

## **SWAN SONG – PROGRAM NOTES**

**by Michael Manning (MM), Pamela Dellal (PD), and Roy Sansom (RS)**

There are a handful of composers in the western sphere that evoke reverence bordering on sycophancy - Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Stravinsky among them. It would have shocked the sickly Austrian Franz Peter Schubert, who survived only thirty-one years, to find himself in that company, for in his life he saw little success. He died a syphilitic pauper, known only to a small circle of aficionados (although his last two years saw a significant increase in his popularity and financial rewards, whereupon, of course, he died). Schubert's life was sad, and his music reflects that, or rather, it refracts it through a unique voice empowering one of the most fertile, facile, felicitous imaginations in human history. In his short life, he gave birth to some 1500 compositions, most of them arguably belonging to the canon of human achievement. The *pater seraphicus* of Romanticism, he elevated the art of song to what we now call Art Song, with hundreds of settings of the lesser and greater poets of his age, dizzying in their variety and depth. He similarly elevated the nascent genre of "miniature" to an exalted status with myriad short pieces for piano. A product of Beethovenian classicism, he wrote dozens of sonatas and sonatinas for various instruments as well as string quartets worthy of the Mozartian legacy, piano sonatas worthy of Beethoven, chamber music with piano that stands at the front of the genre, and symphonies, three of which are staples of the modern concert repertoire.

To perform Schubert is an exalting and humbling experience, for the demands he places on a performer transcend technical considerations. It's sometimes suggested that Schubert is not as technically challenging a composer as, say, Beethoven or Brahms, and surely not in the virtuoso camp of the likes of Liszt or Chopin. But such a dismissal misses the essence of what it means to challenge technique. In Schubert, as in Mozart and Bach, the technical demands are expressed not in notes-per-square-measure but in the more refined metrics of phrasing, color, voicing, rhythm, texture, and timbre - objects of control, not density; metaphorically of landscape, not acreage. Start there and add, as in the late piano sonatas and the two piano trios, the bravura of Beethoven and a breadth of vision exceeded only in latter years by Mahler, and the performer is confronted with works of such daunting difficulty as to discourage most from concentrating on this literature. But we do it because its rewards are as transcendent as its challenges promise. Schubert takes us into the realm of magic, of mystical power. To perform Schubert is to exercise humanism and theology, the former stripped of its politics, the latter, of its pretensions to rigor. The human experience, equally sweet and bitter, is expressed in every single work, and as is emblematic of the Romantic aesthetic, its penetrating universality is projected outward from the deeply personal.

Two of the works on tonight's program, the songs from *Schwanengesang* and the Piano Sonata, are from the astonishingly fecund final months of Schubert's life (*Die Taubenpost* is thought to be the very last composition he completed) which saw, in addition to the three last piano sonatas and *Schwanengesang*, the *C Major Quintet*, the *F Minor Fantasie*, *Drei Klavierstücke*, numerous songs including *Auf dem Strom* and *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, the completion of the *Ninth Symphony*, and sketches for a tenth symphony. Any one of these completed works would be sufficient to establish Schubert in the front rank, and there are dozens of them. The third of tonight's offerings is the final rondo from one of Schubert's many compositional curios, the much earlier sonata for arpeggione (more on this below) and piano, a thoroughly luminous work, conveying a deep sense of well-being but with, as with all Schubert, shadows. (MM)

### ***Rondo from Arpeggione Sonata, D. 821 (1824)***

Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata is a bit of an oddball piece. It was composed on a commission by Vinzenz Schuster for an instrument he invented, the arpeggione; a kind of bowed guitar, most similar to the viola da gamba, which never gained much interest and would have died a quiet death had one of the greatest composers not written this wonderful piece for it. Many of these instruments have been made in recent years (far more than there are pieces for it). The piece was not published in Schubert's lifetime, but was rediscovered by Diabelli in 1871, 43 years after Schubert's death. Since its discovery in the 19th century the sonata has been transcribed for cello, viola, euphonium, clarinet, kitchen sink etc. The transcription we'll be performing was done by flutist Robert Stallman. I've made some changes since my instrument has a smaller range than the modern flute.

