



Schubertiade III

JULY 28

Tuesday, July 28, 8:00 p.m., Stent Family Hall,
Menlo School

Schubertiades feature an intermission reception hosted in partnership with Ridge Vineyards.

SPECIAL THANKS

Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Alan and Corinne Barkin and also to Linda DeMelis and Ted Wobber with gratitude for their generous support.

Moritz von Schwind (1804–1871).
Study for *An Evening at
Baron von Spaun's*, 1868.
Art Resource, NY

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Der Jüngling und der Tod, D. 545 (von Spaun) (March 1817)

Nikolay Borchev, *baritone*; Gilles Vonsattel, *piano*

Piano Sonata in c minor, D. 958 (September 1828)

Allegro

Adagio

Minuetto: Allegro

Allegro

Gilles Vonsattel, *piano*

INTERMISSION

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Der Tod und das Mädchen, op. 7, no. 3, D. 531 (Claudius) (February 1817)

Nikolay Borchev, *baritone*; Gilles Vonsattel, *piano*

String Quartet in d minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden” (1824)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

Escher String Quartet: Adam Barnett-Hart, Aaron Boyd, *violins*; Pierre Lapointe, *viola*;
Brook Speltz, *cello*

Program Notes: Schubertiade III

Notes on the Program by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(Born January 31, 1797, Vienna; died November 19, 1828, Vienna)

Der Jüngling und der Tod, D. 545 (von Spaun)

Composed: March 1817

Other works from this period: February–March 1817: Eight *Écossaises* for Piano, D. 529; Sonata in a minor for Piano, op. posth. 164, D. 537; *An die Musik*, op. 88, no. 4, D. 547; *Die Forelle*, op. 32, D. 550

1817: Piano Sonata no. 5 in A-flat Major, D. 557; no. 6 in e minor, D. 566; no. 7 in D-flat Major, D. 567; and no. 9 in B Major, op. posth. 147, D. 575; Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, D. 574, “Duo”; String Trio in B-flat Major, D. 581

Approximate duration: 4 minutes

Josef von Spaun (1788–1865) was one of Schubert’s closest friends, an enthusiastic supporter from the days they spent together as students at the Choir School of the Court Chapel in Vienna (Spaun, from a prosperous family in Linz, often bought score paper for him when the young scholar’s money ran out) and later a frequent host of the **Schubertiades**. Spaun led a successful career as a court councilor and had no literary ambitions, but he did write a poem titled *Der Jüngling und der Tod* (*The Youth and Death*), about a young man in torment welcoming the arrival of death, that Schubert set in March 1817. Just one month earlier, Schubert had composed *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (*Death and the Maiden*) to a poem by Matthias Claudius, allowing the interesting speculation that *Der Jüngling und der Tod* may have been Spaun’s male counterpart to the earlier song, perhaps the result of a challenge by one of the Schubertians or even by the composer himself.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Piano Sonata in c minor, D. 958

Composed: September 1828

Other works from this period: 1828: Mass no. 6 in E-flat Major, D. 950; Rondo in A Major, op. 107, D. 951, “Grand Rondo”; Quintet for Strings in C Major, op. 163, D. 956; Piano Sonata in c minor, D. 958; Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960; *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (*The Shepherd on the Rock*), op. posth. 129, D. 965; *Offertory: Intende voci* in B-flat Major for Tenor Solo, Chorus, and Orchestra, D. 963; Fantasy in f minor for Piano, Four Hands, op. posth. 103, D. 940

Approximate duration: 31 minutes

For further information on the c minor Sonata, please see the program notes for Schubertiade II for the A Major Piano Sonata.

