

# THE RESTORATION OF EIGHT SYMPHONIES

## **The sources**

### **Six unfinished symphonies**

Almost half the thirteen symphonies Schubert began remained unfinished. He sometimes started work on the orchestral score but soon broke off, or else continued the piece in sketch form; sometimes he started with sketches and the whole thing remained a fragment, or else he almost completed a symphony, but without orchestration... For five of these symphonies, too little material survives to make them performable. However, he did complete two movements of a single symphony, D759. Of the six unfinished symphonies, the celebrated 'Unfinished' is thus... the most finished. We don't know why Schubert did not carry these works through to completion. With a composer as productive as he was, always busy with a large number of projects at the same time, it often happened that a work remained unfinished.

### **Fifty years from Schubert to Brahms**

Schubert's symphonies were not printed in his lifetime. Half a century later, Breitkopf & Hartel published them as part of a complete edition and asked Brahms to direct the project from 1884 on. He took important decisions, but let other men do the editing work. The publication served the noble objective of making this music known. The correspondence between Brahms and Breitkopf also informs us that Brahms was full of admiration for Schubert's work. But the edition represents through textual criticism, since Brahms allowed a certain number of "modernizations", sometime slight, sometimes more substantial.

On the credit side, this Breitkopf edition had the great merit of calling attention to Schubert's symphonies at a time when criteria were not so strict in terms of textual and interpretative authenticity; on the debit side, it continued to be taken seriously for many years because of Brahms's supported authority. Although musicologists regularly pointed out that Schubert's text had been altered, this produced little reaction from practicing musicians: dozens of recordings and thousands of concerts were performed with the Brahms-Breitkopf text.

### **A hundred years from Brahms back to Schubert, or the return to the sources**

The year 1923 saw the publication of a facsimile of the manuscript of the "Unfinished Symphony (score and sketches - Munich: Drei Masken Verlag). It was necessary to wait until 1967 for a critical edition; in that year Barenreiter published Symphonies 1, 2 and 3 in the Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke (the critical commentary appeared only in 1997). In 1990, Breitkopf issued a critical edition of the 'Unfinished', followed by the Fifth Symphony in 1992. In 1996, we were still waiting for nos. 4 and 6 and the "Great C major", all of which were to be published by Barenreiter. Thus, during the period 1986-96, when several complete recordings were made, one could not yet take it for granted that a good text was available for all the works.

There were two ways of reacting to this situation. On the one hand, several orchestras played the symphonies on period instruments, often with splendid results and great purity. But in general, their instrumentarium was not close enough to Schubert's (among other reasons, because they used a pitch standard of A = 430), and the scores, especially for the later symphonies, were often still based on Brahms's version.

On the other hand, certain conductors turned to Schubert's autographs, among them Claudio Abbado (encouraged by Otto Biba) using the corrections suggested by Stefano

Mollo. But it was evident that, given the use of modern instruments and the style of playing associated with them, the results of this source research could be only partly implemented.

Hence there remained a significant step to be taken for Schubert Year in 1997, namely to combine the positive attributes of these two interpretative "poles".

### **The complete symphonies by Anima Eterna, and further questions**

On this recording Anima Eterna performs the symphonies in a new reading by Jos van Immerseel, prepared with the aid of a number of individuals and institutions. Barenreiter Verlag gave us the exclusive privilege of consulting the preparatory material for the New Schubert Edition (Symphonies 4-6 and the "Unfinished").

The Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna allowed us to examine Schubert's manuscripts and provided microfilms.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien helped us in our investigation of Viennese instruments and pitch standards.

Several members of Anima Eterna carried out research on the Viennese instrumentarium and the appropriate pitch.

This research enabled us to restore the symphonies to something like their pristine state thanks to a magnificent array of instruments, totally new to our ears, critically sound version of the texts from which the posthumous alterations were eliminated, and a reconstruction of Schubert's dynamic contrasts.

### **Pitch**

Our research came to the conclusion that the pitch standard in Vienna for the period 1813-28 was situated between 435 and 445 Hz. This affirmation is largely based on

examination of the historical instruments that have come down to us in their original condition.

