

Chapter 16: Schubert's Private Art: 1797–1828

I. Lieder

A. Introduction

1. The previous chapters have focused on public music, but a significant contribution to the nineteenth-century repertory lies in private music, especially the works of Schubert.
2. Two important genres in this regard are *Lied* (plural *Lieder*) and *Charakterstück* (character piece).

B. Schubert: a life in art

1. Schubert was not famous during his lifetime, but his reputation grew tremendously soon after his early death, thanks in large part to his friends.
2. In 1821, Schubert published some songs. The income from these songs allowed him to focus more on composition than teaching.
3. By the time he was twenty-four, Schubert was getting publicity, acclaim, performances, and publications.
4. Schubertiades and the salon
 - a) Schubert's performances were often for a musical society (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde).
 - b) Schubert's private sphere of music making was known as a "Schubertiade," but is in essence the beginning of salon culture.
 - c) Salons were large rooms where invited guests gathered, usually run by a patron.
 - d) While salons were associated with aristocratic circles, Schubertiades involved a more bohemian group of civil servants.
 - e) Such small gatherings fit the Romantic ideal of the individual, private over public.
5. Schubert was the first composer to make the Lied a major genre.
6. Although he never met the poet, Schubert most frequently chose poems by Goethe for his Lieder.
7. At age eighteen he composed both "Heidenröslein" and "Der Erlkönig."

C. Schubert's health crisis

1. In 1822, Schubert became gravely ill and went to hospital.
2. He seemed to get better, although he lived the remainder of his life in fear of new symptoms.
 - a) This is documented by a letter he wrote to a friend, Leopold Kupelwieser.
 - b) He turned to instrumental music, writing chamber music and talking about a great symphony, although he had already written six.
 - c) In this letter he reveals his view of Beethoven as a model.
3. In the 1820s Schubert appeared to his friends to be living only to compose.

D. What contemporaries knew of Schubert's music

1. In a composition career lasting only eighteen years, Schubert wrote just under one thousand works.
2. Putting the compositions in chronological order gives some indication of how his contemporaries saw him.
3. In 1818 he published a large-scale piano work, dedicated to Beethoven, for piano duet.
4. The next publication was three part songs, reflecting a growing popularity for singing societies in German states.
5. The earliest publications show Schubert's attempt at commercial success, working within markets for a buying public, for consumption at home.

E. The elevation of the Lied

1. The type of Lied that dominated private music in the nineteenth century originated in Berlin with C. P. E. Bach.
 - a) This type of piece not only was personally expressive, but also fit the growing fascination with folklikeness, as observed in the study of *Der Freischütz*.
 - b) Lieder was initially considered a lowly genre, and its composers were valued for their simplistic settings.
 - c) Haydn and Mozart composed some Lieder.
2. Beethoven composed almost one hundred Lieder, mostly early in his career.
 - a) His *An die ferne Geliebte* is the earliest song cycle to remain in the performed repertory today.

F. Lyric and ballad: Goethe's "Heidenröslein" and "Der Erlkönig"

1. The poetry of Lied divided into two types: lyric and ballad.
2. Lyrics were set as dance songs with stanzas and refrains.
 - a) Goethe's most famous lyric poem is "Heidenröslein."
 - b) He wanted these types of poems to be set strophically.
3. Goethe also wanted ballads to be set strophically so that the singer had the opportunity to shade the music as he or she saw fit.
4. Composers saw the strophic form as limited, often preferring through-composed or a combination of the two.
5. The most famous ballad was Goethe's "Der Erlkönig" (1781).

G. Schubert's settings of Goethe

1. Schubert composed some 630 Lieder from nearly one hundred different poets. Goethe was the poet who inspired his first masterpieces and was the one whose poems he set most often.
2. "Heidenröslein" is a simple strophic song, natural and relatively easy to perform.
3. "Der Erlkönig" is entirely different in that it completely ignores most aspects associated with the genre in intensity, drama, and technical difficulty.
 - a) The recitative serves only to bring the thundering and driving music to an extremely abrupt halt.
 - b) Each character has special characteristics that mark the part.

- c) The tonal center shifts incessantly throughout “Erlkönig.”
- d) The terrifying outcries of the little boy bring increased tension.
- e) The pounding of the horse’s hooves recedes as the subjective elements take over.

II. Schubert’s piano character pieces

A. Schubert also composed character pieces, such as his impromptus.

- 1. These pieces are good examples of his harmonic style, most notably the use of modal mixture.
 - a) A new range of related keys is available for “tonicization”—for setting up as alternate harmonic goals—including several that had not formerly figured among normal diatonic relations.
- 2. His *Moments musicaux* are also smaller piano works where Schubert’s ability to capture intimacy abound.

III. Schubert’s later works

A. The “Unfinished” Symphony

- 1. In his last years, Schubert turned to larger forms, many of which were only heard for the first time after his death.
- 2. After some early attempts, Schubert attempted a more expansive symphony in 1822. It is now known as the “Unfinished Symphony” because there are only two movements.
 - a) The Unfinished Symphony premiered almost forty years after Schubert’s death and was immediately successful.
- 3. The mood of the symphony is introspective, intimate—in high contrast to those of Beethoven.
- 4. The formal outline is not clear and structured as in the Beethovenian model, but resounds with lyricism.

B. Following Beethoven

- 1. Schubert gave a concert of his own works on the first anniversary of Beethoven’s death.
- 2. Like others, it was in a room owned by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde.
- 3. Chamber music was an important part of this concert.
 - a) Schubert honored Beethoven with these works using techniques and/or motives of the older composer’s works.
 - b) He adapted the “farewell” motive, which, when added to the date of the concert, suggests further homage to Beethoven.

C. Schubert’s last songs

- 1. In less than two years after Beethoven’s death, Schubert composed some of his greatest works: *Winterreise*, String Quintet in C, Violin Fantasy in C, Mass in Eb, three piano sonatas, and others.
- 2. The last songs were published posthumously in 1828, under the title *Schwanengesang* (Swan Song). They are not a true song cycle, but a collection of the final ones.
- 3. At his request, Schubert was buried near Beethoven.