Mozart

K.281 • K.333 • K.570

Orli Shaham

The B-Flat Sonatas

"Mozart's B-flat sonatas are so varied and different in their inventive brilliance. Each has a truly individual and distinct voice, yet together they stand on a timeline that clearly maps Mozart's development from his late teens to full maturity."
Orli Shaham

International travel, for all its discomforts and dangers, introduced young Mozart to new ideas and delivered opportunities to explore a still novel instrument charged with revolutionary power. He may have heard and even played a piano for the first time during his childhood stay in London. Certainly, a decade later, in April 1775, the *Deutsche Chronik* recalled Mozart's first known performance on the instrument, given in private in Munich. The anonymous report described a contest between the nineteen-year-old musician and the much older Franz Ignaz von Beecke, a captain in the Bavarian dragoons and acclaimed harpsichord virtuoso. "Mozart's playing [on the fortepiano] had great weight, and he read at sight everything that was put before him. But no more than that; Beecke surpasses him by a long way." The reviewer's critical yardstick appears to have been set here to measure technical display, a phenomenon harnessed by Mozart to the expression of moods and emotional states rather than paraded for its own sake. Mozart's eighteen piano sonatas provide abundant evidence of his technical facility as a player, present from the early works of 1775 to pieces written in later years for his keyboard students. Above all, however, they reflect the composer's commitment to what he describes in various letters as "taste," "proper precision," and "feeling." In a letter written to his father, Leopold, in November 1777, he confided that he reserved the highest degree of difficulty for his slow movements for piano. "It is much easier to play a thing quickly than slowly: in difficult passages you can leave out a few notes without anyone noticing. But is that beautiful music?" The question, more than rhetorical, rested in part on years of avid listening to singers and actors express rich emotions and dramatic inflections in the theater.

The singing line and its translation to the piano has served as Orli Shaham's constant guide in her interpretations of the piano sonatas. While her analysis of their form, harmonic rhythm, and phrase structure and knowledge of Mozart's biography have played supporting roles, she argues that the vocal nature of each sonata is paramount. "You don't need to know anything about sonata form or the circumstances of Mozart's life to love the opening melody of K.333," she observes. "The beauty of Mozart is that it communicates directly on

2

that level. It's clear to anyone who listens to his operas that K.333 starts with a single melodic idea, not four separate motifs, which is perhaps how many pianists would think of it. I believe that contemplating things from the perspective of the voice is crucial for Mozart–very few of his lines in the piano sonatas and other instrumental works are not vocally inspired. Everything is singable; it's rare to find intervals in Mozart's music that are not. In so many ways, Mozart taught the keyboard to sing."

Countless piano students could be forgiven for thinking that Mozart's piano sonatas were created to weed out lazy novices and reward those willing to practice pieces that fall within close reach of their technical comfort zones. The association of so many of the sonatas with the teaching studio is both blessing and curse, the former bestowed by exposing young musicians to compositions of the highest quality, the latter by a near-universal tendency to overlook the eloquence and profound humanity of such apparently "easy" music. Orli Shaham points to the composer's reconciliation of dramatic contrasts and peerless ability to blend formal logic with quicksilver outbursts of emotion, elements so carefully calibrated and developed in the medium of the piano sonata.
"It has been eye-opening to look at the totality of his output across these sonatas," she recalls. "Of course, I knew them and had heard them so many times. But I had only ever thought about them in isolation, one sonata at a time, or about the small groups of three or four works written in close succession. When you become open to all eighteen sonatas as one body of work, you discover that the breadth of ideas, types of sounds, and depth of expression they contain are quite mind-boggling." In preparing to record the complete sonatas, Shaham initially felt a reasonable suspicion that some works might prove stronger than others. Any doubts were soon replaced by admiration for their consistency and variety, which in turn informed her decision to launch the cycle with an album comprising the sonatas in B-flat major. Together they stand as emblems of Mozart's inventive brilliance, three distinct universes, albeit formed from the same raw materials. "They are all so different, yet the B-flats combine to create a perfect mirror of Mozart's development from his late teens to full maturity," she notes.

