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FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

1. Die Allmacht  Second setting, D875a (Pyrker)  CHRISTINE BREWER, HOLST SINGERS [6'42]
2. Hagars Klage  D5 (Schücking)  CHRISTINE BREWER [16'19]
   (completed by Reinhard van Hoorickx and Dietrich Knothe)
3. Dem Unendlichen  Second version, D291 (Klopstock)  CHRISTINE BREWER [4'20]
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5. Des Mädchens Klage  First version, D6 (Schiller)  CHRISTINE BREWER [5'13]
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CHRISTINE BREWER soprano
HOLST SINGERS conducted by STEPHEN LAYTON
PATRICIA ROZARIO, LORNA ANDERSON sopranos
CATHERINE DENLEY, CATHERINE WYN-ROGERS altos
PAUL ROBINSON baritone
GRAHAM JOHNSON piano
Was Franz Schubert religious? Even if we must define ‘religion’ in order to answer that question, there is no such thing in this case as a straightforward, unequivocal ‘yes’ (as with Haydn and Bruckner, for example, or Duparc and Chausson). Indeed, the bits and pieces of documentation at our disposal are so various and contradictory that the conundrum seems almost insoluble. And even if Schubert himself had been available for questioning, he might not have been helpful. A man has the right, surely, to keep his religious convictions (or lack of them) to himself; in a country like Vormärz Austria, Church and State were inextricably linked, and professions of atheism shut off all avenues of advancement in official circles. (Even the pantheistic philosophy of the God-revering Spinoza was denounced as nothing less than atheism.) As we shall see, there is a certain amount of evidence that Schubert was sceptical about the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, the catalogue of his liturgical music, together with songs and choral music on religious themes, also speaks for itself: setting texts in praise of God was an ever-present part of the composer’s musical existence.

Was Schubert himself a practising Christian, or at least a Christian in terms of his beliefs? A century ago most music-lovers would have replied: ‘The answer to this can be heard in the music—of course he was a believer.’ The phrase ‘in his own way’ may have been appended, allowing the composer a ‘simple and uncomplicated’ faith (Schubert has long been patronized in the guise of affection). And English music-lovers would surely not have minded if Schubert had veered toward Protestantism. In fact it would have made him dearer to many a Victorian. At the end of the twentieth century the composer’s public is much less church-going than it used to be, and an extraordinary phenomenon has come about where listeners take on a God-like role: they imagine that, in terms of the details of Schubert’s daily life, he must have been made in their own image. For example, those with a strong faith (of any denomination) find it almost impossible to imagine that Schubert, whose music has been for them a source of spiritual companionship and consolation, was not a fellow-believer. And those who do not believe in God also wish to see in Schubert someone like-minded, free of mental strictures and superstitions, a man who composed for the here and now. Does it matter if the music was composed to the glory of God, or to celebrate mankind? Some Schubertians do not care as long as they have the music; but many need to feel that the composer was ‘on their side’, as it were.

It is as if we use Schubert as a touchstone of normality—albeit a higher form of normality to which we all aspire: to be in touch with the divine (whatever that may be) at the same time as keeping one’s feet on the ground. (Perhaps the time-honoured linking of Schubert’s name to the adjective ‘normal’ is the reason why the composer’s sexuality is such an emotive issue.) The day-to-day life of many people consists of struggling with an unsympathetic job, and looking forward to having a drink in a pub with friends after work. This is reflected in the Biedermeier Schubert, otherwise known as ‘Schwammerl’—the unwilling schoolmaster whose height and girth suggested a ‘little mushroom’. Countless people have been comforted and reassured by associating this image with the music they love, although the same shape also suggests the unleashing of terrible nuclear power. More recently we have seen the emergence of different Schuberts: for example, the well-read man who was a much greater intellectual than anyone thought; the formidable creative powerhouse, quick to anger and withering in his contempt for the pretentious; the promiscuous voluptuary, reckless in the pursuit of pleasure; the freethinker and political rebel subject to fits of both elation and depression; the secretive member of a thriving gay subculture, an Aids victim of his time, and so on. These refashionings of the Schubert myth seem variously to fit the music as far as a new generation of listeners and scholars is concerned. Nevertheless, contesting projections of Schubert foster proprietary attitudes and conflicts. The case put forward (originally by American scholars, but most recently by the German Christoph Schwandt) for Schubert’s homosexuality may bore and irritate the majority
of people who do not care one way or the other, but the subject will continue to be discussed as long as the prejudice of ‘us and them’ exists in human beings, and as long as people attempt to invest their idols with their own characteristics. There are those heterosexuals who believe that music of such depth and sanity, of such all-embracing humanity, could only have emanated from a source at one with their own perception of life-enhancing joy. (Schubert’s lack of wife and family can easily be ascribed to his financial circumstances, his unfortunate illness and to his youthful demise.)

Increasing study of the Viennese Biedermeier world of secrecy, double standards, political corruption and sexual indulgence have made for an intriguing revisionist viewpoint. In recent times some scholars (not always gay themselves) have been anxious to place Schubert in the homosexual pantheon. There has been a vigorous reaction against this proposition which goes far beyond the discussion of facts and the weighing-up of probabilities; once again ‘ownership’ of Schubert lies at the heart of the matter, and the struggle has become particularly fierce. The stakes are high for both camps: Vienna fights too hard to keep its legends intact, and the politically correct universities of the New World seem too determined to debunk the Biedermeier myths which must have, after all, some basis in reality. The gay faction has long been allowed to claim the brilliant and tortured Tchaikovsky, Lorca, Britten, even Michelangelo and many others; but it seems that Schubert, beloved by the world as a very special agent of spiritual grace, will not be allowed into the same company without a struggle. In this way, and in others with regard to his artistic achievements, Schubert stands together with Shakespeare. If the composer were homosexual, the popular stereotype of the neurotic and highly-strung gay artist might have to be modified; and perhaps also the definition of spiritual grace. The majority of music-lovers believe that sexual distinctions are irrelevant in the face of an art which unites human beings of whatever hue or persuasion. But it is only when everybody takes this for granted that the acrimony will cease. The combination of the two issues, sexual and religious, also makes for some interesting speculations. If the composer was gay, is he automatically debarred from having been a composer of strong religious beliefs? In the eyes of some people this is no doubt the case. Was one of the reasons for the composer’s equivocal attitude to religion to do with his sexuality? Does the argument for Schubert’s atheism (if we imagine the composer fighting off the priests in his dying moments as depicted in Fritz Lehner’s biopic) make it easier to construct a more relevant picture of the composer for modern times?

If at the moment the sexual debate rages more fiercely than the religious, this is surely a sign of the preoccupations of our own era. In reality the two issues are grist to the mill for the same revisionist tendency in Schubert studies. And once again it seems curious that some of us require this composer, perhaps more than any other in the history of music, to mirror our own individual perceptions of what is both interesting and good. ‘Why Schubert?’, we may ask. And the answer lies in his very approachability. Bach, with his formidable brood of children, seems both too gigantic and distant in time; Beethoven was surely too dauntingly choleric (perhaps too drunk, and certainly too afflicted with loss of hearing) for most of us to identify with him; and Mozart’s blinding genius places him on a pedestal far apart from ordinary humanity. But Schubert seems to belong somehow to our everyday experience of the world’s ups and downs of which he was the supremely even-handed commentator. He balances the laughter and the tears, the private and the public worlds, the learned and the purely inspirational, in a way that makes us imagine we have a custom-made relationship with him. Unlike the more daunting Olympian musical personalities, the smallness of his stature and his comfortable embonpoint endow him with a humility and ordinariness that we find endearing. If his music is awe-inspiring, it retains this quality at the same time as being infinitely approachable.

Most of us lead insignificant lives and accomplish little; but here was a man who, on the surface at least, led a similarly uneventful life and who nevertheless accomplished much without boasting about it. Indeed, no one knew exactly
how much he had achieved until long after his death. He is both a nonentity at the same time as being a somewhat unlikely world celebrity and hero. Who could have guessed that he would become even more famous (and certainly better loved) than his dashing contemporary Lord Byron with his handsome looks and his deliciously dangerous reputation? The sense of Schubertian ‘ownership’ goes back to the time of the composer himself, when the factions supporting the singers Vogl and Tietze argued over the best way to perform his lieder. After he died, many people who knew him hardly at all claimed to have been close friends: from these sources stem some of the unreliable stories that began the spinning of the Biedermeier legend. Ever since then, many a singer has felt that a colleague’s performance, however accomplished, is not quite ‘my’ Schubert—in other words ‘I know Schubert better than you’. They secretly cherish the thought that he or she has an interpretation, yet to be heard, which will one day uniquely convey the essence of the composer. A celebrated London singing teacher once told me fiercely that no one understood Schubert as she did. And I daresay she was right. At the end of the day, we musicians all struggle adequately to express the Schubert in each of us, the distillation of all that is musical and profound, loving and selfless. It is for this reason that his music terrifies many singers who shy away from the Schubertian challenge. But if Schubert is in our lives, his music goes deep into the soul and psyche and resides in our musical conscience—that part of the performer which refuses to sell out to superficial success and quickfire financial advantage. And I know of no composer whose music seems to be such an infallible test not only of a singer’s technical and musical accomplishments but also of a performer’s emotional resources. The successful undertaking of an all-Schubert recital has something about it which reminds one of the trials endured by Tamino and Pamina in Die Zauberflöte. When we ask whether Schubert was a religious composer, the first part of our answer must be that his music provokes something of a religious response in those who perform it; but here too there are many and different definitions of ‘religious’. In most cases it is the music—and also the man who wrote it—which are the objects of veneration. Composers are saints whose magical relics can be bought in CD jewel-cases in the Virgin Megastore. And these ‘relics’, when applied to the ear, work mightily to our spiritual advantage.

Schubert’s own background is all that we might expect of someone born into a poor but scrupulously religious Viennese family at the end of the eighteenth century. His own home was certainly more strictly observant than many (his father was Moravian-born, his mother originally from Silesia—parts of the world which were much less laissez faire in these matters than metropolitan Vienna). The parents must have struggled hard to rear God-fearing children, but almost certainly veered toward a strictness which produced a counter-reaction. We know that in one case they failed utterly in their objective; Schubert’s elder brother Ignaz (born 1785) was, almost notoriously, a freethinker, but he was very careful not to parade this fact before Franz Schubert senior. When Ignaz wrote to his composer brother in 1818 (Schubert was in Hungary) much of his letter was a somewhat amused description of a family gathering which involved the erection of a makeshift altar to a saint, and the kissing of relics. Some of the guests crept away, unwilling to take part in the ceremony supervised by Schubert’s father. Ignaz added a postlude to his letter: ‘If you wish to write to Papa and me at the same time, do not touch upon any religious matters.’

But this is to jump forward in the story. The composer’s first music lessons were with Michael Holzer, the organist and Regens chori of the Lichtental parish church, round the corner and down the steps from Schubert’s place of birth. Holzer seems to have been a kind and affectionate teacher: ‘This one has learned from God’, was his pronouncement upon his pupil. From the very first, Schubert was told that his gift came directly from above; it is inevitable that the joy and pleasure he felt in composing should have been associated in his young mind with religion. Moreover, the Lichtental church was, and remained, loyal to its most distinguished musical parishioner. Schubert’s first church music was written for Holzer’s
choir, and his less ambitious church music was always assured of a sympathetic hearing in this environment. The ban on women’s voices in church had been lifted as recently as 1806; it was thanks to this new dispensation that Therese Grob, said to have been the composer’s first love, was allowed into the choir. Thus it was through church music that Schubert had his first experiences of love, and of being a professional musician. Throughout his life it was to be the one branch of his output which, even more than the songs with piano, was more or less assured of public performance soon after he had written each work. Schubert lived at a transitional time when it was still forbidden for Masses to be performed in the concert hall, but when it was becoming acceptable to lavish greater musical resources on the form in the churches. Every composer likes, nay needs, to hear his music performed. Perhaps it is for this reason that Schubert wrote so regularly for the ecclesiastical establishments of a town still hungry for a constant turnover of new religious works. This might be a needlessly cynical explanation of his ongoing enthusiasm for this type of music. After all, if childhood conditioning is an important factor in the adult’s religious outlook, all the foundations had been firmly laid in Schubert’s case for a life of unquestioning faith.

It was when he won a scholarship to the Stadtkonvikt as a member of the Hofkapelle choir that the composer encountered new influences. The quiet faith of his local church was replaced by high-and-mighty manifestations of state religion. At this school daily confession was obligatory, and it could not have been long before it became obvious to the young man that the Church and Government were hand in glove in implementing measures (including rigid censorship) designed to keep ordinary people in check. Any signs of political or moral liberalism were quickly suppressed, and a quick-witted teenager could not have been insensible to the atmosphere of menacing repression lurking beneath the surface of everyday life. Schubert no doubt encountered among the priests some good teachers but there were also brutal bigots who vented their frustrations on their pupils with cruelty and violence. The composer’s dislike of the priestly tribe comes vividly to the fore in a letter from Hungary to his brother Ferdinand in 1818: ‘You have no idea what a gang the priesthood is here: bigoted as mucky old cattle, stupid as arch-donkeys and boorish as bisons. You may hear sermons to which our most venerated Pater Mepomucene [Father Maria Johann Nepomuk Priegl in the Rossau] can’t hold a candle.’

Most of Schubert’s school contemporaries came from wealthier and possibly less strictly observant families. The stage was set for a wide range of influences which were no doubt to change the young man’s religious views as much as his musical tastes and reading habits. It is here that he must have begun to question some of the dogmatic aspects of the Roman Catholic faith. In 1813 he wrote a poem (since lost) in the style of Klopstock’s odes to God’s omnipotence; and yet in 1814 his practical knowledge of religion was singled out as being ‘bad’ in a report at the teacher’s training college. He was obviously not an enthusiastic Bible student, but these poor marks are completely at odds with his extraordinary track record as a precocious composer of religious music of various kinds.

For almost every sign of Schubert’s leanings towards a conventional religious viewpoint, there is a corresponding fact or quotation that seems to oppose it. For example, although he wrote six Masses, he never chose to set the text complete. In every case the phrase ‘et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam’ in the Credo was left out. There are many further variants in his Mass texts, some of them tiny, but what Schubert chose to omit sometimes seems very significant. In the second and fourth Masses (G major, D167, and C major, D452) the phrase ‘qui sedes ad dexteram Patris’ is omitted; in the third Mass (B flat major, D324) the phrase ‘consubstantiale Patris’. In the two great Masses of Schubert’s maturity, his fifth and sixth (A flat, D678, and E flat, D950) we search in vain for ‘Patrem omnipotentem’ as well as ‘genitum non factum’. In the A flat Mass the phrase ‘ex Maria virgine’ is absent. Perhaps most remarkable in the two last Masses is ‘confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem mortuorum’. Schubert constructed this phrase by
shortening the much longer ‘confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum’. Thus mention of sin and resurrection are wiped out at a stroke. The Latin is as suspect as the theology; and it fails to make much sense. It might be argued that this was a slip of the eye if it had happened in only one Mass, but it seems a quite deliberate act of editing. It is also interesting that whereas it was usual to write the words ‘Laus Deo’ (‘Praise be to God’) at the end of a Mass, these words are never found on a Schubert manuscript.

It might be argued that all these adjustments stemmed from musical convenience, but it seems more likely that they represent subtle but significant personal rebellions. By 1814, when the first Mass (F major, D105) was written, the composer seems already to have decided that his conception of religion was not exclusively Roman Catholic; his decision to drop the reference to ‘unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam’ is evidence of his distrust of a Church that reserves divine grace for its adherents alone. Some of those reputedly assured of salvation, the high-andmighty bigwigs of Church and State, must have seemed to Schubert the least worthy of a special place in paradise. From time to time he was drawn to writing works for church performance with German texts (Deutsches Salve Regina, D379; Stabat Mater, D383; the great oratorio fragment Lazarus, D689; Deutsche Messe, D872) which veer towards a more Protestant tradition of church music. As we shall see towards the end of this disc, the composer was also willing to write music for the synagogue. Strong and unquestioning Catholicism was the family religion, but there is no doubt that the composer’s relationship with his own father was difficult and stormy. Schubert senior had a tyrannical side to his nature and this, more than anything, may have been a factor which prevented the boy from giving his heart to his father’s church. The Masses of 1815 and 1816 shy away from words which bow to the authority of the Father; mention of the Father’s omnipotence is finally erased from the text of the late Masses.

