

# 1 | Franz Schubert as a Pianist

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'Like Mozart in the 1780s, Beethoven is the shining meteor among Vienna's piano players in the 1790s.'<sup>1</sup> Thus Eduard Hanslick wrote in his still valuable history of the concert scene in Vienna, published in 1869. These two leading musicians of the Viennese Classical period were in the public limelight at least as much as pianists as for their compositions. The bulk of the repertoire they performed consisted of their own piano works, and their fame as virtuosos also enhanced their reputation as composers. In the second section of the same book, covering the period 1800–30 and promisingly subtitled 'Epoche: Beethoven – Schubert', Hanslick again discusses Beethoven the pianist as well as many other local piano players, including those of the younger generation, sometimes adding extensive biographies.<sup>2</sup> Franz Schubert is, however, not among them. He is treated only at the very end of this section as a composer unrecognised in his day, one who, at the time of publication (1869), still awaited a 'general and fair assessment'.<sup>3</sup> Schubert as a pianist was clearly beneath Hanslick's notice. This chapter aims to uncover the reasons why Schubert was unable to follow in the footsteps of his forebears Mozart and Beethoven, who made names for themselves not only as composers but also as pianists in Vienna's concert life. Did he have pianistic shortcomings or perhaps a lack of proficiency altogether? Or did he simply choose not to pursue this career path? What consequences did this have for his status as a creative young musician?

Before continuing, the fundamental problems of research into Schubert's life, which are particularly relevant to the issues at hand, need to be addressed. The source material that forms the basis of his biography is extremely incoherent and of varying reliability. The most trustworthy documents from Schubert's lifetime are concert programmes, reviews, publishers' announcements and personal records such as diary entries,

<sup>1</sup> E. Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1869), p. 127; there, it reads 'das [sic] glänzende Meteor'.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208–27.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283–5, especially p. 285.

family chronicles and letters between family members and friends.<sup>4</sup> Even though the latter sources are highly subjective, they record direct experiences. Schubert's life was too short, however, and his travels, which would have offered opportunities for writing letters, are too limited to provide sufficient material from which valid personality traits and biographical details might be derived.

For this reason, scholars are forced to draw on the many problematic sources that Otto Erich Deutsch collected and published in 1957 under the title *Erinnerungen seiner Freunde*, followed in 1958 by an English translation under the title *Memoirs by His Friends*.<sup>5</sup> Deutsch, who had previously published a volume of documents on Schubert's life and work, was very much aware that this was source material of a special kind and therefore commented on it extensively. The numerous documents in his collection mainly date from the second half of the nineteenth century and comprise obituaries, biographical and personal notes, anecdotes and memoirs, as well as correspondence and notes on Schubert's works. Each of these groups of sources has its own set of problems. While the obituaries were written at a time close to Schubert's life and deal particularly with his personality, they may only present the recently deceased in the best light, according to the adage 'De mortuis nil nisi bene'. There was a similarly dangerous tendency towards glorification with regard to his afterlife as a composer.

A different problem arises with the biographical material collected in the late 1850s by Ferdinand Luib (1811–77), mainly for an unrealised Schubert biography.<sup>6</sup> Luib, a civil servant who also served as a music journalist and editor of the *Wiener Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*, sent questionnaires to Schubert's by then elderly friends and acquaintances, asking them to remember events from their youth, events then more than thirty years old. These reports, some of them extensive, are suspected of being clouded by a simplifying memory. In addition, over the years their memories may have developed lives of their own through multiple retelling and transformed into 'stories' or anecdotes. Finally, it should also be considered that particularly committed friends deliberately (or unconsciously) wanted to

<sup>4</sup> *Documentary Biography*. For the printed documents, see also T. G. Waidelich (ed.), *Franz Schubert: Dokumente, 1817–1830* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1993); E. Hilmar (ed.), *Franz Schubert: Dokumente, 1801–1830* (Tutzing: Schneider, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> *Memoirs*.

<sup>6</sup> A. Rausch, 'Luib, Ferdinand', *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon online*, [www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik\\_L/Luib\\_Ferdinand.xml](http://www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_L/Luib_Ferdinand.xml), accessed 9 December 2020.

use their answers to reinforce or even ‘correct’ the Schubert image common at the time.

In order to address these problems, a critical approach to the sources will be taken throughout the following discussion and the knowledge gained from them placed in its broader context – knowledge whose validity can only be perceived when the documents are considered en bloc. Despite these caveats, no biographer of Schubert can avoid using this material. Without the memoirs of Schubert’s friends, our image of the composer would be hazier and his biography much more meagre.

### Music Education: A Mozart Prodigy at the Piano?

Even though Luib himself never made use of the answers to his questionnaires, they largely formed the basis of the first detailed biography of Schubert in book form, published in 1865. Luib left his material to the music writer Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, who shaped the image of Schubert in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> As usual in biographies of that time, the author begins with the family background of his hero. It seems significant that the same paragraph that states Schubert’s birth and describes his closest family relations also mentions the piano. Kreissle proves the boy’s musical inclination with a story according to which a travelling carpenter often took little Franz to a piano workshop: ‘Franz went through his first exercises without any guidance on the instruments there and on the worn-out piano in his parents’ house, and when he later received music lessons as a seven-year-old boy, it soon turned out that he had already acquired what the teacher wanted to teach him.’<sup>8</sup> This report is said to come directly from Schubert’s sister Therese Schneider (1801–78), who, being his junior, was certainly unable to remember it personally and must have drawn on narrations that circulated within the family. What at first appears to be a rather dubious story – why would any travelling carpenter take the boy to a piano maker? – could be clarified and to some degree substantiated by Rita Steblin.<sup>9</sup> This travelling carpenter was a relative named Johann Gottfried Schubert, who is documented in Töplitz in 1807 and later went

