

# Introduction: the elusive Schubert

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WANDERER! HAST THOU HEARD SCHUBERT'S SONGS?  
HERE LIES HE WHO SANG THEM.

HE WAS PLACED NEAR THE BEST ONES WHEN HE DIED, AND YET  
HE WAS STILL SCARCELY HALF-WAY IN HIS CAREER.

Franz Grillparzer, Vienna's preeminent poet, sketched five epitaphs for Schubert's grave (*SDB* 899). The controversial one ultimately adopted – THE ART OF MUSIC HERE ENTOMBED A RICH POSSESSION, BUT EVEN FAR FAIRER HOPES – has been interpreted in various ways.<sup>1</sup> Robert Schumann, Schubert's most astute early critic, lost patience with Grillparzer: "It is pointless to guess at what more [Schubert] might have achieved. He did enough; and let them be honored who have striven and accomplished as he did."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Grillparzer's words are better viewed not as a lament over the loss of what more Schubert might have achieved had he lived longer, but rather as evidence of how the composer's genuine artistic achievement was not fully appreciated during his own time, how the true scope of his accomplishment eluded even some of his most sympathetic friends and admirers. During Schubert's lifetime, Grillparzer and the majority of his contemporaries never heard Schubert's late piano sonatas, the C Major String Quintet, the mature symphonies and operas. Many of his supreme compositions remained unknown to a Biedermeier Vienna that revered Beethoven, adored Rossini, and thrilled to Paganini.

Schubert's position, literally as well as symbolically, has changed dramatically since his death in 1828 at the age of thirty-one. Over the course of the nineteenth century, he gradually joined the elect, becoming an immortal composer: the peer of Beethoven, and superior to Rossini and Paganini. His first biographer, Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, wrote in 1865:

Nowadays, when the largest part of Schubert's treasures has been revealed to us, Grillparzer's epitaph, which gave offense so many years ago, sounds to our ears still more strangely, and we may hope that over Schubert's future resting place there will be nothing carved but the name of the composer. As the simple "Beethoven" over that great man's grave, the word "Schubert" will speak volumes.<sup>3</sup>

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Kreissle proved prescient. In 1888 Schubert's body, together with Beethoven's (buried just a few feet away), was exhumed from Währing Cemetery and moved to the "Grove of Honor" in Vienna's Central Cemetery. His new tombstone simply reads "Franz Schubert."

### Masterpieces "outside" history

Among nineteenth-century composers of the highest rank, Schubert is the only one whose lifetime fame was significantly at odds with his later glory. One of the aims of this *Companion* is to explore some of the reasons for this disparity. It seeks to register the social, cultural, and musical climate in which Schubert lived and worked, to measure the scope of his musical achievement, and to chart the course of his reception from the perceptions of his contemporaries to the assessments of posterity. The volume offered here is neither an encyclopedic reference nor a comprehensive examination of Schubert's oeuvre. Rather, in keeping with the etymology of the word "companion" ("taking bread together"), *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert* is more a collection of exchanges – historical, critical, and analytical. This book explores some of the factors that have restricted the serious understanding and interpretation of Schubert, and that have made him an elusive figure to this day.

The initial neglect that Schubert's music encountered is often exaggerated. Nonetheless, certain personal, cultural, and musical factors caused an incomplete, even one-dimensional portrait of the man and his music to emerge, both during his lifetime and during the half-century that followed. Schubert's well-documented shyness and disregard for self-promotion, his lack of virtuosity as a performer, the scarcity of his own letters and writings, his untimely death, the indifference of early commentators, the biased reminiscences of certain friends – all these factors help explain why he eluded biographers.

The limited knowledge about and availability of Schubert's music during the first half of the nineteenth century also profoundly affected both critical and biographical accounts. That the public, for example, had to wait more than forty years for the première of the "Unfinished" Symphony (D759) meant that a defining work, so revealing of Schubert's artistic maturity and compositional style, remained both "outside" history and buried within it, the kernel of its eventual revision.

