

Ensemble for the Romantic Century

presents

Heine: First they Burn Books

Thursday, 7 May 2009, 8:00 PM; pre-concert lecture at 7:00 PM

Saturday, 9 May 2009, 3:00 PM; pre-concert lecture at 2:00 PM

The Liederkrantz Foundation

6 East 87th Street

Written by Eve Wolf

Robert Ian Mackenzie as Heine

Michael Sorvino as Dienstag

Kate Konigisor as Mathilde

Jesse Blumberg, baritone

Wayne Lee, violin

Dmitry Kouzov, cello

Eve Wolf, piano

Max Barros, piano

Directed by Donald T. Sanders

Production and Costume Design by Vanessa James

Lighting Design by Beverly Emmons

Eve Wolf and **Max Barros**, Artistic Directors

James Melo, Musicologist in Residence

Donald T. Sanders, Director of Theatrical Production

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Cover design by James Melo

PROGRAM

HANNS EISLER (Recorded)	<i>Tendenz, op. 10, no. 1</i> (1926)
ERWIN SCHULHOFF	Sonata for Violin Solo (1926) -- Allegro con fuoco
JOHANNES BRAHMS	<i>Mondschein, op. 85, no. 2</i> (1878)
ROBERT SCHUMANN	Sonata for Violin and Piano in A minor, op. 105 (1851) -- Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck
FRANZ SCHUBERT	<i>Das Fischermädchen, D.957, no. 10</i> (1828)
GIACOMO MEYERBEER	<i>Komm!</i> (1837)
FELIX MENDELSSON-BARTHOLDY	<i>Auf Flügeln des Gesanges, op. 34, no. 2</i> (1833-34)
	Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, op. 66 (1845) -- Allegro energico e con fuoco

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY	<i>Hochzeitsmarsch</i> from <i>Ein Sommernachtstraum, op. 16</i> (1843)
	Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, op. 66 -- Andante espressivo
ROBERT SCHUMANN	<i>Die beiden Grenadiere, op. 49, no. 1</i> (1840)
BOHUSLAV MARTINU	Duo for Violin and Cello no. 1 (1927) -- Preludium: Andante moderato
FRANZ SCHUBERT	<i>Der Atlas, D.957, no. 8</i> (1828)
FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY	Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, op. 66 -- Scherzo: Allegro quasi presto
ANTON WEBERN	<i>Drei kleine Stücke, op. 11</i> (1914) -- Mässige
EMMERICH KÁLMÁN	<i>Terezin-Lied</i> from <i>Gräfin Mariza</i> (1924)
ERNEST BLOCH	<i>Tempestoso</i> , from <i>Nocturnes</i> (1924)
FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY	Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, op. 66 -- Finale: Allegro appassionato

PROGRAM NOTES

All I really want is enough to live on, a little house in the country... and a tree in the garden with seven of my enemies hanging from it.
(Heinrich Heine)

Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) was well versed in the gentle art of making enemies. He would need far more than that single tree, and a great number of private gardens, to hang the enemies he had collected in the course of his life. His literary legacy, a banquet of linguistic virtuosity that includes poetry, essays, tales, journalism, and a wealth of aesthetic and political writings, is laced with some of the most acerbic and vitriolic criticism penned in the 19th century. He was a master of wit and irony, infusing his poetry and prose with a biting sense of humor that remained unabated throughout his life. Only in his last years, when he lay on his “mattress-grave” in Paris in excruciating pain and partially paralyzed, did he occasionally give way to a faint sense of pathos and piety.¹ Heine’s wit, however, was far from being the reflection of a happy soul. When he sang of love, it was often about the pain and disillusionment of unrequited love, while his poetic voice invariably betrays a perpetual longing for home. Heine himself never thought of wit as a purely stylistic conceit, but rather as a vehicle for conveying essential truths. Herein lies a fundamental aspect of his personality: The juxtaposition of humor and seriousness was nothing but the external sign of *Zerrissenheit*, or the notion of the divided self that was so dear to the German Romantics, and of which Heine was a perfect example.

