



audite

Beethoven | Schubert | Voříšek

**Ursina Maria Braun
Florian Birsak**

Ludwig van Beethoven

7 Variations on 'Bei Männern,
welche Liebe fühlen', WoO 46 9:49

Franz Schubert / Leopold Jansa (Arr.)

'Die Taubenpost'
from Schwanengesang, D. 957 4:17

Jan Václav Voříšek

Variations for Cello & Piano, Op. 9

- I. Introduzione 4:19
- II. Thema 0:52
- III. Variation 1 0:54
- IV. Variation 2 0:41
- V. Variation 3 0:58
- VI. Variation 4 2:20
- VII. Variation 5 1:32
- VIII. Variation 6 1:28
- IX. Finale 3:05

Franz Schubert / Leopold Jansa (Arr.)

An die Musik, Op. 88/4, D. 547 2:59

Ludwig van Beethoven

Cello Sonata No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69

- I. Allegro ma non tanto 12:07
- II. Scherzo. Allegro molto 5:03
- III. Adagio cantabile 1:41
- IV. Allegro vivace 7:06

Franz Schubert / Leopold Jansa (Arr.)

'Abschied' from Schwanengesang, D. 957 3:38

Franz Schubert / August Lindner (Arr.)

'Ständchen' from Schwanengesang, D. 957 5:26



Biscuits and Schubert – Domestic Music in the Vienna Salon

“Last Friday I had quite a good time, [...] Franz [von Schober] invited Schubert in the evening and fourteen of his good acquaintances. Many wonderful songs by Schubert were played and sung by himself, which lasted until after ten o'clock in the evening. Afterwards, punch was drunk that was brought by one of the company, and since it was very good and there was a lot of it, the already cheerful company became even merrier ...” From Schubert's friend and later housemate Josef Huber (called “Long Huber” because of his height) comes this first report about one of those cheerful musical gatherings, accompanied by a fair dose of drink, that later received the name “Schubertiade.” This letter dating from 1821 not only sheds light on the gradual triumphal march from England of the drink known as punch, but also on the changes in Viennese salon culture six years after the Congress of Vienna.

While prior to the Napoleonic conquests, it was above all the nobility who had sustained musical culture in its city palaces, in the period of the Restoration after 1815, high officials and citizens increasingly invited listeners to concerts or informal soirées in their salons. “In every bourgeois house, the piano is the first thing you see,” wrote Carl Anton Postl, also known as Charles Sealsfield, who emigrated to the USA, in his book *Austria as it is*. “As soon as the guest has taken a seat and refreshed himself with diluted wine and Pressburg biscuits, Miss Karoline, or whatever her name may be, is asked by her parents to play something for the guest.” For the Schubert circle consisting of musicians, writers, painters, and civil servants, who were critical of Chancellor Metternich's system of surveillance and censorship, house concerts in private flats were the only way to engage in a (largely) unhindered exchange on matters of art and politics.

With the present programme, Swiss cellist and composer Ursina Maria Braun has reconstructed such a house concert which could have taken place around 1830 in one of the bourgeois Viennese salons. In addition to the bourgeois daughters, many famous cellists who were active in the musical metropolis performed at that time. Often, however, gifted amateurs such as Ignaz von Gleichenstein or Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz also picked up the bow – both close friends of Beethoven, Zmeskall himself organising “musical academies” in his flat in the Bürgerspitalzinshaus and being among the founders of the Society of Friends of Music, one of the most famous bourgeois concert societies.

The composers of this imaginary concert had died a few years ago – Voříšek and Schubert at the ages of only thirty-four and thirty-one, respectively – and gradually became legends in the Viennese musical scene. Schubert's last collection of songs based on texts by Ludwig Rellstab and Heinrich Heine had just been published and was titled *Schwanengesang* (Swan Song) by the publisher Tobias Haslinger, as an homage to the “last flowering of his noble powers.” One can well imagine that in our salon concert, in addition to larger-scale works by Beethoven and Voříšek, a few selections from the *Schwanengesang* were also heard in arrangements by the Bohemian violinist Leopold Jansa (1795–1875) – after all, Schubert was not yet regarded as a composer of large-scale symphonies and string quartets, but above all as a master of the song with piano accompaniment. And one of the most popular songs was, and continues to be, the “Ständchen,” which the Dessau-born cellist August Lindner furnished with an introduction and two variations in 1851.

“In tears and grief”

Ludwig van Beethoven not only dedicated sophisticated chamber music and a concerto (the Triple Concerto for piano trio and orchestra) to the cello, but, like each of his composer contemporaries, also enriched the repertoire for amateurs. And when the last performance of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* took place in 1801 in the Freihaus-Theater in the suburb of Wieden, he once more (after the 1796 variations on the song “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen”) composed cello variations on a popular theme from the opera. “Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen, fehlt auch ein gutes Herze nicht” (“Men who feel love do not lack a good heart”), sings the king's daughter Pamina, to which the bird catcher Papageno replies: “Die süßen Triebe mitzufühlen, ist dann der Weiber erste Pflicht” (“The woman's first duty is to feel the sweet urges as well”) – lines whose patriarchal touch offends some of today's theatre producers (a version of *The Magic Flute* “purified” of racist and misogynistic clichés recently appeared in the *Critical Classics* project). However, the Viennese salons after 1800 were also run by self-confident women such as the banker's wife Franziska “Fanny” von Arnstein or the writer Caroline Pichler – to them, Emanuel Schikaneder's libretto will have seemed less discriminatory than hopelessly outdated. Beethoven's seven variations usually develop the Mozart theme in a cheerful musical vein, but also impart to the popular song elegiac (in minor variation no. 4) and soulful and expressive colours (in the Adagio variation no. 6).

