

CAL PERFORMANCES  
**AT HOME**

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, March 18, 2021, 7pm

**Mitsuko Uchida, *piano***

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances  
at Wigmore Hall in London, England  
on January 5, 2021.

**PROGRAM**

**Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

From Four Impromptus, D. 935  
No. 2 in A-flat major, Allegretto

From Four Impromptus, D. 899  
No. 1 in C minor, Allegro molto moderato

Piano Sonata in G major, D. 894, *Fantasia*  
Molto moderato e cantabile  
Andante  
Menuetto: Allegro moderato – Trio  
Allegretto

The *Cal Performances at Home* Spring 2021 season  
is dedicated to Gail and Dan Rubinfeld, leading supporters of Cal Performances  
and the well-being of our artists for almost 30 years.

Major support provided by The Bernard Osher Foundation.

This performance is made possible, in part,  
by Patron Sponsors Nadine Tang and Bruce Smith.

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert  
will be available on demand through June 16, 2021.*



### The Multifaceted Schubert:

#### Mitsuko Uchida's Preoccupation of a Lifetime

"I'm afraid there are moments in life when even Schubert has nothing to say to us," remarks Madame Merle during her entrance scene in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. "We must admit, however, that they are our worst."

Isabel, the novel's young protagonist—who will become the victim of Madame Merle's machinations—initially finds herself spellbound when she encounters her new acquaintance for the first time, performing "something of Schubert's" (she recognizes the composer but can't specify the piece). The soundtrack of Jane Campion's 1996 film adaptation, in which Barbara Hershey plays the older woman, gives an identity to the music: it's one of Schubert's Impromptus. Indeed, the film turns Schubert into an accompanying presence who implicitly comments on the unfolding story; later, it cites the composer's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet to accompany Isabel's agitated state of mind.

Schubert somehow accommodates these contradictions. Until well into the last century—especially with regard to his piano music—Schubert's signature for many seemed limited to an alluring gift for melody. His lyrical richness betokened a spontaneous yet "naive" composer. Such traits were seen as essentially harmless and *gemütlich* and deflected from his music's emotional complexity and ambitious—at times even revolutionary—vision.

Alfred Brendel discards the sentimentalizing image from the past and homes in on the ambiguity at the heart of Schubert when he likens the composer to a wanderer and sleepwalker. "To wander is the Romantic condition; one yields to it enraptured or is driven and plagued by the terror of finding no escape. More often than not, happiness is but the surface of despair."

Mitsuko Uchida, too, has for many years proved herself to be among our most sympathetic interpreters of Schubert. Her sense of connection with the composer is profound and goes back to her early childhood, when she recalls being particularly drawn to the melody-become-folksong "Der Lindenbaum" (from *Winterreise*).

For this program, Uchida brings into play still another of Schubert's seeming "contradictions": the composer of the stand-alone miniature versus the long form from Classical tradition. The first is linked for many with Schubert's matchless gift as a songwriter and, for a long time, eclipsed his achievements in the larger genres associated with his great contemporary, Beethoven: genres like the sonata, symphony, and string quartet.

Less than a century ago, in the 1920s, the likes of Sergei Rachmaninoff admitted that was unaware that Schubert had even written piano sonatas.

### Charming, Deceiving, Gripping: Two Schubert Impromptus

One of the advocates who first began to rescue Schubert from obscurity, Robert Schumann, became fascinated by the tension between the improvisatory-seeming freedom of the shorter pieces and Schubert's approach to architecture on the grand scale: he coined his famous remark about "heavenly length" in reference to the newly rediscovered "Great" C major Symphony.

Schumann biographer John Daverio argues that Schubert suggested a kind of liberation to the Romantics by showing that "Beethoven's path was not the only path to grandeur and sublimity in the larger instrumental genres." Schubert's alternate path involved not only "heavenly length" but an "inimitable melancholy and wistfulness" that we can likewise locate in his shorter works.

An aphorism from 1798 by Friedrich Schlegel crystallized an idea that would be seized on by the early generation of Romantic composers, in particular Schumann and Chopin: "A fragment should be like a little work of art, complete in itself and separated from the rest of the universe like a hedgehog." Though in an entirely different context and alluding to an ancient Greek fragment, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin later made the hedgehog an emblem of a type of systematic artist who "knows one big thing," as opposed to the fox, who "knows many things."

