FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
Four Impromptus, D935
No.1 in F minor (Allegro moderato)
No.2 in A flat (Allegretto)
No.3 in B flat (Andante. Theme and five variations)
No.4 in F minor (Allegro scherzando)

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)
Vallée d’Obermann
(from Years of Pilgrimage, First Year – Switzerland, S160)

INTERVAL

SCHUBERT
Sonata in A, D664
Allegro moderato
Andante
Allegro

LISZT
Petrarch Sonnet No.123
(from Years of Pilgrimage, Second Year – Italy, S161)

Mephisto Waltz No.1
(from Two Episodes from Lenau’s Faust, S514)
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In 1924 a Polish concert pianist named Mieczyslaw Munz arrived in Sydney to perform in an extraordinary six solo recitals over just one-and-a-half weeks in the Sydney Town Hall. In total he performed close to 50 pieces, featuring a huge range of repertoire that spanned from Baroque and Romantic to contemporary artists of the day.

Although Munz isn’t a well-known name in Australia, he was partly responsible for teaching and inspiring tonight’s pianist, someone whose name is much more familiar to us – Emanuel Ax.

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The idea that purely instrumental music could embody the spirit of poetry came to its full fruition with the Romantic composers. After a childhood in which he was pushed by his father to public attention as a virtuoso prodigy, Franz Liszt discovered for himself a profound love for literature, and especially poetry – such that on his death, his library contained many thousands of books.

Liszt’s instinctive wish to preserve the great poetic achievements of the past found a connection with the new Romantic sensuality in the sonnets of the original Renaissance Man, Francesco Petrarca. Liszt made song settings of Petrarch’s sonnets, and in turn the better known instrumental responses for piano, one of which we hear tonight.

Liszt also championed Schubert, at the time when Schubert’s works were first being published and appreciated. It’s possible the two composers may have met in Vienna, where Liszt toured as a boy – a connection between the golden age of early Romantic music, and the turbulent things to come. In later life, Liszt referred to Schubert as ‘the most poetic musician ever’ – a testament to his love of the elegance and eloquence of the Viennese lyrical tradition.

The third poetic soul in this program is Emanuel Ax – a pianist renowned as an interpreter of both these composers. Sydney audiences have heard him perform their music before (separately and in combination through Liszt’s transcriptions of Schubert songs). Tonight’s recital promises a sweeter concert still.
Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Four Impromptus, D935 (Op.142)

No.1 in F minor (Allegro sostenuto)
No.2 in A flat (Allegretto – Trio)
No.3 in B flat (Andante. Theme and five variations)
No.4 in F minor (Allegro scherzando)

Are there two sonatas by Schubert in this concert?
No – though Robert Schumann believed the title ‘Four Impromptus’ concealed a sonata, offered as separate pieces to make them more acceptable to a publisher. Had that been Schubert’s aim, he failed. Twice he offered this, his second set of four impromptus, and both times the publishers turned him down. Schott’s Paris agents reported that the pieces were too difficult for ‘bagatelles’. The term is revealing, since Beethoven had pioneered stand-alone character pieces for piano with his first set of Bagatelles, published in 1802. Schumann was right up to a point: these pieces of Schubert were of a scope seeming to transcend their title.

‘Impromptu’, with its suggestions of improvisation, even casualness, and brevity, was not Schubert’s title, but was given by the publisher, Haslinger, to the only Schubert Impromptus issued in his lifetime (Op.90 Nos.1 and 2, the first two of D899). Haslinger was hoping to cash in on the fashion for pieces of this kind, such as the Six Impromptus of Voríˇsek (1822), probably the first to use this title. Voríˇsek, a Bohemian resident in Vienna, was a pupil of Tomáˇsek, whose similar Six Eclogues implied a musical analogy with a short poem. Schubert’s Impromptus are varied in character and form, and he even resorts to a genre Tomáˇsek was explicitly hoping to displace, or improve: the ‘theme and variations’ which had hitherto dominated non-sonata piano music. In fact Schumann didn’t much like the third impromptu of D935, perhaps because it didn’t fit his sonata theory.