Despite all this, it is extremely hard to make out a case for a consistently anti-religious attitude on the composer’s part. Indeed, apart from the stream of church music and religious songs, there are a number of references to God and Christ in the letters which suggest the opposite viewpoint. Writing from Steyr to his brother Ferdinand (21 September 1825) Schubert refers to an infamous episode from 1809 when the Tyrolese ambushed the Bavarians and killed a large number of men from a high vantage point. This massacre was commemorated with a rough cross on the Tyrolean side of the Salzach, as Schubert says, ‘partly to expiate it by such sacred symbols’. The composer’s distaste for the cynicism with which the symbol had been erected is clear enough, but he still seems to revere what it represents: ‘Thou glorious Christ, to how many shameful actions must Thou lend Thy image … Thy image is set up by them as if they said “Behold! We have trampled with impious feet upon God’s most perfect creation; why should it cost us pains to destroy with a light heart the remaining vermin called Man?”’. The reference to Christ as ‘God’s most perfect creation’ seems sincere enough, and the contempt for the cynical exploitation of the trappings of the church would be worthy of a Luther. This letter was written at the time when Schubert was setting the poetry of Ladislaus Pyrker, above all Die Allmacht. We know that Schubert was genuinely impressed by Pyrker, who seems to have struck the composer as a genuine man of God. Here was someone who had accomplished many social reforms during his tenure as Patriarch of Venice, a cleric who was artistically gifted and also an enthusiastic admirer of the composer’s art. It was during this holiday period in 1825 that Schubert also wrote to his family about the composition of the Walter Scott setting Ave Maria, more properly known as Ellens dritter Gesang: ‘I never force devotion upon myself and, except when involuntarily overwhelmed by it, never compose hymns or prayers of this kind, but then it is usually the right and true devotion.’ It is true that this letter was specifically intended for parental consumption, but there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the composer’s statement. It is still a fact little known to the world at large, however, that this song was never meant to be squeezed into Latin garb for church performance.
Pyrker’s presence provided a radiant spiritual aura to the summer of 1825, and this seems typical of the composer’s life, which seems to have been influenced by a succession of mentors at different times. It would be foolish to underestimate the extent to which Schubert’s beliefs were moved this way or that by the personalities of various friends and mentors throughout his life. Was he easily led? Not exactly. He was wary of outside interference and new acquaintances, and he needed to know that new members of the circle were talented and had something to say for themselves. But once he had admitted them to his heart, his mind became receptive to their ideas, and he sometimes found it difficult to see their faults and limitations. The people in whom he put his trust did not always deserve it. Franz von Schober comes to mind—a man who exerted a pull on the composer’s affections (both as friend and librettist) which seems out of proportion to his sincerity and talent. As it happens, *Alfonso und Estrella*, the opera that the pair wrote together, develops a theme which Schober touches on in the poem *Trost in Liede* also set by Schubert: two of the main characters sing the lines ‘through the power of love, joy and sorrow are wedded’. This is a sentiment found elsewhere in Schubert’s songs, and the Catholic scholar Robert R Reilly has pointed out that this is ‘the message of the Cross’. The Christian tone of the opera is also unmistakable; at the end there is a miraculous chain-reaction of forgiveness and repentance set off like a bushfire among the main characters. ‘Mercy redeems our guilt’, sings King Froila, and the opera concludes with redemption for all. It would be hard to imagine such a denouement in a work by artists not raised in the traditions of Roman Catholicism.

For all his charm and enthusiasm, Schober was an intellectual lightweight. There were others of greater substance, above all Johann Michael Mayrhofer, who contributed more substantially to Schubert’s education and literacy. We know that Mayrhofer was not responsible for introducing Schubert to Goethe’s works (*Gretchen am Spinnrade* predates their meeting) but it seems more than likely that he did introduce the inquiring teenager to the Greek and Roman classics and enable him better to understand the subtleties of Goethean thought. It seems almost certain that Schubert set the pantheistic text *Ganymed* as a result of Mayrhofer’s encouragement—it makes a believable companion piece to the mythological settings of Mayrhofer’s poetry also dating from 1817. Goethe had rejected positive religion in favour of a veneration of God/nature which derives from the poet’s reading of Spinoza in 1785. His was an holistic or antimechanistic, anti-Newtonian view of the universe: ‘Spinoza does not prove the Being of God, Being is God. And if for this reason others scold Spinoza for being an atheist, one would like to name him and praise him as *theissimum*, indeed, *christianissimum*’ (letter to Jacobi, June 1785). On the other hand, the idea of miracles was for Goethe ‘a blasphemy against the great God and his revelation in nature’. These two viewpoints are incompatible: the quotation about miracles implies a distinction between God and nature. Such pronouncements were typical of the poet’s ambivalence towards religious matters. This inconsistency—the determination to ‘contain multitudes’ (as Whitman justified his own self-contradictions)—has about it much which also suggests Schubert. When Goethe remarks that the crucifix is ‘the most repugnant thing under the sun’ we are reminded of Schubert’s written comments about the Tyrolean cross in Upper Austria. On the other hand Goethe once referred to the Gospels as ‘messages from God’. The fluidity of the poet’s religious viewpoint is summed up by his famous maxim, ‘Wir sind naturforschend Pantheisten, dichtend Polytheisten, sittlich Monotheisten’ (‘We are pantheists when we study nature, polytheists when we write poetry, monotheists in our morality’). This too seems something with which Schubert would not have disagreed, although it is arguable that on matters of sexual morality the composer and the grand old man of letters would not have seen eye to eye.

It is impossible to know exactly when pantheism came up for discussion among the Schubertians, but it is highly likely that it was in the company of the serious and learned Mayrhofer. An issue such as this had been examined not only by
Goethe, but also by such philosophers as Hegel, Fichte and Schelling, names not unknown to Schubert and his friends who attempted, as far as censorship allowed, to keep abreast of the latest trends in German thought. Rather than deny completely that life had a religious element, the Schubertians seem to have been open to new ideas, and here there were moods and fashions, as in the intellectual life of any group of young people. Thus there seems to have been a pantheistic phase in the composer’s development which corresponded to his settings of Friedrich von Schlegel (see Volume 27 of The Hyperion Schubert Edition), and a related, though by no means identical, enthusiasm for the mysticism of Novalis, more Catholic perhaps, but just as controversial. It seems likely that Schubert lost interest in the later writings of Schlegel as the poet, once a man of the intellectual left, hardened into an arch-conservative, but there is some slight evidence that the composer was passingly interested in such cult-like subjects as hypnosis and magnetism, also pursued by Schlegel in Vienna. Among the composer’s friends it was Franz von Bruchmann who suddenly became extremely religious, damning the behaviour of his former friends with evangelical language that shows clear indications of fear and guilt on his part concerning the probable homosexual leanings of some members of the group. This born-again extremism seems not to have impressed Schubert who simply moved away from the close friendship with Bruchmann that had existed earlier. The one thing that seems certain is that Schubert was not a man attracted to extremes of any sort.

One of the most often cited pieces of evidence concerning Schubert’s lack of faith comes from a note written to him by his friend Ferdinand Walcher in 1826. The letter, something of a jest, begins with Gregorian chant and the phrase ‘Credo in unum Deum’ (‘I believe in one God’) penned in old notation. This is followed by Walcher’s own words meant for Schubert’s eyes: ‘Not you, I know well enough.’ This has always been taken to show that Walcher (no doubt following a discussion on the matter) accepted that Schubert, unlike him, did not believe in God. This is possible of course, and a stinging renunciation of faith may have come the night before from the lips of a composer subject to depression and the lingering effects of his illness. He might have felt that he had very little to be thankful for in terms of the Almighty’s intervention in his affairs. But here it seems to me that the words ‘one God’ are significant. Had Schubert perhaps been talking to Walcher about the fact that God can go by other names—as the words of Mozart’s masonic cantata have it: ‘Whether his name is Jehovah . . . whether he is named Fu or Brahman? Or had Schubert proposed a pagan Parnassus that would have appealed to Jung? One of his most haunting songs, Die Götter Griechenlands, bemoans the end of the beautiful civilization which acknowledged the gods of Greece. In one of his poems which he sent to Schober in 1824 the composer refers to ‘the gods’ in connection with the sacred art of song. It does indeed seem that, like Goethe, Schubert became polytheist when it came to writing his own poetry. A poem written in 1820 (this was a period of the composer’s life which was perhaps the most lively in terms of musical and philosophical experimentation) was entitled The Spirit of the World. This concerns the same sort of implacable controller of destinies that we encounter in Hardy’s poetry, and in The Dynasts. The third strophe clearly shows that Schubert’s imagined Almighty was infinitely forgiving as he voiced these lines:

Nichts ist wahr von allen dem,
Doch ists kein Verlust;
Menschlich ist ihr Weltsystem,
Göttlich, bin ich’s mir bewusst.

Yet no harm it be for them
Short of truth to fall:
Frail and human is their world,
Godlike understand I all.

What seems clear is that at any one time Schubert felt different things about the question of religion. At one moment he seems overcome by a musical feeling which we (and he) could only call devout; at others—as in the late cycles—he sees
the world as a dark and unfriendly place where man can expect no redemption by divine intervention. At one moment he seems happy to set to music conventional depictions of God’s power and grace; and at others he seems drawn to alternatives. ‘Why not?’, we may ask. It is clearly nonsense to put forward a case for a cheery mushroom-shaped composer comforted by church ritual, secure in his place in the divine order of things. He was far too metropolitan, his life too complicated, for him to embrace the unquestioning faith of his forefathers. He had moments of real anger and bitterness associated with religion and its hypocrisies and false promises. The mortal blow of his terminal illness, contracted late in 1822 or early in 1823, must have made a difference to his faith. On the other hand, Schubert seems to have been too much of a mystic, and at heart too much of a life-embracing optimist, to enter the grimly nihilistic world of, say, Brahms’s *Vier ernste Gesänge*, music which purports to be religious but which in fact uses biblical words to show the bleakness of the abyss into which that composer saw himself descending.

It is in Schubert’s music that we hear, time and time again, that he was not a man to lay down the law in a dogmatic and rigid manner; there is nearly always a way out, an alternative enharmonic modulation which provides consolation. (It might be argued that *Winterreise* is shocking because the normal Schubertian avenues of escape and redemption are denied us.) Robert R. Reilly, writing from a Catholic viewpoint, avers that Mozart’s music has a preternatural purity and perfection that somehow escaped the mark of original sin, a sign of life before the Fall and a promise of paradise. He continues: ‘Schubert’s music communicates from the near side of that catastrophic divide. It is the songful lament of the wanderer who has been banished, yet who must find the difficult way back through suffering and death.’ Thus a religious scholar perceives the music and the composer’s struggle. And there is a side to the composer himself which believed this too, particularly when in desperate straits at the time of his illness. ‘It sometimes seems to me’, he said, ‘as if I did not belong to this world at all.’ On the other hand we must not mistake *Der Wanderer* and *Winterreise* as being typical of the entire oeuvre; there is so much joy and promise in Schubert’s music, such celebration of the here and now, such lack of self-pity and self-consciousness, such ineffable grace which comes from we know not where. Or do we?

At a risk of casting Schubert in my own image—the standard fault, as I have pointed out, of all Schubert commentators—I would suggest that in matters of religion this composer refused to take a definite stance. (To say that he ‘sat on the fence’ seems too inelegant a phrase for a metaphysical question; one might be tempted to wonder when and how the iron entered into his soul.) Time and time again we hear the vocabulary of charming, and comforting, circumlocution in the music, as if to say: ‘On the other hand … think of it in this way.’ And we are equally delighted with the alternative. The hedging of bets, in any case, is something typically, even deliciously, Viennese. We are all imprisoned by the time in which we are born, and the language and culture which is native to us, but how many of us have the keys which were possessed by Schubert to let us out of those prisons? He had the means to roam gloriously free in musical realms which satisfied his deepest spiritual and emotional needs, and these daily journeys, launched from his writing-desk, kept him sane and unblemished at times of pain and strife. As a composer he was touched by something divine (and such a phrase may be written, with the greatest sincerity, even by a non-believer). As a man trapped in his own time and background, he seems to have been subject to the doubts and uncertainties on the matter of religion that beset all but the most determined worshippers and atheists. But determination in this sphere also suggests something rigid and unbendable, and this is not our Schubert—or, perhaps I should say, mine. Religious thought and speech came easily to him; it was part of the language of his childhood and upbringing, and at times he reverted to this vocabulary of easy faith with the pleasure of someone coming home to something familiar. At other times he seems angry and on fire, doubting and questioning like Goethe’s Prometheus, making a stand as an angry young man, determined to find a new path for a
new era. On occasion he was no doubt ready to denounce God and deny His very existence. (One has only to listen to the unaccompanied Seidl setting Grab und Mond to hear this.) But whatever he said, and whatever he believed from time to time, he was always able to journey into musical realms which must have touched him, as they touch us, with the wing-tip of paradise.

We return to the thoughts of one of Schubert’s older contemporaries, the man whom the composer respected possibly more than any other, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that Schubert’s beliefs were similar to those of his greatest poet. It is possible briefly to sum up Goethe’s pantheistic philosophy thus: Because man is part of nature, and hence of the divine, he shares the basic impulses of all natural things to develop upward and outward in the pursuit of an ideal. In this striving (which is an end in itself) lies man’s sole reason for living. We are also reminded of the Platonic ideal, the ascent towards divine perfection which Mayrhofer would have expounded to his young friend. If the determined accomplishment of this journey upward and onward is the mark of a religious man, then we can indeed answer the question which opened this essay with a resounding ‘Yes’. There are few who have aspired to higher things than Franz Peter Seraphicus Schubert; there are also few who have been such unselfish guides, or who have helped so many others to take the first faltering steps on the same journey—wheresoever it may lead.

GRAHAM JOHNSON © 1998

Recorded in July and September 1996
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Johann Ladislaus Pyrker (1772–1847)

**DIE ALLMACHT**

Second setting, D875a. January 1826; fragment for chorus, completed by Reinhard van Hoorickx and Dietrich Knothe

Gross ist Jehova, der Herr! Denn Himmel
Und Erde verkünden seine Macht.
Du hörst sie im brausenden Sturm,
In des Waldstroms laut aufruschendem Ruf;
Du hörst sie in des grünen Waldes Gesäusel,
Siehst sie in wogender Saaten Gold,
In lieblicher Blumen glühendem Schmelz,
Im Glanz des sternebesäten Himmels,
Furchtbar tönt sie im Donnergeroll
Und flammst in des Blitzes schnell
hinzuckendem Flug.
Doch kündet das pochende Herz dir fühlbarer noch
Jehovas Macht, des ewigen Gottes,
Blickst du flehend empor
Und hoffst auf Huld und Erbarmen.

Great is Jehovah, the Lord! For heaven
and earth proclaim his might.
You hear it in the roaring storm,
in the loud, surging cry of the forest stream;
you hear it in the rustling of the Greenwood;
you see it in the golden, waving corn,
in the glowing lustre of the lovely flowers,
in the sparkling, star-strewn heavens;
it echoes terrifyingly in the rolling thunder,
and flames in the lightning's swiftly
flickering flight.
But your beating heart will reveal still
more palpably
the power of Jehovah, the eternal God,
if you gaze up in prayer
and hope for grace and mercy.

This piece of music, more or less unknown and seldom performed, comes as a surprise even to the avid Schubertian. The mighty solo song which is a setting of the same text is a mainstay of the repertoire for bigger voices (*Die Allmacht* D852); indeed, it is such an accepted masterpiece that it seems strange to think that Schubert wished to return to the poem five months later to make a second, albeit very different, version. The work has something of a chequered history. It was first mentioned (and wrongly classified as a male quartet) in the work list compiled by Schubert’s first biographer, Kreissle von Hellborn, in 1865. For a brief time the manuscript was in the possession of the Viennese conductor Johann Herbeck, and then lost. It surfaced in 1952 in a private library in Slovakia and has since been placed in the Bratislava City Library. The version heard here- a reconstruction and completion of the work by the late Reinhard van Hoorickx and Dietrich Knothe, conductor of the Berliner Singakademie, was given its first performance in 1978.

The autograph consists of a full score of the work only until bar34 (the sixth line of the poem). Thereafter, the vocal line is complete until bar119 (and the composer has bothered to write in the text only until bar 99). There is a page missing in the middle of the work (a fact not noted in the Deutsch catalogue which is also inaccurate elsewhere in its description of the fragment). There are five further passages filled in; these relate to crucial interludes for the piano where Schubert has noted his exact thoughts. The whole autograph is a fine example of the composer’s working method when in a hurry to compete a work for a specific occasion. We have noted something remarkably similar in the fragment *Gesang der Geister* D705. Schubert sets off by writing everything down; he then takes care that the vocal line is continued, even if words are not always written in; in a broad overview of the piece’s shape, he then writes only what is essentially new material- in this case the transitional passages for piano. It is clear that he could have produced a full score from these sketches with the minimum amount of time and effort. In fact, in his own mind, he no doubt regarded the work as complete. For that reason it has been easier to complete this fragment than some others: what we hear here is rather close to what Schubert would written had he left us a completed manuscript.
Schubert took the text of *Die Allmacht* from Pyrker’s *Perlen der heiligen Vorzeit*. (It is also possible that Pyrker himself pointed out the passage to the composer when they met in Upper Austria in the summer of 1825.) In this once-popular book of verse in hexameters (extremely tricky to set to music) we find the canto entitled ‘Elisa’, or ‘Elisha’ as we spell the biblical name in English. This is Pyrker’s elaboration of the story of Jehoram’s attempt to subjugate the tribes of Moab with the help of Judah and Edom as recounted in the Old Testament (II Kings 3). Elisha has succeeded Elijah as prophet of the Israelites, and Pyrker took his cue from verse 15: ‘But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.’

