

DANISH STRING QUARTET
JOHANNES ROSTAMO, cello

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

String Quintet in C major D 956

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo. Presto - Trio. Andante sostenuto

Allegretto

(approx. 55 minutes)

Intermission

THOMAS ADÈS (b. 1971)

Wreath for Franz Schubert

(approx. 15-30 minutes)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Schubert: Die Nebensonnen (from *Die Winterreise*)

Arr. Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen

(approx. 3 minutes)

Franz Schubert

String Quintet in C major D 956

Schubert's Quintet in C major has been described not only as the composer's "crowning achievement in chamber music" but as "one of the finest chamber works of the nineteenth century."¹

Schubert's decision to write a string quintet in the last year of his life (1828) with two cellos, instead of the more normal two violas used by Mozart and Beethoven in their quintets, was not entirely unprecedented. Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), himself a cellist, had done so before but had written the extra cello part relatively high in the range, i.e., as a viola in all but name.

¹ *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (s.v. "Schubert, Franz") and *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, respectively.

Schubert, by contrast, makes full use of the extra cello's baritone timbre to add a dark but richly burnished lustre to the lower regions of the ensemble and in so doing strides boldly towards a symphonic ideal of sound.

This symphonic ideal is evident in the many passages of throbbing repeated notes that keep the string sonority ringing in your ears while important melodic events are presented. This ideal plays out as well in his varied treatment of instrumental sub-groups as orchestral "choirs" that parallel the established division of orchestral forces into strings, winds, brass and percussion.

That the qualities of pure sound are uppermost in his mind is evident from the way in which the work begins.

Allegro ma non troppo.



The image shows the beginning of a musical score for Schubert's work, titled "Allegro ma non troppo." It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Cello/Double Bass, and Bass. The music is in 2/4 time and begins with a series of chords and melodic lines. The dynamics range from piano (p) to fortissimo (ff). The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

Schubert offers us a static representation, without a steady rhythmic pulse, of the structuring harmonies that will undergird his roughly textured first theme.

This theme is eventually announced by the upper strings in a jagged series of chordal leaps, an arrival made to seem all the more disruptive by contrast with the placid opening bars.



The image shows a close-up of the upper strings (Violin I and Violin II) from the musical score. The music is characterized by a jagged series of chordal leaps, starting with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The notes are marked with accents (>) and the overall texture is highly rhythmic and disruptive.

Where the listener is especially grateful for the expansion of musical forces in this quintet is in the glorious second theme, presented in a cello duet with an almost Brahmsian luxuriance of warmth and charm. Its gently swaying melodic line in 3rds and 6ths is exquisitely perfumed with a sentimentality and sophistication that is uniquely Viennese.



The long development section is kept coherent by Schubert's skillful alternation of instrumental groupings that strive in the end towards a great stretto of cross-imitating motives, amid which the return of the opening material in the recapitulation materializes as if by magic.

The slow second movement is serious in tone, a real adagio.



It presents a triptych of contrasting moods, with two otherworldly outer sections bookending a middle section of dramatic – almost melodramatic – intensity of feeling.



This middle section in the minor mode features gasping accompaniment figures fretting anxiously in the off beats between a nervously active bass line and an urgently pleading melody in the first violin. The contrast with the frozen solemnity of the outer sections could not be greater, and the emotional range of this movement as a whole is astonishing.

The third-movement scherzo is also a triptych of contrasting moods, but inversely arranged. Right from the get-go it explodes with a massive wall of sound created by nine-voice chords made still more resonant by the use of open strings (C - G - D).

SCHERZO.
Presto.



The sounds of hunting horns and galloping hooves combine to create a “William-Tell-Overture” type of visceral excitement that contrasts starkly with the subdued, elegiac tone of the middle section trio, with its halting dotted rhythms and descending melodic line.



Many commentators have likened this trio to the Funeral March from Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony No. 3.

The work is rounded out with a dance finale of distinctly Hungarian flavour. It opens in a heavy peasant stomp with thumping off-beat accents. This tune begins in the minor mode but eventually discovers the upside of going major.



