



FRANZ SCHUBERT : HIS SHORT, SOLITARY JOURNEY

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Abstrak :

Saat kita menyebut nama Schubert, langsung terlintas dalam pikiran kita bahwa Schubert adalah seorang komponis besar untuk lagu-lagu vokal. Memang Schubert sangat dijunjung tinggi untuk penulisan lagu-lagu vokalnya yang berjumlah enam ratus lebih. Sayangnya, karya-karya lainnya di luar musik vokal kurang mendapat apresiasi yang tinggi dan tidak terlalu sering ditampilkan. Lebih parah lagi, beberapa karya besarnya justru dinilai dengan tidak seleyaknya. Sering karya-karya non vokalnya itu dibanding-bandingkan dengan karya-karya dari Beethoven dan dengan tidak adil dianggap lebih rendah mutunya. Ini sangat ironis mengingat kepribadian Schubert sangatlah berbeda dengan kepribadian Beethoven. Justru Schubert menjauh dari segala pengaruh Beethoven yang sangat kuat pada jamannya.

Selain dibanding-bandingkan dengan karya-karya Beethoven, juga sangatlah mengesankan bahwa karya-karya Schubert seringkali dianggap sebagai musik populer atau musik hiburan yang kurang memiliki isi serius. Karena kita sering melihat foto-foto Schubert dalam kerumunan banyak orang, tentu mudah untuk salah mengasumsikan bahwa Schubert adalah penggemar pesta. Kita tidak melihat kekompleksan dan gejolak pribadi Schubert yang hidup dalam dunia introvertnya. Jarang kita sadari bahwa Schubert adalah seorang yang kesepian di tengah keramaian. Musik adalah satu-satunya teman yang mana selalu ada di dekatnya untuk ia ajak berkomunikasi. Karenanya, meskipun Schubert hidup singkat, namun ia mewariskan pada kita banyak sekali karya-karya ciptaannya yang menunggu untuk menerima penghargaan tinggi sebagaimana layaknya. Musiknya adalah ungkapan suatu jiwa bebas yang sanggup melepaskan diri dari batasan-batasan tatanan gaya dan struktur, untuk mengembara seorang diri, mengikuti inspirasinya menjelajahi dunia tertutup pribadinya.



When we mention Schubert, the picture that immediately came to our mind is that he is a major composer of songs (*lieder*). Indeed, Schubert is most appreciated for his writing of more than six hundred songs. Unfortunately, other works of him are not enjoying the same level of appreciation or the same frequency of performance. Worse, some of his major works are viciously misjudged. Often, his compositions are compared to those of Beethoven and unfairly, they are considered of inferior quality. It is a great irony to ignore the fact that Schubert's personality almost totally differed from that of Beethoven. Schubert retreated himself from the massive shadow of *Beethovenianism*.

Beside being compared to Beethoven's works, Schubert music is often tragically associated with the popular or salon style and considered lacking serious content. Due to numerous pictures showing him amidst large gatherings, most-known as the *Schubertiade*, it is easily misconceived that Schubert was a partygoer or an easy going type. Here, we have missed to observe the complex and dramatic nature of Schubert's personality who introvertedly lived in an isolation of his own inner world. It is seldom realized that Schubert was a loner in the crowd. His only friend, to whom he could readily communicate, was only music. Therefore, in his very short life, he left us a large number of compositions waiting to receive highest appreciation they deserve. They are an expression of a soul who was care-free enough to be unrestricted by any stylistical or structural norm but able to wander far alone through his enigmatic inner world, following his very own inspiration.

Unlike Beethoven who wrote music very architecturally and stamped his music with a stark personal identity, Schubert wrote music like a quilt of ideas, or more aptly melodies, and all of this was often done without a desire to promote himself other than to please his circle of friends. If Beethoven was like a mathematic constructor, Schubert was more like a spontaneous decorator.

Even though Beethoven and Schubert were contemporaries, they lived in totally different environments. Beethoven was the first major artist who found independence from aristocratic service. Instead, he turned the table upside down and successfully promoted a patronage system for the arts. Thus, he had to run his composing and concertizing profession as an obstinate businessman. Beethoven's uncooperative manners inevitably created an unfriendly audience and only his proven genius was his strength to conquer such a hostile public. From time to time,



his compositions were judged by a critical, but not necessarily educated society. This made him to be very laboriously careful in his compositional process. He painstakingly developed his sketches into a finished product. Even then, he often dwelled into revising his works for numerous times. After all, we can see how Beethoven was very defensive when his works were unjustly criticized or easily disheartened when his works were not well received. It is not hard to portray Beethoven as a hard working composer; many pictures of him always show his glaring eyes with a penetrating sight and an intensely focused forehead wrinkle.