Erst aufhorchte dem Harfenklang
der heilige Seher, ruhigen Blicks
doch jetzt entflammt’ er sich
glühender Purpur färbte sein blasses Gesicht
er hob in schwebender Haltung
Von dem Boden sich auf
und begann in hoher Begeisterung
‘Gross ist Jehovah, der Herr
denn Himmel und Erde verkünden Seine Macht!’...

At first the holy prophet had listened
to the sound of the harp with a serene expression,
but now he flared up:
his pale countenance became suffused with a crimson glow;
be rose majestically
from the ground
and began in exalted inspiration:
‘Great is Jehovah, the Lord:
for heaven and earth proclaim his might’...

In the Bible the seer goes on to tactical advice: ‘Make this valley full of ditches’ (II Kings 16). Pyrker follows suit with a section beginning ‘Grabt den Gruben im Thal’ but, rather unsurprisingly, Schubert stops before this point and chooses to repeat words from the beginning of Elisha’s hymn of praise instead. (In this way both versions of the text are identical; it is as if the composer has his own song (D852) in front of his eyes rather than Pyrker’s original lines.)

The key is C major, the same as the solo setting of the poem, and the celebratory tonality which also closes this disc. The relationship to the closing fugal section of *Mirjams Siegesgesang* is no accident. Both works describe the mighty workings of the Lord, and both derive from passages in the Old Testament where music takes on a visionary and exalted role. In this choice of tonality suitable for trumpets and fanfares, Schubert owes a great deal to the example of earlier composers, and the whole piece has more than a whiff of the ‘old’ or ‘learned’ style. It is grand and pomposo, and extremely effectively written for the choral forces. The ‘surging cry of the forest stream’ brings forth piano writing which leaps upwards with digit-twisting vigour, but it is not until bar 32 and the first mention of the ‘grünenden Waldes Gesäusel’ that we hear something incontrovertibly Schubertian—rustling piano writing of the greatest delicacy which sets off a similar vocal weaving between the voice parts which could only have come from one source. This makes a wonderful contrast to the opening music of hammered conviction, a mood which can sound a trifle empty if insisted upon for too long. It is as well that the composer himself sketched the piano writing here because his way with this lilting music is inimitable; it surely needed his own hand. The reconstructed piano writing for the later thunder-and-lightning imagery is less effective because it seldom strays from dutifully doubling the (genuine) vocal line. The gently throbbing ‘pochende Herz’ section takes its cue from the earlier lilting passagework, and the recapitulation is self-evident. The majority of the vocal line of the closing fugato is the composer’s own work. He would probably have provided more daring and independent piano writing, but in his absence it was perhaps best to opt for simplicity. The final bars are perhaps the least convincing of the completion.

Although *Die Allmacht* is not the composer’s greatest work for chorus and piano, it is a worthy study for *Mirjams Siegesgesang* and a welcome reminder of Schubert’s command of the choral style. Unless they take the trouble to make
a special study of the church music, it is seldom that lieder lovers are reminded of Schubert’s contrapuntal skills and his ability to make the most of vocal combinations for mixed chorus. Here we see in a flash the exuberant and celebratory side of his personality when it came to religious music of this kind. Perhaps too we are glimpsing the energy of Pyrker himself as he reads the poem aloud to Schubert and Vogl. The composer brings such zeal to the enterprise that we cannot doubt that he has been fired by enthusiasm for the poet as much as the poem.

Clemens August Schücking (1759–1790)

**HAGAR'S KLAGE**

D5. 30 March 1811; first published in 1894 in series 20 of the Gesamtausgabe, Leipzig

Hier am Hügel heissen Sandes
Sitz’ ich, und mir gegenüber
Liegt mein sterbend Kind!

Lechzt nach einem Tropfen Wasser,
Lechzt und ringt schon mit dem Tode,
Weint, und blickt mit stieren Augen
Mich bedrängte Mutter an!

Du musst sterben, armes Würmchen,
Ach, nicht eine Träne,
Hab’ ich in den trocknen Augen,
Wo ich dich mit stillen kann!

Ha! säh’ ich eine Löwenmutter
Ich wollte mit ihr kämpfen,
Kämpfen mit ihr um die Eiter.
Könnt’ ich aus dem dürren Sande
Nur ein Tröpfchen Wasser saugen!
Aber ach, ich muss dich sterben seh!
Koaum ein schwacher Strahl des Lebens
Dämmert auf der bleichen Wange,
Dämmert in den matten Augen,
Deine Brust erhebt sich kaum.
Hier am Busen komm und welcke!
Kömmt ein Mensch dann durch die Wüste,
So wird er in den Sand uns scharren,
Sagen: „Das ist Weib und Kind!“
Ich will mich von dir wenden,
Dass ich dich nicht sterben seh’,
Und im Taumel der Verzweiflung
Murre wider Gott!

**HAGAR'S LAMENT**

Here I sit, on a mound of burning sand,
and before me
lies my dying child!

He thirsts for a drop of water;
be thirsts, and already struggles with death;
be weeps, and with vacant eyes
looks upon me, his distressed mother.

You must die, poor mite;
als, not a single tear do I have
in my dry eyes
to soothe you.

If I saw a lioness
I would fight with her,
fight with her for her milk.

If only I could suck
but one drop of water from the parched sand!
But alas, I must watch you die!

Scarcely a feeble ray of life
glimmers on your pale cheeks
and in your dull eyes;
your little chest scarcely rises.

Come to my breast and perish there!
If a man then comes through the wilderness
be will bury us in the sand,
saying: ‘Here is a woman and her child!’

I shall turn away from you
lest I see you die,
and in the frenzy of despair
cry out against God!
Ferne von dir will ich gehen,
Und ein rührend Klaglied singen,
Dass du noch im Todeskampfe
Tröstung einer Stimme hörst.
Noch zum letzten Klaggebete
Öff' ich meine dürren Lippen,
Und dann schliesst' ich sie auf immer,
Und dann komme bald, o Tod!
Jehova! blick' auf uns herab,
Jehova, erbarme dich des Knaben!
Send' aus einem Taugewölke
Labung uns herab!
Ist er nicht von Abrams Samen?
Er weinte Freudentränen,
Als ich ihm dies Kind geboren,
Und nun wird er ihm zum Fluch!
Rette deines Lieblings Samen!
Selbst sein Vater bat um Segen,
Und du sprachst: „Es komme Segen
Über dieses Kindes Haupt.“
Hab' ich wider dich gesündigt,
Ha! so treffe mich die Rache,
Aber, ach, was tat der Knabe,
Dass er mit mir leiden muss?
Wär' ich doch in Sir gestorben,
Als ich in der Wüste irrete,
Und das Kind noch ungeboren
Unter meinem Herzen lag!
Nein; da kam ein holder Fremdling,
Hiess mich rück zu Abram gehen,
Und des Mannes Haus betreten,
Der uns grausam jetzt verstiess.
War der Fremdling nich dein Engel?
Denn er sprach mit holder Miene:
„Ismael wird gross auf Erden,
Sein Samen zahlreich sein!“
Nun liegen wir und welken,
Unsre Leichen werden modern
Wie die Leichen der Verfluchten,
Die der Erde Schoss nicht birgt.
Schrei zum Himmel, armer Knabe!
Öffne deine welken Lippen!
Gott, sein Herr! verschmäh’ das Flehen
Des unschuld’gen Knaben nicht.

Now we lie dying,
and our bodies will rot
like the corpses of the accursed
which the earth’s womb does not conceal.
Cry unto heaven, my poor boy!
Open your parched lips!
God, his Lord, do not scorn
the pleas of this innocent boy.

We come to the song which stands at the very beginning of Mandyczewski’s sumptuous ten-volume Gesamtausgabe. It is true that a later instalment of The Hyperion Schubert Edition will contain incomplete fragments of a setting of Gabriele von Baumberg that are probably earlier still, but this is essentially Schubert’s first complete vocal work, more of a ballad, or scena, than a song. There is a copy of the complete song in the Witticzek-Spaun collection which has the following inscription: ‘Schubert’s first song composition, written in the Konvikt at the age of fourteen, 30 March, 1811.’ Of course it is always possible that the composer wrote earlier vocal music that has not survived.

Schubert’s model was a ballad by the Swabian composer Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg (1760-1802) titled Hagars Klage in der Wüste Bersaba. This was published in 1797, the year of Schubert’s birth. In the manner of young art students who visit galleries in order to copy their favourite painters’ work, Schubert set about a similar process. He placed the Zumsteeg score before him and reworked it bar by bar. Schubert is guided by great respect for the original and in the first part of the piece chooses the same key and time signatures, as well as the same points for piano interludes. As the work progresses he gradually departs from his model and becomes increasingly adventurous, although this is not always well advised. Unlike the similar process a few years later with Schiller’s poem Die Erwartung (where the younger composer wipes the floor with Zumsteeg without even trying to demean him) some of Schubert’s departures from his model are those of an ambitious and inexperienced tearaway, not yet fully knowledgeable about the capabilities of the human voice. (Schubert was not yet a seasoned visitor to the opera.) In terms of understanding vocal Fach the older composer is a sober professional and Schubert an irresponsible joyrider. (Any soprano singing Hagars Klage would have reason to chastise the teenager capable of making her suffer on the tessitura tightrope!) On every other level, however, where raw talent is a more exiting commodity than good judgement, one can immediately see that Zumsteeg’s days as the leader of his field are numbered. The depth of Schubert’s feeling and the wily strength of his imagination announce the arrival of rare genius.

It would be some time before Schubert had regular access to books, so it is not surprising that this text was lifted from another song. But this is not the only work by Zumsteeg he could have considered, and it is fascinating that he chose this story for his debut. Schücking, admittedly a poet of no importance or renown, here gives centre stage to slaves and outcasts, the bondwoman and her illegitimate son about whom St Paul is so scathing in Galatians 4:21-31. It is clear from an impartial reading of the story (Genesis 16:1-16, also 21:8-21) that Hagar is not entirely to blame for her plight. The song opens at a dramatic moment in the story, her second exile to the desert, but previous events have led to this climactic point. After she was purchased as a slave in Egypt she became Abraham’s concubine because Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was unable to conceive. During her pregnancy, in Sarah’s eyes at least, Hagar became insufferably arrogant; but in matters of sexual rivalry ill-feeling can stem from both sides. Hagar, fearing Sarah’s wrath, fled to the desert where she was told by an angel of the Lord to return to bear her son Ishmael who would have many descendants and be in constant struggle with all other men. Some fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the son with whom
God promised Abraham to make a covenant. Sarah saw the two boys playing together and, fearing for Isaac’s inheritance, once again insisted that Abraham should exile Hagar, this time together with Ishmael. The song opens with the bondwoman’s distress at the lack of water in the wilderness. The boy is supposed to be fourteen years old (Schubert’s age at the time of writing the work) but for the purposes of the poem Schücking implies Ishmael is still a helpless infant.

What songs were about mattered to Schubert from the very beginning. Time and again we find him engaged on a text because he is able to empathize with situations and live through them using music as a connecting medium. The drama of his own life is often at one with the drama which he encounters in the pages of the poetry books. It is surely the immediacy of this reaction which makes him, at certain times of his life, select certain texts before others, because he is able to give himself to them without reserve, and with a knowledge that the feelings are as real for him as for the poet. Throughout his life his greatest family difficulties were with his father. We know too, from the composer’s record of a dream among other things, that young Franz was a disappointment to his father in many ways, that some of his other brothers seemed to him to be more loved, and that there was a battle of wills between the two men. In any case, fourteen-year-old boys, as I remember, have an especially difficult and tense time with their fathers; so much of parental authority seems so unfair—unfair as the way Abraham disowned and mistreated Ishmael. (The recurring theme of other ballads such as Der Vatermörder and Leichenphantasie is difficult father-and-son relationships.) We can also imagine that Elisabeth Vietz Schubert, artistically more refined than her husband, was extremely fond of and protective towards her youngest son who showed such musical promise. Perhaps the elder Schubert’s temper outbursts had extended to his wife who was three years older and perhaps no longer attractive. (Elisabeth died soon afterwards and Schubert senior married, before the year was out, a much younger woman of thirty.) How easy it would be for Schubert to project his situation onto Hagar and Ishmael, where he and his mother were also in the desert of their husband’s/father’s affections. And how comforting to imagine that great things were in store for the outcasts. Ishmael was to be accepted as an ancestor by the Arab peoples, perhaps as a forefather of Mohammed himself; and Franz Peter Schubert was to be a great composer. Writing music quietly in his room was an empowering act for the young composer in more ways than one: an act of subtle and concealed defiance, a way of assuaging the pain of those awkward teenage years.

Alfred Einstein points out how much Zumsteeg owed (and thus Schubert too, without realizing it) to the example of scene with orchestra by the forgotten master Georg Benda (1722-1795). His melodramas with orchestra Ariadne and Medea (1775) were extended monologues where the heroine tells of her plight through a variety of vocal techniques ranging from recitative to cantilena, supported by instrumental commentary which reflects her changing emotions. Mozart admired these ground-breaking works, and Zumsteeg latched on to the crucial idea that replacing the orchestra with piano transformed the form into something more mercurial and flexible; the suggestive power of the piano, and the intimate musical details revealed by an attentive accompanist’s fingers, liberated rather than constricted the listener’s imagination. It is for this reason, Einstein points out, that orchestrations of Schubert songs are ‘almost always a simultaneous coarsening and weakening of the original’.

1-3 (Largo) At the very opening of the work, and elsewhere, we also hear the presence of Haydn, a master by whom Zumsteeg seems infinitely less influenced than his young imitator. The power of the slowly unfolding introduction (the key is C minor, as in Zumsteeg) owes its mood to the spatial grandeur of The Creation; the moonscape emptiness of outer space is analogous with that of the desert. Schubert omits Schücking’s line ‘In der menschenlosen Wüste’ (‘in the unpeopled desert’) either because it did not appeal to him or, in his enthusiasm to begin his great work, he left it out unintentionally; such mistakes happen during the act of copying. This is probably why the first strophe has only three
lines whereas the elisions in verses 4 and 5 were probably deliberate and made for reasons of dramatic fluidity. As Hagar begins to sing, the portentous crotchets of the introduction yield to more lively quavers, and from the beginning of the second strophe the voice is accompanied by pulsating semiquavers. Whatever one may say about the awkwardness of the vocal line, there is no doubt that Schubert here depicts a woman of the greatest temperament. In Zumsteeg she is much more contained and Germanic. Perhaps Schubert has imagined her smouldering Egyptian looks; certainly the music is touched by something dark and exotic. The words ‘sterbend Kind’ descend to the bottom of the voice, whereas ‘schon mit dem Tode’ climbs to a fortissimo wail.

The interlude between the second and third strophes is meant to denote the mute pleading of the child’s eyes. Here Schubert’s solution is not an improvement on Zumsteeg’s. After the intensity of the voice part the music suddenly reverts to eighteenth-century commonplace, cadential trill and all; even at this early stage it is the power of words which brings the most intense reactions from our composer. ‘Du musst sterben’ is a case in point. While Zumsteeg sounds a suitably pathetic note, Schubert suddenly responds to this phrase with an exciting venom, as if he himself were in a rage at the unfairness of it all. This is not only an exhausted mother at the end of her tether, but also a glowering Medea, threatening death. Schubert repeats the words, intoxicated with the power of a descending harmonic sequence. The third verse has a broad and impressive sweep to it, the plashing semiquavers descriptive of the tears that refuse to come. Zumsteeg, choosing to illustrate the absence of tears rather than the idea of them, is justified in his drier approach.

4-5 (Allegro) The new section begins with a seventeen-bar Zwischenspiel for piano in the stormy key of D minor. Here the taut rhythms of Beethoven in Sturm und Drang mood seem to be the inspiration. What might have appeared empty dramatic gesture is made clear by the words. Schubert imagines the rippling muscles and feline guile of the hunting lioness. The power of nature lurking in the bushes is wonderfully conveyed; crotchet rests punctuating the music are crucial to the build-up of tension. A sudden outbreak of semiquavers rushing upwards seems to have been launched by the animal’s powerful leap; this springing surprise is followed by pounce and kill as forte split octaves descend the keyboard. Schubert shifts the poet’s lines so that Hagar’s first word is the dramatic (and unintentionally comical) ‘Ha’.