The pianist and scholar Charles Rosen elaborates on this image of the hedgehog (in German, “Igel”): because it “rolls itself into a ball when alarmed,” the hedgehog has a form that is “well-defined and yet blurred at the edges. This spherical shape, organic and ideally geometrical, suited Romantic thought: above all, the image projects beyond itself in a provocative way.” In similar fashion, continues Rosen, the “Romantic fragment” is “separate from the rest of the universe [yet] suggests distant perspectives.”

Near the end of his tragically brief career, Schubert composed some of the most inspired exemplars of the miniature form in his series of *Impromptus* and *Moments musicaux* for solo piano. These essays on an intimate (as opposed to epic) scale had the force of a revelation for Schumann, who observed: “[W]e discover Schubert anew as we recognize him in his inexhaustible moods, and as he charms, deceives, and then grips us.”

In the fall and winter of 1827, with less than a year to live, Schubert completed two sets of four *Impromptus* each (D. 899 and 935). Only two of these (from the first set) appeared in print right away; the rest were all published at various points after the composer’s death.

Schubert did not invent the idea of the *impromptu*. The Bohemian composer Jan Václav Voříšek published a set for piano in 1821—in turn linked to short pieces by his teacher, Václav Tomášek—which are often cited as a possible musical influence. But the term “*impromptu*” is something of a misnomer anyway. It was initially imposed by the publisher of Voříšek’s pieces as well as by Schubert’s publisher.

Schubert acquiesced to this name and then used it for the D. 935 set. But the latter was deemed “too difficult for trifles” and rejected; it appeared in print only in 1839. From the publisher’s perspective, “*impromptu*” was meant to signal something suited to the newly emerging market of amateur, middle-class pianists: modestly demanding character pieces, in other words, and certainly not the remarkably original examples Schubert was producing. From Schubert’s perspective, these

short-form pieces were likely intended for himself to perform at the intimate Schubertiads, where like-minded friends would gather to enjoy music and company.

When the D. 935 set finally did get published, Schumann wrote a review in which he objected to the term “*impromptu*” insofar as it implies a hastily tossed-off improvisation, something intended only for the moment. Instead, Schumann suggests that Schubert really intended to compose a sonata, singling out No. 1 (in F minor) as the “perfectly executed and self-contained” first movement of a sonata and **No. 2 (in A-flat major)** as the corresponding second movement, while No. 4 (in F minor) would perhaps constitute the finale. “Schubert’s friends must know whether or not he completed the sonata,” he notes.

The A-flat major *Impromptu* is in the ABA form familiar from song or the minuet (with a contrasting central section or trio in the case of a dance movement). A sense of contrast enters into the main section as well, which for its part is differentiated from the flowing triplet texture of the trio. The piece’s overall mood, as Schumann aptly characterizes it, is tranquil and introspective.

The ***Impromptu* in C minor**, No. 1 of the D. 899 set, begins with a dramatically sustained unison, from which a march theme emerges, somewhat subdued at first. It unfolds as a kind of miniature double variation or even rondo: the first theme, a somewhat grimly determined march, acquires a more violent accompaniment by the end. But it yields to a beguiling lyricism in its counterpart version as the second theme. Oscillating with Schubertian ambivalence between major and minor in the coda, the *Impromptu* reaches its conclusion in C major.

### “A Dichotomy of Harsh Reality and Beautiful Dreams”:

#### The Piano Sonata in G major, D. 894

Schubert had a considerably different relationship to the keyboard than did two of his greatest idols, Mozart and Beethoven. While they used the instrument to establish their respective reputations as virtuosos, Schubert

most likely did not even own one; in any case, he was not in their league as a concertizing pianist. Those who heard him at informal music gatherings praised the singing quality and sensitive touch of Schubert's playing, but they noted weaknesses in his technique. Still, the keyboard was essential to his creative identity—all the more so, since Schubert's attempts to establish a career path that would allow him to sustain his artistic ambitions proved so frustrating. As his teen years waned, he found himself locked into a hated, dead-end job teaching in his father's primary school. But Schubert experienced an unprecedented outburst of creative activity in 1815 and 1816, during a period that included his first attempts at writing solo piano sonatas.

The tally of Schubert's complete piano sonatas in the ongoing New Schubert Edition is given as 19, but other sources list 21 (covered on 8 CDs in Mitsuko Uchida's complete recording on the Philips label). The figure is complicated by the existence of both incomplete sonatas (works missing one or more movements) and fragments of projected sonatas.

