

# 1 Music and Culture in Schubert's Vienna

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In Schubert's time, musical and cultural life developed in an exciting way, shifting from the private to the public sphere. Simultaneously, a new type of musician emerged who was no longer sustained by the aristocracy or the court, but was a socially independent, freelance artist who made his living solely by giving concerts, getting commissions, and selling his published music. Franz Schubert was one of the first composers who lived such a life. He was successful in doing this and made a career in a place that is still known as the "City of Music."

That Schubert could make such a career still needs some explaining, however. Contemporary reports that portray Vienna as a liberal and open-minded place in which artists could easily thrive must be examined for what they are worth. The following example of such a report by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, a North German composer and writer, appears too good to be true:

For anyone who is able to fully appreciate life's pleasures, Vienna is surely the happiest, richest, and most agreeable dwelling place in Europe. This pertains especially to artists, and perhaps particularly to musicians. Vienna has everything that marks a great residential city, and this to a very splendid great extent. It has a great, rich, educated, art-loving, hospitable, and civilized fine aristocracy; it has a rich, social, and hospitable middle class, which also does not lack educated and well-informed men and amiable families; and it has a well-off, good-humored, and merry population. All social classes love enjoyment and good living, and life is arranged so that everyone can find any amusement that is known and loved in the modern world in high-quality events, and can enjoy them safely and with full convenience.<sup>1</sup>

As Reichardt was a privileged person who took part in high society, the social circumstances of ordinary people were beyond his awareness. His description of the lower class of society was particularly far from reality.<sup>2</sup> The conditions of everyday life in Schubert's native city were not joyful, but difficult. Prices for food, rent, and clothing were steadily rising, sanitary and medical arrangements insufficient, the drinking water was contaminated, winter damp, and summer dusty. As a result, the average life expectancy was quite low. About 250,000 people lived in

[11]

Vienna, including 984 clergy; 4,342 peers, officials, and notables; and 9,201 wealthy middle-class citizens, tradesmen, and artists. There were also 31,552 peasants, about 40,000 house servants, and 6,000 footmen – as well as 5,196 horses, 113 oxen, and 1,233 cows.<sup>3</sup> These numbers summarize the population of the inner city of Vienna (today the first district) and the thirty-three suburbs that are spread out in a circle and confined by a brick wall and the river Danube in the north (see Figure 1.1). The inner city, where the court, most of the clergy, and the aristocrats lived with their servants, was characterized by narrow but paved roads and heavy traffic. Its marvelous buildings, such as the Hofburg, which housed the imperial family and many government offices, along with several great churches and many palaces, still shape the appearance of the city today. It was the center of cultural life. In the suburbs, the lifestyle was quite rural, with country houses that were less densely built and often had spacious gardens. Schubert, the son of a schoolteacher, was born in one of those suburbs and moved to the inner city at age eleven to get his professional musical education. He stayed there for the rest of his life, but enjoyed excursions to the countryside of the suburbs and further off in his leisure time.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Political Context**

The period when Reichardt visited Vienna – from the end of November 1808 to the beginning of April 1809 – was politically turbulent and unstable. Austria was in the throes of the Napoleonic wars, with volatile fortunes. It had already lost territories in the south and west of its vast empire, and in 1804, as the Holy Roman Empire crumbled, Franz I was declared Emperor of Austria, anticipating his loss in 1806 of the title of Holy Roman Emperor. After Napoleon crowned himself King of Italy, his army reached Vienna on November 13, 1805. Many people fled, but the city was not damaged, and Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* was premiered soon afterwards with an audience of mostly French soldiers. The foreign troops stayed only two months, but threatened the city again three years later. In the last days of his visit, Reichardt attended a public festival in the large courtly *Redoutensaal*, where the national enthusiasm of the people was encouraged through music, leading to an enormous euphoria and glorification of war. Reichardt could anticipate where this would lead, and departed soon after this impressive event.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the propaganda was the building of a militia army – but it retreated, and Napoleon re-entered Vienna on May 13, 1809, mere weeks after Reichardt's departure. This time the city suffered severely: the artillery