On the contrary, Schubert is often depicted as a care free or easy going person. Unfortunately, in addition to this superficial stereotyping of Schubert's personality, many writers have exaggerated his pleasure seeking or hedonistic life style. If Beethoven is often found alone in his pictures, Schubert is often found at a social gathering in his pictures. Unlike Beethoven who ventured into a war frontier, Schubert secluded himself into an environment, that was his Schubertiads, where anything he wrote would be enthusiastically received. These Schubertiads were a sanctuary to him, and he felt at home to share his inspirations. It is very crucial to realize how important this kind of environment was for Schubert's productivity. If he were to switch places with Beethoven, his inspirations would most likely wither due to his complex personal insecurities that will be discussed later on in this article.

The Schubertiads consisted of members of intellectual and social prominence, but only very few were musicians. Regarding the gathering, Flower Neumann wrote :

Examine the members of the Schubert circle, the differing personalities and the conflicting temperaments. It would require more than the common bond of friendship to make of these opposites a coterie so united...

It was impossible for a person of mediocrity to enter the circle, however attractive his personality (Neumann, 1939 : 114).

From the description above, we can assume the unique role of Schubert as 'more than the common bond' at the center of the gathering. However, no matter how significant his role was, it is doubtful that they were truly aware of the artistic genius that Schubert possessed and presented in each gathering. They were more often attracted to singers whom Schubert accompanied. Spaun wrote:



... when Vogl sang Schubert's songs, the ladies would crowd around him, fascinated by the beauty of his voice and his appearance, and would completely ignore the composer (Neumann, 1939 : 77)

Schubert did not seem to mind this lacking of acknowledgement since he was shy and would feel uncomfortable anyway to take the spotlight. Schubert was simply happy that the audience received his compositions well and it was not an important matter whether he was credited or not for composing them.

Schubert's melodies were often so popular that they became like folk-songs and while people were humming them on the street, they failed to relate Schubert as the composer of those melodies. Perhaps, the most notorious anonymity is the so-called *Trauerwalzer* (Mourning Waltz). Composers wrote variations on this waltz and simply referred it as *beliebten Trauerwalzer* ('beloved' Mourning Waltz). Even Johann Penschel, Schubert's contemporary who was well-known for writing dance music and lived in the same city, had no idea where the tune came from when he published a set of variations on this waltz. The same was true of Czerny who also published a set of variations on this waltz, and Beethoven who wrote "a souvenir" which was exactly this waltz with some ornamentations. This incident confirms that even though his music was well received and was very popular, Schubert was content to remain in the background, to dwell in his own creative inner world and thoughts undisturbed by such a boisterous celebrity status.

A look into Schubert's psychological development at his early age may help to explain how Schubert grew into such a unique individual. In the first place, Schubert most likely did not consider himself a professional musician. To him, Beethoven, with his established career and reputation, was the ideal of a professional musician, composer and performer. Schubert viewed himself more as an amateur musician uninterested in the hassle of being a professional musician. At the same time, Schubert must have found himself incapable of doing politics in the business. He often suffered from financial difficulties because he usually never imposed fees for his music or performance unless he was too desperate for money. In addition to that, he was never good anyway at managing his sparse money that he earned mostly from the generosity of his friends. When he had some money at hand, Schubert, in his typical loyalty, took many of his friends to a local bar and paid for



them all. Also, his publishers often took advantage of his lack of a bargain skill. Neumann wrote aptly this irony:

The man who left the world a rich heritage of considerably more than a thousand works of extreme brilliance, and who received in return £575 as the sum total of his life's earnings (Neumann, 1939)

Schubert's lack of formal and professional music training could be the strong factor for his professional insecurity. His father was a school master and an amateur cellist who thought of music only for his family's delight amidst the constant wrestle with poverty. Franz Schubert's very first music lesson was in violin and came from his older brother, Ignaz, whom he soon overtook in skill. Schubert was then sent to Michael Holzer, a local choirmaster of no importance, but who introduced him to the singing world. Later on Schubert went to the Convict¹ whose Court Kapellmeister was Salieri. Schubert never excelled academically in the Convict except in music and even though so, he never attracted Salieri's attention.

