

ANDERS MUSKENS

WEILHEIM, GERMANY

INCARCERATED MUSIC

VIRTUAL CONCERT

SONATAS BY C.F.D. SCHUBART

PREMIERE: **SUNDAY, MAY 19 | 8PM**

IN-PERSON SCREENING

TUESDAY, MAY 21 | 5:30PM

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (1739–1791), a German organist, keyboardist, music theorist, poet, and journalist, was praised as a great composer and keyboardist by none other than foremost music historian Charles Burney, who heard him play in Ludwigsburg. Schubart was also the author of the important musical treatise “Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst,” compiled partway through his imprisonment around 1784. Schubart is mostly remembered today for his literary works, and he was the author of the poem “Die Forelle,” of which Franz Schubert’s musical setting is one of the most famous of the entire lieder genre. Presumably, the context of the poem is autobiographical: Schubart himself is the poor trout tricked into capture.

As part of his journalistic activities, Schubart visited the important court orchestra at Mannheim, met musicians in Heilbronn, Munich, and Augsburg, and even heard Wolfgang Amadé Mozart play a duel against keyboardist Franz Ignaz von Beecke in 1775. As evidenced by his extensive writings on music found in the “Ideen,” Schubart was very familiar with many musical subjects, as well as with the many composers and styles at play during his time, giving his opinions and assessments in an extensive survey of the various musicians at all of the prominent

German courts. His own music, while mostly forgotten today, is tasteful, nuanced, and refined, written in the galant style, and shows some influence from the Mannheim School.

Schubart was an outspoken writer, and his religious and political views got him into trouble on multiple occasions. One of his primary targets was Carl Eugen: the reigning Duke of Württemberg, whose absolutism, despotism, frivolity and extravagance Schubart criticized heavily. However, because Schubart was living primarily in Ulm, a free city outside the Duke’s jurisdiction, he was free to express his opinions without censure. Regardless, seeking retaliation, the Duke lured Schubart out of his safe haven and had him arrested, confining him in the fortress of Hohenasperg from 1777 to 1787. Reportedly, the Duke and his mistress relished in their cruel triumph by personally seeing Schubart to his dungeon in the tower of the Hohenasperg. Yet, despite his loss of his liberty, Schubart used his incarceration to write music and poetry, much of which is in the “Sturm und Drang” style. For his political views, Schubart was persecuted: exiled from society, and confined to a cell within a mighty, cold, stone fortress. But his captors showed a level of Enlightenment leniency, and he was still able to publish his art. This contrast is truly a window into the prevailing spirit of the 18th century.

Captivated by this story, and wondering what such an experience must have been like, I wanted to “empathize” with Schubart by exploring some of this music written during his incarceration. Was music a solace to Schubart during this troubled time? An emotional outlet? Escapism? I personally believe, as seems to be reflected in Schubart’s own writings on music, that music is fundamentally about expressing human passions and bringing sympathy and harmony between humankind. Related also to my own research into the discipline and practice of eighteenth century rhetoric, declamation, and historical acting, I aim to evoke in my performance the sentiments Schubart encapsulated in his scores, bringing his music back to life for a modern audience.

In the concert video, I perform three sonatas on fortepiano contained in Schubart’s “Etwas für Clavier und Gesang,” a collection of music published in Winterthur in 1783 with a copy now residing in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich. I follow with the more jubilant Variations in B flat, dating to 1790, a manuscript now housed at the Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe. Likely composed after Schubart was released from prison by Frederick the Great, king of Prussia, perhaps this lively march variation is a tribute to the famous Prussian soldier king.

I filmed the first half of the performance on location at the Hohenasperg Fortress, a massive Gothic structure on a tall hill overlooking the town of Asperg just north of the city of Stuttgart in southern Germany. The cell pictured in the introduction was not Schubart’s; rather, it is a similar cell one level higher in the tower, as the original cell is no longer accessible to the public. After one year, Schubart was transferred to slightly more comfortable surroundings in the guardhouse of

the prison, where the first two sonatas were filmed. It is here that Schubart had a small square piano, and he taught music lessons to some of the daughters of the guards. Nowadays, this guardhouse contains the Hohenasperg Museum, but still functions as a canteen for staff of the modern Hohenasperg psychiatric prison. The original door of Schubart’s first cell – with scratch marks – is visible just behind the pianoforte. The rest of the video is filmed in the chapel of the historical Pflughof at the University of Tübingen.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Franziska Dunkel from the Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg/Museum Hohenasperg, for providing special access for filming this concert video.

Notes about the Instrument

The early original pianoforte featured in the performance was made by John Broadwood & Son in London in 1794, employing the “single action” mechanics developed by Johannes Zumpe in the 1760’s. It is certainly more difficult to play than the Viennese action employed by (typically later) instruments from the Stein & Walter Schools, but it does have characteristic charm. This square piano is a basic model with no hand-stops or pedals, and is sitting atop a simple trestle stand. However, it is still beautifully furnished with ivory and tropical woods and employs the so-called “peacock underdampers” which Broadwood developed and patented in 1783. This piano, while possibly different from the instrument Schubart had in his confines, is contemporaneous and shares similar tonal qualities with south German square pianos of the period. English square pianos were manufactured on a huge scale for the time and

were exported widely throughout Europe, and elements of this design were often copied by local craftsmen, who could produce instruments more inexpensively than the flashy English imports. This instrument, which is part of my personal collection, was restored by

Michael Cole in 2005, with additional refurbishment completed by Paul Kobald in 2024. In the recording, I used Kirnberger III temperament with tuning to A=415 – a pitch where the instrument was quite stable.

– Anders Muskens

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Anders Muskens is a Canadian early keyboard specialist, music scholar, and ensemble director, active as an international artist in North America and Europe. He began piano studies at the age of 4 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada and completed an Associate Diploma (ARCT) in modern piano from the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto under the tutelage of Dr. Irina Konovalov. With support from the Edmonton Community Foundation and the Adriana Jacoba Fonds, he completed a Masters in Fortepiano at the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague under Dr. Bart van Oort and Petra Somlai, with Fabio Bonizzoni and Patrick Ayrton for harpsichord. He has performed regularly at the Utrecht Early Music Festival, and has given performances at the Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele, Het Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the National Music Centre, the London International Festival of Early Music, the Salle Bourgie in Montreal, and many more. He also recently received an artist residency stipend from Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg.