

# Notes on the Program

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## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata No. 7 in C Major, K. 309

*Allegro con spirito*

*Andante un poco adagio*

*Rondo – Allegretto grazioso*

By early 1777, Mozart had grown discontent with his position under Archbishop Colloredo in Salzburg. Not only had the composer become disenchanted by a lackluster Salzburg orchestra and opera, but tensions in his relationship with the Archbishop grew, not least due to Mozart's low salary. After much back-and-forth with the Archbishop, Mozart was granted an extended leave of absence. He decided to visit Paris, with stops in Munich, Augsburg and Mannheim.

In Augsburg on October 22, 1777, the composer improvised what would become his Piano Sonata in C major, K. 309, which at the time featured a different slow movement. He wrote, "I then played... all of a sudden a magnificent sonata in C major, out of my head, with a rondo at the end – full of din and sound." Later, he would write down the work in Mannheim. There, he reacquainted himself with the concertmaster, Christian Cannabich, and his daughter, Rosa who became his pupil at the piano during his stay. Rosa, with whom Mozart flirted inadvertently, (Mozart thought that she was fifteen instead of thirteen years old,) became the catalyst for the substituted slow movement.

The first movement begins with a polarity between a fanfare of unison octaves followed by a five-bar gentler response. According to musicologist Daniel Heartz, this opening anticipates the beginning of the "Jupiter" symphony and other important orchestral works. The energy in this movement, created by dynamic contrasts and symphonic figures, undoubtedly harken back to the Mannheim symphonists. The development commences with a reinstatement of the opening theme but in G-minor. Harmonic shifts and an increase in rhythmic intensity ensues, leading to a sequence based on the opening theme before the actual home key is restored and the recapitulation occurs.

While Mozart had intended the second movement to be "a tonal picture of Rosa's character," and had written of Rosa as "pretty...charming...intelligent...amiable.... she is exactly like the Andante," it has also been recorded that she had to practice carefully to become "exactly like the Andante." Despite all the dynamic markings in this movement, the Andante does not exhibit the contrasts featured in the first movement and instead is written as a set of variations based on the first sixteen measures.

Of the last movement, musicologist William Kinderman writes, "...the spacious closing "Rondeau" seems to embrace....the brilliant textures and orchestral feeling of the first movement....yet the principal character is more intimate and graceful." While the music opens with a gracious theme unlike that of the initial movement, numerous orchestral techniques abound – fast tremolo textures in the right hand, the orchestration of the different registers on the piano, and the Mannheim-like motivic figures. The movement ends gently, as it began, in *pianissimo* and at the lower registers of the piano.

## **Sonata No. 12 in F Major, K. 332**

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Allegro assai*

While its compositional history is debated among scholars, it has been firmly established that Mozart's Sonata in F major was ultimately published in Vienna in 1784 as a triptych, which included the Sonata in C major, K. 330 and Sonata in A major K. 331. At the time of publication, Mozart had been wed to his wife Constanze for two years and had his first child, Raimund.

As many scholars and pianists alike have pointed out, the Sonata in F major constantly reaches across genre borders into the expressive language of opera buffa (comic opera) and concerto writing. Alfred Brendel writes that within the first movement, one hears a total of "eight different musical ideas which appear in quick succession, all of which have their own character." The first theme is lyrical and gracious in its first four measures, answered by a mini-contrapuntal study and followed by writing that resembles a wind fanfare, "befitting Papageno" according to Kinderman. A dramatic *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) section ensues in the very dark key of D minor, emulating the sound of the string section of an orchestra. After this dizzying array of musical expressions, a second subject in C major is heard, sparkling and upright. The development begins yet with a different theme, illustrating the "intensely dramatic, quicksilver quality of an opera in miniature," in the words of Kinderman.

In contrast to the first movement, which is almost fragmented by all its diversity (a "harlequinade," in the words of Wye Allanbrook), the second movement is intentionally and continuously lyrical with long arching phrases. Eschewing any sort of development, the return of the exposition features an elaborate embellishment of the opening melody, published in the first edition by Artaria, offering a glimpse as to how Mozart may have embellished and improvised his own works.

The last movement is unequivocally virtuosic in its swirling figurations. Mozart uses silence effectively and despite this sonata's repletion of themes and contrasts, the music ends simply and quietly.

## **Franz Liszt: Années de Pèlerinage I: Suisse**

## *Les Cloches de Genève: Nocturne*

Liszt's first book of *Années de Pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage), entitled Switzerland, represents Liszt's portrayal of the landscapes and literature that inspired him, which includes the writings by Lord Byron, Senancour, and Schiller.

Liszt writes in the forward of *Album d'un Voyageur*, the name of its first incarnation, before it was revised:

“Having in recent times traveled in many new countries, throughout different landscapes and places consecrated by history and poetry; having felt that the varied aspects of nature, and the different incidents associated with them, did not pass before my eyes as empty images but produced deep emotions in my soul; and that between us a vague but immediate affinity had established itself, an undefined but real rapport, an inexplicable but irrefutable communication – I have tried to present in music some of my strongest sensations and my most lively impressions.”

Years later, Liszt realized the scope and the bigger picture behind his journey – “*Album d'un voyageur*” would eventually be absorbed into the first of three books making up “*Années de Pèlerinage*,” with the three books covering more than fifty years of his artistic career. The first two books are directly inspired by his eleven-year romance with Marie d'Agoult, the mother of his three children, and member of the highest ranks of French aristocracy. The second book is Liszt's musical portrayal of different pieces of art from Italy, while the final set gives us a glimpse of his spiritual meditations at that time of his life.