<sup>7</sup> H. Kreissle von Hellborn, *Franz Schubert* (Vienna: Carl Gerold’s Sohn, 1865; reprint New York: Georg Olms, 1978). In fact, Kreissle (1822–69) published a sketchy initial biography of Schubert as early as 1861, written without any knowledge of Luib’s material.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> R. Steblin, ‘Unbekannte Dokumente über Schubert und die Klavierwerkstatt von Conrad Graf in Währing’, *Schubert durch die Brille*, 12 (1994), pp. 49–53.

to Vienna to work for some years in the piano shop of Conrad Graf.<sup>10</sup> For the construction of piano cases, carpenters were in demand. Steblin suspects that Johann Gottfried arrived in Vienna in 1808, but it could also have been a few years later. In any event, he is said to have left the city in 1819. At the earliest possible time that he and the young Schubert might have met, the boy was at least eleven years old and about to take his entrance examination for the Stadtkonvikt. Even though the timing in this story is hard to pin down, it suggests that there was a well-worn piano in his parents' house, on which the boy (like many other musically gifted children) tried his hand at an early age.

How much does this leave of the story, typical of the nineteenth century, that Schubert was a born genius? The narrative is supplemented by a literally quoted report from his eldest brother, Ignaz (1785–1844), which was first printed in 1858 in the Viennese daily newspaper *Der Wanderer* and is also mentioned by Kreissle. In a footnote, the unnamed author of the newspaper article notes that Franz Schubert's biography is consistently based on authentic correspondence. According to the report, Ignaz offered himself as a piano teacher to his brother, who was twelve years his junior, but Franz learnt so quickly that the lessons soon became superfluous:

I was very astonished when, after barely a few months [of pianoforte instructions], he announced to me that he no longer needed my further instruction and he now wanted to continue on his own. And, in fact, within a short time he progressed so far that I myself had to recognize in him a master, who far excelled me and whose standard I would reach nevermore.<sup>11</sup>

What is left unclear is whether these legendary initial experiences at the piano took place before the violin lessons with his father. Certainly, however, lessons with Michael Holzer, the *regens chori* in the Lichtental parish church, contributed to Franz Schubert's piano skills. Kreissle quotes, again without reference, from the same newspaper article mentioned above, this time from notes by the boy's father, who reports that his son not only took voice lessons and learned basso continuo from Holzer, but also 'played the piano and organ'. Here, too, there is a fierce cult of genius at work when the

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 5, as rendered in English in *Memoirs*, pp. 212–13, with comment; based on an unsigned newspaper article in the journal *Der Wanderer*, 7 October 1858, reprinted on 9 October 1858 in *Wiener Theaterzeitung (Bäuerles Theaterzeitung)*, pp. 928–9, on the occasion of the unveiling of the memorial plaque at Schubert's birthplace, arranged by the Wiener Männergesangverein (Vienna Male Choral Society).

father (or Kreissle) puts the following words into Holzer's mouth: 'If I wanted to teach him something new ... he already knew it. Consequently I gave him no real instruction but merely talked with him and regarded him in silent astonishment.'<sup>12</sup>

Kreissle concludes this section with words that recall Waldstein's famous entry in Beethoven's poetry album shortly before his departure for Vienna. While the young Beethoven was to receive Mozart's spirit (genius) from Haydn's hands through great application, Schubert was 'one of those gifted natures on whose forehead the genius of art pressed the kiss of consecration when he entered life'.<sup>13</sup> It is no coincidence that Mozart, who, like Schubert, showed great musical talent at a very early age and had already composed a piano concerto at the age of six, is mentioned immediately after this passage. The fact that the first preserved compositions by Schubert from 1810–11 are two fantasias and a sonata (D1, D1B, D1C), each for piano four hands, fits perfectly into the picture of a precociously gifted piano virtuoso.

The truth seems to be that when Schubert entered the Stadtkonvikt, he was probably not as advanced on the piano as he was on the violin. The following account by Josef von Spaun, almost ten years his senior and one of his closest friends from this early period, appears trustworthy, even it was written in retrospect some forty years later:

I once found him alone in the music-room sitting at the piano which, with his little hands, he already played quite nicely. He was just trying through a Mozart sonata, and said that he liked it very much but that he found Mozart very difficult to play well. At my request and aware of my sympathy he played me a minuet of his own invention. He was shy about it, and blushed, but my approval pleased him.<sup>14</sup>

This again recalls the young Mozart, who had also begun by composing minuets. Another close friend of Schubert from the Stadtkonvikt period, Anton Holzapfel, confirmed to Luib that it 'was only later that he made great strides in his piano playing' and all he learned from Salieri was how to play scores.<sup>15</sup> In these narratives from Schubert's youth, Mozart was in the air, either as a child prodigy or as a young pianist who utilised his instrument for his first compositions.

<sup>12</sup> Kreissle, *Schubert*, pp. 4–5, as rendered in English in *Memoirs*, pp. 212, with comment, but without the paragraph where Schubert's father mentions reports that Holzer also taught him piano and organ.

<sup>13</sup> Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> J. von Spaun, 'Notes on my association with Franz Schubert (1858)', in *Memoirs*, pp. 126–7.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Anton Holzapfel to Ferdinand Luib, 1 June 1858, in *Memoirs*, p. 58.

All of the above-mentioned reports and descriptions are, of course, projections of posterity on Schubert's early talent. In contrast to child prodigies from musical families who received a sound education and entered the public limelight at an early age, Schubert's instruction at home is to be understood more as preparation for his future profession as a schoolteacher. The fact that his father took the boy to Court Kapellmeister Antonio Salieri for an examination, thus enabling him to be admitted to the Stadtkonvikt, was certainly due to his general musicality and good singing voice and not to his abilities as a pianist.