The image shows a musical score for the first section of the piece, marked "Allegretto". It consists of five staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and Violin II) and three bass clefs (Viola, Cello, and Double Bass). The music is in 2/4 time and begins with a strong, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, characteristic of a peasant stomp. The first measure is marked with a forte dynamic (*f*). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

More lyrical but still dance-like impulses motivate the lilting second theme announced by a duet between first violin and first cello:



The image shows a musical score for the second section, a duet between the first violin and first cello. It consists of three staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and Violin II) and one bass clef (Cello). The music is in 2/4 time and begins with a soft (*p*) dynamic. The first violin part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, while the cello part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

A third thematic element then enters in even quarter notes to calm things down even more and complete the cast of characters in this multi-mood movement.



The image shows a musical score for the third section, featuring even quarter notes. It consists of six staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and Violin II) and four bass clefs (Viola, Cello, Double Bass, and another Cello/Double Bass). The music is in 2/4 time and begins with a very soft (*pp*) dynamic. The first violin part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, while the other parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

Despite the emotional buoyancy and “hail-fellow-well-met” tone of the proceedings, Schubert manages to create a surprisingly dark and eyebrow-knitting development section based on the first theme before regaining the merry mood of the opening.

The work concludes with an exhilarating race-to-the-finish accelerando and a final “smudgy” D-flat-to-C crush-note ending, one that Brahms would later appropriate for the final bar of his F minor Quintet scherzo.

Thomas Adès

Wreath for Franz Schubert

Thomas Adès must surely rank as Britain’s most celebrated contemporary composer. His operas have been performed at London’s Royal Opera House and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, while his orchestral, chamber and choral works have been performed by leading ensembles all over Europe and North America.

Thomas Adès sends us this note regarding his new work, which was premiered by the Danish String Quartet with cellist Johannes Rostamo in Copenhagen on March 27, 2024.

Wreath for Franz Schubert is a single-movement work for string quintet. The central string trio of violin, viola and cello play arco throughout, a gradually unfolding “lifespan” of entwined “blooms”. The outer violin and cello outline them in pizzicato. The players are loosely co-ordinated, but within specific boundaries, so that within certain limits no two performances would be the same, and the duration is flexible: between fifteen and thirty minutes, depending on the players, or maybe the weather.

The inescapable relation to Schubert’s double-cello quintet will be clear, especially to its slow movement. At a recent (devastating) performance of it I was fascinated over again by the role of the second cello — at once lead singer, commentator and umpire.

I am most grateful to the great Danish String Quartet for giving me the time and encouragement to realize and develop this new path in my work.

Franz Schubert

Die Nebensonnen (from *Die Winterreise*) arr. Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen

Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise* is remarkable for its vivid musical portraits of the human heart smarting from the pains of love lost and stoically resigned to the approach of death.

In *Die Nebensonnen*, the penultimate song in the cycle, the singer looks up at the sky and sees *sundogs*, an optical phenomenon caused by the refraction of sunlight through ice crystals that makes bright spots appear in the sky.

Drei Sonnen sah ich am Himmel steh'n
Hab' lang und fest sie angesehen.
Und sie auch standen da so stier,
Als wollten sie nicht weg von mir.

Ach meine Sonnen seid ihr nicht,
Schaut andern doch in's Angesicht!
Ja neulich hatt' ich auch wohl drei;
Nun sind hinab die besten zwei.

Ging' nur die dritt' erst hinterdrein!
Im Dunkeln wird mir wohler sein.

I saw three suns up in the sky
I looked at them long and hard
And there they stood so blankly staring
As if they would never leave me.

Ah, it's not my suns you are,
Other faces get your gaze!
I did of late have three of them
But now the best ones are down.

Would the third would follow me
To guide me better in the dark.

This scene puts the singer in mind of the two "suns" that mattered most to him, viz. the eyes of his beloved, now taken from him. Wallowing in self-pity, he notes that the third, the real sun, abandons him too when night falls.

The singer's aching sighs are communicated throughout this lied in the dotted rhythms that are a constant feature of the accompaniment in the opening and closing sections of the song.



The song's saccharine major-mode harmonies dip into the minor mode in the middle section, when the singer thinks of the eyes that now gaze on others, not him.

This arrangement of Schubert's lied for string quartet was created by violinist Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen of the Danish String Quartet.

Donald G. Gíslason 2024