The first Year of Pilgrimage in Switzerland was published in 1842 and concludes with the piece *Les Cloches de Genève*. The opening lines of the piece convey the newly found peace and tranquility in Geneva, after Liszt and Marie D'Agoult had fled the gossiping crowds of Paris. Set in the key of B Major, an atmosphere of quietude is established by notes which hover in the air before the first thematic material, full of hope, makes its entrance. The melody is then transferred to the baritone voice of the piano while bells continue to ring in the backdrop in the right hand. A second theme is heard above falling, harp-like notes. As the music builds steam, it rises to a climax and then quiets down, ending in an attitude of repose, as it once began.

Dedicated to his new-born daughter, Blandine, the work certainly bespeaks of the purity and joy he felt at this event. He prefaces the piece with a passage from Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*: “*I live not in myself, but I become portion of that around me.*”

### **Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses**

*Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude S173.3*

As a lifelong Catholic who later took minor orders, Franz Liszt juxtaposed a deeply spiritual inner life with an outer life of intense productivity as a performer, teacher, composer, writer, humanitarian, and philanthropist. Born in Hungary, his artistic turning point came when at the age of twenty, he attended a performance by the virtuoso violinist, Niccolò Paganini. The concert had such a profound influence on Liszt that it prompted him to adapt the violinist's technique for the piano. In addition to his lengthy hours of practice at this time, he educated himself endlessly with great literature. It was during this time period that he came into contact with the poetry of Alphonse de Lamartine, the inspiration behind his *Harmonies Poétiques et religieuses* (named after Lamartine's book of poetry with the same name).

Liszt's musical rendition of Lamartine's writings lasts about 90 minutes and is dedicated in its entirety to the Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittegenstein, the second of his significant romances, and with whom he shared a deep sense of spiritual yearning. The third piece in the set of ten, *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude*, is the most extensive offering in terms of scope. While its compositional history is disputed among scholars, the work has its first reference in a letter dated 1832 by Marie d'Agoult. It was finished in 1847 during his first prolonged stay with the Princess in Woronince, Ukraine.

*Benediction de Dieu dans la Solitude* is set in F-sharp major, a key that Liszt often associated with holy and transcendent subject matters, as expressed in his *St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds* and *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*. The work is comprised of three main sections. Opening with a meditation, an expansive and soulful melody in the tenor is accompanied by sonorous eighth-note figurations in the right hand, harkening to the sound world of his perennially famous *Liebesträume* No. 3. The second section in B-flat major is extraordinarily benevolent and builds in rapture. Liszt ends the work with a reprise of the first section where the left hand is now invigorated with a sense of urgency, quickened and more ecstatic.

Pianist Vladimir Feltsman describes the experience of the piece as, “*An infinite succession of ascending landscapes (soundscapes) unfold in which Divine and human, spiritual and mundane are fused in one supreme harmony that contemplates itself.*” This mystical striving expressed in the music reflects the following quoted stanza from Lamartine's book of poetry, quoted at the beginning of this work:

*Whence comes to me, O my God, this peace that overwhelms me?*

*Whence comes this faith in which my heart abounds?*

*-Lamartine*

## **Alexander Scriabin: Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp minor, Op. 23**

*Drammatico*

*Allegretto*

*Andante*

*Presto con fuoco*

Completed in 1898, the Third Sonata is a four-movement piece firmly rooted in the classical form, yet expressively chromatic and tragic. Rightfully so, the piece is closely tied to his personal, financial, and spiritual struggles of the time. The marriage with first wife, Vera did not last, and he started to drink again as they gradually grew apart. Retroactively, in 1906, the third sonata is accompanied by a program that explains each movement. While scholars consider its weight lightly (as the program was written by Scriabin's second wife, Tatyana), it was approved by the composer:

### *States of Being*

*a) The free, untamed soul passionately throws itself into pain and struggle  
b) The soul has found some kind of momentary, illusory peace; tired of suffering, it wishes to forget, to sing and blossom—despite everything. But the light rhythm and fragrant harmonies are but a veil, through which the uneasy, wounded soul shimmers.*

*c) The soul floats on a sea of gentle emotion and melancholy: love, sorrow, indefinite wishes, indefinable thoughts of fragile, vague allure.*

*d) In the uproar of the unfettered elements the soul struggles as if intoxicated. From the depths of Existence arises the mighty voice of the demigod, whose song of victory echoes triumphantly! But, too weak as yet, it fails, before reaching the summit, into the abyss of nothingness.*

The first movement, marked 'Drammatico' sets the tone for the tragic hero with almost ceremoniously dotted rhythms. The narrator-like introduction gives way to a traditionally contrasting second theme. In the midst of its development, all the themes are combined, as is characteristic of Scriabin's writings.

The second movement is striving, a bit like a restless march but in the form of a scherzo and trio.

The ravishing slow movement contains some of the most beautiful music Scriabin ever wrote. It gives way to chromatic weaving lines. The melody is entwined with a halo of sound above and under, not unlike textures found in his second and fourth sonatas. When Elena Beckman-Shcherbina performed the piece to the composer, Scriabin is recounted of saying at this moment, "Here the stars are singing!"

In the last movement, Scriabin creates a "vortex of unleashed elements." The contrasting second theme is said to be his young child's first lullaby, according to Scriabin scholar Faubion Bowers. A work truly symphonic in nature, its intense chromaticism and counterpoint brings the movement to a valiant and defiant close.

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