answer: he declared that the real difficulty for the orchestra, especially in the rhythmically complex places of the Finale, is the presence of a conductor. An enigmatic statement perhaps, until one saw with one's own eyes the total freedom our soloist left to his orchestra. Led by the concertmaster Frank Huang, it stayed with the piano even in those proverbial rhythmically difficult moments.

The interpretation itself was unusual inasmuch as Mr. Schiff adopted a rather unified tempo to the first pages of the opening *Allegro*. Rather than advancing the tempo later, as many if not all performers do, he had the oboist – the wonderful Liang Wang – play the opening solo much faster than usual. It soon made sense, but it often is a recurring concept behind Schiff's interpretations: keep the tempos as the composer indicated in the score. The lively character was continued in the *Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso*, in which the musical stress was placed on *grazioso* (gracious). The Finale was one of the most joyful, uplifting, thrilling, exhilarating interpretations in recent memory. Sir András has an old-fashioned way of playing where the hands are not always together, somewhat similar to Paderewski, an easy-to-take and quaint mannerism seldom encountered today. What one can always count on with this pianist is

his ability to find details that escape other musicians and conductors. In the first movement there were, for instance, clarinet phrases that I have never heard before; in the last movement there were details in the piano part – a rarely encountered spiky, pointed articulation – that made the music sound fresh. Only right before the coda did the soloist get up from his chair to show a few gestures to the orchestra; the rest was pure chamber music, which is to say everyone was listening to each other. Simple, but how effective!

At the end, not only did the audience erupt in a standing ovation, but the musicians applauded their maestro with the kind of vigor almost unheard of from this hard-to-please orchestra! The visibly pleased Schiff reciprocated by singling out practically every member of the orchestra who, one must admit, had fully earned the admiration of their amiable soloist.

In a video interview given last year at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, Sir András was asked about the qualities he values in a great conductor. He listed a few: a great conductor has to be a psychologist, for he constantly deals with many different souls in front of him. It is not only important what you say, but also how you say it. The less you talk, the better; show the orchestra what you want with your eyes, smile, hand gestures.

I did not attend any of the rehearsals during which the majority of the work is always done. But I have a suspicion that in the case of Maestro Schiff, he practices what he preaches.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

ClassicalSource

October 19, 2017

New York Philharmonic/András Schiff – Haydn 80 & Bartók's Divertimento, and Concertos by Bach & Schumann

By David M. Rice

This New York Philharmonic concert led by András Schiff had a distinctly Middle-European flavor, including two works with direct connections to Schiff's native Hungary – the Haydn, composed during his years at the Esterházy court, and Bartók's Divertimento, the composer's vocabulary derived from that nation's folk-music.

In Haydn 80 we hear remnants of his earlier works in the Symphony genre, including sudden mood-changes and extended pauses, and also a style that would soon ripen into the great 'Paris' and 'London' Symphonies (respectively 82-87 and 93-104). In the Allegro spiritoso, Schiff nicely contrasted dramatic strings with a *Ländler*-like tune. Then the first-violins sweetly intoned the charming opening theme of the Adagio and the Minuet was given a rather grandiose aspect, although the Trio was kept delicate. The Finale was a romp, with its odd, syncopated theme recurring in various guises, keeping us guessing as to which would be the last.

Divertimento was written in 1939 to a commission from Paul Sacher just before Bartók left war-torn Europe for the safety of America. Schiff steered the Philharmonic's strings through this fascinating piece. The outer movements feature dance rhythms and surround a dark Molto adagio, with its tragic mood

then dissipated by the folk-theme-based Finale that is itself interspersed with a *fugato* section and a gypsy-influenced violin solo (excellently played by Frank Huang).

In BWV1055, Bach's reworking of a Concerto for oboe *d'amore*, for all that Schiff contributed much it was weighed down by the use of a relatively large string ensemble needed to counterbalance the piano. The highlight was the brisk tempo and Schiff's joyous approach to the Finale, and he went on to give an excellent reading of Schumann's Piano Concerto, a happy recollection for this writer of hearing it (played by Guiomar Novaes) at my very first New York Philharmonic concert sixty years ago. The piece calls for smooth integration between piano and orchestra, which was well-achieved here. There were many fine orchestral solos, from oboist Liang Wang and, on an instrument heard for the first time this evening, an amorous clarinet contribution from Pascual Martínez-Forteza. Schiff played with technical excellence and subtlety, and he brought propulsive energy to the first-movement cadenza and coda. During the 'Intermezzo' the cellos beautifully intoned the second subject, and the numerous aspects of the Finale were all delightfully performed.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE INDEPENDENT

September 11, 2017

Prom 73: Andras Schiff, Royal Albert Hall, London, review: A stupendous performance

Sir Andras Schiff performed Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier' and transformed the huge and well-filled hall into a bowl of rapt silence

By Michael Church

Two years ago Andras Schiff held this auditorium in thrall with a performance of the *Goldberg Variations*: Now he's done the same with the first book of the same composer's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a work never played at a Prom before. Schiff sees these preludes and fugues in terms of colour, beginning with the snow-white innocence of the opening prelude in C major, and culminating in the B minor fugue which for him is in the pitch-black key of death. And on this occasion he abjured his beloved Bösendorfer in favour of a modern Steinway.

There was indeed a crystalline transparency in the first prelude, a metronomic regularity which was in no way mechanical, and for a while he maintained these qualities, playing with a caressing touch and going at an unusually gentle pace, thus allowing unfamiliar effects to emerge. Some of these had bewitching charm – as in the exquisite melody passed between the hands in the sixteenth prelude – while others were bracingly astringent; when virtuosity was called for it was delivered with impeccable control, every note given due weight. Bach's extraordinary stylistic experiments in the fantasias were played as though being essayed for the first time.

Despite its dramatic and emotional restraint – only in the final lament was there naked emotion – this was the most riveting performance of the work I have ever heard, as for two hours Schiff turned the huge and well-filled hall into a bowl of rapt silence. He delivered the endlessly walking line of the final prelude with majestic assurance, and if the gravely enigmatic final fugue denoted death, this was death of an entirely serene kind. It really was stupendous. Wish you'd been there? For the next four weeks you can catch this remarkable performance on the BBC iPlayer.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

theartsdesk.com

September 8, 2017

The Well-Tempered Clavier - Book 1, Schiff - glorious solo voyage across Bach's universe

Drama without fuss in a masterful journey through the keys

By Boyd Tonkin

Sir András Schiff: epic voyager

Amazingly, last night Sir András Schiff scored a Proms first with his performance of Book One of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Never before has even half of the sublime and seminal "48" taken the Royal Albert Hall stage in unmutilated form. The WTC could have found no better advocate. Schiff's awesome ability as a pianist to deliver clarity without austerity, fidelity without pedantry, made us see how this first set of 24 preludes and fugues (completed in 1722; the second book dates from two decades later) encodes so much of the fundamental DNA of Western music.

Not only across the whole span of the 24 keys, from C major to B minor, but even within the four or five minutes of a single prelude-fugue couple, Bach can take you from the solemn polyphony of a Renaissance cathedral to some avant-garde compositional workshop in late-20th century Darmstadt or Paris. A sort of call-sign for humanity, the C major opening is currently speeding across the universe on the so-called "Golden Record" of the Earth's sounds sent into deep space with the Voyager probe in 1977. Sometimes I wonder if a super-advanced civilisation in a distant constellation will eventually hear it and say: "OK, we won't annihilate those guys. They did this." Or, since the recording chosen was Glenn Gould's,

with all his spiky, show-off mannerisms, will they arm the invasion starships there and then? Sir András is the anti-Gould, a pianist who shuns both modernist eccentricity and romantic grandstanding. He first recorded the "48" (he promises to return to the Proms next year with Book Two) in the 1980s, and in 2012 further refined his already poised and polished command of both volumes with a second recording for ECM. Alone in the Royal Albert Hall, a solo performer looks and sounds horribly exposed: a solitary wanderer through some plush, muffled desert. Yet the unaccompanied Bach strand in the 2015 Proms (to which Schiff contributed his lapidary *Goldberg Variations*) proved that the results can be quite magical.

So it was as Schiff, without score or interval, sculpted around 100 minutes of music into a perfectly paced narrative. His pedal-light approach to the WTC, restrained rubato and avoidance of flamboyant tempi can make the idea of this respectful, self-effacing Bach sound a trifle dull. Not at all: Schiff's gracious lucidity lets the tension and drama inherent in each piece speak directly to us, as when the A minor prelude's whirlwind of agitation yields to the monumental call to order in the fugue. Schiff's (literally) even-handed cherishing of each part, each "voice", meant that we could hear the creative dialogue Bach incorporates within each prelude and fugue as well as between them. So in the celebrated, prophetic finale in B minor, with its startling prelude subject that ranges Schoenberg-like over the 12 tones of the scale in an eerie premonition of the serialist age, Schiff also let the lovely, lilting answer to this disorienting gambit break through, clear but (as ever) never too loud.

With a performance style that train our ears to hear each finely articulated element and steers clear of flashy stunts, it feels invidious to pick out individual passages. Still, I loved the transition in the F sharp minor pair between the almost romantic storm-and-stress of the prelude and the lonely, yearning pilgrim's progress in the fugue. Frequently Schiff made the WTC sing (and, more discreetly, dance), and the "cantabile" style of his aria-like subjects could guide you towards the sound-world of the Passions and Cantatas. In B flat minor, Schiff made the prelude's song of loss and yearning sound operatic, before the hushed beauty of the fugue exposes empty spaces in the soul that (it turns out) only Bach can fill. There you go: I'm indulging in the sort of programmatic waffle that Schiff's entire career in Bach has sought to dispel. But he's not a killjoy "purist" so much as a supremely tactful window-cleaner who wipes away the thick crust of wilful idiosyncrasy that even the greatest pianists have sometimes smeared over the WTC. "Authenticity" hardly applies here, since Bach never imagined a concert grand and the quest for optimum keyboard tuning – although it exercises some musicians to the point of obsession – seldom impinges on the enjoyment of most music-lovers now. Rather, Schiff recovers the truth of this music in Bach's time and – without fussy archaism or academicism – sets it free to speak to ours. In G minor, as the exquisite tumbling waterfall of the prelude gave way to the slow, grave dance of the fugue – muscular, as Schiff can be, but never muscle-bound – you grasped the vast sweep of mood and tone that Bach has loaded into each step of this formal, even pedagogic journey through the keys.

Schiff's objective, but never chilly, attention to both the melodic and the architectural qualities of these pieces generated some sublime question-and-answer moments when the prelude sang out a plea or hope that the fugue then fulfilled: none finer than in the coupling of E flat minor call and D sharp minor response. Roll on 2018, and Book Two: a standing ovation at the close showed that thousands of admirers will rejoice in his return. If Voyager were carrying Schiff's Bach to the distant corners of our galaxy, those aliens would surely come in peace.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

March 14, 2017

Two Concerts Explore Schubert, Before He Took His Leave

By James R. Oestreich

Andras Schiff played a program that included Schubert's Sonatas in A minor and G major, Four Impromptus, and three "Klavierstücke" at Carnegie Hall.

As has often been said about Schubert, it is odd to speak of the "late works" of a composer who died at 31. But that is not to deny that the term has meaning.

For some half dozen years before his death, in 1828, Schubert suffered with worsening symptoms of syphilis and realized ever more clearly that his days were dwindling. Yet during those years he poured out an astonishing quantity of works of "heavenly length" (Schumann's term) and immense depth, which mingled or juxtaposed aching beauty with severe agitation.

New Yorkers had a rich opportunity to contemplate all of this last week at Carnegie Hall, where the pianist Andras Schiff played in the Stern Auditorium on Thursday and the pianist Jonathan Biss and the tenor Mark Padmore performed in Zankel Hall on Friday.

The Friday concert was the last of three in which Mr. Biss concentrated on "late style" — or "leave-taking," as he calls it — in Schubert and others. He performed the Piano Sonata in A (D. 959), from Schubert's last few months, and joined Mr. Padmore in a dozen songs from

1827 and 1828. In a program essay, Mr. Biss writes of the "lyricism and terror" existing side by side in "the astonishing and often unsettling music of Schubert's late period."

Mr. Schiff's recital made no such direct references, but the notion of lateness has undoubtedly stuck in his mind, too, in recent years, since he toured widely with programs of "last sonatas," including Schubert's A major. Here he played Schubert's Sonatas in A minor (D. 845, 1825) and G (D. 894, 1826), Four Impromptus (D. 935, 1827), and three "Klavierstücke" (D. 946, 1828).

Mr. Schiff, though a longtime devotee of Schubert, set his music aside some years ago to concentrate on Beethoven. He spoke in 2015 of his return to Schubert, whose music he now approaches with greater gravity and depth.

It seemed on Thursday that Mr. Schiff had almost come to inhabit Schubert the way he long ago inhabited Bach. He played with a proprietary, improvisatory air, as though he were making up the music on the spot, and to some extent he was: He subtly altered the many repeated phrases, in timing, touch or mood.

Over and above Schubert's own variation movements, it seemed, the music was in constant variation, alive with new meanings. And as for those variations by Schubert himself, Mr. Schiff, in a passage with insistently repeated notes and exquisite dissonances in the second movement of the A minor Sonata, found an uncanny foreshadowing of Chopin's "Raindrop" Prelude. (Chopin must have known Schubert's A minor, one of his few sonatas published during his lifetime.)

These sonatas are big works, and the impromptus and D. 946 pieces each add up to sonata length on their own. So this was a full and difficult program of some two and a half hours.

But as always, Mr. Schiff's concentration and stamina were amazing. He savored the last phrase of the G major Sonata as if reluctant to let go of the work, then added two encores, Schubert's E flat Impromptu (D. 899, No. 2) and "Hungarian Melody" in B minor (D. 817).

Mr. Biss's playing in the A major Sonata the next night, in marked contrast to Mr. Schiff's laid-back style, initially seemed propelled by nervous energy, sometimes at a cost of cleanliness in runs and at phrase endings. But Mr. Biss settled comfortably into the later movements, and his suspenseful treatment of the halting, fragmented ending of the work proved especially apt and profound, given his preoccupation with leave-taking.

He was also an assertive collaborator, no mere accompanist, in the songs. Mr. Padmore evidently approved, commenting between numbers that something he values in these songs is the way the vocal line, "often not purely melodic," moves in and out of the piano texture.

Be that as it may, Mr. Padmore's voice is notable more for its versatility and expressiveness than for its size and tonal allure, and it did not always rise easily over the instrumental sound in the early going. But it took on greater character as the evening proceeded, and Mr. Padmore's expressivity won out in the end.

The selection was lovely. Seven songs were drawn from "Schwanengesang" ("Swan Song"), a collection of 14 released posthumously by Tobias Haslinger, Schubert's publisher.

Technically, "Schwanengesang," unlike Schubert's more or less narrative "Die Schöne Müllerin" and "Winterreise," is not a song cycle. But Mr. Padmore likes to see it as one, he said, "a compendium of all the styles" in which Schubert wrote, loosely based on the theme Sehnsucht (longing).

"Die Taubenpost" ("The Carrier Pigeon"), the last song Schubert wrote, ends "Schwanengesang" and ended the recital. The loyal bird, we learn at the end, is named Sehnsucht and is described as "the messenger of faithfulness."

The lusty ovation brought no encore, and it was hard to imagine what might have been appropriate after Schubert's ultimate leave-taking.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Washington Post

March 8, 2017

Andras Schiff graces the faithful with a recital akin to a religious experience

By Simon Chin

To attend an Andras Schiff recital is to enter a secular temple to music. The eminent Hungarian-born British pianist carries himself like a high priest of Viennese classicism, communing with the musical gods with an air of becalmed reverence. Above all, there is a hush, a solemnity to the proceedings. A preconcert admonition to refrain from coughing reminds us we are leaving the physical realm behind.

