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IAN HOLTHAM

PIANO

BEETHOVEN THE FUNERAL MARCH SONATA

SCHUBERT THE LAST SONATA

SCHUMANN ABSCHIED

RACHMANINOV PRELUDE IN B FLAT

IMO PECTORE

music from the inner-most recesses of the heart

IAN HOLTHAM PIANO

BEETHOVEN SONATA FOR PIANO IN A FLAT, OPUS 26 (1800-01)

- 1** Andante con Variazioni 6'59"
- 2** Scherzo and Trio 2'40"
- 3** Marcia Funebre: sulla morte d'un Eroe 7'22"
- 4** Allegro: Rondo 2'20"

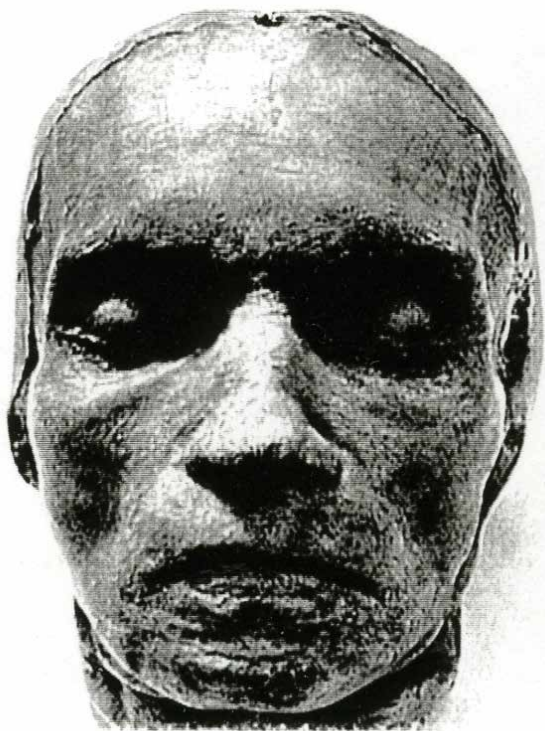
SCHUBERT SONATA FOR PIANO IN B FLAT, D 960 (1828)

- 5** Molto moderato 23'48"
- 6** Andante sostenuto 9'34"
- 7** Allegro vivace con delicatezza 4'06"
- 8** Allegro ma non troppo 7'47"

9 SCHUMANN ABSCHIED 3'09"

10 RACHMANINOV PRELUDE IN B FLAT 3'14"





*Joyfully I hasten to meet Death.
Should he come before I have had the
opportunity of developing the whole
of my artistic capacity, he will have
come too soon in spite of my hard
fate, and I shall wish he had come a
little later.*

So wrote Beethoven in the remarkable 'Heiligenstadt Testament' in 1802, the year after he had composed his piano sonata in A flat, Opus 26. Writing of the anguish he was experiencing with the growing awareness of his deafness, Beethoven responded to the deep inner crisis

which was driving him away from all but his closest friends, and which was reflected in the masterpieces of this period of composition. This sonata contains the first real 'funeral march' in the piano repertoire and is surely yet another reflection of the way in which Beethoven saw himself facing the gathering forces of total deafness and ensuing despair.

Schubert was facing his own great personal crisis in 1828, when he composed the last set of three piano sonatas along with the C major String Quintet and the 'Great' Symphony, while correcting the proofs of the tragic song cycle *Die Winterreise*. Fatally ill and aware of his own impending death from syphilis, Schubert was consumed by a compositional fervour, the result of which was the expression of this profoundly human experience. The death of Beethoven in the previous year had been a monumental blow to Schubert and he mourned that death deeply. He had one crowning ambition after the death of the musical giant, and that was to be buried next to Beethoven. Within two months of completing his final piano sonata Schubert's tragic ambition was fulfilled.

That deep personal grief and tragedy can become the wellspring of intense creativity is beyond dispute, and the remarkable outpouring

from these two composers during such times of personal anguish is a further testament. In a wider sense, their individual tragedies are a reflection of the overwhelming grief facing a modern society plagued by the tragedy of AIDS. The loss of life within the international artistic community has been without parallel yet even as it faces a bleak future, there remains always the glimmer of hope, and the outpourings of creative minds.