It is here that the vocal writing becomes almost impossible for most singers (but happily not for Christine Brewer). The force of the young composer’s conviction somehow carries this otherwise ludicrous passage which imagines a tussle between Hagar and the lioness. She would have to be tough to take on such a challenge, and the high notes on impossible vowels fall into the same athletic category. In Zumsteeg’s song the fourth line of the poet’s strophe (‘so that I may quench your thirst’) explains the reason why Hagar, herself a lioness defending her young, fights the animal; but here Schubert omits the line, probably because it holds up the action. The fifth strophe inspires obsessive repetitions of drooping seconds in the piano writing on diminished-seventh chords. These somehow suggest the pursing of lips and a quick intake of breath through the mouth- desperate and unsuccessful attempts to suck water from the sand- one of the earliest signs of Schubert’s aptitude for tonal analogue. Although not the most elegant of his illustrative touches, it shows an ability to respond to words on quite another level from that of Zumsteeg.

6-7 (Largo) This is one of the most effective sections of the entire piece. We revert to Zumsteeg’s example of repeated quavers in music of sudden hushed stillness. These switches of tempo are at the heart of the drama. As at the very beginning of the song, a Haydn-inspired chromaticism carries far more emotional weight than Zumsteeg’s opening, and here the same may be said of that composer’s rather ordinary dominant sevenths in comparison to Schubert’s otherworldly harmonic explorations. All this is in the spirit of Schubert’s aim, as later revealed by his friend Josef von Spaun, to ‘modernize Zumsteeg’s song form’. These rapt quavers with their inner moving parts seem taken from a
memory of a Haydn string quartet, or perhaps one by Mozart. The drooping sequences successfully convey the idea of colour draining from the cheeks of the dying child. The dryly alternating quavers beneath ‘Dämmert auf der bleichen Wange’ seem distant ancestors of the quavers in *Auf dem Flusse* in *Winterreise* where the image of the river’s icy surface inspires a similar response to that of a cheek pale with death. The music of the next strophe seems written for a Gluck heroine: grand and noble, statuesque but still decorated by runs and decorative turns of phrase which recall the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the final phrase ‘Sagen: ‘Das ist Weib und Kind’’ uses every chromatic twist and turn at the young Schubert’s disposal. This reference to mother and child seems to wring his withers.

8-9 (Geschwind) Note Schubert’s momentary reversion to a German tempo marking; for once he uses the same word as Zumsteeg, and in the same language. He suddenly seems to have remembered that he is writing a song related to a biblical figure. Accordingly there is an outbreak of quasi-fugal music in the ‘old style’. (It is here that Hagars Klage, from the very beginning of Schubert’s career, joins hands with *Mirjams Siegesgesang* from the end of it.) This lasts some fifteen bars, an obvious attempt to improve on Zumsteeg’s six. Once the words begin again we revert to non-contrapuntal music; this is like an allegro movement of a piano sonata with vocal obbligato. Hagar twists and writhes in her torment, a great deal of which relates to the uncomfortable tessitura. The pianist uses every trick in the book: rattling right-hand semiquavers; striding left-hand basses; scale passages of some velocity and virtuosity. It is as if Schubert’s is trying to outdo Zumsteeg at every turn: if the older man sets ‘Verzweiflung’ to a diving diminished seventh, Schubert plunges the entire octave on the same word. The whole of the ninth strophe is a miscalculation however. Schubert should have adopted Zumsteeg’s quietly dignified approach. Instead we have an almost embarrassingly inappropriate accompaniment with chirpy grace notes and banal harmonies. Here the composer’s energy gets out of control. He loses the musical mood suitable for a despairing woman.

10 (Adagio) As if to compensate for this unintentional frivolity we move from A flat major to a section in D flat major. This occasions a heartfelt, though hardly very original, piano interlude of nine bars. The vocal line is doubled by the accompaniment, and the most interesting section of this strophe is the simplicity and bareness of the words ‘Und dann komme bald, o Tod!’ (‘Then death soon will come’). This bleak statement is followed by three bars of piano chordal writing, fortissimo, and three bars pianissimo, a simple descending F minor scale, the hands an octave apart. John Reed points out that these bass octaves would become a familiar Schubert death theme. The last semibreve F slips down a semitone to an octave E, and a dotted rhythm in the right hand establishes the unexpected key of Emajor. This transition is a presentiment of the voice of the authentic adult Schubert.

11 (Largo, followed by Allegro) It is now that we hear, arguably for the first time ever, the unmistakable sound of Schubert’s genius as opposed to his talent. He seizes on the word ‘Jehova!’ which in the original *Schücking* is at the end of the line (‘Blick’ auf uns herab, Jehovah!—’Look down upon us, Jehovah!’) and places it at the forefront, both of the sentence and of the drama. Hagar is made to repeat it three times as she calls to God, twice in a descending arpeggio figure, and for the last time in a upward curve which suggests the supplicant’s gaze heavenward. The dotted accompaniment evokes the sounding of heavenly trombones and the shiver of fear before the Almighty. The effect is gigantic, like a religious canvas by Tiepolo, with the heavens depicted in vast receding perspectives. Time stands still and we know we are in the presence of a great composer, however young. For ‘blick’ auf uns herab’, and the subsequent repetitions of ‘Jehova!’, slowly oscillating quavers in both hands with thickly-spaced basses rumble with mighty grandeur as if something elemental were shaking the very foundations of the earth and God’s presence were filling the air with rich layers of seraphic sound. Hagar’s cries of ‘Jehova’ at the top of her voice, allied with a darkly grounded low C pedal in the
piano, make for something quite extraordinary—agonized and simultaneously exultant. Zumsteeg’s expressive little mordent on the word seems risible by comparison. Schubert has taken eighteen bars to cover words that the older man sets to music in five. The rest of the strophe cannot come up to this level. The fast music for ‘Send’ aus einem Thaugewölke Labung uns herab!’ (‘From dewy clouds send us refreshing rain!’) suddenly sounds peremptory and almost banal. Zumsteeg’s extended (and rather effective) melisma on ‘Labung’, a rare extravagance, is not taken up as a model.

12-14 From here on Schubert more or less abandons the older composer’s rather more disciplined approach and reverts to a slew of his own experiments. This makes the remainder of the song very patchy, and there is a noticeable deterioration in its flow. Thus verse 12 is set very quickly as a recitative with an all-purpose yearning piano interlude. Schubert’s wide tears of joy at Ishmael’s birth are given very short shrift indeed—perhaps significantly, in regard to the composer’s own feelings about his father; this is a much more tender moment in Zumsteeg. Verse 13 (Allegretto) switches moods in an uneasy way and strikes an inappropriately rococo note, the doubling of vocal coloratura with piano merely sounds awkward and coy. Obviously unhappy with this, the composer suddenly launches into a swinging G minor 6/8 (Allegro) for verse 14. This metre does not really suit the words and gives undue prominence to further expostulations of the comical word ‘Ha!’ Schubert may have hoped to create a suitable background for the idea of vengeance and a sense of Hagar’s derangement at this point. As this mood suits only the first two lines of the strophe, another rather makeshift recitative is tacked on to cover the lines ‘Aber, ach, was tat der Knabe Dass er mit mir leiden muss?’ (‘But what has the boy done that he must suffer with me?’).

15-17 The piece recovers somewhat at this point as Schubert reverts to Zumsteeg’s key of A flat and provides a rather old-fashioned, but nevertheless beautiful, set-piece aria for Hagar. Schubert writes a sustained melody (Andante alla breve) realizing that after all these ups and downs the listener longs for something more settled. This reflective piece takes up two of the poet’s strophes (15 and 16) and ends rather dramatically on a high A flat on the word ‘verstießen’. After this the piano provides three little sighing phrases which peter out, leaving Hagar alone with her fears and her memories of her first desert exile. Verse 17 begins with the vocal phrase ‘War der Fremdling nicht dein Engel?’ (‘Was the stranger not your angel?’) which is almost melody, not quite recitative. This is left to resound unaccompanied in the empty expanse of the wilderness. Her question receives no answer, and it is indeed the poet’s ploy to finish the poem before the point where God intervenes to save the unfortunate pair. Only the listener’s knowledge of the Bible could calm his doubts about the safety of mother and son. In music which veers between arioso and recitative, Hagar gathers her strength and recovers some grasp on the memories of the angel’s first visitation and his sweeping promise about Ishmael’s future.

18-19 As the long piece draws to a close it is clear that Schubert, later the pupil of Antonio Salieri, is attempting to add a sort of Italianate operatic gloss to Zumsteeg’s Germanic simplicities and decencies. (Indeed it is said that it was this piece which first aroused Salieri’s interest in the young Schubert.) What Zumsteeg lacks is extravagance, and Schubert, despite his veneration for the older composer’s achievements, finds him worthy but dull, slow to exploit the less obvious, but deliciously dramatic, aspects of a poem. And it is also clear that to be Viennese in 1811 was to be closer to an Italianate sense of drama, even via Mozart’s operas, than to be a composer in Zumsteeg’s Stuttgart or Reichardt’s Berlin.

The music for verse 18 (Largo) is reasonably perfunctory and treated as a transitional passage to the work’s concluding aria (Adagio). There is, however, an exceptional, and suitably ominous, use of the diminished-seventh chord on ‘Leichen werden modern’ (‘our bodies will rot’). At ‘Schrei zum Himmel, armer Knabe!’ (verse 19) we have reached the work’s peroration, and Schubert does not disappoint. Hagar reverts to the grand Gluckian figure who has called out to Jehovah earlier in the piece. A broad and dramatic vocal line is supported by rippling left-hand semiquavers, and the effect is regal
and larger than life. Melismas on several words play their operatic part in expanding this section so that its breadth is worthy of Hagar’s plight, and worthy too of the amplitude of voice which is required to sing the piece in the first place. Zumsteeg ensures that he returns to the key of C minor with which he began his song, but Schubert ignores this nicety and finishes in A flat. The meltingly gentle postlude has a dignity which suggests that the composer was already thinking of Hagar’s imminent rescue from doom by the hand of God. Despite the obvious immaturities, there are moments in Hagars Klage when we are dazzled by an enormous talent which, many listeners would gladly believe, was the ineffable gift of the self-same hand.

The poet Clemens August Schücking is one of the mysteries of Schubertian literary scholarship. We know that this poem appeared in the 1781 Göttinger Musenalmanach, and that it is very unlikely that Schubert had access to the same poetic source. The poem is printed above the abbreviated signature ‘Schg’. There is a slightly younger poet, Christoph Bernhard Schücking (1753-1778) listed in Goedicke who was a lawyer from Münster with published poetry and a play to his credit. As Clemens August also came from Münster, the two writers may well have been brothers.

Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803)

DEM UNENDLICHEN
Second version, D291. c1815; first published by A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in April 1831 in volume 10 of the Nachlass

Wie erhebt sich das Herz, wenn es dich, Unendlicher, denkt! wie sinkt es, Wenn es auf sich herunterschaut! Elend schauts wehklagend dann, und Nacht und Tod!


Weht, Bäume des Lebens, ins Harfengetön! Rausche mit ihnen ins Harfengetön, kristallner Strom!
Ihr lispelt, und rauscht, und Harfen, ihr tönt, Nie es ganz! Gott ist es, den ihr preist!

Welten, donnert, in feierlichem Gang, Welten, donnert, in der Posaunen Chor!
Tönt, all ihr Sonnen auf der Strasse voll Glanz, In der Posaunen Chor!

TO THE INFINITE ONE

How the heart surges when it thinks of you, Infinite One! How it sinks when it gazes down upon itself!
Lamenting, it sees but misery, night and death.

You alone call me from my night, you alone help me in misery and death!
Then I know that you created me for eternity.

Lord of Glory, for whom no praise is sufficient, in the grave below or by your throne above, Lord God, no paeans of thanks are worthy of you.

Sway, trees of life, to the music of the harps! Murmur with them to the harps’ music, crystal streams!

You whisper and murmur, and, harps, you play, but never fully enough; it is God whom you praise!

Thunder, you spheres in solemn motion, to the choir of trumpets!
Resound, all you suns on your shining course, to the choir of trumpets!
Ihr Welten, ihr donnert,
Du, der Posaunen Chor, hallest
Nie es ganz: Gott – nie es ganz: Gott,
Gott, Gott ist es, den ihr preist!

You thunder, spheres,
choir of trumpets, you blaze forth,
but never fully enough;
it is God, God whom you praise.

We know that Schubert admired the Klopstock odes; he attempted to write one of his own in the poet’s high-flown manner sometime in 1813, but the manuscript is now lost. Even today it is hard to resist the grandeur and eloquence of the style when Klopstock is on a ‘roll’, a word as suitable for his writing as for the imposing vibrations of a clap of thunder. He was one of the earliest poets (in terms of historical chronology) whom Schubert was to set with relative frequency; Klopstock’s old-fashioned language seems ideally suited to his subject matter which, with the exception of some exquisite love lyrics, is largely religious or historical (cf the Teutonic ballad *Hermann und Thusnelda*). Pyrker was indebted to him, of course, as were numerous other poets of a later generation who composed on religious or patriotic themes.

The song seems to require delivery from the pulpit, so closely does it simulate the fiery oratory of an inspired preacher. We perform here the second version (which begins in F major) rather than the third version which begins in G major. There is some likelihood that the third version represents the composer’s final thoughts; but the song recorded here is the version familiar to most singers through the Peters Edition, and the most often heard in recital. In actual fact the variations between versions are scarcely discernible to the average listener. There is a crucial, yet small, modulation in the opening recitative, and this is the main difference; the main body of the song, the long paean of praise to God in E flat major, is essentially the same in all versions, although there are some alterations to the layout of the accompaniment.

The music begins with dotted rhythms in the style of Handel, a dotted quaver in the bass followed by the reverberation of fanfare-like demisemiquavers- the first grounded in the earth, the second aspiring to heaven. There are two such flourishes, and then, as if an idea were gathering force and conviction, they spread like wildfire across the stave, the original dotted-quaver fanfares spawning chords in dotted semiquavers which almost convulsively traverse the keyboard in ecstatic proclamation. We land on a C major semibreve, and the voice, alone and unfettered by accompaniment, begins with ‘Wie erhebt sich das Herz’. This is a style of which the eighteen-year-old Schubert is already master- recitative which is also imbued with the outlines of memorable melody. The upward gaze to heaven is then mirrored by a glance downwards on the inadequacies of man, as if from above. The piano’s fanfares in the middle of the keyboard are more muted, and the vocal line is also pulled downward into the chest register by the imagery of night and death. The four-bar piano interlude with its ceremonial mezzo staccato quavers consists of a sequential flourish heard in three different registers. These phrases seem to ponder mortality with a heavy heart; this is music reminiscent of the deathbed musings of Verklärung, a setting of a Pope translation and one of the exceptional songs of 1814.

The recitative continues (‘Allein du rufst mich aus meiner Nacht’) and, true to the meaning of the words, the music begins once more to struggle towards the source of heavenly light. The voice is supported by the piano at crucial points. This succession of phrases is remarkable for superb word-setting; living is created before our very eyes. Suddenly the basses slide down a third and we emerge into the sunshine of C major, the elemental key which suggests the brightness of the Creation itself. We remain there just long enough to look God in the face for an off-beat setting of ‘Herrlicher!’ which plunges an octave between the first and second syllables, and then the voice is launched into one of the most remarkable passages of recitative in the composer’s whole output. Goodness knows how on earth (or heaven) Schubert brings this off! The depth of ‘Grab’ (‘grave’) and the height of ‘Tron’ (‘throne’) are pointedly contrasted, yet all within the extraordinary power of a vocal line which shines a spotlight on the heavens so wide-ranging that it seems in danger of
blowing a fuse and spinning out of control. The voice goes on a high, starry walkabout, but it is the piano which holds the reins of power. We hardly notice the inexorable rise of the accompaniment’s basses (a long progression from low F to B flat in semitones) but it is the tension generated by this slow ascent deep in the heart of the music which makes the launch into the next section so thrilling. The vocal plunge into the new E flat aria (‘den dankend entflammt kein Jubel genug besingt!’) is supported by a ringing B flat 7 chord; the arrival of the spinning E flat major sextuplets of the new section seems as inevitable as the turning of the world, or the progression of the seasons.

In all of Schubert’s songs which are divided into recitative and aria there could never have been a more effective buildup to a ringing peroration. And the aria itself (marked ‘Langsam, mit aller Kraft’) does not disappoint. This is mighty music, painted with a generously broad brush, and it is foolish to suppose that any but a large voice can really do it justice. Schubert must have had in mind a substantially-voiced singer like Anna Milder, whom he had earlier heard in the great Gluck operas. Dem Unndlichen would certainly have been beyond the powers of Therese Grob, the soprano in Lichtental parish church choir and, it is said, the earliest object of Schubert’s affections.

