

Notes on the Program

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Quintet for Piano and Strings in A major, D.667, *Trout*

Franz Schubert

In the summer of 1819, the 22-year-old Franz Schubert went on a vacation with his close friend Johann Michael Vogl to Steyr in Upper Austria, a bit southeast of Linz. Vogl, who was 29 years Schubert's elder, had been born in the Ennsdorf district of Steyr and since 1794 had been a member of the Court Opera in Vienna, where he was one of the company's star baritones. This distinguished member of Vienna's musical establishment met the essentially unknown Schubert in early 1817, was bowled over by the young composer's talent, and became an important interpreter and promoter of his songs.

The composer would recall the summer of 1819 as serenely happy, the days filled with hikes and picnics, the evenings with chamber music at the home of Sylvester Paumgartner, who was the assistant manager of iron mines in the region. Paumgartner was a great music lover, and he possessed a notable collection of musical scores and instruments. (He also was an amateur cellist, although it was said that he didn't play very well.) He held musical soirées at his home on the main square in Steyr, and Vogl sometimes stayed with him during his visits back to his hometown. Vogl and Schubert did not lodge with him during their 1819 trip, although they spent a good many evenings making music at the house, which is today adorned by a marker identifying it as the site that gave rise to Schubert's *Trout* Quintet.

Paumgartner seems to have been particularly enamored of a quintet by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (actually a quintet arrangement of Hummel's D-minor Septet,

Op. 74). Its unusual instrumentation — violin, viola, cello, double bass, and piano — apparently coincided with the forces provided by his fellow musical aficionados in Steyr. Schubert leapt at Paumgartner's invitation to compose a companion piece and was delighted to accede to the only stipulation apart from the instrumentation: that the new work incorporate the melody of Paumgartner's favorite Schubert song, "Die Forelle" ("The Trout"), which had been written two years earlier. While still on vacation, the composer set down some sketches for the resulting composition, forever known as the *Trout* Quintet, and he apparently completed the piece immediately on his return to Vienna.

The *Trout* Quintet was the earliest of several instances of Schubert's quoting his own songs in works of chamber music. It is a particularly happy example, capturing, through the bounce of a strophic folk-song, the tale of a fisherman ensnaring a wriggling trout to an alarmed onlooker's distress. Among Schubert's principal chamber works, the *Trout* Quintet probably qualifies as

IN SHORT

Born: January 31, 1797, in Liechtenthal, then a suburb of Vienna, Austria

Died: November 19, 1828, in Vienna

Work composed: begun in Steyr, Upper Austria, during the summer of 1819; completed that fall in Vienna

World premiere: in Steyr, in late 1819

Estimated duration: ca. 37 minutes

Listen for ... Bubbling Piano

It would be misleading to think that Schubert's *Trout Quintet* is no more than an expansion of the song after which it is named. Schubert's variations on "Die Forelle" are confined to the fourth of the quintet's five movements. But references to the song appear elsewhere as well in the guise of the bubbling arpeggios — usually ascending — that pervade the piano part in the song and that are to be found in every movement of the Quintet except the third. An example comes at the outset, where the opening *Allegro vivace* opens with a flourish — a grand chord from the ensemble and a rising "Trout" arpeggio from the piano. The principal "Trout" movement is nonetheless the fourth, a set of six variations on the song's opening strain, in the last of which the piano finally sings forth with the leaping accompaniment that was original to the song.

the most consistently extroverted in its alluring charm.

It appears that Paumgartner and his friends played the work in Steyr at the end of 1819, and most likely they continued to bring it out from time to time for their own edification, but the work was unknown to the world until after the composer's untimely death. In 1829 the *Trout Quintet* was acquired by the publisher Joseph Czerny, who confidently proclaimed in an advertisement:

The quintet having already been performed in several circles at the publisher's instigation, and declared to be a masterpiece by the connoisseurs present, we deem it our duty to draw the musical public's attention to this latest work by the unforgettable composer.

Dating the *Trout Quintet*

The dating of Schubert's *Trout Quintet* is not a watertight matter since the documentary evidence concerning its genesis, which principally consists of a recollection penned by one of Schubert's

friends 40 years after the fact, could be taken to refer to any of the composers' three visits to Steyr: in 1819, 1823, or 1825. Even the manuscript of the *Trout Quintet* has gone missing. And yet there are compelling musical arguments that support connecting this work to the first of Schubert's Steyr vacations. Over the course of several years, the composer wrote out five versions of his song "Die Forelle," each differing in subtle details from the others, and the theme he uses in the *Trout Quintet* aligns most perfectly to a version of the song that he inscribed in 1818. Then, too, the *Trout Quintet* displays certain distinctive features of structure and harmonic behavior, and even aspects of the keyboard writing (such as the prevalence of using the piano as a melody instrument, with the two hands doubling the same line an octave apart), that coincide with other pieces he composed in 1818 but that he was no longer employing much in the 1820s.



Frontispiece from *The Art of Fly Fishing* by Richard Brookes, 1793