Though this sonata has three movements we're only performing the final one, the allegretto. This movement is a rondo, which begins with a hopeful and serene theme in A major supported by a musette-like accompaniment. The following section is in stormy d minor with assertive arpeggiated figures, which eventually calms down and returns to the more placid rondo theme. Next comes a playful and entirely sunny E major section, followed by a short transition for the piano back to the stormy section transposed to a minor. The movement ends with the A major rondo theme with some devastatingly wonderful turns in the harmony to end this perfectly satisfying piece. (RS)

### ***Selections from Schwanengesang, D. 957 (1828)***

In the fall of 1828 Schubert was dying. His long struggle with syphilis, compounded by poverty and a frail constitution, made him aware that his time was running out. During this period he continued to be marvelously productive, and almost every piece he wrote was a masterwork. Among them are 14 songs that were published posthumously as his third song cycle, *Schwanengesang* (Swan Song). The title of this cycle, as well as the order of its contents, was chosen by Schubert's publisher, Tobias Haslinger, who exploited the untimely death of the composer to help draw attention to this final group of songs. The songs themselves do not form a unified cycle in the model of Schubert's two groundbreaking cycles. *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* revolutionized the Lied by creating a large-scale narrative, linking individual songs by a single poet together. Here we have settings of seven poems by Ludwig Rellstab and six poems by Heinrich Heine. There is evidence that Schubert planned to publish these sets separately, and possibly in a different order than they appear in Haslinger's edition. Haslinger also appended a final, fourteenth song, *Die Taubenpost*, to a poem of Johann Gabriel Seidl, which is considered to be the last song Schubert composed.

The ambiguous history of *Schwanengesang* and the nature of the songs themselves invite deconstruction, reconstruction, and other ways of organizing the songs. Without final evidence of Schubert's own intentions, many artists have changed the published order, inserted other songs, or made shorter selections from the cycle. This evening we present five Rellstab, two Heine, and the final Seidl setting, in two excerpted sets that reflect the variety of moods and emotional range of these brilliant pieces.

Even though this grouping of songs does not have an internal story or innate reason to be bound together, certain themes recur again and again. In the Rellstab poems, separation and longing pervade almost every song. Our sequence begins with a departure: *Abschied*. While this song is a supreme example of the infectious joy that Schubert can weave through a boisterous accompaniment and cheerful melody, the poem tells of a man saying farewell to all he holds dear as he departs on a journey.

The only song in the set not involving separation is *Ständchen*. Here the lover's serenade calls softly to his beloved to join him in the night. The sensuality, intimacy, and tenderness of this song have made it the most often excerpted from the cycle. Yet even this love song is imbued with the implicit pain of yearning and unfulfilled desire.

In the final three songs, the narrator is distant from his beloved. *Liebesbotschaft* shimmers with one of Schubert's most characteristic motives, a rustling brook; the traveller, missing his beloved, entrusts the water with his message. Here the longing is tempered by real optimism and tenderness. Isolation is key in the bleak landscape of *Aufenthalt*; far from human habitation, the poet sees his suffering mirrored in the natural world. *In der Ferne* recalls the desolation of *Winterreise* in the self-exile and despair of the poem; in true Schubertian fashion, the turn to the major key and the entrance of the 'water music' is suffused with almost unbearable poignancy.

One of the most marvelous achievements of Schubert's final year is the set of six songs he composed to the poetry of Heinrich Heine. Schubert's engagement with one of Germany's greatest poets brought him to a new level of brilliance; how regrettable that Schubert did not have more time to explore this collaboration further! Heine's mastery lies in the simplicity and utter clarity of his writing, akin almost to folk song, allied with potent passion and a mixture of fantasy and irony. Some of his most famous poems feature this synthesis: *Der Atlas* portrays the unhappy lover as a hubristic seeker of universal happiness (or pain), introducing imagery from Greek mythology and ironic self-flagellation; *Der Doppelgänger* depicts a man so distraught over an obsessive passion that he witnesses a version of himself as if burned into the air, mimicking actions he repeated over and over in the past.

We have selected only two songs from the Heine set, which make a miniature arc in themselves. In the first poem, *Das Fischer mädchen*, we see the poet wielding his considerable charm to woo a working fisher-girl. By the second, *Am Meer*, they are a pair, but her unhappiness infects him with an almost magical curse. Schubert brilliantly captures Heine's playful, negligent tone in the first poem, allowing the hint of danger to flash through in twists of harmonic direction. The lowering, ominous mood of the second song is enhanced by mysterious tremolos and darkly colored cadences.