I performed these works in Melbourne in 1994 at a fundraising concert on behalf of the Continuing Care Unit of Fairfield Hospital. At that concert I also played two encores which are included in this recording. Schumann's *Abschied* ('Farewell') was composed in 1848-49, the last piece in *Waldszenen*. While written some twenty years after the death of his great musical influence, Schubert, this short piece reveals Schumann's deep sense of loss when, as a young student, he was brought news of Schubert's death: he cried throughout the night and was inconsolable. The other piece, the prelude by Rachmaninov (Op. 23, No. 2), is a fitting conclusion to this disc as it combines the pianist's virtuosic agility with a tremendous sense of heroic triumph.

IAN HOLTHAM

Beethoven: Sonata for piano in A flat, Opus 26 (1800-01)

- i. Andante con Variazioni*
- ii. Scherzo and Trio*
- iii. Marcia Funebre:
sulla morte d'un Eroe*
- iv. Allegro: Rondo*

This sonata was originally published as a grande sonate, the same title as Beethoven's previous four movement sonatas. It marks the beginning of Beethoven's middle period, characterised not least for the composer by the terrible recognition of his growing deafness.

The first movement is a magical set of variations based on a melody which easily lends itself to thematic and harmonic manipulation. The theme itself can roughly be broken into three sections.

Var. 1: Here Beethoven weaves the melody into an arpeggio figuration.

Var. 2: Amongst the pulsation of notes, the melody appears in the left hand.

Var. 3: This variation is in the minor key. The bass provides some interesting harmonic movement, with the melodic variation in the right hand.

Var. 4: The compositional style of this variation is pointalistic, featuring large jumps in pitch of an octave or

more.

Var. 5: The final variation is the most extended and developed. Beethoven carefully leads the melody through a variety of rhythmic and melodic transformations, sometimes in the middle voices, sometimes in the treble, ending the movement inventively with a coda of entirely new thematic material.

The dazzling and vibrant scherzo is characterised by swiftness and frequent harmonic changes which build to an increasing climax before the trio establishes some sense of calm. Yet the variation principle of the first movement is one of the essential aspects of the energetic scherzo's design. The more gently rocking trio provides some relief to the pianist after the vigour of the scherzo.

The 'funeral march' foreshadows its monumental counterpart in the 'Eroica' symphony, written two years later. The power of the music comes in part through the unrelenting rhythm and partly through the essentially static melody. The middle maggiore section can be seen as quite programmatic, suggesting through the tremolos the drum rolls of a military procession, with the pungent chords signifying the volley of shots over the hero's coffin.

The finale is a brilliant display of counterpoint and thematic

development, all conceived around a series of sequences. The motifs are simple enough, but Beethoven charts a course that settles for nothing less than acrobatic agility, briefly broken by the microcosmic harmonic drama of the middle section. After all the busy semiquaver activity, Beethoven elects to end the work with a whimper.



**Schubert: Sonata for Piano in B flat,
D 960 (1828)**

- i. Molto moderato*
- ii. Andante sostenuto*
- iii. Allegro vivace con delicatezza*
- iv. Allegro ma non troppo*

This sonata was written in September 1828, two months before the thirty-one year old master died. The sonata is undeniably music of a creator leaving his life and musicological evidence suggests the work was written in reverse order, beginning with the fourth movement

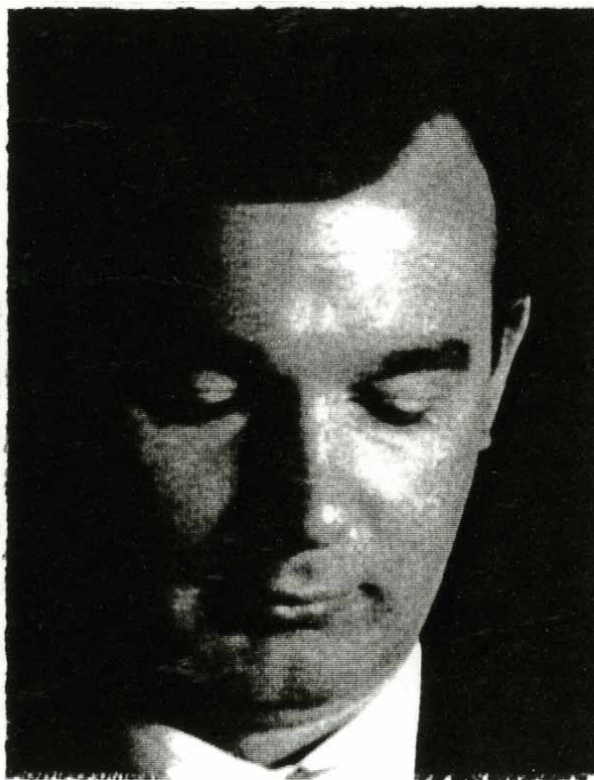
and ending with the first. The tone of the sonata is often intimate, yet the scope and structure of the work are spacious, even vast.

