

Forrest Balman

Dr. Ellison

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### Franz Schubert

Arguably the composer who produced the largest quantity of work in proportion to his lifespan, Franz Schubert served an integral role in the history of Western music. According to Christopher H. Gibbs, author of *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, Schubert composed more than 1,500 works over the course of his short lifespan. Schubert's principal focus was the composition of lieder, or German art songs, which comprised more than one third of his total catalog (Gibbs 21). Schubert's songwriting epitomizes his importance as a transitional composer, whose compositional idioms projected what would become the musical norm well into the late 19th century. Despite never achieving the international acclaim of some of the other Austrian-born composers, such as Mozart and Haydn, Schubert was an idolic cultural figure in his community. According to Gibbs in an article titled *The Life of Schubert*, "During the early 1820s, Schubert was part of a close-knit circle of artists and students who had social gatherings together that became known as Schubertiads" (Gibbs 61). Although his music wouldn't become a universally accepted part of the Western repertoire until after his death, Schubert's musical contributions comment on his innovation and untamed creativity.

Franz Peter Schubert was born in Vienna on January 31, 1797. His father, Franz Theodor Florian Schubert, was a Viennese schoolmaster, and his mother, Maria Elizabeth Katharina Vietz was a housemaid. Schubert demonstrated an innate talent for music early in his life. The first

music instruction Schubert received were informal keyboard lessons from his elder brother, Ignaz Schubert. Schubert, however, would quickly accelerate beyond Ignaz' musical capabilities. Early Schubert biographer, Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, quotes Ignaz: "... Franz told me, a few months after we began, that he had no need of any further instruction from me" (von Hellborn 5). Schubert would graduate to violin lessons with his father at age eight, where he would quickly develop mastery akin to his experience at the keyboard with his elder brother. Acknowledging his musical talents, Schubert's father enrolled him in private lessons with Michael Holzer, the principle choirmaster and organist of the family's local parish. Following the trend of the music lessons he received internally within his family, Holzer realized early that his musical instruction only reinforced what Schubert had already mastered. Von Hellborn is quoted to have said, "Consequently I cannot be said honestly to have given him any lessons at all; I merely amused myself and looked at my pupil with mute astonishment" (von Hellborn 5). The end of Schubert's childhood music education came in the form of private lessons with Antonio Salieri who, at the time, was one of Vienna's most prominent composers. Salieri had become aware of Schubert through his vocal performance as a scholarship awardee of the Imperial Seminary of Vienna's First district. During his private lessons with Salieri, Schubert was introduced to the standard repertoire of the time: Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven primarily. However, the composer who would become Schubert's most important influence was Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg. Zumsteeg primarily composed lieder which would later inform Schubert's songwriting foundation. It was during his time spent with Salieri that Schubert would begin to compose. Schubert focused primarily on choral liturgical works, such as "Salve Regina" and "Kyrie." Schubert wrote instrumental music over the course of his time with Salieri, having

composed an “Octet for Winds,” which is dedicated to the passing of his mother in 1812. Schubert studied with Salieri for more than thirteen years before he would part ways in pursuit of a musical career.

Continuing in the wake of his father and elder brothers, Schubert pursued pedagogical training in efforts to become a schoolmaster. Edmondstone Duncan, author of the biography *Schubert*, documented Schubert’s displeasure with his educational training, which was believed to have been fueled by his financial inability to pursue a career in composition (Duncan 14). Nevertheless, Schubert continued his training to acquire his teaching credentials. Schubert began composing at greater rate during his teaching training. Robert Winter, in his contribution to *Grove Music Online* on the topic of Schubert, suggests that “The explosion in his compositional output suggests that the workload at the Normal Hauptschule was not as great as that at the Stadtkonvikt” (Winter). During this time, Schubert was introduced to Therese Grob. Therese was a soprano who would develop a friendship with Schubert which inspired many, mostly liturgical, vocal works: “Salve Regina,” “Tantum Ergo,” and Schubert’s *Mass no. 1*. Schubert attempted to marry Grob, however due to the passing of legislation which required the future husband to prove his ability to financially support a family, he was unsuccessful. Having spent the majority of his post-adolescent years in impoverished conditions and discontent with his position as a teacher, Schubert is widely believed to have suffered from depression, which surprisingly didn’t not manifest itself in the inhibition of his composition.

