



# Finghin Collins



Haydn: Sonata No.34 in E minor

Schubert: Four Impromptus, D.935

Alban Berg: Sonata, Op.1

Chopin: Scherzo No.2 in B flat minor



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*Piano*



**Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

***Sonata in E minor, Hob XVI:34***

i. Presto

ii. Adagio

iii. Vivace molto

**Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

***Four Impromptus, D.935***

No.1 in F minor

No.2 in A flat major

No.3 in B flat major

No.4 in F minor

**Alban Berg (1885-1935)**

***Sonata, Op.1***

**Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)**

***Scherzo No.2 in B flat minor, Op.31***





### Haydn – Sonata in E minor, Hob XVI:34

*i. Presto ii. Adagio iii. Vivace molto*

Although Haydn was no virtuoso à la Mozart and Beethoven, the keyboard always remained central to his creative process. As a pupil at Vienna's elite choir school he had become more than competent on the clavichord, harpsichord and organ. In adulthood his strict morning routine would begin with him trying out ideas, for whatever medium, on the clavichord or, from the early 1780s, the fortepiano. Late in life he told his biographer, the landscape painter Albert Christoph Dies, 'My imagination plays on me as if I were a keyboard ... I really am just a living keyboard.' Dies also relates how Haydn's 'worm-eaten clavichord' was a profound solace for the young composer in his Viennese garret in the early 1750s.

Haydn composed prolifically for the keyboard through- out his career. While his sixty-odd solo

sonatas give a less complete picture of his artistic development than the symphonies and string quartets, they, more than Mozart's slighter body of sonatas, chart and epitomize the evolution of the classical sonata: from the slender divertimenti and partitas (he only used the term 'sonata' from around 1770) written for young female pupils in the 1750s, modelled primarily on the harpsichord style of the Viennese master of galanterie Georg Christoph Wagenseil, through the more individual works of the late 1760s and early 1770s, several influenced by the *Empfindsamkeit*, or 'sensitivity', of C P E Bach, and the carefully cultivated popular idiom of the sets published between 1773 and 1780, to the two masterpieces, Nos 48 and 49, from the late 1780s, and the magnificent works inspired by the new, sonorous Broadwood instruments Haydn encountered in London.

The E minor sonata, No 34, was one of three sonatas (including No 39) published in London in 1783, though it probably (that word again) dates from the late 1770s. The superb 6/8 opening Presto worries at its laconic main theme with cussed obsessiveness, rising to a splenetic climax in the coda before the opening phrase vanishes into thin air. Only the G major second theme, sounded in dulcet thirds and sixths, offers momentary relaxation. The G major Adagio, extravagantly embellished with rococo arabesques, leads via a passage of quasi-operatic recitative into the finale, whose folk-like theme lives up to its *innocentemente* marking. This is another Haydnesque amalgam of rondo and variations, with a recurring E major episode closely related to the main, E minor, theme.

*Programme notes by Richard Wigmore © 2009*

## Schubert - Four Impromptus, D.935

No.1 in F minor   No.2 in A flat major   No.3 in B flat major   No.4 in F minor



The title of 'Impromptu' was not initially Schubert's own: it was the Viennese publisher Tobias Haslinger who labelled the first two pieces from Schubert's first set, D899, as such when he issued them in December 1827. Haslinger may have had in mind the Impromptus of the Bohemian composer Jan Václav Voříšek which had become popular in the early 1820s. Schubert must have known Voříšek's pieces, and he was happy enough to use the same title when he composed his second set, D935, which he offered to the Mainz firm of Schott & Co in February 1828 as 'Four Impromptus which can appear singly or all four together'. Schott, however, declined to publish them, and they did not appear in print until more than ten years after Schubert's death, when Anton Diabelli issued them with a dedication to Liszt.

It was Schumann who confidently asserted that Schubert's second set of Impromptus was really a sonata in disguise. 'The first [piece] is so obviously the first movement of a sonata, so completely worked out and self-contained', declared Schumann, 'that there can be no doubt about it.' It is true that the first and last of the pieces are in the same key of F minor, but neither is in sonata form; and while Beethoven managed to write a four-movement sonata entirely bereft of sonata form (Op 26), it would hardly have been a characteristic procedure for Schubert.

