Program Notes

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Piano Sonata in A major, D. 664, Op. 120 (1819)

I. Allegro moderato
II. Andante
III. Allegro

Composed in 1819, Schubert's Piano Sonata in A major, D. 664, is among his most lyrical and intimate works for the piano. Its graceful melodies and transparent textures reflect Schubert's gift for song-like expression, while its subtle harmonic shifts reveal a deeper emotional world beneath the music's apparent simplicity.

The first movement unfolds with a gentle, singing theme, balancing moments of warmth and tranquility with unexpected harmonic colors. The second movement, Andante, offers a more introspective atmosphere, where restrained expression and delicate changes in harmony create a sense of quiet reflection. The final Allegro introduces a playful, dance-like character, bringing the sonata to a lively and elegant conclusion.

Throughout the work, Schubert draws upon the natural qualities of song and dance, transforming seemingly simple musical ideas into an expressive and deeply personal musical narrative.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Piano Sonata, Sz. 80, BB 88 (1926)

I. Allegro moderato
II. Sostenuto e pesante
III. Allegro molto

Written more than a century after Schubert's sonata, Bartók's Piano Sonata of 1926 presents a radically different musical language. Influenced by his extensive research into Eastern European folk traditions, Bartók explores the piano's rhythmic and percussive possibilities through sharp accents, driving rhythms, and striking harmonic contrasts.

The first movement is characterized by powerful rhythmic gestures and constantly shifting musical textures. In the second movement, heavy chords and sparse melodic lines create a dark, almost ritualistic atmosphere. The final Allegro molto brings an exhilarating conclusion, with energetic, folk-inspired dance rhythms and brilliant pianistic writing.

Despite their contrasting styles, Schubert and Bartók share a fascination with the expressive possibilities of melody and rhythm. Where Schubert transforms song-like melodies and dance gestures into an intimate musical language, Bartók reimagines folk-inspired materials through bold harmonies and percussive energy. Heard together, these two sonatas reveal how the relationship between song, dance, and instrumental expression evolved across different musical eras, while remaining central to the expressive identity of the piano.