

Annual Review of Schubert's Life

1816

In the August of the previous year Schubert's father had sought to gain advancement in his profession, applying 'to the Prelate of the Scottish Order, Andreas, for the Vacant Teacher's Post at the Elementary School of the Monastery (25th August 1815.)'[1] His application was without success, and his disappointment would resonate in the Schubert household for some time.

The application by his father was to be echoed by Schubert's own hope of personal advancement. A notice that appeared in the Wiener Zeitung of 17th February 1816 invited applications for the 'Filling of the Music Master's Post at the German Normal School Establishment at Laibach'[2] at a salary of 450 florins A.C. The requirements for the post seemed to be well within the capabilities of the young Schubert – he was now nineteen – and the salary, at around six times the pittance that he was currently receiving, was attractive. Moreover, such an improvement in his finances would be necessary if he was to contemplate marriage, and it seems likely that at this time both he and Therese did have such hopes. It would also enable him to break away from the unhappy situation at his father's Säulengasse schoolhouse. However, in spite of a written testimonial from Salieri and being 'highly recommended by the civic authorities and the School Inspectorate in Vienna', he was notified, probably on 7th September, that he had not been successful and that the post had been assigned to a local musician, Franz Sokol.

Schubert scarcely maintained any sort of diary, and of what few pages he may have written very few have survived. The last entry (made on the 8th September, the day after receiving the notification of his rejection) was written in the realisation that any thought of marriage with Therese was now out of the question, and makes dispiriting reading:

'Happy is the man who finds a true man-friend; but happier still he who finds a true friend in his wife. These days matrimony is an alarming thought to an unmarried man: if he does not marry, he has to settle for misery or gross sensuality. Monarchs of today, you see what is happening and do nothing. Or are you blind to it? If so, O God, shroud our senses and feelings in numbness; but remove the shroud again one day without lasting harm.'[3]

"He refers with some intensity to the misery caused by the state's refusal to permit the marriage of men without means, forcing them instead into either unwilling celibacy or commercial sex; and he prays that the nation's rulers will see what they are doing to their people and relent, and that meanwhile God will help those faced with the wretched options open to them."[4]

If he had obtained the post, if he had married, and assuming that the marriage had proved to be a happy one, then Schubert's life could have turned out very differently. As it was, Schubert was to remain unmarried, and was still to be living at home (having with reluctance had to return to the family home and back to teaching, as we shall see) when his father ultimately had success in obtaining his advancement, becoming the principal of a school in the Rossau district. The destruction of his hopes, accompanied now by the worsening relationship with his father, were to precipitate for Schubert something akin to a nervous breakdown early in 1818. But that is still a year away.

If 1815 was a year in which opera was largely to be a preoccupation, 1816 saw Schubert giving more attention to orchestral and instrumental music. The musical evenings in the Schubert household had expanded from a family string quartet into a string chamber orchestra outgrowing available space and moving to the larger premises of a merchant, Franz Frischling.

With the addition of wind instruments the group expanded into an orchestra capable of playing Haydn and Mozart symphonies and the rehearsals were transposed, late in 1815, to the home of Otto Hatwig where there was space for the orchestra to flourish. Works by Schubert were now being played there by the orchestra, and his interest in both orchestral and instrumental pieces was being stimulated.

1816 was to prove to be another prolific year for the composer resulting in two symphonies: the Symphony No.4 in C minor 'The Tragic' (D417) finished at the end of April, and the ever-popular Symphony No.5 in B-flat (D485) completed on 3rd October. He composed chamber music, and another opera, as well as church music that was to include a Fourth Mass, in C major (D452), and something like another 100 songs.

In March Schubert produced three concise Sonatas for violin and piano which have long been favourites in domestic performance. These sonatas were issued under the title of 'Sonatinas' by the publisher, No.1 in D major (D384); No.2 in A minor (D385), with its first movement's main subject clearly influenced by that of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E major Op.14 No.1; and No.3 in G minor (D408). Earlier in the year he had composed what was probably his eleventh, and the last of his schoolhouse quartets, the String Quartet in E major (D353).

Life at the schoolhouse meanwhile was proving difficult. His father objected to visits by his friends – friends with whom he played and sang through his songs, and who together sang male-voice trios – on the basis that it interfered with school life. Schubert was blessed with friends in whose company he was happy and this was one of the few ways that he could enjoy the limited free time available to him. Motivated by his growing dissatisfaction with life at home, and almost certainly by his hope to gain a stipend sufficient to permit him, in law, to marry Therese, Schubert in April made his application for the position at Laibach referred to above.