Schubert's opening piece is conceived on a broad scale, and it contains a wealth of inspired material. The jagged opening theme is followed by a passage of gently rippling semiquavers whose thematic outline eventually gives rise to a wonderfully expressive melody in repeated chords. There is also a contrasting episode that has the pianist's left hand, playing the melody, constantly crossing back and forth over the right. Despite the fact that it unfolds for the most part pianissimo, Schubert clearly wanted this passage played with peculiar intensity: the marking of *appassionato* for such intimate music is a characteristic gesture, and one we find again in a similar context in the slow movement of the E flat major piano trio, D929, and the 'Notturmo' for piano trio, D897.

The second of the D935 Impromptus is similar in form and mood to the last of the six Moments musicaux, in the same key of A flat major—both are essentially a minuet and trio in Allegretto tempo; while the third Impromptu is a famous set of variations on a theme that recalls the melody Schubert borrowed from his incidental music to the play Rosamunde when he came to write the slow movement of his A minor string quartet, D804. Of the five variations, the third is an agitated piece in the minor, and the fourth broadens the tonal horizons of the piece by moving into the warmth of G flat



major. The final variation is a delicate display piece, but Schubert characteristically brings proceedings to an end with a coda that is at once slower and simpler than the theme itself.

There is a decidedly Hungarian flavour to the last Impromptu of the set—not only in its strong off-beat accents, but also the scale-like improvisatory flourishes which seem to conjure up the sound of a cimbalom. The middle section, too, is not without its rushing scales, and there is a coda in which the music gathers pace, before eventually coming to an end with a scale sweeping down over the entire compass of the keyboard.

The final rondo is based on a gavotte-like theme with a repeated-note upbeat. The tempo is *allegretto*, rather than *allegro*, but Mozart nevertheless provides the sonata with a brilliant conclusion through the simple expedient of writing nothing quicker than quaver triplets until the final moments, where the pianist is suddenly confronted with a virtuoso flourish of semiquavers.