On Tuesday evening at Strathmore, Schiff graced the faithful with an all-Schubert program, presented by Washington Performing Arts. Seated at his preferred Bösendorfer concert grand, Schiff seemed not so much directly channeling the spirit of Schubert as delivering a sermon based on sacred texts.

In his readings, Schiff ensured that no musical thought went without comment and that no expressive point was missed by the audience. The pianist's impressive technique — his rounded tone, limpid clarity and astonishing control over color and articulation — was all in service to a kind of musical pedantry. Even in moments of great beauty — and there were many breathtaking passages — one seldom forgot that one was beholding an exquisitely wrought artifact, like a medieval altarpiece.

The opening work, Schubert's Sonata in A minor, D. 845, demonstrated the best and worst of Schiff. The second movement, a glorious set of theme and variations, was a master class in light and shade, full of subtle inflections and delightful filigree. Yet in the Scherzo, Schiff's didactic differentiation of textures verged on mannerism, while his stiff phrasing grew tedious.

Likewise, in the third of Schubert's Klavierstücke, D. 946, Schiff's careful delineation of the cross rhythms sounded stilted and overly precious. More convincing were the set of Impromptus, D. 935, especially No. 1, where Schiff beautifully sustained tension and dramatic sweep, even while maintaining the sparkling clarity of his -passagework.

The recital concluded with a reading of the Piano Sonata in G, D. 894, that was curiously devoid of poetry or mystery. Aside from the disarming simplicity of the third movement's Ländler, Schiff's playing sounded excessively manicured and oddly denatured, with every nuance and every turn of phrase sounding preordained. Here endeth the lesson.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Guardian

May 7, 2017

Sound Unbound; András Schiff review – breaking down the sound barriers

By Stephen Pritchard

…There was more direct communication at the Wigmore Hall, where the venerable pianist András Schiff told his audience he hoped they would "not know where Bach stops and Bartók begins, because Bach is so modern". To prove his point, he reshaped his recital programme, interleaving Bartók's 1939 *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* with four duetti from the third book of Bach's 1739 *Clavier-Übung*, the cleansing Bach bringing clarity to the denser Bartók in an inspired example of both exquisite playing and creative education.

Later, Schiff begged forgiveness from Schumann. When Schiff took part in the Leeds piano competition in 1975, jury member Charles Rosen told him that a manuscript of Schumann's ecstatic 1836 Fantasie in C, Op 17 with an alternative ending was rumoured to exist in the national library in Budapest. Schiff found it, and there he saw Schumann's hand had crossed out the final section of the third movement, replacing it with a more conventional conclusion.

Musical ethics demand you respect the composer's intentions, but Schiff believes that Schumann was merely bowing to the taste of the time and that we should hear his original, genial ending. It was a revelation and a fitting close to an evening of total mastery.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

EveningStandard.

November 30, 2016

András Schiff, concert review: This thinking pianist is a Wigmore Hall favourite

By Nick Kimberley

Schiff made Bach and Bartók seem like absolutely logical companions, writes Nick Kimberley

Wigmore Hall audiences are fair-minded and welcoming, but they have their favourites, and the pianist András Schiff is definitely one of them. Last night's full house was rewarded with a typically imaginative programme.

In the first half, Schiff interspersed groups of Bach's Two-Part Inventions, written for one of the composer's gifted children, with short pieces by Bartók, some of them also written for children. The juxtaposition worked well, although it's hard to imagine children who could cope with the musical complexities. Schiff's Bach is an engaging blend of the cerebral and the dance-like, the left hand building up sturdy rhythms, the right weaving intricate patterns around them.

If anything, Bartók's fractured rhythms and broken articulations were even more convincing. Moments of almost lullaby-like repose were swept away by passages of mock solemnity: at one point, the melody seemed about to become Polly Put the Kettle On. The two composers did not melt into one, of course, but Schiff's presentation made their music, written two centuries apart, seem like absolutely logical companions.

Links between the works that followed were less well defined, but both Janáček's On an Overgrown Path and Schumann's Davidsbündlertänze have a strong narrative element; Schiff played them with barely a pause for breath. Janáček's piano pieces are less well-known than his operas and string quartets, but they display the same

idiosyncratic sense of phrasing, derived in part from speech-rhythms. Schiff caught the conversational ebb and flow, the repetitions and hesitations, the impassioned exclamations and the gentler phrases, equivalent, perhaps to a raised eyebrow or a furrowed forehead.

Schumann's cycle very deliberately plays up the antithetical nature of the composer's character, on the one hand gentle and musing, on the other skittish and boisterous. Schiff made the most of the mood-swings, nicely pointing up moments where the contrasts fused into an organic whole. He really is a thinking pianist.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE JERUSALEM POST

December 26, 2016

Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra's plays the "Three Bs"

Pianist Andras Schiff's masterful playing made the piano sound almost like a harpsichord in Bach's keyboard Concerto Nr.7 – the curtain raiser in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's recent subscription concert.

Though the piano did not yet exist in Bach's time, many contemporary pianists commonly make the piano in Bach's works a vehicle for demonstrating their virtuosity. Schiff, on the other hand, wisely adopted a harpsichord-like touch on the piano, playing in a non-legato style, and refraining from exaggerated virtuosic tempi, thus making the performance a rare aesthetic experience.

Gil Shaham, the soloist in Brahms' Violin Concerto, emerged as a veritable master of utmost delicate, soft, almost inaudible dynamics. The slow movement's lyrical mood was thus expressed most movingly. In striking contrast, the final fast movement was performed with exuberant temperament.

In Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, Schiff appeared as one of the few instrumentalists who excel also as conductor. He displayed authoritative command of the orchestra, highlighting its many enchanting instrumental soli, shaping convincingly also the work's sarcastic passages.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

TORONTO STAR

February 29, 2016

Koerner Hall concert in good hands with Andras Schiff

Challenging music from Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Mozart well worth the effort in Koerner Hall concert.

Hungarian pianist Andras Schiff made his fourth appearance at Koerner Hall on Feb. 28 with a program made up entirely of final piano sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

A concert hall, a piano and a pair of hands: this was all that was needed for a musically fulsome afternoon with Hungarian pianist Sir Andras Schiff.

Even before a note was played, conversations circled the audience recounting Schiff's past divinations. This appearance marked his fourth performance at Koerner Hall, with a program made up entirely of final piano sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

Haydn's *Piano Sonata No. 62* was played with a unique emphasis on the extremes of soft and loud, and dark and light. The dynamics were vibrant yet faithful. Schiff's technique was flawless and left him free to romp around the musical landscapes, unhurried.

Piano Sonata No. 32 was Beethoven's last composition on the piano and, like

many of his late period works, focused more on the minutia between the notes. Schiff's forceful personality underpinned the tumultuous sections against tender moments of inner phrasing. Careful not to resolve the unfolding emotions, Schiff left them undecided and, like Beethoven himself, vacillating.

The remaining Mozart *Piano Sonata No. 18* and Schubert's *Sonata No. 21* proved to be the most compelling of the musically divergent sonatas.

Schiff's Mozart was unexpectedly fluid. He slowed then sped up as if highlighting Mozart as a precursor to Liszt's romantic stylings. The *Adagio* lingered in stride and left the remaining third movement with plenty of room to pick up the pace.

The highlight was Schubert's sonata, which Schiff built from the ground up. Schubert had a cyclical form in mind, which prompts an uncommon focus on the architecture of the four movements. A psychological narrative transpired under Schiff's hands and compelled the audience to step inside of the composition itself.

It was Artur Schnabel who said that the best music is always better than its performance. As challenging as the music was, Schiff ensured it was well worth the effort.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

theguardian

November 29, 2015

András Schiff was out of this world

By Fiona Maddocks

András Schiff played his "Last Sonatas" programme, which he has toured internationally for the past year, bringing drama and surprise to Haydn's E flat Hob XVI:52; wrestling with the turbulence and eventual release of Beethoven's Op 111 in C minor; finding gleaming clarity in the contrapuntal dialogues of Mozart's K576 in D. This was Schiff at his ordinary best, in itself pretty extraordinary. Then he moved into a different realm of otherworldliness. His delivery of Schubert's enormous D960 in B flat, ethereal, with bursts of fire, defies description. I've heard him play this work often enough. This time it was as if he were alone, communing with Schubert in some great beyond, and we were the lucky eavesdroppers.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Seattle Times

October 13, 2015

Light as a feather, mighty as Beethoven — András Schiff enchants with piano sonatas

By Melinda Bargreen

What a difference a day makes at Benaroya Hall!

On Sunday afternoon, there was Lang Lang, all spectacular flash and dash at the piano, playing two concerti with the Seattle Symphony to a packed house of excited fans.

On Monday evening, there was András Schiff, the master of nuance and musical wisdom, playing a solo sonata program to a smaller but still robust house of keyboard cognoscenti. One reviewer recently called the 61-year-old Schiff "the anti-Lang Lang," which seems like a fairly accurate description.

Schiff's fans were surprised to see two pianos on the Benaroya stage, and even more surprised to see the recitalist step out of the wings bearing a microphone.

"It's a very bad idea to start a concert with a speech," Schiff wryly observed to his fans, going on to note that there would be "no change of program ... or pianist." But he would play two pianos ("not simultaneously!"), both the modern Steinway black grand selected for the occasion by his Seattle colleague Craig Sheppard, and also a brown and opulently curved 1876 Steinway rebuilt by Northwest technician/restorer Obi Manteufel.

The program of four sonatas represented some of the last works in that genre by four Viennese masters:

Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert. Schiff chose the modern piano for the first two and the older Steinway for the last pair of works. He could probably make a barroom upright with missing keys sound gorgeous; with two very fine instruments, Schiff had the intriguing ingredients for a remarkably beautiful and varied recital.

The opener, Haydn's Sonata No. 62, was a breathtaking example of Schiff's infinitely varied touch, attack and articulation. His phrasing was both imaginative and thoughtful, with some exquisitely soft and refined passagework that sounded as if the keys were brushed with a feather, not struck with fingers.

For the Beethoven Op. 111 Sonata that followed, Schiff created a completely different sonic world, starting with a mighty, portentous opening statement and concluding with an Arietta that was all poetic simplicity. The piece ended with such quiet beauty that it seemed somehow rude to break in with applause.

After intermission, Schiff turned to the 1876 Steinway for Mozart's K. 576 Sonata and Schubert's great, final B-flat Major Sonata (D. 960). This instrument has a very different voice: not as resonant and rumbly in the bass as the modern piano, but very clean and clear with a little less evenness in the treble and a glittery texture to the upper octaves. Schiff tried out some sustaining-pedal effects in the Schubert, giving the last part of the first movement an intriguingly clouded ambience. Some parts of the fourth movement, however, sounded a bit overpedaled, though Schubert's glorious melodies were always at the forefront.

A lengthy standing ovation followed, but Schiff returned to the stage only once for an encore, which was a bit of a tease: the initial aria from Bach's "Goldberg Variations." Maybe next time we'll get the rest of the 30 Variations.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Santa Barbara Independent WHO. WHAT. NOW.

October 21, 2015

Sir András Schiff Presents Dazzling Program

Pianist Wrestles with the Great Composers

By Charles Donelan

This recital focused on four "last" piano sonatas, all by essential composers — Franz Joseph Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Franz Schubert. Far from being a lugubrious affair of funereal final statements, the program showed Sir András Schiff at his most commanding, his most searching, and his most beguiling best. By the time he returned to the Lobero stage to play one of Bach's Goldberg Variations as an encore, the audience had made a dramatic and monumental journey with him through the highest peaks of the solo piano repertoire.

Haydn never fails to restore my faith in the musical imagination, and Schiff's deft, subtly expressive reading of Haydn's *Sonata in E Flat Major, Hob. XVI/52*, L.62 was no exception. Bold, witty, and technically demanding, it foreshadowed the deeper shadows to come. Beethoven's *Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111* remains endless to contemplation. Hearing it again, especially in Schiff's sure hands, is all the third movement any sane person could desire. Mozart started the *Sonata No. 18 in D Major, K. 576* as a vanity piece for the princess of Prussia, but she never saw the score. As with all the other works on this program, it belongs solidly to the exodus of the sonata from within the reach of amateur pianists.

Schiff has been playing Schubert's sonatas for decades, but in a recent series of concerts in London and elsewhere in the spring and summer of this year, he has been using an extraordinary period instrument, the Brodmann fortepiano, a fully restored example of the kind of keyboard just coming into prominence when Schubert was composing this sonata in the 1820s. It's impossible to know if this change of heart about period instruments — Schiff has in the past denigrated period "specialists" — has necessarily been the catalyst, but this performance of Schubert's last sonata, the sprawling *Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major, D. 960*, was extraordinary, and spiritual in the extreme. All kinds of new direction in music were explored, and we heard it played as well as it is possible to be played.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE
CONCERTS. ARTISTS. CRITICAL REVIEWS.

October 8, 2015

Master of Piano Conquers as Maestro of Orchestra

By Janos Gereben

Taking bows Wednesday in Davies Hall: Schiff on the left, with debuting soloists Britta Schwarz, Anna Lucia Richter, Werner Güra, and Robert Holl

András Schiff, among the most prominent and respected pianists of our time, has been conducting orchestras in Europe for some time, but here, it's still somewhat of a novelty to see him on the podium.

Based on what transpired in Davies Hall on Wednesday, Oct. 7, I fervently hope Schiff, the conductor-pianist, will pause often enough in his globe-circling travels to become a regular here in that capacity.

The concert, which is repeated on Friday and Saturday, is among the most memorable in recent S.F. Symphony offerings: The program is unusual and rich, performances are of the highest standard, we meet four notable singers in their San Francisco debut, and through it all, there is the "Schiff touch" of an elegant, intimate, now playful, now dramatic, always sincere and honest sound.

There is only one exception to what otherwise would be an unqualified rave, so let's get that out of the way: The order of works for the evening makes no sense. Opening with Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27, the program calls for a 20-minute intermission after the half-hour-long work, followed by the crowning glory of the concert, Haydn's majestic Mass in D Minor (the "Nelson Mass"), then another intermission — instead of ending on that high note — and a group of Schubert lieder.

Quiet, sorrowful songs after the rafter-shaking Nelson Mass would be a poor enough arrangement, but here is the worst of it: Before the evening ended with a reprise of "Ständchen" (Serenade), there were magnificent, searing performances by bass Robert

Holl of "Totengräbers Heimwehe" (Gravedigger's Homesickness) and "Der blinde Knabe" (The Blind Boy). Even if you don't necessarily covet a happy ending at the symphony, leaving the hall with this in mind is a... curious decision:

Abandoned by all, with Death my only kin,
I linger at the edge, a cross in my hand, and stare with yearning down into the deep, deep grave!

But on to everything (else) great — the 1791 Mozart Piano Concerto in B-flat Major served as the ideal introduction to Schiff for those who heard him as a pianist for the first time. He played the serenely beautiful work, characterized by late-Mozart simplicity, with the effortless perfection that has made the "Schiff brand" treasured for his Bach recitals. Occasionally rising from the piano bench, Schiff conducted the small orchestra — Nadya Tichman serving as concertmaster — with economy and his usual understated authority, devoid of posing. Unlike rare orchestral bloopers in the Haydn — such as a premature entry by a violin — all was right with the Mozart... and the world.

The Nelson Mass, originally called Missa in Angustiis (Mass for Troubled Times), was written in 1798, a time of Napoleonic victories and turmoil, may be Haydn's greatest single work. (The association with Lord Nelson and the English fleet's defeat of Napoleon's navy at the Battle of the Nile came after that military feat.)

As conducted by Schiff, with the brilliant participation of Ragnar Bohlin's S.F. Symphony Chorus, this powerful liturgical celebration was pure joy. Schiff controlled forte passages so they never became noisy, the (relatively few) lyric portions sounded crystalline and diction remained excellent throughout.

Following performances in Europe, Schiff brought with him four soloists for the Mass, all making their San Francisco debut.

