

# *camera lucida*

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Chamber music concerts at UC San Diego  
November 6, 2017 – 7:30 p.m.  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

## *Franz Schubert: The Piano Trios*

Trio in B-flat major, Opus 99, D. 898

Allegro moderato  
Andante un poco mosso  
Scherzo: Allegro  
Rondo: Allegro vivace; Presto

*intermission*

Trio in E-flat major, Opus 100, D. 929

Allegro  
Andante con moto  
Scherzando: Allegro moderato  
Allegro Moderato

Özgür Aydin, piano  
Jeff Thayer, violin  
Charles Curtis, violoncello

Schubert's two piano trios date from the latter half of 1827. In April of that year Schubert carried a torch at Beethoven's funeral; only one year and eight months later, Schubert himself would be laid to rest at the age of 31. Theodor Adorno, writing about Schubert in 1928, at the age of 25, describes in almost hallucinatory prose this interim between the two composers' deaths as a dreamlike, unearthly space, a space of Dantean devastation, an uncanny "landscape:"

*He who crosses the threshold between the years of Beethoven's death and Schubert's will shiver, like someone emerging into the painfully diaphanous light from a rumbling, newly formed crater frozen in motion, as he becomes aware of skeletal shadows of vegetation among lava shapes in these wide, exposed peaks, and finally catches sight of those clouds drifting near the mountain, yet so high above his head. He steps out from the chasm into the landscape of immense depth bounded by an overwhelming quiet at its horizon, absorbing the light that earlier had been seared by blazing magma. Although Schubert's music may not always have the power of active will that rises from the inmost nature of Beethoven, its endemic shafts and fissures lead to the same chthonic depth where that will had its source, and these lay bare its demonic image... when it comes to Schubert's music we speak of "landscape."*

Adorno likens Beethoven's "power of active will" to a volcanic eruption, and his death leaves a landscape of weirdly sustained quiet. Conscious of his own consuming illness and approaching death, Schubert's music mirrors this landscape; the figure of the wanderer stands in for Schubert himself, and by extension for his listeners, and even personifies the meandering themes drifting between tonal settings.

*What we have before us is the landscape of death... The ex-centric construction of that landscape, in which every point is equally close to the center, reveals itself to the wanderer walking round it with no actual progress: all development is antimatter, the first step as close to death as the last, and the scattered features of the landscape are scanned in rotation by the wanderer, who cannot let go of them. Schubert's themes wander just like the miller does, or he whose beloved abandoned him to the winter. Those themes know of no history, but only shifts in perspective: the only way they change is through a change of light...*

The two piano trios lie in the company of his monumental String Quintet, the last three piano sonatas, the Impromptus and the *Moments musicaux*, the a-minor Rondo and the f-minor Fantasia for piano four hands, and a profusion of Lied, including the genre-defining song cycle *Winterreise*. But the trios stand somewhat apart from the rest of this output in their musical ambition and density; while *Winterreise* and the late piano works feature a more contemplative, withdrawn, and noticeably bleak affect, a more barren landscape, the piano trios seem to hearken back to a different time in Schubert's career – they are congenial and extroverted, begging the listener to partake, bursting with life. But they are not without their own pathos: the "chthonic depths" are very much present, visible in the internal contrasts – whether in dynamics or texture, in the surprising harmonic shifts, the interchangeability of parallel major and minor, the sudden pauses, or in the captivating interplay among different themes trying to coalesce into a unified whole.

Often meaning is contained in the relationship between themes. The humor of the scherzo of the E-flat trio lies in its form: it makes a kind of inverted minuet and trio – the effortless charm and grace of the delicate canons of the Scherzo suddenly erupt into a boisterous minuet, itself unceremoniously vanishing mid-measure to be replaced by a solemn, brooding recollection of the canon, which somehow coalesces into a seamless harmonious amalgamation of both canon and minuet. Likewise, in the Rondo of the B-flat trio, the main theme is subject to incremental mutations with each iteration such that it seems to be acting as a kind of narrator or commentator on the intervening themes.