### Schubert's Piano-Playing in Later Years

Conflicting assessments of Schubert's piano-playing in his later years have been preserved. In response to an enquiry from Franz Liszt, who was also planning a Schubert biography, Anselm Hüttenbrenner recounted that his childhood friend was 'not an elegant pianist but he was a safe and very fluent one' and that he had difficulties in rendering his own Sonata in C# Major (presumably the first version, in D $\flat$ -major, of the Sonata D568).<sup>16</sup> Benedict Randhartinger, later court music director, took the same line when he informed the author of a publication on ballads by Carl Loewe and Schubert about the premiere of 'Erlkönig' at the Stadtkonvikt.<sup>17</sup> According to this report, Schubert himself accompanied the song and complained that the piano part, with its fast triplets, was too difficult for him, causing him to replace them with crotchets. When asked why he left out the triplets, Schubert replied that they could only be played by a virtuoso (and not by him).<sup>18</sup> Even though this story is probably more anecdotal than factual, it may contain the grain of truth that Schubert as an eighteen-year-old still had technical limitations at the piano. Kreissle's account of Schubert's later performance of the virtuosic 'Wanderer' Fantasy fits in well here. In a footnote to his biography, he reports that he 'could not completely master it. When he played it once among friends and got stuck in the last movement, he jumped up from his seat with the words:

<sup>16</sup> Anselm Hüttenbrenner, 'Fragments from the Life of the Song Composer Franz Schubert: Communicated by his boyhood friend and fellow-pupil Anselm Hüttenbrenner', dated 1854, in *Memoirs*, p. 180 and p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> The personal communications by Randhartinger are reproduced in A. B. Bach, *The Art Ballad: Loewe and Schubert*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890), pp. 103–9. According to Deutsch, Randhartinger exaggerated his relations with Schubert as he grew older; see *Memoirs*, p. 203–4.

<sup>18</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 203.

“Let the devil play that stuff!” (Kupelwieser, Spaun and Gahy witnessed this performance).<sup>19</sup> The judgement of Ferdinand Hiller, who as a fifteen-year-old piano pupil of Johann Nepomuk Hummel heard the composer play during their joint visit to Vienna, is more sober. Exactly fifty years later he recalled that Schubert had little technique and the piano-playing of the ‘quiet young man . . ., in spite of not inconsiderable fluency, was very far from being that of a master’.<sup>20</sup>

The assessment of Schubert’s abilities at the instrument quickly changed after his death. In his obituary, Josef von Spaun speaks of the ‘tender playing’ with which the ‘unassuming artist’ accompanied the songs he himself had created.<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Schubert goes one step further in his obituary in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* when he quotes an anonymous musician:

Although Schubert never represented himself as a [pianoforte] virtuoso, any connoisseur who had the chance of hearing him in private circles will nevertheless attest that he knew how to treat this instrument with mastery and in a quite peculiar manner, so that a great specialist in music, to whom he once played his last sonatas, exclaimed: ‘Schubert, I almost admire your playing even more than your compositions!’<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Anton Schindler, the questionable biographer of Ludwig van Beethoven, called Schubert an exemplary piano player in a magazine article from 1857.<sup>23</sup> Finally, there is the report of the senior civil servant Albert Stadler, another friend of Schubert’s from his time at the Stadtkonvikt and a good pianist himself, who describes Schubert’s playing less enthusiastically but all the more concretely: “To see and hear him play his own pianoforte compositions was a real pleasure. A beautiful touch, a quiet hand, clear, neat playing, full of insight and feeling. He still belonged to the old school of good pianoforte players, whose fingers had not yet

<sup>19</sup> Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> F. Hiller, *Briefe an eine Ungenannte* (Cologne: M. Du Mont-Schauberg, 1877), p. 42. See also *Memoirs*, p. 282, and Deutsch’s commentary on p. 284.

<sup>21</sup> J. von Spaun, ‘On Schubert (1829)’, in *Memoirs*, p. 28. The passage is paraphrased in Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 475, without verification.

<sup>22</sup> Ferdinand Schubert, ‘Aus Franz Schubert’s Leben’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (23 April–3 May 1839), as rendered in English in *Memoirs*, pp. 36–7. According to Deutsch’s commentary (*Memoirs*, p. 38), the text was written in 1828 as a sort of obituary notice and was clearly rewritten for its first publication. Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 128 n., made clear that the admirer was the pianist and composer Johann Horzalka (d. 1861).

<sup>23</sup> The corresponding passage from the *Niederrheinische Musikzeitung* (1857) is reproduced in Kreissle, *Schubert*, p. 469, and in *Memoirs*, p. 318. In his commentary, Deutsch draws attention to some of Schindler’s incorrect statements.

begun to attack the poor keys like birds of prey.<sup>24</sup> Compared with the previous, clearly exaggerated assessments, Stadler seems to reflect the level of Schubert's piano-playing most realistically.