Soprano Anna Lucia Richter (who has the lion's share of the work) and bass Robert Holl were both amazing. Their voices filled the big and difficult Davies Hall - hers like a trumpet from a small frame and his beautifully controlled, projected superbly even in pianissimo when later performing the Schubert songs.

Contralto Britta Schwarz and tenor Werner Güra were also welcome new voices — both have relatively little to do in the Haydn, but performing impressively in the Schubert songs.

Schwarz and the women of the Symphony Chorus sang "Ständchen"; she and the men of the chorus closed the evening with a reprise of the song. Güra sang "Widerschein" (Reflection) and "Fischerweise" (Fisherman's Song). Richter followed with "Das Lied im Grünen" (Song of the Greenwood) and "Im Frühling" (In Spring), before Holl's rendition of those two beautiful downers.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

THE INDEPENDENT

August 25, 2015

Andras Schiff casts a spell with Bach's Goldbergs

By Michael Church

A darkened hall, a box of hammers, and a pair of hands – this was enough to draw a capacity crowd to Sir Andras Schiff's late-night recital of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Composed to cure a rich patron's insomnia, this extraordinary work makes supreme demands on technique, imagination, and memory, and great pianists are drawn to it like climbers to Everest.

Glenn Gould was one of Schiff's exemplars for this work, but his intimate investigation of its mysteries took place in the recording studio. For Schiff, who has recorded it several times, it's a comfort zone through which he roams at will, and we got a sense of that comfort as – playing on a Fabbrini Steinway - he launched into the opening statement of the theme. With crystalline clarity of articulation, ornamentation which was delicate but not fussy, and a perfect legato with almost no pedal, we were taken at a relaxed pace through this landscape of mystical threes, as a succession of toccatas, character pieces, and polyphonic canons unfolded seamlessly apart from three magisterial pauses.

The emotion was restrained and the virtuosity was dazzling, with lightning hand-crossings and cascades of triplets spattered with trills, and at the dark heart of the work – Wanda Landowska's 'black pearl' variation – he cast a spell from which one could sense the entire hall subsequently awaken.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

March 14, 2015

Andras Schiff Turns Mischievous at Carnegie Hall

By Anthony Tommasini

Andras Schiff, the Budapest-born pianist who was knighted last year by Queen Elizabeth II, performed at Carnegie Hall on Tuesday night.

What was Andras Schiff, the eminent Budapest-born pianist, up to when he sat down to begin a recital program, the first of two, at Carnegie Hall this week? A part-time London resident who was knighted last year by Queen Elizabeth II, Mr. Schiff commands international respect as a paragon of refinement and musical integrity. Yet, on this night, as he settled into recital mode, was that a glint of mischief I caught in his eyes?

The piece he was about to perform was Haydn's Sonata in C, No. 50 in the standard catalog, among the composer's last sonatas. The sportive Allegro first movement begins with the right hand playing the theme: just the descending, detached tones of a plain old C major chord, sort of plunk, plunk, plunk. And so on. As he readied himself to play, Mr. Schiff curled his right hand so that only his index finger stuck out, as if he was about to point to a key, not play one. Then, using only that finger, he plunked out those first notes, just like Chico in a Marx Brothers film.

Mr. Schiff's way with this passage, though seemingly mischievous, was actually revealing of his artistic depth.

These two programs, on Tuesday and Thursday, could not have been more substantive. For “Sir Andras Schiff, Piano,” Mr. Schiff had chosen eight sonatas, two each by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, among the last sonatas written by these masters of the Viennese Classical era. So the audience that packed the hall both nights expected a typical journey into the sublime with Sir Andras.

This Haydn piece, though, begins with sly humor. The melody is a tease. Is this dumb succession of notes the theme? This is it? Yes. And Mr. Schiff laid it out in all its plainness. The detached notes really should sound like plunks. Hence, he played them all with his index finger, assuring the same kind of touch and weight.

After just two measures, the theme takes a slight expressive turn and continues in pairs of slurred notes, played by Mr. Schiff with legato smoothness and tender lyricism. So in just moments he established the overall nature of this bold sonata as music that shifts between the prankish and the eloquent, the simple and the fancy. In the fleet, amusing finale, which evolves in phrase chunks and keeps stopping and starting, Mr. Schiff displayed perfect comic timing. I bet with a good joke writer, he could deliver a great stand-up routine.

In choosing these programs Mr. Schiff seemed to be suggesting that we should not make assumptions about the last piano sonatas of these Classical masters. Yes, Beethoven turned mystical in his late period. But that was Beethoven. It was a great idea for Mr. Schiff to include, on Tuesday, perhaps the best-known Sonata in C ever written, Mozart’s, K. 545, whose first movement just about every young piano student plays. Mr. Schiff brought out subtleties and lurking wistfulness in this seemingly modest, sort of cute piece, especially in the deceptively simple slow movement. On Thursday he played Haydn’s Sonata in D (No. 51), a work in two movements lasting just six minutes, which in this insightful performance came across as the music of a master indulging himself by writing a piece all joyful on the surface but full of unconventional, quirky bits.

Surely, what most people came for, and will long remember, were Mr. Schiff’s accounts of two late Beethoven sonatas — No. 30 in E, Op. 109, played on Tuesday, and No. 31 in A-flat, Op. 110, played on Thursday — and two of Schubert’s three long, demanding posthumously published sonatas: in C minor, D. 958, and in A, D. 959.

In both Beethoven performances, Mr. Schiff, who has given acclaimedlecture-recitals on Beethoven, was musically searching and pianistically magnificent. He conveyed the mercurial, even bizarre elements of Schubert’s stormy Sonata in C minor, while somehow allowing the piece to seem organic. The highlight for me was his towering account of Schubert’s Sonata in A, in which gossamer passagework alternated with chiseled declamations.

There were three encores each night, including Schubert impromptus and Beethoven bagatelles. I was especially touched by the simplest one, a little Schubert Hungarian dance on Tuesday. Do you have to be born in Budapest to play that piece with such lilting naturalness?

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Chicago Tribune

March 10, 2015

Schiff launches sonata cycle

Andras Schiff likes to present masterpieces of the piano repertory in great gulps, as can be seen from his extensive Bach and Beethoven projects of recent years. The thoughtful Hungarian pianist is doing so again, performing a series of recitals devoted to the late sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. Chicago is one of seven North American cities to hear his cycle this season and next.

He began his three-concert series Sunday afternoon at Orchestra Hall with prime examples of each composer's late creativity. Given the musical and intellectual vigor he brought to his program, one came away with a vivid sense of what the Austrian and German masters contributed to the Viennese classical tradition over the 40-year span represented by the four sonatas.

Schiff brought out the sly wit of Haydn's Sonata No. 46 in C major (XVI:50), using virtually no sustaining pedal, making articulations crisp and structures clear, as if he were playing a fortepiano rather than a modern Steinway.

Beethoven's Sonata No. 30 in E major (Opus 109) made a fine musical foil to the Haydn, in a commanding interpretation that was always sure of its destination and how to get there. I particularly admired the clarity of the pianist's voicings, also how beautifully he set off each variation from the next. Was his concentration rattled by the rude coughing of a couple of audience members? Not so you'd notice in his playing.

Mozart's familiar Sonata in C major (K.545), as sparingly pedaled as the Haydn, proved to be a model of limpid grace and unaffected simplicity.

No greater contrast could be imagined than Schubert's Sonata No. 19 in C minor (D.958). Schiff gave the lyricism ample room in which to expand, applying rubato inflections without sacrificing his grip on the steady underlying pulse. His singing warmth made it all feel effortless, which is how Schubert should feel.

The pianist favored his audience with more Schubert in his four encores – the "Hungarian Melody" in B minor and Impromptus in E flat major and G flat major (Opus 90, Nos. 2 and 3), in addition to Beethoven's Bagatelle in B minor (Opus 126, No. 4).

Schiff will continue his sonata cycle with recitals Nov. 1 and Feb. 14 at Orchestra Hall.

THE GEORGIA straight

March 2, 2015

Pianist András Schiff brings an elegant touch to Vancouver

By Alexander Varty

And now, for classical music fans, the stats.

Not counting his two encores, pianist András Schiff played four compositions at his Sunday-afternoon Chan Centre concert on March 1. In total, those works were comprised of 13 movements, with three of those marked “allegro”—or five, if one counts “allegro molto” and “menuetto, allegro”. Eight of the movements—including two “adagios”, one “andante”, and one “prestissimo”—merited only one-word descriptions, with one notable exception being the third segment of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata *No. 30 in E Major*, for which the musical mastermind’s instructions read “Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante, molto cantabile ed espressivo”.

This—for those who are themselves in need of another espresso, or perhaps a beer—translates more or less as “at a walking pace, with singing and graceful fluidity”. And Schiff must have gotten Ludwig’s memo, for his performance of the Beethoven sonata was the most songlike and elegant of his entirely flawless program, with that bilingually described third movement the crème de la crème.

Elegant, in fact, barely begins to describe it.

I swear that when Schiff began to explore the exploded fugue that ends the *Sonata No. 30 in E Major* I had a vision of celestial motion: stars and planets in synchronous orbit, comets arcing through the interstellar dark, quasars pinging in the far distance, the works. With multiple lines in play throughout, the piece asks for superhuman skill and concentration on the part of the performer, and Schiff delivered, winning a standing ovation upon its completion and three more at show’s end.

The Hungarian-born pianist has long been known for his technical perfection and analytical power, having recorded numerous benchmark versions of works from the classical canon. That he’s on contract to Manfred Eicher’s ECM label, purveyor of flawless avant-jazz, new music, and ethno-fusion recordings is another indication that he has a particularly clear and contemporary vision of what he wants to accomplish—which, here, was to compare and contrast the late works of four middle-European masters: Beethoven, his predecessors Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and his artistic heir Franz Schubert.

On the most basic level, the program drew a neat line between the Classical and the Romantic, with Haydn and Mozart standing firm for form,

Beethoven and Schubert ranging freely into more expressive terrain. It also gave listeners some idea of what the composers were like when closing in on their personal codas: Haydn prayerful; Mozart playfully oblivious; Beethoven exultant; and Schubert apparently trailed by demonic horsemen, given the dark and equine rhythms of his *Sonata in C Minor*, which closed the program. A particularly showy undertaking for something so morbid, it was also performed impeccably.

Let's hope that Sir András isn't contemplating his own mortality; at 61, he's far too young for that. And in any case, he has to stick around for a little while longer; the Vancouver Recital Society has booked the two final installments of his "Last Sonatas" series for the Vancouver Playhouse on February 7 and 9 of 2016.

Be there.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

StarkInsider
ALL THINGS WEST COAST®

February 24, 2015

And the Best is Last: András Schiff at Davies Symphony Hall

Schiff's intense concentration in the slow beginning – not ponderous, but deliberate, taking time to deliver the maximal impact of every note – provided the perfect contrast for the technically complex, bombast section that followed.

By Cy Ashley Webb

When audience with way too much grey hair springs to its feet for five standing ovations, you know something truly extraordinary has happened. Nobody at Sunday's concert at Davies Symphony Hall would pick bones with the assertion that András Schiff is the pianistic equivalent of Mick Jagger. Only he's better than Mick... on so many levels. Sunday's concert was special because Schiff takes things to such a new level that you hear pieces you *thought* you knew with new clarity.

Sunday's program was similar to that of Schiff's concert the week before: late piano sonatas by Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert. Each half of both concerts opened with lighter works by Haydn and Mozart, were followed by longer, more complex works by Beethoven and Schubert. This choice of material could lead to a technical discussion on how each composer expanded the sonata form, but that's an entirely different matter. However, if you want to go there, check out Charles Rosen's *Sonata Forms* or his book *The Classical Style*. The former presents a short analysis of the Schubert's Sonata in A major, D 959, and the latter compares the Schubert piece to Beethoven's Sonata 31, which Schiff also performed on Sunday.

This week's concert opener was Mozart's Sonata in B-flat major, K 570. You might think this a simple piece – repetitious even. A quick glance at the score doesn't suggest anything particularly interesting here. However, every time Schiff repeated the main melody line of that first movement – which starts out with just a touch of wistfulness, he adds more depth and more *brio* until the final repetition brings it to a whole new level. This isn't entirely evident on even good recordings, including Schiff's own. Other surprises popped up in the last moments of the third movement – the allegretto. The alberti bass does its familiar thing, propelling the piece forward – and just as you begin to anticipate an ending, there's a sharp surprise – that Schiff delivers with delicious aplomb.

Intermission was followed by a delightful sprint through Haydn's Sonata in D Major XVI:51. However, this was just a warm up for his performance of Schubert's Sonata in A major, D 959. The audience response was almost visceral. By the time he got to the smoky, winding notes of the second movement, the Andantino, people began to lean forward. Schiff's intense concentration in the slow beginning – not ponderous, but deliberate, taking time to deliver the maximal impact of every note – provided the perfect contrast for the technically complex, bombast section that followed.

A generous three encores followed, beginning with Schubert's Impromptu No. 3 in G-flat major, D.899, followed by

Beethoven's Bagatelle in E-flat major, Opus 126, no. 6. He brought back the first movement of Mozart's Sonata in C major, K.545, which he performed at last week's concert – which was greeted with a welcome reserved for good friends.

Schiff appears as part of the San Francisco Symphony's Great Performers series. I know I'll be staying tuned for when Yuja Wang takes the stage when the London Symphony Orchestra is in town to honor its guest conductor, none other than our own Michael Tilson Thomas.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Los Angeles Times

February 19, 2015

András Schiff slyly and expertly plays late sonatas of legends

By Mark Swed

Andras Schiff performs the third-to-final sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Given music's power to produce emotional attachment, the death of a musical style can call into devastating question our mortality. But this is where András Schiff is headed.

A pianist of rare insight who has served as a spiritual guide to Beethoven and Bach with his regular visits to Walt Disney Concert Hall the last 11 years, Schiff returned Wednesday night for the first of three recitals that will cover the last three sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

These are the four composers who, in late 18th century and early 19th century Vienna, created and then finished off the style that became the foundation for modern classical music. Since their final piano sonatas reveal the heights to which they all rose, the concerts in the hands of a pianistic purist such as Schiff have the potential to be reverently moving occasions.

So, there he was, Wednesday, this cerebral 61-year-old Hungarian pianist for whom his devoted followers make pilgrimages to hear, a spiritual guide to be sure, as trickster too.

Haydn's 50th piano sonata — its daunting full title is Sonata in C Major, Hob XVI:50 — punching out the staccato opening notes with forefingers like Chico Marx. He even looked, from his profile, like Chico. He has mastered

that wry, humorously self-satisfied, hallmark Marx Brothers expression.

The performance was deliciously hilarious, such as when Schiff, with expert comic timing, put just the slightest extra emphasis on what Haydn wanted you to hear as a wrong note, only to, through harmonic sleight of hand, resolve.

Schiff was, of course, no Chico. He played with breathtaking beauty. Every note was exquisitely rounded, the dynamics so subtly handled that the piano sounded not like struck strings but bowed catgut, hit temple bells or wind blown through wood or precious metal.

These were not Haydn's sounds; the keyboards of the composer's time were far more fragile in their tone. But the playing was period practice in remarkable ways. Haydn's late music contains the wry observations of a lifelong trickster. Schiff let none of those tricks pass unnoticed and he added a few his own in little delightful embellishments (as Papa Haydn would have expected performers to do in his day).

Haydn, who died at age 77, lived a far longer life than the other three Classical-period icons. Schiff showed why. He played the sonata with exactly the right wryness to demonstrate that longevity does not favor Type A personalities. You can't get too worked up.

Beethoven got too worked up. His Sonata, Opus 109, is not quite a leave taking, but it is getting there. Moments of ethereal lyricism might be broken by sudden fits of vehemence or ghostly hauntings. Through struggle, he arrives at visions of nirvana.

This is territory Schiff has long explored, and he let Beethoven's sonata unfold as though inside a tormented genius' brain.