Even with the obvious talents shown in his early childhood, Schubert's father wanted him to be a school teacher just like he himself and strongly prohibited Franz from pursuing a musical career. Even his brother, Ignaz who recognized the extraordinary talent of his younger brother failed to persuade his father to let Franz pursue a career in music. The strong prohibition of his father often made Schubert having to hide when he wanted to write down his composition. This was a sharp contrast to Beethoven whose father obsessively and compulsively wanted him to be like Mozart and rigorously pushed him to study and pursue a career in music.

Here, we can see how Schubert's psychological suppression did not sufficiently foster the development of his confidence as a composer. Nevertheless, even though he lived with his inferior view of himself, strangely, history reveals that this condition actually did more benefit than harm to Schubert and great treasures were inherited to us from such a unique condition. A unique style was the product of this setting; a style that was so unassuming, free from any obligation to meet a certain expectation or demand because Schubert did not belong to or try to follow the mainstream

¹ A boarding school with its education roughly equals to a high school level.



trend. He was in his own world. Were Schubert to experience a different condition, his music would have been different than what he left for us.

Schubert had brought himself away from composing under Beethoven's influence. His personality was so different than that of Beethoven. He would never try to rival the established reputation of Beethoven or imitate his musical language. Instead he respectfully separated himself from Beethoven's strong musical radiance to live and explore freely his own style of musical expression. Ernest Porter wrote:

He had not the aggressive power necessary to force his way into the greater world of music. He could not assert himself among the influential aristocracy, nor adopt an imperious attitude to publishers, as Beethoven did; consequently the demand for his works was sporadic, and the results, as compared with the performance and publication of that master's works, very unsatisfactory. All who met Schubert were attracted by him; all who heard his music admired it; but very few realized his true genius and his works never received adequate prominent performance or acclamation. His one public concert was largely a friendly and local affair practically ignored by the press. (Porter, 1980:1).

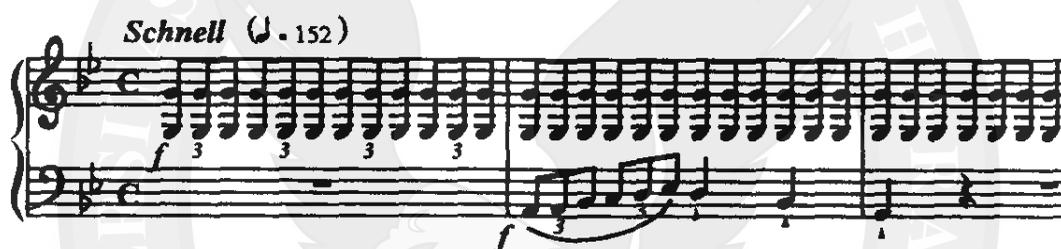
This condition, though it may seem as an underappreciation of his talents and work, was proven to fit perfectly to Schubert's introverted nature. As a matter of fact, it gave him unparalleled privacy to his creative process which was by nature fragile to the noise of the "greater world of music" as Ernest Porter described above. His friends even gave him the solitary time so crucial to him. Franz Eckel, his close companion at the Convict wrote about his introvertedness:

Schubert lived as a youth for the most part in an inner meditative life, which seldom expressed itself to the world except in music. Even to his own most intimate friends, among whom at the time were Anton Holzapfnel and myself, who read and sang his first songs composed at the town Convict almost before they were dry, he was scant of words. He was almost entirely uncommunicative except in matters which concerned that Divinity to whom he dedicated his short but entire life.. (Neumann, 1939 : 38).



On the walks which the pupils took together, he mostly kept apart, walking pensively along with lowered eyes and with his hands behind his back, playing with his fingers (as though on keys), completely lost in his own thoughts. (Newbould, 1997).

We will never know the depth and the vastness of Schubert's introverted world. On one hand, it seemed to a certain degree that Schubert had found an agreement with himself regarding matters of life: the most important thing to him then was to accept and to be content even if he was to be neglected. Goethe, his literary hero, never replied to Schubert's letter when he wrote to him concerning his *Erlkönig* that Schubert set to music. Goethe could have regretted for ignoring Schubert's humble letter if he knew that later on, this song was going to be so famous and becoming a historical landmark in the creation of an artsong and at the same time in the dawning of the Romanticism in music.