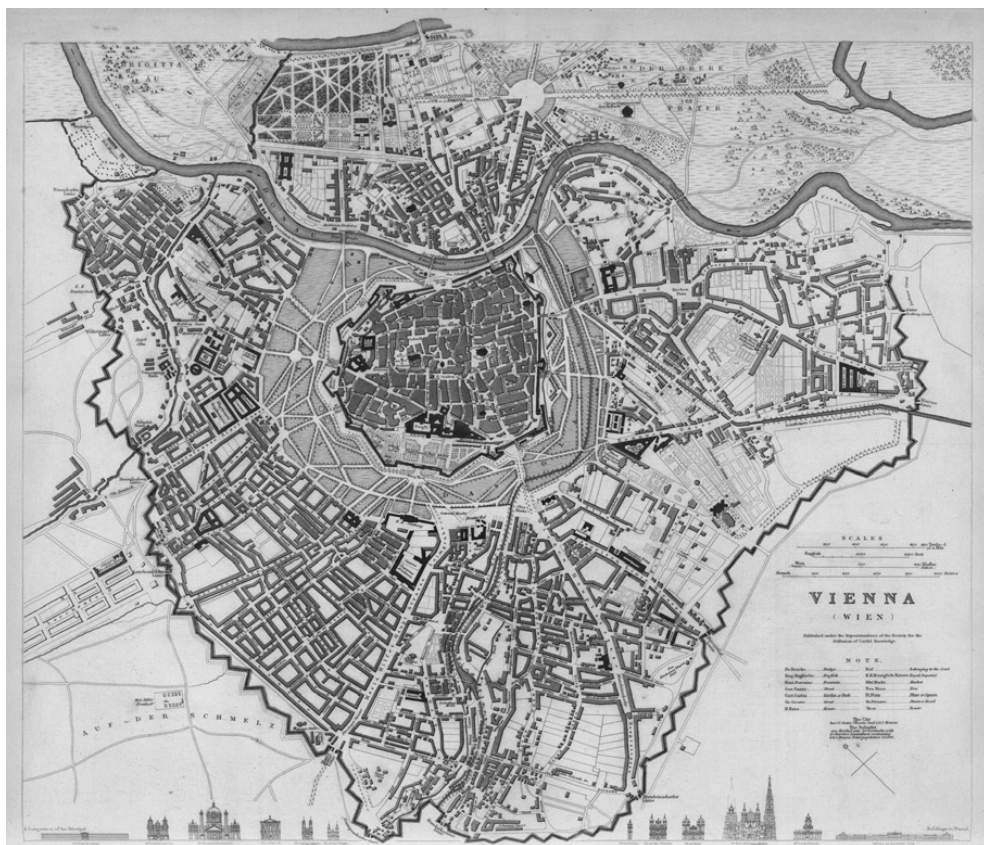


Figure 1.1 Engraved map of Vienna, hand colored (1833)<sup>5</sup>

bombardment destroyed structures and killed many people. Everybody who could flee left the city. Joseph Haydn died two weeks later, and Schubert's school, the Stadtkonvikt, was hit by a shell. In the next months, Vienna's population suffered from mass starvation, and daily life was very hard. According to the terms of the Treaty of Schönbrunn, signed in October, Napoleon was again expelled, but Austria paid a high price: Emperor Franz gave his daughter Marie-Louise to the French emperor as a bride and forfeited lands with a population of 3.5 million. Moreover, the high war debts resulted in state bankruptcy in 1811, with an 80 percent deflation of Austrian currency. In the next years, Napoleon was defeated, first at the Battle of Leipzig (1813) and finally at the Battle of Waterloo (1815). The young Schubert reacted to these historical events with two songs – “Auf den Sieg der Deutschen” (The Victory of the Germans, D81) and “Die Befreier Europas in Paris” (Europe's Liberators in Paris, D104) – and the canon “Verschwunden sind die Schmerzen” (The Pains Have Disappeared, D88).

