

Franz Schubert

**'THE TROUT' PIANO QUINTET IN A
PIANO TRIO NO. 1 IN B FLAT**

The Schubert Ensemble



FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

PIANO QUINTET IN A, D.667 ("The Trout")

1. *i* Allegro vivace 9:24
2. *ii* Andante 6:56
3. *iii* Scherzo: Presto - Trio 4:06
4. *iv* Theme and Variations: Andantino 8:00
5. *v* Allegro giusto 6:36

PIANO TRIO NO. 1 IN B FLAT, D.898 / Op.99

6. *i* Allegro moderato 11:23
7. *ii* Andante un poco mosso 10:28
8. *iii* Scherzo: Allegro 6:40
9. *iv* Rondo: Allegro vivace 9:25

Total time: 73.00

The
Schubert
ensemble

Produced & engineered by Chris Craker
Edited by Alexander Van Ingen

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In 1819, while on a walking tour of Upper Austria, the 22 year-old Schubert stayed with his friend, the acclaimed singer Michael Vogl, whose home town of Steyr the composer thought 'inconceivably beautiful'. Part of the appeal was, undoubtedly, the company he was keeping, as Schubert wrote to his brother Ferdinand:

At the house where I lodge there are eight girls, nearly all pretty. Plenty to do, you see. The daughter of Herr von Koller, where I and Vogl eat daily, is very pretty, plays the pianoforte well and is going to sing several of my songs.

While there, the friends met the mine-manager Sylvester Paumgartner, a wealthy patron of the arts and amateur cellist, who commissioned Schubert to write a chamber piece for one of his musical gatherings. In Germany and Austria at this time, chamber music was a staple form of entertainment for the educated middle classes, whose patronage sustained the tradition, as musicologist Arnold Schering observed:

Here, in the families of academics, of upper-echelon merchants and civil servants, of the prestigious artists of a community, for all their wonted liberalism in politics, there reigns a solid conservative spirit, a wholesome urge to preserve and transmit received culture and to make daily life as rich and variegated as possible by cultivating an idealist cast of mind... The focus of their musical life was chamber music, performed in private domestic concerts by artists befriended of the family and attended by listeners who could be relied upon to possess discriminating taste in matters of literature and the spirit.

Paumgartner's commission included some stipulations: Schubert's work should use the same instrumentation as Hummel's *Quintet* – piano, violin, viola, cello and double bass, – and at least one of the movements should comprise a theme and variations on Schubert's song, *Die Forelle*, D550a, which Schubert had written in 1817.

It has been suggested that the resultant 'Trout' Quintet in A major, Op.114, D667, was composed rather quickly; certainly Schubert uses conventional structures with relatively little modification. For instance, the first movement's recapitulation is an almost exact replica of the exposition, with adjustments made to accommodate the necessary modulations. The slow movement essentially consists of sixty bars of music heard twice, transposed up a minor third the second time – though the music's charm is undeniable. The *finale* is a type of Schubertian

binary form, the second section of which reiterates much of the opening material, again transposed. If Schubert's instruction to repeat the first section is obeyed, we hear the same material three times. As a consequence, scholars tend to look upon the 'Trout' as likeable but lightweight; J.A. Westrup even called the work 'Holiday music for amateurs.' Yet the work represented a creative frontier for Schubert: it was the gateway to the more mature chamber works to come.

The notion that the 'Trout' Quintet was dashed off is corroborated by the fact that Schubert, with no time to write out the full score, scribbled out the string parts – the cello part at first proving rather challenging for Paumgartner – and then proceeded to perform the piano part himself from memory. Schubert did at last produce a full score as a gift for Paumgartner, whose family promptly lost it; the work was eventually published by Czerny as Op.114 a year after Schubert's death.

However hastily written, there is no denying the sheer joy of listening to the 'Trout' Quintet, irrefutably one of Schubert's most celebrated and enduring works. It is hard to resist drawing a link between the Quintet's spacious, airy quality and the inspiring scenery which surrounded Schubert at the time of its commission. The unusually light, high piano writing balances perfectly with the weightier sonority of the double bass, and Schubert uses the apparent simplicity of his structures as a framework for some wonderfully inventive, beautifully contrasted material.

There is a sparkingly witty *Scherzo*, offset by a rather coy trio section, before the famous variations which Paumgartner so specifically requested. In D major, these *Andante* variations perhaps bear the influence of Haydn's variations in his 'Emperor' Quartet, Op.76 No.3. After the theme is introduced by the strings, the first variation provides a notable example of Schubert's unusual piano writing in his chamber music: the piano is treated as though it is the 'primo' part of a four-hands piano duet, doubling the melody at the octave in both hands. This is a device which Schubert used in both *Piano Trios* as well, and it is this octave-based piano sonority which makes the textures of these works so distinctive. During the fifth variation, Schubert shifts the key in a surprising direction – B flat major – and reserves the original song's leaping accompaniment figure until the last *Allegretto*.

The jovial *finale*, with the unbuttoned air of gypsy music, is a joyous embodiment of Austrian *Gemütlichkeit* – a spirit of untroubled relaxation. The second phrase is an elaboration of the first, and the material is used antiphonally, in a sort of call-and-response, with the strings articulating a phrase before being answered by the piano. After a powerful climax at the end of the exposition comes a Schubertian speciality: a sudden, two-bar silence. It is moments like this which undermine accusations of a lack of originality in the work, which in any case cannot detract from the music's infectiously joyful nature, a rollicking, irrepressible quality which cannot fail to charm the ear.