As with his final symphony and such chamber works as his String Quartet No. 15 in G major, in his later years Schubert explored architecture on the grand scale, culminating in the superlative trilogy comprised by the last three piano sonatas of 1828. Exceptionally, the **Sonata in G major, D. 894**, was published while Schubert was still alive, appearing in print in spring of the following year (as his Op. 78); it was the third and last of his piano sonatas to be published in his lifetime. Otherwise, the composer's manuscripts of instrumental works, when he got around to trying to interest publishers, were typically rejected. In 1826, for example, one publisher wrote back to explain: "The public does not yet sufficiently and generally understand the peculiar, often ingenious, but perhaps now and then somewhat curious procedures of your mind's creations..."

Schubert dedicated D. 894 to a member of his close circle of friends, Joseph von Spaun, whom he had met as a youth when singing in

what was the precursor to the Vienna Boys' Choir. Spaun became an important friend until the end of his life and offered financial and moral support; it was at his home that the final Schubertiad was held on January 28, 1828, attracting "an enormous attendance" (according to one diary).

The D. 894 Sonata was Schubert's last work in the piano sonata genre preceding the final trilogy and dates from October 1826. (He was still at the end of his 20s!) The opening movement is marked *Molto moderato e cantabile* but was titled "Fantasie" by the publisher, who must have been struck by its unconventional character, conjuring at times an improvisatory leisure; this has since become a nickname for the entire sonata. The genial, calm flow of this music (notated in 12/8 meter) anticipates the spirit of the corresponding movement of the B-flat major Sonata, D. 960. The opening gesture and its later surprising harmonic shift have been compared with the beginning of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (also in G major). This was the favorite Schubert sonata of Sviatoslav Richter.

Schumann, writing before the belated discovery of the final sonata trilogy (which, in the end, disappointed him), raved about D. 894 as "the most perfect in form and substance" of all the Schubert sonatas he knew at the time. "Everything here is of a piece, breathes the same air." Charles Rosen notes that its sound world must still have been conceived within the older style of pianism, which eventually changed to "continuous pedaling" in the 1820s. Thus pedal markings tend to be "excessively rare in Schubert"—with only one such marking in the G major Sonata, in the tenth measure, which calls for extremely soft playing (*ppp*). "This suggests that Schubert adheres to the Classical system," Rosen concludes, "in which the dry sound is the norm and the pedaled sound is a special effect."

Agitated interruptions to the serenity of the Andante's main theme are a hallmark of Schubertian ambiguity. The scholar William Kinderman gets to the heart of the matter when he describes the composer's use of contrasts in the first movement—as opposed to,



say, Beethoven's goal-oriented approach to sonata form and harmonic tension—as a way to evoke “the dichotomy of harsh reality and beautiful dreams familiar from the world of Schubert's *Lieder*.”

The Minuet startles with its opening in the minor, a deceptive detour before Schubert swerves back to the expected major key. In the

contrasting trio, the shift between major to minor has a delicate but powerful impact. Schubert concludes this ambitious sonata with an Allegretto that reveals moments of emotional disturbance barely suspected from the cheerful opening measures—a microcosm for the history of Schubert's own reception.

— © 2021 *Thomas May*

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

---

One of the most revered artists of our time, **Mitsuko Uchida** is known as a peerless interpreter of the works of Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Beethoven, as well for being a devotee of the piano music of Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and György Kurtág.

She has enjoyed close relationships over many years with the world's most renowned orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and—in the United States—the Chicago Symphony and Cleveland Orchestra, with whom she recently celebrated her 100th performance at Severance Hall. Conductors with whom she has worked closely have included Bernard Haitink, Sir Simon Rattle, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski, Andris Nelsons, Gustavo Dudamel, and Mariss Jansons.

Since 2016, Mitsuko Uchida has been an Artistic Partner of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, with whom she is currently engaged on a five-year touring project in Europe and North America. She also appears regularly in

recital in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo, and is a frequent guest at the Salzburg Mozartwoche and Salzburg Festival.

Mitsuko Uchida records exclusively for Decca, and her multi-award-winning discography includes the complete piano sonatas of Mozart and Schubert. She is the recipient of two Grammy Awards—for Mozart Concertos with the Cleveland Orchestra and for an album of lieder with Dorothea Röschmann—and her recording of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto with Pierre Boulez and the Cleveland Orchestra received the Gramophone Award for Best Concerto.