*...The wanderer encounters these repeated features in new lighting – they are timeless and appear to be disconnected, isolated. This scenario concerns not only the repeated use of the same theme in different pieces, but in actual fact the very make-up of Schubertian form... This is where to find the origin of the idea of atmosphere, one that prevailed as much in nineteenth-century art in general as it did in landscape painting in particular: atmosphere is what changes around things that remain timelessly the same, and this change makes no difference to them.*

The seductive lyricism of Schubert's themes conceals the true depth of his music's beauty, which reveals itself as an obsessive process of repetition and recontextualization. The life-span of the main theme of the *Andante con moto* from the E-flat trio, taken from a Swedish folk-song, begins in the cello with only the most sparse piano accompaniment. As the theme is repeated and traded back and forth, it is gradually subjected to subtle but increasingly elaborate commentary by the accompanying instruments, before it undergoes a demonic transformation beginning in C-sharp minor, and is then dragged agonizingly upwards and compressed into an ostinato pattern which somehow gives way to the second theme in C-major. The folk-song theme is unmoved by Schubert's new theme, and is seemingly laid to rest in C-minor. However, it makes a dramatic return through the cello in the finale. As if brought back from the dead, the folk-song emerges with a strange urgency, now in a 6/8 meter, from the tonal wilderness of b-minor. It interrupts the increasingly violent modulations which seem to be surrendering to chaos, and then recedes just as inexplicably, as if hesitating, only to return a second and final time in e-flat minor; but this time it finally reconciles with the heroic second theme of the movement, slipping into E-flat major, and is finally polished off with the opening gesture of the finale's main theme.

There is nothing whimsically Romantic in identifying references to death in Schubert's late music. *Die Schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise*, *Der Tod und das Mädchen* – so much of Schubert's late music is haunted by the spectre of death. An extraordinary prose piece written by Schubert in 1822 and published decades later by Robert Schumann sets themes of death, banishment and eternity in an allegorical dream narrative.

### *Mein Traum*

*I was one of many brothers and sisters. We had a good father and a good mother. And I felt a deep love for all of them. – One day my father took us to a festive banquet. My brothers became very merry. But I was sad. My father then came to me and commanded me to enjoy the delicious food. But I could not, and in anger my father banished me from his sight. I turned and walked away, and with a heart filled with unending love for those who scorned it, I wandered in distant regions. For years I felt great pain and great love dividing me asunder. Then I received word of my mother's death. I hurried to see her, and my father, softened by his grief, did not hinder my return. I saw her corpse. Tears poured from my eyes. Like the good old past, in which she would have wished us to live and act, just as she had, I saw her lying there.*

*And we followed her remains in sorrow, and the coffin sank into the ground. – From this time on I remained at home again. Then my father led me again into his favorite garden. He asked me if it gave me pleasure. But the garden was repulsive to me, and I did not dare to say anything. He asked me a second time, reddening with rage: did the garden give me pleasure? – Trembling, I said no. My father struck me and I fled. And for a second time I turned my steps away, and with a heart filled with unending love for those who scorned it, I wandered again in distant regions. Songs I sang then over long, long years. When I wanted to sing love, it turned to pain. And when I wanted to sing pain, it turned to love. Thus was I split between love and pain.*

*Once I learned of a pious virgin who had just died. And a circle formed itself around her grave, in which many youths and old men moved eternally in blessedness. They spoke softly, not to awaken the virgin. Heavenly thoughts seemed to flicker like sparks unceasingly from the virgin's grave to the youths, making soft sounds. I longed to join them. Only a miracle, so the people told me, could lead into that circle. But I walked toward the grave with slow footsteps, and with reverence and deep faith inside me, my countenance lowered, and before I knew it I was in the circle, and a wondrous loving tone issued from it; and I felt as if eternal bliss had been compressed into a single moment. I saw my father too, reconciled and loving. He took me in his arms and wept. But even more did I. –*

Schubert's prose, in contrast to his often long and wandering melodies, is compact and succinct. However, like his music, his prose seems to tempt our curiosity by giving us fragments of the full story – presenting thoughts that seem to carefully and delicately both reveal and conceal. Analogous to his music, this fragmentary quality enables reiteration: both the prose and the music feature themes which are revisited, and which take on new meanings as their context evolves. This gives rise to subtle and complex layerings of affect and feeling; paradoxically, through the restrained, cryptic presentation of themes there is somehow a powerful sense of intimacy, openness and vulnerability.

