

# Schubert Familiar and Unfamiliar: New Perspectives Introduction

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The genesis of this special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* occurred at the Thirteenth Biennial International Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music in July of 2004, when the journal was inaugurated at Durham University and Bennett Zon invited Susan Youens and me to serve as guest-editors of an issue devoted specifically to Schubert. The impetus behind this instalment of the publication benefits from the remarkable rise of scholarly interest in Franz Schubert that has been under way for nearly two decades now on both sides of the Atlantic. Distinguished by innovative applications of close analysis, historiographic context and aesthetic considerations, this scholarly groundswell has produced an intriguing new image of the composer – indeed, a vibrant view of a Schubert we never really knew.

*Schubert Familiar and Unfamiliar: New Perspectives* continues this revelatory process by presenting essays that reflect such wide-ranging tendencies in musicology, theory and analysis, thus furthering an ‘intellectual conversation’, as Susan Youens puts it. Readers will notice many shared concerns among these otherwise rather different studies, including inclinations toward literary influences and processes, performance practice, the nature and exercise of Schubert’s creativity, and certainly psychology, as well as the composer’s thoughts on life, death and immortality.

Robert Hatten’s ‘A Surfeit of Musics: What Goethe’s Lyrics Concede When Set to Schubert’s Music’, holds pride of place here for examining the earliest of the artist’s works under consideration in this volume, as well as a fundamental aspect of his creativity. It often is assumed that composers such as Schubert naturally seek to project and enhance the inherent messages incorporated by poets within their verse, just as today’s performers seek (we hope!) to faithfully render a composer’s expressive intentions, but Hatten demonstrates that the art of songwriting is one of appropriation and transformation in which some of the original, essential ‘music’ and meaning of a poem is apt to be lost when adapted to a tonal setting. Using two of Schubert’s lieder, ‘Wanderer’s Nachtlied II’ (D. 768; 1822) and ‘Erster Verlust’ (D. 226; 1815), he illustrates ways in which Schubert’s settings alters the rhythm, accentuation and nuances of Goethe’s texts, thus subtly changing their meaning, and hints, perhaps, at one reason why the poet may have resisted responding to the composer’s attempts to initiate contact.

Susan Youens offers intimate *entrée* into one of Schubert’s most beloved lieder and an exquisite illumination of his evocations of the swan metaphor in her essay, ‘Swan Songs: Schubert’s “Auf dem Wasser zu singen”’. Positioning this vocal treasure (D. 774; 1823) within multiple contexts to reveal its rich

implications – including a survey of successive cultures and several centuries’ estimation of the swan image, other lieder that invoke the same emblem of grace, (such as ‘Schwanengesang’ (D. 744; 1822), set to a poem by Johann Senn), and the personal life of Friedrich Leopold, Graf zu Stolberg-Stolberg, author of ‘Auf dem Wasser zu singen’ – Youens undertakes a close musico-poetic analysis of the composition to expose some of the kaleidoscopic character of its expression. Among her *exposés* are the unique cyclical nature of Schubert’s song, which simulates processes of transformation and transcendence, the essential bonds and mutual dependency that integrate the melody and its accompaniment, and the residence of meaning in relations among the tones that constitute its musical structure and create its effects.

Xavier Hascher’s article “‘In dunklen Träumen’ : Schubert’s Heine-Lieder through the Psychoanalytical Prism’, addresses the six songs set to texts by Heinrich Heine that appear within the second part of *Schwanengesang* (D. 957; 1828), comprising ‘Der Atlas’, ‘Ihr Bild’, ‘Das Fischermädchen’, ‘Die Stadt’, ‘Am Meer’ and ‘Der Doppelgänger’. Applying practices of autograph study, methods of literary criticism, precepts of semiotic thought, principles and techniques drawn from Schenkerian and Neo-Riemannian theories, and, most notably, elements of Freudian psychoanalysis, Hascher deepens our understanding of Schubert’s last songs, highlights aspects of their fantastic nature and, in particular, portrays the interiority, not of Schubert or Heine, but of the persona of the ‘Poet’, who speaks through the six texts in question. Hascher argues, most persuasively, on behalf of the view that the six Heine songs represent a discrete cycle within *Schwanengesang*, a proposition premised upon tonal evidence, and that they bear not a conventional sequential narrative – since Schubert had reordered the texts of Heine’s collection – but an atemporal experience similar to that of a dream.

Finally, my own contribution to this issue, ‘Schubert’s Self-Elegies’, examines two poignant utterances among the composer’s late works for piano, the Impromptu in G, major (D. 899; 1827) and the Andante sostenuto from his last piano sonata in B, major (D. 960; 1828). Applying the Schoenbergian concept of ‘musical problem’ within the framework of the Schenkerian approach to music, I portray these pieces as musical equivalents of the self-elegy, a literary subgenre that began to emerge during Schubert’s lifetime, and propose that they represent the very first of their kind in the tonal domain. I also advance the thought that, for Schubert, the art of music represented a kind of refuge for his imagination as he faced what he regarded as his certain fate, a safe haven that enabled him to develop some of his greatest and most innovative works during his last years.

Another reflection of the tremendous increase in Schubert’s fortunes over the past 20 years may be found emanating from Hyperion Records’ 40-CD set, *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*. Begun in 1987 and completed in 2005, this unprecedented project of recording the sum of Schubert’s lieder, plus part songs and ensemble settings, as well as certain selections by Schubert’s friends and contemporaries included for context, was led by pianist Graham Johnson, whose performances appear on every disc. Requiring 18 years to complete, this extraordinary effort enlisted 58 singers, 4 additional instrumentalists, 2 choirs and a conductor, plus a reader, and featured the vocal talents of such luminaries as Sir Thomas Allen, Elly Ameling, Arleen Auger, Dame Janet Baker, Ian Bostridge, Brigitte Fassbaender, Mathias Goerne, Thomas Hampson, Dame Felicity Lott and Lucia Popp, to mention merely ten of the contributing soloists. An opportunity to review this monumental release was gratefully accepted, for it would offer readers of *Schubert Familiar and Unfamiliar: New Perspectives* a panoramic survey

of more than 700 of Schubert's songs sung by some of the most renowned artists of our time, and would enable documentation of their performances' critical reception as well as a range of attitudes toward the literature, its interpretation, and the genre itself.

An equally stellar panel of Schubertians was secured, including James Parsons, Susan Wollenberg, Susannah Clark, David Gramit, Susan Youens, Lorraine Byrne Bodley and Richard Kramer, each of whom accepted a chronologically sequential span of three to seven CDs for review. All were invited to consider details of interpretation, aspects of performance practice, elements of style, features of structure, and whatever else seemed appropriate and interesting, in the manner most congenial to each. As a result, the eight review-essays that returned capture different ways of listening and appraising, as well as unique and different perspectives on Schubert's music, and thus represent a reflection of contemporary estimation of his vocal art as it exists in 2008. Distinct concerns distinguish each critique, and no effort was expended in enforcing a common style or tone, and certainly no insistence was exerted toward the eliciting of applause for each performance or for every piece, so what emerges is a series of individual informed opinions and honest reactions to long-loved music.

It seems clear from what appears in *Schubert Familiar and Unfamiliar: New Perspectives* that our new image of Franz Schubert continues to emerge, evolve and expand at an astonishing rate, and that the culmination of this process is far from near. Equally evident is that a full grasp of what Schubert actually achieved between his first song in 1810 and his last in 1828 will take untold generations more to articulate. Yet this process of *reconnaissance* represents an ongoing 'conversation' well worthy of our participation.