Example 1. Schubert: *Erlkönig*, Op. 1, mm. 1 - 3²

Schubert was not bothered to experience this ignorance; or if he was, at least it was not too much. He continued to set many of Goethe's poems to music that became major works in music literature. Also, Schubert was not bothered too much when his music was rejected for publication or for a performance at the mainstream venues. If his works were jected by some ignorant publishers, Schubert still had his Schubertiads. There were no hostile music critics to comment on his output but only an audience who would cherish anything that flew down from his pen. He was perhaps the only composer to have the fullest privilege of exploring his musical fantasies and expression without any constraints of professionalism or intellectual filtration. His introverted nature brought him again and again back into his idyllic dream without limitation or reservation. It was a simple and remote inner world full of interplays of tenderness and excitement. Louis Schlösser wrote:

² C. F. Peters, used under permission



Music was the atmosphere in which he lived and breathed, in which his subjectivity unconsciously attained its highest development, and in which his whole being attained a state of ecstasy (Newbould, 1997).

Schubert's unpretentious musical portrayal of his inner world is the key factor in his music that is capable of transporting us into that world of innocence.

Other composers might try to be adventurous in their musical expression as well, but only after considerable calculated confidence and painstaking labor. Thus, Schubert's combination of spontaneousness and adventurousness stand out, so unique in the piano repertoire and yet, often neglected, most critically by pianists.

His introverted personality did not mean that he was in passive submission to life's destiny. Instead, in his silence, he was like a nuclear energy that was channeled into miraculous productivity. Schubert's spirit was naturally so full of energy that constantly manifested in his spontaneity. Schubert's energy is quite different than that of Beethoven. If Beethoven's energy seems to portray human's strength to run and to conquer many challenges, Schubert's energy seems to invite one's spirit to fly and to be free from life's hassle. Schubert's energy, undergoing his on and off depression, left us a legacy of one who did not surrender to his own misery, who did not fight back either, but indeed rise above his stormy life to wander in a solitary flight of freedom. This is a unique quality that is often not realized even by those who are passionate for his music. It is too frequently misconceived that either Schubert lived a thoroughly placid life or he gave up his struggles to depression. His music, that often sounds so tranquil, is a sanctuary for his soul but not necessarily an absence of troubles. It will take a new meaning to perform the tranquil G-flat major *Impromptu*, Op. 90 no. 3 after learning that it was written amidst cruel turbulence of Schubert's inner being. One's spirit may freely fly with the floating melody to rise above the conquered undercurrent.



3. *Andante*

Example 2. Schubert: Impromptu in G-flat major, Op. 90 no. 3. mm. 1 - 4³

This *Impromptu* may be seen as an inner soul's victory; its surface tenderness must be delivered with such an ethereal excitement. Such a contradiction of delicacy and excitement is the true difficulty that challenges every pianist performing this *Impromptu*.

Schubert's abundant energy can be traced back to where he came from and grew up, a home of relentless workers. He was a son of a strict, hard-working schoolmaster who beside his regular teaching at school had almost three hundred students whom he generously taught often for free in order to help educate the poor. Since his childhood, Schubert had inherited and exhibited such work ethic. When he was at the Convict, he used his recreation time to write music rather than to play like other students did.

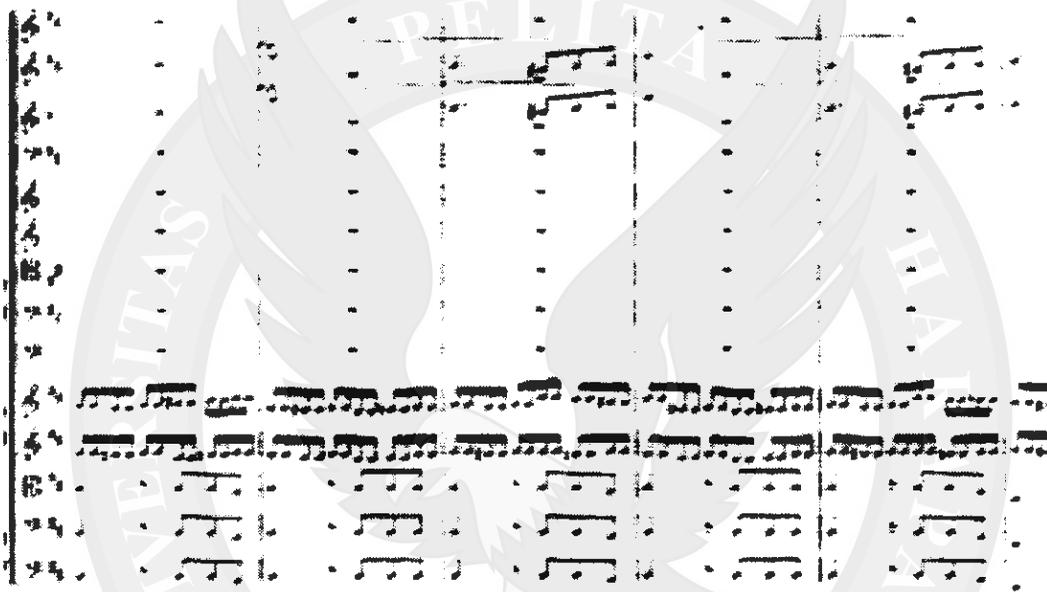
Schubert, with his abundant energy, could not contain his inner world without expressing it and without having anyone to share his musical expression with. He could not wait to play his fresh compositions to his close circle of friends and it was a tremendous misery when there were no one around him to be his audience. One time he was hired as a private piano teacher to an aristocratic family and for this job he had to live in a rather isolated area of Hungary. He would write letters to his friends complaining how miserable it was having no one to listen to his music and