### Schubert's Description of His Own Playing

Stadler's description of Schubert's piano-playing, and his criticism of the newfangled technique, are of particular significance, because they relate to the only original report from Schubert's hand in which he describes and evaluates his own playing. It is a letter from Steyr, dated July 1825, in which he reports in detail to his parents on the progress of his current summer tour.<sup>25</sup> He was on the road for four and a half months, from mid May to early October of that year, staying with friends or with friends of friends. The itinerary, which was largely accompanied by the singer Johann Michael Vogl, took him from Upper Austria via the Salzkammergut to Gastein and back. The trip served not only for relaxation but also as a private recital tour to establish new contacts. In this letter, Schubert raved about the friendly reception he received from local music lovers and the successful performances of his songs, and conveyed his impression that his compositions were widely performed in Upper Austria. In particular, he mentions the two monastic communities of St Florian and Kremsmünster Abbey, which he visited from his residences at Linz and Steyr, respectively. At this time, Austria's rural monasteries had an astonishingly rich musical life and a lively exchange with cultural events in the imperial capital, Vienna. The present music library of Kremsmünster is living proof of this practice. It was precisely in this monastery, according to the report, that Schubert presented his four-hand variations and marches 'with the aid of a gallant pianoforte player . . . with notable success'.<sup>26</sup> Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that he also performed the variation movement from his recently completed Piano Sonata in A Minor (D845), 'not without merit', as he reported to his parents with a proud undertone. The movement begins with a slow, simple theme set in pianissimo, the performance of which enchanted the audience (see Example 1.1a). He was assured that 'the keys become singing voices under [his] hands', which is

<sup>24</sup> Report from Albert Stadler to Ferdinand Luib, in *Memoirs*, p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Franz Schubert to his father and stepmother, 25 July 1825, cited in *Documentary Biography*, pp. 434–7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 435–6. Deutsch identifies this 'gallant pianoforte player' as the collegiate chaplain, Father Heinrich Hassak (see his commentary, *ibid.*, p. 437).



Example 1.1a Schubert, Piano Sonata in A Minor, D845/ii, bb. 1–16.

Example 1.1b Schubert, Piano Sonata in A Minor, D845/ii, bb. 85–93.

Example 1.1c Schubert, Piano Sonata in A Minor, D845/ii, bb. 112–17.

(a)

Andante poco mosso

pp

8

(b)

ff

85

89

sfz

p

(c)

112

cresc.

f

115

ff

fz

pp

still considered a quality of good piano-playing today, and which delighted Schubert greatly. Like Albert Stadler, he too abhorred ‘the accursed chopping in which even distinguished pianoforte players indulge and which’, in his opinion, ‘delights neither the ear nor the mind’.<sup>27</sup>

A glance at the variations, especially the last ones in the set, reveals that no small amount of pianistic skill is required to execute them. They exploit the full range of the keyboard and show fast runs in both hands, wide leaps in the left, and rapid changes of register, powerful octave passages and full-voice chordal writing in the right, all in small note-values and extreme, rapidly changing dynamics (see Examples 1.1b and 1.1c). Schubert mastered even these passages ‘not without merit’, as he put it.

### Schubert’s Public Appearances as a Pianist

In contrast to Schubert’s public shyness, which has been mentioned time and again, this letter from 1825 and other documents convey the impression that he presented himself quite unabashedly at the piano in private. In a letter to his bride, the young Anton von Spaun recounts the moment when he heard him perform in Schober’s flat, his playing intensifying Spaun’s longing for the young lady.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Vogl’s wife, Kunigunde, remembers vividly that Schubert often visited her house, not only to accompany his songs but also to play his piano pieces.<sup>29</sup> Even after he left the *Stadtconvikt*, he was not averse to performing his newer compositions on the *fortepiano* available there.<sup>30</sup>

According to reports from several friends, he also enjoyed playing piano duets with Franz Lachner, Eduard von Bauernfeld, Josef von Gahy and Karl Maria von Bocklet.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Anselm Hüttenbrenner, in answer to an

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Anton von Spaun to Henriette von Vogelsang, 20 April 1816, cited in *Documentary Biography* (1946), p. 58–9.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Kunigunde Vogl to her daughter Henriette (Vienna, c. 1850), in *Memoirs*, pp. 216–18.

<sup>30</sup> Reports from Josef Kenner and Josef von Spaun to Luib, in *Memoirs*, pp. 85 and 121.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, E. von Bauernfeld’s diary, February 1825 and 9 May 1828, cited in *Documentary Biography*, pp. 403 and 773; Franz von Hartmann’s diary, 15 December 1826, cited in *Documentary Biography*, pp. 571; letter from Anton Ottenwalt to Josef von Spaun, 27 November [1825], cited in *Documentary Biography*, p. 476; Franz Lachner ‘On his fugue in D Minor (c. 1835)’, in *Memoirs*, p. 195; E. von Bauernfeld, ‘Some notes on Schubert (1869)’, in *Memoirs*, p. 229; J. von Spaun, ‘Notes on my association with Franz Schubert (1858)’, in *Memoirs*, p. 130 (Gahy) and p. 138 (Bocklet); Franz von Hartmann, ‘Family Chronicle (before 1876)’, in *Memoirs*, p. 274 (Gahy).

enquiry from Franz Liszt, stated that Schubert studied oratorios and operas by Handel by playing them from score in piano duet with him.<sup>32</sup>

At semi-public events in Viennese salons, such as house balls or evening gatherings, Schubert allegedly never danced, but, according to Leopold von Sonnleithner, he was 'always ready to sit down at the piano, where for hours he improvised the most beautiful waltzes'.<sup>33</sup> Even if this description seems to serve a Biedermeier cliché, there are numerous reports that Schubert's place at such events was indeed before the piano, where he not only played dances but also pieces for four hands and sometimes even presented his own works. For instance, Franz von Hartmann's diary documents that on 8 December 1826 a Schubertiad took place at Spaun's home, at which Schubert played 'a magnificent but melancholy piece of his own composition'.<sup>34</sup> Otto Erich Deutsch suspects that this was the Sonata in G, D894, the first edition of which is dedicated to Spaun.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, according to Sonnleithner, Schubert is said to have been 'shy and taciturn' in smart society and appeared only 'to accompany his songs, more or less as a favour'.<sup>36</sup> But he did so apparently quite frequently, also on occasions outside Viennese society. In Zseliz in September 1824, he is said to have performed a part-song commissioned by Countess Esterházy that very evening, accompanying the assembled party at the piano.<sup>37</sup> He also turned to the instrument during his summer trips to the countryside. Schubert was happy to accompany the Lied singers Vogl and Carl von Schönstein, and their success was always assured. Even Hiller, who, as mentioned above, criticised Schubert's piano-playing, waxed ecstatic at such performances. In a letter to an anonymous lady he wrote that he had 'never heard Schubert songs as they were then!'<sup>38</sup> And around two years later he commented: 'One thought neither of piano playing nor of singing, it was as though the music needed no material sound, as though the melodies, like visions, revealed themselves to spiritualized ears.'<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> A. Hüttenbrenner, 'Fragments from the Life of the Song Composer Franz Schubert', in *Memoirs*, p. 180.