Throughout this hymn to the Creator the right hand is engaged in flowing sextuplets. With typical Schubertian ingenuity these represent, all at the same time, the wind-blown undulations of the branches of the trees of life, the arpeggios of sacred harps, and the rustling of crystal streams. When we connect the music associated with this last image with one of Schubert’s most famous songs, we hear a powerful pre-echo of the brook music for Wohin? in Die schöne Müllerin—particularly at the words ‘Ihr lispelt und rauscht’ with the diminished-chord harmony suggesting something secret and confidential. The right hand, however, is relatively unimportant in this music; the source of its imposing grandeur lies in the glorious interplay between the majestic vocal line and the left-hand octaves. These variously thunder and resound, definitely more in the trombone register than that of the ‘choir of trumpets’ suggested by the translation. The German word ‘Posaune’ covers both: ‘trumpets’ seems more elegant in English, but surely Schubert had the larger instrument in mind, bearing in mind that trombones were commonly heard in Vienna at the graveside equali of burial services.

At the end of the third strophe the word ‘Gott’ stops the music in its tracks, as if in awe and veneration. The sextuplets cease. As the singer holds on to the word for nearly three beats on an E flat, the piano shifts from chords of E flat major to C minor to A flat major, each of these represented by a single sforzato crotchet. This surely represents three ways of looking at God—a trinity of viewpoints. This is the only time this happens in the song. At the end of the phrase ‘den ihr preist!’ the sextuplets resume and the voice traverses an octave, finishing on a stentorian low B flat.

The final two strophes recycle and develop the music already heard, with subtle changes of tonal emphasis and tessitura which ensure that there is an overwhelming sense of climbing excitement and fervour, and that the final vocal cadence ends in the tonic of E flat major rather than B flat. Settings of the word ‘Gott’ on the song’s final page are a subtle succession of rising notes of ever-increasing intensity: first a simple minim, then a crotchet tied over the bar line with a semitone ascent only on the last quaver; then a high G flat which seems poised to shine for ever in the heavens. This is, in fact, only a minim tied to a dotted quaver, with the two final words ‘ist es’ brilliantly added when one thinks that the singer must be nearly out of breath. The effect is of a gush of dizzying emotion such as someone speaking in tongues might experience. Everything about this great song is extraordinary. It blazes with such inner fire and fervour (it is a mistake for performers to conceive this music as simply overwhelmingly loud) that taken on its own it would be evidence enough of the composer’s passionate belief in God and all his works. But knowing Schubert’s enormous gift for empathy with his poets it could also be seen as a portrait of Klopstock’s own convictions, a tribute to the Messianic faith of an earlier epoch.
**Johann Petrus Silbert (1772–1844)**

**HIMMELSFUNKEN**
D651. February 1819; first published by A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in April 1831 in volume 10 of the Nachlass

*God’s breath is felt.*
*Silently longing awakens.*
*The ecstatic heart*
*swoons in sweet suffering.*
*The earth’s oppressive bonds*
*dissolve in the mild air.*
*Sacred tears flow*
*as we yearn for the heavenly land.*

Der Odem Gottes weht!
Still wird die Sehnsucht wach;
Das trunkne Herz vergeht
In wundersüssem Ach!
Wie löst sich äthermild
Der Erde schweres Band,
Die heil’ge Träne quillt,
Ach! nach des Himmels Land.
Und das verwaiste Herz
Vernimmt den stillen Ruf,
Und sehnt sich heimatwärts
Zum Vater, der es schuf!

This is one of Schubert’s most beautiful, and under-rated, single-page songs. In this period of his life it seems that Schubert was searching for metaphysical answers with particular intensity, and Silbert’s tone seems closer to the mystical imagery of Novalis than to many of the religious poems set by the composer at other points in his career. Even such a well-known masterpiece as *Die junge Nonne*, for example, relies on histrionics and religious cliché for its effectiveness. Silbert’s opening image of the ubiquity of the breath of God seems to have struck Schubert as something different; indeed, the text can be read in a Spinozan or pantheistic sense where God’s breath is related to the morning breezes as in Ganymed, and the ‘swooning of the ecstatic heart’ recalls that character’s ‘Ach, an deinem Busen/Lieg ich und schmachte’ (‘Ah, on your breast I lie languishing’). *Ganymede* is also beckoned home to his Creator on high, and taken back to his bosom. In such a way Christian imagery entwines with mythology, and pagan eroticism is transmuted into high-flown religious ecstasy.

In such public avowal of faith there is much pomp and ceremony conceived for the bigger voice. In this context *Himmelsfunken* (this time in the G major of the first edition) and *Im Abendrot* serve as reminders of the still, small voice that is a central part of all religious experience, and also of all well-balanced song programmes.
**THE MAIDEN’S LAMENT**

The oak-wood roars, the clouds scud by;  
the maiden sits on the verdant shore;  
the waves break with mighty force,  
and she sighs into the dark night,  
her eyes dimmed with weeping.

‘My heart is dead, the world is empty,  
and no longer yields to my desire.  
Holy one, call back your child.  
I have enjoyed earthly happiness;  
I have lived and loved!’

Tears run their vain course;  
but say, what can comfort and heal the heart  
when the joys of sweet love have vanished?  
I, the heavenly maiden, shall not deny it.

‘Let my tears run their vain course;  
let my lament not awaken the dead!  
For the grieving heart the sweetest happiness,  
when the joys of fair love have vanished,  
is the sorrow and lament of love.’

There is some doubt as to whether this song dates from 1811 or 1812. Deutsch has assigned a catalogue number which suggests the earlier date. In any case *Des Mädchens Klage* was composed as a result of the young Schubert’s discovery of Schiller’s poetry. It is a far less distinguished and infinitely less mature debut than his first encounter with Goethe (Gretchen am Spinnrade) at the age of seventeen, but Schiller’s poetry was more available than Goethe’s in the Vienna of 1811/12. When Wallenstein’s daughter Thekla performs this lyric in Act III Scene 7 of Schiller’s play *Die Piccolomini*, she sings only two verses, accompanying herself on the guitar. We know that Schubert could not have copied the text from Zumsteeg’s 1801 setting (titled Thekla, aus dem Wallenstein) because the latter composer wrote his song for a production of the play and used only these two strophes in his setting. For the four-strophe version the composer would have had to consult the Gedichte. The publishing house of Anton Doll in Vienna issued their Schiller Gesamtausgabe in 1810, the ninth volume of which was devoted to the poems. This book, possibly loaned to Schubert (his family were unlikely to have been able to buy the complete edition), was the textual source of the composer’s many Schiller settings. German editions were infinitely harder to come by in a country where books, particularly foreign imports, were rigidly censored.

It was a lifelong habit of Schubert that, once he had discovered a poet, he tended to compose settings in batches. It is no surprise therefore that another Schiller ballad, Leichenphantasie, is the next song in the catalogue (D7). There is also a question mark on the dating of that ballad, although it too was probably written in 1811. It is also just possible however that both D6 and D7 belong together with that other Schiller setting, *Der Jüngling am Bache* (D30), which we can
confidently assign to September 1812. The mood of that song is very different, however; it has perfect proportions, and is also well written for the voice. These factors may be accounted for by the extra year of musical maturity in the composer’s development, the difference between the compositions of a fourteen- and fifteen-year-old.

If we believe that *Hagars Klage* was composed at a time of teenage unhappiness, there is no reason to suppose that this song represents a change of text-selecting mood on the part of the composer. Both texts would have appealed to someone who thought of himself as alone, or unfairly treated. Hagar, abandoned by Abraham, appeals to Jehovah for help; the maiden appeals to ‘die Heilige’—the Virgin Mary. The word ‘Klage’ (‘lament’) is common to both songs, and it also comes up in the beautiful early Rochlitz setting from 1812, Klage D23. Whatever Schubert’s later religious convictions, or lack of them, there is every reason to suppose that at this early stage of his life he was still a believer. On the back of the manuscript of this song Schubert had planned to begin a piece of religious music—a *Missa in Partitura* for chorus, strings and organ. He wrote the title and voice categories, but never began the music itself. This is, incidentally, the first of a number of songs which refer to the Virgin Mary: *Des Mädchens Klage* (second version D19; third version D389); *Gretcbens Bitte* D564; *Das Marienbild* D623; *Blondel zu Marien* D626; *Vom Mitleiden Mariä* D632; *Marie* D658; *Ave Maria* (Ellens dritter Gesang) D839. Although Schubert spoke up bitterly against the misuse of religious symbols, and that of the Cross in particular, his attitude to the Virgin Mary seems to have remained sympathetic and susceptible. Some of his loveliest church music is to be found in his various settings of the *Salve Regina* and *Stabat Mater*.

1 (Allegro agitato) The music begins in every way ‘on a high’. The depths of contemplation and depression suggested by the two later versions are entirely absent. Instead the young composer responds, perhaps over-enthusiastically, to the descriptions of nature’s stormy power. The key is D minor, an important Mozartian key for drama, and Beethoven’s ‘Tempest’ tonality. The tessitura of the voice part might be termed ‘cruelly high’, but Schubert was certainly not deliberately punishing his singer, he simply lacked experience in vocal writing. The music has the air of being conceived in the style of an instrumental sonata (for violin perhaps) with words added later. Because he does not have the guiding example of Zumsteeg in front of him, Schubert is very cavalier with the poem. Right at the beginning, for example, he substitutes the emphatically explosive ‘brauset’ for ‘braust’, and repeats whichever phrases and words that appeal to him, willy-nilly. The poem’s opening line inspires a small anthology of Sturm und Drang pianistic devices. As soon as the maiden is mentioned in the second line the composer writes the word dolce, and the music changes into D major. The effectiveness of this essentially Schubertian fingerprint is undermined, however, by the setting of the words on a D major arpeggio which soars up to a high tessitura, suggesting a Valkyrie rather than a vulnerable maiden. This is immediately followed by tempestuous water imagery (the poem’s third line), the pianist’s fingers working up a storm in short choppy scales, encompassing a fifth, which pound the shore (and ear) mercilessly. The word ‘seufzt’ (‘sighs’) brings another change of mood: hectic quavers are replaced by much longer notes in the vocal line. Underneath the singer’s semibreves and minimis the piano invokes pathos with ‘meaningful’ scales. Mention of tears in the last line freezes the action into crotchets enlivened by piquant chromaticisms.

2 (Grave) This is undoubtedly the most interesting section of the song— a set piece for the maiden whom Schubert unconsciously casts as a larger-than-life diva. Schiller places this strophe in inverted commas. Although the music cultivates an air of self-conscious pathos, and the rum-ti-tum accompaniment occasions a smile, these things are still to be found in countless Italian operatic arias up to the time of Verdi, and beyond. The astonishing thing is that this ‘southern’ style has already been somehow assimilated by the composer as early as 1811, and that it has seeped so successfully into his musical consciousness. Once again the free repetitions of ‘gestorben’ (together with an inherent
sob built into the music) seem unworthy of the proprieties associated with the German song, but what we are hearing here, surely, are the birth-pangs of the lied, even if that birth takes place not in the opera house itself, but in a nearby side-street. The fluidity and, above all, the uninhibited emotion of the vocal line in D minor, poised above, and meshing with, those incessantly rolling sextuplets in the accompaniment, seem strangely familiar. Here is a note of Mediterranean passion not to be found in Zumsteeg or Reichardt, and not even in Mozart in quite the same way. I am in no doubt that we are hearing the beginnings of music for another woman in extremis who also appeals to the Virgin for help and who was to achieve immortal existence only three years later—Goethe’s Gretchen and the heroine of Gretchen am Spinnrade and Gretchen’s Bitte. It is not as long a journey from ‘Das Herz ist gestorben’ (Schiller) to ‘Mein Herz ist schwer’ (Goethe) as one may think; and how appropriate it would be should Schubert have sown the seeds of his first great Goethe song in the heart of his first Schiller setting.

This aria uses the strophe’s first three lines; the remainder of the verse is set to a ‘Recitative in tempo’ which is awkward. The high B flat on ‘das irdische Glück’ merely confirms the strapping health of a character who is supposed to be fading away with grief. With such a disregard for logic, Schubert, at this stage of his life at least, seems to have been an operatic natural. As in Hagars Klage a moment of genuine inspiration is followed by a musical disappointment. The composer chooses to repeat the strophe’s third and fourth lines in an allegretto tempo, together with a modulation into F major. This is once again in an ungrateful tessitura, doubled note-for-note by the piano. After having treated the singer’s line in the Grave section with great skill, we return to what appear to be violin studies.

3-4 The poem, as Schiller envisaged it, may be summed up thus: the narrator introduces the maiden in the first verse; she bewails her fate in the second; the third strophe introduces the voice of the Virgin herself before the girl speaks once again in the fourth. This shape seems not to have been understood by Schubert who elided the second and third strophes and paid no attention to potentially the most dramatic moment, the opening of the Virgin’s statement. Only a change of tempo to Andante shows that a crucial new section of the poem is beginning mid-bar; and then the nondescript doubling of the vocal line by the piano seems particularly inept and anonymous. The reason for this is that the clue that the Virgin is speaking is given only in the last line of the strophe (at ‘Ich, die Himmlische’). It seems likely that the young composer was not quite clear about what was happening. Until these words he seems to have been unaware that he was writing music for the Madonna herself to sing. And he had probably not yet learned the crucial lesson of reading ahead and making the poem’s thorough acquaintance before setting it. ‘Ich, die Himmlische’ is unequivocal, however. Just before that point there is a double bar line and, interestingly enough, a modulation into C major, the key of so much of Schubert’s later religious music. The Virgin, introduced four lines later than she should have been, is no blushing flower; her outpourings are largely marked forte and inhabit the stratosphere. What is more, Schubert continues her aria into the next strophe (there is no gap at all in the music) instead of returning to the maid who has been chastened and instructed by the heavenly intervention of verse 3. It is perhaps the only occasion that Schubert seems to have got himself into a complete muddle over the dramatization of a poem. The music for the fourth strophe, with its undulating triplet accompaniment in the left hand, was no doubt meant to have had a radiant and comforting tone. Instead Schubert composed possibly the most difficult-to-sing page in his whole vocal output. It sits around high Gs and As with a relentlessness born of the composer’s innocence and inexperience, rather than the Virgin’s. It is as if Schubert wanted her words to sound as if they were coming from another world. To do this he placed them in the heavenly heights of the stave. The result, however, is that this music lies in a part of the voice, and across a break in the registers, which assures that it is never performed. It takes the greatest skill to negotiate these hurdles, and Christine Brewer does just this, against all the odds.
IN THE GLOW OF EVENING

D799. Early 1825; first published A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in December 1832 in volume 20 of the Nachlass

O wie schön ist deine Welt,

Vater, wenn sie golden strahlet!

Wenn dein Glanz herniederfällt,

Und den Staub mit Schimmer malet;

Wenn das Rot, das in der Wolke blinkt,

In mein stilles Fenster sinkt!

Könnt’ ich klagen, könnt’ ich zagen?

Irre sein an dir und mir?

Nein, ich will im Busen tragen

Deinen Himmel schon allhier.

Und dies Herz, eh’ es zusammenbricht,

Trinkt noch Glut und schlürft noch Licht.

How lovely is your world,

Father, in its golden radiance

when your glory descends

and paints the dust with glitter;

when the red light that shines from the clouds

falls silently upon my window.

Could I complain? Could I be apprehensive?

Could I lose faith in you and in myself?

No, I already bear your heaven

beneath within my heart.

And this heart, before it breaks,

still drinks in the fire and savours the light.

When Vogl sang this song at a Schubertiad at the home of Josef von Spaun in January 1827 it is little wonder that the assembled company insisted on hearing it again. Here is the very essence of Schubertian greatness in his maturity: the ability to write a song with seemingly little effort, a song which looks so simple on paper that it reminds one of a hymn (which indeed it is); a song which seems to remain fixed around a single tonal pivotal point, and yet contains the world in a grain of sand or a ray of evening sunlight. Although it is a song of joy, it moves us to tears; it reminds us of the fragility of all beauty and of our own mortality—we love sunsets as Schubert and Lappe did; the beauties of nature will remain as a part of human experience, but composer and poet are gone, and we will follow soon. The ache of this leave-taking is also in the music. *Im Abendrot* is an intimate song, but it is also a vast proclamation of ‘faith’ (a loose enough word to embrace the beliefs of most of mankind) contained in a small manuscript which is, according to Mandyczewski, ‘extraordinarily neat and most lovingly written’. Above all it is a song which only Schubert, in all the long history of Western music, could have written. It bears his imprint, if not quite from the opening chords, then from the second bar of the introduction: three E flats, the top notes of what we have taken to be strummed tonic chords, reveal themselves as the beginning of a glorious melody which unfolds, in alla breve tempo, over the four bars of the introduction. At the beginning of the second bar there is the first of a number of Schubertian revelations. Any composer can move from A flat major to an E flat7, but who else would have done this at the same time as keeping the low A flat exactly where it is, resounding as a tonic pedal point beneath the dominant harmony? It is such a tiny detail, but it makes a world of difference. The turn which follows that chord uses a decorative commonplace to establish an aura of wonder and devotion. The third bar moves into the second inversion of the subdominant: two melting cadences, each followed by tiny moments of silence, fall to the tonic in awe-struck worship. So prodigal is Schubert with his inventions that we hear this inspired phrase only this once. How right John Reed is to say that Schubert has an ‘ability to give to the most familiar chord sequences a new inflection and an altogether new expressive power’.