³ Henle G. Verlag, used under permission



that the situation killed his inspiration, which further depressed him. He could not take that job for a long time.

However, even having his friends around, Schubert suffered a sudden strike of depression from time to time. This became more frequent toward the end of his life. His '*Unfinished*' Symphony was written in the midst of such a period and all of a sudden, he regained his energy, never finishing his eight Symphony but only in few days, ready in hand with the '*Wanderer*' Fantasy. The two works are evidence of how depressed and how ecstatic he was in such a short period of time. This sharp contrast suggests that Schubert must have suffered from a psychological bipolarity in his life.



Example 3. Schubert: '*Unfinished*' Symphony in b minor. Mm. 12 - 16⁴

Similar to the G-flat major *Impromptu*, Op. 90 no. 3, the first theme of the '*unfinished*' Symphony is hollowly floating above a turbulent undercurrent. However, here, we miss the ethereal tranquility; instead, we find an intense nervous energy amidst the horrifying atmosphere of this mysterious soft dynamic level.

Strangely, this haunting darkness, as sudden as it came, vanished into such a brilliant atmosphere with an unchained energy to wander. Here is the opening of the '*Wanderer*' Fantasy that interrupted the writing of the '*Unfinished*' Symphony:

⁴ Dover Publications, 1977



Example 4. Schubert: 'Wanderer' Fantasy, Op. 15. mm. 1 - 8⁵

We can conclude that Schubert's introverted life was filled with dualism. In his isolated world, he was both content and at the same time resentful for several possible reasons. For example, perhaps he had wished that his father had allowed him to pursue a music career. However, it is not the aim of this essay to evaluate and determine probable causes for his resentment but to show and bring some evidence that such a conflict occupied his secretive inner being. One can detect this fluctuation from his diary. Schubert wrote of the despair of a loner in the crowd:

Nobody understands another's sorrow and nobody another's joy. One always believes that he is going towards another, only to discover that one is only walking side by side. Oh, the torment of him who realizes this! (Neumann, 1939 : 139).

He often confessed only to his diary about his tormented soul that constantly longed for the unknown. He wrote about his uneasiness in his relationship with others without referring to a specific person or reason. His diary is filled with enigmatic notes, often with a light poetic cynicism as the quote above or as a reflective thought. In the end, words from his diary still conceal his inner world.

His introvertedness brought consequences: first it did not help and even deepened his depression and second, it fueled him to pour out music after music as his only remedy and this took him away further from people. The two forces that seemed

⁵ Henle G. Verlag, used under permission



to work together to bring music out of him were actually tearing him apart inside stronger and stronger toward the end of his life. Yet he was producing more and more masterworks as a result while he was spiraling down deeper and deeper. His two masterworks, the penultimate of the art songs he composed, the cycles *Die Schöne Mullerin* and *Die Winterreise*, show that Schubert was already very low in plunging down to his loneliness. Unlike Schumann who declined in his quality and quantity of music after suffering a mental disturbance late in his life, Schubert entered a prime time of his creative process.

As his illness and depression grew to surpress him, Schubert grew deeper into his pleasure seeking life style. He was found almost every day drinking with his friends and sometimes, he had to be carried home for his over drunkenness. But one must recognize that this kind of drunkenness is very trivial compared to the fact that Schubert's ultimate pleasure was writing music. This resulted in the outburst of works in the last five years of his life.

Schubert died at the age of thirty one. It was a very young age to die. It was a short life to live, to walk down his solitary journey, that from his deepest loneliness comes his loftiest music of tenderness and excitement.

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