

Franz Schubert

Symphony No.7 (8) Unfinished
Die Unvollendete
Symphony No.6

The Little

Royal Flemish Philharmonic
Philippe Herreweghe

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Symphony No. 6 in C, D. 589 “The Little”

1	Adagio – Allegro	9.33
2	Andante	7.01
3	Scherzo (Presto)	6.03
4	Allegro moderato	9.50

Symphony No. 7 in B minor, D. 759 “Die Unvollendete” (Unfinished)

5	Allegro moderato	14.02
6	Andante con moto	9.33

Royal Flemish Philharmonic

conducted by:

Philippe Herreweghe

Recording venue: Queen Elizabeth Hall, Antwerp, Belgium (10/2011)

Recording Producer: Andreas Neubronner

Balance engineer: Markus Heiland

Recording engineer: Markus Heiland

Editing: Andreas Neubronner

Total playing time : 56.27

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Unripe and unfinished

In 1884, while preparing his edition of Franz Schubert's early symphonies, Johannes Brahms found in the scores of the young composer a developmental process typical of student work – he heard music filled with promise, but promise as yet unfulfilled. This led him to doubt whether the early symphonies and unfinished symphonic fragments penned by Schubert between 1813 and 1818 were really worthy of publication. Having leafed through the galley proof, he wrote the publisher: “*I have not kept it a secret from you that I do not take particular pleasure in preparing these symphonies for publication. It is clear to me that such (preliminary) work should not be published, but rather, reverentially preserved and perhaps made accessible to a wider public in the form of transcriptions.*” And when the volume containing Schubert's first four symphonies eventually appeared, he wrote a female friend: “*I urge you not to buy it! Really, you don't need to have everything – in any case not such useless items as this lying around.*”

For clarity's sake, it should be pointed out that Brahms, himself a notorious destroyer of his own sketches and early work, was a great admirer of Schubert's – so much so that he even felt vicarious shame for him regarding these youthful scores. Brahms' protective concern has however now yielded place to a full appreciation of their importance, as exemplified by the enthusiasm with which Italian modernist Luciano Berio greeted Schubert's sketches. Berio, who also orchestrated works of Brahms, did not *problematise* the unfinished early works of Schubert – he *thematized* them, filling in their (yawning) gaps with music perhaps even more unfathomable than Schubert's, in his *Rendering* for orchestra.

The dimensions of the unripe and unfinished in Schubert's music – in the symphonic oeuvre, inextricably linked – continue to fascinate. The journey that ultimately led to the last completed symphony, the ‘Great C major’ (D. 944), is strewn with youthful experiments, unripe attempts and breathtaking fragments, and the fact that his best-known symphony is ‘unfinished’ indeed says it all. Driven by a deep longing to write larger-than-life symphonies like those of fellow Vienna resident Ludwig van Beethoven, but without anyone around him to take his ambition seriously, he had, as a composer of fragile lieder and refined salon music, his own market value working against him (a well-meaning friend is said quietly to have advised him: “*Stick to songs, little brother!*”)

How did Schubert fare with this symphonic project? The first three symphonies were written ‘just for fun,’ presumably for the amateur orchestras in which he himself played viola: schematic music of a cosmetic character, with limited Haydnesque harmonic tensions, crystalline Mozartian melodies above pulsating accompaniments and, here and there, some Beethovenian suspense. It is only with the Fourth – he

himself branded it *Tragic* – that things start getting serious: the work's key is the dramatic one of C minor; its suspenseful moments seem inspired by the fist of Beethoven. The sunnier Fifth again harkens back to Mozart, even including a veiled reference to the minuet from the G-minor Symphony.

If Schubert's symphonic output between 1813 and 1818 came down to a search for himself, it was a search that ended with a question mark – in the form of the Sixth Symphony, the last before ‘symphonic panic’ set in. As an indication that he was entering a new phase, Schubert entitled it ‘Great Symphony in C.’ The work's orchestral euphony certainly makes an ambitious impression, and it will have been no small challenge for an amateurs' orchestra to master its constant mobility. It opens with an *Adagio* introduction featuring majestic *chiaroscuro* tutti chords and rambling melodic lines that appear to have lost their way. The ultimate destination of these ambiguous meanderings is an unexpectedly playful *Allegro*, whose frolicsome and woody mechanical music conjures up associations with Haydn's ‘Military.’ A waddling folk-like tune introduced in the solo flute and clarinet serves as a subordinate theme. Having caught the listener somewhat off-guard with the jolly tone of this (straightforward sonata-form) movement, Schubert provides yet another surprise at its end: a metric whirlwind that appears from nowhere, blowing away the classicist spirit with operatic whiplashes.