In addition to such occasional works which, in terms of technique, were intended for amateurs, Beethoven composed his great cello sonatas for professional musicians: The two Sonatas op. 5 were written for the French master cellist Jean-Pierre Duport, the late Sonatas op. 102 for Joseph Linke, the cellist of the renowned Schuppanzigh Quartet, for whom Beethoven composed the soaring musical and technical heights of his late quartets. The Baden amateur musician Ignaz von Gleichenstein may have been less of a virtuoso than Duport and Linke. But the trained lawyer and official was a loyal friend of Beethoven and also helpful in financial matters: it was he who drew up the contract between Beethoven and three Viennese nobles which guaranteed the composer a life annuity of 4,000 guilders per year – as an expression of his gratitude, Beethoven dedicated the Cello Sonata op. 69 to his friend. Gleichenstein probably never performed the demanding piece in public, because the only existing records of concerts from the time feature the professional musicians Nikolaus Kraft, who premiered it in 1809, and Joseph Linke.

“Inter lacrymas et luctus” (In Tears and Grief) are the words written by Beethoven in the manuscript of the A-major Sonata, presumably referring to the years of deprivation of the Napoleonic Wars: in May 1809, French soldiers had already occupied Vienna for the second time and only withdrew after the Peace of Schönbrunn, which obliged defeated Austria to make a massive cession of territory. It is therefore all the more surprising that the Sonata op. 69 is one of the brightest and most playful works around the time of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The work begins with a kind of motto, which is first stated by the cello and then by the piano and answered each time by improvisational passages in the other part. Beethoven's clever interlocking of the two voices here is also demonstrated by the second theme, in which the melody and accompaniment can scarcely be separated. For the cello – which had long found itself relegated, as a continuo instrument, to the bass section – this kind of equality was synonymous with a leap into musical sovereignty, which Beethoven was able to build on in his mature string quartets.

At the beginning of the development, attentive musicologists have identified a quotation of the aria “Es ist vollbracht” from Bach's *St. John Passion*, and linked it to speculations about Beethoven's reception of Bach's music. The Scherzo presents an extremely dynamic, syncopated theme into which Beethoven plants two “trio”

sections – a procedure he later repeats in his Seventh Symphony. Like in the final version of the “Waldstein” Sonata for piano, in this cello work Beethoven dispenses with an extended Adagio and contents himself with a short Adagio cantabile as an introduction to the finale. With its catchy main theme and rhapsodically halting secondary subject, this movement is more committed and leads into an almost hymn-like coda – Beethoven, too, knew how to both elicit applause from connoisseurs and take amateurs by surprise.

A favourite of Viennese society

“Johann Hugo Wozzischek, composer, born in Wamberg in the Königgrätz district of Bohemia on May 11, 1791, died in Vienna on November 19, 1825” we read in the *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, for which the industrious Constantin von Wurzbach collected more than 24,000 biographies from the Danube monarchy. And of course Jan Václav Voříšek, who, like so many Viennese composers, hailed from Bohemia (today’s Vamberk), could not fail to be mentioned here. Voříšek was a brilliant pianist who had polished his skills under the renowned Johann Nepomuk Hummel; he was active as a conductor for Viennese amateurs’ societies and worked for a time as an official in the War Ministry. His Symphony op. 23 of 1821 attracted great attention, but at the early age of thirty-four he was swept away by tuberculosis. Voříšek was remembered by the Viennese, if one can believe Wurzbach, as a pillar of musical life and a quite genteel contemporary: “Welcomed into high circles in Vienna, he had adopted a demeanour that, in combination with his scholarly education and his thorough knowledge of music, made him a favourite not only among his fellow aspiring artistic colleagues, but also of high society. His early death left a palpable void.”

Apparently Voříšek and Beethoven knew each other fleetingly without cultivating a close relationship. It is possible that Beethoven felt the Bohemian represented serious competition and preferred to keep his contemporary at a distance. In any case, Voříšek’s piano works – including a sonata with the title (familiar to us from Beethoven) *Sonata quasi una fantasia* – were among the repertoire pieces in the Vienna salon. In 1820, his Variations on an Original Theme op. 9 appeared which, in contrast to Beethoven’s cello variations, not only go beyond the scope of amateur music, but stylistically speaking already bridge the gap to early romanticism – at a time when the young Felix Mendelssohn was composing his first chamber works in distant Berlin.

