

SCHUBERT

IMPROMPTUS OPUS 142
FOR THE PIANO

EDITED BY MURRAY BAYLOR

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FOREWORD

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 seventeen—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.

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 song writing, 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 the spirit of song pervades 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*, minuetts, *ländler*, galops, etc.

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.

Another unusual rhythmic aspect of Schubert's music is his ambiguous use of the dotted-eighth, sixteenth figure. Sometimes he used it in a literal sense, but at other times he often used it to indicate a rhythm with a dot of variable length as used by baroque composers (and some of today's popular-music performers). When he wrote:



to sound simultaneously with eighth-note triplets in another voice, it was usually intended to sound like:



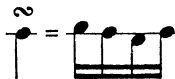
conforming to the triplet rhythm:




Playing the sixteenth note after the triplet, as one might if interpreting it literally, usually sounds clumsy, although exceptions do occur, and so it will be seen quickly that this rule of the "variable dot" doesn't apply to all situations.

Other ambiguities in the interpretation of Schubert's music occur in his use of common ornaments. Most often single grace notes are melodic ornaments played before the beat, though there are exceptions, when harmonic ornaments—*appoggiaturas* on the beat—were probably intended. Pairs of grace notes or groups of three are also normally played before the beat as melodic ornaments.

Trills start on the main note rather than on the auxiliary, and the *Pralltriller*—the short trill or inverted mordent (\sim)—is played as a three-note figure. For turns, however, classical practice should be followed, namely, over the note:



and turns between notes: 

Finally, a word concerning opus numbers. Unfortunately, the opus numbers for Schubert's music were assigned in chaotic order by publishers, most of them after his death. Opus 94, for instance, was written before opus 90. Accordingly, the most reliable guide to the chronological order of the compositions are the numbers assigned by Otto Erich Deutsch in his thematic catalogue (for example, D. 935 to represent op. 142) and they are frequently used to identify the works, in addition to, or as a substitute for, the opus numbers.

THIS EDITION

This edition has been prepared using photoduplicates and microfilm copies of Schubert's manuscript, graciously provided by the Pierpont Morgan Library of New York City. We are also indebted to the scholarship of the late Christa Landon and Walther Durr whose admirable work for the fifth volume of the *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe: Werke für Klavier zu zwei Händen* (Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1984) has been helpful.

Fingerings, metronome marks in parentheses and pedalings are all editorial and should be understood to be only suggestions. Schubert's indications of pedaling are very rare and unspecific. The words *con pedale* appear in his manuscript of the *Impromptu No. 1* under measure 69, and is the only indication of pedaling in this set of *Impromptus*. There is little doubt that Schubert used the pedal freely in his playing and intended its use in his music, though certainly not in the long washes of opaque sound that would be appropriate in the music of Liszt or Debussy.

Schubert's musical handwriting is clear in some respects, yet vague or unclear in others. There are revisions and emendations that probably indicate haste in copying. Slurs in the manuscript are not always clear as to where they start or end, and they are not always consistent. Accent marks ($>$) and diminuendo marks (\rightrightarrows) are hard to distinguish from each other since they are often almost the same length. Dynamic indications are often sparse and inconsistent. There are places where ties from one measure to the next in sustained chords are not complete, and occasionally, intended accidentals have been omitted. In this edition accidentals not in the manuscript have been put in parentheses as well as a few editorial performance suggestions, which of course are not obligatory. Obvious oversights in slurring and ties have been corrected without comment.

IMPROMPTUS

Op. 142 (D. 935)

NO. 1 in F MINOR

Page 5

This impromptu is one of Schubert's most original creations so far as its form is concerned, and one of his most beautiful in its expression. The form has been described as a modified sonata-allegro (though the form here resembles none of Schubert's sonata movements), as a rondo, and as a hybrid of the two. Is it a unique form owing nothing to classical models? A thoughtful examination may reveal an answer. The work opens with an aggressive 4-measure flourish followed by a soft 2-measure reply. These six measures are repeated with embellishments before a fluttering right-hand theme is introduced (measure 13), predominantly in broken thirds and accompanied by light chords. As this first theme develops by 4-measure phrases and sequential passages, it modulates to A-flat for a second theme in octaves (measure 30) and then moves sequentially to F. A vigorous octave passage (measure 39) moves to A-flat to introduce a new lyric theme (measure 45) which progresses by 6-measure units. After a repetition of this theme played by the left hand, a transitional passage leads to new material. It is interesting that all the thematic material heard thus far is unified by a recurring pattern: three repeated pitches, a downward step, and the repetition of the three pitches. The top notes of the fluttering figure at measure 13, the octaves at measure 31, and the lyric theme at measure 45 all follow this pattern.