Indeed, for much of the nineteenth century, many of Schubert's finest compositions were unavailable, especially the large-scale instrumental works. As Schubert's oeuvre became gradually known, changes in musical culture, taste, and also production changed the context in which the

music was experienced. Intimate gatherings, best known to Schubert's contemporaries, have since given way to public concerts. The vocal and dance music most familiar in his day is now largely forgotten. What commands attention today are his symphonies, chamber music, song cycles, and piano sonatas – mostly unpublished and/or unperformed publicly in the 1820s; these are the works that now define Schubert's artistic achievement and secure his stature.

By the Schubert centennial year of 1897, nearly all of his music had been published, and by the 1997 bicentennial, nearly all of it has been recorded. This broad availability allows us to explore the full range of Schubert's art and to recognize how adroitly he negotiated both the public and private spheres, combined popular and more elevated styles, and entertained Biedermeier Vienna while helping to usher in musical Romanticism.

### **In his own time: “favorite composer” Franz Schubert and the “highest in art”**

Schubert earned his fame through his songs and dances, pieces which prompted critics to refer to him as a “favorite composer” (*beliebter Tonsetzer*).<sup>4</sup> Roughly 630 of his songs survive; by the end of 1828 nearly 190 were published and many others circulated in handwritten copies.<sup>5</sup> Schubert and his friends proved remarkably astute in choosing which ones to disseminate, perform, and publish. Those songs available and best known to his contemporaries generally remain the most prominent today. Publication triggered a self-perpetuating process: what was easily accessible became the most familiar, as well as the most frequently translated, anthologized, and arranged.

Although Schubert's Lieder enjoyed a unique position in his own time, his dances, partsongs, and keyboard music also won widespread favor, as evidenced by frequent performances, abundant publications, and substantial critical acclaim.<sup>6</sup> Viennese publishers released nearly 160 dances during the 1820s. These dances exhibit another important ingredient of Schubert's musical character – his conviviality – for both songs and dances were often written for, and played by, his friends and social circle. (Schubert himself never danced [*SMF* 121, 133].)

Schubert also excelled in composing partsongs, mostly for a male quartet of two tenors and two basses. About twenty were published during his lifetime, and they were publicly performed more often than his works in any other genre. Finally, Schubert was best known in his own time for his piano music. Particularly popular were piano duets, unsur-

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passed in this special repertory, but largely ignored today; their eclipse (as with his partsongs) was one result of the general decline in domestic music-making.<sup>7</sup>

Taken together, the Lieder, dances, and partsongs account for over ninety per cent of Schubert's works published during his lifetime; the rest are mostly short keyboard works for two or four hands.<sup>8</sup> None of Schubert's orchestral works was published during this period, nor was any of his dramatic music. Five sacred pieces appeared (one under his brother Ferdinand's name [D621]), but only one of the Masses (D452). Significant large-scale works, for keyboard or chamber ensemble, number less than a dozen publications. In contrast to the available works of Gyrowetz or Hummel, let alone Beethoven and Mozart, Schubert's publications – all from a brief seven years (1821–28) – were surprisingly numerous, but hardly representative of the scope of his art.

As is common in surveys of a composer's oeuvre, the works discussed in the second section of this book are grouped by genre and instrumentation. Such artificial divisions, however, invite duplication among chapters. Matters of style further confound tidy categories. Schubert's lyricism, for example, permeates all the genres in which he composed; the infusion of his Lieder into a wide range of instrumental works testifies to a sovereign lyric sensibility.

For the elusive Schubert, difficulties of classification are both musical and functional. Some of his most ambitious instrumental compositions are piano duets, treated in William Kinderman's discussion of the keyboard music. Much of the piano duet repertory also falls, however, under the category of social music, which Margaret Notley examines. And as Charles Rosen's commentary on some of the same pieces demonstrates, the fingerprints of Schubert's style and of his compositional innovations appear in these works just as much as in the far better known piano sonatas, chamber music, and symphonies.