At the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), the borders of Europe were newly drawn and a balance of power established, intended to prevent future wars. For Austria a time of peace began, with the motto of “tranquility and order” on its flags. This promising restart, however, was marred by a strong police and a system of spies intended to nip any revolutionary ideas in the bud. The state chancellor, Prince Clemens von Metternich (1773–1859), came to personify these oppressive policies that restricted civil society in order to prevent conspiracies. No work could be published without approval from the Office of Censorship.<sup>7</sup> Schubert suffered from these regulations when the libretto of his opera *Der Graf von Gleichen* (D918) was rejected in 1826, and the opera was never finished.

Turning back again to Reichardt’s report of Vienna’s cultural life, it was not all wrong and has its merits despite its restricted perspective. As a musician and man of the theater, Reichardt attended an astonishingly large number of musical events that the city offered even in these difficult times. He attended twenty-one opera performances, sixteen major public concerts, nine dance events, and almost sixty semi-public or private gatherings with music, often mounted at palaces and combined with tea or dinner. Sometimes he even attended three performances in a day: a lunch concert, a chamber concert in the afternoon, and a theater production in the evening. The rich offerings of cultural life are reflected in a survey of musical art in Vienna that was published by a local newspaper a few months before Reichardt arrived. It emphasizes that “nowhere else is music played by so many people, so deeply loved, and so intensely practiced as here.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Performance Venues, Musical Institutions, and Types of Events<sup>9</sup>**

In Schubert’s lifetime, Vienna had five theaters: two court theaters in the inner city and three playhouses in the suburbs. At the Burgtheater, one could enjoy the performance of classical German dramas on the highest level, performed by an internationally acclaimed company. Schubert appreciated this theater, although its facilities were shabby and uncomfortable. It was built for about one thousand spectators and had good acoustics but bad ventilation. The Theater am Kärntnerthor specialized in opera and ballet. Its furniture was elegant, but the house was cramped, stuffy, and hot. It had its own orchestra and a resident dance company. From 1810 onwards, the theater presented operas and musical comedies by Mozart, Weigl, Spontini, and Méhul, all in the German

language. Light operas were often combined with a ballet. Schubert contributed his one-act Singspiel *Die Zwillingsbrüder* (D647) to the repertoire and was engaged for a short time as a vocal coach. Meanwhile, the audience lost its interest in German operas, preferring the Italian repertoire. In 1821, the Kärntnerthor-Theater was given into the hands of the Italian impresario Domenico Barbaja, who attracted famous opera singers trained in the Italian style and offered Rossini a place to present his most recent works. Rossini's opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was staged there in 1819, and many other works by the Italian followed, also admired by Schubert. Rossini's light-hearted operas, with their melodious arias and effervescent plots, were extremely popular with Viennese audiences.

Among the theaters in the suburbs, the Theater an der Wien had the largest and most beautiful building. With its modern set design, it exceeded even the court theaters. More than 2,000 seats were offered, and a broad variety of repertoire was presented. Its program included dramas, folk and magic plays, light operas, ballets, and melodramas. Schubert's music for the magic play *Die Zauberharfe* (D644) was premiered there. The level of the orchestra was high and comparable to the court orchestra. Tickets were cheaper than for the theaters in the inner city, but significantly higher than for the two other suburban houses. In the Theater in der Josefstadt, the great Austrian actor and playwright Ferdinand Raimund (1790–1836) achieved his initial successes. In 1817, he took over the company of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt and led the Viennese folk comedy to a climax. Schubert was quite interested in this popular genre, which often featured catchy, memorable music. In 1822, he may have attended a performance of a magic play by Adolph Bäuerle: *Alina oder Wien in einem anderen Erdteil* (*Alina or Vienna on Another Continent*), its music by the highly successful theater composer Wenzel Müller (1767–1835).