Schubert’s closest approach to Beethoven’s weight of utterance in the last three piano **sonatas** comes in the opening **Allegro** of the c minor Sonata—the work may even be a tribute of sorts to the older composer, who died in March 1827, just a year before this piece was begun. The movement’s essential tunefulness and its concern with matters of hearth and heart rather than grandeur and sublimity, however, mark it unmistakably as a creation by Schubert. The following **Adagio** is a gentle major-key song, poignantly inflected with delicate minor-mode borrowings, which becomes animated in its central section before resuming its initial quietude for its closing phrases. Though given the old name of **Minuetto**, the third **movement** displays such forward-looking devices as irregular **phrasing** and sudden contrasts

**Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 94.*

of dynamics. The finale is rambunctious and incessantly active not only in its rhythmic motion but also in its wide exploration of colorful harmonic territories.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Der Tod und das Mädchen, op. 7, no. 3, D. 531 (Claudius)

Composed: February 1817

Approximate duration: 3 minutes

The German poet Matthias Claudius (1740–1815) edited a newspaper called *Wandsbecker Bote*, in which he published many poems and essays, before he became engrossed in religion in his later years. Schubert discovered his verses in 1815 and found in them a simplicity, a wry humor, a fresh observation of nature, and an elegiac character well suited to his creative talents. He set thirteen of Claudius’s poems during the next two years, the most famous of which is *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (*Death and the Maiden*), which provided a thematic source for Schubert’s most beloved string quartet.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

String Quartet in d minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden”

Composed: 1824

Other works from this period: 1824: “Grand Duo” Sonata for Piano, Four Hands, D. 812; Octet for Winds and Strings, D. 803; Introduction and Variations on *Trockne Blumen* for Flute and Piano, D. 802; String Quartet in a minor, D. 804; Sonata in a minor for Arpeggione and Piano, D. 821; *Salve Regina* in C Major, D. 811

Approximate duration: 40 minutes

When Helmina von Chézy’s play *Rosamunde*, with extensive incidental music by Franz Schubert, was hooted off the stage at its premiere in Vienna on December 20, 1823, the twenty-six-year-old composer decided to turn his efforts away from the theater, where he had found only frustration, and devote more attention to his purely instrumental music. The major works of 1823—the operas *Fierrabras* and *Der häusliche Krieg*, the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*, and *Rosamunde*—gave way to the String Quartets in d minor (“Death and the Maiden”) and a minor, the a minor Cello Sonata (“Arpeggione”), several sets of **variations** and German dances, and the Octet. At that time in Schubert’s life, composition may have been something of an escape from the difficulties of his personal situation. He was suffering from anemia and a nervous disorder as the result of syphilis and its treatment (mercury in the early nineteenth century!) and was constantly broke, living largely on the generosity of his devoted friends, with only an occasional pittance from some performance or publication. In March 1824, he poured out his troubles in a letter to Leopold Kupelwieser, a close friend who recently had moved to Rome: “In a word, I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and whose sheer despair over this makes things constantly worse instead of better; imagine a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the felicity of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain; whom enthusiasm (at least of the stimulating kind) for all things beautiful threatens to forsake, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being?” Schubert then quoted some forlorn lines from Goethe’s poem “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (“Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel”), which he had set in 1814: “My peace is gone, my heart is sore, I shall find it

never, nevermore' [are words which] I may well sing every day now, for each night on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief." Such anguish, however, did not seem to thwart Schubert's creative muse, and the year 1824, when his physician was able to restore somewhat his health through regular mineral baths, a strict diet, and confinement to his room, was one of the most productive periods of his life. Moritz von Schwind, the artist who captured so well the decorous atmosphere of the Biedermeier period and whose woodcuts for children were to inspire the third movement ("Frère Jacques") of Mahler's First Symphony sixty years later, reported on Schubert's absorption with his creative activity at the time: "Schubert has now long been at work with the greatest zeal. If you go to see him during the day, he says, 'Hello, how are you?—Good!' and simply goes on working, whereupon you depart."

