



Program Book

Sunday, October 4, 2026, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Tom Borrow, piano

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791) Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 (1778)
Allegro maestoso
Andante cantabile con espressione
Presto

Franz LISZT (b. 1811–1886) *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, S. 418 (1841)

INTERMISSION

LISZT Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178 (1852–1853)

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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310**

In Mozart's day, the piano sonata was not yet the serious genre it became in the 19th century; instead, it was an ephemeral form intended for light entertainment and often improvised by the composer/performer on the spot. As musicologist Egon Kenton explains, this was partly due to the relatively insubstantial sound of 18th-century pianos, which were still far from the powerful concert grands of today.

Through the excellence and originality of his keyboard sonatas, Mozart greatly elevated the status of this little party genre, paving the way for Beethoven with his 32 sonatas to raise it to the pinnacle of the pianist's art. And his innovations went hand in hand with the piano's metamorphosis into a commanding solo instrument during a period of rapid construction advances as the 18th century moved toward the 19th.

Written in 1778, when Mozart was in Paris seeking opportunities beyond those his native Salzburg could provide, the Piano Sonata in A minor was one of the greatest he wrote and in its intense emotional expressivity pointed to the sonata form's future. That year, his mother, Maria Anna Mozart, who was serving as his chaperone, suddenly died after a brief illness. Mozart enjoyed a warmer relationship with her than he did with his imperious father, and he was emotionally devastated by this loss. Furthermore, his time in Paris was bringing him no real rewards or future possibilities. This combination of grief and professional frustration found its way into this remarkable work written in the minor mode, which Mozart rarely chose for his piano sonatas.

Mozart scholar Jan Swafford points to the appearance of the composer's original manuscript as a visual demonstration of the intense emotions overwhelming this sonata. "Mozart usually wrote with a quite neat hand, but this sonata has notes jammed in and overflowing the staves. The page speaks of

urgency." The first movement opens with an angular theme propelled by hammered repeating chords and punctuated with hard-edged dotted rhythms. Soon, racing 16th notes are added to the fray, disturbing the would-be lyricism of the second theme in C major. In this sonata form, the development section is "fiercely dramatic, a restless chain of mostly minor keys ... that ends in a phrase of pealing dissonances" (Swafford).

The longest and most emotionally complex of the sonata's three movements is the second movement marked "Andante cantabile con espressione." In F major, the opening moments certainly fit this description with a lovely, gracefully ornamented, and songful melody that seems to offer consolation for the composer's pain. The repeated-note motive from the first movement animates the delicate second theme, but now seems optimistic rather than angry. But this serenity and stability suddenly breaks down. Swafford again: "Then rises one of the longest and most passionate developments of [Mozart's] early maturity mounting to a feverish phrase founded on the pounding chords of the first movement accelerated in the right hand, while the left hand sings a defiant theme." Though the songful exposition music returns, it is clear that Mozart's lyrical attempts at consolation cannot erase his darker mood. The beautiful coda at the end confirms that knowledge.

After these two large-scaled and profound movements, the Presto finale, back in A minor, lasts only a few minutes. Built around the dotted rhythms so prominent in the first movement, it runs at a breathless pace, driven by a mood of insatiable nervous energy.

FRANZ LISZT***Réminiscences de Don Juan***

"Whoever really wants to know what Liszt has done for the piano should study his old operatic Fantasies." This statement was made by none other than Johannes Brahms, who certainly was Franz Liszt's opposite in his aesthetic philosophy.

Over the years, a false perception has grown up that Liszt's transcriptions for piano of famous music by other composers—more than 360 works including operas, Beethoven's symphonies, and sacred choral works—are merely flamboyant demonstrations of keyboard virtuosity with little musical substance. But this is hardly the case with his finest transcriptions—and his *Réminiscences de Don Juan* is high among them—which are imaginative recreations rather than decorative treatments of their original models.

Liszt's obsession with creating keyboard transcriptions based on music conceived for other media had many purposes. Those that stuck closer to the original work facilitated his intensive studying of other composers' scores in order to develop his own creative voice. And, as Liszt scholar Derek Watson explains, they provided a service to Liszt's concert audiences by introducing them to "music they would have had rare opportunities to study or hear" in an era before CDs and YouTube. Above all, they provided a whole new repertoire for his concert tours and, as Brahms noted, brilliant vehicles for him to demonstrate his tremendous expansion of piano technique.

Like Chopin, Liszt was a passionate opera lover, even though—also like Chopin—he never created any of his own. In Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, he found the perfect central character and plot to match his own proclivities. If not achieving the Don's record, he had himself chalked up an impressive number of feminine conquests. And his religious nature combined with his Romanticism inspired a fascination with the battles between Heaven and Hell that animate many of his other compositions.

Rather than creating a superficial pastiche of *Don Giovanni*'s best tunes, Liszt took just four musical elements from the opera and used them as thematic material for a well-constructed 17-minute work in three major sections that explore different aspects of the Don's character and fate. It opens with a dark, dramatic treatment of fragments of

the ominous music from Act II, Scene 3, in which the Don visits the grave of the Commendatore, Donna Anna's father, whom he killed at the beginning of the opera. There, the Commendatore's memorial statue comes to life and addresses his murderer; refusing to admit fear, Giovanni invites him to dinner at his castle the next evening. Mingled with this music are the whirling chromatic scales from the opera's final scene (and also its Overture) in which the Commendatore enacts his revenge and drags Giovanni down to Hell. Those scales provide wonderful fodder for Liszt's extraordinary piano technique, and indeed this whole piece emphasizes virtuosity in the execution of rapid scales of all varieties.

The music hushes and relaxes, and we enter the piece's second and longest section. Here Liszt presents the famous melody "Là ci darem la mano," the charming Act I duet in which Giovanni tries to seduce the susceptible peasant girl Zerlina. In classic variations style, Liszt first presents both sections of the duet's melody more or less straight, then creates two lengthy variations on the duet's first section, concluded with a glittering cadenza. Then the duet's bouncier 6/8 last section receives three quite elaborate variations. Toward the end, the dramatic scales of Giovanni's impending doom begin to infiltrate the music.

From this, the fast, effervescent music of Giovanni's first-act "Champagne Aria"—his paean to a life of unfettered pleasure—bubbles into action to form the work's final section. This light-hearted, but hectic theme is undermined by the whirling chromatic scales, but ultimately wins a blazing virtuosic victory.

LISZT

Sonata in B minor, S. 178

Generally considered Liszt's greatest piano work and certainly his most ambitious, the Sonata in B minor is not a work for every pianist. There are, of course, the legendary Lisztian technical difficulties to contend with: exceptionally demanding octaves writing and

passagework made more intricate by its thematic and harmonic content. But far more challenging is the task of controlling and expressing a 30-minute work in which Liszt incorporated the customary four movements into one enormously expanded sonata form, densely woven from a handful of themes and covering the broadest emotional spectrum.

Like most of his major works for both the keyboard and the orchestra, the Sonata in B minor comes from the years Liszt spent in Weimar (1848–1861), after retiring from the most dazzling virtuoso career of the 19th century. Here, though surrounded by a coterie of students and admirers and pursuing a busy conducting career, he found the time to create that his far more hectic touring schedule had denied him. He composed the Sonata between 1852 and 1853, approximately 50 years after Beethoven wrote his *Waldstein* Sonata, a work Liszt cherished.

Like his arch-opponent Brahms, Liszt believed he was carrying on Beethoven's legacy. He considered that Beethoven's own expansion of sonata form—the exposition-development-recapitulation construction of struggle and resolution that became the core form of the late-18th and 19th centuries—should be carried still farther. And he was also inspired by Schubert's innovative *Wanderer Fantasy*, another of his favorite concert pieces; there, Schubert had experimented with combining elements of several movements into a single over-arching shape. Thus, in B minor, we find four sections—opening, slow section, scherzo, and finale—not simply run together without pause, but actually imbedded in one grand structure.

Of course, Liszt was known for his programmatic music, and so commentators have affixed extra-musical scenarios to this highly dramatic work—the struggle between Faust and Mephistopheles being the favorite. But Liszt insisted that this work was absolute music, with no extraneous poetic subtext.

The first minutes of this work are of great importance—"a thematic womb" in Ken-

neth Hamilton's words. Here Liszt presents in rapid succession three of the most important themes from which this entire work will be constructed. First, barely audible thumps on G in the bass register, followed by oddly spaced descending scales—the first modal, the second using the Hungarian gypsy scale that intrigued this Hungarian-born composer. Then in utmost contrast, a fiery extroverted theme: loud, jagged in shape, and *Allegro energico* in tempo. And immediately its companion third theme: pounding repeated notes with a little tail, which Liszt called "the hammer blow." From these three elements—and especially the jagged second theme and the hammer-blow third—the composer will build his music, using the process of thematic transformation or metamorphosis that he favored.