*Die Taubenpost* is generally acknowledged as Schubert's final composition in the song genre. While filled with all the magic of the composer's genius, it seems almost trivial after the gigantic achievements of *In der Ferne* or *Der Doppelgänger*. However, in its subtle shifting of harmony and sweetness of melodic line, the ever-present theme of unfulfilled desire insinuates itself once more into the texture. In his final song, Schubert is still sending messages through intermediaries, trying to bridge the chasm between his heart and the object of his passion – this time his messenger, charmingly imaged as a carrier pigeon, is in fact his own longing. (PD)

***Piano Sonata No. 19 in C minor, D. 958 (1828)***

The last three sonatas, D. 958, 959, and 960, were written between March and September of 1828, and are rightly considered the heirs to the sonatas of Beethoven, a composer whom Schubert (like everyone in the early 19th century) revered. There seems little doubt that Schubert was aware of his connection to and ultimate divergence from this singularly imposing oeuvre, and one gets the impression of a deliberate evolution from the clearly post-Beethoven C minor sonata, with its canonical classical architecture, to the sublime expansiveness of the last sonata in B-flat Major.

All three sonatas are cast in the classical four-movement mold, but the C minor is the most classically adherent of the three, including a minuet where the others offer the more contemporaneously typical scherzo. The dramatic work begins with a textbook sonata-allegro whose theme is unmistakably derived from that of Beethoven's *32 Variations in C minor*. The slow movement is an echt-Schubert excursion into the divine, and the finale, an effusive sonata-rondo cast as a fleet tarantella that, in the hands of any lesser composer, would simply have been prolix. Throughout, the technical demands are very high, again recalling the virtuoso tradition embodied in the 32 sonatas of Beethoven. But the rhetorical style is unmistakably Schubert's, from the casual asymmetry of the first movement's second theme to the parade of dark spirits in the finale (which pianist Mitsuko Uchida has called a "death hunt"), to the uniquely Schubertian key changes in the second and fourth movements (Schubert, more than any other composer, is capable of getting to anywhere from anywhere with a naturalness that defies standard music theory). (MM)

## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

### Schwanengesang - Lieder of Ludwig Rellstab (1799 –1860)

#### Abschied

Ade! du muntre, du fröhliche Stadt, ade!  
Schon scharret mein Rößlein mit lustigen Fuß;  
Jetzt nimm noch den letzten, den scheidenden Gruß.  
Du hast mich wohl niemals noch traurig gesehn,  
So kann es auch jetzt nicht beim Abschied geschehn.

Ade, ihr Bäume, ihr Gärten so grün, ade!  
Nun reit ich am silbernen Strome entlang.  
Weit schallend ertönet mein Abschiedsgesang;  
Nie habt ihr ein trauriges Lied gehört,  
So wird euch auch keines beim Scheiden beschert!

Ade, ihr freundlichen Mädlein dort, ade!  
Was schaut ihr aus blumenumduftetem Haus  
Mit schelmischen, lockenden Blicken heraus?  
Wie sonst, so grüß ich und schaue mich um,  
Doch nimmer wend ich mein Rößlein um.

Ade, liebe Sonne, so gehst du zur Ruh, ade!  
Nun schimmert der blinkenden Sterne Gold.  
Wie bin ich euch Sternlein am Himmel so hold;  
Durchziehn wir die Welt auch weit und breit,  
Ihr gebt überall uns das treue Geleit.

Ade! du schimmerndes Fensterlein hell, ade!  
Du glänzt so traulich mit dämmerndem Schein  
Und ladest so freundlich ins Hüttchen uns ein.  
Vorüber, ach, ritt ich so manches Mal,  
Und wär es denn heute zum letzten Mal?

Ade! ihr Sterne, verhüllet euch grau!  
Ade! Des Fensterlein trübes, verschimmerndes Licht  
Ersetzt ihr unzähligen Sterne mir nicht,  
Darf ich hier nicht weilen, muß hier vorbei,  
Was hilft es, folgt ihr mir noch so treu!

#### Ständchen

Leise flehen meine Lieder  
Durch die Nacht zu dir;  
In den stillen Hain hernieder,  
Liebchen, komm zu mir!

Flüsternd schlanke Wipfel rauschen  
In des Mondes Licht;  
Des Verräters feindlich Lauschen  
Fürchte, Holde, nicht.

Hörst die Nachtigallen schlagen?  
Ach! sie flehen dich,  
Mit der Töne süßen Klagen  
Flehen sie für mich.

