

## PROGRAM NOTES

### FRANZ SCHUBERT

*(Born January 31, 1797, Vienna; died November 19, 1828, Vienna)*

#### **Piano Trios in B-flat Major, Op. 99, D898 & E-flat Major, Op. 100, D929**

According to what evidence we have in lieu of Schubert's manuscript, the B-flat Trio was composed within weeks prior to the Opus 100 Trio in E-flat Major, whose autograph is dated November 1827. Like many of Schubert's works, the B-flat Trio was not published until after the composer's death. It appeared in print only in 1836 as the composer's Opus 99. The Trio in E-flat Major—which Schubert seems to have more actively peddled—was published in 1828 by Probst, in Leipzig.

In January 1828, Schubert wrote in a letter to a friend about the recent performance of a “new trio,” given on December 26 under the auspices of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of Friends of Music). While said trio is widely assumed to have been the E-flat Trio, the presentation of this same work as a “new” (which typically meant “never before heard”) trio on a concert program three months later (more on which in a moment) leaves open the possibility that the work premiered in December may in fact have been the B-flat.

Otherwise, the earlier trio in B-flat would have received only a private performance during Schubert's lifetime, on January 28, 1828, courtesy of three of Vienna's top chamber musicians: pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet, violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh (who, as the leader of nineteenth-century Vienna's finest string quartet, first gave voice to Beethoven's middle and late quartets), and cellist Josef Linke (Schuppanzigh's quartet colleague, and the first interpreter of Beethoven's Opp. 69 and 102 Cello Sonatas). The same three musicians had given the performance of December 26, whether this was of the first or second piano trio.

Schubert's particular pride in the E-flat is evidenced by his inclusion of it as the centerpiece on a program of his own music on March 26, 1828, commemorating the first anniversary of Beethoven's death. The shadow of Beethoven is significant, not only for Beethoven's profound influence on Schubert on the whole, but also for his own granite essays in the piano trio genre. Indeed, there may be no higher compliment than Robert Schumann's regard for Schubert's Opus 100 as equal to Beethoven's formidable “Ghost” and “Archduke” Trios.

Despite his great physical suffering and psychological anguish at the end of his life, Schubert did not go quietly. His final year was staggeringly productive. Between mid-1827 and November 1828, Schubert completed, in addition to the two piano trios, the Fantasies in C Major, for violin

and piano, and in F Minor, for four-hand piano; the “Great” Symphony; the Cello Quintet; more than two dozen songs, including the presciently titled Schwanengesang (Swan Song); and the last three Piano Sonatas, in addition to numerous other piano, vocal, and orchestral works—all told, an imposing set of masterpieces, miraculously concentrated within a deeply trying twelve months or so, unequaled by many composers over entire lifetimes. Schumann's reflection on the E-flat Trio poetically captures the meteoric luminosity of the end of Schubert's life: “Some years ago, a Trio by Schubert passed across the ordinary musical life of the day like some angry manifestation in the heavens. It was his hundredth opus, and shortly afterward, in November 1828, he died.”

*Notes: Patrick Castillo © 2008*