Prologue: Schubert yesterday

This book concerns less *The Life of Schubert* than "The Life of Schubert's Career," a story more of the artist than the man. Perhaps someday a trove of new material will surface that might allow a future historian to write an intimate portrait of the man and artist, the son, brother, and friend. But for now, and probably forever, scholars can only speculate about such fundamental matters as Schubert's relations with his parents (his mother is virtually missing from all the surviving evidence) or about the true nature of his romantic and sexual activities. A recurring theme of this brief biography will be the reasons for, and the consequences of, voids in documenting Schubert's life, absences that have been filled with much fantasy and many projected images created by others, whether in popular biographies, novels, operettas, or movies.

The most important scholarly work on the composer in recent decades – including the German version of Otto Erich Deutsch's catalogue of compositions, a new complete edition of the music, and sophisticated critical and analytical studies – allows the full breadth of Schubert's creative achievement to shine forth as never before. Even though technical accounts are beyond the scope of this series of Musical Lives, some general musical observations are provided in relation to Schubert's professional career. The discussions of the music herein gain in length and significance as the composer matures, with special emphasis on his late compositions. My primary

concern is to appreciate how Schubert negotiated between intimate songs, dances, and keyboard miniatures, and his far more ambitious instrumental, dramatic, and sacred projects.

The introductory chapter examines three visual depictions of Schubert (and can be read later if one wants to plunge immediately into the life story in chapter 2), and those that follow are roughly chronological, with each concentrating on larger issues relevant to the composer's daily existence, music, and reputation. Chapter titles are intended to capture the changes in Schubert's life, as well as some of the clichés about that life. I place particular importance on the social and musical culture in which Schubert lived and worked in Vienna, and on the friends who played such a large role in his aesthetic education, in his everyday activities, and in the construction of his image. The last chapter charts Schubert's "life" after his premature death, for if his physical body expired at age thirty-one, his body of work flourished as unknown compositions continued to be discovered, and as his legacy was constantly reassessed. The posthumous "Life of Schubert's Career" spans the nineteenth century – and beyond.

In keeping with an overriding concern for Schubert's compositional and professional development, I focus specifically on his relationship to Beethoven – not so much on any personal contact between them, or even on what Schubert learned compositionally from the older master (albeit indirectly), as on how Beethoven served as his essential professional model and later became the touchstone – explicit and implicit – for discussions of Schubert's life and works. My identification of a "secret program" to the late Piano Trio in E flat, Op. 100 (D929), provides significant new evidence of Beethoven's importance. Schubert could not, nor did he wish to, escape Beethoven's example and legacy.

In the end, my view of Schubert's professional life is optimistic, perhaps at times even overcompensating for the historically pervasive images of a "poor Schubert" – without money, love, fame, or good health. I aim to counter the idea of the neglected Schubert by

empowering him with responsibility for his life and works. I believe it is possible to reconcile the undivided accounts of Schubert's timid, humble, and often childlike nature with evidence of a fierce awareness of his artistic genius and worth. For too long, his shyness has been confused with low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. My approach is affirmative because it directs appropriate attention on the successes of Schubert's budding career, and not, as is usually the case, on an occasional bad review, troubles with certain publishers, or rejections from jobs he probably did not want anyway. No doubt some phases in his short creative life were extremely frustrating and discouraging, but Schubert proved remarkably adaptive. For nearly two centuries commentators have lamented his early death because it robbed posterity of further masterpieces; we might flip this formulation around and say that Schubert was personally robbed of the hard-earned success he was finally winning by the end of the 1820s.

In certain respects this book aims to be an "anti-biography." I shall emphasize the distortion and trivialization of his life that formed and informed popular images. Such an approach does not pretend to present definitively the "true" man and composer, but rather seeks to recount what can be reliably documented and to examine some of the most persistent legends. But no matter how current the scholarship and critical the examination, constructing a narrative of Schubert's life, be it during the nineteenth century or now at the turn of the millennium, necessarily reflects contemporaneous interpretations, concerns, and methods, and constitutes Schubert's subjectivity according to contemporaneous theories, paradigms, and cultural context. While examining Schubert's place in history, any reconsideration will itself be part of that history. This is the necessity, as well as the value, of retelling Schubert's story.