The theaters served other purposes as well. Due to the small number of performance venues for orchestras, they were also used for public concerts on religious or state holidays, when theater performances were forbidden and the stages were available. To keep the costs for lighting and heating in the winter as low as possible, the noon hour was preferred for such extra events. The earliest concert organization was the *Tonkünstler-Sozietät*, founded in 1771. Four times a year, this society produced a benefit concert in the Burgtheater for widows and orphans of professional musicians – but its frequent performances of Haydn's oratorios *Die Schöpfung* (The Creation) and *Die Jahreszeiten* (The Seasons) attracted more and more criticism. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, this society faded in importance.

The idea of these benefit performances was taken over by other social groups. Concerts to support needy personnel of both court theaters were organized, and events to promote the public hospital were launched. Such benefit academies were an essential element of Vienna's concert life in the early nineteenth century. Though they were not always on the highest artistic level, their diverse repertoire and entertaining quality made them something special. Italian arias from current operas and virtuoso solo pieces were as popular as the interspersed recitations of poems and pantomimed depictions of tableaux.

There were also many concerts featuring excellent local musicians or traveling virtuosos performing for their own financial benefit. Every reputable Viennese musician, including Beethoven and Schubert, presented "Privat-Concerte" with his students, friends, and family members in the audience. These performances also had mixed programs. Vocal and instrumental pieces, overtures, and individual movements from multi-movement works were presented in random order.

For the new genre of the public concert, venues other than the theaters were available. The *Redoutensaal* in the Hofburg was particularly favored by external virtuosos who could expect a more numerous audience. The even larger hall of the same place was used less often. It could be filled only by larger organizations or when a star such as Niccolò Paganini was in town. Benefit concerts, larger productions by local musicians, and events with full orchestra were performed in the university hall and in the hall of Lower Austria's statehouse (*Landständischer Saal*). The latter had two sweeping exterior staircases and convenient acoustics, but unfortunately no heating.

More comfortable venues were rooms in inns, which could be rented for smaller events. They bore typical names such as *Zum römischen Kaiser* (The Roman Emperor), *Zur Mehlgrube* (The Flour Pit), or *Zum roten Igel* (The Red Hedgehog). During the carnival season before Lent, the same rooms were used for dancing. Dance music was very popular, and dance orchestras emerged in various sizes according to the dimensions of the location. In inns, small ensembles were sufficient; the *Redoutensaal* needed ten to fifteen musicians; and in the *Apolloaal* the orchestra comprised as many as sixty members. The latter was a very spacious, newly built establishment catering to both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy; it was in the suburb Schottenfeld (today known as Neubau, Vienna's seventh district). A dance event started with a promenade, followed by a slow march or a polonaise, and then a series of quadrilles and quick dances, such as the galop. The typical Viennese waltz was not established until about 1820.

Members of the middle class, such as Schubert, and of lower social classes – those who did not travel with closed carriages within the city – attended

outdoor musical events. There were many of these in public gardens, markets, fairs, squares, streets, and backyards. The musicians who were active in these public spaces in Vienna around 1800 included itinerant harp players, folk-singers, ballad-sellers, and organ-grinders. Many of them were blind, ill, or disabled people who made their livings from donations. Thus the Viennese populace supported some of the poorest members of society.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, music was performed in church services. The most prestigious venue was the imperial court chapel, where a full mass was performed every Sunday at 11 a.m. Performances of high quality could also be heard in the Augustiner church. Other churches in the inner city and the thirty parishes in the suburbs made great efforts and performed church music at a high level. The parish church in the suburb of Lichtental was Schubert's native church, where he took music lessons from the organist in his early days. Schubert was also friendly with Salomon Sulzer, a famous Jewish cantor with an extraordinary voice who was active in Vienna from 1820 onwards. For Sulzer, Schubert composed his *Psalm 92* (D953), a song for the Sabbath set for choir and baritone solo.

