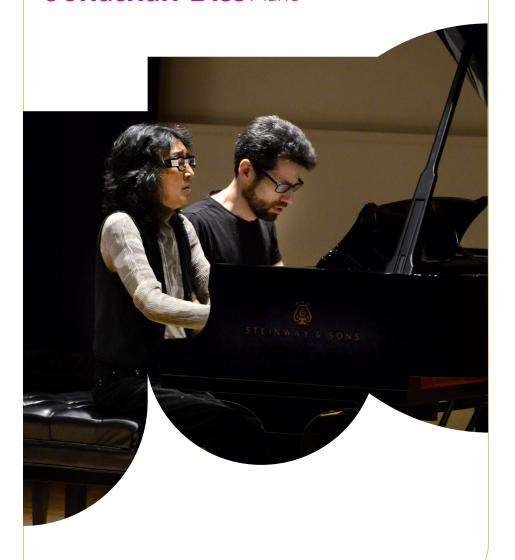


# Mitsuko Uchida Piano Jonathan Biss Piano





Dear Friends,

Spring has arrived, bringing with it a melody of renewal and anticipation. As the birds chirp their songs, we find ourselves at that magical juncture where all good musical things come together. Tonight, amidst the strains of some of the most beautiful compositions ever written, I am honored to unveil our eagerly awaited lineup for the 24/25 season. As you peruse the details printed in this program, I invite you to share in our excitement for the music that lies ahead and to join us again next season.

But before we delve into the future, let us first revel in the present moment. Tonight, we have the privilege of hosting the extraordinary partnership of pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Jonathan Biss, whose friendship and musical synergy epitomize the essence of chamber music at its most profound.

As the seasons meld together, I find myself overwhelmed with gratitude to be a part of our musical community—a gathering where the air literally vibrates with beauty.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Man C

Marna Seltzer

Director of Princeton University Concerts

# MITSUKO UCHIDA Piano JONATHAN BISS Piano

## FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

Allegro in A Minor, D. 947, Lebensstürme

Grande Marche in E-flat Minor, D. 819, No. 5

Rondo in A Major, D. 951

#### **INTERMISSION**

Divertissement à l'hongroise, D. 818 Andante Marcia: Andante con moto Allegretto



# About the Program

# By Jonathan Biss © 2024

The longer one lives with Schubert, the more moving and, paradoxically, the more unfathomable he becomes. It is his lyricism—sublime, simple, seemingly effortless—that first captures the ear and the heart. Then one might discover his song cycle *Winterreise* and, with it, the horror that complements and complicates that lyrical impulse. But then you hear the late instrumental music—the C Major Symphony, or the E-flat Major Piano Trio—in which those same qualities are applied to a massive canvas. These pieces are a revelation. Schubert's music is not merely beautiful, and profound, and confronting: it is grand. Its scale is epic; its vision is staggering.



Schubert's music is not merely beautiful, and profound, and confronting: it is grand. Its scale is epic; its vision is staggering."

And then comes another revelation: that of the nearly 1,000 works Schubert wrote in his solitary, impoverished, syphilis-plagued 31-year lifetime, it is not just the relative few that made the hit parade that are a demonstration of his magnificent, inimitable gift. No. Open your ears further, and you will find that one little-known piece after another is a world unto itself, each suffused with such tragedy and such tenderness, each offering a window into a different corner of Schubert's soul.

This is the space that Schubert's music for piano 4-hands occupies. Apart from the Fantasy in F Minor, a decidedly un-celebratory work trotted out for many celebratory concerts, most of it is unknown to audiences. Apart from a few dedicated piano duos, much of it is unknown to pianists. What a shame! It would be difficult to overstate the richness of this music, or the extent to which it rewards an immersion in it. In true Schubert fashion, it can be massive in scope, but it can also evoke feelings of overwhelming intensity through a lone harmonic shift, or turn of phrase, or sleight of counterpoint so unassuming, any attempt to explain the source of its power would be an exercise in futility.

# Allegro in A Minor, D. 947, Lebensstürme (1828)

Each of the four works on this program is riveting for a different set of reasons. The Allegro in A Minor, written in Schubert's last year, is a cataclysm that owes much of its power to its form. Late in life, Schubert's sonata movements expanded in a quite extraordinary way: their willingness to wander—to make room for Schubert's most sublime daydreams and his most

upsetting nightmares—makes them unlike any music written before or since. This Allegro is no exception: its tragic nature is laid bare with its opening gesture, a furious A-minor descent, and is somehow heightened rather than tempered by the unearthly beauty of its second theme. The arrival of this theme is a stunning event. In the work's opening pages, Schubert uses the extra pair of hands at his disposal in a brilliant, unsettling way, creating constant rhythmic and motivic complication; unrest is everywhere. The second theme, by contrast, has the purity of a hymn, played pianississimo first in the distant key of A-flat Major, then a celestial C Major, exploring the uppermost reaches of the piano with unhurried wonderment. The central fact of this theme is not its beauty, or even its profundity, but its "faraway-ness." It is not another country, or another world, or even another solar system: it is unreality. It is as beautiful as music can be, but it does not bring comfort, because it exists only in Schubert's imagination. The Allegro in A Minor is devastating on account of the disconnect between this utopia and a terrible fate that cannot be avoided and grows closer with every iteration of the opening motive.