From his early years, Heine found himself divided by conflicting loyalties. His native city of Düsseldorf was at the time occupied by French troops, who had granted the Jews a number of civil rights that far exceeded anything that German rulers were willing to accept. Thus, Heine spent his youth in a society in which Jews were precariously poised between hopeful new prospects and very real old threats. He converted to Lutheranism in 1825, at a time when Jews and Christians alike were deeply suspicious of such conversions. From his own perspective, Heine saw his conversion as a ticket of admission to the institutions of European culture, a move that was prompted primarily by the fact that, in Germany, Jews were forbidden to pursue many careers, including those in academia, a situation that severely undermined Heine’s intellectual and artistic ambitions. While he was still a student, Heine had joined the Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentumes (Society for the Culture and Scientific Study of Judaism), but remained a member for only three years. His conversion happened almost immediately after he left the Society, and this radical decision has been a bone of contention in the analysis and reception of his vast and controversial legacy ever since.

Throughout his life Heine would continue to wrestle with contradictions stemming from the incompatible elements of his German and Jewish heritage. It was in part to find alternative ways to negotiate these contradictions that he went to Paris in 1831 to begin his voluntary (and later forced) exile, which lasted for the rest of his life. After he had been in Paris for a little more than a year, he wrote to the composer Ferdinand Hiller that if a fish in water were asked how it felt the answer would be: like Heine in Paris. The analogy could hardly be more appropriate for describing the feelings of liberation and excitement that swept over the poet when he settled in the city that was the cultural center of Europe. From Paris, secure in the far more liberal milieu of that city, Heine embarked on a relentless attack on German culture and politics to such an extent that his

¹ In January 1856, just a few weeks before Heine’s death, George Eliot published the influential essay “German Wit: Heinrich Heine”, on the *Westminster Review*. This essay was an important turning point in the reception of Heine outside of Germany, bringing him within the aesthetic horizon of cultures in which wit, as a literary quality, was far more appreciated than in his native country.

works were banned in his native country, and he himself risked being arrested when he made a trip to Germany in 1843. However, Heine's political and cultural activism was only one of the many arenas in which he played out his internal conflicts. He was an outspoken advocate of the poet's autonomy, and yet he did not hesitate to accept a clandestine pension from the very same French regime which he criticized in his articles; he was a radical critic of the aristocracy and the priesthood, but at the same time distrusted democratic movements and other egalitarian causes; he was perennially short of money, and yet insisted that he should make his living as a man of letters; he scorned sentimentality, but his poems became emblematic of bittersweet sentiment.

All these paradoxes were integral to Heine's life, irrevocably coloring the way he was perceived by his contemporaries and influencing the judgment of critics all the way to the present. The scope of his intellectual and artistic achievement, however, far outweighs any reservations one may have about him as a person. Few Romantic artists were so influential across so many fields, leaving for posterity an oeuvre dense with highly original insights, perceptive social commentary, and far-reaching ideas. For this haunted man, abrasive wit was much more than a literary expedient: it was a tool for survival. And as he lay dying, unable to leave his "mattress-grave," Heine could still rekindle the biting humor that he had cultivated throughout his life by remarking that "God will forgive me; it is His job." This from a man who revealed a rather partial attitude towards forgiveness: "We should forgive our enemies, but not before they are hanged."

In tonight's production, the political circumstances affecting Heine's life and work, as well as his predicament in the hands of German censors, are related to the rise of Nazism and its horrific project of cultural and racial obliteration. The musical portion of the program features works by composers who were banned by the Nazis, including Mendelssohn, Hanns Eisler, Bohuslav Martinu, Ernest Bloch, and Erwin Schulhoff, as well as settings of Heine's poems by Schubert, Schumann, and Meyerbeer.