Schubert's two expansive *Piano Trios* were probably written, or at least begun, in the autumn of 1827, the composer's recently-formed friendships with the pianist Bocklet, the violinist Schuppanzigh and the cellist Linke perhaps inspiring the works. The Piano Trio No.1 in B flat, D898, is one of Schubert's most delectable chamber creations, full of long, lyrical melodic lines. In Beethoven's trios the piano tends to dominate, but Schubert achieves a perfect balance between the instruments. In some regards, the B flat Trio is reminiscent of the 'Trout' Quintet without direct thematic resemblance. This is apparent in the first movement especially, in which Schubert creates a wonderful variety of textures: unison statements contrasted with conversational dialogue, underpinned by a piano part that incorporates thematic elements rather than being purely accompanimental.

Just as the 'Trout' has its roots in Schubert's *Lieder*, so the B flat Trio's opening theme resembles the texture of another of his songs, An Sylvia. Initially uninhibited and jaunty – a similar mood to that cultivated by the *Trout* – the reiteration of this theme is articulated using a texture strongly redolent of the *Quintet's* spacious sound-world: piano in octaves, violin quavers, and the cello playing a *pizzicato* version of the piano's bass-line. The second subject group – the emotional heart of the movement – features a favourite Schubertian device: the cello's sustained A begins as a tonic pedal and, as the music modulates, is transformed into the median note in the new key of F. Further touches of originality include the distinctive way Schubert varies the opening material at the beginning of the recapitulation, and the *coda's* inversion of the first theme.

The *Trio's* angelic slow movement is in a loose ternary form, the tranquil outer sections framing a more dramatic centre. The initial material may be said to lull the listener into a

false sense of security, with its deceptively simple melodic and harmonic language, and the almost continuous violin and cello duetting above the piano's accompaniment. The opening melody is one of Schubert's finest, played at first by the cello over rippling triplets before being taken up by the violin. Against this serene backdrop, Schubert's use of an episode in which the piano takes centre stage, and some unexpected harmonic shifts later in the movement, are thrown into relief, standing out as fresh and vivid.

The *Scherzo*, which again possesses similar qualities to that of the 'Trout', may also be related to one of Schubert's piano works, D916b, which was written at about the same time, probably in the second half of 1827. The *Scherzo* is a movement of almost symphonic proportions, with a trio section that features a sighing melody passed between violin and cello before intertwining as a wistful duet.

The Trio's *finale* is one of Schubert's most exuberant and ambitious. Not for the first time, he labels it a 'Rondo' but proceeds to write what is essentially a sonata-form movement. The lackadaisical opening recalls Schubert's early violin sonatas, with an unexpected rhythmic emphasis that anticipates the witticisms to come: during the first theme, Schubert accents the fourth bar, not the third, undermining the four-square two-bar groupings which have hitherto prevailed. What follows includes moments of considerable originality: a playfully delayed first entry from the cello, and a second theme in octave-unison which is presented in a variety of guises.

We then hear a theme played on the cello, decorated by the violin, during which the first theme's skewed rhythmic emphasis is 'transformed' into triple meter. That un-accented third bar is effectively 'explained' in this context as an upbeat – the third and final beat of each 3/2 bar; while the first theme's accentuation of the fourth bar is now given rhythmical logic as the first, accented beat of each 3/2 bar. In short, accents which made no sense in groupings of four are given meaning in groupings of three. This rhythmical joke – worthy of Haydn – is further emphasised by the static, almost rustic repetition of melody, harmony and bass-line, and Schubert makes one last reference to the joke in the quick-fire *coda*, sustaining the work's good humour to the last.

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The *Schubert* ensemble

Simon Blendis - violin **Douglas Paterson** - viola **Jane Salmon** - cello
Peter Buckoke - double bass **William Howard** - piano

After 26 years at the forefront of British chamber music, the Schubert Ensemble is firmly established as one of the world's leading exponents of chamber music for piano and strings. Regularly giving over 50 concerts a year, the Ensemble has performed in over 40 different countries. It has recently performed in major concert halls in Europe and North America, including London's Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Hall, Oslo's Konserthus and for the Coleman Chamber Series in California, and given a four-concert Brahms series for BBC Radio Three at St. George's, Bristol.

In 2008 the Ensemble celebrated its 25th Anniversary. The year began with a concert at LSO St. Luke's for the Barbican/BBC Judith Weir weekend (Telling the Tale) and a tour of the USA. It continued with a performance of six recent Ensemble commissions at The South Bank. The Ensemble gave two further 25th Anniversary concerts at Wigmore Hall in November, concerts in Luxemburg and Turkey, and a four-concert Fauré series at St. George's, Bristol, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Alongside its busy concert schedule, the Ensemble has established a reputation for innovation in the field of new music, education and audience development. It has also built up strong relationships with many of the UK's leading composers, and has an impressive list of over 80 commissions. Its vision in combining education and new music initiatives led to the creation of the groundbreaking national project, Chamber Music 2000.

The Schubert Ensemble is supported by The Schubert Ensemble Trust which gratefully acknowledges funding from the PRS Foundation.

"...The Schubert Ensemble of London are a marvellously unified ensemble, imparting their energy and lyricism to anything to which they turn their expert hands..." Classic FM Magazine

"... an account that combined passion, refinement and, in the slow movement, sheer desolation with impeccable control" The Independent on Sunday

"At the end, where the music rises to an orchestral exuberance, the performers swept us along irresistibly with that same combination of reckless abandon and perfect control" The Daily Telegraph

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