

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

The last of the first Viennese School composers, Schubert was the only one who was actually born in Vienna. His greatest strength was integrating lyricism and expression with classical architecture-form. His spectacular melodies are typically Viennese, and his music has a common touch, for he was part of the movement that encouraged amateur consumption.

Son of a schoolmaster, he received excellent early training, first at his father's school and then later at a boarding school at which music was a specialty. In 1813, at age 16, he **entered a teacher training course and became an assistant to his father**. By 1817, he had given up teaching and become a full-time composer, alienating his father. The remainder of his life (less than 12 years; he died at age 31) he worked at a feverish pace to support himself by writing an enormous body of music:

- 8 operas
- 7 masses
- 8 symphonies (and sketches for 2 more)
- 12 string quartets
- 15 piano sonatas
- over 600 songs with piano accompaniment

Though well aware of Beethoven, his models were more Haydn and Mozart, in his early works. He used the standard classical orchestra and orchestration: standard 4 string parts, pairs of woodwinds and horns, and (sometimes) 2 trumpets and timpani.

Later in life, Schubert became interested in emulating Beethoven to a greater degree. So for his **“Unfinished”** and **“Great C Major”**

symphonies, he used trombones. Until then, however, he wrote mostly for a “Haydnesque” orchestra.

In form, Schubert was also a genuine classicist. Almost all fast outer movements are sonata allegro forms. Many first movements are preceded with slow introductions. All of the first five symphonies have minuets, though they sound like scherzi.

In his earliest works, the influence of Mozart is most notable. The themes are highly chromatic and even laced frequently with mild dissonances. (Listen to Schubert’s “Tragic” [4th Symphony] as an example.)

However, despite these obvious influences, from the beginning Schubert was highly original. In the last movement of the “Tragic,” for instance, he writes a “Perpetual Motion” against which he repeats dance-like material.

This frequent repetition of materials is a hallmark of his style.

(Beethoven had, of course, written a “Perpetual Motion” finale to his 4th Symphony. Comparison of the two movements is illuminating. Beethoven’s music has immense tension and great climaxes. Schubert, on the other hand, is more lyrical, relatively placid, and even pleasantly static.)

--Paraphrased from Plantinga.