

Programme note by Chris Darwin: use freely for non-commercial purposes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Four Impromptus, D 935 (1827)

No 1 in F minor *Allegro moderato*

No 2 in A-flat major *Allegretto*

No 3 in B-flat major *Theme & Variations*

No 4 in F minor *Allegro scherzando*

Impromptus are nominally just single movement pieces that let the composer do what they want, but Schubert's are more tightly structured than the name implies. Schubert anticipated Chopin in writing them, though he was probably influenced in turn by his good friend Jan Václav Voříšek. He had had one of his pieces described in a journal as an 'Impromptu' in 1817 and then published 6 more explicitly under that name five years later.

Tonight's impromptus are the last four of eight that Schubert wrote towards the end of 1827 at around the same time as his two Piano Trios. Musical opinion is divided as to whether or not they are really a four-movement sonata in disguise. They are more substantial than the first four of the eight and there are structural and thematic links between the four 'movements'. In addition, Schubert might have thought he would get paid more for four separate pieces than for a single sonata.

The first impromptu combines elements of sonata and rondo. There is a wide range of moods, from the sombre melancholy of the opening to some highly excitable passages later on. Schubert's characteristic switches between major and minor are something to listen out for.

The second, *Allegretto*, (*illustrated*) is in the form of a Minuet and Trio. The mood, tempo, melodic outline and harmonic progressions of the movement are very similar to those of the *Andante* opening (*illustrated*) of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 26 in the same key.

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is titled 'Allegretto' and is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat major). It begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The bottom staff is titled 'Andante' and is in 3/8 time with the same key signature. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ends with a fortissimo (*sf*) dynamic. Both staves show the melodic line and a simple harmonic accompaniment.

The third impromptu is a theme and five variations. Its well-known *Andante* theme (*illustrated*) comes from his 1823 incidental music to a play about Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus. A close variant of it appears in his A minor String Quartet (D.804).

The image shows a single musical staff titled 'THEMA Andante'. It is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats. The melody is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three flats, and a 3/4 time signature.

The final *Allegro scherzando* Impromptu is the most virtuosic, ending in a furious rush to the finish, and a swoop down to the lowest note (F) on Schubert's piano.