The d minor Quartet (popularly subtitled "Death and the Maiden") was largely composed in March 1824, immediately after the one in a minor had been completed. The second quartet seems not to have been played, however, until January 29 and 30, 1826, when Schubert directed two rehearsals at the Viennese home of the musical amateurs Karl and Franz Hacker in preparation for the formal premiere at the residence of the lawyer Josef Barth on February 1st. Schubert was said to have made some revisions to the score during the rehearsals. The quartet was heard again later that month at the home of the composer, conductor, and intimate of Schubert's Franz Lachner in suburban Landstrasse. Schubert offered the quartet for publication to Schott in February 1828, along with the Quartet in G Major, three operas, the Mass in A-flat, the E-flat Piano Trio, and several dozen songs, but he was refused, and the score was not issued until Josef Czerny of Vienna brought it out in July 1831, three years after the composer's death.

Though Schubert spoke of the d minor and a minor Quartets and the exactly contemporaneous Octet as preparatory exercises for a "grand symphony," there is nothing tentative or unpolished in the structure, style, or expression of any of these splendid creations. Indeed, these compositions rank among the greatest instrumental works that Schubert ever wrote—the d minor Quartet was described by Maurice Brown as "one of the supreme accomplishments of all chamber music." The first movement opens with a bold, dramatic gesture, founded upon a pregnant **triplet-rhythm motive**, which Jack Westrup said represents "not acceptance of the world's misery; it is rather defiance." ("My compositions are the product of my mind and spring from my sorrow," Schubert confided to his diary in March 1824, just when he was writing this quartet. "Those that were born of grief give the greatest delight to the outside world.") The opening motive is whipped into a considerable frenzy before the music quiets, pauses on two chords surrounded by silence, and then launches into the subsidiary subject, a lilting violin duet of contrasting lyrical quality. This **theme** soon slips out of the halcyon realm of F major into the more troubled tonality of a minor, however, where it brings the movement's **exposition** to a close amid the turbulent emotions of the opening. The **development** section is a compact and closely worked-out **contrapuntal** elaboration of the second theme. A rising wave of expressive tension leads without pause to the **recapitulation**, which is announced by a stark, barren **octave** splayed across all four instruments of the ensemble. The music gravitates toward the calmer region of D major for the return of the second theme but then reverts to the agitated key and mood of the movement's opening for its extended **coda**.

The sobriquet of the d minor Quartet—"Death and the Maiden"—is derived from the source of the theme of its second movement, a song that Schubert composed on a poem of that title by Matthias Claudius in February 1817. Claudius's brief text contrasts the terror of a young girl ("Pass by, horrible skeleton! Do not touch me!") with the mock-soothing words of death ("I am your friend. Be of good cheer! I am not fierce! You shall sleep softly in my arms!"). The song begins with

a piano introduction depicting the solemn tread of death, continues with the maiden's music of panic and fear, and ends with the words of death set to the strains of the introduction. It is from the opening and closing sections of the song that Schubert borrowed the theme for the quartet, which he worked as a set of five variations. The *Andante* is, at the very least, the expressive heart of this masterly piece, but Sir George Grove went so far as to call this deeply affective movement "the most poetical, the most mournful, the most *musical* thing in the world." The theme, more harmony than melody (and, therefore, the perfect subject for variations), is given in simple **chorale** texture by the ensemble. The opening variation is devoted to floating arabesques from the first violin. The cello's long, lyrical line is supported by a richly textured accompaniment in the second variation. The third variation is more energetic and vigorous in its rhythms, while the fourth migrates to the expressive purity of G major. The final variation combines lyricism with drama and recalls the triplet figurations of the opening movement before it draws to a sorrowful close.

The **scherzo**, with its unsettling rhythmic **syncopations** and restless expression, reinstates the defiant mood of the first movement. Its main theme, bursting with tension and barely contained energy, has been interpreted by many commentators as a precursor to the swaggering Nibelungen theme in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. The finale, a feverish **tarantella**, combines formal elements of **rondo** and **sonata form** to close what George R. Marek called "the most consistently inspired and moving quartet that Schubert ever wrote."