



SERGEI KVITKO
SCHUBERT
by Candlelight
LIVE IN MADRID

SCHUBERT


A Personal Journey

by Sergei Kvitko



BAD GASTEIN, AUSTRIA

Sometimes inspiration comes when you least expect it....



I walked out of the hotel, nodding politely to the portier, and noting his impeccably sharp outfit, so different from the unremarkable clothing he wears when he is not working. The rain stopped and the clouds on the other side of the valley seemed stuck hanging in the middle of the mountains like fluffy oversized necklaces. I always loved that, being on the same level with the clouds, being *in* the clouds. I stopped at the café next door to get my morning coffee and, as usual, briefly and pointlessly chatted with the woman at the counter. She had no idea who I was, but she knew I was a musician and somewhat a well-known one and spoke to me with careful reverence, just in case. Morning just like any other.

I kept walking towards the waterfall, as I've done dozens of times before, anticipating the magnificent view, already feeling the mist on my face. I could never get used to its majestic beauty—no matter how many times I saw it, no matter how well I seemingly knew every stone and every curve of the flowing water—it always stunned me as it did the first time. I stopped as I always did, losing sense of time. I could watch this forever—such a cliché, but so true—like fire, or snowfall... Nothing changes, and everything changes. Always and never the same...





A sudden thought of someone looking at the same water-covered stones some 200 years ago became overwhelming—did they feel the same about the magnificent beauty of this wonder? Did they also think that the time stops, that there is no purpose other than this glorious view? Did they hear the rush of music in the cascading water? What did it sound like? What about some wanderer who will be looking at this waterfall 200 years from now? Will they hear the same unstoppable rush of melodic lines and arpeggios, tender and thunderous, pensive and exalted, ever-changing and frozen in time... Another startling thought that Schubert was possibly standing on the exact same spot I'm standing right now struck me like lightning... Did he hear music in the sounds of this place? Did he hear *his* music? I know I did... Somehow this impromptu moment became the idea, the program. Somehow the puzzle was solved even before I had the pieces...

KYIV, UKRAINE



It all feels so different now, in 2023—the whole world is different. This atrocious, criminal, inconceivable war hit so hard and so close to my heart. It made the memory of that trip to Ukraine so much more precious, and so much more painful. I played this program for the first time on January 31 (Schubert's birthday), 2020, at the Ukrainian National Academy of Music, right before the pandemic and before the war. The mood in the city was already tense, but people looked happy, the sights were beautiful, and life seemed to be normal, busy, hectic.

I was terrified of Kyiv's notoriously tough audience—they've heard the best of the best, they had opinions, and they knew what to listen for. The lights went off, flickering of candles lazily reflecting on the ceiling was mesmerizing, and all that people could see were the keys, my hands, and my face. And after a few lines of music I knew—the audience was my captive. The intense



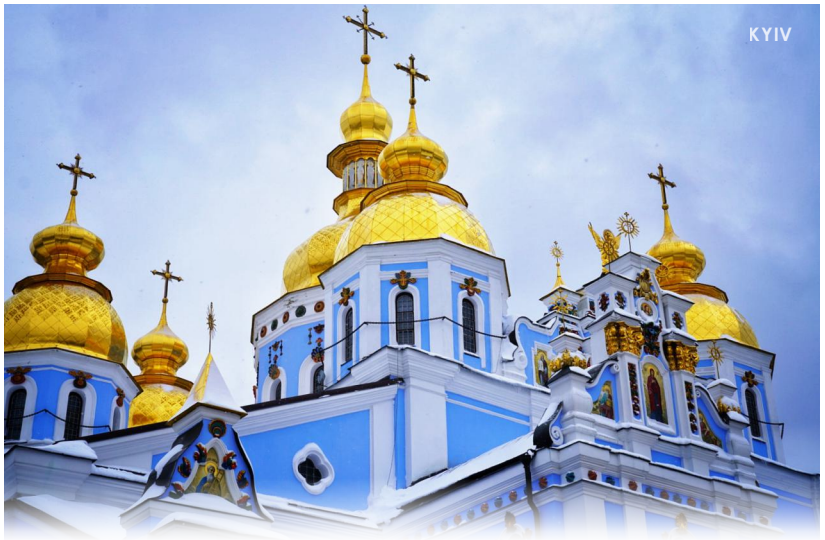
KYIV

attention and the absorbing silence felt so incredible, that I completely forgot where I was, to the point that after the *Impromptus*, when the applause died out, and I wanted to say a few words about the *Scherzos* that I played as encores, I started talking to the audience in English (!), until someone politely asked me to speak Russian instead... And after the whole program ended, the lights came back on, but nobody moved—and I heard an older lady’s voice saying, “but we don’t want to go, can you play more?” ... one of the most precious moments of my life, truly...

