

Annual Review of Schubert's Life

1823

The Kassel symposium defined the crisis years as being from 1818 to 1823. The year 1823 was certainly to fit this definition, proving for Schubert to be a year of very serious illness - and extreme shortage of money. Performances of Schubert's music had fallen off badly - we know of only four in the year, each of just one work (a single song or one vocal quartet) until at the end of 1822 there would be two performances of the play *Rosamunde* with Schubert's incidental music.

In the early part of the year Schubert was extremely ill for several months with a recurrence of the secondary phase of his syphilis. In February he was briefly well enough to write the A minor Piano Sonata D784 (which many commentators see as 'grim'). In April - still ill - he heard that he had been elected an honorary member of the Styrian Musical Society in Graz and would be awarded a diploma. This however provided no financial reward and he was still earning no income.

In April or May he received a libretto from Joseph Kupelwieser (*Fierabras*, D796) and on 30th April a review appeared in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of the newly published *Wandererfantasie* (D760) of November 1822. With income now only from the sales of a few songs and the newly successful *Wandererfantasie* Schubert returned to his belief that his road to success had to lie in the theatre.

Still suffering, on the 8th May Schubert wrote a poem 'My Prayer' (*Mein Gebet*), a plea that the torments of his illness might abate, and around May he moved out to the countryside at Hütteldorf in the hope that this might aid his recovery. By July Schubert's health had improved somewhat and the outward signs of his disease had disappeared. He accepted an invitation at the end of July for a holiday in upper Austria (Steyr and Linz) with Vogl. His relations with Vogl were now mended after being badly strained in 1821 & 1822 and with Vogl's financial help he was able to travel, and by courtesy of the hospitality of the Hartmann family to whom he had been introduced by Vogl, Josef von Spaun, and by Albert Stadler who was now working there, he was able to stay in Linz. At this time Schubert seems to have been well enough to perform some songs with Vogl for their friends.

Around the 14th of August Schubert and Vogl were in Steyr, from where he wrote to August Schaeffer in Vienna that he was only *ziemlich wohl*. However he was well enough towards the end of August to return with Vogl to Linz where both of them were invested with honorary membership of the Linz Musical Society. On 23rd August he and Vogl performed for a small party organised by the Ottenwalds (Anton & Marie, neé Spaun), at the Schlossberg gardens.

By mid-September Schubert & Vogl were back in Vienna. A return of his ill-health whilst he was in Upper Austria had necessitated this return to Vienna where he was generously invited to stay with Joseph Huber (nicknamed 'Tall Huber') in his lodgings. It was on the 20th September that Schubert wrote his well-known letter to the Styrian Musical Society thanking them for the diploma (now brought to him by Josef Hüttenbrenner) and promising them 'before long ... one of my symphonies in full score'. He was preoccupied with completing his opera *Fierabras* which he believed might solve his problems - he was penniless again.

Handing over his score of *Fierabras* to the *Kärntnertor-Theater* at the beginning of October Schubert had every expectation that it would be put on, but the financial

failure of their production of Weber's *Euryanthe* spelt the end of German productions and thus of Schubert's hopes, and so it was that Italian artists, ever popular with the Viennese public, were invited back to perform Rossini operas and other works in the Italian repertory.

Early October saw Schubert seriously ill again with a recurrence of the secondary and extremely infectious form of his disease. Unable to stay in Huber's home, and unable too to return to the schoolhouse, his stepmother being pregnant, it was probably at this time that he entered the General Hospital. [It should be noted that some authorities prefer a May date for Schubert's hospitalisation.] Having recently discovered Wilhelm Müller's *Die schöne Müllerin* poems it seems possible that he worked on some of these as songs whilst he was in the hospital.

This was not the time to return to the B minor symphony, and still incomplete after some twelve months "it remained on one side" (in the words of Dr McKay^[1]) "as with the three other symphonies he had begun since 1818".

Schubert would seem to have been back at Huber's lodging by 6th November but "ill in bed again" according to Schwind. On November 30th a letter from Schubert to Schober declares "the state of my health (which thank God) seems to be firmly restored at last". On Christmas Eve Schwind wrote that Schubert was better and it "would not be long before he goes about with his own hair again... He wears a very nice wig".

Now, whenever he was fit enough to compose Schubert worked to complete the song cycle, and later to complete the incidental music for *Rosamunde* in order to be ready for the first performance of the play in the week before Christmas. As so often with Schubert, it seemed that out of extremis the greatest works would be born, and out of the worst of this year *Die schöne Müllerin*, D795, was given to the world.

Notable works of 1823:

6 *Moments musicaux* for Pianoforte:

- D780/1 C Major Moment Musical 1823-1828
- D780/2 A flat Major Moment Musical 1823-1828
- D780/4 C # Minor Moment Musical 1823-1828
- D780/5 F Minor Moment Musical 1823-1828
- D780/6 A flat Major Moment Musical 1823-1828

D784 *A Minor Piano Sonata* 14 Op posth 143 1823 Feb

D787 *Die Verschworenen (Der hausliche Krieg)* One Act Castelli Singspiel 1823 Mar-Apr

D795 *Die schöne Müllerin*: Müller Cycle of 20 songs 1823 Oct-Nov

D796 *Fierabras* Opera Three Acts Kupehvieser 1823 25 May-2Oct

D797 *Rosamunde, Furstin von Zypern* Four Acts Chezy, Play with music Autumn 1823.

Notes

[1] McKay: [Franz Schubert: A biography](#)

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