All the orchestras using period instruments that have recorded Schubert until now have done so at  $A = 430$ . A resolute choice in favor of the Viennese instrumentarium therefore meant raising the pitch, which meant in turn that all the wind players had to find different instruments and all the strings had to adapt the tuning, with all the consequences that implied!

After a moment of hesitation, the musicians of Anima Eterna decided to take the plunge and opt for  $A = 440$ , on the basis of musicological arguments but also of the instruments available.

The result may be heard on the CDs: the sonorities are more dramatic than before, the orchestra sounds unusually dark and yet transparent, the wind instruments take on a special colour, and the strings sound alert, with sharp articulation yet broad phrasing.

### **The instrumentarium**

In some cases, it was possible to use original instruments of the period; Viennese flutes by Stephan Koch, the Kuss bassoon, and - we were particularly lucky to find these - four superb matching horns by Ignaz Lorenz of Linz! Other wind instruments had to be specially built for the occasions. Some musicians, such as the clarinetists, even had to find more than one instrument. The tonal and timbral balance produced by this new wind section was an unknown quantity for everyone but proved to be splendid and immediately convincing. Both the diversity in characters and the perfect blend (the *Harmonie*, to use the German term) were obvious.

It went without saying that the string instruments would use only gut strings and bows chosen to match. Especially noteworthy was the composition of the double bass section,

for which we chose a combination of four-stringed instruments and five-stringed basses with frets: this allowed us to obtain both clarity of attack and depth and plenitude of sound.

### **How big was Schubert's orchestra?**

The answer to this question must be sought in the scores, the surviving orchestral material, and the information we have on performances, Viennese orchestral activity, and the Viennese instrumentarium in Schubert's time.

### **The scores**

Fortunately, the manuscripts of all the symphonies have been preserved. These give us the wind forces. The commonest scoring is for double woodwind (two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons), two horns, and the military ensemble (two trumpets and a pair of kettledrums): thirteen musicians in all.

There are some exceptions to this rule: only one flute in the First Symphony, four horns in the Fourth Symphony, and the additional of three trombones for the 'Unfinished' and the 'Great C major' (as was customary at the time scored music and opera). The Fifth Symphony stands somewhat apart, for here we find a smaller ensemble, as in Mozart's time: a single flute, two oboes, two bassoons and two horns, a total of seven musicians. The notation for each instrument and the layout of the score show that Schubert cannot have envisaged doubling the wind parts. The largest complement of wind and timpani therefore consisted of sixteen musicians, and the smallest of seven.

### **The surviving orchestral material**

Manuscript orchestral material survives for six of the symphonies, but none of it is in

Schubert's hand. The wind parts in these sources generally add up to the correct number, but for the strings one finds both very small, perhaps incomplete sets of parts, and large sets which may include spare parts. Since the material cannot be dated with certainty, we do not know if it is relevant to Schubert himself, but it can give us a picture of Viennese practice shortly after this death.

If we try to deduce the tutti forces from this material, we get a minimum of eighteen musicians and a maximum of forty-five.

However, we must use these data with caution, since the material dates largely or even completely from after Schubert's death. Still, one thing is certain: the string forces remained far below the usual numbers in modern symphony orchestras.

### **Information on performances in Schubert's lifetime**

We have certain knowledge of performances of only two symphonies (the Fifth and Sixth) Schubert's: they were played at a "private" concert in the Schittenhof in Vienna, under the direction of the violinist Otto Hatwig. Schubert played the viola and his brother Ferdinand the violin on this occasion. Both performances are documented by Leopold von Sonnleithner in his Rezensionen dated 23 March 1862. According to this source, the orchestra consists of seven first violins, six seconds, three violas, three cellos, two double basses, and the wind instruments.

### **The Viennese instrumentarium in Schubert's lifetime**

When one studies his chamber music, lieder and piano music on the instruments for which they were written, one is struck by the fact that Schubert penetrated the possibilities and limitations of the instruments of his day with perfection and precision. It is therefore logical to suppose that he wanted to do the same with the orchestra. He

knew the secrets of orchestration because, in his teenage years, he had accumulated years of inside experience of the orchestra as a violinist, violist and rehearsal conductor, and had played and studies overtures and symphonies on a daily basis.

