Last voyage

Ludwig van Beethoven	Sonata in E major op. 109 - Vivace ma non troppo - Prestissimo - Andante. Molto cantabile ed espressivo Gesang mit innigster Empfindung
Frédéric Chopin	Scherzo op. 54 in E major
Robert Schumann	„Geistervariationen“

Break

Franz Schubert	Sonata in B-flat major D 960 - Molto moderato - Andante sostenuto - Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza - Allegro ma non troppo

Late works, all of them! Landscapes in the autumn of life, music from the last years of their creators.
Such an announcement can, of course, cause stomach aches in view of all the presumed heaviness and seriousness. But I invite you to be convinced of the opposite: the music of this programme knows the secret of lightness.
And it starts off with a real chunk: in Beethoven's Sonata op. 109, the music becomes a seismograph for the in- and outbursts of a person whose almost complete deafness prevents him from really hearing his art. The first two movements almost seem like sketches compared to the great last movement, whose chorale is one of the most consoling pieces of music I know.
Led back into silence, the stage is set for Chopin's last scherzo. The music pleases itself in the indirect, preferred state of aggregation: gas-like. Momentary clouds are soon dispelled - but return when the moon begins to shine in the middle of the work. Here, the music clearly points right into the heart.
This is the cue for Robert Schumann's last composition: Variations on his own theme - or on a theme sung to him in a dream by angels, in short: the " Geistvariationen". The fact that he himself is haunted by demons while writing this piece is dramatically demonstrated by his nightly, desperate jump into the Rhine. Afterwards, he writes the last variation - music in a state of dissolution.
After the break we part for a final hike - on tiptoes. Franz Schubert's last sonata was written a few months before his early death in the late autumn of 1828. In contrast to a life that was far too short, this music has all the time in the world. Already the first movement has "heavenly lengths", all the more so as I play the repetition of the exposition. Why? Because through a trill, which only sounds here in the lowest register of the piano and in full force, we know about the abyss above which all wondrous melodicism, all singing unfolds. An abyss that becomes bottomless loneliness in the second movement, music beneath a frozen water surface.
Then there is a thaw: the feather-light scherzo flies by with a short, haunting trio. Things start to move and lead into a finale full of ambiguity. To my ears at least, this is theatre! Again and again a horn sounds a G as a signal, again and again someone knocks on the door - until finally the signal begins to drop in semitone steps, the music begins to yawn and Schubert decides to show us the door in twenty seconds of presto-coda after almost three quarters of an hour wandering.

Leon Wenzel