Schubert/Mertz · Padovec · Ponce

MOMENTS MUSICAUX

Petrit Çeku

SUPER AUDIO CD

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ROSS GUTTENFELDER

MOMENTS MUSICAUX

Gonzalo Noqué

As a producer, I've been blessed with the opportunity of working with some outstanding artists – deeply sensitive musicians with amazing technical and musical skills. But it's the rarest of things to find someone who can connect with an audience in the way Petrit Çeku does. He's one of the very few musicians I've encountered who's able to transcend what is written in the score, his instrument and even, dare I say it, the music itself, thereby bringing our focus with pinpoint precision to that mysterious "place" beyond the music: the true spiritual inspiration that strikes composers as they're putting the notes down on the page, something which is beyond time, in all of us. It's therefore my pleasure to introduce you, dear listener and reader of these notes, to this recording from Petrit Çeku – an album I'm very proud to have produced.

There are many myths surrounding the great composer Franz Schubert's relationship with the guitar, most of them of spurious origin. Although his degree of familiarity with the instrument is much debated and there's no firm evidence as to his level of interest in it, we do know that the guitar played a part in the Schubert family's music-making when Franz was a teenager. He composed the D.80 vocal trio with guitar accompaniment and also arranged Wenzeslaus

Matiegka's Notturno op. 21 for flute, viola and guitar into what became the D.96 quartet, both works probably intended for domestic performances. Schubert's close circle of friends also included several guitarists, among them Franz von Schlechta, who compiled 39 of the composer's Lieder, with guitar accompaniment, in a beautiful manuscript. In fact during Schubert's lifetime many of his songs were published with guitar accompaniment, a genre much in vogue in Vienna at the time. Whatever the full truth about Schubert and the guitar, it is easy to understand why some guitarists and composers – such as those featured on this album – were devoted to his music.

Joseph Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856), born in Pressburg (now Bratislava), is rightly considered one of the most important guitarist-composers of the 19th century. His music followed the pianistic models of his contemporaries, including Liszt, Schumann and Chopin, and while the quality of his surviving compositions varies considerably, Mertz's best works remain a cornerstone of the Romantic guitar repertoire. He was probably aware of Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions for solo piano when he decided to arrange the set of pieces that feature in the *6 Schubert'sche Lieder* recorded here. Mertz condenses Schubert's vocal-piano texture into a score for solo guitar with the utmost skill – this is a very fine example of the art of guitar transcription. He chose his six songs wisely, and although he had to simplify the original texture and make melodic changes in order to meet the demands of the instrument, the arrangements uncompromisingly respect the essence of Schubert's originals while showcasing the strengths of the guitar. Four of the songs (*Liebesbothschaft*, *Aufenthalt*, *Ständchen* and *Das Fischermädchen*) are from *Schwanengesang*, *Die Post* is from *Winterreise* and *Lob der Thränen* was a standalone work.

Croatian guitarist and composer Ivan Padovec played an important role in the Croatian music scene of his time, though his name is less well-known than that of some other 19th-century composers who wrote for the guitar. Between 1829 and 1837 he lived in Vienna, from where he travelled on tour to several European countries; after that period he returned to his birthplace of Varaždin because his eyesight was failing. His earliest influence was Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829), a pivotal figure in the history of the instrument. The impact Giuliani had on Padovec can be heard in the *Variations sur la valse favorite de Franz Schubert Op. 4*, which could have been penned by the great Italian guitarist-composer himself. Based on Schubert's *Waltz op. 9 no. 2, D.365*, Padovec's variations follow the conventional 19th-century pattern: the first is based on triplets; the second, in semiquavers, on scales and ornamentations on the original melody; the third on arpeggios; the fourth, the customary minor-key variation, explores the expressive capabilities of the guitar's low register; the fifth and last, with coda, is a virtuosic Rossinian display: not even Schubert was immuned to the Rossini craze!

Manuel María Ponce, one of the first internationally recognised Mexican composers, developed a very close relationship with the renowned guitarist Andrés Segovia – the many works he wrote for him have become pillars of the guitar repertoire. Ponce's talent is evident in his ability to write not only in a recognisably personal idiom, but also in that of others, while remaining faithful to his own style, creating amalgams that never sound like pastiches. This practice was, in part, a consequence of Segovia's requests for repertoire that met the expectations of a performer of his level of fame. It led Ponce to write such works as the *Sonatina Meridional* – composed in an explicitly, almost Turina-esque Spanish idiom – the intentionally Baroque

Suites I and *II* and the *Sonata Romantique "Hommage à Schubert"* – the fifth of his guitar sonatas – which appears on this album.

The sonata opens with a lyrical, Schubertian movement, whose development section seems to take its inspiration from that of the opening movement of Schubert's final piano sonata, D.960, its *Wanderer*-style triplets creating an intense sense of urgency. This section represents perhaps the biggest difference between the famous "Segovia" version of the score and the autograph manuscript, which was published for the first time in the 1990s and was used for this recording. The *Andante* that follows is probably one of Ponce's finest compositions, a movement Segovia called "exquisite – one of the best things Schubert never wrote". After the third movement – a *Moment Musical*, after one of Schubert's favourite forms – the sonata ends with a buoyant *Allegro non troppo e serioso* which caused Segovia more than one headache: "I'm in despair here with my guitar. What's impossible, for the first time in your music, is the thing you'd least imagine – the arpeggios!!" All in all, the guitarist held this work in the greatest respect, saying, "It honours the instrument."

As the great pianist Alfred Brendel said, "In Beethoven's music … we always know where we are; Schubert, on the other hand, puts us into a dream." His mysterious ability to switch between seemingly unrelated harmonies is probably what has attracted guitarists and composers to this instrument, one whose wealth of colours seem somehow naturally linked to Schubert's inner world. And I can't think of anyone better than Petrit Çeku to guide us on this wonderful journey. I hope you enjoy it!

RECORDING DATA

Recording: May 17-18, 2022, Auditorio de San Francisco, Ávila, Spain
Guitar: Ross Gutmeier
Strings: D'Addario XTC46
Producer and recording engineer: Gonzalo Noqué
DSD Mastering: Tom Caulfield

Equipment: Sonodore LDM-54 & Schoeps microphones; Merging Horus microphone preamplifier and AD/DA converter; Pyramix Workstation; Hifiman headphones; Dutch & Dutch 8c speakers

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petritceku.com

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FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

/arr. Joseph Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856)

6 Schubert'sche Lieder

01 I. Lob der Thränen 3:22
02 II. Liebesbothschaft 3:51
03 III. Aufenthalt 4:17
04 IV. Ständchen 4:31
05 V. Die Post 3:11
06 VI. Das Fischermädchen 2:44

IVAN PADOVEC (1800-1873)

07 ***Variations sur la valse favorite de F. Schubert, Op. 4*** 7:10

MANUEL MARÍA PONCE (1882-1948)

Sonate Romantique "Hommage à Schubert"

08 I. Allegro non troppo, semplice 9:15
09 II. Andante 5:31
10 III. Moment Musical. Vivo 3:21
11 IV. Allegro non troppo e serioso 6:54

TOTAL TIME
54:15