Mozart had just turned nineteen when he composed the Sonata in B-flat No.3 K.281. Created in early 1775 to please musical connoisseurs in Munich, the work reveals both his debt to Haydn and a shift in style away from the influence of Johann Christian Bach. In October 1777 he wrote to Leopold with news that he had played his six sonatas K.279–284 in Munich "by heart several times." The composer's heart

3

The Mozart team, left to right: Orli Shaham, Erica Brenner, Barbara Pease Renner, Michael Bishop

was also occupied at the time with love for the young soprano Aloysia Weber, to whom he gave singing lessons during an extended stay in Mannheim. The Sonata in B-flat No.13 K.333 dates from mid-November 1783 and was started, if not completed, in Linz as Mozart traveled back to Vienna after a period spent in his home city of Salzburg. It surely served the composer well as a concert showpiece and was subsequently published, in company with the piano sonatas K.284 and K.454, in Vienna in 1784. The Sonata in B-flat No.17 K.570, written in Vienna in February 1789, was first published posthumously in 1796 with the addition of a spurious violin accompaniment.

"Here we have K.281, a work by a young man developing his voice," comments Orli Shaham. "The 1783 sonata is by a composer who is established and giving concerts to sophisticated audiences in Vienna, and the third B-flat piece comes from the later period that follows *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*." For all their differences and diversity, she adds, there are threads that run through the three sonatas. "One of these is the elegance of their third movements. Mozart even marks the finale of K.333 as *Allegretto grazioso,* which is a quality common to the third movements of these B-flat works. It's a particular approach to the B-flat rondo that is present in each of the sonatas."

Mozart, observes Shaham, was influenced by the breakneck speed of improvements made to the piano's action and construction between the early 1770s and late 1780s. The instrument on which he performed in Munich in 1775, perhaps by the Regensburg maker Franz Jacob Späth, was superseded in Mozart's affection by the pianos of Johann Andreas Stein, the actions of which included an escapement mechanism. Writing to his father in 1777, Mozart expressed his preference for Stein's pianos: "When I strike hard, I can keep my finger on the note or raise it, but the sound ceases the moment I have produced it. In whatever way I touch the keys, the tone is always even. It never jars, it is never stronger or weaker or entirely absent; in a word it is always even…His instruments have this special advantage over others that they are made with an escape action."

"Today we would say that Mozart was an early adopter of technology," suggests Shaham. "He was constantly pushing the limits of what the keyboard instruments of his time could do. The mechanics of the evolving instrument are what determined the ease and quickness of the fingers– that could be the result of something as simple as where a screw was placed in the keyboard's action." Instruments by Stein and Anton Walter, one of which Mozart owned, were capable of sustaining a

singing line and producing the melodic and textural clarity conducive to "proper precision." While K.333 was almost certainly created as a showpiece for inclusion in its composer's concerts, neither it nor its two B-flat companions exceed the bounds of good taste; rather, each sonata captures the listener's attention by subtle means, simple, restrained, graceful in expression, never forced or abrupt.

Orli Shaham explains that it falls to the performer to capture the mood of Mozart's music, an ineffable process that involves making myriad choices of phrasing, articulation and ornamentation, all within the rules and conventions that the composer knew. "Those choices may be 'correct,' but do they fit the flow of what's happening at that point in the movement?" Recording under studio conditions, she continues, encouraged her to experiment and "go all out" with ornamentation, to add or subtract trills and grace notes with successive takes.

"As he matured, Mozart gave the player more and more information. He writes down what he wants to hear and grants the player less freedom to put their stamp on his music. But then we have such late outliers as the aria-like Adagio of K.570, that are less detailed, as it were, and invite the player to add ornaments and do what would come naturally to a singer. In the *Andante amoroso* of K.281, he's clearly imagining a scene in an opera. You can almost see the boat with the two lovers–let's say Mozart and Aloysia Weber–crossing the stage. And in K.333, he's working out a concerto in the form of a piano sonata, with all its dramatic contrasts and energy."