Mozart and Schubert did not have authentic late periods. They were cut down by disease in their early 30s, and Mozart's third-to-last sonata has little to indicate late style. It is a simple sonata, the one every pianist learns first. Millions of amateurs have played it.

Wednesday's audience was utterly quiet, transported, but during Mozart's C-Major sonata a woman near me quietly hummed. I'm sure it was involuntary and she didn't know she was doing so. Maybe that's why it was a welcome intrusion, conveying a sense of communality in an uncommonly quiet crowd.

But for all of us who thought that we had learned to play at least one Mozart sonata adequately, Schiff was there to show us what we were missing.

He brought out inner details that gave piquancy to harmonies that are as conventional as they might first appear. As in the Haydn, he exquisitely decorated the melodic lines when sections repeated to add complication. He found song where others find formula; he conveyed song where others play scales.

Schubert's Sonata in C Minor, D. 958, was something else in Schiff's hands — a shocking psychodrama. Schubert could be a repeating machine, falling into rhythmic grooves. For Schiff, so gentle and maturely far-seeing elsewhere, these grooves were the occasion for fury.

He attacked the sonata, but he also made more vivid than I have ever heard in this sonata the astonishing range of expression when a restless Schubert shockingly changes gear. Schiff was in the kind of control that no matter how extreme his range of musical emotions, he never lost the long line. It was a great and important performance.

Schiff's encores were a Schubert Hungarian melody and an impromptu, along with a late, transcendentally played bagatelle of Beethoven. He returns to Disney on March 4 for the four composers' penultimate sonatas and in October for their final ones.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Telegraph

January 10, 2015

András Schiff: A Schubert & Beethoven Celebration, review, Wigmore Hall: 'extraordinary and intense'

The virtuoso pianist's concert seemed like the grail for which all his performances had been searching

By John Allison

András Schiff is no stranger to playing Schubert at the Wigmore Hall, but this extraordinary event – first concert of the pianist's brief "Schubert & Beethoven Celebration" – communicated a level of innermost intensity that made it seem like the grail for which all his performances had been searching. What set it most obviously apart was Schiff's deployment of a fortepiano from Schubert's Vienna. For a musician who has previously railed against the "globalisation" of modern piano playing, this period sound provides more than just an alternative: the muted tone actually seems to suit Schiff's musical personality, and the result here was a rare communion of player and instrument.

The instrument, now owned by Schiff himself and normally deposited on loan with the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn, has a distinguished history. A beautiful Biedermeier artefact clad in warm walnut, it is the work of the Viennese piano manufacturer Franz Brodmann and dates from c. 1820 – the start of the decade in which Schubert died. Once

owned by the Austro-Hungarian imperial family, the fortepiano went with the last emperor, Karl I, into Swiss exile in 1919.

For Schiff, the small, dusky sound is clearly not an end in itself but a means to an end: a fuller understanding of Schubertian intimacy. The instrument is, of course, much less powerful than a modern concert grand, and its hushed tone positively draws the listener in (the Wigmore audience was, mercifully, on a quiet setting). Its delicacy was demonstrated here when, only a few bars into the second sonata on the programme, a string slipped out of tune and Schiff had to stop while a technician came on to fix things; it all felt like part of the show.

In the Sonata in G, D894, the introverted opening took on an almost confessional tone as Schiff unfolded the music with gentle, musing love. With its unblended registers, not homogenised as on a modern grand, there is little danger of the weaker bass overpowering anything, but still the pianist has to work hard to sustain a phrase, and Schiff traced long spans. The delicate Ländler episode of the Menuetto sounded like a distant shepherd's pipe, and the finale had swirling lightness.

Even by the elevated standards it usually inspires, Schubert's last Sonata (in B flat, D960) took on a rare, devotional quality here. The slow movement's ineffable melancholy came across under Schiff's caressing hands, the scherzo was all tinkling delicacy, and main rondo theme was amiability itself. Everything about this performance – from the music itself to Schiff's own presence – felt transfigured.

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ANDRÁS SCHIFF

FINANCIAL TIMES
December 26, 2013

András Schiff, Wigmore Hall, London

Schiff marked his 60th birthday with a show of dexterity and focus that few could hope to match

By Andrew Clark

It is tempting, but mistaken, to describe András Schiff's 60th birthday concert as a marathon: it comprised Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, two of the longest and most demanding works in the solo keyboard repertoire. Each is worth a concert on its own. Neither offers the performer a break in the course of an hour or more. But a marathon implies endurance and muscular doggedness. Schiff, who chose the *Goldberg Variations* for his Wigmore Hall debut in 1978, hardly broke sweat. His dexterity and focus only increased as the evening progressed, as if he could have gone on to deliver Beethoven's Herculean *Hammerklavier* sonata as an encore.

Schiff did return to the keyboard – to play a tiny, touching piece by György Kurtág, written after the death of Schiff's mother, a Hungarian compatriot, with the dedication "in remembrance of a pure soul". That was more of a "thank you" than an encore, for the formal part of the evening had ended with the Duke of Kent presenting Schiff with the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal, an award that puts him in the company of Rubinstein, Brendel and Arrau. His acceptance speech was charming and modest – the very opposite of this recital.

There is no other pianist today who could pull off such a programme so effortlessly, but the temptation during the *Goldbergs* was to ask why Schiff should want to lay on such a big "meal", other than to flaunt his prowess to an adoring audience and demonstrate that, at 60, he is at the peak of his powers. This was an interpretative artist putting himself on a pedestal, basking in his own glory, rather than serving Bach or Beethoven with humility. Yes, Bach's trilling was thrilling, the cross-hands feats had playful fluency, the fugues sounded impeccably crisp and the densest counterpoints always communicated a musicianly sense of line. But what both sets of variations ultimately need is a touch of humanity, a variation of pace, a sense of expressive climax. By emphasising self-satisfied virtuosity, Schiff almost turned these masterworks into recreational fodder.

The *Diabellis* sounded fresher, wittier, more impulsive and introspective than on his new recording. But the lesson of Schiff's recital is an age-old one: more sometimes.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

November 1, 2013

In Communion With Bach, Head, Heart and Fingers

Andras Schiff Plays All 6 Bach Partitas at Carnegie Hall

By James R. Oestreich

Andras Schiff The pianist played all six of Bach's partitas, long committed to memory, on Wednesday night at Carnegie Hall.

In 1985, the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth, the Hungarian-born pianist Andras Schiff, then 31, gave three concerts at the Metropolitan Museum, prompting many to declare him the Bach pianist of his generation. The first two programs offered the six keyboard partitas and another work or two, and the third consisted of the "Goldberg" Variations.

I don't remember many details of the performances, but I vividly recall an overall impression. In experiencing Mr. Schiff at the piano — spilling out all this Bach from memory; looking preternaturally confident and relaxed, to the extent of spreading his right leg in a sort of sprawl, and exuding a proprietary air; sounding utterly spontaneous in his little embellishments — you felt that you were observing old Bach himself, making things up on the spot.

Mr. Schiff's subsequent career has fully borne out the promise of those concerts. He has mastered — virtually consumed — all of Bach's keyboard works and committed them to memory, available at a moment's notice. He has also performed them all in concentrated cycles and is just now finishing his second complete survey, a two-year itinerant Bach Project, which arrived at Carnegie Hall on Wednesday evening

with, of all things, most of the same works he performed at the Met in 1985.

Mr. Schiff has also become something of a marathon man. Along with a capacious memory (where also reside great swaths of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, among others), he has amazing physical stamina and great generosity of spirit. So this time around, on Wednesday, it was all six partitas in a single evening, and Tuesday will bring not only the "Goldberg" Variations, but also the huge bonus of Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations and undoubtedly an encore.

That Mr. Schiff can perform, say, all the partitas in a single evening almost flawlessly and with brilliant characterization is astounding. Whether it is the ideal way to present these works to listeners, many of them far from fresh after a day's work, is another matter, and Mr. Schiff lost some of his audience at intermission, after four partitas.

He has also changed in other ways over the years. Whereas he used to employ pedals sparingly in Bach, he now uses no pedals at all, playing with both feet flat on the floor and no sprawl.

Yet Mr. Schiff achieves a remarkable variety of touch, from the smoothest legato to the spikiest isolated notes to kick off a fugue. Only rarely does a too-light touch combine with a fleetness of tempo to make things sound slightly facile.

The partitas consist mostly of pieces derived from dance, and here is where Mr. Schiff truly shines. Enlivening rhythms are everywhere, and the variety of sonority and mood that he achieves over some 40 movements and three hours is remarkable.

His concentration never flags, and you can almost sense the wheels turning in his imagination as to how he will ornament this repeat or how a slight jolt to the tempo might animate that phrase. Any encounter between Mr. Schiff and Bach can only inspire awe at a conjoining of spirits, and that extended to his little encore here, the Two-Part Invention No. 1 in C.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Boston Classical Review

November 2, 2013

Schiff shows supreme artistry in variations of Bach and Beethoven

By Aaron Keebaugh

It was like taking a victory lap after running a marathon.

The dainty minuet that concludes Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations, which pianist András Schiff performed along with Bach's *Goldberg* Variations Friday night at Jordan Hall, left the audience wanting more.

And more they got. His encore, the Arietta movement from the composer's Piano Sonata Op. 111, itself a set of variations, was the finale to a long but wholly delightful evening.

The concert was the latest installment of the Bach Project, Schiff's two-season international concert exploration of Bach's music and the influence it had on composers who followed in the master's footsteps.

The *Goldberg* Variations is a goliath in keyboard literature. The aria and thirty variations, broken into sets of ten each, present a vast collection different genres in miniature that, when played together, last well over an hour.

At the keyboard, Schiff strikes a statue-like presence. He moved very little while playing, his fingers left to do the work.

That was the most impressive feature of his performance Friday night. He is capable of rendering the music's intricate fingerwork with incredible smoothness, all the more impressive as he does not use the sustain pedal. But his playing was equally crisp, his

crystalline tone, brisk tempos, well-hewn phrases, and sensitive dynamic range all contributed to a mesmerizing reading of the *Goldberg* Variations.

Time seemed to stand still as Schiff elegantly traversed the work's many styles. For the toccata variations, he played with grace. The dance-like pieces, such as the jig in variation seven, were rendered with delicately and supple flow. In the more deliberate inventions and fugues, he pushed and pulled the tempo, giving shape to each phrase. Other variations exploded with a fury of mordents and trills. The most profound of the set, the twenty-fifth variation– what harpsichordist Wanda Landowska called the "black pearl' –was played with reverence, the music rich with chromatic shading.

Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations possess the emotional range and dramatic power of the composer's piano sonatas. But like Goldberg, the music captures the spontaneity of improvisation. Based on a whirling waltz theme by Anton Diabelli, Beethoven's thirty-three variations run the gamut from a pompous march to charming arias, and solemn, funereal passages to virtuosic showers of arpeggios that coalesce in textures of almost symphonic grandeur.

Here too, Schiff proved to be master of his environment. He captured the music's full range of light and shade, shifting quickly between loud and soft dynamics. His tone thundered in the furious cascades of scales and dissolved to ghostly whispers immediately afterward. The lines of the fugal thirty-second variation resonated with authority; the melodic swirls of the third variation sang beautifully.

Other than the intermission, the only interruption came at the encore, when coughs from the audience forced Schiff to stop midway through the Arietta's opening theme. After chastising the offenders, he began again and

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Seattle Times

October 12, 2013

Schiff sprinted with style through marathon Bach

Bach specialist András Schiff opened Seattle Symphony's Distinguished Artists Series for 2013-14 with an astonishing performance of the Goldberg Variations, as well as the variation-laden Sonata No. 30, Op. 109, by Beethoven, as an encore.

By Philippa Kiraly

There is almost nothing in the musical literature with which to compare Bach's Goldberg Variations, but watching András Schiff playing this 75-minute work makes one realize what a physical feat it is also.

In a concerto, the soloist has moments to rest when the orchestra is playing, or in a slow movement when the hands are moving at a more leisurely pace, but the Goldberg Variations has one scintillating variation after another, many coruscating with ornamentation or running at speed from one end of the range to the other.

Schiff performed it at Benaroya Hall Friday night, opening the Seattle Symphony's Distinguished Artists Series for this season. The Hungarian pianist is one of the few musicians who has become a towering figure in the interpretation and performance, in recording and on stage, of this profound musical work. He has recorded it twice. The first recording, from over 20 years ago, has been this generation's definitive performance until he made another one recently, incorporating his latest thinking.

The large audience sat as though carved in stone as Schiff played. Being written for the harpsichord, the Variations are meant to be clearly articulated, no matter how fast the notes. Schiff often had his hands bouncing lightly up off the keys as he gave it that articulation. This is much harder on a piano than on a harpsichord as, firstly, the piano keys are far heavier to depress, and secondly, piano notes are geared to a long decay time. Add to that continually playing at many notes per second, lightly and in a fashion which shapes the music, and the control needed is phenomenal. He played throughout without pedal, as harpsichords had none.

Though the torrents of notes may on paper make the Variations appear quick and agitated, in reality the piece is more like the rippling of a little stream over pebbles. Often in Schiff's hands the notes flew by so fast and lightly one could barely imagine that it was possible to play them. In order to do so for 70-plus minutes on end requires extremely relaxed hands and supple fingers, so as not to become exhausted to the point of stumbling. Watching Schiff, one could see the apparent ease with which he played, though a few times in the performance, Schiff made a small hiatus between variations, when perhaps he was resting his fingers briefly. There never appeared a moment when he hit a wrong note, or the run was less than clear, or the dynamics were out of sync.

His performance demeanor is notable also. He walks out on stage slowly and with very straight back, sits down with that same straight back and plays, only his hands moving a few inches above the keys, self-effacing, as though he is merely the conduit for Bach's music.

And then he rises, bows in stately fashion to all sides of the audience and walks slowly out.

Brought back five times for vociferous plaudits from the audience, he relented and, amazingly, played an encore. Even more amazingly, it was the complete Sonata No. 30, Op. 109, by Beethoven.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Los Angeles Times

October 11, 2013

Andras Schiff dazzles Disney Hall with Bach suites

By Mark Swed

A state of exhilaration flows through the hall as the Hungarian pianist takes on Bach's six 'English' Suites with spellbinding mastery.

On one side of 1st Street in downtown L.A., Einstein looms large. On the other side, Socrates. Who can possibly walk among them? Why, Bach, of course.

Wednesday night at Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Hungarian pianist András Schiff performed Bach's six "English" Suites with a consciousness-raising concentration. He reminded us, Socrates-like, that unexamined Bach is not worth playing. Einstein-like, he demonstrated the profound relative nature of musical time.

I even caught a glimpse of Einstein as she walked by in the lobby at intermission.

That was violinist Jennifer Koh, herself a notable Bachian who is appearing as the great physicist in "Einstein on the Beach" at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion this weekend.

Although the Music Center has made little of it, the complex happens to be hosting at the moment a remarkable, if ad-hoc, brainpower extravaganza assessing three of history's greatest minds. Without them the world wouldn't be anything at all like the one we inhabit.

Einstein comes to us courtesy of Los Angeles Opera's presentation of the Philip Glass and Robert Wilson opera. Across the way at Disney, the Los Angeles Philharmonic has the premiere of Brett Dean's oratorio, "The Last Days of Socrates."

And it all began with what felt like a spectacular shower of shooting neurons

Wednesday with the first of Schiff's latest Bach recital programs. What made the night's performance all the more impressive is that the "English" Suites are not quite the best of Bach. Yet to come from Schiff's Bach series this season will be the six Partitas next Wednesday, followed by the "Goldberg" Variations on Oct. 20.

Musicologists are not sure what it is that makes the "English" Suites English. These are, in fact, French suites in that they are made up of a series of French dances. But they are not Bach's "French" Suites; that set of six keyboard pieces came later.

