

ZWEI DOKUMENTE DER SCHUBERT-REZEPTION  
IN DEN BÖHMISCHEN LÄNDERN  
I.

*This article appears below exactly as it appeared in the Century Magazine in 1894, pp.341-346.. A transcription of the article is also found in John Clapham's Antonín Dvořák: Musician and Craftsman. This has some small changes, including changing the spelling from English to American style. There were also some small mistakes, which have been corrected.*

FRANZ SCHUBERT<sup>1</sup>

In less than three years, on January 31st, 1897, a century will have elapsed since Franz Schubert was born, and sixty-nine years since he died. He lived only thirty-two years, yet in this short time—or, more accurately in eighteen years—he wrote more than eleven hundred compositions. This fact, in itself sufficiently astounding, becomes more so when we consider the conditions of his life as described by his biographers—his poverty and privations, from his early years, when we find him suffering from hunger and cold, and unable to buy music-paper to write down his inspirations, to his last year, when typhoid fever ended his career and left his heirs about ten dollars, not enough to pay for his funeral expenses—and no wonder, since even in his last years twenty cents was considered pay enough for some of those songs on which many publishers have since grown rich.

Surprise has often been expressed that the Viennese (among whom he lived) and the publishers should not have appreciated him more substantially; yet it is not difficult to find reasons for this in the circumstances of the case. While a pianist or singer may find immediate recognition, a composer, especially if he has so original a message to deliver as Schubert, has to bide his time. We must

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<sup>1</sup> Previous articles in this series on the Great Composers are: Gounod (autobiographical), *THEY CENTURY* for January 1892; Antonín Dvořák, by H.E. Krehbiel, September 1892; Massenet (autobiographical), November 1892; Liszt, by Camille Saint-Saëns, February, 1893; Saint-Saëns, by H. E. Krehbiel, March 1893; Franz, by H.T. Finck, June 1893; Berlioz, by Ernest Reyer, December, 1893; Schumann, by Edvard Grieg, January, 1894; Grieg, by William Mason, March, 1894.

bear in mind how very young he was when he died. Dr. Hanslick has urged, in defense of the Viennese, that only seven years elapsed between the publication of Schubert's first works and his death, and that during his lifetime he became known chiefly as a song composer; and songs were at that time not sung at public concerts, but only in the domestic circle. Moreover, Rossini on the one hand, and Beethoven on the other, overshadowed the modest young Schubert, and it is significant that Beethoven himself did not discover his genius till the year of his own death. As regards Schubert's orchestral works, we must remember that orchestras were not at that time what they are to-day. The best Viennese organization, the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, found the Symphony in C "too long and too difficult" at the rehearsal and substituted an earlier work. This was in 1828, the year of the composer's death. Ten years later the zealous Schumann discovered the great Symphony in C and took it to Leipzig, where the equally enthusiastic Mendelssohn secured for it a noteworthy success. In Vienna, too, it was taken up again in the following year, but only two movements were given, and these were separated by a Donizetti aria! Three years later Habeneck attempted to produce this symphony in Paris, but the band rebelled over the first movement, and the same result followed in London, two years later still, when Mendelssohn put it in rehearsal for a Philharmonic concert. These things seem strange to us, but they are historic facts, and help to explain why Schubert, with all his melody and spontaneity, made his way so slowly to popular appreciation. He was young, modest, and unknown, and musicians did not hesitate to slight a symphony, which they would have felt bound to study, had it borne the name of Beethoven or Mozart.