After playing the symphonies with the Viennese instrumentarium of Schubert's time, we came to a number of conclusions.

Within the wind section, the proportions are optimal: in the woodwind, there is a fine balance between high, medium and low registers; with their increased dynamic range, the horns combine equally well with pianissimo woodwind and fortissimo trumpets and trombones. Moreover, these brass instruments blend well with the others in the orchestral tutti sound while still remaining clearly defined. The wind instruments are particularly powerful, even in comparison with their modern counterparts (maybe not so much individually, but certainly as a group).

Two questions remain: what is the optimal number of strings, and what was the balance within the string orchestra? There is no easy answer to these two questions, because: eight first violins with clean intonation and healthy tone production generate a more powerful and richer sound than, say, twelve playing less cleanly;

the internal balance of the strings depends to a large extent on their layout: the sound of the cellos and basses carries further and is thus louder if they are arranged antiphonally or dispersed over the platform;

the balance is affected by the direction in which the sound of the instruments is projected and by the different levels at which the various sections are placed on the platform. Depending on how this is managed, the instruments may sound freely or be masked by the music desks or by other musicians;

the volume of sound depends on the cleanness and precision of the attack, and thus also on the quality and commitment of each musician;

the internal balance of the orchestra depends on the nature of the tone production in its different sections and the way these blends into an overall sound; each acoustic possesses different characteristics, which also affect the balance.

### **How big should today's orchestra be?**

Did Schubert have a larger string orchestra in mind when his music was played in a bigger hall? This is unlikely, since the size of the wind group never varied. Anima Eterna has experimented with the number but it is less precise, less committed of musicians, the playing style, and the orchestral layout, and we have found that the orchestra cannot be bigger than around fifty musicians. Increasing the complement of strings makes them too intrusive in the frequent woodwind solos and too cumbersome for the orchestration of the symphonies. The size of hall changes nothing in this respect; if Winterreise is performed in a large (overlarge) venue, no one thinks of doubling the singer and the pianist, because the medium does not permit it. So, after a good deal of experimentation, I am convinced that one cannot make an orchestra substantially larger than the composer intended and get away with it. In Schubert, the upper limit lies between thirty and thirty-five strings. With more than that, the sound is no louder, but it is less precise, less committed, less colourful, less exciting for both performers and listeners.

If the orchestra plays with a well-nourished, clean, controlled sound, with intelligence and sensitivity, and on the right instruments, smaller forces are quite sufficient, even in sizeable venues. The score one is performing determines the number of musicians, their profile, and even the tempo, articulation, and phrasing. It is a regrettably widespread misconception that a hall can influence or even modify these elements. The only thing one can do to adapt an orchestra to the acoustic of a given hall is to tailor the articulation and dynamics to the venue and search for the appropriate layout and the



correct degrees of platform elevation for the different sections of the orchestra.

### **The possibilities of orchestral layout**

We have some concrete data and a few images - which need to be interpreted with caution - concerning the arrangement of orchestras in Schubert's environment. One constant in most "historical" layout is the presence of the bass voice throughout the orchestra, or, to put it another way, an arrangement of bass instruments to ensure that all the musicians remain in permanent contact with it.

We also let ourselves be guided by the scores themselves and the experience of the musicians. To achieve good ensemble and good intonation, the musicians must hear each other directly enough and, if possible, also see each other, while the sound in the hall (or for the microphone) must be naturally balanced. This is why high and low instruments must be dispersed throughout the orchestra and there must be no barriers or great distances between partners who dialogue or play in unison.

### **Tempos in Schubert**

#### **Who determines the tempo? The performer, the listener, or the composer?**

One often hears remarks about tempo that give the impression that it is the performers themselves who must choose. "With your technique, you shouldn't play too fast", says the teacher; "the soloist forces me to follow him", says the conductor; "his tempo was startlingly modern and yet musical", says the critic.

Tempos are generally judged in relation to other performances, usually with the interpretations of famous musicians serving as a benchmark. In general, the discussion centres on whether the tempo is faster or slower, as if there were no other elements

that can influence the perception of tempo. But listening habits and teaching traditions can also affect judgment. Hence choice of a tempo has come to be seen as no more than a question of taste, style, or even "level".

