

# Annual Review of Schubert's Life

## 1824

Schubert announced his entry into the year 1824 by throwing stones at a window in order to attract the attention of the New Year party revellers that he wished to join, successfully as it turned out as he shattered the glass. His health seemed to be improving and he was clearly in good spirits. By the end of the month however he became unwell having drunk all too well at a party at the Hungarian Crown inn given in part to celebrate his birthday, and was compelled to adhere to a strict regimen both by undertaking a fortnight's fast and by being confined to the lodgings that he had with 'Tall Huber'.

Early in the year he was to receive unwelcome news, for the high hopes he had held for the publication of his rather gritty *Piano Sonata in A minor* of February 1823 (D784) were dashed with the rejection of the sonata by Diabelli.

He then began to suffer considerable distress brought about by the onset of a particularly virulent phase of his disease, and in defiance of this he began a period of almost ceaseless work at new compositions. As a result the month of February was to see the composition of a major work, his *Octet* (D803), and the month of March two of the greatest works of the chamber repertoire, the *String Quartet in A minor* (D804), occasionally referred to as the 'Rosamunde'; and the *String Quartet in D minor*, 'Death and the Maiden' (D810).

On March 31<sup>st</sup> Schubert wrote in a letter to Kupelwieser of his present misery: "... I feel myself the most unhappy and wretched man in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again..."; and yet remarkably, in that same letter, he could express hopes for the future, writing that whilst he had completed but few songs (there are just five settings - one being for a quartet of male voices - of four Mayrhofer poems, D805-809), he was looking forward to attempting further major works. Having "... tried my hand at two string Quartets and an Octet, he continues "... and I want to write another Quartet; in fact that is how I want to work my way towards composing a grand symphony". This, with some of the notes he made at the time, suggest that he needed to construct a personal philosophy around his suffering to accept it as being necessary for his creative spirit.

Suffering from laryngitis that prevented him from singing Schubert now also developed pains in his bones that prevented his playing of the piano (symptoms typical of secondary syphilis), and this additional frustration was to plague him well into April. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May Schubert was present at Beethoven's concert to hear the first performance of the *Choral Symphony* and parts of the *Missa Solemnis*. Happily, by the end of May he was again feeling rather restored in health and set off for another visit to the Esterházy family in Zseliz, this time as a guest of the family. We know from his letters that he composed there the 'Grand Duo' (*Sonata in C* D812) and the *Eight Variations in A flat* (D813), both of them major works for piano duet, and in addition the *Six Grandes Marches et Trios* (D819), also for piano four-hands, which he dedicated to the doctor who had been treating him for his ailment (Dr J. Bemhardt).

Baron Schönstein was a visitor to Zseliz on the occasion of Schubert's visit and describes how Schubert decided to write something that they could all sing together, the result being the vocal quartet for SATB 'Gebet' (September 1824,

D815), in which the Baron would sing tenor, the Count would sing bass, and the Count's daughters, the Countesses Marie and Caroline, would take the two top parts (joined by their mother also singing the contralto line with Caroline), with Schubert playing the piano accompaniment. Together they would also on these occasions sing excerpts from Haydn, Mozart and other composers.

These more carefree times were nonetheless to become affected by the composer's growing unhappiness at his variable physical condition and by a deepening depression that was beginning to overcome him again. In a letter to Ferdinand in July he speaks of a "dire recognition of a miserable reality, which I endeavour to beautify as far as possible by my imagination (thank God)" and these sentiments are echoed, and generalised, in his poem *Klage an das Volk* (Plaint to the nation). Schubert now began to have delusions that he was being poisoned - it is possible that this was as a consequence of the side effects of the mercury ointments prescribed for syphilis - and had to leave Zseliz, being taken back to Vienna by Baron Schönstein in his private carriage, Schubert managing to smash the rear window on the way.

Instead of returning to his lodgings with Huber, Schubert went straight to his father's schoolhouse at Rossau, and stayed there with his family until early in the following year.

Now that he was back in Vienna he was heartened by the news of performances of some of his music in both Linz and Vienna, as well as by the publication of several of his works including the *String Quartet in A minor* (D804), and pieces for piano including two of his *Moments Musicaux* (D780). The *A minor Quartet* had already had its first performance at Schuppanzigh's subscription concerts at the *Musikverein* on 14<sup>th</sup> March soon after its completion. The good news signalled a period of remission and Schubert soon recovered his spirits.

### **Notable works of 1824:**

D802 E Minor *Introduction and Variations on Trockne Blumen* flute and piano  
1824 Jan

D803 F Major *Octet* clarinet, horn, bassoon, 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass  
1824 Feb-Mar

D804 A Minor String Quartet 13 ('*Rosamunde*') 1824 Feb-Mar

D810 D Minor String Quartet 14 '*Der Tod und das Mädchen*' 1824 Mar

D812 C Major Sonata '*Grand Duo*' piano 4 hands 1824 Jun

D813 A flat Major *8 variations on an original theme* piano 4 hands 1824 summer

D821 A Minor *Arpeggione Sonata* arpeggione, piano 1824 Nov.

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