Already here, the question thrown up by this symphony is apparent to the listener. Namely: is its bid for glory not too unconventional and too polystylistic in content for it to qualify as ‘great’? The musical heterogeneity of the whole makes it impossible to span it with a single, uniform arch: we are continually mystified by a clash between outward pomp and inward indecision. The richly ornamented, nonchalantly beautiful melody with which the *Andante* opens is cut off in midstream by martial bombast. The *Scherzo*, too, – the first in Schubert's symphonic catalogue – appears to channel the musical discourse in two different directions: juxtaposed to the rhythmic voltage of the scherzo proper (clearly inspired by the third movement of Beethoven's First Symphony) is the archaism of the middle or ‘trio’ section. But what takes us most aback is the symphony's seemingly never-ending finale, decked out in prickly figures and Rossinian harmonic changes.

The discovery of Schubert's last symphony, set in the same key of C major, quickly put an end to any claim the Sixth had had to the epithet, ‘great.’ But does this necessarily qualify it as ‘little,’ as it is sometimes called? The answer is to be found in what followed. Schubert seems to have sensed that his symphonic writing needed to take a new direction. In the years immediately following the Sixth, he appears to lose his symphonic bearings, leaving no fewer than ten symphonic movements

unfinished between May 1818 and August 1821. But in the winter of 1822, he at last seems to find his 'groove': he pens an opening the likes of which no one has ever heard before, in which the double basses and cellos sing themselves into the depths, followed by mysterious murmurings in the strings, to which a panoramic theme in the wind is added. A few weeks later, Schubert is diagnosed with syphilis; the hair has to be shaved from his head; depression lurks. *"Imagine someone who knows his health can never really return, and because of his despair, gets worse and worse, rather than better (...), whose brightest hopes have come to nothing, and whom the happiness of love and friendship offer nothing but pain, at most [...]."* With these words, Schubert summed up his situation to a friend in the Autumn of 1823, having just aborted the new symphony. While the work had initially seemed so full of promise, he had ultimately been able to complete only two movements. For the third – a scherzo – he had hardly managed to complete twenty measures.

But what seemed only half complete, was already a work in its own right, one in which Schubert appears to have freed himself of the contradictory elements to be found in the Sixth. While a potpourri-like confusion had dominated the symphonic writing of 1818, four years later, a dialectic made its entrance which would characterise the remainder of his oeuvre. The *Allegro moderato* opens with a creeping melody in the lower strings, with a metre that wrong-foots the listener. Once it has receded, the strings commence to stir nervously, while above them, the solo oboe and clarinet superimpose a dispirited tune. Via an ingenious bridge (the horns and bassoons make a soft landing on G major terrain), a casually flowing, unexpectedly luminous subordinate theme appears, before being ripped apart by brusque bellowings a few moments later. The oppositions of gloom and light, minor and major, drama and nonchalance come from the same pen as those in the Sixth Symphony, but this time it is the hand of the master that juxtaposes them. The shimmering grandeur attained in the development section, with its majestic thrashing oscillations, dominated by the gloomy opening motif, appears to address all of the questions which the Sixth left unanswered.

In the *Andante con moto*, as well, the contrast between sombre and naive is achieved more organically, and with less harshness than in the past. The movement commences with a curiously pastoral opening phrase, which in turn tilts into more shadowy regions. The conspicuous tranquillity of the transition to the subordinate theme in the solo clarinet, introduced ethereally by the first violins, is short-lived: its innocence is plunged into a veritable din of orchestral pathos. The seeming randomness with which Schubert routes his melodic material – at one moment toward the idyllically pastoral, at another, disorienting tumultuousness – is something which no one before or after him was able to do with such

mastery. In his last work in this medium (and the first in which Beethoven was beaten on his own territory), Schubert added yet another facet to the symphony: the suggestion of the absence of time and space.