Schubert's teaching career came to an end in 1818 when he was invited by the Count of Esterhazy, Johann Karl, to teach his two young daughters how to sing and to improve their keyboard skills. His professional relationship with the Esterhazy court ended after the summer.

Schubert began, at this point, to pursue work as a professional composer. Despite the volume of his composed works, Schubert struggled to find patrons to commission him. The lack of professional work made living difficult for Schubert, resulting in his having to endure less than ideal living situations with friends and admirers of his work. Winters details the end of an extensive period spent with poet Johann Mayrhofer, whose poetry Schubert often set: “By the end of 1820 the stresses of sharing a single room with Mayrhofer had brought Schubert to breaking point. Early in 1821 Schubert moved to new lodgings in the same street (21 Wipplingerstrasse), although the two men remained on warm enough terms for Schubert to continue setting poems by Mayrhofer” (Winter). It was during the early and mid 1820s that Schubert neared the peak of his musical maturity. One of his earliest lasting works, “Der Erlkonig,” was met with unanimous approval from the larger music community of Vienna. It was with the success of “Der Erlkonig” that Schubert involved himself in a series of stage productions, namely in the form of opera, including *Alfonso und Estrella*, *Die Burgschaft*, and *Fierrabras*. According to author and Schubert historian, Brian Newbould, it was not the lack of musical talent demonstrated in Schubert’s stageworks, but rather the meteoric popularization of Italian opera: “From 1816 Rossini’s operas made their appearance, and as these caught the popular Viennese imagination the number of performances grew in a Rossini crescendo, as did the local acclaim by press and public alike” (Newbould 186). Schubert virtually abandoned opera and other genres of stage music and retained a newfound focus on lieder and instrumental works. In his late life, Schubert composed the majority of the music that would immortalize his importance as a composer. It was during this period that Schubert composed both of his song cycles, *Die Schone Mullerin* and *Winterreise*, the most famous of his symphonies, the

‘unfinished’ Symphony in B minor, his Mass in A flat-Major, and the majority of his solo piano pieces, including three piano sonatas dubbed ‘Schubert’s Last Sonatas.’

The *Piano Sonata in B flat-major* displays the exploration of the outer reaches of Schubert’s tonal imagination. Amongst the final pieces composed during Schubert’s short life, this piano sonata in particular is a demonstration of the nontraditional modulations that later become expected in Romantic music. The first theme is introduced in Bb-major. According to Rita Steblin in her translations of key characteristics in her book, *A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries*, B flat-major is often associated with cheerful love, clear conscience, and hope aspiration for a better world (Steblyn). The choice of B flat-major is fascinating because of Schubert’s nearly fully realized sickness. The theme continues with a chorale-like harmonization of a simple melody. The harmony is strongly grounded in B flat and does not deviate from tonic and dominant sonorities. At measure eight, the first atypical gesture is encountered. Schubert composes a G flat trill in the lower register of the piano. This has a particularly jarring impact due to its stark contrast with the simple and lyrical texture of the theme. The trill is also unusual due to its location in the phrase structure. It occurs where one would expect the first cadence--following a dominant sonority. After a long rest, the first theme is repeated with harmonic variation. Eight measures following the restatement of the theme, a tonicization of C-minor occurs briefly before ending on a half cadence.

A tremolo between B flat and C flat follows this half cadence suggesting that the harmonic course of the piece is set for D-major, if the B flat is functioning as the flattened sixth. Instead the harmony modulates to G flat major. Similar to the first statement of the theme, this

theme in G flat major introduces a more active accompaniment in the left hand, and a single line melody in the right hand. The following sixteen measures continue to vary the first theme. The harmony, however, contains a lingering G flat in every sonority. This section moves frequently between the tonic, G flat, and the subdominant, C flat, in second inversion due to the relentless G flat present in every chord. G flat makes an appearance in the dominant D flats as well. After sixteen bars of variation, the exposition returns to the original theme. This time, however, the theme is played forte, along with an F pedal in contrast to the B flat. The theme ends with a half cadence and continues unresolved into a section of new material. The F major triad is followed by an unusual B fully diminished seventh chord over an F pedal. One could expect the harmony to move to the supertonic C-minor, however, the B fully diminished seventh is succeeded by an E sharp fully diminished seventh chord. The E sharp diminished seventh is enharmonically equivalent to F diminished seventh, which is a respelt B diminished seventh chord. The E sharp diminished seventh is used to modulate to F sharp minor, which is the key in which the second theme is introduced.