But the historical sources formally contradict all of this and caution against precisely this kind of arbitrariness. The term "interpretation" was never used until around 1850.

The more completely a musician mastered the art of "execution", the more he was admired. And that art - like any true art - was based on hundreds of rules and recommendations, the result of years of experience. Obviously, those rules differed from period to period, from country to country, from school to school, and sometimes from composer to composer. But certain rules were always and everywhere valid. One of the most important of these rules states that the composer himself fixes the tempo in the composition. This is logical, since the tempo and its degree of stability determine the structure and character of a composition. The tempo also has an influence on the articulation, phrasing, and dynamics. Certain genres or dance forms of dances were tied to a fixed tempo and character.

In that case, the composer authorized the convention *de facto*. The performer therefore had to learn to identify with the composer's tempo and build his interpretation on it. If such was not the case, the performer was not highly regarded. However, the fault could also lie with the composer, because his work might not obey the rules of the art.

Carl Czerny, who has left us extremely accurate descriptions of performance practice, wrote in 1839:

Next to precise execution, nothing is more important than choosing the right tempo. The effect of even the finest piece of music will be upset, indeed entirely destroyed, if one performs it too hastily or, even worse, too sluggishly.

In his commentaries on Beethoven's complete piano works, Czerny also draws attention

to the importance of the right tempo in each piece and each movement.

The sources include innumerable remarks on the same subject. Mozart wrote in 1778 about tempo and "interpretation";

[The important thing is] to play the piece in the correct tempo, just the way of is supposed to be, and to play all the notes, appoggiaturas etc. with proper expression and feeling, just as the work is printed on the page, so that one could have the impression that the person playing it is the one who actually composed it.

Just as an architect determined the dimensions and proportions of a building, a composer always determined the form and the tempo of his work. A splendid work by a skilled architect and only come into its own when the edifice is built in accordance with his ideas. A splendid work by a skilled composer can only shine forth in its glory when it is performed in accordance with his ideas.

### **Tempo notation**

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Nuove Musiche and the Seconda Prattica made their appearance, while new, semi-improvised instrumental forms like the toccata and the prelude began to fascinate composers. These new conceptions expanded the notion of tactus. Other phenomena too came to erode the age-old authority of proportional notation, such as the sometimes very exuberant practice of ornamentation and the striking development of dance forms, which in musical terms were to take on a whole life of their own in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, recitative set the composer a difficult task: here grammatical and metrical forces stood against rhetorical and oratorical ideas. How should that be notated? Since a standard in the modern sense of the term scarcely existed, each region developed its own habits. All of

this caused confusion, but that did not mean that the old theory of proportions disappeared in the eighteenth century and that time signatures lost their significance for tempo. One need only look at Bach's notation in the first part of the well-tempered Clavier. Only the last prelude and fugue is given a tempo marking. In the other forty-six pieces, the tempo is indicated only by the time signature. However, knowledge of these (old) tempo relationship was gradually lost. The tempos that nineteenth-century editors added in their editions of Bach got further and further away from the original intention. Because of the distance created by the intervening centuries, things have become even more complicated for modern performers. So, for example, most performers today play Bach's second prelude from the "48" almost twice as fast as the first, whereas the notation indicates that the tempo is the same.

### **The influence of "tradition" and deviation from the correct tempo**

Many performers and listeners think changing a note or a rhythm in a score is unacceptable, while the very same people find it rather uninteresting to observe the correct tempo, because they don't think an imposed tempo is compatible with artistic feeling. Perhaps they are encouraged in this opinion by certain trends in contemporary art to the effect that technical skill is no longer necessary.

Maybe it is also because control of a steady tempo and of tempo relationship is a difficult discipline to acquire, and one, moreover, that is often difficult for outsiders to evaluate without technical or mechanical aids. The ability deliberately to deviate from the basic tempo while being able to revert to it any moment is a skill that demands years of study and practice. In jazz, we know musicians who are capable of detaching themselves from the tempo and even the harmony and then moving back into it in masterly fashion. In "classical" music, too little importance is attached to the style of the composition.

Performers today are too far removed from the original process of composition. And modern concert life is too exclusively focused on external virtuosity, commerce and the pursuit of gain to be able to devote time and energy to the music itself.

