

A high-angle photograph of a man, Ulrich Roman Murtfeld, sitting on a black piano bench. He is wearing a black suit, a black scarf with a white pattern, and glasses. He is looking up at the camera with a slight smile. His right arm is resting on the fallboard of an open grand piano, and his left hand is resting on his knee. The piano is black with a polished finish, and its internal mechanism, including the hammers and strings, is visible. The background is a plain, light-colored floor.

audite

EARLY PIANO WORKS

BURGMÜLLER
SCHUMANN
SCHUNCKE
CHOPIN

Ulrich Roman Murtfeld

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano', Op. 2

Introduzione. Largo 4:49

Tema. Allegretto 1:23

Variation 1. Brillante marcato 1:04

Variation 2. Veloce, ma accuratamente 1:03

Variation 3. Sempre sostenuto 1:13

Variation 4. Con bravura 1:15

Variation 5. Adagio – 2:53

Alla Polacca 3:45

Rondo in C Minor, Op. 1 8:03

Norbert Burgmüller (1810-1836)

Rhapsodie in B Minor, Op. 13 4:35

Polonaise in F Major, Op. 16 5:26

Mazurka in E-flat Major 2:59

Ludwig Schuncke (1810-1834)

Scherzo capriccioso, Op. 1 3:15

(premiere recording)

Caprice No. 1 in C Major, Op. 9 4:38

Das Heimweh 3:47

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Abegg Variations, Op. 1

Thema. Animato 0:48

Variation 1. Energico 1:28

Variation 2. Il basso parlando 0:58

Variation 3. Corrente – 1:00

Cantabile 1:03

Finale alla Fantasia. Vivace 2:36

Toccata in C Major, Op. 7 7:55

1810, which saw the births of both **Frédéric Chopin** and **Robert Schumann**, marks an important moment in the development of piano music. Also born in that year were **Norbert Burgmüller** and **Ludwig Schuncke**, composers who achieved a lesser level of fame. None of the four reached old age. While Schumann and Chopin fortunately made it to middle age, enabling them to develop their art and make their invaluable contributions to music, Schuncke and Burgmüller were torn from life at a young age. Schuncke tragically succumbed to tuberculosis shortly before his twenty-fourth birthday, and Burgmüller died at the age of twenty-six whilst taking a bath, possibly due to an epileptic seizure. Both left behind small *œuvres*, but ones that revealed promising potential and received praise, not least by Schumann, who followed and judged the music scene of his time very closely in his reviews and obituaries.

The personal and artistic links and interconnections among these four contemporary musicians are manifold. They lived in politically turbulent times. The romantic concept revolutionised literature and art. Thanks to a hitherto unimaginable level of virtuosity amongst players as well as advances in instrument making, piano music entered previously inconceivable realms of soundscape and playing technique. The biographies of these four musicians at this time make for intense and moving reading. On the one hand, they bear witness to early musical mastery and an effervescent creative urge in a lively, music-loving environment. On the other hand, all of them also experienced difficult circumstances and life struggles in this early phase of their lives. They all had to find and seize their own positions in the musical world with the greatest personal commitment.

In Chopin's case, whose apparent genius admittedly led him to enjoy early support and successful performances, it was, above all, the horror of the political situation and the suffering in his Polish homeland that he had to observe from exile. Burgmüller's short life was riddled with adversity. His father, the municipal music director in Düsseldorf, provided an excellent music education for his children, but not sufficient general schooling. The nonconformist family also lived in great disorder. After the father's early death when Burgmüller was fourteen years old, the family was at risk of sinking into poverty. Professionally, Burgmüller achieved recognition as a composer, violinist, conductor and music teacher – one highlight being his close friendship with Felix Mendelssohn in Düsseldorf – but never gained a truly satisfying permanent position as a musician. His physical and mental health were fragile. The failure of an early engagement led to a lasting crisis, and even in retrospect his alcoholic excesses in particular remain linked with him as a person.