Complications in classifying Schubert's work unambiguously within neatly defined categories of genre (or form), style, technical level (amateur or professional), and social function (public, semi-public, or private), begin to explain his putative neglect during his lifetime, and are consistent with an increased blurring and mixing of genres associated with musical Romanticism. The disparity between the intimate and small-scale music that defined Schubert's Viennese fame in the 1820s, and those instrumental works – the string masterpieces, late piano sonatas, symphonies – which placed him among the immortals of Western music, is a concrete manifestation of a multifaceted oeuvre that served various needs and ends, not only for Schubert and his family, friends, and critics, but also for those who listened to his works many decades later. In the first

chapter, Leon Botstein examines, from a social-historical perspective, the context in which this music was first heard and warns of extracting Schubert's art from the grim realities of Viennese daily life in the 1820s.

The distinctions between amateur and professional, and between private and public (also not clear-cut), to some degree relate to other aspects of Schubert's musical character, such as his highest, most serious aspirations in certain works and a lighter, more popular sensibility found in others. Reflecting a traditional hierarchy of genres, short songs and dances had to contend with large-scale symphonies and operas.<sup>9</sup> Several authors in this volume refer to the famous letter Schubert wrote not long before his death to the Mainz publisher Schott in which he mentions "three operas, a Mass, and a symphony" so as to acquaint Schott with his "strivings after the highest in art" (*SDB* 740). Although the reminiscences of Schubert's friends focus mainly on the Lieder, many likewise refer to his "larger efforts" and the "highest branches of art" when discussing his big pieces. By the end of Schubert's life, critics were also getting the message. Just months before his death, the *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode* wrote: "The great talent of the renowned song and romance composer is many-sided and tries itself in every branch, as do all those who possess the spirit of true and upward-striving art" (*SDB* 781).

One must be careful not to distinguish inappropriately between high and low culture, popular and serious tastes, because such lines were not drawn the same way in Schubert's time. Rossini's operas, for example, were both thoroughly professional and extraordinarily successful. And Schubert, like Rossini, remarkably mixed, even within a single composition, what we now characterize as elevated and popular styles.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Schubert composed "orchestral" songs, "lyrical" symphonies, and occasionally used small Lieder as the basis for large instrumental works.<sup>11</sup> Still, a gap remains between the music and styles typically associated with Biedermeier music-making in Vienna and the heady cosmopolitan world of opera and symphony from which reputations – and money – traditionally came.

Schubert's music defies tidy historical boundaries and stylistic categorizations. As Charles Rosen has written about attempts to designate Schubert as a Classical, post-Classical, or Romantic composer: he "stands as an example of the resistance of the material of history to the most necessary generalization, and as a reminder of the irreducibly personal facts that underlie the history of style."<sup>12</sup> While he remains an elusive figure, perhaps we can appreciate that his puzzling position for nearly two centuries represents an answer more than a problem, that Schubert's multivalence partly explains his achievement and appeal.

## Schubert in “the epoch of Beethoven and Rossini”

Historians would today label the period encompassing Schubert’s active career, roughly from the time of the Congress of Vienna to his death in 1828, as the “Epoch of Beethoven and Schubert.” Contemporaneous descriptions, however, are tellingly different. In an influential survey of music history published in 1834, Raphael Georg Kiesewetter characterized the years 1800–32 as “The Epoch of Beethoven and Rossini.”<sup>13</sup> This description may now seem odd precisely because it reflects distinctions of genre, aesthetic ideologies, and a north–south geography that have long since ceased to matter. Kiesewetter’s principal concern was with the prestigious genres of opera and instrumental music, the realm of the “highest in art,” into which Schubert, as a composer most associated with social and domestic music, did not readily fit. And therefore, even though Kiesewetter himself held Schubertiades in his home,<sup>14</sup> he did not even mention Schubert in his book, a sign not so much of Schubert’s lack of fame, or an indictment of the composer’s talent, as an indication of what kinds of music mattered most. However, by the 1860s, when Vienna’s pre-eminent music critic Eduard Hanslick wrote his still-essential *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, the period had become designated as the “Age of Beethoven and Schubert”;<sup>15</sup> at this stage, the public recognized Schubert as one of the “immortals.”