*Salvation happens in the tiniest move, in the transformation of the minor third to the major; these are in such proximity that the minor third, once the major has appeared, turns out to have been its mere shadow... For the genuine joy in Schubert's world – the world of dances and military marches, of paltry four-hand piano music, of latent banality and slight tipsiness – has little to do... with the naive affirmation of existence. If you insist on pigeon-holing Schubert as a jobbing musician, you must always bear in mind that the kind of musician we may thus be talking about is a social outcast more in line with traveling folk, with jugglers and tricksters and their wanderings, than what we think of as a craftsman. So to find simple joy in Schubert's marches is in fact excessive, and the time-world that they place us in is not the time-world of psychological development, but much rather that of seething humanity. (Adorno)*

W. G. Sebald describes a family of circus performers whom he encounters in the village of Piana, on the island of Corsica. At the end of their performance before an audience almost exclusively of women and children, the five artistes return to the stage with musical instruments: “an enormous bass violin patched with black duct tape, an accordion, a tin whistle, a dented tuba and a xylophon.” A white goose stands with them onstage, a bystander left over from their magic tricks. The music evokes for Sebald a vanished world of forgotten emotions and feelings, confronting him with a sensation of loss and farewell. Spontaneously he recalls the slow movement the B-flat piano sonata of Schubert, as if the circus musicians were channeling Schubert or reconstructing by ear the very details of that *Andante sostenuto*.

*Already in the first piece it seemed to me as if I was hearing something long since vanished, yet deeply familiar to me, a kind of village music, the sort that comes about when none of the musicians can read music, when the instruments are a little out of tune and not in the best repair. One almost never hears such sounds any more, except maybe by accident, as I did, when I encountered a pair of traveling musicians about a year ago in the freezing pedestrian passage under the train station of a wintery north German city, who had wandered over to us from Suwalki or Pinsk. The Corsican circus musicians played with all their hearts, their gazes fixed far in the distance... The chords and tones that they strung together had strange colors, half from Africa, as it seemed to me, and half from the lands of the Alps. Sometimes I seemed to hear a church hymn, or the spinning of a waltz, then again the sluggish rhythms of a funeral march, in which those accompanying the final procession, with each step, hold their foot barely noticeably up in the air before placing it again on the earth. In any case it seemed as if this strange Serenade were drifting over to us from a much slower world, bringing with it a sense of solace that we no longer have any knowledge of. This seemed especially so in the piece that the musicians played as an encore. It sounded like a farewell to all of life, and reminded me down to its tiniest details of the movement marked *Andante sostenuto* from the B-flat piano sonata, composed in the somnambulistic assurance typical near the end of his life by Franz Schubert, born in the *Himmelfortgrund*. It remains inconceivable to me that the Corsican circus musicians could have reinvented such an incomparably solemn music; probably they heard it once, I thought to myself, and then never forgot it, which one can easily understand. The low tones of that slow movement, right at the beginning, that seem to rise up from underground like air pockets out of a dark pond, the shadows of clouds that pass overhead with the change of tonality, the isolated ringing of the death bell, sounding off to the side, the ascending, ever-higher, reaching-to-be-rescued chords of the right hand, and then this tiny step, from G-sharp to E, almost a slip (out over the edge of the abyss), and yet so true and precise, that one could almost hear, like the poor Heinrich in the fairy tale, the iron restraints springing free from his heart. That evening it seemed to me not only that my breast opened up again for the first time in a long time, but also that my skull grew from the inside all the way out to the firmament, as if it had freed itself together with my useless, gradually more transparent body, far, far out between the scattered stars. What the musicians themselves might have felt as they played this music, these Viennese strains which had found their way to them by God only knows what means, I cannot say; but I know that I was not the only one in the audience whose soul opened up, for the eyes of several of the women who listened silently with their children filled with gleaming tears, which they surreptitiously wiped, tears less of happiness than of mourning for our lives, which are in fact made up only of miscalculations and loss. For a fundamentally unmusical person such as myself it will forever remain mysterious what it is about certain tones that move us so. This mystery appeared to me, on this evening in Piana, and still does now, captured by the image of the snow-white goose, standing steadfast and motionless between the performing musicians. Full of dignity, with neck stretched high and eyelids lowered, placed in this room that resembled a planetarium, she listened intently until the last tones disappeared, as if in full cognizance of her own fate and that of all the others in whose presence she found herself.*

