

FRANZ SCHUBERT

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Edited by Murray Baylor

Foreword

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Of the many famous composers who lived and worked in Vienna, Europe's most musical city, Franz Schubert was the only one who made his home there from birth to death. Though his genius was recognized by a few when he was a child—and he had written at least one great masterpiece by the time he was 17—only a small part of his music had been published when he died at the age of 31. Considering the fact that he had had little more than a dozen years as a mature composer, the large, rich heritage of wonderful vocal and instrumental music that he produced is indeed astonishing.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)



SCHUBERT'S PIANO MUSIC

Schubert's music seems to fall between Classical and Romantic classifications—perhaps between that of Beethoven and Chopin. Although he first became known in Vienna as a composer of *lieder*, the piano was his instrument, and he wrote some of his finest music for piano solo and piano duet. The kind of instrument he played, however, usually called a fortepiano, was very different from a modern Steinway. In the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna, there is a well-maintained piano that he once owned. Its compass is from the F an octave below the bass staff to the F two octaves above the treble—six octaves in all. The action is light and the key drop shallow, permitting brisk tempos. It is a piano, of course, for a home, not a concert hall. While the volume is small compared with a modern instrument and the sound decay is short, the tone is bright, silvery, and attractive, particularly in the upper octaves.

Because of these limiting characteristics, the music that Schubert wrote for this kind of instrument was quite different from that written by later composers. His music, on the whole, was not intended for a virtuoso playing in a concert hall but for the musician communicating with friends in more intimate surroundings. Probably because of his love of singing and songwriting, he often incorporated in his piano music singable melodies that must be phrased with the breath pauses and points of emphasis that a fine singer would give to a song. Not only does the spirit of song pervade this music, but also the spirit of dance. In the Vienna of his time, social dancing was very popular among young people, and Schubert often played for his friends to dance. Out of these improvisations, he wrote about 400 short waltzes, *écossaises*, minuets, *ländler*, galops, and other dances.

In addition to his melodic gift, another part of the originality of Schubert's music lies in his use of harmony—his subtle or bold modulations, often to the mediant or the submediant, his use of the Neapolitan chord, his unexpected, poignant shifts from major to minor, and his expressive use of dissonance; all are used in a very personal way. Repeated chords, frequently with quick left-hand jumps, are characteristic. In triple meter, Schubert may briefly contradict the rhythmic pulse by accenting every other beat, thus giving the impression of a change to duple meter—a hemiola—measures that a 20th-century composer might notate as a change from 3/4 to 2/4 time.

No. 2 (E-flat major) 43

For most of its length, this popular piece achieves its unity—in part—by emphasizing the second beat of each measure. Although the right-hand line with its small upward leaps, downward diatonic scales and rising chromatic figures is clearly challenging, the part of the left hand with its varied ways of emphasizing the second beat deserves special attention and practice. The eight-measure phrases flow continuously in the tonic key until measure 25 when E-flat minor moves to A-flat minor. In every second measure the right hand adds emphasis to the second beat with half notes as the harmony moves downward to G-flat, F minor, and then back to E-flat minor. At measure 36, the harmonic motion stabilizes in G-flat, until the eight-measure dominant with a suspension (m. 44) leads to a return to the opening of the piece. With this reprise, however, there is only one eight-measure phrase in the middle register before a repeat in the higher register. Tension mounts as the rising chromatic figure extends to a climax on a high F while the bass moves downward through A-flat, G, and F minor, arriving at E-flat minor. Measure 71 marks the beginning of four three-measure phrases, during which a new *sforzando* emphasis is placed on the second beat (m. 77). This leads to a sweeping upward scale culminating on a powerful chord of G-flat, the enharmonic dominant of the following middle section.

A new B-minor section progresses by four-measure phrases and contrasting dynamics to F-sharp minor (m. 102), and back to a two-measure phrase which negates the triple meter temporarily (mm. 157 and 158). Then a 6/4 chord on E-flat, another two measures contradicting the meter, four measures of dominant, and a fermata on B-flat anticipate the *da capo*. The coda unifies the piece by contrasting the two principal key centers, swinging from B minor to E-flat (now minor) before the *accelerando*, which concludes the piece in exciting fashion. This is, incidentally, one of the rather few pieces in the piano repertory that begins in a major key and ends in the tonic minor.

A good practice technique for the rippling right-hand passages is to mentally place a fermata over the first note of measures 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, etc. and then play from fermata to fermata in one sweep. This kind of rapid practice with pauses divides the problem into smaller steps which are easier to assimilate, and it helps concentration during performance.

No. 3 (G-flat major) 49

Carl Haslinger, who published this piece for the first time almost 30 years after Schubert's death evidently decided that the time signature (which had indicated 4/2 time) and the key signature might intimidate potential buyers; he had the piece transposed to G and changed to 4/4 time by cutting each measure in half with extra bar lines. Though this might have helped some readers, it actually made the playing more difficult and, since all the *Impromptus* are in flat keys, spoiled the key relationships between the pieces if they were to be played as a group. Occasionally, this changed version—with a few chords altered as well—is still published.

The elegant serenity of this piece is achieved by a spacious unfolding (in four-measure phrases) of the song-like melody over the fluid sextuplet accompaniment. The middle section of the ternary form begins with a more active, dramatic bass line and less regular phrase lengths (m. 25). The key is now E-flat minor, moving to C-flat and back again before a return to the opening melody (m. 55). The last section of this ternary form begins with a literal reprise of the first section adding small variants at measure 63, but it takes a new turn toward the subdominant at measure 70. A coda starting at measure 74 brings the piece to a tranquil conclusion.

The playing problems are chiefly those of keeping the melody shaded and shaped against the bass line while maintaining the eighth notes as an unobtrusive background. At times, a quick application of the soft pedal after a melody note is played can ease this difficulty.

Schubert depicted (seated) in a watercolor by Leopold Kupelwieser



MOMENTS MUSICAUX

Opus 94 · D. 780

Moderato (♩ = c. 96)

1. *p* **a**

6 *cresc.* *fp* *p*

11 *R.H.* *f* *fz* *fz*

16 *fz* *fz* *p* *decresc.* *pp*

21

a The grace notes in the first measure and in all similar rhythmic figures are played before the beat.