One wants to avoid uncritically perpetuating distinctions between a formidable instrumental north and a sensuous lyrical south, the “brains” of the hard-working German Beethoven as opposed to the “beauty” of the charming Italian Rossini. For one thing, the ascription of popular to Rossini and serious to Beethoven is not always clear. Rossini wrote more serious operas than comic ones, and Beethoven’s most popular pieces with his own public are quite different from posterity’s verdict: *Wellington’s Victory*, the “Allegretto” from the Seventh Symphony, the song *Adelaide*, the Septet, and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* were the crowd-pleasers of his day. Yet the long-standing tension between a German instrumental tradition and an Italian vocal one was much discussed in Schubert’s time and forms part of many composers’ own self-representations. If Rossini’s later report to Wagner is accurate (and accurately reported), the topic dominated the single meeting between Rossini and Beethoven in the spring of 1822.

Where does Schubert, promoted privately by Kiesewetter in his own home yet unmentioned publicly in print, fit into this bifurcated musical culture?<sup>16</sup> Although Schubert yearned for success in opera and symphony, and composed prodigiously in both, he had only minimal and brief success with their public performances, all of which were early in his

career. He most actively participated in a private and semi-private culture of edification and entertainment. (Where significant instrumental pieces are concerned, Schubert's greatest exposure came in presenting chamber music, largely because he had a strong and prominent advocate in the famous violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, a close collaborator of Beethoven.)

Beyond Kiesewetter's concern with geography and genre, his preoccupation with Beethoven and Rossini also reflects the musical culture of his time by pairing the greatest composer with the most popular one. While the venerated Beethoven claimed a new role for music among the arts, Rossini entertained and delighted. Rossini's music inundated publishers' catalogues not in complete scores, however, but rather in all manner of arrangements aimed at domestic enjoyment. Similarly, Schubert's considerable success in getting a large number of his works published came from intimate genres and from arrangements. Yet while Schubert's reputation, for all the national and institutional differences, essentially belonged to a Rossinian tradition of entertainment, albeit in a domesticated version, his creative legacy was posthumously acclaimed by many as Beethovenian in dimension.

This *Companion* helps show that both the contemporaneous and posthumous assessments of Schubert – the “favorite” composer of small pieces and the immortal genius of “heavenly length” – are sound. They are complementary, not contradictory. Historically, keyboard-dominated genres that Schubert himself cultivated during his career gave way in importance to his large-scale instrumental music; private Schubertiades opened out to public concerts. The Biedermeier Schubert known to the musical Vienna of the 1820s eventually came to be the Romantic Schubert lionized by Schumann, Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Brahms. For decades to come, Schubert's popular accessibility continued to attract listeners and win new admirers through all manner of arrangements, particularly piano transcriptions by Liszt and others. As the century progressed, Schubert was also credited with having written instrumental masterpieces, and he thereby gained new esteem.

Even as pieces representing Schubert's “highest” aspirations slowly won recognition, some of his compositional procedures and innovations continued to elude critics, and still do today. Rosen has argued recently that “the music of Beethoven is literally the origin of our conception of musical analysis, and this has unnaturally restricted analysis by limiting it almost entirely to methods of examination relevant to his music.”<sup>17</sup> Especially when set against Beethovenian paradigms, Schubert's formal structures were often judged lacking. What the enthusiastic Schumann perceived (or perhaps excused) as “heavenly length” in Schubert, others dismissed as tedious repetition. A number of authors in this volume

explore, and appreciate, how Schubert's compositional strategies and musical values differed from Beethoven's.