This problem has existed since the middle of the nineteenth century. A virtue was made of a necessity and the new type of virtuoso went on to develop "personal" tempos. The glamour of "virtuosity" led to extremes of tempo, both fast and slow, and the sales methods of the publishers meant that these deviations were increasingly considered as benchmarks.

In the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, instrument making evolved very rapidly, so that many musicians no longer played older music with the appropriate instrument. This usually led to mistaken conclusions on the subject of tempo. Even the metronome mark did not bring a definitive solution, for the metronome can only give the speed. When performers reproduce the speed with complete accuracy, but over- or under-accentuate the metrical microstructure, they will feel that marked tempo is not correct and choose another one.

For all these reasons, tempo have been in constant flux over the centuries. They have not become systematically faster or slower, because all such deviations come and go like waves. Some people assert that life moved more slowly in earlier times and that all tempo are taken faster nowadays. On the other hand, in recent years it has often shown that the tempos of well-known works have frequently grown slower. For example, it would appear from the timings at a hundred years of Parsifal productions of Bayreuth that the work now takes an hour longer to perform than at the premiere. String players often play more slowly today because they want to vibrate on every note. Virtuoso pianists, by contrast, sometimes perform their repertoire pieces faster as the years go by. Finally, many people believe that tempos have got slower in general because we now play

today in (over-)large halls. If that were true, why then would those tempos not get faster again when one plays in smaller spaces for a recording?

### **Is there a consensus over tempo in the Schubert symphonies?**

When one listens recordings of Schubert's symphonies, one realizes that there is little consensus over the matter of tempo, as is demonstrated for example by comparing the duration of the "Great C major". The shortest version I know lasts 49'43, and the longest 61'43. These differences are really very considerable. In the Breitkopf edition, the opening Andante is notated in C(4/4), whereas in the manuscript Schubert wrote cut C(2/4), that is to say, twice as fast. In many performances, the Andante is therefore played too slowly, which creates a problem at the transition to the Allegro ma non troppo. Tradition provided a practical solution to this in the form of an accelerando in the final bars of the Andante. The original tempo relationship is confirmed in Schumann's remark after the first performance of the work, in Leipzig on 21 March 1839, under the direction of Mendelssohn: "The tempo does not seem to change at all: we have reached land and don't know how.

Indeed, Schubert brilliantly contrives the doubling of tempo with interweaving binary and ternary rhythms; it is already discreetly underway at bar 61 and swells further into the main fast section of the movement. This Allegro ma non troppo is not easy technically for the orchestra, which often results in the tempo flagging in performance. In one recording, I noted an initial tempo for Allegro of  $\text{minim}=152$ ; by the end this had dropped to 120. In the final bars of Piu moto. Schubert reverts to the theme stated at the opening of Andante, now abbreviated and speeded up. But in many performances, on the contrary, the theme is radically slowed down. The record is held by a CD where the (short) Piu moto begins at  $\text{minim}=152$  and ends at 60.

We will not find Schubert so easily via "tradition", for we stumble from one mirage to another. To discover the correct tempos, we would do better to study the manuscripts and listen to the appropriate instruments.

### **What do we learn from Schubert's tempo markings?**

At first glance we possess less information about tempos in Schubert's symphonic works than we do for Beethoven. For the latter we have the metronome marks dictated by himself, given by Czerny, or taken from information in newspapers and periodicals of the time. But these marks do not always give the definitive tempo, since the starting point was sometimes proportional relationships, sometimes feeling, and sometimes both. Nevertheless, the reference value of these data is unquestionable. With Schubert this reference is lacking, insofar as we know of no metronome marks for his symphonies stemming from the composer himself. However, there are sources that give metronome marks for Schubert's own performances of, for example pieces from his operas and keyboard works. To what extent these data are reliable is of course hard to ascertain but they do give some idea of an order of magnitude for his tempos.

Yet the situation is not as bleak as all that, because, unlike Beethoven, Schubert adhered closely to contemporary traditions of tempo and proportional notation.

Moreover, his tempo indications are not as complex as Beethoven's. Schubert's language is often revolutionary, but his ideas concerning tempo are Classical. This is why it is appropriate to schematize Schubert's tempos.

