

PLAYING THE PIANO MUSIC OF SCHUBERT

In conjunction with this document, one should definitely read my essay, "Relevant Advice from the 18th Century On Playing 18th Century Music", at <http://www.dersnah-fee.com/essays-educational-materials.html>. Some parts of the essay may be less applicable to Schubert's music than to earlier music, but much is very applicable to Schubert's music.

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Introduction: Challenges of Schubert's Piano Music

- Can make case it is the most difficult keyboard music to realize well
 - Not idiomatic, not suited for the heavy modern piano, not meant for modern concert halls
 - Classical—not 19th century piano music, yet subjectivity
 - Needs balance, proportion and subtlety
 - Most decisions of any
 - Compromise always required
 - Charm, but not precious
 - Intensity, but not violent
 - Details, but not lose line, big picture or simplicity
 - So many challenges of rhythm and tempo
- Thankless, humbling endeavor ("Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"-Dante)
 - For selfish gratification, play Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, etc. Such music is partly about the player. Schubert's (as well as Bach's, Mozart's, and Beethoven's) is about the music. Let the music play you, instead of you playing the music.
 - Must accept that will feel exposed and vulnerable and never happy with results-if don't feel this way, shouldn't be playing Schubert
 - Long experience with Schubert's music needed
 - Study much Schubert and revisit throughout life (" Many things will only become clear to you when you are old "-Schumann)
 - Have faith your sincere love for the music, and the love in the music will reach, uplift, and heal your listener ("The composer nearest to God"-Schnabel)

1) Know and study Schubert's world and his non-piano music= key to understanding his piano music

- Person of powerful feelings, especially after 1823
 - not at all a virtuoso, did not even own a piano
 - primarily a composer of Lieder, chamber music and symphonic works
 - For appreciation of and history of Lieder, watch and read at <http://www.dersnah-fee.com/lieder.html>
- Romantic literary movement
 - The Wanderer, alienated from the world, pantheism, love, pain, death, Sehnsucht (an unquenchable yearning for what cannot be)
- Vienna
 - Gemütlichkeit of Biedermeier era
 - Everyone dancing and enthusiastic over Rossini's music
 - "It is hopeless, but not serious " (Viennese saying reflecting pessimism behind a veneer of joviality)
- Hungarian influences

2) Unique Schubertian Tone

- Pre-hear aural concept- ask for, and don't be satisfied until get it--"what the ear wills, the fingers produce"
- Avoidance of harshness and angularity, cushion, float, blossom, buoyancy, imitate strings and voice
- Control from key the speed of key descent
- Play from arm, not finger individualization
- Wrist suppleness absolutely essential
- Legato

3) Tempo Selection

- Tempo/character words of crucial importance-much thought went into by Schubert
- Fundamentally same tempo unifies all sections of piece or movement--the longer the piece, the more important is tempo choice
- Follow classical tradition of Mozart, not of later 19th century
- "Every melodious piece has at least one phrase from which one can recognize quite surely what sort of speed the piece demands "(Leopold Mozart)
- Sing and breathe melodies
- Walk to the swing of the melodies (frequently not same as notated beat units) to feel direction
- Influence of waltzes, minuets, processions/marches, barcarolles
- Not too fast, hectic and vapid
 - Spaciousness--Allow to breathe
 - Room to highlight details and not rush over
 - Show character, drama, tragedy, and ominous, fateful foreboding
 - Room to show whimsical playfulness, as well as elegance
- Not too slow, square and ponderous
 - Allow to dance
 - Must above all always have direction
- individual piano and acoustics require adjustment of desired tempo

4) Tempo Flexibility

- Over long term of piece:
 - Fundamentally same tempo for every section of piece or movement --so not destroy structure and break "il filo"
 - Includes, unless otherwise marked, every variation of variations, trios in scherzo and minuets, and second key areas of sonata-allegro form movements
 - Not metronomic, but use met. to realize and control slight deviations from basic tempo
- Over intermediate term:
 - Fundamentally same tempo within a section
 - Use metronome to control the slight deviations from basic tempo
- Over short term:
 - Allow flexibility within a phrase or over a few phrases
 - Count to control flexibility
 - No overdo flexibility
 - Direction and forward motion to destinations
 - Relax phrase ends
 - Diminuendo=slight rit
 - Hairpin crescendo sign=often broaden to increase tension and prepare important arrivals (Beethoven did this)

5) Rhythm Aspects

- Control continuous pulsation by counting
- Accentuation stresses
 - Strong and weak beats
 - Strong and weak measures
- Frequently feel 3/4 in dotted half notes, and 2/4 and 4/4 in half note pulses
- Length of dotted 8th and 16th notes
- Dotted 8th and 16th notes vs. triplets
- Give full value to long notes, rests, and fermate
- Time every note expressively--late is often appropriate, and mathematically on time often unsatisfying
- Delay and stress syncopations
- Handling of upbeat
- Viennese waltz stylization

6) Harmonic Inflection-extensive knowledge of theory essential

- Relate degrees of tension over the long term, intermediate term and short term, and set up arrivals
- “Master of the Unexpected” --prepare ahead

7) Melodic Inflection

- Allow to speak via degrees of more and less stress
 - Metrical accents and rhetorical accents
- Skeletonize=highlight and prioritize important notes
- Group so that flow ahead and have direction to goals
- Play by the phrase-feel longer units
- Breathing and degrees of punctuation
- Match what remains sounding of previous note/chord
- Inflect scale passages
- Feel intensity of melodic intervals (“The music is not in the notes, but in the space between”--Mozart)
- Enjoy folksong- like qualities
- Single line melodies need exceptional nuance
- Respond to previous musical gestures as in chamber music playing
 - Relate cadences to each other
- Never play repeated phrases or similar phrases the same way twice
 - -Accentual and dynamic variety

