

## Pianist Till Fellner to return to Cleveland Chamber Music Society

by Jarrett Hoffman



Till Fellner last came to town in 2011 at the invitation of the Cleveland Chamber Music Society. The Austrian pianist returns to the series for a recital next Tuesday, November 12 at 7:30 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Roger Klein will give a pre-concert lecture at 6:30 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

Fellner's international career was launched when he won first prize at the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in 1993. Since then, he has been a guest at major orchestras and music centers of Europe, the U.S., and Japan. Last season brought his debut with the London Symphony, and this season includes his second appearance with the Boston Symphony. He teaches at the Zurich Hochschule der Künste.

The pianist's Chamber Music Society program is one part Schoenberg and two parts Schubert — who is among the composers Fellner admires most. As he told Kyle MacMillan last year in an [interview](#) for the Chicago Symphony's *CSO Sounds and Stories*, "...it seems to me that Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and Bach are so important, and it's the most interesting music for me."

Despite the pianist's busy schedule, he agreed to answer a few questions by email. I began by asking him to compare the Schubert works — the composer's final two sonatas, D. 959 and 960 in A and B-flat — that bookend the program.

Till Fellner: The A major Sonata has a great variety of characters. It is an unorthodox, colorful piece with a lot of surprises and with huge contrasts. The B-flat major Sonata is more homogeneous. There is coherence, harmony, breadth, and beauty.

*Jarrett Hoffman: And how do you see Schoenberg's Op. 11 Drei Klavierstücke fitting in?*

TF: In the A major Sonata, in the middle section of the second movement, Schubert expresses a nightmare, or an attack of fever. This music is irrational, almost without any logic. It is in fact the most anarchic piece of music until the third piece of Schönberg's Op. 11. That's why I wanted to combine these two works.

*JH: You gave a fascinating [interview](#) in 2015 with cellist Knut Weber of the Berlin Philharmonic before your debut with the orchestra. One thing you revealed is that you took a sabbatical a few years ago, and only played a few high-profile performances that you promised your agent you would accept.*

*During the sabbatical, you said that you largely stayed away from the piano — you took composing lessons, read, and wrote an article on the Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel. Was it a difficult decision to take a sabbatical?*

TF: Not at all a difficult decision, but a necessary decision. I wanted to study composition seriously and on a regular basis. Also, writing about Buñuel required a lot of research. I wouldn't have been able to realize these projects without taking some time off.

*[As Fellner told Weber in that conversation, film music often gets on his nerves. But Buñuel, who studied music, uses it "very deliberately, often in counterpoint to what you can see," the pianist said. "And in his later films he dispenses entirely with background music. If there's music, it's played in the film, on the radio or at the piano." His article on the filmmaker, written in German and published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, can be read [here](#).]*

*JH: I understand that it's important for you to work with technicians to even out the voicing of a piano. Is that something you're able to have done during recital stops like this one in Cleveland?*

TF: Yes, there will be some time to work with the local technician. For me, this work is crucial. It is almost impossible to play in a refined way without an even and reliable instrument.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 5, 2019.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)