Schubert seems to have been under the sway of the tiny downward step of the semitone. The D-flat to C appoggiatura at the end of the String Quintet, and the sustained G-flat to F trill near the beginning of the B-flat piano sonata, are famous examples. The same trill occurs in the piano part near the beginning of the B-flat trio, but

hidden in the exuberant texture. These dwellings upon chromatic upper neighbor-tones, and the slight falling motion that results, seem to destabilize the established tonality, to mix finality with uncertainty. The back-and-forth between major and minor triads is also accomplished with the shift of a semitone. Not a sense of ambiguity, but rather a sense that no state is unproblematically what it is, that every moment of existence teeters at the brink of another, profoundly different state, seems to be at play; and this constant potential for re-castings and re-appraisals lies in a strange rapport with the patiently unfolding, at times seemingly static lengthiness of Schubert's form. On the horizontal plane of narrative unfolding, we are confronted with the dizzying wanderings of modulation from one key area to another. In the development section of the opening movement of the B-flat trio we are led from B-flat minor to A-flat major, D-flat major, E-flat major, C-minor, C-major and A-flat major, then from B-major to E major, and gradually through B-flat minor to F major, where we might reasonably expect a return to B-flat and the recapitulation; but F major gives way unexpectedly to G-flat major, D-flat major, A-flat minor, E-flat minor, and then through a semitone shift of G-flat to G-natural in the cello's melody, and A-flat to A-natural in the left hand of the piano, again through the good graces of the chromatic upper neighbor-tone, we return, as if nothing unusual had happened, to the recapitulation, the home key and the opening theme, played softly.

The exuberance of the B-flat trio is expressed in an abundance of dotted rhythms. Fanfare-like dotted-eighth-and-sixteenth-note figures, at times clashing or alternating with minutely off-set triplet figures, recur throughout the opening movement, even in lyrical and reflective sections, like offstage bugle calls. In the slow movement, an almost *Siciliano*-like 6/8 meter spins gentle dotted figures, like rhetorical speech-echoes, ardently affectionate. And the Finale strings together repeated dotted figures like a parody of marching soldiers, in *piano* and *pianissimo* shadings.

Schubert's dream-text dwells upon a self-inverting figure: ...with undying love for those who scorned it... And again, *When I wanted to sing love, it turned to pain. And when I wanted to sing pain, it turned to love.* Like a polarity that reverses, and like the rhetorical figure of the *chiasmus*, in which the formulation of the terms expresses an inherent overturning which can take effect at any time, and in either direction, we read in these words the inherent complexity of Schubert's inner life. Much of the emotional depth of the late works seems wrapped in paradoxes. Elements of folk and profane music coexist alongside unsurpassed refinement and purity; intellectual rigor is somehow unencumbered by an almost painful degree of emotional sensitivity; the magical shifts in tonality appear and disappear like sleight-of-hand; an aura of sincerity and vulnerability comes to us in a guarded, at times self-conscious voice. In the first movement of the B-flat trio, the exuberant joy of the first theme is met by a gentle, tender, seemingly peaceful second theme; but as the theme progresses it begins to express a sense of longing. Its alternating downward and upward leaps seem to be reaching outward; extra bars are added as the phrase repeats; the melody in the piano reaches higher and higher, searching for something, and upon failing, retreats with a sighing gesture. In the development section the longing of the second theme only seems to intensify, as it clings to the restatements of the opening theme. This unfulfilled promise of happiness reveals the second theme's subtly tragic nature. After the two themes travel to distant keys, merge, and are separated again, the movement bids farewell with a subdued, polite, painfully amiable reminder of its brave beginning.