New material is introduced (measure 69) as the right hand starts a murmuring flow of sixteenth notes and the left hand crosses above and below to play both voices of a hushed dialogue. The key changes from A-flat minor to C-flat and back to A-flat minor (after the repeat sign), for an extension and development which eventually changes to A-flat major. Beginning at the second ending, six measures of transition lead to the second large section, in which all the elements heard thus far return in the tonic key. The proportional lengths within this section are almost identical to those of the first section. The opening twelve measures of the piece are repeated with small alterations (measure 115). The fluttering first theme recurs in F minor at measure 127, then continues in F major. The return of the second theme in octaves and its extensions starts at measure 144, and the lyrical third theme reappears—now in the major—at measure 159. The dialogued episode (measure 182) is in F minor moving to A-flat as it unfolds, and back to F. This dialogue continues in C briefly and, again, moves back to F before the coda. This coda modeled on the opening flourish ends the piece quietly.

This is one of the longest of the impromptus, and its chief difficulty is in the passages with hands crossing. Practicing each hand separately will help solve the problem. Other requirements for mastering this piece include sensitivity to melodic shapes and an awareness of the distinctive harmonies.

NO. 2 in A-FLAT

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This deservedly popular piece begins like a saraband in a gentle swaying rhythm. The first eight measures are repeated in a higher octave concluding with a turn embellishing the second cadence. The next 14 measures—the middle section of this small ternary form—are more forceful and have two extra measures of dominant harmony to break the steady progress of 4-measure phrases before a return to the piece's opening material. At this point (measure 31), there appears a seemingly literal repetition of the beginning, but the second phrase introduces a G-flat in the bass (measure 35) making a small change in these 16 measures which balance with the opening section.

The trio contains rolling triplets with subtly changing harmonies in the subdominant key, contrasting with the first section of the piece. The opening 4 measures of the trio are repeated with the right hand an octave higher. A 4-measure extension concludes with a soft cadence; then the 12 measures are repeated. Following the repeat, a more melancholy expression begins in the key of D-flat minor, leading to a powerful climax in A major. Before the recapitulation of the first part of the trio begins, the bass trill in measure 76 sounds like a distant roll of thunder. A transition from measure 91 to 98 brings the listener back to a complete repetition of the opening of the piece, completed by a 4-measure coda.

The problem of playing the first and last parts is one of keeping the melody and bass line distinct from the remaining harmonic structure through dynamic contrast. Blocking the chords of the trio section by playing all three notes written on one beat as a chord, is an excellent practice technique for learning the hand positions and as an aid to memorization.

NO. 3 in B-FLAT

Page 25

The theme used for this set of variations is similar to one Schubert used as an *entr'acte* in *Rosamunde* as well as to one used in the *Andante* movement of his string quartet in A minor. The exquisite little theme—in two parts, each of 8 measures—cadences toward the tonic through a diminished-seventh chord in measure 7, to end the first half of this theme. The same chord appears in measure 14 of the theme's second half, after a small excursion away from the tonal center. A 2-measure codetta to the theme, repeating the final cadence, brings it to a graceful close. The first variation retains the basic harmony and phrase length of the theme but creates a new melody by weaving additional notes among those of the original melody. The second variation, again retaining the essential shape and harmony of the theme, adds a dainty right-hand melody to its first half and an assertive left-hand melody to the second. The third variation is an impassioned one. It departs further from the theme as the meter changes, the key changes to B-flat minor, and as the register is raised an octave for the literal repeat of the first half of this variation. The phrase lengths remain the same as those of the theme, but the second half takes a wider tonal orbit, moving to F before returning to the tonic and the expected

codetta. The gloom of this variation is dispelled, however, by the perky fourth variation in G-flat with its arpeggiated melodies divided between hands. The codetta to this variation is extended to make a transition back to B-flat. The fifth and last variation is based on the second one. The original harmonic scheme with characteristic diminished seventh chords at the expected places reappears, and the glittering scale figures summon up the mood of a merry romp. The coda, extended to greater length, recalls the theme in a grave, meditative final statement that moves gently to the repose of the final cadence.

