

Maria João Pires - Schubert piano sonatas 16 & 21 [2013]

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Piano Sonata No.16 in A minor, D.845 1. 1. *Moderato* 12:39 2. 2. *Andante, poco mosso* 12:08 3. 3. *Scherzo (Allegro vivace) - Trio (Un poco più lento)* 9:38 4. 4. *Rondo (Allegro vivace)* 5:19 Piano Sonata No.21 in B flat, D.960 5. 1. *Molto moderato* 20:32 6. 2. *Andante sostenuto* 9:47 7. 3. *Scherzo (Allegro vivace con delicatezza)* 4:31 8. 4. *Allegro ma non troppo* 8:44
Maria João Pires – piano

The hugely respected Portuguese pianist Maria João Pires has tackled two of Schubert's great sonatas — No. 16, D845 and the final No. 21, D960 — in the most pianistic way for the Deutsche Grammophon label. She is bold and delicate, fiery and introspective, her ever-changing touch colours the notes in so many different, vivid shades. Yet the whole effort is always in the best of taste.

But here's the debate. These Schubert sonatas are in the air these days, and there is another very serious school of interpretation that suggests pianists should take it a little easier with these pieces written not for the concert hall but for private enjoyment. Pianists like Toronto's Boris Zaranin and England's Paul Lewis and France's David Fray metaphorically sit back a bit and underplay the dramatic contrasts. It is sort of like letting the music speak for itself versus imbuing it with the interpreter's voice. But this argument falls apart if you scratch the surface, because we can never get away from the interpreter's voice. The composer's music would be silent without her.

So, while in theory I agree and deeply enjoy the Schubert of Zaranin and Lewis and Fray, I am seduced by Pires's powerful pianism, never too soft or too loud, always moving forward, yet sparkling with every contact between fingertip and piano key. Most importantly, these sonatas sing, which is always the essence of Schubert's beauty. This is Schubert made for the modern

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concert hall, yet still true to the salon. I think we can call that good taste. This is not the first time Pires has recorded these sonatas, and I don't get the impression there's been a radical change in her interpretation. Instead, her evolution is about meticulous honing and burnishing. For more on the album, [click here](#).---John Terauds, musicaltoronto.org

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