LANSING, MICHIGAN, USA

And then the pandemic hit—all my concerts were cancelled, and I, just like everyone else, was locked up in my house, full of uncertainty and fear. Work seemed pointless—“why bother, we are all going to die anyway,” reading news was terrifying, trying to start exercising seemed both—pointless and terrifying. The only thing that was able to completely distract me was Schubert’s music, and I was playing it over and over, again and again losing sense of time and place. It would transport me to the waterfall of Bad Gastein and the Austrian Alps, to Kyiv, and to places I’m yet to visit...





Somehow this music seemed to be the only thing worth the time and obsession, and while driving me crazy, it kept me sane...

The perfectly crafted, magnificent architecture of the *Four Impromptus* became a temple of a labyrinth where I can hide, cry, think, pray, laugh, scream... *Moments Musicaux*, with their “divine lengths” and sprawled tenderness became a symbolic summary of life, a human life—starting with the sunrise – or birth – of the opening C Major, traversing through love and heartbreak, angst and humor, storm and idyllic happiness, resentment and peace, and ending with a calm sadness of death...

MADRID, SPAIN



It was love at first sight—everything about this city was magnificent. The architecture, the history, the food, the people, music and dancing on the streets, the air and the vibe—all seemed to be in concert to make you fall in love with it. And I did. In 2021, when I got the opportunity to go back to Madrid to record two albums—my dream Mozart album with Madrid Soloists Chamber Orchestra, as well as an album of the most gorgeous French and Spanish music with the incredible violist Wenting Kang, the city also became my soulmate and my inspiration. It seemed to ignite my most adventurous musical ideas and then fulfil them.

By that time, I played this *Schubert by Candlelight* program many times in different corners of the world—from Kiev to Tashkent, from Odessa to New York and so many places in between. All these concerts were videotaped and recorded as I was preparing to make a studio album of this music. And somehow, on April 7, 2022, for

this concert in Madrid the stars aligned, and this live performance *became* the album. The most spectacular piano, Steinway D, courtesy of Hinves Pianos, the lovely room, my friends in the audience, my mood and feel for this music that evening—everything was just right, and I felt that I could never replicate all of it together in the studio. With this program, like with no other, I realize that I play completely different when I play it for an audience. Like with no other music, the ephemeral things that happen in the air between the performer and public are palpable, I feel like a storyteller that captivates his audience so much that he gets lost in his own stories.

I never get tired of quoting Chris McCandless—“happiness is only real when shared.” This music makes me happy, sharing it with you makes my happiness real. 🔥





Aug. 1846

On the centennial of Schubert's death, Edgar Istel wrote "Inexhaustible—some six hundred in number are the love-gifts which Schubert gave to the world in his short creatively active life, inexhaustible in their beauty and in their truth." Not until 1951, did the musical world realize the enormity and variety of Schubert's productivity during his 31 years on this earth when Austrian musicologist Otto Erich Deutsch (1883–1967) compiled and published the first comprehensive catalogue of Franz Schubert's (1797–1828) compositions. It is from this catalogue that the D numbers used to identify Schubert's works are derived. As it turned out, Schubert bestowed the world with no less than 1,515 works! These included 22 piano sonatas (7 of which are incomplete or unfinished), 48 impromptus, moments musicaux, fantasies and partly incomplete piano pieces, and 452 dances for piano (German dances, ländler, écossaises, waltzes, minuets).

What a treasure trove!

The works on this program include thirteen piano works. The **6 Moments Musicaux** (Op. 94 (D. 780)) were composed between 1823 (No. 3), 1824 (No. 6) and the Autumn of 1827 and published in the year of his death. These are snapshots in time and lyric inspiration, almost improvisational and whimsical yet serious. They show, in a condensed way, the many sides of Schubert lyric and melodic style. The **4 Impromptus** (Op. 90 (D. 899)) that follow are works from the Summer to the Autumn of 1827. These are masterpieces of thematic integration and elaboration—each Impromptu different from the next. They are unquestionably among the loveliest and most thoroughly characteristic of his short instrumental works. The first develops almost like a sonata movement, pensive at times and full of emotion. The second is flowing and lyrical. The third is serene and evocative. The fourth is a brilliant scherzo contrasted with a sonorous and darkly intense trio. The program continues with the **2 Scherzi** (D. 593) which date from November 1817 (and were first published in 1871). In 1817, Schubert devoted himself to the composition of piano sonatas and in October began writing his *Sixth Symphony In C* (D. 589). These two works are happy and dance-like. Concluding the program is a somewhat unusual **Minuet in C-sharp minor** (D. 600) composed in 1814 (and only published in 1897). The *minuet* is originally a French dance form. Etymologically the term comes from *pas menu*, that is, small step. This highly stylized pair dance (with no bodily contact between partners) in Schubert's hands is a miniature masterpiece in slower tempo and full of elegance.

This recital reminds us that Schubert's music is imbued entirely by the beauty and sweetness of the melody, yet is intensely spontaneous and unplanned. Writing in his diary, Schubert stated: "Imagination—Man's greatest treasure, the inexhaustible spring at which we all refresh ourselves—be with us, even if few respect and honor you. You alone can save us from so-called "enlightenment," that hideous skeleton without flesh and blood." Robert Schumann, writing in his diary, contemplates "And you, heavenly Schubert who left this world too soon—if ghosts and spirits and geniuses spoke to each other, they would speak like you; you are the celestial flowing spirit covered by its spring flowers."