In the closing years of the twentieth century a new Schubert image has suddenly emerged, generating considerable controversy. The explorations of Schubert's possible homosexuality, depression, habitual drinking, and neuroses have all made for alluring headlines and are a striking counter-pole to the trivial image of the guileless

"Prince of Song" that had reigned for so long. There is often also, I believe, a great deal more truth to the revised view. And yet we are currently at a point where some unproven claims about the darker Schubert threaten to become a new orthodoxy in the absence of sufficient historical investigation or evidence. Ultimately, Schubert remains elusive. It is my hope that this book dispels some of the sentimental platitudes of the past, gives a better idea of the conditions that formed Schubert's own present, and helps in the effort to construct a more nuanced and well-informed portrait of Schubert for the future.

1 Representing Schubert: "A life devoted to art"

> [Schubert] lived solely for art and for a small circle of friends
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> Obituary Notice, *Allgemeine Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 27 December 1828 (SMF 10)

Schubert had an image problem. During his lifetime, he was largely unknown beyond his native Vienna, where in any case the public was familiar with only a select portion of his vast output. After Schubert's death, scarce, inaccurate, and often conflicting information about him meant biographers and commentators could create almost any representation they fancied, the all-too-familiar portrait whose authenticity deserves a hard look. This introductory chapter examines Schubert's malleable image by contemplating the larger meanings of three important nineteenth-century pictures. Pondering specific visual depictions, I believe, can help us better understand Schubert's baffling place in the popular imagination. The sketch, sepia drawing, and painting reproduced here raise crucial issues concerning Schubert's compositions, cultural milieu, and general reputation. Even if this preliminary investigation does not ultimately yield the "real" Schubert, at the very least it alerts us to some of the complicating factors in representing his life.[1]

But before looking at these visual portraits, I should say a few words about the verbal portraits of the composer that have so powerfully informed public views. The first significant biography of

Schubert appeared nearly forty years after his death, an inconceivable lapse of time for any other leading nineteenth-century composer. No doubt a major reason for this delay was the unusual course of Schubert's lived and posthumous career, particularly that so many of his supreme compositions were only discovered long after his death. When Schubert died in 1828 at age thirty-one, few people would have considered his life worthy of a substantial book. Only in the mid 1860s did Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, a Viennese lawyer who had never met Schubert but who loved his music passionately, finally realize the task others had started yet never finished. In his lengthy biography Kreissle suggests another reason for the lack of interest: "Schubert is, perhaps, a single instance of a great artist whose outer life had no affinity or connection with his art. His career was so simple and uneventful, so out of all proportion with works that he created like a heavensent genius."[2] In short, Schubert's music is magnificent; his life is dull.

The composer's own family and friends had already sounded this familiar theme. Josef von Spaun (1788–1865), who arguably wrote the most detailed, reliable, but also the most protective reminiscences of his close friend, reacted quite negatively when Kreissle's book appeared late in 1864. He took issue with some of the musical observations offered, and even more with the portrayal of Schubert the man: "The biography contains too little light and too much shadow regarding Schubert as a human being" (SMF 362). Yet neither Spaun nor any other friend left a thoroughly convincing and compelling verbal portrait of the person they knew so well. Moreover, Schubert's own words are discouragingly limited. Fewer than a hundred of his letters survive, many fairly inconsequential. Aside from some scattered diary entries of 1816 and 1824, several poems, and a few pages known as "Mein Traum" (My Dream), no diaries, criticism, essays, or memoirs by Schubert have come down to us.

If we do not possess Schubert's own words in nearly the abundance we do Mozart's, Schumann's, or Wagner's, there does exist a good amount of testimony from others. Ultimately the letters, diaries, and

memoirs written by family and friends provide the core information for a narrative of Schubert's life and the delineation of his character; they have proved indispensable to his biographers. The so-called Schubert Circle established a pattern of supporting and promoting its friend while he was alive, and it further sought to perpetuate certain views of him after his death. Some writings date from Schubert's lifetime, others came as memorial tributes immediately following his death, but the vast majority appeared many years later, after dear friend Schwammerl (an affectionate nickname meaning "little mushroom") had become a recognized Great Composer.

