

## Schubert Impromptus op.142

Schubert's biography in his last years is essentially the catalogue of his compositions. One can paint a substantial picture of his life just by giving his address(es), and then listing one after another the masterpieces which grew from his incomparably rich inner life (*Winterreise*, Mass in E-flat, C major symphony and quintet, last three sonatas, f-minor phantasia, to name only a few).

Similarly the piano music of the Impromptus (December 1827) tends to speak for itself. They are exactly what he called them, improvisations, rooted in Classicism, and closest in style to his favorite form, the Lied.

The sensual beauty of the Impromptus always brings to mind Schubert's vocal writing, except perhaps in the 4<sup>th</sup> which calls up a wild Hungarian folk ensemble complete with fiddle, hurdy-gurdy and cimbalom effects. Since his song-writing could be picturesque, we can find the same in these vocally-inspired pieces. A beautiful section in no.1 features a murmuring, rippling harmony surrounded by a touching dialogue between soprano and bass, distinctly bringing to mind the water-music of "Liebesbotschaft," where similarly the piano seems to complete the singer's phrases in the low register.

The following trio of no.2 doesn't depict any element in particular, but recalls a peaceful pastoral atmosphere as in the "sighing breezes, "softly rippling waves," and "rushing sunbeams" of "In der Ferne." The outer sections meditate on a melody full of that wistful resignation which seems so inextricable to Schubert's late style.

The theme of no.3 comes from incidental music to a failed sentimental play "Rosamunde." The variations contain some of Schubert's most popular music, ranging in compact mood from dreamy and sensuous to turbulent and agitated. The melodic simplicity and syncopated, rustic accompaniment is comparable to the folksy "Die Taubenpost."

Schubert with disarming simplicity gives us already music of essences, rather than solids, and is already only one step away from the supremely dark, static music of "Die Stadt," "Ihr Bild," or "Doppelgänger," the music that would define his last months.

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