

## 15 Schubert's reception in France: a chronology (1828–1928)

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At the same time as Schubert's fame started to spread across Europe during the late 1820s and 1830s, Paris rose to unprecedented heights as the Continent's foremost and busiest musical center. In spite of King Louis-Philippe's overt lack of interest in music (manifested in a complete absence of governmental support) the French capital became, more than it ever was, a place of intense rivalry between composers and performers from many different countries. Rossini and Meyerbeer (who had settled there before the July Revolution), Chopin, Liszt, and Wagner – to name but a few – bear witness to this extraordinary attraction. Particularly illustrative is the career of one of Schubert's champions, the Bohemian violin virtuoso Josef Slawjk (1806–33), who, unable to withstand such a competitive atmosphere, had to retreat to Vienna, obviously a less strenuous city.

Success in Paris could make the difference between international glory and recognition on a purely local level. The establishment of Schubert's fame, therefore, even though posthumous, necessitated the acknowledgment of the Parisian public. Hence the importance of retracing the history of Schubert's reception in France, more perhaps than in any other non-German country.

The historical process of discovering Schubert's musical output in France during the nineteenth century and up to the centenary of his death, falls roughly into four uneven periods.

### **1827–35: From the first edition of a work by Schubert to Nourrit's performance of *la Jeune Religieuse***

That France, particularly Paris, represented a potential market for Schubert's music, we learn from a letter of October 1828 from the German publisher Schott to Schubert, where the former deplores the "uselessness" of the Impromptus (D935) for sale to the French public (SDB 817). Even before Schubert's death, however, a work of his had been

published in this country – the *Rondeau brillant* for Violin and Piano, Op. 70 (D895), written for Slawik and released by Artaria in Vienna in 1827, appeared the same year from the Parisian publisher Simon Richault (1780–1866). This piece was followed in 1829 by the Piano Trio in E flat, Op. 100 (D929), and by the two string quartets, Op. 125 Nos. 1 and 2 (D87, in E flat, and D353, in E), in 1831.

Despite a commonly held opinion, it was thus not Schubert's Lieder, but rather his chamber music that first penetrated Gallic soil. The earliest public performance recorded is also that of a chamber work, the Piano Trio in E flat, played by Mlle Malzel at one of the Colbert *matinées* of the Tilmant brothers at the end of 1833 or the beginning of 1834.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, the publication of other instrumental pieces included the following:

- 1831 *Les Viennoises. Walses autrichiennes pour le piano* Op. 9 (D365) and Op. 18 (D145)
- 1832 *Walzes allemandes et deux Ecossaises pour violon et piano*, Op. 33 (D783)  
*Marche funèbre à l'occasion de la mort d'Alexandre pour le piano à quatre mains*, Op. 55 (D859)
- 1832–33 String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 29 (D804)  
String Quartet in D Minor (D810)  
Impromptus, Op. 90 Nos. 1 and 2 (D899)  
Piano Sonata in A Major, Op. 120 (D664)
- 1834 *Variations à 4 mains*, Op. 10 (D624)  
*Quatre Polonaises pour le piano à quatre mains*, Op. 75 (D599)

During this time Schubert's songs were only known through a few sets of variations by Carl Czerny,<sup>2</sup> until the publication by Richault – in a French translation by Bélanger – of the *Six Mélodies célèbres* in 1833 or 1834.<sup>3</sup> According to various sources, some of the Lieder had already appeared before certain members of the capital's élite. As early as 1832, Franz Liszt played them in the salons of Alexis-François Rio or of his own mistress, the countess Marie d'Agoult. It is at the home of the Czech banker-composer Josef Dessauer (1798–1876) that the celebrated singer Adolphe Nourrit (1802–39) heard him play *Erkönig* in 1834.<sup>4</sup> Nourrit was obviously conquered and in December sang *Ave Maria* (D839) in the salon of the then successful *romance* composer Louise (or “Loïsa”) Puget (1810–89). In January 1835, Nourrit interpreted an orchestral version of *la Religieuse* (*Die junge Nonne* D828) at the Conservatoire, which met immediate approbation, notably from Berlioz.<sup>5</sup> Two days after the

concert, the critic Joseph d'Ortigue wrote with a mixture of perspicacity and over-optimism:

It is sad, for an enlightened nation, that it should be necessary to teach the public, and even some artists, the name of a man who, when he is better appreciated, will take his place between Beethoven and Weber. The *Société des concerts* would claim new rights to the gratitude of the friends of the art if . . . it did for Schubert's orchestral music, what in more modest meetings, MM. Urhan, Liszt, Hiller, Nourrit, Tilmant, etc., etc., did for the songs, trios and quartets of this great master.<sup>6</sup>