Sergei Kvitko's career is as diverse as it is successful. As a pianist, Mr. Kvitko has captured the attention of music critics with his "polished pianism... glorious Horowitzian three-dimensional perspective" (*Gramophone Magazine*), "masterful, intuitive playing... arresting artistry... an iconoclastic sense for rubato rhythm and phrasing" (*Fanfare Magazine*), and has been praised for his "luminous touch... warm, round sound... plenty of brilliance" as well as "a natural, appealing musicality and sensual understanding of piano tone" (*The Chronicle-Herald*). *American Record Guide* placed his recording of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* "among the best ever made" and included it on its coveted Critics' Choice List. His critically acclaimed 2021 album "Mozart. Post Scriptum" with Madrid Soloists Chamber Orchestra was praised as "an absolute explosion of creativity for Mr. Kvitko" (*EarRelevant*, Atlanta). In 2013, Mr. Kvitko made his New York City debut with a solo recital at Carnegie Hall that "was met with rousing applause, bravos, and a standing ovation" (*New York Concert Review*). He made solo, chamber and orchestral appearances in the United States, Canada, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

As a composer, he gathered multiple awards for his incidental music for the production of Steven Dietz's play "Dracula." Lawrence Cosentino of *City Pulse* wrote: "Kvitko wove a borderline insane level of care and sophistication into every bar of his score even when you can barely hear it," and *Fanfare Magazine* called it "a well-conceived, executed, and imaginative score... entertaining, powerful, witty." Other compositions include incidental music for Tennessee Williams' play "The Glass Menagerie" as well as many transcriptions and arrangements. His cadenzas for Mozart's Concerto in D Minor were called "spectacular, to say the least" (*Pizzicato Magazine*, Germany).

What makes Kvitko's career truly unique, is that his artistic accomplishments are balanced by his reputation as an internationally sought-after classical recording engineer and producer of the highest caliber, declared by *Fanfare Magazine* as "one of the best in the business," and dubbed "recording wizard" by *New York Concert Review*. *Gramophone Magazine* stated that "as engineer, he makes magic," while *American Record Guide* praised his work as a "consistent stream of exceptionally enjoyable recordings." He is a Latin Grammy-nominated producer in Best Classical Album category. His recording of Carter Pann's piece *Mechanics* was a finalist for Pulitzer Prize in Music. Albums produced and engineered by Sergei Kvitko have been favorably reviewed by national and international publications such as *Fanfare Magazine*, *BBC Music*, *Flute World*, *Clarinet Magazine*, *Clavier*, *Percussion* and *Strings Magazine* among many others, earning praises such as "superbly well recorded" (*International Record Guide*, UK), "vividly detailed, vibrant sonics" (*Gramophone*, UK), "beautifully balanced and warmly atmospheric" (*Gramophone*, UK), "the recording is close to ideal—rich, but clear, truthful and immediate" (*American Record Guide*), "larger-than-life recording that sounds fabulous at virtually any volume level" (*Strings Magazine*), "warm and immediate sound" (*The Strad*).

Sergei Kvitko was born in Russia and began studying music at the age of six. After receiving the highest musical education there, he came to the United States to pursue a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Michigan State University, where he studied with Ralph Votapek. He is a voting member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (GRAMMY®).



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Produced and engineered by Sergei Kvitko

Assistant audio engineer Jorge Núñez Colell

Piano Steinway and Sons, Model D. Piano technician Sarah Dimichino

Album art director JoAnn Nunes

Kvitko portrait (page 16) by Matthew Mitchell. All other photos by Sergei Kvitko

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6 Moments musicaux, Op. 94 (D. 780) [1823-28] 32:07

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|---|----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Moderato in C Major | 8:02 |
| 2 | II. Andantino in A-flat Major | 6:41 |
| 3 | III. Allegro moderato in F minor | 1:50 |
| 4 | IV. Moderato in C-sharp minor | 5:04 |
| 5 | V. Allegro vivace in F minor | 2:07 |
| 6 | VI. Allegretto in A-flat Major | 8:23 |

4 Impromptus, Op. 90 (D. 899) [1827] 29:48

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 7 | I. Allegro molto moderato in C minor | 10:29 |
| 8 | II. Allegro in E-flat Major | 5:01 |
| 9 | III. Andante in G-flat Major | 6:00 |
| 10 | IV. Allegretto in A-flat Major | 8:18 |

2 Scherzi (D. 593) [1817] 9:04

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|----|--|------|
| 11 | I. Scherzo No. 1 Allegretto in B-flat Major | 4:23 |
| 12 | II. Scherzo No. 2 Allegro Moderato in D-flat Major | 4:41 |
| 13 | Minuet in C-sharp minor (D. 600) [1813] | 2:47 |