NO. 4 in F MINOR

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The last impromptu of this opus is the most brilliant, the least melodic, and the most difficult to interpret and play. It is a large-scale ternary form with a middle section in the relative major. The word *scherzando* indicates a joking, playful atmosphere, and the rhythmic figures suggest a lively Czech or Hungarian dance. The phrase lengths are regular through the first 16 measures and are not disturbed by the implied duple meter in measures 17 and 18, nor in 25 and 26. The nervous trills and the quick dashes up and down the keyboard over dissonant chords in the interlude (measures 36 through 44) suggest a shaken tambourine and the whirl of a dancer; then the dance rhythm resumes at measure 45. Though this appears to be a return to the beginning of the piece, a new departure at measure 59 takes the tonality further afield and uses more implied duple meter before arriving at a second interlude comparable to the one at measure 36.

The dominant seventh before the fermata (measure 86) opens the way to the second large section. More sparkling scale figures, alternating between A-flat major and A-flat minor, now appear in 8-measure groups. The *forte* in the last minor grouping precedes three 4-measure groups, ending at another fermata. A-flat minor is the tonality of the next section marked *con delicatezza*. These 4-measure groups, extended twice (measures 143 and 157), lead to a dominant pedal point and another measure of rest. Of a number of surprises which occur in this piece, the next is a change of key from A-flat to A over a dominant pedal point (measure 165) but measure 185 restores A-flat. This movement of a half step up and down recalls a similar motion in the first part of the piece at measures 30 through 35.

After three groups of four measures, scale passages in 8-measure groups rush up and down, changing from A-flat to A-flat minor and to A again before returning to A-flat (measure 231) and moving from A-flat to C. At measure 283 there begins a mysterious passage of irregular phrase lengths, chords suspended over muttering bass figures, and dramatic measures of extended silence. The last fermata is on a C chord, the dominant, followed by 12 measures of C major, which anticipate the recapitulation of the first section. A literal repetition of 85 measures takes place before a long coda begins (measure 420) with a bouncing right-hand part which continues in 8-measure groups over solemnly changing left-hand chords. After two silent measures, the *più presto* builds in power and tension

over three 8-measure groups and one of four measures, before a final precipitous plunge covering six octaves down to the low F.

The difficulties of learning and playing this piece are those of controlling a fine and varied staccato, playing seamless, glittering scale passages, and establishing and maintaining the continuity that results from thinking in long sections that are the building stones of this remarkable music.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Abraham, Gerald, editor, *The Music of Schubert* (W. W. Norton, 1947).
Brown, Maurice J.E., *The New Grove Schubert* (W. W. Norton, 1983).
Deutsch, Otto Erich, *The Schubert Reader* (W. W. Norton, 1947).
Marek, George R., *Schubert* (Viking-Penguin, 1985).
Osborne, Charles, *Schubert and his Vienna* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

The Impromptus from Opus 142 have been recorded in their entirety by Augustin Anievas, Rudolf Buchbinder, Jörg Demus, Brigitte Engerer, Edwin Fischer, Peter Frankl, Walter Gieseking, Friedrich Gulda, Ingrid Haebler, Wilhelm Kempf, Radu Lupu, Murray Perahia, Artur Schnabel, and Rudolph Serkin. Other artists have recorded individual Impromptus.

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IMPROMPTUS

Allegro moderato (♩ = c.112)

Opus 142 D.935

1. *fp* *cresc.* *f_{R.H.} fz p*

5 *fp* *cresc.*

9 *f fz p* *cresc.* *f*

13 *pp*

- (a) The three grace notes sound best played as a triplet before the rolled left-hand chord.
- (b) The grace notes are played before the beat in measures 4 and 10.
- (c) Of several possible ways of playing the turns in measures 7 and 8, without slowing the tempo, the most satisfactory might be:

etc.

Allegretto (♩ = c.92)

sempre legato

2.

17

23

(a) The turn may be played:

(b) The rhythm of measures 27 and 28 could be:

(c) The manuscript has wide fermatas over and under the first two beats of measure 30, implying a ritard, a pause, and then a return to the original tempo on the third beat.