Private or semi-private musical events traditionally occurred in the palaces of the aristocracy, where Reichardt was invited so often. Depending on their financial capabilities, these noble families maintained a string quartet, a wind band, or even a small house orchestra. This was the social world of Beethoven, but not of Schubert, who was closely affiliated with Vienna's bourgeoisie. After the fortunes of most of the aristocratic families were dramatically reduced as a result of major contributions to armament during the war years, this social class gradually had to withdraw from its leading role in Viennese musical life. At the same time, private circles emerged around distinguished individuals such as court officials, wealthy artists, and members of the upper classes. The privy councilor Raphael Kiesewetter, court secretary Ignaz Mosel, brewery owner Vincenz Neuling, and the writer Karoline Pichler, who hosted a highly esteemed salon, belonged to this group. One needed a written invitation to attend, but visitors came from different social groups and did not always know each other. While courtly etiquette was imitated in such circles, the enjoyment of art rather than social interaction stood at the center of interest.

Making music together as evening entertainment was also appreciated by ordinary citizens. People met privately with their friends or in the immediate family circle, enjoying domestic music in its proper sense. Schubert, for instance, gained his first musical experience in his family string quartet. The so-called Schubertiades, a phenomenon of his later years, are discussed below. Minor genres that were rarely on the program of public concerts were particularly fostered: vocal ensembles, songs,

instrumental works in smaller scorings, string quartets, and piano music. Piano dances were the favorite genre. The atmosphere of such meetings was friendly and informal, with invitations often made only by word of mouth. In some cases, small orchestras developed out of such circles that were able to perform entire symphonies in private homes. When the famous Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick described the years from 1810 to 1820 as the pinnacle of musical dilettantism, he did not mean it in a negative sense.<sup>11</sup> In this time, “dilettante” meant a person who made music privately rather than as a profession, but on a level often comparable with that of professional musicians.

### **Concert Series and Professionalization**

It was also a bourgeois initiative that led to the foundation of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Society of Friends of Music) in 1812. During the nineteenth century, this society became the most prominent musical institution in Vienna, and it is still active today. The founding members were responding to the often one-sided and shallow programs of public concerts, which also promoted “classical” works by composers such as Haydn or Mozart. According to the by-laws of 1814, the chief aim of the *Gesellschaft* was the development of all branches of music. Leading personalities of this organization were its first president, the aforementioned Ignaz Mosel, and Josef Sonnleithner, who belonged to a respected music-loving family of lawyers. The *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* was open only to dilettantes and soon counted a thousand members. It organized an annual music festival with significant works on the program. In 1815, Händel’s *Messiah* was scheduled. Performances could be attended by anyone who paid an entrance fee.

An important issue within the society was the equal status of all its members. Seats were assigned by lottery, and in the early years, soloists, conductors, and instrumentalists were only chosen from among the members in alternation. A special pride lay in the fact that musicians of all social classes played together, united by the society in their shared love for music. In the orchestra, counts sat next to clerks, head officials next to secretaries, professors next to students, while aristocratic ladies sat beside girls from the bourgeoisie in the choir. The German poet Ludwig Rellstab, who visited Vienna in 1825, was enthusiastic about the quality of the performances and commented: “It would be great if we could achieve a similar level in Berlin.”<sup>12</sup>

Each season had four society concerts and about sixteen smaller evening concerts. They were mainly for members, who formed either the



audience or the orchestra. Symphonies and overtures by renowned Viennese composers, as well as solo music with orchestral accompaniment and major choral works, were on the program of the society concerts. Because of their great success, these events soon had to move from the smaller to the larger *Redoutensaal*. In late fall 1817, the concert series known as *Abend-Unterhaltungen* (Evening Entertainments) began. These performances, regularly scheduled on Thursdays between 7 and 9 p.m., were more like events in Viennese salons than public concerts. They actually started in private houses and later moved to the official location of the society, the *Roter Igel*. Leopold Sonnleithner, Joseph's nephew, made himself a name by managing the *Abend-Unterhaltungen*, where chamber music for string ensembles, pieces for solo instruments, songs with piano accompaniment, vocal quartets, arias, and duets were played. From 1825 on, Schubert was the composer played most often after Rossini; in earlier years, Mozart and Beethoven were slightly ahead of him.<sup>13</sup>