#### Grande Marche in E-flat Minor, D. 819, No. 5 (1824)

The Grande Marche in E-flat Minor is again something else: a funeral march as uncompromising as it is desolate, each bass note a step towards an inexorable fate. It is also a neglected masterwork—neglected even by the standards of Schubert's 4-hand music, a masterwork by any standard. In the most affecting way possible, it exemplifies one of Schubert's signature qualities: the deep sorrow he finds in the major mode. If you know one thing, and one thing only, about diatonic music, it is this: major keys convey happiness, minor keys sadness. It is an oversimplification, to be sure, but it is not wrong, per se.



Not wrong, that is, except for with Schubert. For Schubert, sorrow is a constant; it never goes away. It can be more or less deep, more or less mediated, more or less overt, but it is inescapable. And therefore, the appearance of the major mode, particularly in the context of minor key music, often brings even greater pain. It is the pain that can be masked but never forgotten.

Following in the wake of this grim, remorseless, E-flat minor march, the trio, in the parallel major, ought to offer relief; coming from Schubert's pen and soul, it cannot. This music defies analysis: its simplicity is extreme, and on the page, nothing in it looks likely to be moving. Yet it is moving beyond description: it cannot find its way to joy, but it offers such solace. It lays bare the harsh, heartbreaking realities of Schubert's existence, and the role music played in making it bearable. Life is lonely, and death is inescapable. All there is, in the end, are E-flat minor and E-flat major. The former giving voice to the pain Schubert knew, the latter to the pain of what he longed to know.

#### Rondo in A Major, D. 951 (1828)

In contrast to the Allegro in A Minor, the Rondo in A Major, contemporaneous to the Allegro and possibly intended as a companion to it, offers fifteen minutes of nearly uninterrupted consolation. It spotlights that most elemental gift of Schubert: the lyricism. Schubert's character has a morbid streak running through it: it manifested from the time he was a teenager, in works such as the *Erlkönig*, and in the illness-plagued last years of his life, even in comparatively placid works, horrifying visions frequently intrude.

The A Major Rondo is a work without horror; on this occasion, he manages to keep it at bay. The serenity and directness of this music are instantly disarming; it seems to have flowed from him utterly unimpeded. This being Schubert, that extraordinary serenity cannot quite mask the equally extraordinary fragility: morbidity may have been an element of Schubert's character, but <code>sehnsucht</code>—longing—is its core. The generosity of this music is deeply moving of its own accord; when one considers the hurt and the terror that defined his later life, that made their way into so much of his later music, and that remain just suppressed here, that generosity becomes overwhelming.

## Divertissement à l'hongroise, D. 818 (1824)

For all that, the *Divertissement à l'hongroise* might be the most remarkable work on this program; certainly, it is the most singular. Its power is, once again, inexplicable: There is no form of analysis that can help us understand why listening to it is such a peculiarly devastating experience. Its title is already deeply misleading. This massive work—its

two outer movements, while formally ambiguous, are of symphonic proportions—is not a diversion or an entertainment. Rather, it is a portal into another world: a bleak, melancholy, terribly lonely world. This music is devastating but not depressing; it is too beautiful for that. Its point of origin is Hungarian folk music, which Schubert treats with the opposite of condescension: in his hands, even the most unassuming motive becomes unspeakably profound.

Whatever its ethnic roots, the Divertissement is unmistakably Schubertian. Schubert's music contains the full spectrum of human emotion, to be sure. But loneliness was the central fact of his existence and, accordingly and heartbreakingly, it is at the center of his music as well. Schubert could convey what it is to be alone like no other artist, and he does so in nearly every one of his works, either fleetingly or unremittingly.



# 66 ...being able to share this music is a privilege and a gift."

To experience this in the context of his 4-hand music is to experience a deep irony, as there is no other musical genre in which two instrumentalists find themselves so close to one another, physically and otherwise. Often, the primo player's left hand will cross below the secondo player's right; nearly as often, Schubert will ask the two pianists to do the impossible and play the same note at the same time. (This might be an oversight; I am inclined to think that it is not, but rather a reflection of the human connection for which Schubert was so starved.)