But his fame has grown steadily from year to year, and will grow greater still in the next century. Rubinstein has, perhaps, gone farther than any one, not only in including Schubert in the list of those he considers the five greatest composers—Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Glinka—but in exclaiming, "Once more, a thousand times more, Bach, Beethoven and Schubert are the highest summits in music" ("Die Musik und Ihre Meister," p. 50). I am asked whether I approve of this classification. Such questions are difficult to answer. I should follow Rubinstein in including Schubert in the list of the very greatest composers, but I should not follow him in omitting Mozart. Schubert and Mozart have much in common; in both we find the same delicate sense of instrumental coloring, the same spontaneous and irrepressible flow of melody, the same instinctive command of the means of expression, and the same versatility in all the branches of their art. In their amazing fertility, too, they were alike; and herein lay, and still lies, one of the greatest impediments to their popular appreciation. The longer I live, the more I become convinced that composers, like authors, mostly follow the impulse of writing too much. There are a few exceptions, like Berlioz and Chopin—not to forget Wagner, who condensed all his genius into ten great music dramas. Would it not have been better for their immortality and the perpetual delight of mankind, had Rossini written ten operas instead of forty, Donizetti seven instead of seventy? Even Bach's magnificent cantatas would have had a better chance of appreciation if there were not quite so many (the

first 34 volumes of Bach's collected works contain 160 of them.) At the same time we should be sorry to lose a single one of them.

If we are often amazed at the prevailing ignorance and neglect of many of the great works of the masters, we are at the same time obliged to confess that they themselves are largely to blame: they have given us too much. However it is easier to give advice than to follow it. There is in creative minds an impulse to write, which it is difficult to curb, and this was especially the case with Schubert, whose genius was like a spring which nothing but exhaustion could stop from flowing. Fortunately the works of the great master have at least been made accessible in complete editions; the Schubert collection is being completed by Breitkopf and Härtel. It contains many gems unknown to the public, or even to the profession; and it now behooves artists and conductors to select from this embarrassing wealth what most deserves revival.

Schubert contributed to every form of his art; he was, as I have said, as versatile as Mozart, to whom he bears so many points of resemblance. But in one respect these two masters differ widely. Mozart was greatest in the opera, where Schubert was weakest. Schubert's attempts to exercise his genius and improve his fortunes by writing operas came at an unpropitious moment—a time when Vienna was so Rossini-mad that even Beethoven was discouraged from writing for the stage. It took several rebuffs to discourage Schubert; indeed, though all his attempts failed, he is said to have had further operatic projects at the time of his last illness. He was always unlucky with his librettos, which are, without exception, inadequate. There were other untoward circumstances; yet the chief cause of his failure lay, after all, in the nature of his genius, which was lyrical, and not dramatic, or, at any rate, not theatrical. When Liszt produced 'Alfonso und Estrella' at Weimar in 1854, it had only a *succès d'estime*, and Liszt himself confessed that its performance must be regarded merely as *ein Act der Pietät*, and an execution of historic justice. He called attention to the strange fact that Schubert, who in his songs contributed such picturesque and expressive accompaniments, should in this opera have assigned to the instruments such a subordinate rôle that it seemed little more than a pianoforte accompaniment arranged for the orchestra. At the same time, as Liszt very properly adds, Schubert influenced the progress of opera *indirectly*, by showing in his *songs* how closely poetry can be wedded to music, and that it can be emotionally intensified by its impassioned accents. Nor must we overlook the fact that there are in these Schubert operas a few melodies, beautiful as such, which we can enjoy at home or in the concert hall. These melodies were too lyrical in style to save the operas; they lacked also the ornamental brilliancy and theatrical dash which enabled Rossini to succeed temporarily with poor librettos, and with a less genuine dramatic instinct than Schubert has shown in some of his songs such as the "Earl King" and especially the "Doppelgänger," where we come across chords and modulations that affect us like the weird harmonies of *Ortrud's* scenes in "Lohengrin."