### **Where theory and practice converge harmoniously**

When one places the tempos in a proportional table, it is interesting to investigate whether they are usable in practice and also artistically convincing. We therefore

rigorously tried out all the tempo relationships, taking time to adapt to certain pieces because our listening habits were more deeply ingrained than we thought. But we very soon got used to the "new" tempos. Experience taught us that the problems in realizing a "correct" tempo were always due to weak points in our performance.

After gamely studying and rehearsing the music in question, we always had to admit that Schubert was right and that his tempos were natural and organic.

We compared the theoretical tempos and respective proportions with the style of writing of the movement in question. Occasionally, a texture featuring very small or less small note values influenced the tempo by slowing it down or speeding up, as the historical sources recommended. One also finds small adjustments of this kind in the table drawn up by Czerny for Beethoven's music and in the metronome marks that have been conserved for Schubert's opera *Alfonso und Estrella*. The question of whether the trios of minuets or scherzos should be played at the same tempo remained unanswered. In certain works, a single tempo seemed right, whereas in other symphonies a trio in a more lyrical or rustic character required a more leisurely tempo.

We accepted these minor adjustments in so far as a logical return to the initial tempo was possible.

One important question was how stable a tempo should be and where a deliberate deviation from it was desirable. Leopold von Sonnleithner wrote in 1857:

I heard [Schubert] accompany and rehearse his songs a hundred times. Above all else, he always kept strictly to the same tempo, except in a few cases where he had expressly written *ritardando*, *morendo*, *accelerando*, etc. in the score.

There are also written scores for Bach and Mozart which show that stability of tempo was important for them. I assume that this Schubert quotation also applies to the symphonies. We did indeed find that increased concentration on phrasing, articulation



and cultivated sound generally resulted in a more stable tempo.

We applied tempo rubato only when Schubert marked it, as in the chromatic oboe part in bars 16 and 17 of the Adagio introduction to the Sixth Symphony. The ritardando indicated in the autograph was omitted in Brahms's edition. We also tried to keep fluctuations of tempo to a natural minimum, bearing in mind the rule that stability must be a rhythmic force, not unrhythmic slavery.

### **Some points remain uncertain**

For example, a theoretically correct tempo in the finale of the Fifth Symphony is so fast that the work proves unplayable, whereas at a workable tempo it quickly loses excitement.

It is also strange that, in the two movements of the "Unfinished", the unit of metre remains virtually the same; but here that works very well in musical terms.

In the Sixth Symphony, many elements come from Italian opera. Rossini was a discovery for Schubert at this point in his career. In bar 341 of the first movement he marks a typical acceleration, as he was later to do in the "Great C major". The question is whether this should not also happen at the end of the finale, because the style of writing there no longer corresponds to the initial Allegro moderato marking. I opted for accelerando here.

### **A few more questions**

- Must a tempo be adapted to fit the acoustic of the hall?

An interesting position here is that of Quantz, who took as his point of departure the principle that one should play different pieces (that is, pieces with fewer harmonic modulations and less ornamentation) in (excessively) large spaces and in smaller ones (where one can perform highly elaborate music). In other words, the hall and the acoustic

may well influence the choice of repertoire, but not the way of performing the work. Indeed, if a space is not suitable for a particular work, the musician can do nothing else but think up emergency measures and makeshifts. For a change of tempo may perhaps be beneficial for a certain part of the work, but never for the work as a whole. Schubert's Symphonies sound best in a medium sized hall, where details are clearly perceptible, but the acoustic provides a certain grandeur. For our recording, we looked for and found halls of this kind.

-Does the make-up of the musicians influence the tempo?

In Schubert's time, musical Vienna was a melting pot of nationalities and peoples: Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, Moravians Bohemians, Gypsies... and also Viennese. That certainly gave color and positive tension to the orchestras. Today the same is true of Anima Eterna. Our mixture is not exactly the same, but the contrasts are just as marked. Each musician brings a characteristic element and helps to find a good balance. And so, the tempo remains under control...

-Does the size of the orchestra influence the tempo?

The short answer is: if the size of the orchestra influences the tempo, then the orchestra is too small or too large.