HEINE AND THE MUSIC OF HIS TIME

I. THE LIED

It was as a poet that Heine made the greatest impact on music. His lyric poetry, in particular, was equal to that of Goethe in influencing the development and transformations of the German *Lied* and, by extension, of Romantic music in general. In his autobiographical writings, Heine commented upon some of the contradictions inherent in his poetic outlook:

After I had delivered the most deadly blows to the taste for Romantic poetry in Germany, there stole over me an inexpressible yearning for the blue flower of the romantic dreamland, and I seized my enchanted lyre and sang a song in which I gave free rein to all the lovely extravagances, to all the moon-intoxication, to all the blooming, nightingale fancies that I once so fondly sang. (from My Place in German Literature)

This fragment of self-analysis, voiced in a faintly self-deprecating tone, contrasts with the more measured view of music expressed by Heine in one of his reviews of Parisian musical life:

Music is a strange thing. I would almost say it is a miracle. For it stands halfway between thought and phenomenon, between spirit and matter, a sort of nebulous mediator, like and unlike each of the things it mediates... The essence of music is revelation. (from Letters on the French Stage)

Heine's views were echoed by many other Romantic artists who were equally intrigued by the nature of music and its special relationship with words. In the early 19th century, while instrumental

music was becoming increasingly more valued as the quintessentially Romantic art, important changes were taking place in the way music and words merged into song. A felicitous combination of social, cultural, and musical factors contributed to rescuing the song with piano accompaniment from its low status as a genre suitable only for amateur performances, transforming it into one of the most refined forms of expression available to the Romantic composer. The development of the *Lied*, or art song, particularly through the works of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Wolf, revolutionized the perception of this genre. The most important contributions these composers made to the *Lied* involved the exploitation of the complementary expressive powers of music and poetry and the increasingly important role ascribed to the piano accompaniment as a vehicle for psychological insight. Contrary to the larger vocal genres such as opera, oratorio, and various forms of choral music, the *Lied* was ostensibly personal in its character, intimate and confessional in its mode of delivery, and these conditions made it ripe for a full alliance with lyrical poetry.

Heine was keenly aware of the complementary roles of music and poetry, commenting on one occasion that “where words leave off, music begins.” The musical qualities of his poetry proved irresistible to several generations of composers, not only in his native Germany but also across a wide range of cultures and languages. The comprehensive index of songs maintained at the Unter den Linden branch of Berlin’s Staatsbibliothek lists more than 8,000 musical settings of Heine’s poems, a list that is nevertheless incomplete. No other poet, not even Goethe, has been so universally favored by composers. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847), who like Heine had to grapple with the conflicts inherent in his Jewish-German heritage, was one of the many 19th-century composers who fell under the spell of Heine’s poetry and its potential for being set to music. Mendelssohn left an intriguing statement about the expressive power of music, responding to challenges by some contemporary critics that music was too vague an art to communicate anything concrete:

People usually complain that music is so ambiguous; that what they should think of when they hear music is so unclear, whereas everyone understands words. But for me it is just the opposite... words seem to me so ambiguous, so unclear, so misleading in comparison with good music, which fills one’s soul with a thousand things better than words. What the music I love expresses to me is not thoughts too unclear for words, but rather too clear. I therefore find in all attempts to put these thoughts into words something correct, but also always something insufficient and not universal... The words remain ambiguous, but we understand the music. (Letter to Marc-André Souchay, 12 October 1842)

Heine’s and Mendelssohn’s views come together in the latter’s *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges* (On Wings of Song), one of Mendelssohn’s most popular songs. Written in 1833-34, it reenacts the transporting power of music and poetry as words and tones join to create a conduit for the lover’s imagination. Mendelssohn’s setting, informed by a youthful naiveté, differs markedly from the interpretation of Heine’s poetry embodied in the songs of Franz Schubert (1797-1828). Schubert, the consummate master of the German *Lied*, was always attuned to new and innovative poetry, and he turned his attention to Heine immediately after the poet’s works appeared in print in readily accessible editions. Unfortunately, Schubert did not have much time left, and his only settings of Heine’s poetry are the six songs included in the posthumous pseudo-cycle *Schwanengesang*, dating from 1828. At the time of his death, Schubert was working on a group of 13 songs on texts by Heine and Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860), but there is no indication that he was planning to gather them into a song cycle. Schubert’s brother, Ferdinand, submitted these songs to the publisher Tobias Haslinger shortly after Schubert’s death, and in May 1829 they appeared in print, together with an additional song (*Die Taubenpost*, on a poem by Johann Gabriel Seidl), under the title *Schwanengesang* (Swan Song). Two of the Heine songs are included in this program. *Der Atlas* is a powerful depiction of unrelieved suffering. By invoking the mythical figure of Atlas, who was destined to carry the terrestrial globe on his back, the poet magnifies the depth and extent of