Besides the opera there is only one department of music in which Schubert has not in some of his efforts reached the highest summit of musical achieve-

ment. His sacred compositions, although very beautiful from a purely musical point of view, usually lack the true ecclesiastic atmosphere,—a remark which may be applied, in a general way, to Haydn and Mozart, too. To my mind, the three composers who have been most successful in revealing the inmost spirit of religious music are Palestrina, in whom Roman Catholic music reaches its climax; Bach, who embodies the Protestant spirit; and Wagner, who has struck the true ecclesiastic chord in the Pilgrims' Chorus of "Tannhäuser," and especially in the first and third acts of "Parsifal." Compared with these three masters, other composers appear to have made too many concessions to worldly and purely musical factors—of course, not without exceptions. One of these exceptions is Mozart's "Requiem," especially the "Dies Irae," which moves us as few compositions do, and attunes the soul to reverence and worship. Such exceptions may also be found among Schubert's sacred compositions. "Miriam's Song of Victory" is a wonderful work, as are some of his masses. In the Psalms, too, he has achieved great things, especially the one for female voices in A flat major, which is celestial without worldly admixtures. It must not be forgotten, too, that the notions as to what is truly sacred in music may differ somewhat among nations and individuals, like the sense of humor. To the Viennese of their time the masses of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert probably did not seem too *gemütlich* as the Germans say—too genial and sentimental. As for Schubert himself, although he was one of the most modest of men, he was thoroughly convinced of the truly devotional character of his church music. We know this from a letter he wrote to his parents in 1825, and in which occurs the following passage: "Surprise was also expressed at my piety, to which I have given expression in a hymn to the Holy Virgin, and which, as it seems, moves everyone to devotion. I believe this comes of the circumstance that I never force myself into a devout attitude, and never compose such hymns or prayers unless I am involuntarily overcome by it; but in that case it usually happens to be the genuine spirit of devotion"

Schubert's chamber music, especially his string quartets and his trios for pianoforte, violin, and violoncello, must be ranked among the very best of their kind in all musical literature. Of the quartets, the one in D minor is, in my opinion, the most original and important, the one in A minor the most fascinating. Schubert does not try to give his chamber music an orchestral character, yet he attains a marvelous variety of beautiful tonal effects. Here, as elsewhere, his flow of melody is spontaneous, incessant, and irrepressible, leading often to excessive diffuseness. Like Chopin and Rossini, Schubert has frequently shown how a melody may be created which can wonderfully charm us even apart from the harmonic accompaniment, which naturally goes with and enriches it. But he was accused by his contemporaries of neglecting polyphony, or the art of interweaving several melodious parts into a contrapuntal web. This charge, combined with a late study of Handel's scores, induced him shortly before his death to plan a course of counterpoint with Sechter. No doubt his education in counterpoint had been neglected. It is not likely, however, that such study would have materially altered his style. That was too individual from the beginning to

undergo much change, for Schubert did not outgrow his early style so noticeably as did Beethoven and Wagner, for example. Besides, Mendelssohn is undoubtedly a greater master of polyphony than Schubert, yet I prefer Schubert's chamber music to Mendelssohn's.

Of Schubert's symphonies, too, I am such an enthusiastic admirer that I do not hesitate to place him next to Beethoven, far above Mendelssohn, as well as above Schumann. Mendelssohn had some of Mozart's natural instinct for orchestration and gift for form, but much of his work has proved ephemeral. Schumann is at his best in his songs, his chamber music, and his pianoforte pieces. His symphonies, too, are great works, yet they are not always truly orchestral; the form seems to hamper the composer, and the instrumentation is not always satisfactory. This is never the case with Schubert. Although he sometimes wrote carelessly, and often too diffusely, he is never at fault in his means of expression, while mastery of form came to him spontaneously. In originality of harmony and modulation, and in his gift of orchestral coloring, Schubert has had no superior. Dr. Riemann asserts with justice that in their use of harmony both Schumann and Liszt are descendants of Schubert; Brahms too, whose enthusiasm for Schubert is well known, has perhaps felt his influence; and as for myself, I cordially acknowledge my great obligations to him.