<sup>33</sup> Leopold von Sonnleithner, Postscript in the report to Ferdinand Luib, 5 March 1858, in *Memoirs*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> Diary of Franz von Hartmann, 8 December 1826, cited in *Documentary Biography*, p. 568.

<sup>35</sup> *Documentary Biography*, p. 568. <sup>36</sup> Postscript in the report to Luib, in *Memoirs*, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Memoirs of Karl Freiherr von Schönstein, January 1857, in *Memoirs*, p. 102. This was the vocal quartet with piano 'Gebet', Op. post. 129, D815.

<sup>38</sup> Hiller, *Briefe an eine Ungenannte*, p. 42, as trans. in *Memoirs*, p. 282.

<sup>39</sup> F. Hiller, *Künstlerleben* (Cologne: Du Mont, 1880), pp. 48–9, as trans. in *Memoirs*, pp. 283–4.

When a professional musician such as Hiller gets carried away by emotion in his late recollection of this performance, he is guided by the idea of a perfect unity of creator and work. The interpretation by the composer himself revitalises this unity in a romanticised understanding of the work and vouchsafes a special authenticity and depth of expression. This phenomenon also played a role in the broad public sphere of Viennese concert life at the time. Perusing the programmes, advertisements and reviews from Schubert's lifetime, ten concerts during the period 1818 to 1828 in which Schubert is mentioned by name as a piano player can be found. He is almost always listed as a song accompanist (see Table 1.1): in a private concert by the actor Carl Friedrich Müller in the hall of the restaurant Zum Römischen

**Table 1.1** Public concerts with programmes mentioning Franz Schubert as pianist

Date	Event / organiser / venue	Composition	Additional performers
12 Mar. 1818	Private concert / C. F. Müller / Zum Römischen Kaiser	Overture in the Italian Style, D597, for eight hands on two pianos	Therese and Babette Kunz, Anselm Hüttenbrenner
9 Nov. 1821	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Gundelhof	'Am Grabe Anselmos', D504	Georg Krebner
7 Sept. 1826	Examination recital / Conservatoire / Landständischer Saal	'Psalm 23', D706	unnamed female students
8 Mar. 1827	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Zum Roten Igel	'Normans Gesang', D846	Ludwig Titze
22 Apr. 1827	Private concert / L. Jansa / Landständischer Saal	'Normans Gesang', D846	Ludwig Titze
29 Apr. 1827	Private concert / F. Sallamon / Landständischer Saal	'Der Einsame', D800	Ludwig Titze
6 May 1827	Academy / University of Vienna / Great Hall of the Law Faculty	'Im Freien', D880	Ludwig Titze
8 Sept. 1827	Grand concert / Steiermärkischer Musikverein / Schauspielhaus Graz	'Normans Gesang', D846 'Gott in der Natur', D757 'Geist der Liebe', D747	Marschall (tenor), unnamed vocal quartets
2 Feb. 1828	Private concert / L. Jansa / Landständischer Saal	'Romanze des Richard Löwenherz', D907	Ludwig Titze
20 Apr. 1828	Private concert / J. Lewy / Kleiner Redoutensaal	'Auf dem Strom', D943	Ludwig Titze

Kaiser; at the evening entertainments of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in the Gundelhof; at an examination concert in the conservatoire's Landständischer Saal; at further private concerts by the violinist Leopold Jansa and the pianist Fanny Sallamon at the same venue; in another private concert by the horn player Joseph Lewy in the Kleiner Redoutensaal; at a private concert (academy) for the benefit of widows and orphans, mounted by the Faculty of Law in the Great Hall; and during Schubert's visit to Graz, where he himself took an active part in a large vocal and instrumental concert as an honorary member of the Styrian Music Society.

Only one event documents Schubert in a role other than that of piano accompanist in a vocal work. On 12 March 1818, a private concert organised by Friedrich Müller opened with an 'overture on two fortepianos, each for four hands, by F. Schubert, performed by Mlles Therese and Babette Kunz, and the gentlemen Schubert und Hüttenbrenner'.<sup>40</sup> Whether this was the Overture in the Italian Style in D Major (D590) or in C Major (D591) is unclear. Very probably, however, it was the same work that had opened the second half of a private concert (academy) given by Eduard Jäll at the same venue shortly before, on 1 March, but with orchestration.<sup>41</sup> The later performance must have been quite spectacular: two lovely young ladies at the piano on one side, two young gentlemen at the piano opposite and, in addition, the composer himself at work. In her preface to the NSA edition, Walburga Litschauer assumes that the well-known four-hand version of the overture was played two to a part.<sup>42</sup> However, it may be that Schubert produced another arrangement of the overture for eight hands for this particular occasion, a version later lost owing to the scant possibility of its ever being revived. In any case, the reviewer of the *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* emphasised Schubert's composition and encouraged him to create a place for himself and his works in the concert repertoire through 'practice, this mother of all human perfection'. On the quality of the piano-playing, he remarked: 'The execution was also worthy of all praise.' This refers, of course, not specifically to Schubert, but to all four players.<sup>43</sup>

Another remarkable event was the public examination concert at the newly established conservatoire of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde.