Schubert accepted the title ‘Impromptus’, and numbered his second set 5–8, clearly intending them as a sequel. The key relationships, which Schumann noted in support of his ‘sonata’ theory, make the pieces a happy sequence and they are well suited to being played as a whole. But they are not a sonata – rather, in pieces of this type (including the Moments musicaux and the three late pieces sometimes called ‘Posthumous Impromptus’ – D946) Schubert proved the first great master of the
Romantic character piece for piano, more concerned with sentiment than with an argument. For many these pieces have been a gateway to Schubert. As the scholar Brian Newbould remarks, Schubert here often shows a popular facet without any compromises with his true self.

**Impromptu No.1** immediately shows the expanded scale of this set – it begins with a passage that sounds introductory, and is in the form of a modified rondo, or a sonata form without development. After his second theme, Schubert adds another, four times as long. This, Newbould muses, is Schubert the sleepwalker, losing any mundane measurement of time. Schumann imagined a sorrowful hour, as if the musician was contemplating his past. There is a telling interplay of major and minor, with the major key in the reprise proving largely illusory.

The **second Impromptu** – for Schumann the ‘minuet’ – is the simplest and most direct, but its contrasting Trio, in D flat, shows how Schubert can conjure up a sudden dark, powerful climax, with syncopation and a premonitory trill in the bass – then return just as deftly to the opening mood.

The **third Impromptu** is a set of variations on a theme from Schubert’s music for the play *Rosamunde* (1823), which he also used in the String Quartet in A minor (1824). The rhythm (like one in tonight’s sonata), recalls the *Allegretto* of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. The variations are catchy, even showy at times – this should have appealed to the publishers, but the third is dark, even passionate, in the minor, and the fourth sonorous.

The **fourth Impromptu** shows a rare side of Schubert: provocative, even witty, in its game of hinting that triple is actually double time. Folk music comes to mind – some say a Czech furiant, some a Spanish dance; certainly the frenetic cimbalom-like flourishes recall the gypsy music imitations of Schubert’s *Divertissement à la hongroise* for piano duet. Scales become more and more wild and lengthy, the end coming extravagantly with a sweep down six octaves to the very lowest note on Schubert’s piano.

David Garrett ©2008
Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Vallée d’Obermann
(from Years of Pilgrimage, First Year – Switzerland, S160)

Petralch Sonnet No.123
(from Years of Pilgrimage, Second Year – Italy, S161)

Mephisto Waltz No.1
(from Two Episodes from Lenau’s Faust, S514)

There are many similarities in the genesis of the first and second books of the Liszt’s Années de Pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage): most of the pieces in both books were conceived in the 1830s during his travels to and from Switzerland and Italy with Marie d’Agoult, a time which saw the birth of the couple’s three children, and for Liszt a period of intense compositional activity, punctuated by a good many concerts. The two books were eventually prepared for publication in their final form by the early 1850s, in Liszt’s busiest period as a composer/conductor at the court of Weimar.

In the case of the Swiss volume, Liszt had selected all but one of the pieces from the previously published Album d’un Voyageur; with the Italian set only three of the pieces had appeared in print in earlier versions – the Petrarca Sonnets. The important difference between the two books lies in the source of inspiration: although various literary references lie in the background of the Swiss volume, the principal imaginative spring is the landscape of Switzerland itself; the second Année draws entirely upon Italian art and literature.