Ludwig Schuncke, who came from a family of musicians with many branches, attracted public attention from an early age as a piano prodigy. He studied composition with Antonín Reicha in Paris and, as a travelling and celebrated piano virtuoso, encountered numerous famous musicians of his time, including Chopin, whom he met in Stuttgart. From his arrival in Leipzig in December 1833, he cultivated an intimate and enthusiastic friendship with Robert Schumann and his circle. A strong artistic exchange took place. At that time, Schumann found himself in an extremely productive and highly creative *Sturm und Drang* phase, during which he wrote his first important piano works. He recognised in Schuncke a personification of his own artistic ideal and made him one of his *Davidsbündler*. Schumann's mental state, however, was quite unstable during this period. He was haunted by moments of obsession and anxiety, which can be linked to a series of deaths in his immediate family. In one nocturnal episode, he had the unbearable delusion of losing his mind one day in the future. Schuncke's sudden severe illness, followed by his slow death, became so unbearable for Schumann that he suffered depression and had to leave the city, without attending his friend's funeral. In the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, however, he paid emphatic tribute to Schuncke in an obituary, styled as a review of his piano sonata.

This recording combines early compositions by Chopin and Schumann with selected works by Burgmüller and Schuncke. All these piano pieces were written between 1825 and 1834 and represent an energetic expression of these four geniuses, still youthful and seeking orientation, yet already manifestly inspired due to their precociousness.

The **Variations on “La ci darem la mano” from the opera *Don Giovanni*, Op. 2**, are an important early work by Chopin. In the introduction, the 17-year-old composer artfully incorporates sections of Mozart's melody. Each of the ensuing variations offers up a surprise in the form of a specific pianistic or artistic idea. The

work is crowned by an extended polonaise. It was met with enthusiasm both by the then 12-year-old Clara Wieck, who added this tricky piece to her concert repertoire, and by Robert Schumann, who included in his enthusiastic review his famous remark about Chopin “Hats off, gentlemen, a genius”.

Two years earlier, the **Rondo in C minor, Op. 1**, had been composed, and its youthful author chose it as the first fully valid work among his numerous other early pieces (at the tender age of seven, Chopin had already written his first polonaises), bestowing upon it the opus number 1. The various sections of the rondo, already conjuring up the typical Chopin sound on the piano, still of course unknown at the time, run through different moods from the mysterious, dramatically proud and elegiac to the expressively vocal, lyrical and expansively romantic with rich use of ornamentation, runs and leaps.

While the piano concerto and piano sonata are the most important compositions of Norbert Burgmüller's small number of surviving piano works, the **Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 13**, occupies a position of its own, since this work was particularly admired by Robert Schumann (“What a masterful structure, as in one moment conceived, designed and completed [...]”) as well as, later on, by Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. The term rhapsody, harking back to the Greek musical tradition, denotes an improvisatory, often fragmentary work with an epic expression. Burgmüller creates the latter in a nervous, erratic, hurrying “A” section, which contrasts strongly with an enchanted, rapturous “B” section. An astonishing bridge could be forged to the present day to Wolfgang Rihm's *Klavierstück No. 7*. The **Polonaise in F major, Op. 16**, and the **Mazurka in E-flat major, WoO**, are delightful romantic piano works, very much of their time, which vary the character of the respective dances in a colourful and varied manner.

Ludwig Schuncke's early **Scherzo capriccioso, Op. 1**, dedicated to his father, proves to be capricious with its contrasting sections and sometimes surprising turns. The melody of the middle section passes through several stages of varied expression. The witty piano piece, **Premier Caprice, Op. 9**, with dedication “à Mademoiselle Clara Wieck”, turns out to be a highly virtuosic work. The high speed of playing and the refined turns of phrase testify to Schuncke's outstanding pianistic facility. As the *Scherzo*, the *Caprice* also reveals Schuncke's ability to write beautiful codas, which, towards the end of the piece, offer up harmonisations and techniques not used up to that point. **Das Heimweh** [Homesickness] is an expressive romantic character piece. Here, too, Schuncke processes the opening motif during the course of the piece by presenting it in different registers, dynamics, keys, octaves and with varied accompanying patterns. At the end of this poignant and at times dramatic piece, the melodic line finds a redemptive final turn into a conciliatory F major tonic.

