

# Alexander Kobrin, piano

## ARTIST'S VISION

I always find it difficult to answer why I chose specific pieces for a program. There are times when certain composers are requested and it will surely be the case in 2010 for the anniversary of Chopin.

I have spent a lot of time with Haydn of late in recording a new Haydn CD but curiously, I discovered these two sonatas only a few months ago. I found them to be a very nice combination. Franz Joseph Haydn was one of the most important, prolific and prominent composers of the classical period. He is often called the "Father of the Symphony" and "Father of the String Quartet" because of his important contributions to these genres. He was also instrumental in the development of the piano trio and in the evolution of sonata form. He spent much of his career as a court musician for the wealthy Hungarian aristocratic Esterházy family on their remote estate. Isolated from other composers and trends in music until the later part of his long life, he was, as he put it, "forced to become original".

Within the programme, I was most intrigued by the Chopin Impromptus because they are not a cycle but four different pieces composed at different times. I felt they fit together very well nonetheless, flowing together even while giving us a snapshot of Chopin's life. "Impromptu" comes from improvisation and all are very bright, like much of Chopin. And yet it's not that simple. In the first piece, he starts with a nice triple movement with a slow middle section that spreads the form of the first Impromptu in 3-part form. Then the second piece is a little like a ballade form because it has different sections and comes to a climax at a much faster tempo than it started, before coming back to the first theme. The third piece is close to the first one, in having a three-part form. It has an amazing, very sad middle section with the brightness at t



he beginning and end. This is exactly opposite to the first piece where the structure is reversed. We forget about all of this of course when we are listening to it, and yet we are aware of what he's done. That is the magic of the music.

Brahms wrote his three piano sonatas over the period of just one year, beginning in November 1852 when he was only nineteen years old. All three were flamboyantly romantic, full of passion and the exuberance of the times

yet they also showed the set structures he'd inherited from his Classical forefathers. The most popular of the three, the Piano Sonata No.3 in F minor, Op 5, projects a feeling of impressive drama and great dynamic intensity. The sonata contains five movements of which he composed the two slow (even-numbered) movements first and then the three fast movements in October 1853. Brahms also inscribed a short poem, by Otto Sternau (pseudonym of A. Inker-mann), before the *Andante espressivo*. The nocturnal quality of the music successfully captures the tender emotions of two lovers:

"The evening is falling  
The moonbeams rise  
And light two lovers  
Who mingle their sighs  
And commune in happiness together."

Possibly these three early sonatas were actually too successful; some suspect that Brahms set himself very high expressive and technical goals which he achieved, and then did not return to this form during the remaining forty-four years of his life. (Alex Kobrin)