### **Phrase structure, timing, dynamics, balance**

On these aspects of performance, regrettably little was written in Schubert's time and the scores offer a dearth of information in this respect. More ever, our views and our thoughts are determined by methods of analysis that are generally accepted nowadays but were devised fifty years or more after Schubert.

These methods cannot be applied to Schubert because they make no distinction between styles and periods. In addition, the use of modern instruments and the corresponding

style of playing have also achieved a powerful hegemony today, both institutional and commercial, so that we generally listen to Schubert through the filter of the contemporary sound experience. Many readers will object that "knowing" is not enough and that there still intuition, feeling and imagination to be taken into account. And indeed, a musical interpretation with little or no admixture of these characteristics will never be experienced as genuine music, because to know without feeling is never truly to know. Perhaps Schubert was alluding to this when he wrote in 1824:

O Imagination [Phantasie]! Thou greatest treasure of humanity, thou inexhaustible source from which both artists and scholars drink! Oh, stay with us still, though recognized and venerated by only a few ...

Our intuition, our feeling and our imagination are by definition not the same as Schubert's, and moreover they differ from one person to another. Collective memory can easily disorientate us, because, when we play and listen to Schubert, we also have in mind's ear Brahms, Messiaen, Ellington, Sinatra and a great deal more music that Schubert did not know, such as certain polyphonies and music from other continents. Hence it is far from evident for us to "fee" when a chord is dissonant in Schubert's music, when we should experience pain or tension or melancholy or horror...

Musicians or listeners who give themselves over wholly to their sentiments will often get lost in the conventions of the school in which he was trained. To seek Schubert's ideas and emotional palette is to follow a long path on which one rarely finds a Wegweiser, a signpost.

In vocal music, the text can help us determine the melodic and rhythmic profile of a phrase. In instrumental music we cannot on count on this. Where is the climax, or are there several? Which notes are most active in the prosody? Which notes point to the next group? Is the end of a movement a conclusion or at the same time a new start?

Is the micro-rhythm calm or nervous, heavy or light, fluctuating or constant? In the notation of his phrase structure, Schubert is generally very clear, but the score rarely indicates how the bars are to be grouped.

The timing (a modern word meaning "the right note at the right moment") must also be decided by the performers. How long should we make a fermata, a pause, a comma? Can we delay a certain chord for a fraction of a second? Should we slow up at the end of a movement or will that mean we lose tension? In many cases, the busy "accompaniment machine" helps us find a solution, but unfortunately not always. And if we sometimes accelerate a little in a crescendo (Beethoven generally did some according to Czerny) should we consider that as musical, or just regard it as a weakness?

Dynamics and balance also raise many questions. Should the abnormally high trumpet parts in the Fifth Symphony really ring fortissimo and thus above the orchestra, or should they blend into the fortissimo of the tutti? In the finale of the Fourth Symphony, at bars 85-113, should the second violins and the violas shine like soloists with their improbably virtuosic perpetual mobile, or keep this rhythmic drive modestly in the background?

Schubert mostly writes the same nuance for all the parts. Does that mean that the first violins should fit in with the others and leave room for the inner voices and the bass, or should they (as is usual today) still sound a little stronger than the other strings? In short, each symphony throws up thousands of questions, even if the correct instruments have been chosen, even if the source material has been thoroughly investigated.

**The "accompaniment machine" as driving force and the influence of "Hungarian" folk musician Schubert's compositions and their performance.**

In Schubert's music, a timekeeping device is always present. One sees its importance in the manuscripts, because Schubert takes more than usual care over this "accompaniment machine". In most modern performances, however, the machine is regarded as unmusical and annoying. The same thing has happened with the "poppy" rhythmic templates in Mozart and Haydn: just think of the rhythmic primal force of a well-played Alberti bass! Such rhythmic structures were not thought appropriate in the "genteel" society of grandparents, who concentrated all their attention on the noble melody. But is it not very primal force of the rhythm that gives Schubert's scores their true character?