personal tragedy by equating it to the curse of carrying all the world's pain in one's heart. Schubert's setting is a concentrated A-B-A form characterized by impassioned gestures and great rhythmic vitality, culminating in the painful outburst in the last line. By contrast, *Das Fischermädchen* is a charming barcarolle that exudes youthful love, undisturbed in the bouncing regularity of its rhythms. *Komm!*, a setting of this same poem by Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864), does not have the same lilting rhythm of Schubert's rendition. Instead, Meyerbeer opted for a lively dance rhythm that conveys a little of the exhilaration of the young man in love. The setting is rhetorically more inflected than Schubert's version, and it provides an interesting example of art song by a composer whose name is primarily associated with the bombast and high drama of the French *grand opera*.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was unquestionably the greatest interpreter of Heine's poetry into song. His settings of Heine's poems, particularly in the song cycle *Dichterliebe* (1840), remain unsurpassed in their psychological refinement and accuracy of expression, matching the poet's moods with exquisite precision. The setting of *Die beiden Grenadiere*, composed in 1840, departs from Schumann's more lyrical approach to Heine's poetry. The overtly political and military content of the poem, which was set by many other composers (including Richard Wagner, in spite of his ferocious anti-Semitism), elicited from Schumann a type of piano texture that mimics the rumbling of military drums and the precision of marching rhythms. The music has a strong narrative quality, driving the story unrelentingly forward to its sad denouement. Nothing could be more contrasting than the mood that unfolds in *Mondschein*, *op. 85, no. 2*, by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), another composer for whom Heine was a major source of inspiration. The sustained declamation of the poem is buoyed by supple melodic lines of great concentration, creating a miniature tone poem whose introspection is shattered by only a few moments of passionate outburst.

II. THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Mendelssohn's *Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, op. 66*, is not as well known as its companion in D minor, *op. 49*, but it is unquestionably a work of consummate craftsmanship, with tightly woven musical forms and richly textured thematic material. In many ways it represents an advancement over its predecessor, in regard to Mendelssohn's conception of the genre. As with much of Mendelssohn's chamber music, the *Piano Trio no. 2* pays homage to long established classical models, even though the Romantic tint impregnates all its movements. This reflects one of Mendelssohn's greatest achievements: how to infuse the classical forms with an intense Romanticism that remained nevertheless disciplined and under control. The handling of sonata form in the first movement is highly nuanced and balanced, while the "Andante espressivo" sings with an emotional intensity that is almost Schubertian. The highly demanding "Scherzo" is one more example of the gossamer, fairy-tale-like sonorities that Mendelssohn was able to achieve in fast passages, recalling the shimmer of some of his most successful orchestral works. In the last movement, Mendelssohn incorporates a chorale taken from the Geneva Psalter of 1562, the same chorale used by Bach in his cantata *Herr Gott, Dich fürchten alle wir*, BWV 130. The incorporation of the chorale adds a new dimension to the emotional depth of this concluding movement and of the trio as a whole. This magnificently mature work is further proof that Mendelssohn was far more than just "a pleasant incident in German music," to quote Nietzsche's rather unflattering words.

Schumann's *Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1 in A minor, op. 105*, is a late work, composed amidst the strains imposed on him by his obligations as Düsseldorf's director of music. The composition of the sonata, which was finished in September 1851, reflected Schumann's renewed interest in chamber music at the time, and especially his desire to find solace in more intimate forms of music making. Clara Schumann's diaries reveal how impatiently she awaited the completion of this sonata and its companion in D minor. Shortly after their completion, she tried out both sonatas during an informal gathering at their home, with the young Leipzig violinist Wilhelm

Joseph von Wasielewski, who had been appointed by Schumann as leader of the Düsseldorf orchestra. She was particularly pleased with the beautiful, elegiac first movement of the *Sonata in A minor*, and in March 1852 she gave the official premiere of the work, with Ferdinand David on the violin.