I have just observed that mastery of form came to Schubert spontaneously. This is illustrated by his early symphonies, five of which he wrote before he was twenty, at which, the more I study them, the more I marvel. Although the influence of Haydn and Mozart is apparent in them, Schubert's musical individuality is unmistakable in the character of the melody, in the harmonic progressions, and in many exquisite bits of orchestration. In his later symphonies he becomes more and more individual and original. The influence of Haydn and Mozart, so obvious in his earlier efforts, is gradually eliminated, and with his contemporary, Beethoven, he had less in common from the beginning. He resembles Beethoven, however, in the vigor and melodious flow of his basses; such basses we find already in his early symphonies. His "Unfinished Symphony" and the great one in C are unique contributions to musical literature, absolutely new and original, Schubert in every bar. What is perhaps most characteristic about them is the song-like melody pervading them. He introduced the song into the symphony, and made the transfer so skillfully that Schumann was led to speak of the resemblance to the human voice (*Aehnlichkeit mith dem Stimmorgan*) in these orchestral parts.

Although these two symphonies are by far the best of Schubert's, it is a pity that they alone should be deemed worthy [of] a place in our concert programs. I played the sixth in C major and No. 5 in B [sic] major a dozen times with my orchestral pupils at the National Conservatory last winter; they shared my pleasure in them, and recognized at once their great beauty.

It was with great pleasure and feelings of gratitude that I read not long ago of the performance in Berlin of the B [sic] major Symphony by Herr Weingartner, one of the few conductors who have the courage to put this youthful work on their programs. Schubert's fourth too, is an admirable composition. It bears the

title of "Tragic Symphony" and was written at the age of nineteen, about a year after the "Erl King". It makes one marvel that one so young should have had the power to give utterance to such deep pathos. In the adagio there are chords that strikingly suggest the anguish of *Tristan's* utterances; nor is this the only place wherein Schubert is prophetic of Wagnerian harmonies. And although partly anticipated by Gluck and Mozart, he was one of the first to make use of an effect to which Wagner and other modern composers owe many of their most beautiful orchestral colours—the employment of the brass, not for noise, but played softly, to secure rich and warm tints.

The richness and variety of coloring in the great Symphony in C are astounding. It is a work which always fascinates, always remains new. It has the effect of gathering clouds, with constant glimpses of sunshine breaking through them. It illustrates also, like most of Schubert's compositions, the truth of an assertion once made to me by Hans Richter—that the greatest masters always reveal their genius most unmistakably and most delightfully in their slow movements. Personally I prefer the *Unfinished Symphony* even to the one in C; apart from its intrinsic beauty, it avoids the fault of diffuseness.

If Schubert's symphonies have a serious fault it is prolixity; he does not know when to stop; yet, if the repeats are omitted, a course of which I thoroughly approve, and which, indeed, is not generally adopted, they are not too long. Schubert's case, in fact, is not an exception to, but an illustration of, the general rule that symphonies are made too long. When Bruckner's eighth Symphony was produced in Vienna last winter, the Philharmonic Society had to devote a whole concert to it. The experiment has not been repeated anywhere, and there can be no doubt that this symphony would have a better chance of making its way in the world if it were shorter. This remark has a general application. We should return to the symphonic dimensions approved by Haydn and Mozart. In this respect Schumann is a model, especially his B flat major and D minor Symphonies; also in his chamber music. Modern taste calls for music that is concise, condensed, and pithy.

In Germany, England, and America, Schubert's instrumental works, chamber and orchestral, have long since enjoyed a vogue and popularity which have amply atoned for their neglect at first. As for the French, they have produced two Schubert biographies, but it cannot be said that they have shown the same general sympathy for this master as for some other German composers, or as the English have, thanks largely to the enthusiastic efforts of my esteemed friend Sir George Grove. It is on record that after Habeneck had made an unsuccessful effort (his musicians rebelled at the rehearsal) to produce the great Symphony in C at a Conservatoire concert no further attempt was made with Schubert's orchestral compositions at these concerts for forty years.