Even in the composer’s lifetime his tendency to modulation was known and discussed by the critics. It was often seen (or heard) as a weakness and distraction, and he was reproved for it in the press on more than one occasion. The world has since learned to glory in the composer’s discursive escapades, and there is no one like Schubert for leading us gently
astray into hidden pathways of unexpected harmonic delight. But this song, in company with a handful of other masterpieces (Meeres Stille and Wandrer's Nachtlied come to mind), reminds us that Schubert at his greatest depends neither on 'heavenly length' (Schumann's phrase) nor diversity of harmony to leave his imprint on the soul. Richard Capell was right when he wrote that 'to stare at the page... is to find nothing explaining how such beauty came to be. Music is here felt to be not so much a medium of expression as something more intimate, the very emotion itself miraculously manifested'. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is also eloquent in his belief in the song as the product of a pantheistic, rather than a strictly Christian, impulse: 'The religious spirit underlying the music is that of a child's nature, whose gods are the stars, the mountains, the seasons and the flowers.' The song passes as imperceptibly as the sunset it describes, and like a sunset it changes at the same time as seeming to stand still (the movement of the inner voices of the chords is masterful). This somehow discourages our curiosity to analyse what is happening; the music, like the moment of evening radiance, seems stationary and unending in its beauty. And then, just as suddenly, it is gone. This seems a metaphor for life itself which we imagine will last for ever but which is as precious as those few moments when the sun hangs in the sky before slipping gently over the horizon.

To write a song about a sunset is literally to seize the day—carpe diem as Horace said in his first Ode—and to make a moment of fleeting beauty live for ever. Schubert's instinctive ability to write music of this kind (to call it cunning seems unfair) takes more than craftsmanship and calculation. Nevertheless, it is cleverly shaped and very well planned. The whole of the poet's first verse is mirrored in a huge musical arc, moving between the tonic key and variously decorated versions of the dominant, with pedal points on both. The simplicity of the grand design, essentially built on two harmonies, gives the picture its amplitude and its space. But minimalism is not enough; the complexity of the details—the way those two basic harmonies are given new life by subtle modifications—adds depth and humanity. The second verse is introduced by a shortened version of the prelude that has begun the song. Because we have been lulled into a mood of quiet contemplation, the harmonic changes in the next four bars, all unfolding within the time frame of the next twenty seconds, seem cosmic. The song's equilibrium is suddenly disturbed by the question 'Könnt' ich klagen, könnt' ich zagen?' ('Could I complain? Could I be apprehensive?'). The shadow of doubt looms for a moment only. After the restlessness of 'Irrt sein an dir und mir?' ('Could I lose faith in you and in myself?') a small interlude in the piano climbs tenuously towards the light of clarification. With the word 'Nein' all doubt is stilled, as reassuring as a parent's hand on the arm of a frightened child. We revert to the world of security and beauty, sustained by these wonderful pedal points which are, in turn, supported by the sustaining pedal which, unusually for Schubert, is a specific requirement in the score. There is however one more surprise in store. Schubert reserves this for the moment when the poet tells us that heaven is something that he bears within his own heart. At this point ('Deinen Himmel schon allhier') we move briefly into D flat major, that most personal and heartfelt of Schubert's harmonic realms, the subdominant. It is this moment that was prefigured in the introduction. Thus in the midst of the narrator's humility before the wonders of God and nature, he allows himself a brief moment of self-revelation. After this we return to the familiarity of the great hymn. We have not yet spoken of the beauty of the vocal line itself, hovering around the mediant, wafting on the horizon, and refusing to sink to the tonic. Even if we finally reach Aflat major on 'schlürft noch Licht', the repeat of 'Licht', the final note of the song, returns to a C which seems to vibrate endlessly into the ether. In fact it is the piano which is given the last word, and that extraordinary seventh chord, the slowly uncoiling turn, and the final mezzo staccato triplets, are even more haunting than when we heard them first. Tomorrow is another day, and tomorrow the sun will set again, perhaps without us; it is this realization which adds a typically Schubetian bitter-sweet note of pain to what is otherwise a hymn in praise of nature.
Karl Lappe was born in Wusterhausen, near Wolgast in Pomerania. He was both a schoolmaster and a farmer. His literary career, if so it may be called, is typical of nineteenth-century Germany where poets often achieved a regional celebrity (Lappe's Gedichte were published in 1801 and 1811, and finally his complete works in 1836) without being taking seriously by the literati in the important cities. Deutsch pronounces him ‘unimportant’, but he provided the texts of two of Schubert’s most beloved songs (the other is Der Einsame D800) and his poem Nord oder Süd! achieved national celebrity through the setting of K. Klage. Beethoven also set this lyric as a song in 1817 under the title So oder So (WoO148) and the same poem was used by Schumann for his choral setting Op59 No1. Lappe's debt to the pantheistic poetry of Goethe is obvious in Im Abendrot, but he was also influenced by his teacher Kosegarten. His simplicity of approach, and his homely naturalness, were obviously valued more highly by Schubert than the more high-flown products of some of Lappe’s more celebrated contemporaries.

Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803)

THE CONSTELLATIONS

[DIE GESTIRNE

D444. June 1816; first published by A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in April 1831 in volume 10 of the Nachlass

Es tönet sein Lob Feld und Wald, Tal und Gebirg, Das Gestad' hallet, es donnert das Meer dumpf brausend

Des unendlichen Lob, siehe des Herrlichen, Unerreichten von dem Danktief der Natur!

Es singt die Natur dennoch dem, welcher sie schuf, Ihr Getön schallet vom Himmel herab, lautpreisend

In umwölkender Nacht rufet des Strahls Gefährt Von dem Wipfeln, und der Berg' Haupt es herab!

Wer gab Melodie, Leier, dir? zog das Getön

Und das Gold himmlischer Saiten dir auf? Du schallest

Zu dem kreisenden Tanz, welchen, beseelt von dir, Der Planet hält in der Laufbahn um dich her.

Ich preise den Herrn! preise den, welcher des Monds

Und des Tods kühlender, heiliger Nacht, zu dämmern, Und zu leuchten! gebot. Erde, du Grab, das stets

Auf uns harrt, Gott hat mit Blumen dich bestreut!

We have already heard the most glorious and extravagant of the Schubert Klopstock settings (Dem Unendlichen), but here is the composer, less than a year later, tackling another setting of the same poet and seemingly content to give it a much more modest musical garb. The poem itself could easily have been treated in the grand manner; it has all the textual ingredients necessary for a blockbuster—roaring seas, resounding thanksgiving, whirling dance and spinning planets. This is intoxicating stuff, and Dem Unendlichen from 1815 is Schubert’s enthusiastic response to this side of Klopstock. In 1816, however, the boldness and sheer exuberance of the previous year yield to something different: the music is far more intimate and displays greater economy of means. As the successes of 1815 are consolidated, there seems to be a
conscious attempt to find the concision and lucidity apparent in the (admittedly less ambitious) lieder of the North German masters. In this respect Schubert achieves his objective handsomely.

At a different time the poem’s opening might have been cast as a stirring recitative. Instead Schubert, intent on mastering the strophic form, launches into a melody which makes the greatest possible effect using the simplest possible means. Even the two-bar preamble, heard only once, is remarkably expressive. Pulsating right-hand triplets combine with a purposeful and strongly etched bass line. The oscillation between the tonic and the German sixth was to become extremely hackneyed in music of portentous mood, but this is an early use of the device and it seems fresh and original. Trumpet-like, the voice climbs an F major arpeggio on ‘Es tönet sein Lob’, a dotted quaver-semiquaver on the second beat emphasizing the vigour and determination with which the narrator is intent on praising God. This dotted figure for the voice is echoed in the accompaniment on the fourth beat of the bass line, a quasi-canonic imitation which adds a note of pomposo grandeur to the proceedings. The strength of the part-writing is a feature of the Schubert songs of this period: the vocal line meshes splendidly with the pianist’s left hand which is energized here and there with rumbling trills and resonant octaves. The music passes restlessly through various tonalities (F minor, D flat major, A flat major) and it is interesting to see how cunningly Schubert handles Klopstock’s rolling hexameters. As the strophe moves to its central point he constructs a vast musical arc which covers nearly three lines of poetry; this begins on F major (at ‘es donnert das Meer’) and only returns there, in root position, at the very end of the verse (‘Danklied der Natur!’). In between we seem lost in space, one harmonic constellation opening after another before our ears. We reach the home straits with a sense of slightly breathless relief. For Schubert to have arrived in F major any sooner, however, would have earthed this music in mid-flight.

Schubert only wrote out one verse of the song with repeat marks. The Gesamtausgabe prints the poem’s fifteen verses, and the Peters Edition selects five of these (1, 3, 6, 10, 14) and prints the music as if the song were durchkomponiert. In this performance we select four verses from the Gesamtausgabe (1, 2, 10, 14) and make some tiny adjustments to the prosody of the vocal line to make the music fit the words. Schubert admittedly left this aspect of the song incomplete; he would have had to address this issue had the song been published in his lifetime. Die Gestirne is chiefly remarkable as an early study for the stentorian Die Allmacht of 1825. It seems to be the missing musical link between that song and Dem Unendlichen.
translated by Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786)

8 DER 13. PSALM

Ach, Herr! wie lange willst du mein so ganz vergessen?
Wie lange noch dein Antlitz mir verbergen?
Wie lange muss ich meinen Geist mit Sinnen,
Mein Herz mit Sorgen täglich quälen?
Wie lange noch mein Feind obsiegen?
Schau herab! erhöre mich! Ach Ewiger!
Mein Gott! Erleuchte meine Augen wieder,
Dass ich des Todes nicht entschlaf.
Sonst spricht mein Feind: „Den überwand ich!“
Frohlocken Widersacher meines Falles.
Doch ich vertraue deiner Güte,
Mein Herz frohlockt ob deiner Hülfe,
Dem Ewigen singe ich;
Denn er tat mir wohl.

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? For ever?
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
having sorrow in my heart daily?
How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and hear me, O Lord
my God: lighten mine eyes,
lest I sleep the sleep of death;
lest mine enemy say, 'I have prevailed against him';
and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.
But I have trusted in thy mercy;
my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.
I will sing unto the Lord,
because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

This song belongs to a period in Schubert's life when he seems to have been interested in exploring new forms of religious music, as well as new styles for writing it. For example, from 1818, apart from the Deutsches Requiem D621, there is the unusual fragment titled Evangelium Johannis, a selection from the Gospel according to St John and Schubert’s only work for voice and piano which is a setting of prose. Numerous songs about the Virgin Mary, as well as settings of the religious poet Silbert, date from the same period. In May 1819, a month before writing Der 13. Psalm, there are the four Hymnen of Novalis which are unlike anything else he wrote and, as a sequel, the Nachthymne (also Novalis) which is also unique in its more elaborate way. Soon afterwards Schubert began work on the big Mass in A flat (not finished until 1822); and then there is the unfinished oratorio Lazarus which was begun in November 1820.

Perhaps Schubert was going through a particularly religious phase at this point of his life. After all, it is known that the Esterhazy family with whom he spent the summers of 1818 and 1824 was deeply devout, as were the two pretty daughters, and the composer was susceptible to the enthusiasms of people he liked and admired. But there may be another explanation, and this lies in the rather unusual character of Anton Pettenkoffer (1788-1834) who, on the Thursday evenings of 1819 and 1820, hosted musical gatherings in his third-floor apartment in a house in the Bauernmarkt. Earlier there had been a private orchestral society which met at Otto Hartwig’s, but these new premises were bigger, and the meetings were avidly attended by the Schubert circle. This was an opportunity to hear much unfamiliar music, and the gatherings were precursors of the genuine Schubertiads which date from 1821 or so. We know that Handel’s Messiah, Haydn’s Die Schöpfung and Die sieben letzten Worte unseres Erlösers am Kreuze were all performed at Pettenkoffer’s, and that Schubert himself took part, playing the viola. The host had a penchant for sacred music and it seems likely that at least some of Schubert’s religious compositions of the time, including Der 13. Psalm and Lazarus, were conceived for performance at the home of the same patron.

This song has remained a fragment, and it would be tempting to say one knows why the composer put it to one side, were it not for the fact that it is more likely that the final page has simply been lost. Like Evangelium Johannis (also a fragment) it seems less than convincing as a piece of Schubert; its simple aria style seems rather plain for what we know
of this composer’s response to deep and significant words. It is the accompaniment in particular which seems under-developed. Although it has never been questioned that the work was written for voice and piano, these andante triplet arpeggios drifting down the stave, and the subsequent gently undulating semiquavers, seem infinitely more like harp writing. If this song is genuinely for piano, it is certain that Schubert never wrote anything more anonymous for the instrument. The lack of pianistic detail and elaboration is astonishing considering how often the words might have suggested something more interesting. Not only would the harp have been a highly appropriate instrument to accompany the Psalms of King David (who was a harpist after all), but it also seems possible that there would have been a harp among the orchestral instruments available at Pettenkoffer’s. It was about this time that people were beginning to play Erard’s splendid new double-action harps tuned to the key of C flat. The piece as it stands is entirely performable on the harp, and the key of B flat minor with its five flats, rare in Schubert songs, is an ideal tonality for performance on that instrument.

If this is not harp-accompanied music, Schubert deliberately restricted himself to a background accompaniment of the greatest simplicity, and no doubt had it in mind that the accompanist could imitate a harp sonority, perhaps using a harp stop, on the piano. It is also possible that he had the slightly inept fingers of an amateur organist in mind, and that the piece was written for performance in a church where the acoustic would preclude fancy detail in the accompaniment. But the idea of a harp prevails, because this sonority with this vocal particular line would make perfect sense, and would also provide the colour and texture missing to give the piece a magic of its own. Most unusually, one is reminded of certain lieder by Schumann that share either a Jewish or harpist theme, sometimes both (Aus den hebraischen Gesängen Op25 No15 comes to mind—a Byronic reworking of a Psalm, with its arpeggios slowly spiralling down the keyboard—as well as the more virtuosic Die Tochter Jepthas Op95, and the mournful Harflner Lieder from Wilhelm Meister Op 98).

The vocal line also seems deliberately reined-in, as if too much theatrical emotion is inappropriate: the controlled asceticism of the Novalis hymns comes to mind, and of course we could simply be overhearing the composer in experimental mode, attempting to be more and more expressive using the simplest means. There are tiny touches of word-painting— for example the held G flat suspended in mid-air at ‘Wie lange noch mein Feind obsiegen?’ and the softening modulation into the tonic major at ‘Schau herab!’ The recitative at ‘Sonst spricht mein Feind’ is disappointingly stiff. The final section of the song is a gentle dance in 6/8. Here the atmosphere is that of a charmingly unpretentious Singspiel aria in Schubert’s Claudine von Villa Bella style, although the metre of Mendelssohn’s translation is an awkward fit for this sort of pastoral simplicity—there are too many words and too few occasions for the singer to breathe. The last six bars in this performance are by the eminent Schubert scholar Eusebius Mandyczewski and are no more than an adequate continuation of the ideas already unfolded. It is likely that Schubert would have composed a postlude, but Mandyczewski was wise enough not to try to provide one.

translated by Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786)

**DER 23. PSALM**

D706. December 1820; first published by A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in 1832 as Op posth 132

Gott ist mein Hirt, mir wird nichts mangeln,
er lagert mich auf grüne Weide,
er leitet mich an stillen Bächen,
er labt mein schmachtendes Gemüth,
er führt mich auf gerechtem Steige

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall want.
He maketh me to rest in green pastures;
be leadeth me beside still waters;
be giveth peace unto my soul.
He leadeth me in paths of goodness
zu seines Namens Ruhm.
Und wolle ich auch im Todesschatten-Tale,
so wolle ich ohne Furcht,
denn du beschüttest mich;
deiner Stab und deine Stütze
sind mir immerdar mein Trost.
Du richtest mir ein Freudenmahl
im Angesicht der Feinde zu,
du salbst mein Haupt mit Öle
und schenkst mir volle, volle Becher ein,
mir folget Heil und Seligkeit in diesem Leben
nach, erst ruhe ich ew’ge Zeit
dort in des Ew’gen Haus.

for his name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through valley of the shadow
of death I will fear no evil,
for thou art with me.
Thy rod and staff,
they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table for me
in the presence of mine enemies;
my head with oil thou anointest;
my cup runneth over.
Yea, surely peace and mercy all my life
shall follow me, and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord for evermore.