Bach was probably 30 when he wrote the "English" Suites (though he revised them a few years later), and they display characteristics typical of a very clever young composer. They are everywhere shot through with genius. Each opens with a wondrous prelude that is a font of what sounds like improvisatory invention, full of harmonic and contrapuntal surprises.

In some of the dances, though, and especially in the jumpy courantes, Bach can try too hard to be ingenious. Some of his fussily irregular phrases could cause chaos on the dance floor. Nor does he resist the temptation to load melodic lines down with excessive embellishments that he surely loved for showing off his virtuosity at the keyboard.

But Bach also amazes with special keyboard effects that sound avant-garde to this day, and he can suddenly take your breath away with a turn of phrase that is so gorgeous you barely believe your ears. The slow, stately sarabandes are, all six of them, beautiful beyond words and glories of the keyboard literature.

Bach, in the end, is always Bach. No bar goes by that doesn't repay investigation, and that is Schiff's approach. He is an ascetic Bachian. His recitals can come across almost like religious rituals. He played the suites straight through, without a break between the dances and allowing only a few seconds applause between the works. Disney remained bathed in a quiet, reverent hush. The intermission came between Nos. 4 and 5, making the first half an 80-minute marathon.

Schiff's playing, nevertheless, is anything but somber. Indeed, he can prove downright seductive. He did not use the pedal. He gave an appropriate nod to proper period practices in his carefully tasteful embellishments and crystal-clear revelation of inner lines. This is music originally written for the harpsichord.

But his pearly, even sensual, tone is pure piano. Schiff also has a flair for the playful. And even without using the sustaining pedal, he somehow gives the impression of bending pitches for rapt expressivity.

The suites flowed. Tempos were swift. Details came out, often catching a listener unaware.

I had the sensation of riding a raft down white-knuckle Bachian rapids. Out of the corner of my eye (ear?), I took in the breathtaking scenery. But the power was in the afterimages. This is where experiencing time got confusing and electrifying, because past, present and future all started to seem as one.

Schiff ended the last suite in a state of exhilaration with dazzlingly supple gavottes and then a terrorizing gigue. He left a dazed audience with an extravagant encore: Bach's "Chromatic" Fantasy and Fugue, ferociously played.

Now on to Einstein and Socrates — then more Bach. Too bad the Music Center failed to follow the example of these great thinkers and think a little differently by maybe providing, especially to students, some sort of genius ticket package deal, to say nothing of mounting a symposium.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Santa Barbara Independent WHO. WHAT. NOW.

April 22, 2013

Epic Bach

András Schiff Played All Six of Bach's "English" Suites

By Joseph Miller

In Michael Lawrence's documentary *Bach &Friends* composer Philip Glass makes the provocative claim that J.S. Bach was not a composer — not in the sense that we ordinarily understand, as someone who plans and works over his craft. "I think pieces arrived in his mind complete," in a kind of cosmic download. The best complement for Glass's unorthodox view might very well be the experience of a Bach recital by pianist András Schiff; Friday's marathon performance of the "English" Suites seemed infused with fluent and effortless energy from a higher sphere.

This was a concert for the die-hard Bach lover, and for anyone else who simply wanted to witness keyboard artistry at an exceptionally high level. These six suites, of six movements each, are relatively early compositions for Bach, and they emerged during a prolific period of secular writing that included the cello suites, the violin sonatas and partitas, and reams of keyboard music. Bach never intended all six to be played in one sitting, and Schiff admits he may be the only one to do so. With clarity that rivaled a Euclidean proof, the pianist cycled through all 36 movements, dutifully honoring every repeat. Schiff is a purist who plays with his shoes flat on the floor, shunning the sustain petal, a feature unknown in the clavichords and harpsichords of Bach's day. The burden of legato phrasing and sustains falls entirely on the hands, a feat masterfully demonstrated early in the program in the contrast between Bourrée I and II in the first suite.

Schiff has a long relationship with this music; his 1990 recording of the "English" Suites was awarded a Grammy. He is a full-immersion researcher who throws himself into whole bodies of work at one time (recently, all of Beethoven's piano sonatas), relishing context, seeing every part in the whole. A Schiff recital is always an experience of austerity and endurance, which brings its own welcome measure of clarity. But the real marvel is the purity of his encounter with the music, and the portal of light and color he throws open for the rest of us.

Culture spot LA
A Selective Guide to the Arts in Los Angeles

April 18, 2013

András Schiff at Disney Hall

By Hao Yuan Kueh

On April 17, pianist András Schiff continued his survey of Bach's complete solo keyboard works at Walt Disney Concert Hall with a performance of the Six French Suites and the French Overture.

Schiff's program was singular in its organization – so singular, in fact, that the audience was unsure whether to applaud after the end of each piece. Instead of settling for a shorter program with three French Suites for each half, as a lesser mortal might have done, Schiff completed all six Suites in a marathon first half lasting an hour and a half, and followed with a sizable second half consisting of the French Overture and an extended encore of – surprise! – more Bach.

The performance was quintessential Schiff in many respects – it showcased his thoughtful lyricism, crystal-clear articulation, and even his signature black mandarin-collared suit; however, the most remarkable aspect of Schiff's performance Wednesday night was his ability to unite these disparate and seemingly unrelated dance movements in a coherent manner. While it is unlikely that Bach intended for these pieces to be played together, Schiff brought the diverse styles and sentiments of the different Suites together to tell a surprisingly compelling musical story.

The first three of Bach's French Suites are in the minor key, and Schiff struck a generally somber tone throughout them. The moods in the dances were at times pensive – particularly during the slower Sarabande movements – and at times more agitated. The Third French suite in B minor culminated with a lively and slightly turbulent Gigue, and the audience could not resist offering their applause at its dramatic ending.

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth French Suites are in the major key and possess a warmer disposition; as if to clear the air after the vehement ending of the Third Suite, Schiff started the Allemande of the Fourth Suite in a subdued manner and let the dynamics increase progressively with its rising melodic line. Letting the energy build up gradually throughout these pieces, Schiff eventually burst into vigorous dance towards the end of the Fourth Suite and maintained this energy throughout the Fifth and Sixth Suites.

For the second half, Schiff played Bach's French Overture in B minor, essentially an extended French suite with a regal overture at the beginning and a few additional dance movements. To cap off this Bach marathon, he then encored – to the palpable delight of the audience – with all three movements of Bach's Italian Concerto in F major.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Washington Post

April 8, 2013

At Strathmore, Andras Schiff delivers immaculate, unvarnished 'French Suites'

By Robert Battey

Andras Schiff is one of a handful of musical artists today who can write their own ticket. For a pianist, it's almost unthinkable to build a major career without programming the works of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Liszt, Ravel or Prokofiev, but this Hungarian master has all but ignored these cornerstones of the repertory, focusing instead on the Austro-German classics from Bach through Brahms (with a few early excursions into Bartok). This singularly narrow approach would be fatal to anyone else, but Schiff has demonstrated that depth is more important than breadth.

He took this concept to extremes in his recital Sunday at Strathmore, presented by the Washington Performing Arts Society, but the power of his musical intellect filled the hall and brought an exhausted audience to its feet. The program had been announced as all six of Bach's "French Suites," a full meal if there ever was one. He then added the "Overture in the French Style" (Bach's single most imposing stand-alone work after the "Goldberg Variations" and the "The Well-Tempered Clavier").

This added up to two solid hours of music, and it was a gripping evening — note-perfect, full of imagination and impeccable musicianship. Schiff makes you listen to Bach on his own terms. There is no underlining or exclamation points, no hesitations before surprising harmony changes, no exaggerated characterizations of the dances. Both feet remained flat on the floor all night; he never touched either pedal, shaping the harmony changes and creating the legatos one note at a time.

Given this self-imposed restriction, the dynamic range was narrower than one often hears. Even in the most anguished sarabands, Schiff declined to tap the full expressive range of the instrument at his disposal. He kept the focus squarely on the genius of the structures and phrases themselves.

His ornamentation was a marvel of subtlety — just little touches here and there on repeats, but everything sounded natural and purling. Schiff's tempos meander slightly at times, and without discernible reasons. There were some exhilarating, driving gigues that channeled Glenn Gould, but in the more contemplative movements the tempo could drift. But the power of the music and the interpretation was still overwhelming, and the ovation went on and on until Schiff gave us the entire "Italian Concerto" for an encore.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

April 5, 2013

Conjuring as Well as Conducting

Philharmonic, Conducted by Andras Schiff, at Avery Fisher Hall

By Anthony Tommasini

Andras Schiff conducting at Avery Fisher Hall on Wednesday evening.

Bach, who wrote his keyboard concertos for the harpsichord, could not have envisioned hearing them played on a grand piano with an ensemble of modern string instruments in a 2,738-seat concert hall. But you can imagine that he would have been exhilarated by the performances of the Keyboard Concertos No. 5 in F minor and No. 3 in D that the superb pianist Andras Schiff gave at Avery Fisher Hall on Wednesday night with a complement of about two dozen string players from the New York Philharmonic. This is the final program in the orchestra's monthlong Bach Variations festival.

Naturally Mr. Schiff, an incomparable Bach interpreter, performed on a Steinway grand, conducting from the keyboard. His performance, as always, was a model of pristine articulation, varied colorings and rhythmic élan. Yet when Mr. Schiff plays Bach, you never feel that he is imitating a harpsichord, though in these concertos he dispatched streams of passagework with detached crispness and used hardly any sustaining pedal. (For his survey of both books of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" at the 92nd Street Y this fall he

scrupulously played with no pedal at all.)

Mr. Schiff embraces the resources of the piano in Bach. For example, in the Largo, the slow movement, of the Concerto in F minor, he shaped the flowing melody with grace and lyricism. Of course there is an element of conjuring involved in playing melodies on the piano, since every note, once struck, starts to decay in sound. But with his supple handling of the steady bass line that supports the melody, Mr. Schiff made it seem that sustained notes in the tune were lingering expressively over the delicate pizzicato accompaniment of the Philharmonic strings.

He held back the tempo of the Allegro opening movement a little, which lent the music hardy vigor and allowed him to bring out nuanced details in the busy contrapuntal lines. He and the string players also conveyed the ebullience of the Concerto in D, especially the final Allegro, with its conversation between the teasing piano and the perky orchestra.

Though he is one of the busiest pianists in the business, Mr. Schiff has done a fair amount of conducting, including appearances with major orchestras in Europe. Wednesday night was his official debut as a conductor with the Philharmonic.

After the Bach concertos, he led Mendelssohn's Sinfonia No. 9 in C ("Swiss"), one of the mini-symphonies for strings that the composer wrote in his youth. This one has a yodeling tune in the middle section of the scherzo that the composer may have heard on a trip to Switzerland. Mr. Schiff seemed intent on emphasizing the elegance and intricacy of the music to the point that sometimes the performance was draggy and lacked lightness.

Mr. Schiff excelled, though, in Schumann's Symphony No. 4 in D minor, which he conducted from memory and without a baton, using his hands to draw playing from the orchestra that was shapely, vibrant and full of character. The Philharmonic musicians seemed delighted to be working with this longtime colleague and great artist.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Guardian

March 18, 2013

András Schiff – review

Wigmore Hall, London

★★★★★

By Andrew Clements

There may be no definitive way of programming a cycle of Beethoven's piano sonatas, whether it's in strict chronological order or with a balance of early, middle and late works in each recital. But undeniably the chronological approach does result in two final evenings of some of the most extraordinary piano music ever composed.

András Schiff completed his survey at the Wigmore Hall with two concerts in which he played the last six sonatas in unbroken triptychs, without intervals.

Both were exceptional experiences, for Schiff's Beethoven is wonderfully truthful and thoughtful. The music is always his starting point, without any attempt to impose preconceived ideas or to make anything other than what is. Though he is capable of conjuring up the most ravishing colours and crystalline transparency from his instrument, he doesn't shy away from more forthright, rougher sounds when appropriate. The uncomplicated way in which he presented some of the themes in both the E minor sonata Op 90 and the A major Op 101 was beautifully contrasted with the limpid purity of his lyrical playing, while in the Hammerklavier Op 106 Schiff's grace under pressure, his clarity of thought among the welter of the outer movements and in the depths of the Adagio, was hugely impressive.

There had already been an extraordinary foretaste of the final recital when Schiff played the whole of the E major sonata Op 109 as an encore after the Hammerklavier. That performance was more relaxed and unbuttoned than the official one four nights later, where everything seemed conceived as part of his profoundly searching totality, with the A flat sonata Op 110 raptly unfolded and the C minor Op 111 beautifully balanced between rugged assertiveness and transcendence. Totally compelling.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

American Record Guide
INDEPENDENT CRITICS REVIEWING CLASSICAL RECORDINGS AND MUSIC IN CONCERT

January/February 2013

Andras Schiff's Well-Tempered Clavier

Staggering Scope of Bach on the Piano

Richard S Ginell

It was a stunt, some would say, to perform all 48 of JS Bach's Preludes and Fugues in that mighty collection known as *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. We do not know whether Bach would have wanted the collection to be performed in public at all, let alone in one or two sittings. These were teaching pieces, mainly for Bach's own children, meant to be practiced, studied, or perhaps only read for one's own pleasure and enlightenment.

But that didn't stop one leading Bach champion of our day, Andras Schiff, from tackling the 48 on consecutive Wednesdays in October in Walt Disney Concert Hall. Not only Los Angeles, but San Francisco and New York also heard Schiff's WTC, with Vancouver BC, Santa Barbara, Washington DC, and Chicago hearing one book or the other. And ECM released a handsomely packaged boxed set of the WTC (Schiff's second go at the cycle) in September. And this was just the beginning, for Schiff launched a two-year Bach project that resumes here in April when he will perform the French Suites and Overture, followed in 2013-14 by the English Suites, Partitas, and *Goldberg Variations*.

This was definitely an event for piano buffs, Schiff fans, Bach nuts, and the assorted curious who flocked to Disney Hall on both nights (October 17 for Book I, October 24 for Book II). The rush lines were long (though the upper balconies and orchestra rear seats were not for sale and left empty), and I've never seen so many people who brought their own scores to a local concert this side of a *Messiah* sing-along. But the house lights were turned off at the concerts (unfortunate for score readers), probably to intensify the theatricality of a solitary musician communing spiritually with Bach.

Far from content to simply perform the music, Schiff has sounded off quite emphatically about how he chooses to play Bach. There is a promotional DVD for his new ECM set (excerpts of which can be sampled on YouTube) that contains a fascinating interview-demonstration that Schiff gave in New York's Kaplan Penthouse last May where he defends the modern grand piano as the best instrument for every facet of the 48, coming down especially hard in favor of not using the damper (right) pedal at all. True to his word, in all of the performances Schiff kept his right foot planted firmly at a slight angle on the stage floor. Only in the closing measures of Book I's A-minor fugue, which has an A pedal point in the bass that is supposed to sustain all the way to the end as if written for an organ, did Schiff use the sostenuto (middle) pedal as an aid to hold down that note without smearing the rest of the texture.

The result was that Schiff's WTC had wonderful clarity, the polyphony sharply defined while mellowed and rounded by the reverberation of Disney Hall. Schiff could point out at will any strand of the polyphonic texture that he chose, creating internal dialogs and call-and-response effects, but there were also plenty of singing legatos (no pedal needed). Since there are only a handful of tempo markings in the WTC, usually for contrast in the middle of a piece, Schiff exercised free rein, mostly within boundaries set by various posthumous editors and that hoary old thing called tradition, but sometimes markedly faster. Very often Schiff seemed to be creating cohesive mini-suites by running the end of a particular fugue right into the succeeding prelude with barely a pause.

Along the way, there were revelations of how far ahead of his time Bach could be, particularly in Book II where the preludes are often longer, more intricate, and more contrapuntal. To just cite a scoop of examples from my notes, the B-minor fugue in Book I, patient and solemn at first, drifted into a trance suggesting the finale of Beethoven's Sonata No. 32; and Schiff stabbed away at trills in the A-minor fugue from Book II in a manner that conjured another Beethoven finale from the *Hammerklavier Sonata*. Nor would he suppress the jazzy implications in the syncopations in the G-sharp minor prelude from Book II. That was grist for the musicologists' mills.