If ambiguity can be considered a quality, then it is certainly a quality possessed by Franz Schubert. But while in the Sixth Symphony, the ambiguity is implicit, in the 'Unfinished,' it is fully and magnificently explicit, with moments of pure joviality alternating with ones of profoundest seriousness – to the point of despair. Yet another case in point is the Piano Sonata in B-flat major, D. 960. In its first movement, a heart-rendingly fragile melody, propelled forward by a pulsing left hand, is confronted, after only a few bars, with an eerily frightening chasm: a trill from unfathomable depths, terrifying if played properly, opens the blackness of the Abyss. Less than ten years after Schubert's death, Georg Büchner wrote in his play, *Woyzeck*: "Every man is an abyss – you get dizzy looking into it." Schubert is such an abyss. There, both he, and his music, are in their element.

Tom Janssens

Translation: Nicholas Lakides

Royal Flemish Philharmonic

A modern and stylistically flexible symphony orchestra, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic demonstrates an artistic flair which allows for a variety of styles – from classical to contemporary – in a historically authentic manner. Chief Conductor Edo de Waart is responsible for the orchestra's main repertoire. Drawing on his vast orchestral experience, as former Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, he contributes to the unique character of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic. He works in close co-operation with Principal Conductor Philippe Herreweghe, who makes use of his specific background in his readings of (pre)Romantic music. Martyn Brabbins is Principal Guest Conductor.

Thanks to its own series of concerts in large venues, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic occupies a unique position in Flanders. The orchestra has earned itself a recurring spot on the annual programmes of the Queen Elisabeth Hall and deSingel in Antwerp, the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, de Bijloke Music Centre in Ghent and the Bruges Concertgebouw. Alongside its regular concerts, the Philharmonic attaches great value to developing educational and social projects, offering children, youngsters, and people with different social backgrounds the opportunity to get acquainted with the symphony orchestra from close quarters.

The Royal Flemish Philharmonic has also been a guest of some major foreign concert halls: the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna, the Festspielhaus in Salzburg, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Suntory Hall and the Bunka Kaikan Hall in Tokyo, the Philharmonie of Cologne and Munich, the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, the Palace of Art in Budapest and the National Grand Theatre of Beijing. International concert tours through various European countries and Japan are a constant item on the yearly calendar.

In collaboration with the publisher, Lannoo, the Philharmonic is currently developing a series of audio books for children. The Royal Flemish Philharmonic is frequently broadcast on its media partner, Radio Klara, and on television. Several of the orchestra's CDs received acclaim by the professional press, including the recent recordings of Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Stravinsky conducted by Philippe Herreweghe (PentaTone). The orchestra's recent releases include Shostakovich' Fifth Symphony with Jaap van Zweden (Naïve) and recordings of Mortelmans and Vieuxtemps with Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion). The Royal Flemish Philharmonic also records for its own label, focusing on the main orchestral repertoire, Belgian composers and contemporary music.

www.royalflemishphilharmonic.be

Philippe Herreweghe

Philippe Herreweghe was born in Ghent. There he studied medicine and psychiatry at the university and piano at the Music Academy. He founded the Collegium Vocale Gent, La Chapelle Royale and, later, the Ensemble Vocal Européen, thus establishing himself as a specialist in renaissance and baroque music. Since 1991, he and the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées have applied themselves to playing romantic music on period instruments. From 1982 to 2001, he served as Artistic Director of the Festival of Les Académies Musicales de Saintes. At the start of the 2008-2009 season, he became the principal guest conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic. In his capacity as principal conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, Philippe Herreweghe has been focusing for the last ten years on interpreting the pre-romantic and romantic repertoire adequately and refreshingly.

He has also appeared as guest conductor with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Concerto Köln, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and other illustrious orchestras and ensembles. Some of his most significant recordings include the vocal masterpieces of Bach (such as the St. Matthew and St John Passions, the Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio), an anthology

of the French 'Grand Motet', the requiem masses by Mozart, Fauré and Brahms, oratorios by Mendelssohn, and Schönberg's Pierrot lunaire. He is working on recordings of the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, in collaboration with the international label PentaTone.

The European musical press acknowledged Philippe Herreweghe's artistic vision by proclaiming him Musical Personality of the Year in 1990. In 1993, Philippe Herreweghe and the Collegium Vocale Gent were appointed Cultural Ambassadors in Flanders. A year later he was awarded the Order of the Officier des Arts et Lettres and in 1997, Philippe Herreweghe received an honorary doctorate from Louvain University. In 2003, he was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in France



Photo: Miel Pieters

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