This may help to explain the extraordinary opinion of the eminent French critic, Fétis, that Schubert is less original in his instrumental works than in his songs, the popularity of which, too, he declared to be largely a matter of fashion! The latter insinuation is of course to absurd to call for comment to-day, but as regards the first part of his criticism I do not hesitate to say that, greatly as

I esteem Schubert's songs, I value his instrumental works even more highly. Were all his compositions to be destroyed but two, I should say, save the last two symphonies.

Fortunately we are not confronted by any such necessity. The loss of Schubert's pianoforte pieces and songs would indeed be irreparable. For although much of their spirit and substance has passed into the works of his imitators and legitimate followers, the originals have never been equaled in their way. In most of his works Schubert is unique in melody, rhythm, modulation, and orchestration, but from a formal point of view he is most original in his songs and his short pieces for piano. In his symphonies, chamber music, operas and sacred compositions, he follows classical models; but in the *Lied*, the "Musical Moment," the "Impromptu," he is romanticist in every fibre. Yet he wrote no fewer than twenty-four sonatas for pianoforte, two or four hands, in which he follows classical models, and we can trace the influence of Beethoven's style even in the three, which he wrote in the last year of his life. This seems strange at first when we consider that in the *Lied* and the short pianoforte pieces he betrayed no such influence even in his earliest days. The 'Erl King' and "The Wanderer," written when he was eighteen and nineteen respectively, are Schubert in every bar, whereas the piano sonatas and symphonies of this period are much more imitative, much less individual. One reason for this, doubtless, is that just as it is easier to write a short lyric poem than a long epic, so it is easier for a young composer to be original in short forms than in the more elaborate sonata and symphony; and we must remember that Schubert died at thirty-one.

But there was another reason. The tendency of the romantic school has been towards short forms, and although Weber helped to show the way, to Schubert belongs the chief credit of originating the short models of pianoforte pieces, which the romantic school has preferably cultivated. His "Musical Moments" are unique, and it may be said that in the third "Impromptu" (op.90) lie the germs of the whole of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words." Schumann has remarked that Schubert's style is more idiomatically pianistic (*claviermässig*) than Beethoven's, and this is perhaps true of these short pieces. Yet it can hardly be said that either Schubert or Schumann was in this respect equal to Bach or Chopin, who of all composers have written the most idiomatically for the piano. I cannot agree with Schumann in his rather depreciatory notice of Schubert's last sonatas. (he speaks of "greater simplicity of invention," "a voluntary dispensing with brilliant novelty," and connects this with Schubert's last illness). I would not say that Schubert is at his best in these sonatas as a whole, but I have a great admiration for parts of them, especially for the last one in B flat with the exquisite andante in C sharp minor. Taking them all in all, I do not know but that I prefer his sonatas even to his short pieces for the piano. Yet they are never played at concerts!

Just as the "Impromptus" and "Musical Moments" were the source of the large crop of romantic short pieces, so Schubert's charming waltzes were the predecessors of the Lanner and Strauss dances on the one hand, and of Chopin's

waltzes on the other. There is an astounding number of these Schubert dance pieces; they are charming as originally written, and Liszt has given some of them a brilliant setting for the concert hall. In this humble sphere, as in the more exalted ones we have discussed, historians have hardly given Schubert full credit for his originality and influence.

In Schubert's pianoforte music, perhaps even more than in his other compositions, we find a Slavic trait which he was the first to introduce prominently into art-music, namely, the quaint alternation of major and minor within the same period. Nor is this the only Slavic or Hungarian trait to be found in his music. During his residence in Hungary, he assimilated national melodies and rhythmic peculiarities, and embodied them in his art, thus becoming the forerunner of Liszt, Brahms, and others who have made Hungarian melodies an integral part of European concert music. From the rich stores of Slavic folk-music, in its Hungarian, Russian, Bohemian and Polish varieties, the composers of to-day have derived, and will continue to derive, much that is charming and novel in their music. Nor is there anything objectionable in this, for if the poet and painter base much of their best art on national legends, songs, and traditions, why should not the musician? And to Schubert will belong the honor of having been one of the first to show the way.