This well-loved piece, heard in many a church over the last hundred-and-fifty years and at many an eisteddfod, feis or village festival, owes its existence to a commission, or at least a request (we are not sure whether money changed hands or whether Schubert merely provided the score out of personal kindness). It was written for the pupils of Anna Fröhlich (1793-1880), a singing teacher at the Wiener Konservatorium. It was also this Anna who cajoled Schubert into writing the Grillparzer Ständchen D920 for mezzo and women’s chorus in (July 1827) when the soloist was Josefine, her sister. The four sœurs Fröhlich were either very insistent (although Schubert never seems to have composed music against his will) or very charming and persuasive. (Grillparzer was hopelessly in love with one of them, Katharina.) The composer delivered the score of Der 23. Psalm on completion in December 1820, and the work was first heard seven months later, in August 1821, at a pupils’ concert in the Gundelhof. It was immediately popular, taken up by older performers, and given on several further occasions in Schubert’s lifetime, most notably on 7 February 1828 when it was part of the programme at the Musikverein under the direction of Franz or Josef Chiami. Ludwig Finscher avers that this music is in the style of the Austrian Landmesse, the homespun liturgical music heard in small country churches of the period. That it was conceived for a concert illustrates the way that the barriers between the performance of sacred and secular music, once rigidly upheld by the authorities, were disintegrating during the composer’s lifetime.

Male choruses were a long-established Viennese tradition, and it is hardly surprising that Schubert wrote the majority of his choral music for men’s voices. About a third of these ninety or so works are piano-accompanied as are the seventeen works for mixed voices and piano. The list of songs for women’s voices is much shorter. Only seven works specifically require an all-female cast, five of these with piano. When Schubert came to compose this Psalm he had written only one such work, five years previously in 1815 (Das Leben D269) but others were to follow, including the haunting Coronach from Scott’s Lady of the Lake settings. The Ständchen mentioned above is probably the most substantial work in this genre. Probably from force of habit the composer originally conceived that work for men’s chorus and female soloist; he immediately rectified his mistake by providing another version for women’s voices.

Schubert chooses the key of A flat major to express calm and glowing faith. The opening piano triplets waft and weave with the utmost delicacy as a tonic pedal underpins subtle harmonic changes. Some years later the composer was to use this device even more effectively in the introduction to Im Abendrot. The entry of the voices (two sopranos and two altos) is a magical moment: Schubert exploits the lack of a bass line in the voices to conjure a tessitura which seems
unconnected to the earth and its worldly concerns. The spacing of the four voices also gives an ethereal quality to the music. It is difficult for the ear to disentangle this insinuating blend of close harmony for women’s voices, an effect which has been much exploited in popular music: from the *Supreme Being* to *The Supremes*, from Schubert to the Spice Girls, is one way of charting the so-called ‘progress’ of the medium.

In the beginning the musical calm established is such (so smooth is the vocal line and so soothing the accompaniment) that we see only unending vistas of gently rolling Elysian fields. At ‘er lagert mich auf grüne Weide’ (‘He maketh me to rest in green pastures’) the pianist’s fingers become more active. Dancing little sequences in dotted rhythm, where the sopranos and altos are briefly separated in imitation, are buoyed up by gentle Schubertian water music- at this heavenly banquet the waters are sparkling rather than still. At ‘seines Namens Ruhm’ (literally, ‘for the fame of his name’) there is a sudden outbreak of forte singing accompanied by grandiose triplets which prophesy *Die Allmacht*. At ‘Und wall’ ich auch im Todesschatten-Tal’ (‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death’) the music becomes mysterious and tense, the triplets now pulsating in the bass, a tessitura of the piano which the piece so far has pointedly failed to exploit; in this we hear a ghostly premonition of the song *Schwestergruss* where Franz von Bruchmann’s sister supposedly returned with a message from the grave. These central sections provide the only passing moments of doubt and drama, and the music soon returns to the higher regions, in terms of both the tessitura and the spirit. The piece as a whole seems to be the music of angels, materializing out of thin air and returning to ether—but not before an extremely apt setting of the final words ‘in des Ew’gen Haus’ (literally, ‘the eternal home’) where the idea of immortality occasions a broadening of the word-setting and a lengthening of note-values. The first soprano holds a high E flat for six beats as the second climbs a chromatic scale as if aspiring to eternal heavenly light. The piano’s arpeggios become more ecstatic for a moment, but it is not long before the gently plucked harps of Seraphim re-establish themselves. It is as if they have been resounding for all eternity, and we have been permitted to tune in to them for only the allotted time of five minutes and twenty-three seconds.

Schubert turned to the translations of Moses Mendelssohn (published in 1783) for the texts of Psalms 13 and 23. When the unaccompanied Psalm 92 (originally in Hebrew) was first published with a German text in 1870, the Mendelssohn text was also used. It is difficult for English-speaking music-lovers to appreciate that, because of his place in the history of philosophy and the development of German thought, Moses Mendelssohn is considered even more important a historical figure than his grandson Felix, the composer. Abraham, Moses’ businessman son, remarked that he was either his father’s son, or his son’s father. He decided to baptize his children (thus the suffix Bartholdy to the family name, still used in Germany but never considered necessary in England). As an adult, Felix Mendelssohn, proud of his grandfather’s achievements, bitterly regretted his father’s decision. Moses Mendelssohn had worked within the bounds of his ancestral faith to effect changes in Jewish life. He argued that the deism of the Enlightenment, which he had developed into a universal religion of reason, was identical with Judaism. Without in any way renouncing his faith he believed in a cultural and political union for Christians and Jews, separation of church and state, and civil equality for his people. For this he was reviled by both anti-Semites and conservative Jews. If Schubert identified with Goethe’s pantheism, he owed a great deal to Mendelssohn, as did Goethe via the great Jewish philosopher Spinoza.

Like the poet Wilhelm Müller, Mendelssohn was born in Dessau. His progress from a poor background to a position in the forefront of German intellectual life was the result of an astonishing auto-didactic capacity for hard work. His home language was Yiddish, and his first school was one of Talmudic and Hebrew studies. From these beginnings he mastered not only German, but also French, Latin and Greek. In his youth he was a teacher, and then a bookkeeper to a silk
manufacturer’s business, and in the midst of his tasks as thinker and writer he developed this business into an extremely prosperous one—something from which his children and grandchildren benefited. Mendelssohn, noted for his moral authority and goodness as much as for his intelligence, became extremely famous on a number of levels—as a critic, aesthetician, philosopher, translator (from ten languages) and as the ‘German Socrates’. He was well-known as Gottfried Lessing’s model for the eponymous hero of the play *Nathan der Weise*. In the same year as the Psalm translations were published appeared *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*—perhaps Mendelssohn’s most important book on the Jewish question. Since the end of the Second World War there has been a renewed German interest in Mendelssohn studies which had been harshly suppressed during the Nazi era.

**DER 92. PSALM**

D953. July 1828; first published in 1841 as No 6 of *Schir Zion, gottesdienstliche Gesänge der Israeliten von S. Sulzer* later published by J P Gotthard (with German text by Moses Mendelssohn) in Vienna in 1870

Tov lehôdôs ladonoi
Ulzameir leshimcho elyôn.
lehaqid babôker chasdecho
Ve-emunoscho baleîlôs.
tau osôr va-alei novel
alei higôyn bechinôr.
ki simachtani adônoi befo-olecho
Bema-sei yodecho aranein.
ma godlu ma-asecho adônoi
Meôd omku machshvôsecho.
isch ba-ar lô yeido
Uchsil lô yovin es zôs.
bîfrôach rshoim kmô eisev
Vayotzitzu kol pôalei oven
Ihishomdom adei ad.
veato morôm leômom adônoi.

**PSALM 92**

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High; to declare thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness in the night seasons, with an instrument of ten strings, and with the psalltery; with a solemn sound upon the harp. For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work; I will exult in the works of thy bands. How great are thy works, O Lord! Thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring up as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they may be destroyed for ever. But thou, O Lord, art on high for evermore.

This is one of the most unusual pieces in the whole Schubert repertoire. How many people even know that Schubert wrote a Psalm setting in Hebrew? This came about because of the composer’s acquaintance with Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890), a gifted young Jewish baritone whose extraordinary talents brought him to Vienna in 1826. Sulzer was born in Hohenems in Vorarlberg where he was appointed cantor at the age of thirteen. (This is the only historical link with Schubert that can be traced back to this tiny town, renowned today as the cradle of a yearly Schubert festival which has since expanded to nearby Feldkirch.) As a young man Sulzer was a music student in Karlsruhe and travelled widely to perfect his calling as a cantor; he also worked on conducting and composition. When he was only twenty-two he was invited to take up the post of chazzan or cantor in the newly-built Viennese synagogue in the Seitenstettengasse. After his arrival in the capital he studied further with Ignaz von Seyfried, Kapellmeister at the Theater an der Wien and a distinguished composer of religious music. It was probably through Seyfried that Sulzer was introduced to Schubert.

The 1820s, although a very repressive period politically for most Austrians, marked increasing religious toleration for the Jewish community, at least in legal terms. The Heskalalah, the process of Jewish Enlightenment in Vienna, gathered
momentum as the walls of the ghetto crumbled away. In 1821 the Emperor had ennobled nine Jews, and he agreed that a new synagogue might be erected, the first officially recognized building of its kind since 1671. A new rabbi for this large house of worship was selected by hearing trial sermons; the choice fell on a remarkable man from Copenhagen, Rabbi Issaak Noah Mannheimer, a radical reformer who preferred to preach in German rather than Hebrew. It was Mannheimer’s wish to modernize the life of the religious community, and this included the important musical side of the services. He invited Beethoven, no less, to compose something for the consecration of the house, but the ailing composer could not be persuaded. In the end it was Josef Drechsler, Kapellmeister at St Stephen’s, who provided a cantata for the opening of the temple on 9 April 1826. As Elaine Brody points out in Schubert Studies, Mannheimer and Sulzer, the precocious young cantor who was the new rabbi’s adventurous but canny choice, proved a fine team. Sulzer was less in favour of sweeping changes than Mannheimer; he preferred to modify only certain aspects of the service, while keeping to tradition in other respects. Thus a compromise was reached which balanced the wishes of the reformers with those of the conservatives: Sulzer insisted that the Eastern style of cantillation should be conserved, and that the music should continue to be unaccompanied (it was only much later that an organ was installed). For High Holidays the traditional melodies of the church continued to be used, but Sulzer felt that music by non-Jewish composers might be heard at the Friday night and Saturday services (thus Schubert’s setting of this Psalm for the Sabbath).

As Sulzer had been charged with the reorganization of the musical side of the service in the new synagogue, he set about commissioning pieces of music from well-known composers which could be used for liturgical purposes. The first volume of his anthology Schir Zion (‘The Harp of Zion’, 1839) consists of 159 musical items of religious music; 122 of these are by Sulzer himself, but the collection also includes works by Josef Drechsler, Josef Fischer and Michael Umlauf, as well as this Schubert Psalm. It is self-evident that Vienna’s leading Jewish composers should have taken an interest in such a project, but it remains unclear what led Schubert to compose this Psalm in July 1828. He was always short of money and it is possible that the arrangement was purely financial. But the composer is also said to have admired the beauty of Sulzer’s voice and his artistry. There is an apocryphal story that Schubert insisted on hearing the young singer perform Der Wanderer three times in succession, and was astounded by Sulzer’s rendition of Die Allmacht. Liszt certainly admired Sulzer at a later date and, perhaps as a result, arranged Die Allmacht for tenor solo and large male chorus. Someone at the end of the nineteenth century saw fit to provide written evidence that Schubert had been the cantor’s fervent admirer. There is a letter to Sulzer, purportedly from the composer, which lauds the cantor extravagantly—and rather uncharacteristically (Schubert was rather sparing in his praise of younger artists). Otto Erich Deutsch pronounced the letter a forgery, and it was thus not included in the Documentary Biography.

But one thing is clear: Schubert could have chosen to deliver this Psalm to Sulzer in German, but chose instead to set it in Hebrew. As an unaccompanied work, this Psalm shows the composer at the end of his life to have been open-minded and interested in religious viewpoints other than those from his own cultural background. Walcher’s teasing phrase about not believing in one God comes to mind, perhaps meaning the limited vision of a purely Roman Catholic God. Schubert seems to have gone out of his way to honour Jewish traditions and language with his serious attention to detail; he went to some trouble to provide Sulzer with a piece that was as authentic as he could make it. Some years earlier the composer had been tempted into a project with the poet Craigher which aimed to widen the appeal of his songs by publishing them in other languages. Schubert obviously had an ecumenical streak which delighted in working with other religions and cultures.

The technical difficulties of setting Hebrew to Western music are not to be underestimated. These arise because there is no metrical system as such with a constant number of feet—Hebrew poetry is in fact poetical prose. Traditional Jewish
melodies with their freely flowing characteristics also resist being confined in the straitjackets of exact Western notation. The composer omitted the first verse of the Psalm and set the next eight (2 to 9) for a group of soloists and chorus in alternation. A baritone solo for Sulzer was included at the heart of the piece. There is nothing like this in Schubert’s other choral music, and it is obviously based on the tradition of the meshorim, where the cantor sang his melodies with a boy soprano and a bass on either side of him who accompanied his melodies. It is clear that the composer consulted Sulzer on matters of Hebrew accentuation and meaning. Despite the fact that Schubert made no attempt to use any traditional melodic material for the setting (this was Sulzer’s compositional speciality), the music is tinged with a trace of what might be termed ‘Middle-Eastern exoticism’. It is also the consensus that Schubert did rather well in his handling of Hebrew: for example, correct accentuations of the syllables ‘noi’ and ‘yôn’; the florid word-painting at ‘babôker’ (‘in the morning’) and the downward cadence on ‘baleîlôs’ (‘at night’). As Elaine Brody points out, ‘at ‘lhishomdom’ Schubert brings the music to a climax; the setting’s highest pitch and forte dynamics combine to stress the meaning of the words here: ‘It is that they shall be destroyed for ever’.

The ninth verse contains only a single line—a four-word Hebrew sentence which is repeated six times. The piece concludes with a simple (and appropriate) repetition of the word ‘leôlom’ (‘for evermore’). It is likely that Schubert deliberately stopped at this verse to enable Sulzer to chant the remainder of the Psalm in recitative. According to Brody, the fact that Schubert stopped on this word rather than on the written ‘adônoi’ (‘Lord’) has counted against later performances in synagogues. The manuscript, extant in the 1870s, has since been lost. But the Psalm, and the way he set an unfamiliar language, provides a fascinating glimpse of the composer’s intellectual curiosity as he looks beyond the borders of his own background and experience. If it is tempting to think of ‘Schwammerl’ as a sedentary soul, this work proposes another Schubert—one who would have made an enthusiastic and fascinated traveller had he been given a chance to explore the wide world beyond Austria’s borders. More than this, even in his own lifetime there were signs of something that we now take for granted: Schubert’s musical genius enabled him to be a mediator and link between different cultures and faiths.

Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872)

MIRJAMS SIEGESGESANG
D942. March 1828; first published by A Diabelli & Co in Vienna in 1839 as Op posth 136

Rührt die Zimbel, schlagt die Saiten,  
Lasst den Hall es tragen weit;  
Gross der Herr zu allen Zeiten,  
Heute gross vor aller Zeit.  
Aus Ägypten vor dem Volke,  
Wie der Hirt den Stab zur Hut,  
Zogst du her, dein Stab die Wolke  
Und dein Arm des Feuers Gluth.  
Zieh, ein Hirt vor deinem Volke,  
Stark dein Arm, dein Auge Gluth.

MIRIAM’S SONG OF VICTORY

Strike the cymbals, sound the strings,  
let them echo far and wide:  
great is the Lord always,  
and greater today than ever.  
Like the shepherd with his protecting staff,  
you led your people out of Egypt;  
your staff was the clouds,  
your arm the fire’s beat.  
Go forth, a shepherd leading your people,  
with your mighty arm and your eyes blazing!
Und das Meer hört deine Stimme,
Tut sich auf dem Zug, wird Land;
Scheu des Meeres Ungethüme,
Schaun's durch die kristallne Wand.
Wir vertrauten deiner Stimme,
Traten froh das neue Land.

Doch der Horizont erdunkelt,
Ross und Reiter löst sich los,
Hörner lärmen, Eisen funkelt,
Es ist Pharao und sein Tross. 
Herr, von der Gefahr umdunkelt,
Hilflos wir, dort Mann und Ross.

Und die Feinde, mordentglommen,
Drängen nach den sichern Pfad;
Jetzt und jetzt – da horch’! welch Säuseln,
Wehen, Murmeln, Dröhnen — Sturm.
‘S ist der Herr in seinem Grimme,
Einstürzt rings der Wasser-Thurm.