THE ENTARTETE MUSIK BLACK LIST

The reception of Heine's works in Germany has been profoundly affected by his activities as a critic and journalist in exile and by his ambiguous position as a converted Jew. These simmering contradictions surfaced with renewed force during the Nazi era, when Heine's status as a representative of German culture underwent a radical change, culminating in the destruction of his works and the elimination of his name from any songbook containing poems by him that were set to music. In his historical and political writings Heine had been frighteningly prescient in his analysis of German culture and the unsettling forces that lay dormant underneath the constraints of civilization. A century before the Nazis unleashed their nightmare of racial and cultural obliteration, he warned his readers of the potential for just such a scenario:

*Do not smile at the visionary who anticipates the same revolution in the realm of the visible as has taken place in the spiritual. Thought precedes action as lightning precedes thunder. German thunder is of true Germanic character; it is not very nimble, but rumbles along ponderously. Yet, it will come and when you hear a crashing such as never before has been heard in the world's history, then you know that the German thunderbolt has fallen at last. At that uproar the eagles of the air will drop dead, and lions in the remotest deserts of Africa will hide in their royal dens. A play will be performed in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like an innocent idyll (from *Toward a History of Philosophy and Religion in Germany*, published in French in 1832).*

One hundred years later, in 1933, the Nazis raided the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin and made a bonfire in the Opernplatz with thousands of books, among which were works by Heine himself. This barbaric act was the concretization of a warning contained in a line from Heine's play *Almansor*: "Where they burn books, they will ultimately also burn people." Once again, the poet had proved himself to be the prophet of his age and of ages to come. Obviously, there is no better way to annihilate a culture than to erase its heritage and rob their members of their tools of reflection. Accordingly, the Nazis' project of cultural extermination soon moved beyond the burning of books. Their new forum for bigotry was the exhibition *Entartete Kunst*, which opened in Munich on 19 July 1937 and subsequently traveled to several other cities in Germany and Austria. The exhibition contained 650 sculptures, paintings, prints, and books confiscated from 32 German museums on the grounds that they represented degenerate art that was inimical to true German values. These works were also meant to instigate the fury of the populace against what was perceived to be the "perverse Jewish spirit" that threatened German culture. As part of the general concept of degeneracy, Nazi officials and appointed critics also kept a list of musical works considered to be degenerate music (*Entartete Musik*), opening a parallel exhibition in 1938 in Heine's native city of Düsseldorf with the purpose of showcasing these works. The poster for the exhibition depicted a black musician dressed in a style that recalled the world of American jazz and sporting a Star of David on the lapel of his jacket. He plays a saxophone, an instrument that was obviously meant to represent some aspect of the degeneracy that the Nazis perceived in modern music. The musical works listed in the exhibition were branded "degenerate" either because of the Jewish heritage of the composers and performers, or because they sponsored political views that were contrary to the Nazi regime, or because the works themselves displayed features that ran against the tradition of German music. An increasing number of composers had their works banned during the Nazi regime, including Germans such as Anton Webern, who had close ties to

the Jewish composer Arnold Schoenberg. In a moving statement, Schoenberg commented on the confusion of feelings unleashed by the exhibition *Entartete Musik*:

I have at last learned the lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall never forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely a human being (at least the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me) but I am a Jew.

In the course of the Nazis' massive project, Jewish composers who were already dead had their works summarily banned, while those who were alive found themselves in imminent danger and had to flee as the racial and cultural purge continued unabated. The thunder that Heine had forecast was rumbling in full force, and the works included in tonight's program exemplify the breadth of the Nazis' act of cultural vandalism.