In fact, the evidence on which recent biographical conjectures about Schubert's sexuality and darker nature are based has been available for more than fifty years; most was published by the great Schubert scholar Otto Erich Deutsch in two magisterial collections of "documents" and "memoirs" (the essential SDB and SMF cited throughout this book). Revisionist scholars have rarely marshalled new material but, rather, like Dupin in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," looked afresh at documents long in full public view. If these reinterpretations make use of familiar sources, what is novel are the connections made, the subtle readings and methodologies employed, and the critical imagination that attempts to conceive of Schubert free from the sentimental clichés of the past. Archival discoveries in the last few decades have substantially broadened our understanding of Schubert's cultural milieu, especially of his friends' lives, but unfortunately significant letters, diaries, or writings by the composer himself have not been found. Schubert remains in the shadows, even as some try figuratively to bring him out of the closet and the pub and into the psychiatrist's consulting room.

Although many friends and acquaintances described Schubert's physical appearance (often somewhat contradictorily), portraits supply the most compelling images.[3] Wilhelm August Rieder, an acquaintance of Schubert's, produced a famous watercolor that served as the basis for innumerable later illustrations (see illustration

1 Sketch by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller of Schubert and friends (1827).

13, page 133). Schubert's nickname "Schwammerl" becomes much more concrete after one sees the caricature of the diminutive composer walking behind the towering singer Johann Michael Vogl (see illustration 7, page 58). Schubert's closest friend Franz von Schober (1796–1882) is said to have sketched these figures, and just as music was part of the general skills of many in Schubert's circle, so also was drawing. Two of his intimates, Leopold Kupelwieser (1796–1862) and Moritz von Schwind (1804–71), however, were far more than dilettantes; they were distinguished artists who executed many portraits of the composer.

The three depictions examined here enable us to consider Schubert in his contemporary context, as well as to chart briefly the changing representation of him over the course of the century. The first is by the distinguished Biedermeier artist Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, who otherwise is not known to have been connected to Schubert. He sketched the composer informally singing with friends in a drawing that can be dated to late 1827. This primary source is, in fact, the closest thing we have to a "photograph" of Schubert in active music-making with friends, not all of whom have been identified.[4] The date and unusual scoring of the vocal trio (two males and a female) strongly suggest that they are singing *Der Hochzeitsbraten* (The Wedding Roast), a charming concoction to a trivial Schober text that was sure to delight all who heard it. This is Schubert enjoying music with friends, spontaneously and merrily.

All three of our illustrations, as well as many others dating from his own time, portray Schubert in the company of others. On the other hand, as befits the quintessential solitary creative genius, there are no known contemporaneous depictions in which Beethoven is placed together with anyone else. This is emblematic of Beethoven's relative isolation, in contrast to Schubert's far more social existence. The situation is likewise reflected in their respective musical reputations. While Beethoven's fame came from mighty masterpieces, primarily instrumental, Schubert was best known for small works, primarily vocal and keyboard. All three pictures capture this intimate, social,

and domestic side of the Schubert. And yet the project of Schubert's maturity was to accomplish and to account for more.[5] In this he directly confronted the magnificent musical tradition bound to his native Vienna, and, more specifically, to the dominating artistic presence of Beethoven.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Vienna, still at the center of the Holy Roman Empire, was in the midst of a musical golden age. The roughly seventy years (1760s-1828) that span Haydn's maturity and Mozart's entire career, and that conclude with the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert, saw not only the glories of the Classical style and the birth of musical Romanticism, but also striking changes in musical culture, such as the beginnings of modern concert life and the forging of a new status for musicians working as independent creative artists. Much of the music and musical life that we know and value today emerged during this remarkable period. Beethoven is the pivotal figure, the bridge between Classic past and Romantic future. Blessed by Mozart (who supposedly predicted that he would go far) and for a time fitfully taught by Haydn, Beethoven was the imposing model for many composers who followed him. Moreover, his ultimate authority came as much from the aesthetic creed he embodied as from the music he wrote. One can scarcely imagine the solitary Beethoven wearing a powdered wig or bowing to anyone, as Haydn and Mozart had. Schubert, too, let his hair grow free.

Schubert studied and cherished this outstanding musical heritage, although he lived a quite dissimilar existence from that of his predecessors. A truly freelance composer, without title or station, Schubert died just twenty months after Beethoven – a generation younger, yet his contemporary. While Rossini's operas delighted Viennese audiences beginning in 1816, and Paganini's wizardry dazzled them in 1828, Beethoven towered artistically above them all, and the musical world knew it. Schubert genuinely admired Rossini ("You cannot deny him extraordinary genius") and was overwhelmed after hearing Paganini play ("Tonight I heard an angel sing"), but Beethoven consumed his thoughts. If Schubert had a "Beethoven complex," it was