Sie verstehn des Busens Sehnen,  
Kennens Liebesschmerz,  
Rühren mit den Silbertönen  
Jedes weiche Herz.

#### Departure

Farewell! You cheerful, happy town, farewell!  
My little horse already paws with lively hoof;  
now receive the final, the parting greeting.  
You have never really seen me sad,  
so even now, in parting, that can't happen!

Farewell, you trees, you garden so green, farewell!  
Now I ride along the silvery stream.  
Far abroad rings out my parting song;  
you have never heard a sad song,  
so even now, in parting, you won't get one!

Farewell, you friendly girls, there, farewell!  
How you peep out of your fragrant flowery houses  
with naughty, enticing glances!  
As before, I greet you and take a good look,  
but I never turn my horse around.

Farewell, dear sun, as you go to your rest, farewell!  
Now the twinkling gold stars shimmer.  
How fond I am of you, little stars in heaven;  
though we travel through the world far and wide,  
you keep us faithful company everywhere.

Farewell! You bright, glowing little window, farewell!  
You shine so cosily with a twilight gleam  
and so kindly welcome us under your little roof.  
Ah, I have ridden by so many times,  
and could it be for the last time today?

Farewell! You stars, veil yourselves in grey!  
Farewell! The darkening, fading little window,  
you countless stars cannot replace;  
Since I may not dally here, must depart,  
what good is it, however faithfully you follow me?

#### Serenade

Quietly my songs plead  
to you through the night;  
down into the silent grove,  
darling, come to me!

Whispering, slender treetops rustle  
in the light of the moon;  
unfriendly, treacherous eavesdropping  
should not frighten you, my lovely one.

Do you hear the nightingales crying?  
Alas! they implore you,  
with the sweet lament of their song  
they plead for me.

They understand the heart's longing,  
know the pain of love,  
they touch with their silvery tones  
every tender heart.

Laß auch dir die Brust bewegen,  
Liebchen, höre mich!  
Bebend harr' ich dir entgegen!  
Komm, beglücke mich!

#### **Liebesbotschaft**

Rauschendes Bächlein,  
So silbern und hell,  
Eilst zur Geliebten  
So munter und schnell?  
Ach, trautes Bächlein,  
Mein Bote sei du;  
Bringe die Grüße  
Des Fernen ihr zu.

All' ihre Blumen,  
Im Garten gepflegt,  
Die sie so lieblich  
Am Busen trägt,  
Und ihre Rosen  
In purpurner Glut,  
Bächlein, erquicke  
Mit kühlender Flut.

Wenn sie am Ufer,  
In Träume versenkt,  
Meiner gedenkend,  
Das Köpfchen hängt;  
Tröste die Süße  
Mit freundlichem Blick,  
Denn der Geliebte  
Kehrt bald zurück.

Neigt sich die Sonne  
Mit rötlichem Schein,  
Wiege das Liebchen  
In Schlummer ein.  
Rausche sie murmelnd  
In süße Ruh,  
Flüstere ihr Träume  
Der Liebe zu.

#### **Aufenthalt**

Rauschender Strom,  
Brausender Wald,  
Starrender Fels  
Mein Aufenthalt.

Wie sich die Welle  
An Welle reiht,  
Fließen die Tränen  
Mir ewig erneut.

Hoch in den Kronen  
Wogend sich's regt,  
So unaufhörlich  
Mein Herze schlägt.

Let your breast be moved as well,  
darling, hear me!  
trembling I await you!  
Come, delight me!

#### **Message of Love**

Rustling brook,  
so silvery and bright,  
are you hurrying to my beloved,  
so quick and lively?  
Ah, faithful brook,  
be my messenger;  
bring the greetings  
of the distant one to her.

All her flowers  
nurtured in the garden,  
which she lovingly  
presses to her breast,  
and her roses  
glowing crimson,  
brook, refresh  
with your cooling water.

When on the bank  
lost in dreams,  
thinking of me,  
she hangs her head;  
comfort the sweet one  
with a kindly glance,  
for her beloved  
will soon return.

When the sun sinks  
with reddish light,  
lull my darling  
into sleep.  
Rustle her, murmuring  
into sweet rest,  
whisper dreams  
of love to her.

#### **Resting Place**

Rustling stream,  
roaring wood,  
stark crags  
are my resting place.

Like wave  
rises after wave,  
my tears flow  
always renewed.