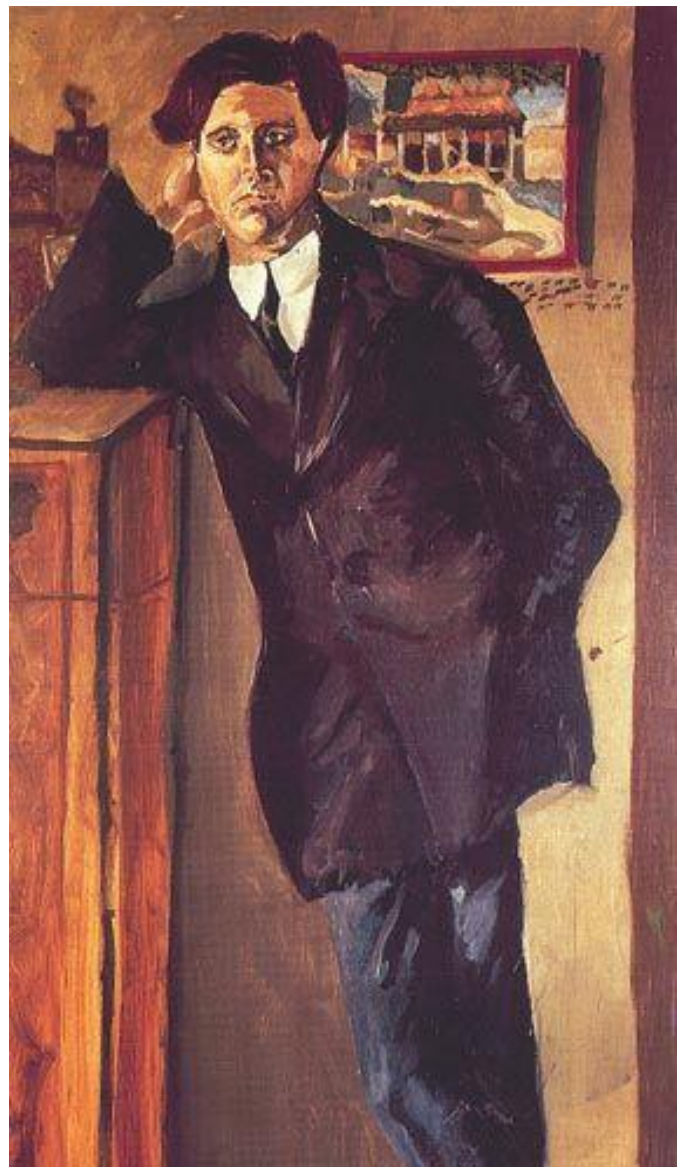
*Programme notes by Misha Donat © 2017*

## **Alban Berg – Sonata, Op.1**

Alban Berg's Piano Sonata Op 1 (1908) is often referred to as a graduation piece. With no formal musical training, Berg met Schoenberg in 1904 and became a devoted pupil and lifelong friend. His direct studies with Schoenberg would continue for six years, and, like his fellow pupil Anton Webern, Berg never failed to extol his teacher's dictum that any musical innovation could be made only after achieving a profound understanding of the traditions of the Western musical heritage. The sonata, despite its harmonic adventures, sounds firmly rooted in a late Romantic musical language. In fact, though no specific key is indicated, the piece hovers around the key of B minor—a key it shares with another great one-movement Romantic sonata, that of Franz Liszt.

The young Berg, still in his early twenties, presented the movement to Schoenberg as part of a longer projected composition, but was encouraged by his teacher to let the piece stand on its own. Beginning and ending in enigmatic quiet, the brief sonata manages to surmount turmoil and crisis in little more than ten minutes. As in Tsontakis's *Man of Sorrows*, we return to the start but find that it is not the same.

*Programme notes by Grant Hiroshima © 2007*



## Chopin - Scherzo No.2 in B flat minor, Op.31



The Scherzo No 2 in B flat minor, Op 31, was written and published in the same year as Chopin wrote the 'Funeral March' from his Piano Sonata No 2 in B flat minor, Op 35. The scherzo is another form extended and redefined by Chopin. The quartet of independent works he composed with this title between 1831 and 1843 has little to do with the earlier scherzos of Beethoven and Mendelssohn or with the derivation of the word 'scherzo' (meaning 'joke' or 'jest'), although Chopin does preserve the A-B-A structure of the minuet and trio, the scherzo's musical antecedent.

The B flat minor scherzo, the most popular of the four, opens with a striking phrase which has been aptly cited as an instance of scorn in music: a timid question followed by a forceful put-down. Wilhelm von Lenz, who studied the work with Chopin, reported that for the composer, 'it was never questioning enough, never piano enough, never vaulted (tombé) enough,

never important enough'. And on another occasion: 'It must be a charnel house.' There follows one of Chopin's most inspired lyrical themes (in D flat major, as is the majority of the scherzo) before a chorale-like central section. Here the music becomes increasingly agitated before reaching an impassioned climax and a return to the opening subject. The coda is superbly written and conceived, for now the questioning phrase returns in an altered form followed by the answer. But this time the question has been answered—not with scorn but with complete accord, and the two hurtle together towards the scherzo's triumphant conclusion.

*Programme notes by Jeremy Nicholas © 2017*

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One of Ireland's most successful musicians and significant musical ambassadors, Finghin Collins was born in Dublin in 1977 and, following initial lessons with his sister Mary, studied piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music with John O'Connor and at the Geneva Conservatoire with Dominique Merlet. His international career was launched by winning first prize at the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in Switzerland in 1999. He has performed in recital and with major orchestras throughout Europe and the United States, as well as in the Far East and Australia.

In 2019 Finghin performs in the UK, Denmark, the USA, Italy, Switzerland, Russia, Turkey and undertakes an extensive Irish recital tour marking 20 years since his Clara Haskil Prize. The year 2020 will see solo, chamber and concerto performances of Beethoven across Europe to mark the composer's

250th anniversary, as well as his début with the Russian National Orchestra in Moscow.

Over the past two decades Collins has maintained a close relationship with Claves Records in Switzerland, recording many award-winning CDs of music by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann and Stanford. A Chopin recital CD was released in September 2017, a co-production between RTÉ lyric fm and Claves Records, while in spring 2020 Claves released Collins' latest release: a recording of the Mozart Piano Quartets with Rosanne Philippens (violin), Máté Szücs (viola) and István Várdai (cello).

Finghin Collins also makes a significant contribution to the musical landscape of his native Ireland, where he resides. Since 2013, he has been Artistic Director of Music for Galway, which will present the major classical programme of Galway 2020, European Capital of Culture. He is also the founding Artistic Director of the New Ross Piano Festival, which celebrates its 15th edition in 2020, as well as the founding co-Artistic Director of the International Master Course at the National Concert Hall in Dublin.

In October 2017, the National University of Ireland conferred on him an honorary Degree of Doctor of Music.