The second theme introduces a new triple rhythm that contrasts with the duple rhythm of the first theme. Although the theme presents itself in the upper register of the right hand, the left hand plays fragments of the original theme in unison with the rhythm of the right hand. The F sharp-minor section continues with transitional material. Many sequences are used to vary the harmony tonicizing many scale degrees within the key before returning to B flat-major through a C-major chord functioning as a V of V in measure seventy. The return to B flat-major, however, does not include a restatement of the melody. The transitional material continues until measure eighty where Schubert introduces new material akin to the second theme. This new material is

not nearly as tonally stable as the previously stated themes. Moving through various keys: G-minor, F-major, A flat-major, and a very distant D flat-minor, Schubert ties together this theme with the instability introduced with the sequential material that succeeded the F sharp minor theme. The exposition ends with a sparse coda filled with quick gestures separated by vast spaces. Leading into the repeat, Schubert reintroduces the prominent G flat trill that uniquely characterized the first theme.

The development section begins with a harmonic progression that sets a trajectory for C sharp-minor. The development section as a whole is embodied by fragmented transpositions of the thematic material introduced in the exposition and transitional material that further explores the role of the A section trill. The first theme is reintroduced in the key of C sharp-minor, which is expected following the modulation. A triple time theme is transitioned to quickly after the restatement of the initial theme. With inherently sequential characteristics, this material leads naturally to the bulk of the development section. Measure 169 marks a drastic contrast in the overarching texture of the piece. The measure consists solely of staccato D flats that set the precedent for the accompanimental material to come. A progressive thickening of the texture occurs over the course of the development from this point onwards. The piece consistently crescendos and introduces more notes into each chord played between the two hands. This gradual building of textural density reaches its zenith at measure 192 where the fortissimo crescendo concludes with a section of forte piano--followed by a passage of piano--followed by another passage of pianissimo. At measure 205, the left hand accompaniment consists solely of a trill akin to the one introduced in the first theme. The right hand plays the melodic material from the first section in the key of the dominant, F, over block chords. This trill occurs every six

measures until measure 217 when the sustained note is passed to the right hand. The sustained note in the right hand, however, is not trilled. In measure 233, the original Gb trill is restated as a cadential gesture leading back into the restatement of the original theme.

The recapitulation restates the original theme verbatim. The section continues to mimic the exposition until the moment where the exposition prepared to move to G flat. Instead, the harmony moves in the direction of D-major by accentuating an A pedal for sixteen measures. Unexpectedly, the A pedal resolves back to the tonic key, B flat-major. This modulation is short lived, however. The B flat theme quickly transitions into a dominant emphasized passage that ends in the same unusual fully diminished seventh chord first seen in the exposition. This iteration of the diminished seventh material, however, resolves to a B flat augmented sixth chord, which is then followed by a full authentic cadence in B-minor. The second theme, originally stated in the key of F sharp--the dominant of B-minor, is reintroduced in the key of B-minor. The B-minor section repeats the second theme before inevitably returning to the tonic key of B flat. The remaining material in the development follows a comparable formal scheme to the exposition. Schubert sequences between different keys, and finishes the piece with a series of spaced gestures followed by a coda based strictly on the first theme's material.

The B flat-major piano sonata accurately outlines Schubert's short, yet productive, life. As a child, Schubert showed tremendous musical promise. Schubert was constantly praised by his superiors and maintained a trajectory towards musical success, which corresponds with the historical use of B flat-major. However, Schubert's life early on was wrought with instability. Especially in the context of his musical career, Schubert never attained the level of success that would have allowed him a comfortable lifestyle, which is represented in the prolonged use of late

resolved dissonance in the exposition. Schubert, in order to maintain a lifestyle that could support his musical endeavors, underwent many career changes, which is reflected in the unstable transitions that never settle until they arrive in a distant key. Finally, despite having produced a remarkable amount of masterful content throughout his lifetime, as his condition worsened, the amount of material he produced dwindled, which is symbolized in the sparse and distant texture displayed at the end of the exposition. Nevertheless, Schubert has left a catalog of music that has, largely, become standard fare in the Western canon. Outside of the proto-Romantic musical idioms he helped in developing, Schubert teaches a valuable lesson in work ethic and consistency. If anyone is passionate about something that they wish to be successful at, continue to pursue it, and success will always be the outcome.

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