Mann und Pferd,
Ross und Reiter
Eingewickelt, umspunnen
Im Netze der Gefahr,
Zerbrochen die Speichen ihrer Wagen;
Tod der Lenker, tod das Gespann.

Tauchst du auf, Pharao?
Hinab, hinunter,
Hinunter in den Abgrund,
Schwarz wie deine Brust.

Und das Meer hat nun vollzogen,
Lautlos rollen seine Wogen,
Nimmer gibt es, was es barg,
Eine Wüste, Grab zugleich und Sarg.

Schrecklich hat der Herr vollzogen,
Lautlos ziehn des Meeres Wogen;
Wer erräth noch, was es barg?
Frevler-Grab zugleich und Sarg.

Drum mit Zimbel und mit Saiten
Lasst den Hall es tragen weit,
Gross der Herr zu allen Zeiten,
Heute gross vor aller Zeit.

The sea bears your voice,
opens up before the multitude, and becomes land.
Fearful of the monstrous sea,
we behold it through the crystal wall.
We trust your voice
and with joy enter the new land.

But the horizon darkens,
borse and rider break away;
borns peal, swords flash:
it is Pharaoh and his baggage train.
Lord, surrounded by darkness and danger
we are helpless. Yonder are men and horses.

And our enemies, flushed with murder,
thro to the passage.
But bark now! What surging and whistling,
what plashing and groaning: a tempest!
It is the Lord in his wrath.
The towered waters collapse.

Man and horse,
steed and rider
are enveloped and ensnared
in the perilous net;
the spokes of their chariots are shattered,
driver and horses are dead.

Are you coming up, Pharaob?
Go down, down,
down into the abyss
as black as your heart.

The sea has now done its work,
it's waves roll silently;
at once a wilderness, grave and coffin,
it will never yield what it has hidden.

The Lord has done his terrible work,
the sea's waves flow silently;
who could guess what they bide —
that grave and coffin of the impious?

Then let the cymbals and the strings
echo far and wide.
Great is the Lord always,
and greater today than ever.
It is curious that we know more about Schubert’s setting of Psalm 92 than we do about the background to this much larger, and equally unusual, work composed in the same period. It shows a similar sensitivity to Jewish history and tradition; a few months later Schubert was to set six poems of Heinrich Heine who was known, nay notorious in more conservative Austrian circles, for being both Jewish and anti-establishment. Schubert’s sympathy with the poet and his background seems clearly evident in those Schwanengesang songs; as well as this, the other Jewish-inspired works of 1828 raise the possibility that Sulzer’s friendship had brought about in Schubert a new engagement with the Jewish cause. After the composer’s death, Anna Fröhlich claimed that Schubert had written this cantata for her sister Josefine. The poet Grillparzer’s connection with the Fröhlich family was well-known: he was in love with another Fröhlich sister, Katharina, and no doubt he could have been prevailed upon to write a poem, a Gelegensbeitgedicht, for Schubert, especially if the musical result involved one of Katharina’s sisters. Less believable, however, is the practical side of the casting. Josefine Fröhlich was a mezzo soprano for whom Schubert had written the solo part in another Grillparzer setting, the gentle and beguiling Ständchen. The tessitura of that work seems carefully crafted to the range of an amateur contralto; nowhere does the composer tax the voice with unreasonably operatic demands. The role of Miriam is quite another matter: it is larger than life in every way. With the exception of some of the operatic music, it is perhaps the most demanding of all Schubert’s soprano roles. It requires considerable stamina and an opulent voice able to ride triumphantly over a large chorus. A resounding high C places it outside the range of the usual lieder-singing soprano. If the solo part of Ständchen was conceived accurately for Josefine Fröhlich, there is no way she could also have sung Miriam. Only one other singer known to Schubert would have been able to do so—someone with whom he was in contact at the end of his life, the great soprano Anna Milder Hauptmann for whom he wrote the Suleika songs and Der Hirt auf dem Felsen with clarinet obbligato. Perhaps Schubert hoped that Milder would jump at the opportunity of playing a great prophetess. If so, it seems that the diva was not interested, perhaps for reasons of religious identification. The work received its first performance in a private concert organized by Anna Fröhlich in Schubert’s memory at the Musikverein (30 January 1829, a few months after the composer’s death). Anna accompanied this cantata, but it is interesting that Josefine Fröhlich did not sing Miriam on that occasion. Indeed, the concert organizers must have been at a complete loss to find a suitable woman singer. The role was given to a tenor, the resilient Ludwig Tietze, admired for his ability in the vocal heights. The music was so obviously conceived for the brilliance of a female voice, however, that this must have been one of the more demanding evenings of Tietze’s career.

Leopold Sonnleithner, a great patron of the time, particularly of religious music, remarked that Schubert intended this work for a large orchestra. If this were so, the rescoring would have been no easy task. There are arguably some unpianistic passages (notably in the concluding fugue), but this is an intricately-written accompaniment with numerous pianistic effects, not merely a short-score standing in for an orchestra. Franz Lachner provided an orchestration as early as 1830, but this has not stood the test of time. Like so much else in this composer’s vocal music, the clash of Miriam’s timbrels sounds better at the keyboard. In a curious way, this hybrid work, somewhere between oratorio excerpt and choral ballad, joins hands with the early songs: we return to the Old Testament world of Hagars Klage composed some seventeen years earlier, and we hear many an echo of the piano-generated drama of such ballads as Der Taucher and Die Bürgschaft. Mirjams Siegesgesang is a biblical epic worthy of Cecil B de Mille: the raising of the waters of the Red Sea, the chase of Pharaoh’s hordes at full gallop, and his destruction, were all featured in that director’s The Ten Commandments. Not for the first time we notice that this type of narrative cinema, with its exaggerated yet effective pathos, seems related to the mood of the early Schubert ballads and, strangely enough, also to this work from the end of the composer’s life.
Two other great composers hover in background of this work’s genesis—Ludwig van Beethoven and George Frideric Handel. As we have seen, it is likely that Schubert inherited the synagogue commission from Sulzer because Beethoven was out of the running; from the same composer’s deathbed Schubert inherited the Rellstab poems, later published as part of *Schwanengesang*. By 1828 he seems to have become closer friends with Anton Schindler, Beethoven’s former factotum, and there are signs that Schindler was even preparing to take up the younger composer as his new ‘cause’. (Whether Schubert would have played along with this, had he lived, we shall never know.) Schindler had taken possession of Beethoven’s music library, and this contained at least one treasure not to be found easily elsewhere: the Samuel Arnold edition (1787-1790) of the collected works of Handel which had been sent as a gift from England. It seems certain that Schubert perused these volumes, via Schindler, after Beethoven’s death, with as much interest as the older composer. One of the effects of this was to make Schubert want to return to his studies; he resolved to begin counterpoint lessons with Simon Sechter. It is likely that *Mirjams Siegesgesang* is early fruit of Schubert’s new enthusiasm for the Handelian oratorio tradition. Beethoven had remarked that all composers bend the knee before Handel. Miriam and the tribes of Israel, unbending to mighty Pharaoh, are made to curtsey in like manner.

Grillparzer’s poem is based on the episode of the Israelites’ flight from Egypt. Mention of her song of victory occurs in Exodus 15:20/21: ‘And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.’ Thus, as Miriam praises God, she recounts a part of the story of Pharaoh’s destruction. Taking his cue from this, Grillparzer frames the celebratory aspect of the outer verses with a long central section, essential for Schubert’s purposes, which tells the story of the flight from Egypt, and the pursuit of Pharaoh, in the historic present. As if the poet had also studied Handel’s works, the words preserve just that sort of narrative distance that distinguishes oratorio texts from either operatic libretto, or song lyric. Mention of ‘we’ in the poem suggests that Grillparzer was fully aware that portions of the poem were to be set for chorus. ‘All the women’ following Miriam are mentioned in the Bible, of course, but Schubert chooses to back the prophetess with a chorus of mixed voices.

1 (Allegro giusto) The very opening of the work proclaims its Handelian ancestry. Dotted rhythms set the work off to a grand start. This is music for a state celebration, the brilliance of C major being the time-honoured tonality for such jubilation. After the introductory fanfare of six bars the soprano begins her trumpet-like melody. Perhaps this loud and jangling introduction corresponds to the mention of the cymbal; a few bars later, the succession of sixths in the pianist’s right hand is also rather metallic, but these chords probably refer to ‘die Saiten’—the strings. The dotted rhythms of the left hand also suggest percussion of some kind. After the sibyl’s ‘Gross der Herr zu allen Zeiten, Heute gross vor aller Zeit’ we suddenly hear the exciting entry of the massed chorus echoing the last phrase of the soloist in a manner as familiar in Gilbert and Sullivan as in Handel or Bach. A piano interlude in the old style, pomposo and with a touch of canon, introduces the chorus’s repeat of the words ‘Rührt die Zimbel’; here Schubert has enormous fun with imitation between the voice parts. This interweaving of snaking quavers, accompanied by rhythmically insistent crotchets in the piano, generates real energy—an intoxicating barefoot stomp such as might have been danced in biblical times. (Crowd scenes in Cecil B de Mille again come to mind.) The rest of the section repeats and develops these ideas with the same old-fashioned, and symmetrical, interaction between soloist and chorus.

2-3 (Allegretto) Inspired, no doubt, by the image of a protecting shepherd, Schubert constructs the next section in a pastoral $\frac{4}{6}$ in the comforting key of F major. All is classical symmetry muscular and strident; here, as elsewhere, the rhetorical exchanges between solo voice and chorus are in a style that suggests music from another century. The first
mention of the sea at the beginning of verse 3 (‘Und das Meer hört deine Stimme’) retains the 6/8 rhythm but introduces a note of turbulence into the music as God parts the waters. Some of the best and most original music in the piece (from ‘Scheu des Meeres Ungethüme’) now follows. The whispered fear and amazement of the chorus is accompanied by an edifice of suspensions in slowly moving dotted crotchets in the piano. The effect of this is to suggest water (the chorus’s moving semiquavers) held in check by the shimmering of a miraculous wall, damming the sea’s force. Low tremolos in the key of G flat major underpin a slow and ominous pianistic underswell; this is a perfect musical analogue for the miracle— the surging power of the sea held and parted, against all laws of gravity and nature, by a higher power. Schubert conveys both the fear and danger, as well as the impermanence of this altered state where water glistens and moves even as it is held in a stationary position. The music of the Good Shepherd returns, and the crossover into the promised land occasions a triumphant high C from Miriam at the final ‘das neue Land’.

4-6 (Allegro agitato) This section in C minor describes, with an admirable sense of excitement, Pharaoh giving chase. Scuttling semiquavers convey mounting panic and the raising of dust by a vast phalanx of Egyptian troops. The piano’s left hand sounds a military bugle motif in dotted rhythm. The choral echoes of Miriam’s increasingly breathless descriptions become shorter and more frequent, and this too adds to the tension. At ‘Hörner lärmen’ the piano writing moves into the bouncing triplets of a cavalry charge. These alternate with semiquavers in writing which paints the swift movement of a large army over constantly changing terrain. This recalls part of the long Schober ballad Viola when the abandoned flower, like the Jewish race also in danger of extinction, flees the forces of winter, propelled forward by semiquavers, and stumbling over many changing harmonies. A turning point is reached at the repetitive setting of ‘Jetzt und jetzt’, a rhetorical device that reminds one of a cliff-hanging end to a soap-opera episode. A succession of hammered C flats changes enharmonically to ominous triplets in B minor for ‘da horch!’ and further single-word exchanges (‘Wehen’, ‘Murmeln’, ‘Dröhnen’) between soloist and chorus; here one thinks of Bach’s St Matthew Passion as much as of Handel, but Schubert could not have known the work. This is a bridge passage to a new section, and the return to C minor is cleverly managed with the most protracted and exciting build-up. The word ‘Sturm’ announces the pummelling waves of the watery retribution visited upon the forces of Pharaoh. This new section is marked Allegro moderato. It is in this music of destruction that the power of the piano seems insufficient to convey the full force of the cataclysmic turn of events, particularly when the weaker middle register of the instrument is pitted against the chorus at full throttle. Schubert had abandoned the ballad Johanna Sebus (also about disaster caused by water) because he had come to an impasse: the piano is capable of only so much violent sound, and there comes a point when only an orchestra in full flood can be sufficiently loud.

7-9 (Andantino) The spirit of Handel returns to point the moral of the story in music of the greatest self-righteousness and pomp. ‘You have got what was coming to you’ is the gist of Miriam’s tirade in an E minor panoply of dotted rhythms and old-fashioned devices like canon entries and trills. The image of the enemy being sent down into the abyss (‘Hinab, hinunter, Hinunter in den Abgrund’) prompts the doubling of voice and piano and a descent into the chest regions of the voice. The music is so physical here that one can almost see the prophetess striking a pose in the grand manner, her finger pointing imperiously down towards the watery grave. Some of the most gracious and original music is reserved for ‘Und das Meer hat nun vollzogen’. These gently rolling phrases suggest the quiet, rather than violent, movement of water (the poet gave Schubert the cue for the mood here with the word ‘Lautlos’—‘soundless’). Here the sea is dead rather than red, its depths containing not only the bodies of the Egyptian army, but also the many imponderable mysteries of the Lord. After having delivered this extended solo, Miriam hands over to her implacable chorus. The imperious music and
mockingly sarcastic words asking Pharaoh whether he will emerge like a surfacing diver from the depths (‘Tauchst du auf, Pharao?’) are repeated from the beginning of verse 7; but instead of echoing Miriam’s words in verse 8, the chorus moves to the slightly different verse 9. Here a chorus proves even better able to depict the sinuous flow of water which gently obliterates all the evidence of this great event: smoothly gliding counterpoint between the voices paints wave after wave of nescience. It is as if the Egyptians had never been. These doleful undulations, as well as the repetitions of ‘Nimmer gibt es’ at the end of the strophe, illustrate the eerie end of a once-powerful enemy. One is tempted to feel rather sorry for Pharaoh who has become, perforce, a deep-sea diver, obviously no match for a high C diva.

10 The story of the Egyptian rout has been told and now it is time to return to the celebration. There is a stirring return to the music of the opening, beginning with the piano’s opening C major fanfare. (This represents a real clearing of the air after the long episode in E minor.) Miriam sings ‘Drum mit Zimbel und mit Saiten’—that crucial ‘Drum’ (‘for that reason’ or ‘therefore’) summing up the events recounted in the last ten minutes in a single word. This time we do not have to wait so long to hear the chorus mirror Miriam’s phrases—they enter almost immediately. A lesser composer would have been satisfied with a simple repeat of the opening music, but for Schubert the fun is just beginning; indeed we now encounter one of his principal reasons for writing this work in the first place: he wishes to practise his fugal writing! Taking the final two lines of the last strophe, he develops as mighty a contrapuntal structure as is to be found in any of his vocal works with piano. The basses state the four-bar subject (‘Gross der Herr zu allen Zeiten, Heute gross vor aller Zeit’); the tenors enter a fourth above with the fugal answer, slightly altered as is permitted and required; then the altos and sopranos repeat the process in turn. The working out of the fugue arguably has a whiff of the schoolroom exercise about it, but it is extremely effective; particularly stirring is the mighty stretto on a pedal G before the work abandons contrapuntal garb and ends in an outburst of punched-out chordal harmony and unanimous joy. The unfolding and intermingling of all four voices (Miriam herself is silent; she leaves this peroration to the masses) is mightily impressive, even if a little stiff and unwieldy in comparison with the real masters of fugal writing. Indeed, one is reminded here of the sinewy and wilful writing of the late Beethoven: the uncompromising fugue that ends the D major Cello Sonata, Op 102 No 2, was published as early as 1817 (it is likely that Schubert knew it) and it feels similarly awkward under the pianist’s fingers. The Missa Solemnis was also finally published in 1827 and Schindler would no doubt have let Schubert borrow a copy. Inspired now by the same Handelian source as the older composer, only in 1828 does Schubert seem to have welcomed the idea of immersing himself in counterpoint. Like Beethoven before him, this is an interest that belongs to his final period (not that he could have known that his allotted span was nearly over). Before he died, Schubert had one composition lesson with the great pedagogue Simon Sechter with the aim of improving his technical command of counterpoint.

Miriam’s Siegesgesang is one of a series of works that give us a fascinating hint of what directions Schubert might have taken had he lived. The other ‘signpost’ works are the starkly modern Heine settings from Schwanengesang (unlike any other of the Schubert songs), the unfinished opera Der Graf von Gleichen, and of course the bold romantic inventiveness of the sublime late piano sonatas as well as of the String Quintet. It is as if we are standing on the threshold of something new and staring into an infinite horizon where the waters of the Red Sea have quietly removed all trace of former life and activity. The possibilities for the future are endless, but there is not enough detail visible to enable us to continue the journey without our dear Schubert himself being at our side.
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