But Schiff could also arouse more general impressions—the jolly hornpipe-like way he romped through the F-minor fugue from Book II, the playful folk dance of the C-sharp fugue from Book II, stroking the rolled chords of E-flat minor prelude from Book I as if he were playing a harp, and the way its companion fugue seemed to emerge as if from a dream.

There was no thought of monotony; every piece was given its own individual, fully developed character (no two were alike), with Schiff pointing out associations between pieces and unexpected details. His playing had life, joy, humor (Schiff comments on Bach's wit on the video, while charging that Schubert and Chopin had no sense of humor, which should set off partisan debate), intellectual strength, and in the home stretch of Book II, a withdrawn spiritual side as Bach goes deeper and deeper.

With the help of all of the resources that a nine-foot Steinway can supply, Schiff at 58 has captured and projected a staggeringly wide scope of what Bach-on-the-piano can be, perhaps more than any other living pianist that I could name—and that includes some blue-chip figures.

The name of Glenn Gould is bound to come up in any Bach-on-the-piano discussion, especially since Schiff's Bach project began only days after what would have been Gould's 80th birthday September 25. A fresh round of Gould reissues, retrospectives, and tributes followed, but so strong was Schiff's account of the WTC that it was easy to step outside the orbit of the Canadian iconoclast for awhile and celebrate what we have today. We await the rest of Schiff's Bach project eagerly. ☆

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

November 2, 2012

Completing a Bach Marathon That Would Probably Have Amazed Even Bach

Andras Schiff Performs Bach's 'Clavier' at the 92nd Street Y

By Anthony Tommasini

Andras Schiff performing Book 2 of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" at the 92nd Street Y on Thursday.

Last Saturday, in one of the highlights of this or any concert season, the pianist Andras Schiff gave a magnificent performance of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," Book 1, at the 92nd Street Y. That Mr. Schiff, 58, has studied, played and inhabited this music for about a half-century came through in his probing and vibrant performances of the 24 preludes and fugues, in every major and minor key.

On Thursday, just five days later, Mr. Schiff was back at the 92nd Street Y to perform Book 2, in another exhilarating performance. Book 2 of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" is, over all, even harder and definitely longer. (Not counting the intermissions, Mr. Schiff's account of Book 1 took just under two hours; Book 2 was about 2 hours 20 minutes.)

Bach's contrapuntal writing is more intricate and experimental in the later collection. Many of the fugue subjects, like the halting, fragmented one of the Fugue in F sharp minor, are quirky,

clipped and strange. It is as if Bach had intentionally set himself the challenge of developing elaborate fugues from unwieldy themes.

Though New York was still reeling from Hurricane Sandy, the 900-seat auditorium at the 92nd Street Y was nearly filled. Listening to Mr. Schiff performing Bach so beautifully, I thought about what an out-of-body experience it would have been for Bach to attend these concerts.

Hearing his preludes and fugues, which were written for the harpsichord, played on the piano would have been the least of it. Though he was critical of early fortepianos, he had positive things to say about an instrument he tried on a visit to Berlin in 1747, three years before he died. Besides, no keyboard works are more all-purpose and reduced to the essentials of music than Bach's preludes and fugues.

But what would have stunned him would be the sight of all those people sitting in an auditorium listening to "The Well-Tempered Clavier" being performed. Though many of these pieces are dazzling, even charming, this is formidably complex music. Bach thought of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" as a kind of treatise, the ultimate demonstration of the workings of counterpoint, as well as an exploration, almost a manifesto, on behalf of a system of tuning that made it possible to explore the chromatic nooks and crannies of all the major and minor keys.

Most of all, Bach would have been flabbergasted that Mr. Schiff had played the complete 48 preludes and fugues from memory. The very idea would never have occurred to Bach. In his day there was composed music, which was performed from printed scores, or there was improvised music. My guess is that Bach would have found it easier to improvise a new prelude and fugue in A flat than to play this intricate work from memory.

There was much talk during intermission about Mr. Schiff's feat of memory, which was awesome. Still, there are different kinds of talent and genius. That Mr. Schiff played this music from memory so comfortably is what can happen after decades of study and immersion.

But it also suggested that the wiring of Mr. Schiff's brain was suited to Bach's highly contrapuntal style. I would have been just as impressed by Mr. Schiff's brilliant playing had he performed the "Well-Tempered Clavier" using the printed scores.

I still feel, as I did after hearing Mr. Schiff play Book 1, that he may go too far in his resolve to perform these works on the piano without using the sustaining pedal at all. He made a strong case for his choice in a recent interview in The New York Times, yet now and then, just a touch of pedal would have lent the sound some lingering richness and hazy colorings, as in the tender Prelude in G from Book 2. Still, Mr. Schiff brought fresh, prickly clarity and rhythmic vitality to that prelude.

Over all, he has found a way to make his no-pedal approach work. I would not be surprised, though, if in future years he rethought this issue.

For now, those who were not at the 92nd Street Y have Mr. Schiff's new ECM recording of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" to savor. And in April Mr. Schiff's Bach Project continues in New York when he plays the complete French and English Suites at Alice Tully Hall and two concertos with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall. All, of course, from memory.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The New York Times

October 29, 2012

Complex Bach Is Illuminated

András Schiff Plays 'Well-Tempered Clavier,' at 92nd Street Y

By Anthony Tommasini

András Schiff seemed to channel Bach while performing Book I of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" almost without pausing and all from memory on Saturday at the 92nd Street Y.

When the pianist András Schiff took a break halfway through his magnificent performance of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," Book I, on Saturday night at the 92nd Street Y, the intermission seemed more for the benefit of his audience than for himself. This seminal Bach work has 24 paired preludes and fugues, one pair for each of the major and minor keys. Performing these intricately contrapuntal works from memory, Mr. Schiff played them almost without pausing, taking only enough time to set the mood for each piece.

He clearly thinks of the first book of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" as an entity. When he stood up to take a bow before intermission, he looked almost reluctant to be leaving the stage. You sensed that he would just as soon have played straight through all of Book I, nearly two hours of intensely complex music, at one sitting.

Now 58, Mr. Schiff has been playing Bach's preludes and fugues since his early childhood. He recorded the complete "Well-Tempered Clavier" (both books) in the mid-1980s. His new recording was issued by the ECM New Series label this summer and he recently began his "Bach Project" tour, a recital

series on which he will perform the major keyboard works of Bach (all from memory).

On Saturday it was as if Mr. Schiff were channeling Bach, not just performing him. He has put decades of thought, analysis and imagination into his interpretations. It was fascinating to hear him reveal the contrapuntal tangles of the Fugue in A minor, with its curiously abrupt theme. Every twist in its four intertwined voices came through with uncanny clarity. But it never sounded as if Mr. Schiff was pointing out things or didactically highlighting inner voices. The music unfolded with naturalness and grace. He captured both its stern complexity and jumpy playfulness.

These days when playing Bach Mr. Schiff does not use the piano's sustaining pedal, which lifts the dampers off all the strings so that sounds linger and mingle. (Bach's keyboard works were written for the harpsichord, which had no sustaining pedals.) By not availing himself of the full resources of the modern piano Mr. Schiff is taking an absolutist stance. He said in a recent interview with The New York Times that some respected colleagues who advocate using the pedal in Bach have argued with him about this. In principle I am on their side.

Yet hearing Mr. Schiff play these works in the moment, with such musical integrity and technical elegance, I was swept away. He uses his fingers alone to make every nuance and detail in his performances happen, especially legato smoothness in long-spun lines. When you have fingers like Mr. Schiff's, this is more possible than it might seem.

The other result of his not using the pedal is that the rhythmic character of the music came through with startling freshness, right from the opening Prelude in C, which every child who studies piano learns. Played with the sustaining pedal, the short arpeggio figures turn the prelude into a hazy, lapping chorale. In Mr. Schiff's account, the rhythmic patterns had a dancelike lift. In the weighty Prelude in B-flat minor, which sounded here like a somber processional, the transparency of Mr. Schiff's playing gave new definition and character to the music.

Once in a while I missed hearing the lingering colors that just a touch of pedal would have added. But if making such principled choices as a pianist and musician is what accounts for the extraordinary performance Mr. Schiff gave on Saturday, more power to him.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE
The Go-To Place for Great Music in the Bay Area

October 21, 2012

The Infinitely Rewarding Artistry of András Schiff

By Benjamin Frandzel

András Schiff probably knows J.S. Bach's keyboard music as fully as any pianist alive, having devoted so much of his career to recording and performing it. In his traversal of Book II of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* on Sunday at Davies Symphony Hall, the second of his four Bach recitals there this season, he delivered a performance that was both commanding and searching. His playing revealed the depth of his connection to this music and brought a sense of discovery to it, as well.

From the outset, scarcely pausing between movements, Schiff's playing offered the broadest possible range of colors and a complexity of musical character. One noteworthy element of his approach is the decision to forego pedaling completely in this work, the case for which he made in a convincing program essay. By dispensing with this single expressive device, his playing revealed so many more tools at his disposal that it hardly seemed that the music could be approached otherwise.

First, Schiff's sound is a marvel, not only because of the warmth he can bring to the piano but also because of the sheer variety of tone he can produce. The rich tone that filled the opening C-major prelude and fugue suggested an orchestral fullness, but then there was the organlike warmth for the thick textures in the E-minor fugue, or the bright tone that animated the F-major prelude and fugue.

A special characteristic that Schiff brings to this music is an extraordinary range of articulation, so that he could set contrapuntal voices apart, with one in a singing legato and another line played just slightly more detached, or could pose the voices further apart with greater differences in attack.

This same approach allowed individual lines to evolve as they were repeated, moving from legato to detached or vice versa, and giving a prismatic view of a single musical idea. Even brief, ornamental figures were imbued with multiple meanings — a trill might serve as a brief flourish, or a spark for a new phrase, or a decisive turning point in the music.

Schiff's command of the music played out in innumerable ways. In huge movements such as the F-sharp-minor

or B-flat-minor fugues, each filled with an interwoven network of contrapuntal ideas, the pianist played with a sense of unfolding exploration even as each line proceeded with a quality of gravitas. The balance in Schiff's playing is so refined that he can weave Bach's counterpoint such that each line emerges in utter clarity, even as a complex sense of the work's total architecture is summoned forth.

Part of the continuity the pianist brings to the work, the sense of its encompassing a large musical arc within which a vast variety of expression is possible, comes from his unerring sense of pulse. Finely chosen rhythmic subtleties emerged throughout the work, a gentle push and pull within phrases, or a slight slowing to highlight the occasional ambiguity between major and minor, while a deeper pulse could still be perceived.

Schiff brought a quality of denouement to both halves of the program, with a lovely feeling of breath infused into the F-minor prelude and fugue that closed the first half and the B-minor pairing that ends the full work. Schiff encored with the C-major prelude and fugue from Book I, suggesting the complete work as an unending, ever-rewarding cycle to return to, all while revealing just a little more of the infinite rewards that this artist can bring forth from this music.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

Los Angeles Times

October 18, 2012

Andras Schiff plays Bach preludes, fugues masterfully

Andras Schiff plays the first book of Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier' beautifully at Walt Disney Concert Hall. On Wednesday, he'll play the second book.

By Mark Swed

Pianist Andras Shiff performs Bach's Goldberg Variations at Disney Hall, Sunday, May 9, 2004

András Schiff is the Master.

Wednesday night at Walt Disney Concert Hall, he played the first book of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier." A book it is. A Bach bible. Or maybe, devout Lutheran though Bach was, a Bach Torah, something to be not just studied, but argued over, interpreted and re-interpreted generation after generation by master after master. Then again it might be a Buddhist scripture, exploring the intricate interworking of the universe.

One thing is obvious: There can be no last word on these 24 preludes and fugues, one in each key, major and minor, or on the 24 in the second book, which Schiff will play in Disney Hall next Wednesday. There is no single essence, but essences. Schiff's mastery, in what is without question the most illuminating and moving and beautiful piano performance I've heard this year, is to reveal that plural.

Wednesday's concert had the quality of ritual. Schiff is 58 but gives the impression of an ageless musical

wisdom. He walked very methodically on stage, which was given a peculiar pinkish lighting design this evening. The hall then darkened, with the piano and its player in a circle illumined as if for a shaman.

Schiff's concentration is penetrating and he can get flustered by distractions. In 2006, a noisy Disney Hall audience made it hard for him to continue and he had to briefly leave the stage. He waited a long moment for the proper mood and then began the rolling arpeggios of the famous C-Major prelude. Every piano student knows it. They — we — have all tried to line those repeated half-notes in the bass just right and get the right hand to produce a proper proto-Philip Glass minimalist trance.

Schiff's tempo was quick, and the arpeggios gracefully flowed not like water in a stream but like steam from a spaceship readying for liftoff. The pianist planted his feet on the floor, playing without the use of the pedal, with the exception of the end of the A-Minor fugue, which ends with a sustained bass A. "Clavier," in Bach's time, meant any keyboard instrument at hand, and this fugue was evidently intended for organ.

Schiff released a recording of the "48" (as the two books are often nicknamed by musicians) in 1990 when he had longish, wavy brown hair (now it is gray and frizzy). It seemed at the time, eight years after the death of Glenn Gould, to be a new kind of Bach for the piano — thoughtful and decidedly not eccentric. But in comparison to the way Schiff now plays Bach — he has an essential new recording of the 48 just released on ECM — he was, 22 years ago, overly pianistic.

His newly deepened approach to the "48" is more vocal. Every line sounds sung. The elaborate counterpoint in the fugues requires of a listener the exercising of both sides of the brain to follow Bach's logic and feel his music's emotion. Schiff's great accomplishment with his Bach now is that piano becomes a tool. You can't miss the extreme elegance and beauty of his tone, but there is also the sense of transcending this instrument, which is far more sophisticated than the keyboards of Bach's time.

One could complain about too much piety, what with the darkened hall and Schiff's overpowering vision of these works as a dramatic entity. Schiff often elided the end of a fugue with the beginning of a new prelude, a concluding major chord sinking delicately but still theatrically into the minor for the next chapter. He is not the first pianist to treat the "48" as a unified epic, but that is a concept far from Bach's mind and can be suffocating.

Yet for all Schiff's asceticism, he also conveys a sly hedonism. He may transcend the piano, but he still retains a tone that is sweet and, despite the forgoing of the sustaining pedal, corpulent. His Bach conveys physical delight. The sense I had was of heightened awareness. It felt as though the Disney folks had pumped pure, intoxicating oxygen into the room.

This epic finished with the B-Minor Prelude and Fugue, the most serious and religious in Book 1. Schiff took a determined approach to the chromatically tortuous prelude, as if walking undeterred through a minefield. The slow four-part fugue was a revelation of something for which words will not suffice.

Please don't let the Book 2, next Wednesday, pass you by. Plus, you can kill two birds with one stone by dropping into the Disney shop and taking care of early Christmas shopping. Schiff's new "Well-Tempered Clavier" recording is the gift for the people whose spiritual well-being matters most.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

The Seattle Times

October 16, 2012

Bach in the hands of a master: András Schiff in Seattle

A review of Monday night's concert by renowned pianist Andras Schiff, at Benaroya Hall in Seattle.

By Philippa Kiraly

Pianist András Schiff needs no introduction to Bach lovers. He is one of the towering Bach interpreters of our time.

In a rare and special performance Monday night on the Distinguished Artists Series at Benaroya Hall, he played all 24 preludes and fugues of "The Well-Tempered Clavier," Book II.

It was a long concert, 70 minutes in the first half, 80 in the second and without applause until the end of each half, but you could have heard a pin drop among the audience, so close was its attention to Schiff.

