

SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 5

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2021

In 1816, 19-year-old Franz Schubert was writing music and was a much-loved member of a musical ecosystem that buoyed guys like Beethoven and Rossini to stardom. If he were alive today, it's easy to imagine him as one of those kids who dropped out of school to sit on his bed and play guitar all day. Making music was not a vocation for Schubert—he didn't make much money at it—but it's what he did with his time.

Schubert was one of fourteen children born to Franz and Elisabeth Schubert. Only five survived infancy. An amateur cellist and schoolmaster, Schubert's father made music the focus of family life. By his teens, young Franz was the violist in his family string quartet, and it was for this group that he wrote some of his earliest known compositions—sixteen quartets by the age of 19 (including unnumbered juvenile pieces).

As a youth, Schubert had been a member of the famed Vienna Boys Choirs where he received schooling at the Academic Grammar Gymnasium, played in and conducted an orchestra, received music lessons, meals and a roof over his head. One of his music teachers was Antonio Salieri (perhaps unjustly maligned in the Broadway show *Amadeus*), who proved to be a very nurturing influence. Once Schubert's voice changed, he was a candidate for a fellowship which would have enabled him to continue his education, however academics failed to hold his interest. Instead of writing copious amounts of music, he dropped out and returned home, hoping to become a full-time musician. His father did not approve and insisted that he work. At age 17, he started teaching at his father's school—a job he found unbearable. Quitting the teaching job,

he moved out and fell into a society of musicians (mainly friends from school), as well as poets, writers, and intellectuals.

Drinking into the night, Schubert and friends haunted local taverns, discussing the art and politics of Imperial Austria, as well as dancing, playing music, and reading aloud. Referring to themselves as the pub crawlers, this group became his support system, sustaining his short life by lending a piano, sharing in his compositions or offering a place to sleep.

19-year-old Schubert wrote his Symphony No. 5 in September and October of 1816.

At the time, he played viola in a pickup orchestra that would gather in people's homes, most of whom were amateur players. But one of the musicians was violinist Otto Hatwig, a member of the Burgtheater orchestra (famous for having premiered works by Mozart and Beethoven). It was at Hatwig's apartment, in the fall of 1816, that this ad hoc ensemble first played Schubert's Symphony No. 5. **The public premiere would not happen until October 17, 1841—thirteen years after Schubert's death.**



Franz Schubert
oil on panel, 1827
by Gabor Melegh

PRICE: Andante Cantabile for Strings



“I have two handicaps—those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins.”

– Florence Price, 1943

Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and studied music with her mother from the time she was a tot. As a Black child, she was denied a formal musical education, but managed to excel musically and academically—she was valedictorian of her class at age 14. Price went on to study piano, organ and composition at the prestigious New England Conservatory. **After graduating, she taught in Little Rock, and then Atlanta, where she became head of the music department at Clark Atlanta University.**

In 1912, she married a Little Rock lawyer named Thomas Price. Returning to her hometown, she had hoped to continue teaching, but had trouble finding employment and was denied admission to the Arkansas Music Teachers Association due to her race. She founded the Little Rock Club of Musicians and taught at a segregated school. Over the next fifteen years, Price and her husband found the persecution of Black people in Arkansas increasingly

alarming. After a man was lynched in 1927, the family joined the Great Migration and moved to Chicago.

A breakthrough happened in 1932, when Price entered her Symphony No. 1 in the Rodman Wanamaker Contest in Musical Competition. Coming to the attention of conductor Frederick Stock, the piece was then performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on June 15, 1933, during a World's Fair concert.

She published her String Quartet No. 2 in 1935. The Andante Cantabile movement is featured here in an arrangement for string orchestra.

Price died in 1953, leaving behind a store of unpublished compositions in her Illinois summer home where they remained undiscovered until 2009.

MENDELSSOHN: Piano Concerto No. 1

The expression “Grand Tour” has been applied to many things, from diplomatic missions to a TV show for car enthusiasts. Originally, it referred to an extended journey through Europe which exposed a young gentleman to classical antiquities and Renaissance art. A rite of passage for Europe’s elite, the Grand Tour followed a course through France, crossing the Alps into Italy, and eventually circling back through Germany. Typically, the young traveler visited a canned list of must-see historical sites and works of art. But young Felix Mendelssohn was not the typical traveler.


He was just 16 when he wrote his first masterpiece. The son of a banker, Mendelssohn received the best instruction available, and excelled in literature, languages, geography, math, piano and drawing. When the 21-year-old composer embarked upon his Grand Tour, he customized his trip to go deeper into already highly cultivated interests.

He took a walking tour in Scotland and knocked on the door of Sir Walter Scott (who was not particularly receptive). He spent two weeks with the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe before swinging through Austria and crossing into Italy where he stayed for more than a year. As he traveled, he wrote music, but focused mainly on visual art, painting landscapes and studying the techniques of the great masters.



A host of letters to family and friends provides a detailed travelogue, which is echoed in his paintings and in the music that he writes. While in Rome, he wrote to his sister “I intend now to finish my [*Hebrides*] overture, and then (D.V.) to proceed with my [*Italian*] symphony. A pianoforte concerto, too, that I wish to write for Paris, begins to float in my head.”

Whatever it was that was floating in his head came out en masse once he arrived in Munich in 1831; it took Mendelssohn just a few days to commit the entire piano concerto to paper. He played the premiere in Munich on October 17, 1831, and the piece was an instant success.



“*It always pleased people very much, though me very little,*”

wrote the composer. In fact the 21-year-old Mendelssohn attracted the attention of music’s heavies, including Clara Schumann and Franz Liszt.

In his colorful 1853 book *Evenings with the Orchestra*, the composer and critic Hector Berlioz penned a rather amusing farce about the popularity of Mendelssohn’s G Major Piano Concerto. In it, dozens of contestants of a piano competition have just finished playing the piece when the piano—now haunted by the music—begins playing the concerto from memory.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with the piano, but the keys go down all by themselves”—all are bedeviled by the unstoppable piano. Berlioz writes that M. Erard, the piano maker, “sends for holy water and sprinkles the keyboard with it—in vain: proof that it wasn’t witchcraft, but the natural result of thirty performances of one concerto.”

In a scene anticipating Disney’s *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, Berlioz describes Erard’s attempts to hack the piano to bits. “Each piece danced, jumped, frisked about separately on the paving stone, between our legs, against the wall” until the locksmith hurled the pieces into the fire. Berlioz capped his tale with a word of caution: “M. Mendelssohn won’t be able to complain that his music isn’t being played. But think of the damage!”