But the closeness goes deeper than that. Many pianists have analogized pedaling to breathing, in that both are done primarily instinctually, as needed. To have another pianist pedal for you, as you must in this music, is thus to allow another person to be your lungs. To trust that someone else will anticipate your choice to linger, or not, over a harmony that strikes you differently today from how it did yesterday is a profound sort of trust the sort of trust that comes only with deep attunement to another human being.

That is to say: playing Schubert's 4-hand music is an act of extreme intimacy in the service of music that conveys extreme loneliness. To feel Schubert's loneliness so palpably is painful. But living with this music and being able to share in it is a privilege, and a gift.



# MITSUKO UCHIDA

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 is Musical America's 2022 Artist of the Year, and a Carnegie Hall Perspectives artist across the 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons. Her latest recording of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations was released to critical acclaim in 2022, has been nominated for a Grammy® Award, and won the 2022 Gramophone Piano Award.

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 US—the Chicago Symphony and The 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 multi-season touring project in Europe, Japan, 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 Mozart and Schubert piano sonatas. She is the recipient of two Grammy® Awards—for Mozart Concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra and for an album of lieder with soprano Dorothea Röschmann—and her recording of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto with Pierre Boulez and the Cleveland Orchestra won the Gramophone Award.

A founding member of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and Director of 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 the Wigmore Hall Medal, 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. This is Mitsuko Uchida's fourth appearance at PUC, and she will return next year with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

# JONATHAN BISS

Pianist Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned educator and critically acclaimed author who channels his deep musical curiosity into expansive performances and projects in the concert hall and beyond. Biss has appeared internationally as a soloist with the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonics, the Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco Symphonies, and the Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, as well as the London Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw, the Philharmonia, and Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. He is Co-Artistic Director alongside Mitsuko Uchida at the Marlboro Music Festival, where he has spent fifteen summers.

In the 2023-24 season, Biss returns to perform his music with the Saint Louis Symphony and Stéphane Dénève, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Ramón Tebar, and the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Seguin at Carnegie Hall. Throughout the season, Biss will present a new project that pairs solo piano works by Schubert with new compositions by Alvin Singleton, Tyson Gholston Davis, and Tyshawn Sorey. Biss continues his longstanding collaboration with Mitsuko Uchida with concerts featuring Schubert's music for piano 4-hands at Carnegie Hall and Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, in addition to Princeton. He will also appear with the Brentano String Quartet.

European engagements for the 2023-24 season include a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 with London Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of conductor Karina Canellakis and a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the BBC

National Orchestra and conductor Ryan Bancroft. Biss also reunites with the Elias String Quartet for performances at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Cockermouth Music Society, and Wigmore Hall. He concludes his European season with the Orchestre de chambre de Paris and conductor Pekka Kuusisto with a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Timo Andres's *The Blind Banister*, part of his ongoing Beethoven/5 commissioning project in association with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, which paired each Beethoven concerto with a new concerto composed in response. Prior to the Beethoven/5 project, Biss commissioned works by David Ludwig, Leon Kirchner, Lewis Spratlan, and Bernard Rands.

Coinciding with the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth in 2020, Biss recorded the composer's complete piano sonatas and offered insights to all 32 landmark works via his free, online Coursera lecture series *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*. In March 2020, Biss gave a virtual recital presented by 92NY, where he performed Beethoven's last three piano sonatas for an online audience of more than 280,000 people. That year, Biss released his fourth book, *Unquiet: My Life with Beethoven* (2020), the first Audible Original by a classical musician and one of Audible's top audiobooks of 2020.

Biss is the recipient of numerous honors, including the Leonard Bernstein Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and a Gilmore Young Artist Award. His albums for EMI won the Diapason d'Or de l'Année and Edison awards. He was an artist-in-residence on American Public Media's *Performance Today* and was the first American chosen to participate in the BBC's New Generation Artist program. He is also on the piano faculty of the New England Conservatory.

Biss is a third-generation professional musician; his grandmother is Raya Garbousova, one of the first famous female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his Cello Concerto), and his parents are violinist Miriam Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Biss began his piano studies at age six, with his first musical collaborations alongside his mother and father. He studied with Evelyne Brancart at Indiana University and Leon Fleisher at the Curtis Institute of Music. This is Jonathan's third appearance at PUC. He will return on April 10 for a Live Music Meditation and will close our Healing with Music Series on April 24 with writer Adam Haslett in an event that explores anxiety, depression, and music.



# Anxiety, Depression, and Music

Jonathan Biss Piano • Adam Haslett Writer

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 • 7:30PM Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

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