A founding member of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and Director of the Marlboro Music Festival, Mitsuko Uchida is a recipient of the Golden Mozart Medal from the Salzburg Mozarteum, and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. She has also been awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society, and holds honorary degrees from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 2009, she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Mitsuko Uchida is managed by Kathryn Enticott at Enticott Music Management in partnership with Alex Monsey at IMG Artists.

[www.mitsukouchida.com](http://www.mitsukouchida.com)

## IN LONDON

Darius Weinberg, Live Video Switcher  
Tom Wright, Camera Operator

By kind permission of John Gilhooly, Artistic and Executive Director, Wigmore Hall

## For *Cal Performances at Home*

Tiffani Snow, Producer  
Jeremy Little, Technical Director  
Jeremy Robins, Executive Video Producer

## For Ibis Productions, Inc.

Jeremy Robins, Editor

## For Future Tense Media

Jesse Yang, Creative Director

## For Cal Performances

### EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Jeremy Geffen, Executive and Artistic Director  
Kelly Brown, Executive Assistant to the Director

### ADMINISTRATION

Andy Kraus, Director of Strategy and Administration  
Calvin Eng, Chief Financial Officer  
Rafael Soto, Finance Specialist  
Marilyn Stanley, Finance Specialist  
Gawain Lavers, Applications Programmer  
Ingrid Williams, IT Support Analyst  
Sean Nittner, Systems Administrator

### ARTISTIC PLANNING

Katy Tucker, Director of Artistic Planning  
Robin Pomerance, Artistic Administrator

### DEVELOPMENT

Taun Miller Wright, Chief Development Officer  
Elizabeth Meyer, Director of Institutional Giving  
Jennifer Sime, Associate Director of Development, Individual Giving

Jamie McClave, Individual Giving  
and Special Events Officer  
Jocelyn Aptowitz, Major Gifts Associate

### EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Rica Anderson, Interim Director, Artistic Literacy

### HUMAN RESOURCES

Judy Hatch, Human Resources Director  
Shan Whitney, Human Resources Generalist

### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Jenny Reik, Director of Marketing and Communications  
Ron Foster-Smith, Associate Director of Marketing  
Mark Van Oss, Communications Editor  
Louisa Spier, Public Relations Manager  
Cheryl Games, Web and Digital Marketing Manager  
Jeanette Peach, Public Relations Senior Associate  
Elise Chen, Email Production Associate  
Lynn Zummo, New Technology Coordinator  
Terri Washington, Social Media and Digital Content Specialist

### OPERATIONS

Jeremy Little, Production Manager  
Alan Herro, Production Admin Manager  
Kevin Riggall, Head Carpenter  
Matt Norman, Head Electrician  
Tom Craft, Audio/Video Department Head  
Jo Parks, Video Engineer  
Tiffani Snow, Event Manager  
Ginarose Perino, Rental Business Manager  
Rob Bean, Event Operations Manager

### STAGE CREW

Charles Clear, Senior Scene Technician  
David Ambrose, Senior Scene Technician  
Jacob Heule, Senior Scene Technician  
Jorg Peter "Winter" Sichelschmidt, Senior Scene Technician  
Joseph Swails, Senior Scene Technician  
Mark Mensch, Senior Scene Technician  
Mathison Ott, Senior Scene Technician  
Mike Bragg, Senior Scene Technician  
Ricky Artis, Senior Scene Technician  
Robert Haycock, Senior Scene Technician

## CREDITS

---

### STUDENT MUSICAL ACTIVITIES

Mark Sumner, Director, UC Choral Ensembles

Bill Ganz, Associate Director,

UC Choral Ensembles

Matthew Sadowski, Director of Bands/

Interim Department Manager

Ted Moore, Director, UC Jazz Ensembles

Brittney Nguyen, SMA Coordinator

### TICKET OFFICE

Liz Baqir, Ticket Services Manager

Gordon Young, Assistant Ticket Office Manager

Sherice Jones, Assistant Ticket Office Manager

Jeffrey Mason, Patron Services Associate

Opening fanfare used by permission from Jordi Savall from his 2015 recording of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* on Alia Vox.

Major support for the Cal Performances

Digital Classroom is provided by Wells Fargo.

Major support for Beyond the Stage is provided by Bank of America.

[calperformances.org](http://calperformances.org)

© 2021 Regents of the University of California