<sup>40</sup> See the programme of the concert in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, pp. 7–8 (No. 7).

<sup>41</sup> See the announcement of the concert in *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, 26 February 1818, supplement no. 2, p. 6, cited in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, p. 7 (No. 5).

<sup>42</sup> NSA, series VII/1, vol. 5: *Ouvertüren*, ed. W. Litschauer (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1984), p. xi.

<sup>43</sup> *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, 24 March 1818, p. 143, cited in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, pp. 9–10 (No. 10).

Eight female students of the third-year singing class, headed by Schubert's friend Anna Fröhlich, were accompanied by the composer himself when they performed the 'Psalm 23' ('Gott ist mein Hirt', D706), based on a German translation by Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>44</sup> The piano part of this work for two sopranos and two altos is not difficult to play. The tempo of the composition is Adagio, with the melody in the left hand and the right hand accompanying in triplets. It is striking that the performances listed in Table 1.1 are concentrated in the last two years of Schubert's life, with the semi-professional singer Ludwig Titze standing out as vocalist.

While Schubert is usually mentioned in the programmes merely by his first and last names, the Viennese newspapers also allude to the fascination of hearing the work performed by its creator. Phrases such as 'accompanied by the composer himself on the piano' or just 'accompanied by the composer' are common.<sup>45</sup> In stark contrast to this attitude stands a common understanding of Lied performance in which the accompanist is subordinate to the singer. This seems to be a mockery of the balanced compositional structure of the Schubert Lied, but already in Schubert's time it was often the case that only the singer was named, the accompanist being left unmentioned. It is therefore possible to surmise that Schubert performed in public far more often than is proven, if only as a piano accompanist. At least seven events support this conjecture (see Table 1.2). One is a private concert (academy) given by the pupils of the Imperial Theresian Knight's Academy to celebrate the emperor's birthday, where, among other music, 'Erlkönig' was performed. Others include evening entertainments held within the framework of the Gesellschaft, and a private concert (academy) given by the thirteen-year-old violinist Joseph Khayll for the benefit of an actor who had suffered a tragic accident.

Most likely, Schubert was active as a piano accompanist at his own private concert that took place in March 1828 in the premises of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. Evidence of his participation includes the second item on the programme – a series of songs performed by Johann Michael Vogl without naming an accompanist – and a later item with the song 'Die Allmacht', likewise sung by Vogl. Schubert's activity at the piano in the preceding programme item, 'Auf dem Strom', a composition for voice, horn and piano, is fairly certain. The work was

<sup>44</sup> See the reproduction of the programme of this concert on 7 September 1826 in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, pp. 284–6 (No. 404).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; see also the review of a concert with Leopold Jansa on 22 April 1827 in *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode*, 10 May 1827, p. 459, cited in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, p. 338 (No. 498).

Table 1.2 Concerts with possible or probable participation of Schubert

Date	Event / organiser / venue	Composition	Additional performers
25 Jan. 1821	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Gundelhof	'Erkönig', D328	August Gymnich
11 Feb. 1822	Academy / Theresianische Ritter-Akademie / Theresianum	'Erkönig', D328	unnamed students of the school
19 Dec. 1822	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Zum Roten Igel	'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus', D583	Josef Preisinger
beginning (?) of 1823	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Mölkerhof	'Gretchen am Spinnrade', D118	Babette Mosel
27 Jan. 1825	Evening entertainment / Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Zum Roten Igel	'Sehnsucht', D636	Josefine Fröhlich
16 Mar. 1828	Private concert / J. Khayll / Zum Römischen Kaiser	'Normans Gesang', D846	Ludwig Titze
26 Mar. 1828	Private concert / F. Schubert / Zum Roten Igel	'Der Kreuzzug', D932 'Die Sterne', D939 'Fischerweise', D881 'Der Wanderer an den Mond', D870 Aeschylus', D450	Johann M. Vogl
		'Ständchen', D920	Josefine Fröhlich, female students of the Conservatoire
		'Auf dem Strom', D943	Ludwig Titze, Joseph Lewy
		'Die Allmacht', D852	Johann M. Vogl

performed by the same musicians nearly a month later at the aforementioned private concert of the horn player Joseph Lewy, but with Schubert's name mentioned.<sup>46</sup> It can also be assumed that Schubert participated in

<sup>46</sup> See the announcement of the concert on 20 April 1828, *Der Sammler*, 17 April 1828, p. 188, cited in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, p. 417 (No. 612).

‘Ständchen’ (D920), performed by Josefine Fröhlich and the students from her sister Anna’s conservatoire class. The first public performance of this choral work with alto solo and piano took place two months earlier at an evening entertainment of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, also with no accompanist named.<sup>47</sup>

## Piano Virtuosos in Vienna

Since Beethoven’s last public appearance as a concert pianist in 1815, not only had the tradition of Viennese piano construction developed further,<sup>48</sup> but the technical demands and social requirements for virtuosos had also increased. The establishment of the music press, which provided concert announcements and reviews, as well as the increasing possibility of performing before a broad, paying audience, contributed significantly to the publicity of musical events. To be successful, piano virtuosos had to offer attractive programmes and showcase themselves to a much greater extent than in Mozart’s or Beethoven’s time. This development is also echoed in the programming of the Musikalische Abendunterhaltungen, a concert series of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. The initial intimacy of chamber music, produced jointly by a group of music lovers, was gradually replaced by brilliant performances by professional soloists.<sup>49</sup> The epitome of this new type of virtuoso – albeit not on the piano but on the violin – was Nicolò Paganini, who undertook international concert tours. Schubert heard him play on several occasions, with deep admiration.<sup>50</sup>

