

## Annual Review of Schubert's Life

### 1815

"The year 1815 has been called Schubert's *annus mirabilis*. This hardly overstates the case. His output in this year can be summarised as: four Singspiele, a symphony and a half, a string quartet, nine works for solo piano, eight or nine church works involving orchestra (from the 109-bar *Offertory* (D181) to the *Mass in G major*, (D167), some two dozen partsongs mostly with piano accompaniment, and about 140 songs."<sup>[1]</sup> During the late weeks of 1814 Schubert had begun to develop a new sensitivity to text and this revealed itself especially in a heightened response to the verse of Goethe, most notably expressed in the setting of *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, D118 – almost certainly written with the voice of Therese Grob in mind. The piano promised by a proud father following the festival performance of his son's first Mass (in F, D105) was delivered during the early weeks of 1815, and for the composer its arrival generated a renewed interest in the scope of the piano as a solo instrument. The piano's accessibility also helped to catalyse a greater liberation in the piano's rôle in song, offering it increased independence to play its own part by expressing the underlying emotions of the text. Schubert, increasingly greedy for fresh texts to set, found inspiration from his new circle of friends. One of the aims of the *Bildung Circle* to whom Schubert had just been introduced, was the study of literature, and at their meetings this would frequently take the form of members reading to the group from texts that they had personally chosen. Circle members were keen enough to prepare notes or essays on these texts, presenting them for discussion when they next met. Schubert was being exposed to a quantity of new material much of which excited him, but feeling ill-equipped to offer essays to the group nevertheless found himself taking along bundles of paper, manuscripts of songs, settings of the new poems that he had fallen upon so eagerly.

Music of many kinds was now flowing freely from his pen, although the pieces for solo piano soon dried up – perhaps with disillusionment at the poor quality of instrument that his father had been able to afford – but not before he had produced two major pieces in styles new to him; a set of free-standing variations and a sonata for piano solo. The *10 Variations on an Original Theme in F* (D156) are undoubtedly inhibited by the conventions of key and form but do display a range of interesting textures. The *Piano Sonata in E major* (D157, also of February) is more important, being his first known essay at a major instrumental work. It is incomplete, lacking a final movement, and perhaps it was a natural reaction on the part of the composer to withdraw from the sonata at that stage given the unsatisfactory opening movement with its below-par inspiration and its repetitive nature. "By this time Schubert had created some immortal songs. He aspired to greatness as an instrumental composer, but greatness in that field was harder won."<sup>[2]</sup> The struggle to achieve that greatness will re-surface when Schubert makes a return in 1817 to tackle the problems posed by the structure of the sonata with some determination. In the meantime the rôle of the piano continues to be active, some nine or ten songs with piano making their appearance in that same month of February, and part-songs now frequently being provided with piano accompaniment.

By the end of the first week in March Schubert had written his second Mass (in G, D167), taking only a few days, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>. Smaller in scale than the first Mass it was again written for the Lichtental church but with regular Sunday use in mind. Schubert wrote the high soprano-solo part for the pure voice of Therese Grob; the other forces were solo alto and tenor, a mixed chorus and strings, trumpet and timpani parts being added later. Over the next few days two settings of Klopstock for mixed chorus and piano, and four pieces set to

texts by Körner were penned. By the 24<sup>th</sup> Schubert had completed his *Second Symphony in B-flat* (D125) which he had begun in the previous December (on the 10<sup>th</sup>), and on the very next day, 25<sup>th</sup> March, he was working at a new *String Quartet in G minor* (D173) which, with rougher edges than the previous *Quartet in B-flat* (D112), perhaps reveals some Beethovenian influences. This quartet is now beginning to make occasional appearances in performance.

A variety of songs and shorter church pieces followed before Schubert turned again to the theatre, starting work on a light-hearted Singspiel by his late friend Theodor Körner. Körner had lived in the room that Schubert was later to share with Mayrhofer, before he was killed in battle in 1813. *Der vierjährige Posten* (The Four-year Sentry Duty) D190 took Schubert just twelve days to complete, during which time he was also producing songs to texts by Schiller and Hölty. He continued by setting a dozen more songs to words by Hölty some fourteen by Kosegarten, and settings of Goethe and others whilst working on his sunny *Third Symphony in D major* (D200) from 24<sup>th</sup> May to 19<sup>th</sup> July. A short Singspiel in one Act, *Fernando* (D220), to words by his friend from the *Stadtkonvikt*, Albert Stadler, occupied him briefly during this same period from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 9<sup>th</sup> July. This story, based too closely on the basic premise of *Fidelio*, unfortunately did not offer much promise of success.