A few moments later, we hear a fourth theme, marked "Grandioso"; this noble dotted-rhythm rising melody will also play a vital role throughout and forms the beginning of the second group of themes in the sonata construction. In two superb examples of Liszt's thematic transformation, this melody receives two lyrical companions. Listen closely: they are the jagged second theme and, even more astonishingly altered, the hammer-blow third theme, now dreaming rhapsodically in a cloud of arpeggios.

Following a pair of sustained trills in the right hand, we enter the development section, which occupies the majority of the work. A bold and thickly chordal treatment of the second theme leads to some of the work's most demanding virtuoso passages. And in another dramatic transformation, we hear the noble fourth theme, now played triple forte in brutal, heavy chords.

The embedded slow section (marked "Andante sostenuto") introduces a fifth and final theme, more serene and contemplative than the rest. It is followed by a *dolcissimo* transformation of the third theme, its farthest journey from its hammer-blow origin. The fourth theme, aspiring passionately upward, also makes a reappearance. This mini-



movement closes with a beautiful bridge passage and the first theme's eerie descending scales.

Now Liszt launches his scherzo, a sardonic short fugue built from the second and third themes. Percussive chords hammering darkly on the first theme in the left hand then begin the finale section—or in the overall sonata structure, the recapitulation. The key of B minor has now brightened to B major as the noble fourth theme reprises grander than ever. We begin to anticipate a crashing, all-stops-out finish. But Liszt has something more original and beautiful in mind. First, he quietly revisits the lovely theme of his “slow move-

ment.” Then, a hushed, ruminative passage of mysterious chords rises above the third theme, hammering distantly in the bass. A fleeting glance at the jagged second theme, and then the first theme's descending scales, ending in sepulchral B's at the bottom of the instrument. We have come full circle in one of Liszt's most inspired and magical closes.

— © Janet E. Bedell

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

Pianist **Tom Borrow** earned great public and critical acclaim in 2019 when, with only 36 hours' notice, he replaced renowned pianist Khatia Buniatishvili in a series of 12 concerts, performing Ravel's Piano Concerto in G on tour with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Since then, Borrow has been welcomed by many of the world's major orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Hallé Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Czech Philharmonic, Basque National Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, NHK Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, St. Louis, Atlanta, New Jersey, and Pittsburgh, among others. Leading conductors with whom he has collaborated include Bychkov, Luisi, Eschenbach, Petrenko, Fischer, Oramo, Zhang, Denève, Saraste, Suzuki, Wellber, Treviño, Oundjian, Emelyanychev, and Elder. Borrow has also toured to Eastern Europe with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, to regular standing ovations, and to South Korea with the Tel Aviv Soloists.

Equally in demand in recital, he has appeared at the BBC Proms, Verbier, and Ruhr festivals, Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Berlin Konzerthaus, Vienna Konzerthaus, Vancouver Recital Society, Aspen Music Festival, Festival Piano aux Jacobins (Toulouse), Aldeburgh Festival, Cheltenham Festival, Bolzano Concert Society (Italy), and Bellerive Festival (Geneva).

Borrow's 2026-27 season includes debut recitals here at Cal Performances, as well as with the Gilmore Piano Festival and on Washington Performing Arts' Hayes Piano

Series; chamber music in the Seattle Chamber Music Society's Winter Festival; and concerto appearances with the symphony orchestras of Dallas and Atlanta.

Following recognition as a recent BBC New Generation Artist, and by *International Piano* and *Gramophone* magazines and *Musical America*, Borrow was later presented with the prestigious Terence Judd-Hallé Orchestra Award and the Alte Oper Frankfurt Young Artist Prize.

Across 2024 and 2025, he was Artist in Residence with the São Paulo Symphony (OSESP), during its 70th anniversary season, and was subsequently named to a third artist residency of his career for 2025-26, with the Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini during its 50th anniversary season.

Borrow has won all of the national piano competitions in Israel, taking First Prize at the Israeli Radio & Jerusalem Symphony Young Artist Competition in Jerusalem and three top prizes at the "Piano Forever" Competition in Ashdod (in three different age categories). In 2018, he won the prestigious Maurice M. Clairmont Award, given to a single promising artist once every two years by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation and Tel-Aviv University.

Born in Tel Aviv in 2000, Borrow began studying piano at age five. A protégé of Murray Perahia, he has performed as soloist with all the major orchestras of his native country, and has had the privilege of participating in master classes with such prominent artists and pedagogues as Sir András Schiff, Christoph Eschenbach, Richard Goode, and Menahem Pressler, among many others.