Perhaps the luckiest accident in Schubert's life was his acquaintance and friendship with the famous tenor Vogl. This was brought about deliberately by his friends, in order to secure for his songs the advantage of that singer's artistic interpretations. Vogl at first pretended to be "tired of music" and showed some indifference to his modest young accompanist's songs; but this was soon changed to interest, followed by genuine enthusiasm. Thus it came about that these songs were gradually made familiar in Viennese social circles. Schubert himself sang, though only with a "composer's voice"; but he must have been an admirable accompanist. In a letter to his parents he says: "I am assured by some that under my fingers the keys are changed to singing voice, which, if true, would please me greatly." This, written only three years before his death, illustrates his great modesty. In some recently published reminiscences by Josef von Spaun<sup>1</sup> it is related how, when Vogl and Schubert performed together at soirées in Vienna, the ladies would crowd about the tenor, lionizing him and entirely ignoring the composer. But Schubert, instead of feeling annoyed or jealous, was actually pleased. Adoration embarrassed him, and he is known to have dodged it once by escaping secretly by the back door.

Little did the Viennese dream that the songs thus interpreted for them by Schubert and Vogl would create a new era in music. In the *Lied* or lyric song, not only is Schubert the first in point of time, but no one has ever surpassed him. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven did indeed write a few songs, but merely by the way, and without revealing much of their genius or individuality in them. But Schubert created a new epoch with the *Lied*, as Bach did with the piano, and Haydn with the orchestra. All other song writers have followed in his footsteps,

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<sup>1</sup> "Classisches und Romantisches aus der Tonwelt," von La Mara. 1892.

all are his pupils, and it is to his rich treasure of songs that we owe, as a heritage, the beautiful songs of such masters as Schumann, Franz, and Brahms. To my taste the best songs written since Schubert are the "Magelonen-Lieder" of Brahms; but I agree with the remark once made to me by the critic Ehlert that Franz attained the highest perfection of all in making poetry and music equivalent in his songs.

In the best of Schubert's songs we find the same equivalence of poem and music, and it was lucky that Vogl was an artist who, as Spaun says, "sang in such a way as to interest his hearers not only in the music, but also in the poem," which so few singers do. In the absence of singers who could imitate Vogl in this respect, Liszt was justified in arranging these songs for the piano-forte, whereby he greatly accelerated their popularity. To hear the real Schubert, however, we must have the voice and the poem, too, so that we may note how closely the poem and the music are amalgamated, and how admirably the melodic accent coincides with the poetic. In this respect Schubert marks a great advance over his predecessors. He was almost as adverse to word-repetitions as Wagner, whom he also resembles in the powerful emotional effects he produces by his modulations, especially in his later songs.

Schubert's melodic fount flowed so freely that he sometimes squandered good music on a poor text, as is shown in his operas and in some of his songs. Usually, however, the best poems evoked the best music from his creative fancy. His fertility is amazing. It is known that he composed as many as eight songs in one day, and ninety-nine in one year (1816), while the whole number of his songs exceeds six hundred. The best of these songs are now so universally known, and have been so much discussed, that it is difficult to offer any new comment on them.

There is only once more point to which attention may be called here—Schubert's power of surrounding us with the poetic atmosphere of his subject with the very first bars of his *Lieder*. For such a stroke of genius recall his song "Der Leiermann," the pathetic story of the poor hurdy-gurdy player whose plate is always empty, and for whose woes Schubert wins our sympathy by his sad music—by that plaintive, monotonous figure which pervades the accompaniment from beginning to end, bringing the whole scene vividly before our eyes and keeping it there to the end. Before Schubert no song writer had conceived such an effect; after he had shown the way others eagerly followed in his footsteps.

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<sup>1</sup> The coöperation of Mr. Henry T. Finck in the preparation of this article is hereiwht acknowledged by the Editor.

