

Music 320

Franz Peter Schubert

1797-1828



Schubert is probably the most famous of Beethoven's contemporaries

Biography:

- from a poor family, his father was a schoolmaster
- Schubert was trained to be a schoolmaster but didn't do it long; always wanted to be a musician; did that exclusively after 1817
- wrote lots of songs before that, 144 songs in 1814, about 600 total
- never really made a living; friends took care of him; he composed every minute
- died in poverty age 31
- other works: 9 symphonies, 22 piano sonatas (never owned a piano until year he died), other short piano works, chamber music, masses (last Viennese composer to write much in that area), operas

Schubert's Lieder: (singular: Lied) a refined art song, not a folk-like song. Germany led Europe in development of art song in 19th Century

- Schubert's art songs express every nuance of Romantic feeling
- He wrote some strophic settings, some through-composed (allows music to adapt to feeling) (also modified strophic, which describes many of Schubert's), some are in between ("modified strophic")
- Schubert had great melodic gift, sensitivity of harmony
- Harmonic traits: liked to move by 3rds; also switched between major and parallel minor a lot
- Schubert's first masterpiece was ***Gretchen am Spinrade*** (1814). Poem is from Goethe's Faust, Schubert's first Goethe text

- Text setting is modified strophic
- Piano accomp ingeniously depicts motion of spinning wheel as well as agitation of her thoughts
- **Der Erlkönig**- another masterpiece about one year later; another Goethe text
 - the Erlking is a figure in Scandinavian and German mythology: a spirit or personified natural power that works mischief, especially on children.
 - recurring text “Mein Vater” receives same melodic treatment, each time at a higher pitch - raises anxiety; otherwise piece is through-composed
 - accompaniment and melody both paint text: accompaniment is like galloping horse; at the end repeated notes slow as if horse is stopping; melody creates different moods for various characters
- **Song Cycles**: Definition: sets of songs intended to be sung in order, all at one performance, poetry is all by one poet.
 - sometimes tell a story, or at least poems are loosely connected by some theme.
 - Schubert wrote two true song cycles: *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise*; both with poetry by Wilhelm Müller
 - **Schwanengesang** is not a true song cycle, because contains poetry by several authors (Rellstab, Heine, Seidl)
- Combining Genres: Lieder used in Chamber Music
 - A few different chamber movements based on Lieder; e.g. *Trout Quintet* contains a variations movement based on the Lied *Die Forelle*.

Piano Music

- Many of his shorter pieces are really Lieder for piano
- wrote more than 20 piano sonatas (some incomplete)
- Schubert wasn't a piano virtuoso like Mozart or Beethoven
- His short piano works often intended to entertain friends at their parties: Waltzes, Landler, other dances

Orchestral Works - mostly symphonies

- The number of symphonies is a matter of opinion: some incomplete or unorchestrated. Most common numbering system has Unfinished as no. 8, Great C Major as no. 9
 - first six are “early” (1813-18); Mozart and Haydn are the models, NOT Beethoven. Orchestra is that of Haydn or Mozart, but harmony is progressive
- His most famous is **Unfinished** (1822, No. 8); very different from previous syms.
 - There are numerous theories about why it is called “unfinished” (non conclusive)
 - This work is different from earlier works because:
 - it has a more adventurous formal structure: recurring monophonic idea before expo, development, coda (not at beginning of recap)
 - emotion is central (and dark)
 - piece is in B minor, a special key for Schubert