The Swiss volume stands as one of the most important productions from Liszt’s Weimar years – the years of his real coming of age as a composer of international stature, and Vallée d’Obermann (Obermann’s Valley) is one of his finest works. Liszt himself excused its inclusion in a collection of Swiss impressions by pointing out that the French novel (Senancour’s Obermann) which inspired it was set in Switzerland. In its revised version the original two-page preface from Senancour (describing the character of alpine scenery and folk music) is reduced to a dozen lines – ‘Que veux-je? Que suis-je? Que demander à la nature?...’ (What do I want? What am I? What to ask of nature?...) – and a further nine lines from Byron’s Childe Harold introduce this powerful piece:

Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me, – could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,  
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,  
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe – into one word,  
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;  
But as it is, I live and die unheard,  
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

If the flattery of imitation were anything to go by, then Tchaikovsky certainly admired Vallée d’Obermann sufficiently when he appropriated its main theme for Lensky’s aria in Eugene Onegin.

The three Petrarch Sonnets are intense love songs, rich in passionate harmonies and generous in their melodic flight, and they have long been amongst Liszt’s most beloved works.

Three of Petrarch’s cycle of sonnets hymning the poet’s love for the divine Laura occupied Liszt’s imagination over many decades. The three sonnets were first set as songs for high voice and piano in 1838–39. (In fact they really call for a lyrical tenor who can fearlessly cope with the ossia passages and negotiate a high D flat.) The piano transcriptions were complete by 1846 and published that year. These were revised for the Second Year of Pilgrimage by 1855, and the songs were totally recomposed for low voice in 1861. A sense of the poetry remains crucial to the understanding of the music, and Petrarch’s original sonnet is given here:

SONNETTO CXXIII
I’ vidi in terra angelici costumi,  
et celesti bellezze al mondo sole,  
tal che di rimembrar mi giova et dole  
ché quant’ io miro, par sogni,  
ombre, et fumi.  
E vidi lagrimar que’ duo bei lumi,  
ch’ an fatto mille volte invidia al sole,  
et udi’ sospirando dir parole  
che farian gire i monti et stare i fiumi.  
Amor, senno, valor, pietate et doglia  
facean piangendo un più dolce concerto  
d’ogni altro che nel mondo udir si soglia;  
ed era il cielo a l’armonia si intento,  
che non se vedea in ramo mover foglia,  
tanta dolcezza avea pien l’aere e ’l vento.  
Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374)

SONNET 123
I beheld on earth angelic grace,  
And heavenly beauties unmatched in this world,  
Such that to recall them rejoices and pains me,  
And whatever I gaze on seems by dreams,  
shadows, mists.  
And I beheld tears spring from those lovely eyes,  
Which many a time have put the sun to shame,  
And heard words uttered with such sighs  
As to move the mountains and stay the rivers.  
Love, wisdom, valour, pity and grief  
Made in that plaint a sweeter concert  
Than any other to be heard on earth.  
And heaven on that harmony was so intent  
That not a leaf upon the bough was seen to stir,  
Such sweetness had filled the air and the winds.
The Faust legend also preoccupied Liszt for much of his life, and Goethe’s rendering of it inspired his orchestral masterpiece, the *Faust Symphony*. His other works on the subject were a response in the first instance to Nikolaus Lenau’s dramatic poem, although the late Mephisto Waltzes 2–4, the *Bagatelle sans tonalité* and the *Mephisto-Polka* from the 1880s do not specify the particular source of inspiration. The Two Episodes from Lenau’s *Faust* for orchestra were completed by 1861, but Liszt’s piano version of the ‘Dance in the Village Inn – [First] Mephisto Waltz’, which preceded the orchestra version, had already appeared.

This famous work marks a point of transition to Liszt’s later style. Early critics were shocked by the daring harmonies, especially at the beginning where a devilish pile of fifths is assembled. The original title, ‘Dance in the Village Inn’, refers specifically to a long passage from Lenau’s *Faust*, and Humphrey Searle, in *The Music of Liszt*, cannot be bettered in his paraphrase of the episode:

*Faust and Mephistopheles enter the inn in search of pleasure; the peasants are dancing, and Mephisto seizes the violin and intoxicates the audience with his playing. They abandon themselves to love-making, and two by two slip out into the starlit night, Faust with one of the girls; then the singing of the nightingale is heard through the open doors.*

The solo piano version does not contain Liszt’s quiet alternative ending to the orchestral version depicting the company sinking ‘in the ocean of their own lust’, but has Mephisto laugh, dance, and the vision is abandoned.