Turning again to the theatre with a Goethe 3-Act Singspiel, *Claudine von Villa Bella* (D239), Schubert completed the first act on 5<sup>th</sup> August. Unfortunately only this first act survived the 1848 revolution, when Acts II and III were burned as fuel by the servants of Josef Hüttenbrenner. Josef was the brother of Anselm Hüttenbrenner whom Schubert would first meet at Salieri's composition classes towards the end of the year. Anselm was an extremely good pianist and musician and his friendship with Schubert would grow to be strong, and came to be influential. Josef, the younger brother arrived in Vienna in 1818, becoming Schubert's amanuensis for a time. Both brothers held manuscripts of Schubert's works after his death.

During the summer months the members of the *Bildung Circle* were alarmed to hear that their circle had been denounced to the police as a suspect secret society. Student groups were regarded suspiciously by the Emperor Franz as free-thinking and harbouring democratic ideas destabilising to the State, and as such would often find the heavy hand of Metternich falling upon them. Impending trouble was first felt at the *Stadtkonvikt*, where young men associated with the Circle began to experience harassment and troublesome attention. As a result Franz von Schober, a member of the *Bildung Circle* in Linz, was advised in a long letter from Josef von Spaun on 9<sup>th</sup> October not to enrol at *Stadtkonvikt* on his arrival in Vienna where he could come under suspicion. Fortunately a favourable report on the activities of the Linz group reached the Austrian authorities from a respected churchman of the St. Florian monastery and the Vienna branch of the circle was permitted to continue its activities.

The period between July and October was filled with song, Schubert commonly writing whole groups of songs to texts by a single poet; finding a voice in response to one author and then moving on to seek inspiration from another. Hence we find quite long sequences of settings to verse-texts by, say, Kosegarten or Schiller or Hölty or Goethe. On the 15<sup>th</sup> October he wrote eight songs in the one day (D302-9) – in this instance not all to the words of one author – but to one dedicatee; it was the name-day of Therese Grob. Two days later he created seven new songs, all to words by Kosegarten (D313-9), and completed two versions of a Schiller scena *Hektors Abschied* (D312).

One could not expect all of the 140 or 150 songs of this year to be outstanding – many were by their nature experimental and Schubert was still extending his wings – but his new-found freedom for the rôle of the piano together with his increasing fluency inevitably created a varied range of songs, some of them beautiful, and some unquestioned masterpieces: from the rapturous *An die Nachtigall* (D196), of May to words by Hölty; the small-scale magic of *Seufzer*, *The Sigh*, (D198), also by Hölty; *Mein Gruss an den Mai* (D305) with its delightful piano interludes; the small-scale masterpiece *Heidenröslein*, *The Hedge Rose*, (D257); to that towering masterpiece of October, *Erlkönig* (D328).

November and December once again saw Schubert turn towards the theatre, working through the remainder of the year on *Die Freunde von Salamanka* (D326), a Singspiel in two Acts to a libretto by Johann Mayrhofer. "His friendship with Mayrhofer was growing, and by the end of November two new friends who were nearer his own age, Schober and Anselm Hüttenbrenner, had entered his world in Vienna."[\[3\]](#)

### **Notable works of 1815:**

D141 A major *Der Mondabend* Kumpf song 1815  
D156 F major *10 variations on an original theme* 1815 15 Feb  
D157 E major Piano Sonata (1) Incomplete (no final mvt) 1815 Feb  
D167 G major Mass 2 S,T,B,SATB,str 1815 2-7 Mar  
D181 A minor Offertory *Tres Sunt* SATB, orch, org 1815 10-11 Apr  
D173 G minor String Quartet 9 1815 25 Mar-1 Apr  
D190 D major *Der vierjährige Posten* Körner Singspiel 1815 8-19 May  
D196 F#minor *An die Nachtigall* Hölty song 1815 22 May  
D198 G minor *Seufzer* Hölty song 1815 22 May  
D200 D major Symphony (3) 1815 24 May-19 Jul  
D215a C major *Meeres Stille 1* Goethe song 1815 20 Jun  
D216 C major *Meeres Stille 2* Goethe song 1815 21 Jun  
D220 *Fernando* 1 Act Only Stadler Singspiel 1815 27 Jun-9 Jul  
D239 E major *Claudine von Villa Bella* Overture & 1st Act Goethe Singspiel 1815 26 Jul  
D257 G major *Heidenröslein* Goethe song 1815 19 Aug  
D305 Bb major *Mein Gruss an den Mai* Kumpf song 1815 15 Oct  
D325 A minor *Harfenspieler-Wer sich der einsamkeit ergibt 1* Goethe song 1815 13 Nov  
D326 C major *Die Freunde von Salamanka* Mayrhofer Singspiel (2 Acts) 1815 18 Nov-31 Dec  
D328 G minor *Erlkönig* 4 Versions Goethe song 1815 Oct

### **Notes**

[1] Newbould: [Schubert The Music and the Man](#), pp40

[2] Newbould: [Schubert The Music and the Man](#), p95

[3] McKay: [Franz Schubert: A biography](#), p55-6

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