Being unable with comfort to bring his friends home Schubert by May had begun visiting the home of a tenor, Mozatti, where together with Anselm Hüttenbrenner and Anton Stadler they could enjoy the singing of male-voice quartets. All of them were or had been pupils of Salieri, and it became a custom between them that each of them (with the exception of Mozatti who was not a composition pupil but a singing pupil of Salieri) should bring along a quartet that they had newly composed to enliven the evening. We know that Schubert's contributions included *Die Einsiedelei* (D337), *An den Frühling* (D338), and *Fischerlied* (D364). Hüttenbrenner tells how Schubert, on one occasion having forgotten to bring his contribution, found no difficulty in writing one at great speed whilst they waited.

Sometime in the early months of the year Spaun had persuaded Schubert to prepare copies of a number of his settings of Goethe so that he may bind them and send the volume to the poet, with the hope that the great man would sanction the dedication of the songs to him. Spaun together with a group of his friends and admirers of the composer intended to assemble a whole series of volumes of Schubert's songs for publication, each book to be dedicated to one of the poets that Schubert had set. In the event Spaun's letter was unanswered and the volume of songs was returned by Goethe without comment.

Anxious for Schubert's well-being, the composer "perhaps showing early signs of the depression that was to darken his later years"[5], Spaun invited him to spend a few days with him in the school's term-end break in May. Spaun had recently moved to a new home in the house of Prof. Heinrich Josef Watteroth where his friend Josef Wilhelm Witterczek from student days also had a home, and when they were together the youthful high spirits and pranks of the trio must have provided a much needed tonic for Schubert. It was on this visit that his companions locked him in his room with instructions that he had to complete a composition before they would be release him. The resultant *Six Écossaises* for piano (D421) bore the inscription on the title page (now lost), 'Composed whilst confined to my room at Erdberg, May 1816.'

Schubert and Schober had become acquainted in the previous autumn. Franz von Schober was a close neighbour of Spaun and being a man of culture, with both literary and musical skills, he was quickly accepted into this circle of friends. His mother was wealthy, and together with her and his sister, he lived a luxurious lifestyle. Being also a man of great charm he soon came to be a leading personality in the Vienna Bildung Circle and his home a popular meeting place. He was to have an important influence on Schubert throughout the whole of the composer's life, and it was his generosity (and especially that of his mother) that was to present a lifeline to Schubert when he gave up the burden of teaching in the autumn of this year. Indeed it would appear that Schober, recognising Schubert's distress at his life in the Säulengasse schoolhouse, encouraged him to take this pivotal step.

An aspect of Schober's character, however, that was to prove less attractive, was a philosophy of hedonism that over time came to stimulate a sensuality in Schubert that must already have been latent. The consequence was the treading of a path that we now know led to a serious impairment of the composer's health within as few as the next six or seven years.

Heinrich Josef Watteroth, Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of Vienna, counted several members of the Bildung Circle amongst his pupils, and these included Spaun and Schober, as well as Stadler, Mayrhofer, Schlechta, and Sonnleithner, all of whom admired him for his liberal views. Like the professor, Josef Witterczek was a music-lover, and he together with other students, also pupils of the professor, devised a scheme to celebrate Watteroth's nameday with a serenade concert, for which Schubert was commissioned to write the music. The text was by another of the law students, Philipp Draxler. The Cantata, Prometheus (D451), was Schubert's first commission, and a significant event of which he was proud; 'Today I composed for money for the first time' he wrote in his diary ...'The fee is 100 florins WW' (40fl. KM) – but this was destined to be the last commission that he would gain for some time.

A shorter cantata was written for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Salieri's arrival in Vienna (D407), and in his diary Schubert noted the satisfaction that it must have given Salieri on this occasion to be surrounded by his admiring pupils - and also to record Salieri's admiration for Gluck, echoing (uncharacteristically) Salieri's denigration of Beethoven. With Salieri's guidance he began in May to work on a serious opera, Die Bürgerschaft (D435) with which he never seemed to be in sympathy and which was to remain unfinished. Another short cantata, in honour of Canon Spendou (D472) was to follow, but neither of these cantatas were commissions offering a fee. Two settings of the Tantum Ergo (D460 & 461) came in the summer soon after the completion of the Mass, and a Magnificat (D486) soon followed – all of these works, like the Mass, being in C major.