In the **Abegg Variations, Op. 1**, composed by the 20-year-old Schumann, the mellifluous theme develops from the sequence of A-B(flat)-E-G-G. In the second part of the theme, this is also heard as an inversion and is then adapted freely during the course of the work. The dedicatee, a “Comtesse Pauline d'Abegg”, is a completely fictitious figure, even though there was actually a pianist named Abegg in the composer's wider circle of acquaintances at the time. Schumann, a fantasist and humourist in equal measure, left those around him entirely in the dark about this. The *Abegg Variations*, with their virtuoso and brilliant piano style, are akin to Chopin's *Don Giovanni Variations*, which Schumann had studied in detail. Finally, the technically extraordinarily difficult **Toccata, Op. 7**, is linked to an anecdote that also played a decisive role in the design of this programme. Schumann had dedicated the work to Schuncke in return for Schuncke's dedication of his Op. 3 piano sonata. The two musicians lived next door to each other and could therefore hear each other's piano playing very well. Schumann was piqued to find that his friend showed no signs of practising the *Toccata*. His astonishment was all the greater when, out of the blue, he heard Schuncke give a perfect rendition of the piece in front of guests. Afterwards, Schuncke explained to Schumann that he had learned the *Toccata* in his head when he heard Schumann practise it a few times in the room next door. The challenges of this piece are its intricate and extensive chains of double notes, often in each hand, as well as leaps, complex rhythms and fast octave passages. All this is highly condensed and to be played at great speed, with barely any respite for the performer.

ULRICH ROMAN MURTFELD

Ulrich Roman Murtfeld, born in 1970 in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, began his professional piano education in Frankfurt at Dr. Hoch's Conservatory. As a Scholar at Phillips Academy Andover, he continued his piano studies with Veronica Jochum in Boston/USA. The Romanian piano pedagogues Ana Pitiş and Ioana Minei (Bucharest) had a decisive impact on Murtfeld's artistic development as well as Karl-Heinz Kämmerling at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. He found additional artistic inspiration in the Lied class of Hartmut Höll and in master classes with Sergei Dorensky (Salzburg/Moscow) and François-René Duchâble (Paris). In 2003 Murtfeld, who is also a certified Natural Scientist, passed the concert exam at the Musikhochschule in Karlsruhe/Germany with distinction. In the same year he was the „Brahmshaus“-Scholar of the Brahms Society in Baden-Baden.

As a soloist, Murtfeld has performed in numerous European countries, in the United States as well as in Brazil and Venezuela. He has appeared at important festivals such as Auftakt Alte Oper Frankfurt, Kasseler Musiktage, Musikfest Bremen, Thüringer Bachwochen, Festwochen Gmunden, Schloss Elmau and the Festival 2D2N (Odessa). He has given master classes at the University of Brasília and at the National Conservatory in Baku/Azerbaijan. Frequent appearances with chamber music partners round off his artistic activities.

Ulrich Roman Murtfeld's repertoire ranges from Bach to New Music. Characteristic of his concert programmes is an innovative and unusual selection of works. Murtfeld has premiered many contemporary works and has co-operated closely with composers such as José Antônio Almeida Prado, Violeta Dinescu, Henri Dutilleux, Moritz Eggert, Ernst-Helmuth Flammer, Bernd Franke, Adriana Hölszky, Mauricio Kagel, Art-Oliver Simon, Jörg Widmann and Walter Zimmermann. In lecture recitals and seminars he devotes himself also to the theoretical aspects of music.

Murtfeld's discography includes major piano works of the Classical, Romantic, and modern periods. At audite he has already issued the two-part, internationally acclaimed CD series „American Recital“ with works by American composers. In addition, he has made numerous radio recordings with Radio Bremen, Hessischer Rundfunk, Südwestrundfunk, and Radio Romania Bukarest. His recordings are regularly broadcasted by international radio stations.



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Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
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