Almost all the works by the 20th-century composers represented in the program depart in one way or another from the genres and forms inherited from the classical tradition. The chamber music of Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959) includes works for a great variety of instrumental combinations. He often experimented with textures that were dependent on the specific number of instruments involved, hence the several duos, trios, quartets, quintets, etc., in his output. The *Duo for Violin and Cello no. 1* (1927) is a diptych made up of two contrasting movements, the first of which also has the function of an introduction in the spirit of the Baroque prelude. A more traditional organizing principle is at work in the *Sonata for Violin Solo* (1926) by Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942), a brilliant composer whose life came to an abrupt end at the Wülzburg concentration camp. There are precedents for Schulhoff's *Sonata for Violin Solo*, but the eclectic blend of musical styles that characterizes this work and other pieces from his third period is quite unique. Externally, the *Sonata for Violin Solo* follows a classical layout, but its thematic material is inflected with a judicious use of dissonance and elements derived from several musical traditions. The three *Nocturnes* by Ernest Bloch (1880-1859), of which the *Tempestoso* is the third, were composed during his second stylistic phase, when he embraced neoclassicism wholeheartedly. The *Tempestoso*, true to its designation, suggests the pent-up energy of a wild ride through a stormy night. Its tumultuous sound landscape is only briefly relieved by the recall of themes from the second nocturne, just enough to create a sense of organic closure but not strong enough to dispell the dark mood that prevails in the piece. No such contrasts are to be found in the brief *Mässige* from the *Dei kleine Stücke* for cello and piano by Anton Webern (1883-1945), a composer who fell into disfavor with the Nazis not only because of the radical modernity of his music but also because he had close ties of friendship with Schoenberg. Webern's concentration of musical gestures reaches a high point in these miniatures, to the point where the musical material is reduced to its bare minimum: sound without any formal elaboration.

The two vocal works from the 20th century included in the program differ markedly from one another. *Tendenz*, a piece for male chorus by Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) on an overtly political poem by Heine, belongs to a set of works for male chorus composed in 1926, all of which address some type of political or revolutionary ideal. As such, *Tendenz* can be seen as part of a comprehensive statement, in musical form, of Eisler's own political convictions. By contrast, the *Terezin-Lied* excerpted from the operetta *Gräfin Mariza* by the Hungarian composer Emmerich Kálmán (1882-1953) offers through its text a humorous take on life at the village of Terezin, which became infamous as the site of one of the most horrific concentration camps of the Nazi era. The anonymous text was fitted to the melody of Kálmán's original song, which obviously contained no reference to the concentration camp (the operetta premiered at the Theater and der Wien in 1924). By juxtaposing works from the 19th and the 20th centuries, this program bridges two moments in history that pivot on the figure of Heinrich Heine and his timeless warning about the burning of books as a prelude to more horrendous crimes against humanity. Heine's dictum was given full fictional expression in Ray Bradbury's dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*, a book that was published 20

years after the Nazis had already put into practice that terrifying scenario in the book burning that took place at the Opernplatz in Berlin. Bradbury's novel was the source of many references in tonight's program, including its central metaphor of book burning as an instrument of cultural destruction and, by extension, of racial purging. The dysfunctional society that Bradbury unmasks in *Fahrenheit 451* is one in which critical thinking is eschewed in favor of inconsequential hedonism, and where the masses are in the grip of an old expedient employed by totalitarian regimes: provide the people with bread and circus to prevent them from seeing the harsh reality staring them in the face. It all sounds very familiar, as in the old cliché according to which life imitates art or, equally pertinent, the other way around. The question that remains is how far can our collective conscience reach back into the past.

James Melo
Musicologist in Residence

THE STEINWAY MUSIC ROOM GRAND PIANO

This rare Steinway Music Room Grand Piano fashioned of Brazilian rosewood is a premier example of the late 19th-century Art-Case Piano. Its visual elegance befits the most regal surroundings; its inner workings comprise a superb recital-quality instrument. The vibrant palisander veneer is a dramatic background for musical instrument motifs, embellishing the encircling bellflower swags. In late 19th Century mansions, this motif would often appear as a decorative element in parlors and music rooms. This masterpiece is an example of turn-of-the-century marquetry in its most advanced state as an art form. The piano's inlay work consists of satinwood, tulipwood and mahogany motif-elements treated with the all-but-lost techniques of sand-burning and tinting, achieving shades and gradations of color and depth that create a three-dimensional design experience. This piano is completely restored by Klavierhaus with the original ivory keys intact. The inscription inside the piano dates the instrument, according to Steinway company records, circa 1895.