ABRIDGED FROM NOTES BY LESLIE HOWARD ©1992–1997
Schubert
Piano Sonata in A, D664

*Allegro moderato*
*Andante*
*Allegro*

The history of Schubert's piano sonatas is one of those rare cases where a very important part of a composer’s work took a long time to be recognised at its true worth, and fully represented in performance. This sonata was for long the exception that seemed to prove the rule. It was relatively short, indeed succinct. It seemed to be easy to play, whereas many of the other sonatas were considered ungrateful by pianists. And here was found the Schubert who was loved for his songs – lyrical and charming – and in the last movement especially, celebrating his local musical heritage, in what one writer called 'a Viennese waltz danced in heaven'.

The sonata's history may explain some of these characteristics. One of the works published very soon after Schubert's death (in 1829 as Opus posthumous 120), it was long thought to have been composed in 1825. Research has since suggested it must date from July 1819, when Schubert spent his summer holiday at Steyr. There he composed the ‘Trout’ Quintet, which shares with the sonata its key, its freshness and the popular cast of its themes. The daughter of Schubert's host was 18-year-old Josephine von Koller; he described her in a letter to his brother as 'a very pretty girl, who plays the piano well and is going to sing some of my songs'.

If Schubert wrote the sonata for her, that may explain its comparatively simple design and only moderate pianistic difficulties. Even so, we should be careful: the very first bar, requiring a spread of a tenth, suggests 'Pepi' must have had big hands. Nevertheless, the light-heartedness of the outer movements does suggest an idyllic love on the part of the composer, and no later Schubert sonata shows the same degree of freedom from care.

This feeling, and what Schubert authority Alfred Einstein calls its pure lyricism, helps explain the sonata’s enduring popularity. It is also a completely satisfying artistic achievement. If the date 1819 is right, this sonata followed a series of sonatas which could be called experimental, many of which remained incomplete,
so that Schubert may have become irritated with his failure to find his way in the sonata genre. The ‘little’ A major sonata may sound a joyous breakthrough. The voice is Schubert’s own, without any tension with classical models, although the rhythm of the first movement’s second subject, a favourite rhythm of Schubert’s, is that of the second movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, which left such a deep imprint on the younger man.

This sonata is not without darker shadows. The development of the first movement brings octave passages rough and powerful, even aggressive, but the moment soon passes. The turn to the minor before the reprise is characteristically Schubertian. Songlike, the slow movement has a persistent rhythm and a theme distinctive for the asymmetry of its phrase lengths. Einstein finds here a concealed text of happy reconciliation. Musical unity is promoted by beginning with the descending appoggiatura figure ending the first movement, and there are subtle oppositions of major and minor towards the conclusion.

There is no minuet or scherzo (as Schubert’s many four-movement sonatas would lead us to expect), but a finale in sonata form, with the lightest of touches. As William Kinderman points out, the descending scale of the main theme balances the ascending scale of those fierce octaves of the first movement. This seems to dispel any lingering memory of their threat. Schubert, as he often does, begins the recapitulation in the subdominant. This is not a mere convenience to avoid inventing a new bridge passage to the second subject, as is proved by the striking modulations at the point in question. It also enables Schubert to delay the return of the first subject to the tonic key until the coda. Josephine von Koller, if it was she, was given the opportunity to shine in the brilliant figuration, but Schubert’s light touch has its originality, too, in the integration of dance measures – the accessibility of this sonata made it influential, perhaps even on Schumann in the finale of his piano concerto.

DAVID GARRETT ©2008
GLOSSARY

APPOGGIATURA – literally, a leaning note; in practice a melodic ornament in which the main note is preceded by a note one step above or below (therefore in dissonance with the underlying harmony), which resolves on a weak beat.