In the same year, 1817, the society established a singing school, which soon developed into a conservatory offering instruction on all orchestral instruments. The musical education of young people was already laid down in the by-laws and was one of the society's central concerns. Initially nobody expected that through these regular lessons, instrumentalists would be trained at such a high technical level that they were competitive with professional orchestra musicians. These trained performers also gradually displaced the dilettantes from active concert life. Thus the original function of the society was finally undermined by its own conservatory, and the musical scene in Vienna became more and more professional.<sup>14</sup>

A second bourgeois concert series called *Concerts spirituels* was started by the choir director of the Augustiner church, Franz Xaver Gebauer. At first, the musicians met every two weeks in the inn *Zur Mehlgrube* to cultivate serious music, and later they moved to the *Landständischer Saal*. Their first public concert took place on October 1, 1819, followed by seventeen concerts each season. The ambitious program, played by a choir and an orchestra totalling about one hundred musicians, proved quite popular at the beginning. In this concert series, Schubert heard Mozart's Symphony No. 41 ("Jupiter") and presumably also the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Only in later years did critics lament the low quality of the performances due to the small number of rehearsals. In some cases, the orchestra had to play symphonies and oratorios at sight.

A new type of event was subscription concerts: series of concerts for which people could buy a cheap season ticket. The first such concert series was founded in 1804 by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the first violinist of the

famous so-called Rasumovsky Quartet that had close ties to Beethoven. This professional ensemble premiered several string quartets at the highest level, including Schubert's A Minor Quartet (D804). Vienna was the first European city where one could hear quartets performed in public concerts on a regular basis. However, in all other areas of institutional music life, it lagged behind cities like Paris and London.<sup>15</sup>

## **Lied, Biedermeier, and Musical Public**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Lied genre did not play an important role in public musical life, but it was central to the culture of sociability. In almost every bourgeois household in Vienna, a piano was available, and music lessons were provided for the children of such families, including girls. Private and semi-private gatherings were the domain for the performance of songs, with the Schubertiade as a paramount example. The first known event of this type took place in January 1821 when Franz von Schober, one of Schubert's best friends, invited fourteen of his acquaintances to his home. Although the word "Schubertiade" was not mentioned, this seems to have been the starting point for an irregular series of such gatherings.

Schubert's friends gave detailed reports in their letters and diaries about what usually happened at these events. According to their notes, it was always a great entertainment with drinking, eating, dancing, and music-making until late at night. Schubert was often sitting at the piano, playing his four-hand pieces with a friend or accompanying his songs performed by the opera singer Johann Michael Vogl, his favorite interpreter. For the composer, it was a great opportunity to present his new works in a semi-public sphere. The audience of about twenty people consisted of intellectuals and artists from Viennese society: writers, painters, musicians, actors, and officials, who were all on friendly terms and gathered mainly for social reasons. Women, usually those associated with the invited male guests, also attended.<sup>16</sup> The last Schubertiade took place at the end of January 1828, the year Schubert died. The pieces performed that time included some four-hand piano variations and one of his piano trios.