The complex mixture of Schubert's available and esteemed works provides a clue to the complexities of his reception – we need to grasp how he realized a lofty aesthetic realm for his music alongside a social and entertaining one. Grillparzer's notorious epitaph does not so much describe the reality of Schubert's genius as demonstrate the scope of Biedermeier awareness. Twentieth-century audiences know that the intimate Schubert, the “favorite” song and dance composer of the 1820s, had a great deal more to offer.

## Schubert as “father of the Lied”

It will come as no surprise that every chapter in this book refers at some point to Schubert Lieder. For nearly two centuries Schubert's songs have resounded as the common denominator of his fame. Lieder first spread his name locally and internationally, and Lieder later secured his place in music history. While the stature of individual songs occasionally changes, *Gretchen am Spinnrade* nevertheless remains his first undisputed masterpiece, and *Erlikönig*, written shortly afterwards, one of the commanding compositions of the century.

Not since the Renaissance could masterpieces of such unassuming scale, lasting less than five minutes, so powerfully mold a career and decisively affect music history. When Schubert's fame began to flourish with the *Kunstlied*, this relatively minor artistic genre still awaited its “master.” Two decades earlier, at a comparable stage in his own career, Beethoven honored his sonata-form compositions by granting them opus numbers. Schubert, in his debut publications of 1821, crowned his songs with opus numbers, signaling that they too could be significant works of substantial content.

For well over a century now, writers have hailed October 19, 1814, the date Schubert composed *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, as the “Birthday of German Song.” Schubert as the “Father of the Lied” is a view all too familiar. It alarms scholars who see in this conception an implicit rejection of Schubert's predecessors and an indiscriminate use of the term “Lied” for a wide variety of pieces. Nevertheless, we must appreciate not only what Schubert took from, or how he surpassed, his models – the “real history” of the Lied in a chronological sense that Kristina Muxfeldt touches upon in her chapter – but also what prompted the perception of Schubert as the composer whose works were exemplary for this particular genre, as Beethoven's were for the symphony.<sup>18</sup> Earlier German Lied composers,



such as Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, and Carl Friedrich Zelter, composed works at the most advanced stage of the *Kunstlied*, but their efforts neither elevated the genre nor decisively rivaled, in musical quality or popular acclaim, works such as Mozart's *Das Veilchen*, K. 476, or Beethoven's *Adelaide*, Op. 46.<sup>19</sup>

With Schubert, the nascent Romantic Lied changed not only in musical content, but also in historical stature. As the discussion by Susan Youens demonstrates, important changes in German poetry at the turn of the century were fundamental to the new position of song. Goethe's poetry in particular inspired Schubert's earliest masterpieces. Along with this heightened literary awareness came other factors: the Romantic cultivation of small-scale forms in general, the rise of a middle-class musical culture and domestic music-making, and the new tonal qualities and technical capacities of the piano. Thrilling accompaniments of unprecedented intensity, extraordinary difficulty, and unifying power that rarely appeared in the Lieder of Schubert's contemporaries were now possible.

This constellation allowed the Lied to reach new heights in the second decade of the century. Some critics constructed elaborate historical schemes for the Lied and for Schubert's contribution to it, often in relation to the towering figure of Beethoven – for this was the one area in which Schubert surpassed the master.<sup>20</sup> An 1859 article in the musical journal *Signale für die musikalische Welt* presents a remarkable analogy between Schubert's Lieder and other supreme creative triumphs:

The Schubert song is – like the Goethe poem, the Beethoven symphony, and the Shakespeare drama – a *unicum*. That is to say: the essence of the particular art form achieves its highest and purest appearance in the works of these masters. Schubert's Lieder cannot – as could Mendelssohn's, or Schumann's, or a Mozart aria – be imitated; any more than can a Beethoven symphony.<sup>21</sup>

By elevating, fulfilling, and therefore, in a sense, defining the *Kunstlied*, Schubert's work in this genre eclipsed his other music for decades to come. (That so much of the instrumental music went unpublished only complicated matters.) As the “Father of the Lied,” Schubert was viewed not only as the preeminent composer of Lieder, but also as the one who had finally realized the potential of the genre.