The piano as an instrument was not much more than a gleam in a builder's eye when Bach died, but the word "clavier" encompasses all the keyboard instruments. Schiff plays the Steinway grand as a very early piano might have been played — without pedal, as there were no pedals then, and somehow creating the fast note decay which gives great clarity, enabling the listener to hear each line of the music as it interweaves with others above and below.

He also uses a narrow dynamic range. A harpsichord such as Bach knew has no dynamic range: increased volume is created by adding another layer of strings. A clavichord, which Bach knew well, can be known as a landlady's delight, so quiet you can't hear it from outside the door, although the player can play louder or softer.

Schiff played the entire evening between mezzo-piano and mezzo-forte, not reaching the latter more than a few times.

Within these constraints, he gave a mesmerizing, compelling performance, amazing as each individual prelude or fugue gave way to the next very different one.

His tempos were rock-solid steady, his hands gentle and even on the piano. Sometimes, for staccato emphasis, he would seem to bounce his fingers off the notes in a crisp attack. He created the expressive variety from robust to dreamy, from lively and bright to weighty with phrasing, with minuscule hesitations, with articulation, by playing notes firmly or with a caress, making the result airy or smooth, and always absorbing to hear.

Hearing this entire book of Bach works leaves the listener in awe of the musical inspiration of the man, that anyone could create such extraordinary variety in just two musical forms.

At the end, after enthusiastic applause, Schiff even played an encore: the Prelude and Fugue in C major, from "The Well-Tempered Clavier," Book I.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

October 15, 2012

SFist Reviews: Week Review In Classical Grooves

András Schiff in Recital: For all the agoraphobic people who did not want to be caught in a crowd of a gazillion America's Cup/Giants/Hardly Strictly Bluegrass/Blue Angels fans, there was a haven a peace and calm and quiet sophistication: András Schiff's piano recital at Davies Symphony Hall. There, the roar of the Blue Angels hardly moved the needle beyond tiny whisper. And the power of Schiff's artistry is such that the sound level did not have to hit over a hundred dB to awe us.

Schiff did not perform the Well-Tempered Clavier as much as he led a session to channel the spirit of Johan Sebastian Bach, using the Steinway as his Ouija board. We participated in mystical, monastic experience to reveal the music not as re-invented by the performer, but as written by the composer. There is no more self-effacing pianist than Schiff: he's the anti-Lang Lang, if you will, with minimal gestures, no body movement beyond what's required for the service of the score, and above all, a respect for the written note that verges on the obsessive. Schiff is the conduit through which the music flows, but you feel he sees the performer more as a necessary evil to bring Bach's music to life than an interpreter who has to put his stamp on it. Paradoxically, this is what makes Schiff's playing so special: a focus on clarity and purity, an unadorned look into the essence of the music.

For Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, it means playing the whole thicket of notes from memory (as Schiff always takes pride in doing) and without the sustain pedal. All amateur pianists have played Bach's preludes and fugues. He wrote two books of 24 prelude & fugue pairs, one set for each major and minor keys. Schiff will play the second book on Oct. 21st. In 1722, it was still a new idea to have a keyboard tuned to even tones, where the scale is split in twelve identical chromatic steps, so that pieces can be written in any key. So Bach went ahead and ran away with the idea. Most of the pieces are relatively short, live in a range that never strays to far above or

below the written staff (pianos had fewer notes then) and orchestrate between two and five, but mostly three or four, voices.

The math will tell you that to play four voices outnumber two hands, which leaves you with two choices: hold notes with a sustain pedal, freeing you to layer more notes on top, or hold notes with a combination of sticky fingers and hellish fingerings and face a constant struggle to make a singing continuity of melodic lines. Each hand has to play at the same time as schizophrenic mix of voice leading and accompaniment, a blend of interstitial dynamics. For Schiff, that's piece of cake, giving full clarity to each note with a light, perfectly articulated touch.

The overall effect is of asceticism and it's not a performance you can go through without giving it your full concentration. Avoid a big lunch before this Sunday matinee. But immerse yourself in Schiff's playing, and you'll be entranced, so that you feel let down once it's over. There are moments of lyricism, of dance, of unexpected grace, but there is also a feel of Schiff walking the tight rope, so exposed is he, each note so clear, with nowhere to hide. We wonder if Schiff is human after going through the recital with maybe one bass note out of place, and those perfectly even trills. But he must be to phrase the 8th prelude in Eb minor as softly as raindrops, or an almost laughing theme in the G# minor Fugue with its note repeated three times, or a sweet innocence in the 21st prelude, reminiscent of the 1st one. He could put so much intonation in the first, single note, of the theme of the A major Fugue, both as an interjection and a punctuation. It's in the wealth of details, in the richness of small gestures that Schiff weaves a huge tapestry.

We would have assumed he'd be drained after all 48 pieces, but he still gave us an encore, another prelude and another fugue because certainly, we hadn't had enough.

ANDRÁS SCHIFF

StarkInsider
ALL THINGS WEST COAST®

October 13, 2012

András Schiff: In Residency at San Francisco Symphony (Verdict: A Gem)

By Cy Ashley Webb

András Schiff conducts Bach and Mendelssohn

★★★★★

5 out of 5 stars - 'Outstanding - Starkie!'
San Francisco Symphony
Thursday, October 11 - Saturday, October 13
www.sfsymphony.org

Pianist András Schiff, as 2012-13 Project San Francisco Artist, begins his two year residency in the month of October with a variety of events and performances exploring the keyboard works of Johann Sebastian Bach.

While something extraordinary is always happening at the San Francisco Symphony, 2012-2013 is all the more so with András Schiff's repeated appearances. Beloved by classical aficionados – and even more by pianists – Schiff appears both on podium and behind the piano. Last night's concert featured both Schiff-the-pianist and Schiff-the-conductor, which made for a truly magic evening.

As a pianist, András Schiff invariably awakens your ears to things they have never heard before. His subtle expressivity makes common Bach preludes known by almost every elementary piano student seem like a whole new experience. Because of this, I was particularly curious how he would be as a conductor.

The evening's performance opened with *Fingal's Cave* (1834) by Mendelssohn. Like the other Mendelssohn piece that book-ended the concert, it was inspired in part, by Mendelssohn's travels. The real Fingal's Cave lies in the outer Hebrides, an impressive beach cave composed of volcanic basalt pillars.

Under Schiff's non-existent baton, the SF Symphony delivered a nuanced expression of every phrase which brought out the essence of this heroically mystical piece. The color of this performance, particularly of the reeds and bassoons as they repeat the several musical ideas that make up this eight-minute gem, made my own recording (Leonard Bernstein with the Israel Philharmonic) seem curiously overwrought in comparison.

J.S. Bach's *Keyboard Concert No. 2 in E Major* followed. Alexandra Amati-Camperi explained earlier in the evening that this piece may have originally been a violin concerto, given the insistent repetition of a second note, as if it were a drone on a violin. Origins aside, in a day in which virtuoso pianists seems ever more common, almost every concert pianist can perform the two *Allegros* of this piece with lightning-like speed, only Schiff does it with such clarity and ease of ornamentation. The lack of excessive emotionality made the delivery all the more effective. I haven't been this blown away by a single musician since Lars Mortensen played with Philharmonia Baroque several years back.

Concerto No. 2 in E Major was immediately followed by *Keyboard Concert No. 1 in D Minor*. The two main foci of all three movements of this piece were: (1) Schiff the soloist; and (2) Schiff and the symphony playing together. While two centers (soloist and orchestra) are the very definition of a concerto, last night the focus was on how gently Schiff the soloist seemed to make room for the orchestra to join him. The entire audience was on board and hanging on every note of the first movement. The overall effect was so stunning that the audience broke out in applause. This response reminded me of how relatively recent the restriction on not applauding after individual movements is – and how instead of elevating the performance, this custom seems to deaden a live performance into a museum piece. The elderly gentleman behind me expressed how stricken the audience felt when the piece ended, as he whispered "bye-bye piano."

Schiff returned to the podium after intermission for a performance of Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 4 in Major*. Better known as the *Italian*, this piece seems to be a favorite of the SF Symphony, as they just performed it in 2011, under the baton of Kurt Masur. While this previous performance was quite stunning, tonight's performance was decidedly different.

The violins in the first *allegro vivace* movement sounded the first theme of this Symphony lightly, almost burbling in rapture, as it does throughout the exposition. This airiness was unlike the hearty-good-times-in-the-south version so commonly heard. The second theme, as first sounded by the woodwinds, had a similar lightness. The delicacy provided a perfect contrast for what followed throughout this movement, as Mendelssohn puts these two simple riffs through their paces, including even a martial version.

The second *andante con moto* movement was remarkable for what it wasn't. Unlike the 2010 performance, which had the somber feel of a religious processional, Schiff's version seemed faster, lighter. If possible, the SF Symphony seemed to bring even more unity than they usually do to a performance as they finessed trills with perfect clarity.

The precision and clear articulation continued throughout the rapid-fire *Salterello*, the performance of which was amazing for the clear enunciation of every single note. Having listened to this pieces dozens of times over the years, I came away thinking that I had finally really heard it.

The good news is that Schiff will be performing several times throughout the year, so if you missed this opportunity, there will be more to follow, including a performance of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 2 on October 21st. Hopefully, SFS will continue with more videos by this master, such as the gem presently on their web site that I will talk about later.

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András Schiff
Discography

ECM NEW SERIES (BMG)

ECM 2690 (2021)	**Brahms: Piano Concertos**
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ECM 2425-26 (2015)	**Franz Schubert: Sonatas, Impromptus, Moments Musicaux**
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B001733702 (2012)	**J.S. Bach: Well-Tempered Clavier, Books I & II** ***GRAMMY NOMINATED: BEST CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTAL SOLO***
B001611502 (2011)	**Schumann: Geistervariationen**
ECM 2001/02 NS (2009)	**Bach: Six Partitas**
B001190802 (2008)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. VIII: Opp. 109, 110 and 111**
B001190602 (2008)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. VII: Opp. 90, 101 and 106**
B0010814-02 (2008)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. VI: Opp. 54, 57, 78, 79 and 81a**
B0009660-02 (2008)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. V: Opp. 31 and 53**

B000884802	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. IV: Opp. 26, 27 and 28**
289-476-315-5 (2006)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. III: Opp. 14, 22 and 49**
289-476-310-0 (2005)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. II: Opp. 10 and 13**
289-476-305-4 (2005)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: The Piano Sonatas Vol. I: Opp. 2 and 7**
289-472-401-2 (2004)	**Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete Music for Piano and Violoncello** (András Schiff, piano; Miklós Perényi, cello)
289-472-185-2 (2003)	**J.S. Bach: Goldberg Variations** BWV 988 ***GRAMMY NOMINATED: BEST INSTRUMENTAL SOLOIST PERFORMANCE***
289-461-899-2 (2003)	**Songs of Debussy and Mozart:** Debussy: Beau soir, Clair de lune, Pierrot, Apparition, Pantomime, from Fêtes galantes, 1er livre: En sourdine, Fantoches, Clair de lune, Ariettes oubliées, C'est l'extase langoureuse, Il pleure dans mon clur, L'ombre des arbres, Chevaux de bois, Green, Spleen; W.A. Mozart: Dans un bois solitaire, Oiseaux, si tous les ans, Warnung, Der Sauberer, Das Veilchen, Sehnsucht nach dem Frühlinge, Als Luise die Briefe ihres untreuen Liebhabers verbrannte, Abendempfindung (Juliane Banse, soprano, András Schiff, piano).
289-472-119-2 (2002)	**Schumann: In Concert:** Humoreske for Piano in B flat Major, Op. 120; Novelletten for Piano, Op. 21; Sonata for Piano in F minor, Op. 14 No. 3; Nachstucke for Piano in F minor, Op. 23 No. 4.
289-461-660-2 (2001)	**Leoš Janáček: A Recollection:** In the mist, Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, On an overgrown path, A recollection.
289-464-320 2 (2000)	**Schubert:** Fantasy for Piano in C Major "Wanderer", D760 and Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C Major, D934 (András Schiff, piano; Yuuko Shiokawa, violin).
465-062-2 (1999)	**Music for Two pianos Mozart:** Fugue in C minor, K. 426 and Sonata in D Major, K. 448/375a; **Reger:** Variations and Fugue on a theme of Beethoven, Op. 86; **Bussoni:** Fantasia contrappuntistica, 256b (Peter Serkin and András Schiff, pianos).

NAXOS

NBD0105V 2020	**Sir András Schiff plays The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II** (Visual Album)
NBD0104V 2020	**Sir András Schiff plays The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I** (Visual Album)

TELDEC (ATLANTIC)

0630-17142-2	**Dvořák:** Piano Quintet in A, Op. 81; Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat, Op. 87 (András

(1999)	Schiff, piano; Panocha Quartet).
3984-21261-2 (1999)	**Bedrich Smetana Polkas:** Tri salanní polky, Op. 7; Tri poetické polky, Op. 8; Polka in F minor; Polka in A Major; Vzpomínky na Cechy ve forme polek Op. 12; Polka in E Major; Polka in G minor; Vzpomínky ne Cechy ve forme polek Op. 13.
0630-17141-2 (1999)	**Haydn Piano Sonatas:** Sonata No. 32 in g; Sonata No. 54 in G; Sonata No. 53 in e; Sonata No. 58 in C; Sonata No. 33 in c; Fantasia in C; Sonata No. 59 in E-flat; Sonata No. 60 in C; Sonata No. 58 in D; Sonata No. 62 in E-flat.
0630-19992-2 (1998)	**Veress:** Hommage à Paul Klee; Concerto for Piano, Strings & Percussion; Six Csárdás (András Schiff, piano; Dénes Várjon, piano; Budapest Festival Orchestra; Heinz Holliger, conductor).
0630-14566-2 (1998)	**Schumann:** Kreisleriana, Op. 16; Nächtstüke, Op. 23; Gesänge Der Frühe, Op. 133; and Geister-Variationen.
0630-13151-2 (1997)	**Schubert Piano Trios:** Arpeggione Sonata in a, D. 821; Piano Trio in B-flat, Op. 99; Notturno in E-flat, Op. 148; Piano Trio in E-flat, Op. 100 (András Schiff, piano; Yuuko Shiokawa, violin; Miklós Perényi, cello.) 2-CD set
0630-13159-2 (1997)	**Beethoven:** The Piano Concertos (complete) and Piano Sonata in f "Appassionata," Op. 57 (András Schiff, piano; Bernard Haitink, conductor; Staatskapelle Dresden). *3 CD-set*
0630-13158-2 (1996)	**Bartók** Concertos for Piano and Orchestra No. 1, Sz 93; No. 2, Sz95; No. 3, Sz 119 (András Schiff, piano; Ivan Fisher, conductor; The Budapest Festival Orchestra).
4509 99205-2 (1996)	**Mozart:** Clarinet Trio "Kegelstatt," K.498; Piano Trio, K. 502; Piano Trio, K. 542 (András Schiff, fortepiano; Yuuko Shiokawa, violin; Erich Hobarm, viola; Miklós Perényi, cello; Elmar Schmid, clarinet). *Not released in the US.*
4509-99051-2 (1995)	**Handel:** Suite No. 1 in B-flat, HWV 434; **Brahms:** Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel, Op. 24; **Reger:** Variations and Fugue on a Theme of J.S. Bach, Op. 81. Live from the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, December 4, 1994 (Andás Schiff, piano).
4509 99176-2 (1995)	**Schumann:** Symphonische Etüden, Davidsbündlertänze, Blumenstück, Arabeske.

