

SOUNDLY UNSOUND

SCHUMANN

Piano Sonata No. 2 in
G minor, Op. 22

SCRIABIN

Piano Sonata No. 2 in
G-sharp minor,
“Sonata-Fantasy”, Op. 19

Tay Shu Wen,
Piano



26 November 2020 | 7:30PM
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music
Concert Hall
Livestream

26 November | Thursday

Tay Shu Wen

Piano Recital

PROGRAMME

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 22

I. So rasch wie möglich – Schneller – Noch schneller

II. Andantino. Getragen

III. Scherzo. Sehr rasch und markiert

IV. Rondo. Presto

ALEXANDER Scriabin

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp Minor, 'Sonata-Fantasy', Op. 19

I. Andante

II. Presto

About The Performer

Singapore-born pianist, **Tay Shu Wen**, started learning the piano at the age of 6, and is currently a third-year student at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance under Associate Professor Albert Tiu. Performing is her passion, and she strives to do her best all the time. As such, she attained a distinction in Piano Performance (LRSM) in 2016 and was invited to perform at the ABRSM South and East Asia Diploma Awards Ceremony in 2017 as the top-scorer. In 2016, she was also the First Prizewinner for the Asia Youth Piano Competition (Open Category), performing at the Singapore Conference Hall. In the 7th Performer's Festival, she learnt from Dr Dean Kramer, and received the Platinum Award in her performance of Schumann's Abegg Variations, and the Dakademy Study Scholarship Award, after the invitation to perform in the Gala Concert. In Summer 2020, she was featured on the Bowdoin International Music Festival (Online) in their Virtual Young Artists Concert Series. Shu Wen has also attended numerous masterclasses by notable pianists, such as Lars Vogt, Kirill Gerstein and Roswitha Heintze. Since entering the conservatory, she has garnered a richer performing experience through chamber and solo performances in public. Most recently, she was involved in Tang Tee Khoon's Grand Series featuring 36 of Mozart's Sonatas for Violin and Piano, and performed in 2 concerts at the Esplanade Recital Studio. She has also organized a concert entitled "Deep Blue Sea" with 7 other friends, for children with autism spectrum disorder. She aspires to continue performing and working with like-minded musicians in the future.

Programme Notes

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 22

Other than writing for the piano, Robert Schumann also composed song cycles, such as *Dichterliebe*, and symphonies. His compositional flair for beautiful melodic writing, as well as colourful, orchestral textures is made evident in this work.

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22, was a work that spanned many years in its creative process, because the individual movements were mostly conceived independently of one another, with only the first and third movements written contemporaneously in June 1833. Completed in June 1830, the second movement was actually a standalone piano solo piece titled "*Papillote*", a reworking of a posthumous song, "*Im Herbst*" (In the Autumn), written in 1828. As for the fourth movement, it underwent a complete revision after its original completion in October 1835, which Clara Wieck remarked as being "somewhat too difficult...the masses, the public, and even connoisseurs

for whom one is ultimately writing – they don't understand it." This was replaced with a new finale in 1838.

The opening of the first movement is a clarion call, followed by a passionate flurry of arpeggios that backs the descending and scalar first subject that would become Clara's motif in his other piano works, a "cry from the heart" for her when they were apart. Filled with rich Florestan pathos, the music melts occasionally into short-lived moments of the lyrical Eusebius, such as in the beautiful syncopated second subject. There is much contrapuntal interplay to enjoy in this movement, where often, canonic imitation of the same material is introduced one after another in both hands, forming the basis of the complex structure and polyphonic texture. Though titled **So rasch wie möglich**, which translates to "as fast as possible", Schumann's dry humour requests that at the coda, the performer should play "**Schneller... Noch schneller**", which ultimately translates into "faster... still faster!"