Domestic music-making has been interpreted as a retreat from the policed public life and the suppressing policy of the government. It is seen as an epitome of Biedermeier culture, which fostered a private, non-political civic life. The term "Biedermeier" was applied to this time period later, referring to a literary figure called Gottlieb Biedermeier, who was the protagonist in a series of satirical articles in the journal *Fliegende Blätter* (1855–57). He was a schoolmaster who represented a confident, philistine,

and complacent man from the middle class. Since it appears to lack any element of social protest and represents an ideal, family-centered world, Biedermeier art is often suspected of being naïve or even trivial.<sup>17</sup>

Schubert's songs, though, and specifically his *Winterreise*, hardly meet this description. They were also not completely excluded from public musical life. The first Schubert song heard in public was "Schäfers Klagelied" (D121; Shepherd's Lament) which was performed at the end of February 1819. The concert at the inn *Zum römischen Kaiser* was organized by Eduard Jäll, a member of the orchestra at the Theater an der Wien and principal of the Hatwig private orchestra, in which Schubert played the viola. The song was integrated into a typical mixed program, squeezed between a polonaise for solo violin and a recitation of a poem. The singer, Franz Jäger, was a colleague of Jäll's in the same theater, and the pianist's name is not mentioned. "Schäfers Klagelied" was repeated a month later at a benefit concert for impoverished theater performers, and another month later in the *Landständischer Saal*.

Another important occasion for song performances was the *Abend-Unterhaltungen* of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*. At the beginning of this concert series, vocal ensembles by Schubert were more popular; songs with piano only gradually became part of the program. On January 25, 1821, the famous "Erlkönig" (D328) was the first Schubert song that could be heard there; this was the first public performance of that song. The *Abend-Unterhaltungen* were also the venue for the premiere of *Winterreise*, at least in part. Only the first number of the cycle, "Gute Nacht," was performed on January 10, 1828, shortly after its publication. This was the only public performance of a song from *Winterreise* during Schubert's lifetime.<sup>18</sup> Concerts presenting exclusively or mostly songs developed only in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the practice of performing song cycles in full became normal even later.<sup>19</sup>

Musical life in Schubert's time had two sides. On the one hand, Biedermeier house music cultivated a musical experience for a broad segment of the population within a private, intimate ambiance. On the other hand, public music and commercial concert life developed and made important advances, despite the governmental fear of revolutionary activism within such societies. Police approval was required for all public concerts, and the programs and texts had to pass the censor. That music events could indeed be an opportunity for political discussions is documented in a report from 1828 by another visitor to Vienna: the well-traveled and colorful, though somewhat unreliable writer Charles Sealsfield (pen name of Carl Anton Postl). Like Reichardt, Sealsfield had

access to the aristocratic salons, which were by then a declining institution and only a sideshow of the rich public musical life. He wrote:

It is in the circles of the nobility, and the wealthier class of bankers, that you will find a certain degree of political freedom and liberty of speech, newspapers, and as they are called, “Verbotene Bücher,” (prohibited books) in every tongue. There are no political saloons of liberals, as there are in Paris, except [in] the very highest families of the nobility; where, however, none but the most intimate and confidential friends are admitted: but during a dancing, a dining, or whist party, some couples of gentlemen will loose themselves from the tables, and step just occasionally into the next room; or a letter received from Paris or London – of course not through the post – will glide from hand to hand, in that imperceptible way which Metternich has taught them. That is the way to concert in Austria, measures, plans, and even something more – in the midst of pleasure and gaiety. They are forced into this; as the Emperor though far from being a Caesar, acts fully on this principle with respect to his subjects, – and thinks himself and his family secure as long as his subjects are dancing and singing.<sup>20</sup>

The mounting social, economic, and political tensions that seethed below the surface of society culminated in the Revolutions of 1848. They brought the Biedermeier period to an abrupt end. In Austria, people protested against the long-standing conservatism of the government, fighting for liberal and democratic changes. These strong movements did not destroy, but did shake the Habsburg Empire. The revolt was finally suppressed, the weak emperor Ferdinand I replaced by his nephew Franz Joseph, and a new phase of neo-absolutism was entered. By the time these political turbulences happened, Sealsfield was in Switzerland in a safe haven, and Schubert had already been dead for twenty years.

## Notes

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