## The changing Schubert canon

The changes in stature of various genres, the array of venues in which Schubert's music was heard, and the growing availability of his scores

help to explain the critical adjustments about what constituted the canon of Schubert's central works. While much of his dance music, and many of his partsongs, piano duets, keyboard music, and even Lieder gradually faded in popularity over the course of the century, works in other genres received increasing attention. Admittedly, however, some newly acclaimed pieces are themselves no longer much performed in the late twentieth century, including such one-time favorites as the unfinished oratorio *Lazarus* (D689) or the Singspiel *Die Verschworenen* (D787).

The popularity of specific Lieder also changed. In Schubert's time *Der Wanderer* (D489) was second in fame only to *Erkönig*; rarely performed today, it is now associated mainly with the "Wanderer" Fantasy in C Major for piano (D760). In a letter to his parents Schubert tells how *Ellens Gesang III* (D839) genuinely moved friends (SDB 434–35; cf. 458). Gradually this ubiquitous song, better known as *Ave Maria*, was so egregiously misappropriated that, except in the care of the greatest interpreters, it devolved into kitsch. Many of Schubert's compositions entered the popular consciousness through myriad *fin-de-siècle* potpourris that dispensed melodious tunes from the "Unfinished" Symphony, from *Rosamunde*, and from countless songs and dances.

The chapters in the third section of this volume chart some of these changes in repertory and the role that celebrated composers and performers played in these developments. For example, while Artur Schnabel's performances and recordings are justly credited for bringing Schubert's piano sonatas into the modern concert repertory, John Reed shows that as early as 1868 Sir Charles Hallé had performed all eleven Schubert sonatas then available in print.

During the course of the twentieth century the canon has continued to evolve. For instance, while the "Arpeggione" Sonata and the "Trout" Quintet retain their popular appeal, Schubert is now most highly esteemed, and is best represented in the concert hall and on recordings, by late works such as the "Great" C Major Symphony, the C Major String Quintet, and the last three piano sonatas. Illustrative are the two Müller song cycles, both published in the 1820s and therefore known to Schubert's contemporaries. In the nineteenth century, *Die schöne Müllerin* held a prized place among Schubert's works, while after the Second World War *Winterreise* came to dominate critical and public attention. (This twentieth-century reception has vindicated Schubert who, responding to his friends' pronounced lack of enthusiasm for the latter cycle, allegedly declared, "I like these songs more than all the others, and you will come to like them too" [SMF 138].)

Along with these changes in canonic repertory came radically new descriptions of Schubert the man, especially in recent decades. Most sig-

nificant, and widely publicized, have been Maynard Solomon's articles presenting a compelling case that Schubert probably engaged in homosexual activities.<sup>22</sup> But well before this claim – fiercely debated and, by some, passionately rejected – a more complex, multi-dimensional, even “neurotic” Schubert had already emerged, one more associated with a song like *Der Leiermann* than with *Das Wandern*.<sup>23</sup>

Paradoxically, as Schubert's own milieu recedes further into history, we continue to gain easier access to more music and more information with which to assess his artistic achievement. For generations after Schubert's death, audiences have gradually encountered the “far fairer hopes” that Grillparzer only dreamed of. The conscientious record collector can now hear more of Schubert's music than anyone ever could in Biedermeier Vienna – indeed can hear more than Schubert himself, excepting that all his music resounded in his inner ear. Listeners today could thus claim to know Schubert better than those of his own era. Yet there need be no contest as to which age knows Schubert best, most thoroughly, authentically, deeply – music transcends the time of its creation even while bearing witness to that time.<sup>24</sup>

Too often unacknowledged is how musical and biographical concerns alike reflect a particular historical period. Redescriptions and reassessments of Schubert will continue for as long as he is known and played. They will, ultimately, always tell us something about ourselves, as well as about the ever-elusive object of their description and regard.