Voříšek’s variations begin with an extended *largo* Introduzione, in which a descending baroque figure in the piano is answered by an expressive lyrical melody in the cello; then a brief, harmonically daring dialogue drama unfolds within a compact space, culminating in the simple, aria-like D-minor theme at the end. The heart of the piece is the slow chorale-like major variation (No. 4), while the finale begins with a fugato and, as a reminiscence of the introduction, explores even more distant keys before the theme appears in bright D major.

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Aaron Epstein



Ursina Maria Braun's musical career is characterised by its enormous versatility. A prizewinner of the Leipzig Bach Competition, she is active as a soloist and chamber musician as well as a solo cellist in renowned ensembles, and is also a sought-after composer.

She began her training as a junior student with Thomas Grossenbacher at the Zurich University of the Arts, where she also received composition lessons from Andreas Nick. Her Bachelor's and Master's studies with Clemens Hagen and Heinrich Schiff then took her to the Mozarteum University Salzburg and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Additional studies with Reinhard Goebel deepened her interest in historical performance practice, which she has made an essential focus of her work.

During her studies, Ursina Maria Braun received numerous awards, including first prize at the international CONCORSO 12 Enrico Mainardi in 2012, the study award of the Migros Kulturprozent in 2016, and second prize and the audience prize at the International Bach Competition Leipzig. During the coronavirus pandemic, she initiated an innovative concert series on the Kapuzinerberg in Salzburg and won second prize at the Musica Antiqua Competition in Bruges in 2021.

With her chamber music partners such as Kit Armstrong, Denes Varjon, Pietro de Maria, Florian Birsak, Reinhard Goebel, Julian Prégardien, Dmitry Smirnov, Lorenza Borrani, Alfredo Bernardini, Franziska Hölscher, Erich Höbarth, and Dorothea Oberlinger, she has performed at festivals such as Styriarte Graz, Carinthischer Sommer, Thüringer Bachwochen, Bachwochen Ansbach, Suoni delle Dolomiti, Stresa Festival, and Mittelfest and has already performed in concert halls such as the Wiener Musikverein, Teatro della Pergola in Florence, Wigmore Hall in London, and Konzerthaus Berlin. As principal cellist of the Concentus Musicus founded by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, she is part of one of the most respected ensembles for historical performance practice. In addition, she performs as a principal cellist with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Camerata Salzburg, the Kammerakademie Potsdam, the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, and the Munich Chamber Orchestra.

As a composer, Ursina Maria Braun receives commissions from the Musikpodium Zürich, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Swiss Chamber Concerts, Azahar Ensemble, Norwegian Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra, and Sinfonietta de Lausanne. The Salzburg-based cellist regularly passes on her enthusiasm for music in projects with students at the Zurich University of the Arts, the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole, and the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana and leads a cello class at the Tirolean State Conservatory in Innsbruck.

Florian Birsak's first musical steps took him through the sound world of the Baroque. As a child, he exclusively played the harpsichord and clavichord, and he still regards the music from Frescobaldi to Bach as his musical home.

Birsak first began his training in his native city of Salzburg and continued it at the University of Music and Theatre Munich. He received important inspiration for his artistic maturation from formative personalities such as Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Kenneth Gilbert, and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Prizes followed at international competitions such as the Festival of Flanders in Bruges and the Mozart Competition in Salzburg. In 2003, together with the cellist Isolde Hayer, he received the August Everding Prize of the Munich Concert Society.

An essential part of his musical and scholarly interest lies in the appropriate execution of the figured bass in all its stylistic facets.

As a soloist and chamber musician, Birsak has performed in ensembles such as the Camerata Salzburg, Hofkapelle München, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, L'Orfeo Barockorchester, Zefiro Barockorchester, Armonico Tributo, Oman Consort, Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble, Munich Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Bern, and Concentus Musicus Wien under conductors such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Roger Norrington, Simon Rattle, Sigiswald Kuijken, Giovanni Antonini, Christopher Hogwood, Ivor Bolton, Thomas Hengelbrock, and many others.

Recently, Florian Birsak has increasingly focused on solo performance as well as on his own chamber music projects with selected programmatic objectives. In 2013, he was appointed professor of harpsichord at the Mozarteum University Salzburg, and he also serves as acting head of the department of Early Music and initiated and directed the "Innsbruck Baroque" academy, which offered master classes and workshops in the field of historical performance practice from 2014 to 2019. In 2021, he joined the Baroque programme of the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena and has also led a fortepiano class at the Mozarteum Salzburg since 2023.



recording: December 5 - 8, 2021
recording venue: Radio Studio, Zurich

RADIO SRF 2 KULTUR A coproduction with
Radio SRF 2 Kultur

recording producer / sound & editing:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Andreas Werner

executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

recording format: pcm, 96 kHz, 24 bit

photos:

Marco Borggreve (Ursina Maria Braun)

Nikola Milatovic (Florian Birsak)

instruments:

cello: Lorenzo Ventapane (early 19th century)

fortepiano after Jakob Bertsche (Vienna, ~1810),

built in 2015 by Robert Brown

see: audite.de/s/Fortepiano

art direction & design: AB.Design, Detmold

audite

© 2024 Ludger Böckenhoff • © 2024 Ludger Böckenhoff
info@audite.de • www.audite.de