LONDON/DECCA RECORDS (POLYGRAM)

455 761-2DH2 (1998)	**Bach:** Three Concertos for Two Claviers and Strings, BWV 1060-2a; Concerto for flute, violin, clavier and strings in a, BWV 1044b; Two concertos for three claviers and strings, BWV 1063-4c (Auréole Nicolet, flute; Yuuko Shiokawa, violin; András Schiff, Peter Serkin, Bruno Canino, pianos; Berne Camerata/Thomas Füri, violin.) *2-CD set*
444-817-2 (1996)	**An die ferne Geliebte- Beethoven Lieder:** "Mailied," Op. 52, No. 4; "Neue Liebe, neues Leben," Op. 75, No. 2; "Adelaide," Op. 46; Aus Göthes Faust (Der Floh), Op. 75, No. 3; "Andenken," WoO 136; "Ich liebe dich," WoO 123; "An die ferne Geliebte," Op. 98; "Lied aus der Ferne," WoO 137 "Wonne der Wehmut," Op. 83, No. 1; "Sehnsucht," Op. 83, No. 2; "Mit einem gemalten Band," Op. 83, No.3 "An die Hoffnung," Op. 94; "Der Liebende," WoO 139; "Der Wachtelschlag," WoO 129; "Resignation," WoO 149 "Seufer eines Ungeliebten und Gegenliebe," WoO 118;

	"Der Kuβ," Op. 128; "Abenlied unterm gestirnten Himmel," WoO 150 (András Schiff, piano; Peter Schrier, tenor).
444-861-2 12 (1996)**	**Haydn:** Piano trios in e, H. 12; Trio in f-sharp, H. 26; Trio in E, H. 28; Trio in E-flat, H. 30 (András Schiff, piano; Yuuko Shiokawa, violin; Boris Pergamenschikow, cello).
440-311-2 (1995)	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 7:** Sonata in E, D. 157; Sonata in A, D. 664; Sonata in E, D. 459.
440-310-2 (1995)	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 6:** Sonata in C, D. 279; Sonata in f, D. 621; Sonata in B-flat, D. 960.
443-877-2 (1995)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 26, K. 537; Quintet for Piano & Winds, K. 452 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica; Sándor Végh, conductor; Hollinger; Schmid; Thunemann; Vlatkovic).
440-309-2 (1994)	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 5:** Sonata in a, D. 537; Sonata in A, D. 959.
436-123-2 (1994)	**Schumann:** Liederkreis, Op. 39; Sieben Lieder, Op. 90 (Robert Holl, bass; András Schiff, piano).
443-893/4-2 (1994)**	**Bartók:** Sonata for Violin & Piano, No. 2, Sz 76; Contrasts, Sz 111; Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz 117; Sonata for Violin & Piano No. 1, Sz 75; Duos, Sz 98; Sonata for 2 Pianos & Percussion, Sz 110f (András Schiff and Bruno Canino, pianos; Elmar Schmid, clarinet; Lorand Fenyves, Arvid Engegard, Heinz Scneeberger and Yuuko Shiokawa, violins; Zolton Vaczi and Zolton Racz, percussion).
440-308-2 (1994)**	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 4:** Sonata in E-flat, D. 568; Sonata in c, D. 958
436-122-2 (1994)	**Schubert:** Winterreise (András Schiff, piano; Peter Schrier, tenor.)
440-474-2 (1994)**	**Mozart:** Piano Music 4-hands Sonata in c, K. 521; Andante & Five Variations, K. 501; Adagio & Allegro, K. 594; Sonata in f, K. 497; Allegro & Andante, K. 608 (András Schiff and George Malcolm, pianos).
440-307-2 (1994)**	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 3:** Sonata in A-flat, D. 557; Sonata in B, D. 575; Sonata in G, D. 894.
433-042-2 (1993)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 8 in C, K. 246; Piano Concerto No. 11 in F, K. 413; Rondo in A Major, K 386 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academia des Mozarteums Salzburg; Sándor Végh, conductor).
421-259-2 (1993)	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 19 in F, K. 459; Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat, K. 595 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica des Mozarteums Salzburg; Sándor Végh, conductor).
440-306-2 (1993)	**Schubert Piano Sonatas, Volume 2:** Sonata in e, D. 566; Sonata in a, D. 784; Sonata in e, D, D 850.

440 305-2 (1993)	**Schubert Piano Sonata, Volume 1:** Sonata in C, D. 840; Sonata in a, D. 849; Sonata in C, D. 840; Sonata in a, D. 849; Sonata in f-sharp, D. 571.
440-297-2 (1993)	**The Impatient Lover-** Italian Songs **Beethoven:** "Ecco quell fieroisante!" (La partenza) WoO 124; "Che fa il mio bene?" "L'amante, si mio cor" (Liebes-Klage) Op. 82, No. 2; "In questa tomba oscura," WoO 133. **Mozart:** "Ridente la calma" K 152 (210a); **Schubert:** "Vedi quanto adoro" D.510; "Se dall'Etra," (Nel boschetto) D.738 "Io vuo' Cantar di Cadmo" (Alla cetra) D. 737; "La pastorella," D. 528; "Non t'accostar all'urna," D. 688, No. 1; "Guarda, che bianca luna," D. 688, No. 3; "Mio ben ricordati," D. 76; "Mi batte 'lcor!" (Felice arrivo e congedo) D. 767. **Haydn:** "Arianna a Naxos," (Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano; András Schiff, piano).
433-313-2 (1993)	**Bach:** 6 French Suites, BWV 812-817; Italian Concerto, BWV 971; French Overture, BWV 831. ***GRAMMY NOMINATED RECORDING***
430-514-2 (1993)**	**Mozart Lieder:** "Ariette," K. 308; "Die Zufriedenheit," K. 349; "Komm liebe Zither," K. 351; "Ich wurd' auf meinem Pfad," K 390; "Lied zur Gesellenreise " K. 468; " Der Zauberer," K. 472; "Die Zufriedenheit," K. 473; "Die Betrogene Welt," K 474; "Das Veilchen," K 476; "Lied der Freiheit," K. 506; "Die Alte," K. 517; "Die Verschweigung," K. 518; "Das Lied der Trennung," K. 519; "Als Luise die Briefe," K. 520; "Abendempfindung an Laura," K. 523; "An Chloe," K. 524; "Das Traumbild," K. 530; "Die Kleine Spinnerin," K. 531; "Shensucht nach dem Fruhlinge," K. 596; "Der Fruhling" K. 597 "Kleine deutsche Kantate" K. 619 (Peter Schrier, tenor; András Schiff, piano).
430-425-2 (1993)**	**Schubert:** Impromptus, Op. 90, D. 899; Moments Musicaux, Op. 90, D. 780; Hungarian Melodies, D. 817; German Dances, D. 820; Gratzer Galopp, D. 925.
436-547-2 (1992)**	**Mozart:** Variations for Violin, K. 359-360; Violin Sonatas K.304, 379, and 454 (Yuuko Shiokawa, violin; András Schiff, piano).
430-374-2 (1992)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 15, K. 450; Piano Concerto No. 16, K. 451 (András Schiff, piano, Camerata Academica; Sándor Végh, conductor).
430-517-2 (1992)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 5, K. 175; Piano Concerto No. 6, K. 238; Rondo in D, K. 382 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica; Sándor Végh, conductor).
430-529-2 (1992)**	**Brahms:** Piano Quintet in f, Op. 34; String Quartet in B-flat, Op. 67 (Takacs String Quartet, András Schiff, piano).
430-513-2 (1992)	**Mozart Arias:** Le nozze di Figaro, K. 392: "Non so piu," "Voi che sapete," "Giunse alfin il momento;" Concert aria, K. 582: "Chi sa, chi sa, qual sia;" Cosi fan tutte, K. 588: "E'amore un…;" Concert aria, K. 578: "Alma grande e nobril core;" Don Giovanni, K. 527: "Vedrai, carino;" La Clemenza di Tito, K. 621: "Parto, parto," "Deh, per questo," "Ecco il punto o Vitellia…Non piu di fiori;" Concert aria, K. 505: "Ch'io mi scordi di te?" (Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano; András Schiff, piano; Weiner Kammerorchester, Gyorgy Fischer, conductor).
430-510-2 (1991)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 20 in d, K. 466; Piano Concerto No. 21 in C, K. 467 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica; Sándor Végh, conductor).
430-333-2 (1991)**	**Mozart:** Allegro, Andante, and Rondo, K. 494/533; Sonatas No. 1-18; Fantasia in c, K. 475. *5-CD set*
425-855-2	**Mozart**: Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat, k. 482; Piano Concerto No. 23 in A, K. 488

(1991)**	(András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica; Sándor Végh, conductor).
430-414-2 (1991)	**Schubert:** Die Schöne Mullerin, D. 795 (Peter Schrier, tenor; András Schiff, piano.) 1991 GRAMOPHONE AWARD
425-791-2 (1990)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 24 in c minor, K. 491; Piano Concerto No. 25 in C, K. 503 (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica des Mozarteums Salzburg; Sándor Végh, conductor).
430-232-2 (1990)	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 7 for 3 pianos in F, K. 242; Piano concerto No. 10 for 2 pianos, K. 365; Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No.20 in d, K. 466 (Daniel Barenboim and András Schiff, pianos; English Chamber Orchestra; Sir Georg Solti, piano and conductor.)
425-638-2 (1990)	**Schubert:** 4 Impromptus, D. 935; Allegretto, D. 915; 12 Ländler, D. 790; 3 Klavierstüke, D. 946.
425-612-2 (1990)**	**Schubert:** Schwanengesang, D. 857; Herbst, D. 945; Der Wanderer an den Mond, D. 870; Am fenster, D. 878; Bel dir allein, D. 866 (Peter Schrier, tenor; András Schiff, piano). 1990 GRAMOPHONE AWARD
425-466-2/4 (1990)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat, K. 271; Piano Concerto No. 13 in C, K. 387b (András Schiff, piano; Camerata Academica des Mozarteums Salzburg; Sándor Végh, conductor).
425-676-2 (1990)	**Bach:** Concertos BWV 1052-1058 (András Schiff, piano; Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Marieke Blankestijn, leader).
425-110-2 (1989)	**Brahms:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in d, Op. 15; Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Op. 23, 4-hand Piano Version (Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra; Sir Georg Solti, conductor and piano; András Schiff, piano).
417-886-2 (1989)**	**Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 12 in A, K. 414; Piano Concerto No. 14 in E-flat, K. 449; Piano Concerto No. 17 in G, K. 414; Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-flat, K. 449 (András Schiff, piano; Sándor Végh, conductor.)
421-422-2 (1989)**	**Scarlatti Keyboard Sonatas for Piano:** K. 175 in a; K. 402 in e; K. 403 in E; K. 144 in G; K. 115 in c; K. 116 in c; K. 474 in E-flat; K. 475 in E-flat; K. 449 in G; K.450 in g; K. 544 in B-flat; K. 545 in B-flat; K. 516 in d; K. 517 in d.
421-423-2 (1989)**	**Dohnanyi:** Piano Quintet no. 1; Sextet (Kalman Berkes; Radovan Vlatkovic; Takacs String Quartet; András Schiff, piano.)
421-640-2 (1989)	**Bach** Six English Suites, BWV 806-811. *2-CD set*. 1990 ***1989 GRAMMY AWARD WINNER FOR CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTAL SOLOIST WITHOUT ORCHESTRA***
417-802-2 (1988)**	**Dvořák:** Concerto for Piano and Orchestra; **Schumann:** Introduction and Allegro Apassionata in G, Op. 92 (Vienna Philharmonic; Christoph von Dohnanyi, conductor; András Schiff, piano.)
421-369-2 (1988)	**Mozart:** Adagio in b, K. 540; Adagio in C, K 356; Rondo in a, K. 511; Variations for Piano, K. 265/455; 12 Variations on "Ah, vous dirai je, maman," K. 300a (265)

	Andante for Mechanical Organ in F, K. 616; Adagio for Glass harmonica in C, K. 617a (356);Minuet in D, K. 578b (535); Gigue in G, K. 574; 10 Variations on "Linser dummer Pobel meint," K. 455.
421-110-2 (1988)**	**Mozart:** Piano Sonatas K. 279, K. 282, K. 332, K. 570.
421-109-2 (1988)**	**Mozart:** Piano Sonatas K. 280, K. 283, K. 284, K. 330
421-119-2 (1988)	**Mendelssohn Songs Without Words**: Op. 67, Nos. 4 & 6; Op. 85; Op. 102, Nos. 3 & 5; Op. 19, Nos. 1, 2, 4, & 6; Op. 30, Nos. 3-6; Op. 38, Nos. 1, 2 & 6; Op. 53, Nos. 1-3; Op. 62, Nos. 1-6.
417-572-2 (1987)**	**Mozart:** Piano Sonatas K. 533, K. 281, K.311, K. 309.
417-236-2 (1987)	**Bach** The Well Tempered Clavier BWV 870-869, Book II. *2-CD set.* ***GRAMMY NOMINATED RECORDING***
417-571-2 (1987)**	**Mozart**: Piano Sonatas K. 331, K. 310, K. 576.
417-149-2 (1986)**	**Mozart:** Piano Sonatas K. 333, K. 545, K. 457; Fantasie, K. 475.
417-294-2 (1986)**	**Dohnanyi:** Variations on a Nursery Song; **Tchaikovsky:** Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 (Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Sir Georg Solti, conductor; András Schiff, piano).
417-116-2 (1986)**	**Bach** Goldberg Variations, BWV 988.
414-388-2 (1986)	**Bach:** The Well Tempered Clavier, BWV 846-869, Book I. ***GRAMMY NOMINATED RECORDING***
410-114-2 (1986)**	**Brahms:** Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano; Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (András Schiff, piano; Schmidt, clarinet; Dolezal, cello; Hogner, horn; Binder, violin).
414-672-2 (1986)**	**Mendelssohn:** Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 (Symphonie Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfucks; Charles Dutoit, conductor; András Schiff, piano).
411-974-2 (1985)	**Bach** Two and Three part Inventions, BWV 722a-811.
411-942-2 (1985)**	**Chopin**: Piano Concerto No. 2; **Schumann:** Piano Concerto, Op. 54 (Concertgebouw Orchestra; Antal Dorati, conductor; András Schiff, piano**).** ***GRAMMY NOMINATED RECORDING***
411-732-2 (1985)**	**Bach** Six Partitas, BWV 825-830.
411-375-2 (1983)**	**Schubert:** Piano Quintet in A "Trout," D. 667 (Hagen String Quartet; András Schiff, piano).

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HCD 11690	**Bach:** Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue; Partita in G; Toccata in D Major; English Suite in F.
HCD 12926	**Bach:** Concerto for Piano and Strings in d; Concerto for Piano and Strings in E; Concerto for Two Pianos in C (András Schiff and Zoltán Kocsis, pianos; Orchestra of the Liszt Academy; Albert Simon, conductor).
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HCD 11806	**Scarlatti:** Twelve Sonatas for Piano.
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PHILIPS (POLYGRAM)

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L'OISEAU LYRE (POLYGRAM)

433-328-2**	**Mozart:** Eine Kleine Nachmusik; Gigue in G, K. 574; Fantasy in c, K. 475; Piano Sonata No. 16 in B-flat, K. 570; Rondo in D, K. 485; Rondo in a, K. 511; Minuet in D, K. 576b; Andante, K. 616.

VOXBOX

CD 3X3001	**Schumann Complete Works for Piano 4-Hands:** Andante and Variations for 2 Pianos, 2 Cellos and Horn in B-flat, Op. 46; Kinderball, Op. 130; 6 Impromptus, Op. 66; Ball-Scenen, Op. 109; 8 Polonaises, Op. III; 12 Vierhändige Klavier Stucke fur kleine und Grosse Kinder, Op. 85; Studies for the Pedal Piano, Op. 56; Sketches for the Pedal Paino, op. 58 (Anthony Halstead, horn; Laszlo Varga & Olga Hegedus, cellos; Annie Frankl, Peter Frankl & András Schiff, pianos).

KOCH

King 137 (1996)	**Schubert:** Impromptus Op. 90, D. 899.

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071-227-113 (1991)	**Bartók:** Piano Concerto No. 3; Concerto for Orchestra; Dance Suite (András Schiff, piano; Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Sir Georg Solti, conductor).

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