### 1835–50: Schubert's rise to fame as a Lied composer

Even though d'Ortigue implies that some of the chamber works had already been performed in private circles before Nourrit's concert, and despite public performances of the slow movement of the D Minor Quartet by Chrétien Urhan in 1836,<sup>7</sup> of the Piano Trio in E flat (with the young César Franck taking up the piano part) the following year, and of the "Trout" Quintet (D667) with Doehler and Tilmant in 1839, it is the songs which brought Schubert into the limelight. Meanwhile, his instrumental pieces, not meeting with such success, seemed relegated to comparative obscurity. Besides Nourrit, who introduced a handful of songs to the audiences in Marseilles, Lyon (performing with Liszt), and perhaps Bordeaux – but committed suicide in 1839 – the great exponent of Schubert's Lieder was François-Pierre Wartel (1806–82). A pupil of Nourrit's, he became so identified with the composer that he was bestowed with the nickname "Wartel-Schubert." Like Nourrit, he traveled around the country, singing in Amiens in 1846 and in Nancy in 1849. Rouen had been initiated to *Ave Maria* at least in 1840, with the singer Mme Nathan-Treilhet. Other singers who promoted Schubert's Lieder include Jean-Antoine-Just Géraldy, Kathinka and Sabine Heinefetter, Cornélie Falcon, Sophie Bodin, Pauline Viardot, and Mlles Méquillet and Unald.

In the meantime, publication of the songs progressed steadily, so that by 1845 Richault offered no less than 336 distributed among fifteen series and four volumes. Maurice Schlesinger (1798–1871), the editor of the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* whose catalogue also included various dances and transcriptions, became Richault's main competitor. Starting with the Three Italian Songs, Op. 83 (D902) in 1837,<sup>8</sup> he advertised a collection of twenty-six songs in 1839 (in a translation by Emile Deschamps) which expanded to fifty-two the following year. Besides independent songs such

as *Tu es le repos* (*Du bist die Ruh* D776) and *Sois toujours mes seules amours* (*Sei mir gegrüßt* D741), this collection included many *Lieder* from the song cycles, particularly *Die schöne Müllerin* (D795).

The most striking feature of the period, however, is the vogue of the *Lied* transformations, from straightforward transcriptions to variations, fantasies, and elaborate paraphrases. After Czerny's example from the early 1830s, an army of arrangers ensued – although not all were entirely bereft of artistic dignity, notably Liszt and Stephen Heller (1813–88).<sup>9</sup> Besides those already quoted, transcriptions for the piano reveal the names of innumerable, more or less famous, virtuosos such as Heinrich Herz, César Franck, Charles Mayer, Alphonse Thys, Theodor von Doehler, Emile Prudent, Savart, Joseph Czerny, Victor Delacour, Edouard Wolff, Sir Charles Hallé. Other instrumental arrangements included cello (Elise Christiani, Félix Battanchon, Alexandre Batta, Joseph Merk), violin (Alexey Fyodorovtich L'vov, Nicolas Louis, C. Pfeiffer and Charles de Kontsky), cornet à pistons (P. Gatterman), and horn (Eugène Vivier). Some songs were also available with guitar accompaniment (by Napoléon Coste), while the most famous were even orchestrated by Liszt, Berlioz, and others.<sup>10</sup>

In the wake of Schubert's success, Dessauer, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, and Heinrich Proch tried their hand at the *Lieder* or at the newly born *mélodie*. The demand was such that in the early 1840s, when the fame of the composer was about to reach its peak, it was justly feared that the German *Lied* would kill the old French *romance* for good – as the following little scene amusingly bears witness:<sup>11</sup>

THE ROMANCE: I am eminently French, and I've come to beg you to protect me and take sides with me.

1841: Against whom?

THE LIED: Mein Gott! Against me, who come to take herr place. I am feiporrous like she, and morre dan she; I haffe morre naiffety dan she. I vos de feifforite tchilt of Schubert and I am now dat of Proch ant Dessauer. . . .<sup>12</sup>

## 1850 to 1870s–80s: Schubert's chamber music becomes standard repertory

Shortly before the next decade, though, the novelty of the *Lied* had waned, and interest shifted to figures such as Wagner, Verdi, Johann Strauss, and even Félicien David. Yet the second half of the century saw the accession of some of the chamber compositions to quasi-repertory status. If performances of these works seem rather infrequent during the