In 1888, sixty years after Schubert's death, five pieces for the piano came to be published, being entitled simply Fünf Klavierstücke (five keyboard pieces), and being made available separately. In 1930 an incomplete autograph of the first two pieces (the whereabouts of which is now unknown) was discovered, headed 'Sonate', leading to the then opinion that these five pieces had been intended to belong together as a five movement piano sonata. Research on paper types has since suggested that these represent two separate sonata projects, one of two movements (D459), and the second of three movements: constituting a slow movement, a scherzo and trio, and a possible finale (D459A). The significance of these projects lies in the recognition that Schubert's creative attention is at this stage becoming drawn to the piano sonata as a means of expression – and this will now become his main instrumental concern in 1817.

Many songs continued to flow from Schubert's fluent pen, but his reaction to the Laibach rejection, and with it the evaporation of his marriage prospects, brought about an increased depth of feeling to his songs – "a deeper, more philosophical note begins to sound"[6]. These songs embrace the Wilhelm Meister settings (D478-80), and Der Wanderer (D489 – formerly D493), a song that was to become as popular as Erlkönig.

A renewed burst of musical creativity was to result in a portion of a String Trio (D471), an Overture in B-flat (D470) and the famous Symphony No.5 in B-flat (D485). It has long been believed that in November or thereabouts Schubert sent copies of sixteen or seventeen of his songs to Therese Grob - but recently Rita Steblin[7] has cast doubts as to whom the actual recipient of the songs might have been. By the time his friend Franz von Schober returned from his business trip to Sweden in December Schubert had moved out of the schoolhouse, away from teaching, and into the comfort of the Schober's family home.

Notable works of 1816:

D337 G minor Die Einsiedelei 1 Lob der Einsamkeit Salis-Seewis TTBB 1816
D338 G major An den Frühling 2 Schiller TTBB 1816
D353 E major String Quartet 11 1816
D364 G major Fischerlied 2 Salis-Seewis TTBB 1816 or 1817
D369 D minor An Schwager Kronos Goethe song 1816
D417 C minor Symphony 4 'The Tragic' 1816 finished 27 Apr
D435 Die Bürgschaft 2 Acts Complete Anonymous Opera 1816 2 May
D451 Prometheus Cantata, for the nameday of Heinrich Josef Watteroth - Lost
D472 Kantate zu Ehren von Josef Spendou Hoheisal 2S,B,SATB,orch 1816 Sep
D460 C major Tantum Ergo SATB,orch,org 1816 Aug
D461 C major Tantum Ergo S,SATB,orch,org 1816 Aug
D470 Bb major Overture (Possibly overture to Kantate D472) 1816 Sep
D471 Bb major String Trio 1st movement and fragment of 2nd 1816 Sep
D478(478/1) A minor Harfenspieler I - Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt Goethe song 1816 Sep-1822
D479(478/3) A minor Harfenspieler II - An die Türen will ich schleichen Goethe song 1816 Sep-1822
D480(478/2) A minor Harfenspieler III - Wer nie sein Brot mich Tränen ass Goethe song 1816 Sep-1822
D485 Bb major Symphony 5 1816 Sep -3 Oct
D486 C major Magnificat S,A,T,B,SATB,orch,org 1816 15 Sep
D489 C# minor Der Wanderer "Ich komme von Gebirge her" 3 Versions Lübek song 1816 Oct
D498 Ab major Wiegenlied Anonymous song 1816 Nov

Notes

- [1] Deutsch: [Schubert: A Documentary Biography](#), p42-3
- [2] Deutsch: [Schubert: A Documentary Biography](#), p52-3
- [3] Deutsch: [Schubert: A Documentary Biography](#), p70-1. For this new translation, see McKay: [Franz Schubert: A biography](#), pp. ix, 66
- [4] McKay: [Franz Schubert: A biography](#), ibid.
- [5] McKay: [Franz Schubert: A biography](#), p59.
- [6] Reed: [Schubert](#), p40.
- [7] Steblin: "Schubert's beloved singer Therese Grob: New Documentary Research" in *Schubert durch die Brille* (the Journal of the Internationales Franz Schubert Institut, Vienna) no. 28 (January 2002).

Article © Arnold Howarth, The Schubert Institute (UK), 2002