In 1858, Anselm Huttenbrenner wrote: "[Schubert] told me that he was very interested in gypsy music." The composer listened to as much of this music as he could in Zseliz, where he spent the summers of 1818 and 1824. But he had already heard so-called "gypsy" music in Vienna all his life. This repertoire was also called "Hungarian" music, but in reality it was a mixture of different styles and characters with melodic and rhythmic patterns from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Russia, and other countries. From around 1780, Magyar táncok (Hungarian dances) were equally popular with the nobility, the peasantry, and the urban bourgeoisie. In melody and rhythm, these dances give the image of proud personality, majestic yet tender, and above all are extremely simple in structure. It is music that is not really composed but rather emerged from improvisations on existing tunes. Many of these dances were published in collections in Vienna by such firms as Artaria, Cappi, Hoffmeister, Traeg, and Sauer.

As the son of two immigrants to Vienna, Schubert probably found this style very appealing, and he may well have known the published editions. It was in this environment that he was inspired to write his *Ungarische Melodie* D817 and *Divertissement à la Hongroise* D818. What interests me most here is the rhythmic structures of these pieces, because they are the real driving force in all his orchestral

works, in his piano and chamber music, in his songs and even his masses and choral works - in short, everywhere. Like their folk models, these structures are in general built on an ostinato rhythm with the bass playing the strong beat and the viola and/or second violin voicing a strong but short offbeat. In principle, the style is conceived for string instruments. Schubert uses these models discreetly in his First Symphony but much more markedly in the Second and Third. In the Fourth Symphony, this rhythmic machinery is essential in the two fast outer movements.

In the Sixth it is present, and more pertinent than ever, but now acts as an astronomical clock. There is no more trace of a melody, only rhythm.

In the "Unfinished", he constantly reaches out to the syncopated accompaniment and the finale contain very little typical melodic material and fascinate with their magical use of perpetual mobile rhythmic figures.

### **What do we learn from Schubert's manuscripts?**

Schubert wrote very quickly, like Mozart, with few erasures. Scores were written directly, bar by bar: everything was already programmed in his mind. In principle there are no mistakes in the writing and absolutely no slipshod notation. However, there are a few places which are not always immediately comprehensible because he wrote so fast. Schubert was extremely modern for his time. But his modernity did not fit in with the image of the period that was formed later. The Brahms edition tried to remove some of this modernity. Hence the dynamic contrasts were weakened by the frequent addition of transitional dynamics and the replacement of *fff* by *ff* and *ppp* by *pp*: numerous accents were changed into diminuendos. The micro-dynamics in the solo parts were simplified. In the manuscripts we can read a powerful and dramatic composer; in the Brahms edition

he is more of an amiable singer.

The dynamics of solo instruments or groups of instruments are often opposed to the overall dynamic. In the Brahms edition these (deliberate) differences are almost always eliminated.

In repetitions of a theme or other elements, the Brahms edition prefers "consistent" articulations, phrasing, and dynamics. But Schubert follows the tradition of Bach and Mozart and seeks the greatest possible variety in repetitions.

The Brahms edition removed dissonant cords, for example at bar 109 of the first movement of the "Unfinished", rewrote bars 98 and 99 of the Andante of the Fourth Symphony (Schubert repeats bar 97 as an ostinato in the violins, which generates an impressive tension), added eight bars to the first movement of the same symphony, and cut four magnificent bars from the Trio of the Scherzo in the "Great C major".

The alterations in the Brahms edition are more far-reaching in some symphonies than in others. The most severely affected are the "Great C major" and the Fourth Symphony (some 1500 "corrections"!).

A large number of Schubert's indications in the manuscripts, like the differentiated treatment of cellos and double basses, the pronounced dynamics of the woodwind or the pertinent role of the timpani, will only make sense if one uses the right instruments. At a thousand different moments, an editor takes decisions which are conceived for a certain instrumentarium. And most editions are intended for a modern (or, at least, too modern) instrumentarium.

- In the manuscripts one finds innumerable little details, such as spaces, page division, more or less pressure on the quill, agitation in the hand movement, "coolly" notated models, expressly marked dynamics, and so on. They give an impression of the compositional process and the hierarchy of the elements. It is as if we were looking over

the composer's shoulder as he writes.

- We must be careful how we make use of all at this. One can try to read too much into manuscripts. It remains to keep searching, to weigh up all the evidence, and to continue experimenting.

Jos van Immerseel, 1997  
(Translation: Charles Johnston(2012))

ZZT308