The first movement, *molto moderato*, starts with the opening theme played quietly above a steady bass. As the melodic line navigates a way through various modulations, the dimensions and intensity of the music gradually increase until the theme is once more stated, this time a powerful *forte*. The tension subsides as the music turns toward the second group of themes. Schubert now lets the ideas come and go without any emphatic start or finish. A remarkable development follows, alternating quiet contemplation with brief surges. A trill deep in the bass heralds the recapitulation, and the movement comes to its end with four still chords.

The slow movement is generally subdued, its mood one of sadness and stillness; yet it is also a stark and powerful reminder of earthly doom. The tripartite form of the movement is like a simple frame, delicate and fragile. The central section provides a more freely flowing melody supported by a swiftly moving harmony that occasionally peaks at a climax. Following this, the first theme returns with a slightly altered harmonic outlay, and the movement ends in quiet contemplation.

Schubert's scherzo gives some relief from the deeply sombre tone of the previous movements. The marking of *Allegro vivace con delicatezza* tells us how the composer saw the purpose of the movement: it should be lively, but with a sense of delicacy. The tone changes in the Trio to something quirky, even ominous, but only briefly, as the scherzo soon returns. The movement ends with a short coda. Once again, Schubert finishes quietly.

The final movement starts with a portentous horn-call on an unexpected pitch. The following theme continues the lively and delicate character of the scherzo; however, it is constantly pervaded by a sense of foreboding. The end of the first subject is cut off with a two bar rest, which is followed by a thunderous motif in a dotted rhythm. Yet the music does not continue in its fateful tone, but curiously is moulded into a more lyrical episode accompanied by triplets. After a short return of the first theme, a boisterous developmental section follows, finally subsiding into the return of the first themes. A brief and dazzling coda finishes the sonata in an almost optimistic, and certainly vigorous vein, finally looking outward and upward from the deeply contemplative nature of so much of this piano masterpiece.



After early specialist musical training in Australia, Ian Holtham studied intensively in Europe with Peter Feuchtwanger for over five years, and worked with Géza Anda in Zurich, as well as with Geoffrey Parsons and Enrique Barenboim in London. He also studied Composition and Conducting at the Guildhall School of Music. As pianist, Ian Holtham has performed in Australia, England, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, Hungary, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand. He has played throughout his native Australia and has broadcast regularly

with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since the late seventies. He has appeared as soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, as well as with many other ensembles. He has a vast and varied repertoire which, excluding works for solo piano, contains well over forty piano concertos. He returns regularly to Europe for highly successful tours which recently have included recitals at London's Wigmore Hall, concerts and masterclasses in regional centres in the United Kingdom, France, and Austria.

In 1990 Ian Holtham performed the complete Chopin Preludes and the complete Études in one programme: an extraordinary event for any performer. In 1991 he presented a special Homage to Mozart program on the exact anniversary of Mozart's death to a packed house in Melbourne. In 1994 he released his first compact disc of the complete Chopin Etudes, Opus 10 and Opus 25, uniquely coupled with four Godowski transcriptions of the études, also on the Move label. He has become known for his huge repertoire, his pianistic command and his enterprisingly innovative approach to programming.

Dr Holtham is also a respected musical pedagogue and has published a book on piano technique. He has been senior piano adjudicator of

virtually all the major eisteddfods in Australia and teaches piano at the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne.



Recorded in Melba Hall, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne in April 1995 on the 'Farren-Price' Steinway Model D, No 507410.

Technical production: Martin Wright and Vaughan McAlley

Front cover: Photomontage of the life mask of Beethoven, the death mask of Schubert and photograph of Holtham by Glen Taylor

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Programme notes: © Ian Holtham; © Daniel Khong

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