At home in her favorite recording venue and with its fine instrument, Orli Shaham felt free to explore the pathos and cultivate the humor of Mozart's B-flat sonatas, genial and good natured in intent, always vivacious. "There's something about Mozart's life that is easy to connect with, at least in the big picture of his biography: his break with the family home in Salzburg, the need to move on to bigger and better places, and how he dealt with having so much talent. He had such insight into what it means to be human and had to get that out in his music. Mozart was superhuman in what he was able to do. But that never comes across in music that is so human, so full of insight into our desires, fears, hopes, and intuitions."

Authored by Andrew Stewart

Orli Shaham, piano

A consummate musician recognized for her grace and vitality, Orli Shaham has established an impressive international reputation as one of today's most gifted pianists. Hailed by critics on four continents, Ms. Shaham is in demand for her prodigious skills and admired for her interpretations of both standard and modern repertoire. *The New York Times* called her a "brilliant pianist," *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has praised her "wit, passion, delicacy," and *The Chicago Tribune* referred to her as "a first-rate Mozartean."

Orli Shaham's performance schedule brings her to concert halls from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House and most of the major venues in between for recitals, chamber music, and concerti. Ms. Shaham has performed with nearly every major American orchestra as well as many in Europe, Asia, and Australia and is a frequent guest at major summer festivals around the world. Since 2007, she has served as curator and performer in the Pacific Symphony's chamber music series in Costa Mesa, California.

Ms. Shaham's wide variety of repertoire is reflected in her discography, which includes "Mozart Concertos" (K.453 and K.491) with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Robertson (CC18), "Brahms Inspired" (CC15), and "American Grace" (CC11), featuring Steven Mackey's piano concerto *Stumble to Grace* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and conducted by David Robertson. Other recordings include "Nigunim, Hebrew Melodies" (CC10), "Dvorak for Two," "The Prokofiev Album" (CC02), and "Mozart in Paris" (CC01), all with her brother, the violinist Gil Shaham; "Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*" with the pianist Jon Kimura Parker and the San Diego Symphony; and "John Adams' *Grand Pianola Music*" with pianist Marc-André Hamelin and San Francisco Symphony conducted by John Adams (SFS0063).

Driven by a passion to bring classical music to new audiences, Orli Shaham maintains an active parallel career as a respected broadcaster, music writer, and educator. On radio, she has hosted the nationally broadcast Dial-a-Musician and America's Music Festivals series, and in 2020 she was named Regular Guest Host and Creative for NPR's "From the Top," airing coast to coast. Ms. Shaham is on the piano and chamber music faculty at The Juilliard School.

Inspired by her enthusiasm for introducing young children to the pleasures of music, Ms. Shaham created and hosts Orli Shaham's Bach Yard, a series of classical concerts for young children, and the video series Bach Yard Playdates, both of which have devoted followings.

For more, visit: orlishaham.com

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Piano Sonata in B-flat Major No.3, K.281			**18:45**
1	i.	Allegro	06:57
2	ii.	Andante amoroso	07:10
3	iii.	Rondeau: Allegro	04:38
Piano Sonata in B-flat Major No.13, K.333			**27:39**
4	i.	Allegro	10:43
5	ii.	Andante cantabile	10:20
6	iii.	Allegretto grazioso	06:36
Piano Sonata in B-flat Major No.17, K.570			**20:53**
7	i.	Allegro	08:59
8	ii.	Adagio	08:05
9	iii.	Allegretto	03:49

Orli Shaham, piano

Recording Producer and Editor: Erica Brenner
Recording and Mastering Engineer: Michael Bishop, Five/Four Productions, Ltd.

Original recording format: 24 bit/96 kHz
Recorded August 20-22, 28-29, 2019 at Mechanics Hall, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA

Hamburg Steinway (Model D-274 #576975)
Piano Technician: Barbara Pease Renner
Technical Assistance: Ian Dobie
Special thanks to Joseph Chilorio, Kathleen Gagne, and Diane Casavecchia at Mechanics Hall

Orli Shaham is a Steinway Artist.

Graphic Design: Amy Baird
Photography: Aleksandr Karjaka

Vol1 / CC19