The most important representatives of the new piano virtuosity in Vienna were Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837) and Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870), both from the generation between Beethoven and Schubert. Hummel was born in Bratislava, moved to Vienna with his

<sup>47</sup> See the programme of the concert on 24 January 1828, cited in Waidelich (ed.), *Dokumente*, p. 393 (No. 570). Gerhard von Breuning (1813–92) recalled Anna Fröhlich’s account of this performance in his anecdotal article ‘Aus Grillparzers Wohnung’ in *Neue Freie Presse*, 19 November 1884, p. 3; see *Memoirs*, p. 253. According to her memory, Schubert was not present at the performance, but had to be brought from a nearby inn, where good beer was served.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>49</sup> I. Fuchs, ‘Die musikalischen Abendunterhaltungen der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien: Kammermusik auf dem Weg vom Salon in den Konzertsaal’, in I. Fuchs (ed.), *Musikfreunde: Träger der Musikkultur in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2017), p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> From a lost letter from Schubert to Anselm Hüttenbrenner (on Niccolò Paganini): ‘I have heard an angel sing in the *Adagio*’, cited in *Documentary Biography*, p. 773.



family at the age of eight and shortly thereafter became a pupil of Mozart.<sup>51</sup> Following Mozart's example, as it were, he went on a perennial European tour with his father as a piano-playing prodigy. After his return, he studied music theory with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, composition with Antonio Salieri and organ with Joseph Haydn. Around the turn of the century, he was one of Vienna's leading pianists. Carl Czerny, himself an excellent pianist and a former student of Beethoven, greatly admired Hummel. He remembered his playing as 'a model of the highest purity and clarity, of the most graceful elegance and delicacy; . . . the difficulties were always calculated to the highest effect of arousing admiration'.<sup>52</sup> Hummel's career as a concert pianist was interrupted by his employment at the court of Nicholas II, Prince Esterházy, a position arranged by Haydn. As concertmaster, he was obliged not only to direct the chapel but also to supply compositions, give lessons and take care of the music library. After being dismissed from this position, Hummel returned to Vienna, but until 1814 he only gave private music lessons and devoted himself primarily to composing. It was not until the Congress of Vienna that he again gave public concerts, at which he appeared as a much-admired pianist until 1816. After that, he left Vienna, working first as court kapellmeister in Stuttgart and two years later in the same position in Weimar, where he remained to the end of his days. Against the background of secure employment, he undertook extensive concert tours across Europe almost annually and excelled in virtuoso playing. He returned to Vienna in the spring of 1827, when he visited Beethoven on his deathbed. Schubert had presumably heard him at one of the four concerts in which Hummel participated after the funeral ceremonies had been completed. At all these events, he played only his own compositions and shone above all with free improvisations. The reviewer of the magazine *Der Sammler* observed that Hummel was no longer unrivalled in technique, 'but in the soul of his playing, in the composition for his instrument, and especially in the performance of free fantasies, he stands unique and unrivalled'.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> C. Blanken, 'Hummel und das "Wien Beethovens"', in A. Gerhard and L. Lütteken (eds.), *Zwischen Klassik und Klassizismus: Johann Nepomuk Hummel in Wien und Weimar* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003), pp. 1–13.

<sup>52</sup> C. Czerny, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, ed. and annotated by W. Kolneder (Baden-Baden: Heitz, 1968), p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> *Der Sammler*, 21 April 1827, p. 191. All quoted journals are available online via the database 'ANNO: Historische österreichische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften', hosted by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (<https://anno.onb.ac.at>).

Moscheles was sixteen years younger than Hummel and had a similar career.<sup>54</sup> Born in Prague, he moved to Vienna as a fourteen-year-old teenager. When he arrived in the capital of the Habsburg Empire, he was already familiar with Beethoven's piano works. The young Moscheles received composition and theory lessons from the same teachers, Albrechtsberger and Salieri, and studied piano with Andreas Streicher, who was also Franz Xaver Mozart's piano teacher. Until 1820, Moscheles undertook several smaller trips but mainly gave concerts in Vienna, filling the gap after Hummel's departure. It was not until the following years that he undertook more extensive tours. In 1825 he settled in London, where he taught at the Royal College of Music. He also conducted, gave concerts throughout Europe and founded several concert series. The last station of his career was a piano class at the Leipzig conservatoire. Moscheles's playing was praised above all for its subtle touch, technical skill and wonderful delivery.<sup>55</sup> In addition, his piano compositions were valued as repertoire pieces.

Both piano virtuosos share a striking characteristic that also applied to Schubert's generation of musicians: they were broadly based, making names for themselves not only as excellent pianists in local concert venues.<sup>56</sup> European concert tours beyond the Habsburg Empire, intensive teaching, orchestral conducting and concert organising were just as much part of their activities as composing and publishing works for piano or other instrumental formats. Both, however, eventually left Vienna. How rapidly piano-playing, and with it the species of concert pianist, developed in the following years is demonstrated by two piano virtuosos only fourteen and fifteen years younger than Schubert: Franz Liszt and Sigismund Thalberg. Both studied in Vienna for several years as teenagers – Liszt with Czerny, Thalberg with Hummel and Moscheles. Liszt and Thalberg initiated a golden era of Romantic piano-playing that met the highest technical demands and brought with it a cult of exalted musical personalities who ceaselessly traversed the world.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> For biographical details, see C. Hust, 'Moscheles, Ignaz', in L. Lütteken (ed.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart MGG-Online* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2016). Article first published in 2004 and published online in 2016, <http://mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/46521>, accessed 7 January 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Review in *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, 19 March 1818, p. 135.