BAGATELLE – a ‘trifle’, or a short, light piece of music, typically for keyboard; first found in music in a 1717 suite by François Couperin, but gained prominence as a genre (albeit with no specific form) with Beethoven’s sets.

CIMBALOM – a Hungarian dulcimer, best known to concert audiences through its use in Kodály’s Háry János.

ECLOGUE – in music a piece in a pastoral character, first used in the 19th century by Tomášek. The term comes from classical literature, where it is associated with a pastoral genre of Greek poetry developed by Theocritus; in Latin Virgil’s Bucolics are an example.

FURIANT – a lively Czech couple dance in triple time, traditionally characterised by changing rhythms (nothing to do with ‘fury’ – in Czech the word refers to a ‘proud, swaggering, conceited man’).

MINUET AND SCHERZO – the scherzo (literally a ‘joke’) as a genre was a creation of Beethoven. For composers such as Mozart and Haydn the third movement of symphonies and some chamber works had typically been a minuet (in a dance-like triple time and featuring a contrasting central section call a trio). In Beethoven’s hands it acquired a joking and playful mood (sometimes whimsical and startling) as well as a much faster tempo.

OSSIA – a musical term used to mark an alternative version of a passage in notated music – an ossia can either be a simpler version (as is often found in 19th-century virtuoso piano music) or an embellished, and inevitably trickier, version (more typical in vocal music).

SONATA – this term can refer to both a musical genre and a musical form. The classical sonata is a three-movement (or, later, a four-movement) work for solo instrument in which the first movement, and sometimes the last movement, is in sonata form.

The term SONATA FORM was conceived in the 19th century to describe the harmonically based structure most Classical composers had adopted for the first movements of their sonatas and symphonies. It involves the EXPOSITION, or presentation of themes and subjects: the first in the tonic or home key, the second in a contrasting key. Traditionally the exposition is repeated, and the tension between the two keys is then intensified in the DEVELOPMENT, where the themes are manipulated and varied as the music moves further and further away from the ultimate goal of the home key. Tension is resolved in the RECAPITULATION, where both subjects are restated in the tonic. Sometimes a CODA (‘tail’) is added to enhance the sense of finality.

In much of the classical repertoire, movement titles are taken from the Italian words that indicate the tempo and mood. A selection of terms from this program is included here.

- Allegretto – lively, not so fast as Allegro
- Allegro – fast
- Allegro moderato – moderately fast
- Allegro scherzando – fast, playfully
- Allegro sostenuto – fast, sustained
- Andante – at a walking pace

This glossary is intended only as a quick and easy guide, not as a set of comprehensive and absolute definitions. Most of these terms have many subtle shades of meaning which cannot be included for reasons of space.
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LISZT
Emanuel Ax has recorded both the Liszt piano concertos with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia Orchestra. It is available in two separate releases, an earlier one coupling them with Schoenberg’s Piano Concerto and a more recent issue with Liszt’s Piano Sonata in B minor.
SONY 53289 (WITH SCHOENBERG)
SONY 94746 (WITH THE SONATA)
Australian pianist Leslie Howard recorded every note that Liszt set down for piano in a marathon series for the Hyperion label, accompanied by his excellent program notes. For the specific works in this program, seek out:
Volume 38: including the Two Episodes from Lenau’s Faust
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Liszt Waltzes
HYPERION CDA66201

Broadcast Diary

JUNE–JULY
21 June, 8pm
MOZART AND GRIEG
Michael Dauth violin-director
Jasminka Stancul piano
Grieg, Mozart, Bridge
28 June, 12.05pm
IN BLACK AND WHITE
Dene Olding violin-director
Ian Munro piano
Lambert, Waxman, Mozart
4 July, 8pm
MAHLER 1
Gianluigi Gelmetti conductor
Michael Dauth violin
Shefali Pryor oboe
Matthew Wilkie bassoon
Catherine Hewgill cello
Haydn, Mahler
29 & 30 July, 8pm
SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION
Nicholas Milton conductor
Finalists to be advised
Mozart concertos