1840s (one of the trios was played at some Parisian *soirée* in 1847), they became almost weekly occurrences in the 1870s and the 1880s. The favorite items were the E Flat Piano Trio, the *Rondo brillant*, and the “Wanderer” Fantasy Op. 15 (D760) – most often heard in Liszt’s orchestration (Saint-Saëns regularly performed the solo part with Edouard Colonne conducting), albeit sometimes played on two pianos. The D Minor Quartet was only known through its slow movement, occasionally performed in a version for string orchestra (again under Colonne’s direction), while Girard orchestrated one of the most popular *Moment musical*, in F Minor (D780), for the other great concert-organizer of the time, Jules Padeloup. Among the other pieces to receive increasing exposure were the “Trout” Quintet, the *Divertissement hongrois* (D818) – which Eduard Reményi transcribed for violin – the Piano Trio in B flat, Op. 99 (D898), and the “Trockne Blumen” variations for flute and piano (D802). Although some of the piano sonatas had long been in print, documentation of public performances is scarce. Charles-Valentin Alkan, who had already played some pieces by Schubert in the 1830s, played the G Major Sonata, Op. 78 (D894), in March 1875, and Gustave Pradeau the B flat Sonata (D960) in April 1876. The violinist Jules Armingaud and his *Société classique*, whose names are recurrently linked with the performance of Schubert’s chamber music, gave the first performances of a movement from the G Major Quartet (D887) in March 1859 and of the Andante of the *Quatrième Quatuor* [?] in March 1865, yet with no further apparent consequence.

### 1870s–80s to 1928: From the discovery of Schubert the symphonist to the centenary of the composer’s death

Although Schubert’s religious music remained unknown in France throughout the century, with the possible exception of a Mass performed at Saint-Eustache in Paris on Ascension Day of 1836, a fragment from his unfinished oratorio *Lazarus* (D689) was sung by Pauline Viardot and her daughter Marianne in their Paris *hôtel particulier* in February 1878. In contrast, the first performance of the “Great” C Major Symphony (D944) took place relatively early, in November 1851, at the *Société philharmonique* under François Seghers’s baton. Although the reviewer of the *Ménestrel* praised the slow movement, “written in a masterly manner,” he condemned the “prolixity and the too many repetitions” of the other movements, especially finding fault with the extreme length of the finale.<sup>13</sup> The symphony was not played again until Padeloup conducted it at the *Cirque d’hiver* in February 1873, repeating the venture at the end

of 1875. The *Société des Concerts* only approached the work in January 1897 for the centenary of Schubert's birth, although they had rehearsed the first movement in 1841.<sup>14</sup> The first movement of the "Unfinished" Symphony (D759) was premiered in November 1878 by Padeloup, whose "role as a pioneer, an international mediator" was acknowledged by the *Gazette musicale*.<sup>15</sup> Both movements were then performed in October 1881 with Colonne at the Châtelet, and repeated the following year. The favorable, although not overwhelming, reception incited Emile Deldevez, the conductor of the *Société des concerts*, to take up the work with the Conservatoire orchestra. He conducted it twice in January 1883;<sup>16</sup> once again – especially in the light of the future popularity of the work – the reception was rather lukewarm:

The Allegro and Andante of an unfinished symphony by Schubert, which the *Société* allowed us to hear for the first time, are charming pieces. They are both in a pleasant style, but for that very reason stand in each other's way; we believe that the Andante could be reproduced to the best effect on its own.<sup>17</sup>

The only other orchestral piece revealed to the French public during the century seems to have been the overture to the opera *Fierrabras* (D796), which was played at the *Cirque Fernando* in November and December 1875 (and perhaps sometime before, in 1874). Of Schubert's stage works, the Singspiel *Die Verschworenen* (D787) appeared in a French adaptation by Victor Wilder under the title *la Croisade des dames* in February 1868, and was followed by a run of at least twenty nights.

Thus the panorama of Schubert's music offered to the French public in the nineteenth century remained, as elsewhere, largely incomplete. The Lied was well represented, and to a far lesser extent, the chamber music – although we remain uncertain about complete public performances of those works which we now regard as Schubert's most important contribution to this genre such as the late string quartets and piano sonatas. The only orchestral work to enjoy true popularity by 1928, however, was the B Minor Symphony. Schubert remained unrecognized as a composer of opera and religious music.

Yet we should refrain from condemning French audiences and critics altogether for their one-sided view and their failure to acknowledge the full range of Schubert's greatness. First, because this seems to have been the case in almost every other country; and second, because the French did not fail to rate Schubert as a musical genius of the very first order and let him enjoy considerable recognition, while the Romantic generation – George Sand, Alfred de Musset, Gérard de Nerval – who never confused

him with the cheap *romance*-makers of the day, indeed felt deep sympathy for his music.

This recognition took time and needed cultivation. Early French writings on Schubert from the 1830s and 1840s abound in erroneous biographical details and tend to overemphasize the importance of the Lied, whilst taking for granted Schubert's inferiority to Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber in the other fields of composition.<sup>18</sup> They regularly stress the presence of a poetic side to his songs, comparing the composer to Heine, or even Byron. The first books on Schubert, by Barbedette and Audley,<sup>19</sup> date from the last third of the century, following Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn's first German biography. The centenary of Schubert's death in 1928 saw the publication of a number of articles (including a special number of the *Revue musicale* devoted to the composer) as well as new books, among which must be distinguished Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme's *Schubert raconté par ceux qui l'ont vu* (Paris, 1928), which remains to this day the only attempt at translating the documents collected by Deutsch into French.