<sup>56</sup> Compare, for instance, the biography of Franz Schoberlechner, a Viennese pianist who was born in the same year as Schubert; see 'Schoberlechner, Franz', in C. von Wurzbach, *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, vol. 31 (Vienna: k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1876), pp. 66–8.

<sup>57</sup> K. Hamilton, 'The Virtuoso Tradition', in D. Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 57–74. While Liszt travelled only in Europe, Thalberg also visited Brazil and Cuba and lived for some years in the United States.

All in all, Schubert does not seem to have been attracted to such a prominent public role. Presumably, displaying himself to an audience for its own sake was not in keeping with his self-image, nor were long concert tours to his liking. As mentioned above, Leopold von Sonnleithner described the composer as ‘shy and taciturn, especially in smart society’, while Czerny speaks of ‘brilliant and well-prepared bragging . . . which is usually so necessary for travelling virtuosi’.<sup>58</sup> It was not only his character but also his physique that kept Schubert from being predestined for a virtuoso career. His allegedly short fingers and chubby hands were unsuited to this task,<sup>59</sup> and his stocky body also in no way corresponded to the idealised image of a virtuoso as a tall, gaunt figure with spidery fingers, as embodied by Liszt and Paganini. That he was also technically no match for a Hummel or Moscheles can be concluded from the documents cited above. As Stadler put it, he still belonged to the ‘old school’.

## Conclusion

While Beethoven’s public performances were still about presenting himself as a composer rather than as a pianist, this attitude changed in the next generation of musicians. Now, it was all about building repertoire to demonstrate one’s virtuosity, to ignite the enthusiasm of the audience and to celebrate triumphs in the concert hall. The new virtuosity brought short-lived, but all the more effective, works to the public, often composed by the pianists themselves for their own instrument. The compositional quality of the works was subordinate to this demand.

Schubert’s dismissive, or at least critical, attitude towards superficial virtuosity is reflected in his *œuvre*. The volume of ‘Concert Pieces’ in the NSA is conspicuously thin, containing only four compositions, all for solo strings.<sup>60</sup> Chamber works, such as the Variations in E Minor for flute and piano (D802), the Rondo (*‘brillant’*) for violin and piano (D895) and the Fantasy in C Major for the same instruments (D934) may also be counted among this repertoire. For the piano, the only bravura piece is probably the ‘Wanderer’ Fantasy in C Major (D760), a work that Schubert dedicated to

<sup>58</sup> Sonnleithner, Postscript in the report to Luib, in *Memoirs*, p. 121; Czerny, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> The best description of Schubert’s physical appearance comes from Sonnleithner, Postscript in the report to Luib, in *Memoirs*, p. 121.

<sup>60</sup> D345, D438, D487 and D 580; see NSA, series V, vol. 7: *Konzertstücke*, ed. M. Kube (Kassel: Bärenreiter 2008).

a former piano student of Hummel. It is remarkable that there is not a single work for solo instruments with orchestra in his *œuvre*, in particular not one piano concerto. Nevertheless, Schubert appreciated good piano players. He entrusted the virtuoso Karl Maria von Bocklet with the public performance of his more demanding piano chamber music, including the aforementioned *Rondeau brillant* (D895) and the Violin Fantasy (D934). It is also noteworthy that Schubert did not take on the piano part of the piano trio himself in his own private concert on 26 March 1828, but entrusted it to Bocklet. The fact that the last three great piano sonatas were originally intended for Hummel is certainly not due to empty virtuosity, but to Hummel's high technical abilities and expressive playing, which are indispensable for an appropriate interpretation of these monumental creations.<sup>61</sup>

As a composer of more demanding works, there would have been other opportunities for a good piano player to gain a foothold in Vienna's musical life, as the biographies of many of Schubert's contemporaries demonstrate: as a private music teacher or professor at the newly founded conservatoire of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde; as an instrumentalist in the court orchestra or a local theatre orchestra; as a music director or conductor at the same; or in church as a *regens chori* or permanently employed organist. In the case of Schubert, no other serious attempts to gain a bread-and-butter job are documented, other than his activities as a music tutor for the Esterházy family, his applications for a teaching position in Ljubljana, as kapellmeister at the Kärntnertor Theatre and as deputy kapellmeister at the Viennese court (all in vain). Composers who did not pursue any activities other than composing were extremely rare in Vienna in the first decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> The strict separation of performer and composer, as was the case with Schubert, was unusual and far from being a standard model for a musician of his time.

Taken as a whole, the various documents on Schubert's piano playing, however differently they must be assessed, suggest that he was certainly not a piano prodigy, as was the case with Mozart. As an adult, he must have been at least a fairly good pianist who could also handle quite demanding

<sup>61</sup> It is doubtful that Schubert himself played it 'with much success in several places', as he mentioned in a letter to the publisher Probst, 2 October 1828, cited in *Documentary Biography*, p. 811.

<sup>62</sup> There are only two known instances in which this was at least to some extent the case: Anton Eberl (1765–1807) and Franz de Paula Roser (1779–1830). Both had already had successful careers – the first as a concert pianist and music teacher, the second as a singer and bandmaster – and they retired to compose only towards the end of their lives.

music. Schubert made few appearances in public as a piano player. However, active participation in musical life was not only a welcome source of income in his time; it also promoted networking, brought additional performance opportunities and established a personal presence. The association of a 'face' with a composer's name is still conducive to an artist's popularity today. That Schubert had little presence in the wider public – be it as a solo pianist or in any other capacity – certainly did not boost his career. The fact that he was nevertheless already successful during his lifetime is due solely to the extraordinary quality of his works, which were appreciated by the Viennese public and the local and international music press even without additional publicity. Unlike the work of many contemporary composer-performers, Schubert's music has ultimately secured a place in history.