Webcast Diary

Selected Sydney Symphony concerts are recorded for webcast by BigPond and are available On Demand.
Visit: sydneysymphony.bigpondmusic.com
June webcast:
EMANUEL AX PLAYS MOZART
Available On Demand

sydneysymphony.com
Visit the Sydney Symphony online for concert information, podcasts, and to read the program book in advance of the concert.
Born in Lvov, Poland, Emanuel Ax moved to Canada with his family when he was a boy. He studied at the Juilliard School, New York, and subsequently won the Young Concert Artists Award; he also attended Columbia University, where he majored in French. He captured public attention in 1974 when he won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. Five years later he won the coveted Avery Fisher Prize.

This season he has returned to several orchestras with which he works closely, including the Minnesota Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the Chicago, Houston, Toronto, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and National symphony orchestras. In Europe he has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, and the German Symphony Orchestra Berlin. An international solo recital tour took him to London’s Wigmore Hall, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Carnegie Hall.

In the 2005/06 season he was Pianist-in-Residence with the Berlin Philharmonic. Other highlights have included performing with his long-standing colleague Yefim Bronfman for the opening gala of the New York Philharmonic in 2006 and recital tours with chamber music partner Yo-Yo Ma.

Emanuel Ax has been an exclusive Sony Classical recording artist since 1987. Recent releases include Strauss’s Enoch Arden narrated by Patrick Stewart; piano duo music by Brahms and Rachmaninov with Yefim Bronfman; and period-instrument performances of Chopin’s works for piano and orchestra. Two volumes of his cycle of Haydn’s piano sonatas received Grammy awards, as did his recordings of Beethoven and Brahms cello sonatas with Yo-Yo Ma. His discography ranges from solo Brahms and Liszt and Schoenberg concertos to Piazzolla tangos and the premiere recording of Adams’ Century Rolls with the Cleveland Orchestra.

This last reflects his commitment to contemporary composers, premiering works by Adams, Christopher Rouse, Krzysztof Penderecki, Bright Sheng, and Melinda Wagner. He is also a devoted chamber musician and, in addition to Yo-Yo Ma, has worked regularly with such artists as Young Uck Kim, Cho-Liang Lin, Edgar Meyer, Peter Serkin, Jaime Laredo, and the late Isaac Stern.

On his most recent engagement with the Sydney Symphony in 2002, Emanuel Ax played Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto with conductor Andrey Boreyko, and appeared in recital.

This week Emanuel Ax is also performing Mozart’s Piano Concerto in E flat, K482, with the Sydney Symphony and conductor Robin Ticciati. Remaining concerts:

- **Friday 20 June** | 8pm
- **Saturday 21 June** | 8pm

**Sydney Opera House**
Founded in 1932, the Sydney Symphony has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Last year the Orchestra celebrated its 75th anniversary and the milestone achievements during its distinguished history.

Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, where it gives more than 100 performances each year, the Sydney Symphony also performs concerts in a variety of venues around Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra world-wide recognition for artistic excellence.

Critical to the success of the Sydney Symphony has been the leadership given by its former Chief Conductors including: Sir Eugene Goossens, Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Edo de Waart. Also contributing to the outstanding success of the Orchestra have been collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky.

Maestro Gianluigi Gelmetti, whose appointment followed a ten-year relationship with the Orchestra as Guest Conductor, is now in his fifth and final year as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony, a position he holds in tandem with that of Music Director at Rome Opera. Maestro Gelmetti’s particularly strong rapport with French and German repertoire is complemented by his innovative programming in the Shock of the New concerts.

The Sydney Symphony’s award-winning Education Program is central to the Orchestra’s commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The Sydney Symphony also maintains an active commissioning program promoting the work of Australian composers, and recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards and Brett Dean, as well as Liza Lim, who was composer-in-residence from 2004 to 2006.

In 2009 Maestro Vladimir Ashkenazy will begin his three-year tenure as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.
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ACN 003 311 064  ABN 27 003 311 064

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