8) Dynamics

- In context of Schubertian sound
- 100% adherence to—essential to structure
- Each dynamic a clearly distinct level of sound
- Extremes of ppp and fff asked for
- Make pp truly special – appears so often. ppp=otherworldly (“Schubert’s music seems to come from another world”-Schumann)
- ff: with conviction and distinct from forte

9) Articulation Markings

--Slurs

--1st note longer and sometimes louder

--Relax and breathe at end of

--Staccati- Warm, flowing , not dry and brittle

--Accents-so frequently written

--Lean on and hold longer

--Not percussive

--“sfz” --Intense, though not harsh

--Portato is not staccato –instead stress each note marked with dot under slur

10) Ornaments

--Play meaningfully and expressively, not mechanically

--Appoggiaturas

--Length of and Placement

--Trills, Turns, and Slides

11) Polyphonic Awareness (Voicing and Balancing)

--All voices important, but transparency

--Crucial role of bass line

--Highlight and follow moving voices

--Subdue unimportant, busy, accompanimental notes

--Registral awareness

--Control lower registers

--Repeated chords/notes

12) Pedaling- absolutely crucial decisions

-- Discreet-small depressions and abundant changes

--“Mit erhobener Dämpfung”

--“Sordini”, “Verschiebung”, una corda

13) Repeat Signs--To take or not to take

14) Let go and spontaneously enjoy the music

--A narrative journey through life and exploration of the human condition

--Play with it(“He who cannot play with it ,cannot play at all “-Schumann)

--“I’ll drown my book”(Shakespeare)

SCHUBERT'S MOST SIGNIFICANT PIANO MUSIC

Dances (400 of them)	Allegretto in C Minor, D. 915
6 Moments Musicaux, D. 780	Hungarian Melody, D. 817
4 Impromptus, D. 899	4 Impromptus, D. 935
3 Klavierstücke, D. 946	"Wanderer" Fantasy in C Major, D. 760
Sonatas, especially A Major, D. 664; A Minor, D. 784; A Minor, D. 845; D Major, D. 850; G Major, D. 894; C Minor, D. 958; A Major, D. 959; B-flat Major, D. 960	Fantasy in F Minor for 4 hands, D. 940

ESSENTIAL SCHUBERT LISTENING AND STUDY

Lieder (625 of them)	Piano Trios in B-flat Major, D. 898; E-flat Major, D. 929
Piano Quintet in A Major, D. 667 ("Trout")	String Quintet in C Major, D. 956
String Quartets, especially A Minor, D. 804; D Minor, D. 810; G Major, D. 887	Symphonies, especially No. 5 in B-flat Major, D. 485; No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759; No. 9 in C Major, D. 944

ON SCHUBERT'S OWN PLAYING

"Several people assured me that the keys became singing voices under my hands, which if true, pleases me greatly, since I cannot abide the accursed chopping in which even distinguished pianoforte players indulge and which delights neither the ear nor the mind." (Schubert, 1825)

"In accompanying and rehearsing his songs he always kept the most strict and even time except in the few cases where he had expressly indicated in writing a ritardando, morendo, accelerando, etc. Furthermore, he never allowed violent expression in performance." (Leopold von Sonnleitner)

"A beautiful touch, a quiet hand, clear neat playing full of insight and feeling. He still belonged to the old school of pianists whose fingers had not yet begun to attack the keys like birds of prey." (Albert Stadler)

"Sometimes delicate, sometimes full of fire and energy." (Josef von Gahy)

RECOMMENDED SCHUBERT INTERPRETERS

Current : Malcolm Bilson (fortepiano), Imogen Cooper, Simone Dinnerstein, Radu Lupu, Menahem Pressler, Andras Schiff, Grigory Sokolov, Christian Zacharias. Interpreters of the past : Alfred Brendel, Wilhelm Kempff, Artur Schnabel (largely responsible for putting Schubert's sonatas into the repertoire)

RECOMMENDED READING

Black, Leo. Franz Schubert: Music and Belief. The Boydell Press, 2003.

Bostridge, Ian. Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession. Knopf, 2015.

Brendel, Alfred. On Music. A Capella Books, 2001.

Brown, Maurice J. E. "Franz Schubert" in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 1980.

Erickson, Raymond, ed. Schubert's Vienna. Yale University Press, 1997.

Gibbs, Christopher H., ed. The Cambridge Companion to Schubert. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Johnson, Graham. Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs, 3 volumes. Yale University Press, 2014.

Montgomery, David. Franz Schubert's Music in Performance. Pendragon Press, 2003.

QUICK CHECKLIST FOR SCHUBERT PLAYING

- 1) Means: Pre-hear
Float tone
Arm, not isolated fingers
Wrist
Legato

- 2) Tempo: Words
Unity
Spacious enough for details

- 3) Stresses: Rhythmic
Harmonic
Melodic
Goals : Move towards
Set up
Relax after
Full length of notes, rests, fermate; Dotted 8th/16th note decisions

- 4) Dynamics
Match remainder of previous
Bass lines
Balances
Pedaling

- 5) Enjoy the music!

Sonata in B Flat Major, D.960 : First Movement:

Expo:	P			T		S		K				
	1	20	36	48	74	80		99				
	Bb	Gb	Bb	f#	V/F	F		F				
Dev:	118	131	137	141	146	149	159	163	173	193	199	203
	c#	A	g#	B	bb	Db	E	C	d	Bb	d	V7/Bb
Recap:	P			T		S		K	Coda	End		
	216	235	255	267	293	299		318	336	357		
	Bb	Gb/f#/A	Bb	b	V/Bb	Bb		Bb	Bb			