-Amir Moheimani and Charles Curtis

Theodor Adorno, *Schubert* (1928), translated by Jonathan Dunsby and Beate Perrey

Franz Schubert, *Mein Traum*, translated by Charles Curtis

W. G. Sebald, from *Aufzeichnungen aus Korsika*, translated by Charles Curtis

Amir Moheimani is an undergraduate double-majoring in Piano Performance and Cognitive Behavioral Neuroscience. Charles Curtis is Professor of Music, cellist, and artistic director of Camera Lucida.

Born in Colorado to Turkish parents, **ÖZGÜR AYDIN** studied with Peter Katin at the Royal College of Music in London. He made his major concerto debut in 1997 in a performance of Brahms' Piano Concerto No.1 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the same year, he won the renowned ARD International Music Competition in Munich. Mr. Aydin has appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras in Germany, as well as with the BBC Concert Orchestra London, he has been invited to festivals in Salzburg, Rheingau, Ravinia and Edinburgh. He is a guest at prestigious venues including New York's Carnegie Hall. His performances of the complete cycles of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas and Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier have been highly praised by the critics. He is also a dedicated chamber musician, he enjoys recurrent collaborations with violinists Midori and Kolja Blacher, cellist Clemens Hagen and members of the Berlin Philharmonic. Mr. Aydin lives in Berlin.

Violinist **JEFF THAYER** is currently the concertmaster of the San Diego Symphony. Previous positions include assistant concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, associate concertmaster of the North Carolina Symphony, concertmaster and faculty member of the Music Academy of the West (Santa Barbara), and concertmaster of the Canton (OH) Symphony Orchestra. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Eastman School of Music, and the Juilliard School's Pre-College Division. His teachers include William Preucil, Donald Weilerstein, Zvi Zeitlin, Dorothy DeLay, and James Lyon. He has appeared as soloist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the San Diego Symphony, the Jupiter Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, the Canton Symphony Orchestra, the Pierre Montoux School Festival Orchestra, the Spartanburg Philharmonic, the Cleveland Institute of Music Symphony Orchestra, The Music Academy of the West Festival Orchestra, the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra, the Nittany Valley Symphony Orchestra, and the Conservatory Orchestra of Cordoba, among others. He attended Keshet Eilon (Israel), Ernen Musikdorf (Switzerland), Music Academy of the West, Aspen, New York String Orchestra Seminar, the Quartet Program, and as the 1992 Pennsylvania Governor Scholar, Interlochen Arts Camp. Through a generous loan from Irwin and Joan Jacobs and the Jacobs' Family Trust, Mr. Thayer plays on the 1708 "Sir Bagshawe" Stradivarius.

Cellist **CHARLES CURTIS** has been Professor of Music at UCSD since Fall 2000. Previously he was Principal Cello of the Symphony Orchestra of the North German Radio in Hamburg, a faculty member at Princeton, the cellist of the Ridge String Quartet, and a sought-after chamber musician and soloist in the classical repertoire. A student of Harvey Shapiro and Leonard Rose at Juilliard, on graduation Curtis received the Piatigorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society. He has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco, National and Baltimore Symphonies, the Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, the NDR Symphony, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the BBC Scottish Symphony, the Janacek Philharmonic, as well as orchestras in Italy, Brazil and Chile. He is internationally recognized as a leading performer of unique solo works created expressly for him by composers such as La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, Éliane Radigue, Alvin Lucier, Christian Wolff, Alison Knowles and Tashi Wada. Time Out New York called his recent New York performances "the stuff of contemporary music legend," and the *New York Times* noted that Curtis' "playing unflinchingly combined lucidity and poise... lyricism and intensity." Recent seasons have included solo concerts at New York's Issue Project Room and Roulette, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, the Sub Tropics Festival in Miami, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Angelica Festival in Bologna as well as solo performances in Brussels, Metz, Paris, Mexico City, and Athens. Last summer Curtis led four performances of the music of La Monte Young at the Dia Art Foundation's Dia:Chelsea space in New York.

Camera Lucida takes great pleasure in thanking all our supporters for their generous support, in particular pH Projects, Carol, Lanna, Eloise, Mary and Michael, David, Julia, Evelyn, Marion, Pauline, Harry, Georgiana, Irene, Amnon, Geoff, Donald, Laurette, Stephan and Civia, Bob and Ginny, and Caroline.

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