The **Andantino** is labelled **Getragen**, which loosely means "worn", or "solemn". Perhaps, this is fitting, given that the performer has gone at breakneck speed in the energy-packed preceding movement. It opens with an elusive and *cantabile* melodic line full of yearning and love, drawing a parallel with the lyrics in Justinus Kerner's poem to the lieder as follows:

*Move, Sun, only move,
quickly, away from here,
So that warmth may come to her
from me alone.
Wilt, flowers, only wilt,
be silent, you little birds,
So that I, I alone,
May sing and blossom for her.*

For the most part, the Eusebian movement comprises the initial statement of the melody, which gives an ambiguous idea of the tonal area, followed by three variations of it, before reaching the coda that finally places us back in the simplicity of C major through a beautiful display of interwoven voices that close softly.

The atmosphere is quickly livened up by the **Scherzo** that follows, with its opening somewhat an alternative interpretation of the opening chordal figure of the first movement. Nevertheless, its boisterous character is made more present by the opening "chirps" in both hands, along with the octaves descending at a loud dynamic. Contrasts and surprises are abundant in the writing, with sharp changes from the extroverted to the light dance-like or more lyrical character that alternates. These surprises are only further egged on by the syncopated displacement of rhythm, ideas to be heard later in the symphonies of Brahms.

This highly energetic, Florestan feel is further prolonged and continued by the final **Rondo**, in its haphazard use of broken octave and sixteenth note figures. There is only brief respite when the song-like, Eusebian theme in the relative major enters – which, again, eventually feels the need to return to the preceding sense of urgency with lots of motion. All this energy culminates to the *quasi cadenza*, characterised by a mysterious atmosphere driven by increasingly frequent harmonic changes, ending off with a bang.

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp Minor, *Sonata-Fantasy*, Op. 19

“The first part evokes the calm of a night by the seashore in the South; in the development we hear the sombre agitation of the depths. The section in E major represents the tender moonlight which comes after the first dark of the night. The second movement, presto, shows the stormy agitation of the vast expanse of ocean.”

As described by Scriabin, this piece draws inspiration from the sea, which he first encountered in Latvia in 1892, when he began crafting the work. His experience with the sea continued with a subsequent visit to Genoa in 1895, as well as during a honeymoon with his wife Vera Isacova in 1897 in Crimea, on the shores of the Black Sea, the year in which he finally completed this work. In the 5 years of the compositional process, Scriabin was met with various ups and downs. He started performing the completed second movement in a public concert in March 1895 in St. Petersburg, in which after, he declared that he would finish the first movement in a month. However, in Autumn of the same year, he wrote to his friend Anatoly Lyadov, that he was unsure of the transition sections, and was in a dilemma about choosing one of two drafts that featured logic and beauty respectively. This creative dissatisfaction with the work continued, despite his seven revisions on it. Eventually, after tucking it away for a while, he finally published it in 1897.

In terms of form and concept, the piece brings to mind Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor *Quasi una fantasia*, “Moonlight”, Op. 27 No. 2, by Beethoven. Both pieces have a similar fantasy-like nature, and begin with a slower start contrasted with a faster second movement. Interestingly, the bell-like motif featured in the **Andante** echoes in a rhythm that is reverse to the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony¹. In terms of soundscape, the *bel canto*, singing quality and numerous lyrical motives within the piece are reminiscent of Chopin’s poetic piano writing, full of the *fioritura* writing commonly found in the earlier composer who played an influential role in Scriabin’s compositional output. The movement is not without its usual bouts of intensity and turbulence unique to Scriabin, especially prevalent in the middle section, with its stark contrasts in mood and character exacted further by dynamic changes. Eventually, the movement ends with the motif that begins it, in the key

of E major – that because of Scriabin's synaesthesia, was portrayed in a bluish-white tint, similar to moonlight.

The character of the **Presto** is of turbulent perpetual motion, where the evocative rise and fall of waves in the sea are invoked due to the hairpins and changes in register in the lines. For the most part, there are only suggestions on what could be fragments of a possible melody, but eventually, our need for a clear singing line is satisfied with the brooding stepwise melody, that gets expanded upon widely within the middle of the movement. Throughout, the constant triplet figure is omnipresent, and forms the basis of quiet intensity, eventually bringing us to a dramatic finish.

Programme notes by Tay Shu Wen.