High up the tree crowns  
buffeted, are stirring;  
just as incessantly  
my heart beats.

Und wie des Felsens  
Uraltes Erz,  
Ewig derselbe  
Bleibet mein Schmerz.

Rauschender Strom,  
Brausender Wald,  
Starrender Fels  
Mein Aufenthalt.

#### **In der Ferne**

Wehe dem Fliehenden,  
Welt hinaus ziehenden! -  
Fremde durchmessenden,  
Heimat vergessenden,  
Mutterhaus hassenden,  
Freunde verlassenden  
Folget kein Segen, ach!  
Auf ihren Wegen nach!

Herze, das sehnde,  
Auge, das tränende,  
Sehnsucht, nie endende,  
Heimwärts sich wendende!  
Busen, der wallende,  
Klage, verhallende,  
Abendstern, blinkender,  
Hoffnungslos sinkender!

Lüfte, ihr säuselnden,  
Wellen sanft kräuselnden,  
Sonnenstrahl, eilender,  
Nirgend verweilender:  
Die mir mit Schmerze, ach!  
Dies treue Herze brach -  
Grüßt von dem Fliehenden,  
Welt hinaus ziehenden!

And like the crag's  
primeval ore,  
always the same  
my suffering remains.

Rustling stream,  
roaring wood,  
stark crags  
are my resting place.

#### **In the Distance**

Woe to the runaway,  
withdrawing from the world! -  
pacing out distances,  
forgetting homeland,  
hating mother's house,  
abandoning friends,  
no blessing, alas,  
follows their path!

Heart, longing,  
eye, weeping,  
Longing, never ceasing,  
yearning towards home!  
Breast, heaving,  
cry, ringing out,  
evening star, twinkling,  
hopeless, sinking!

Breezes, humming,  
waves, softly rippling,  
sunbeam, hurrying,  
never tarrying:  
to her who with pain, alas!  
broke this faithful heart -  
bring greetings from the runaway,  
withdrawing from the world!

### **Schwanengesang - Lieder of Heinrich Heine (1797 – 1856)**

#### **Das Fischermädchen**

Du schönes Fischermädchen,  
Treibe den Kahn ans Land;  
Komm zu mir und setze dich nieder,  
Wir kosen Hand in Hand.

Leg an mein Herz dein Köpfchen  
Und fürchte dich nicht zu sehr;  
Vertraust du dich doch sorglos  
Täglich dem wilden Meer.  
Mein Herz gleicht ganz dem Meere,  
Hat Sturm und Ebb' und Flut,  
Und manche schöne Perle  
In seiner Tiefe ruht.

#### **Am Meer**

Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus  
Im letzten Abendscheine;  
Wir saßen am einsamen Fischerhaus,  
Wir saßen stumm und alleine.

#### **The Fisher Girl**

You lovely fisher girl,  
drag your boat on land;  
come to me, and sit down,  
we will cuddle, hand in hand.

Lay your little head on my heart,  
and do not be too afraid;  
without a care you entrust yourself  
daily to the wild ocean.  
My heart is just like the sea,  
with storms, ebb and flood tide;  
and many lovely pearls  
lie in its depths.

#### **At the Sea**

The sea sparkled far and wide  
in the last light of sunset;  
we sat before the lonely fisher hut,  
we sat silent and alone.

Der Nebel stieg, das Wasser schwoll,  
Die Möwe flog hin und wieder;  
Aus deinen Augen liebevoll  
Fielen die Tränen nieder.

Ich sah sie fallen auf deine Hand  
Und bin aufs Knie gesunken;  
Ich hab von deiner weißen Hand  
Die Tränen fortgetrunken.

Seit jener Stunde verzehrt sich mein Leib,  
Die Seele stirbt vor Sehnen;  
Mich hat das unglücksel'ge Weib  
Vergiftet mit ihren Tränen.

The mist rose, the water swelled,  
the gull flew back and forth;  
From your eyes, full of love,  
the tears fell down.

I saw them fall on your hand  
and sank down on my knee;  
from your white hand  
I drank up the tears.

Since that hour my body wastes away,  
my soul perishes with longing;  
the unhappy woman has  
poisoned me with her tears.

### **Schwanengesang - Lied of Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804 – 1875)**

#### **Die Taubenpost**

Ich hab' eine Brieftaub' in meinem Sold,  
Die ist gar ergeben und treu,  
Sie nimmt mir nie das Ziel zu kurz  
Und fliegt auch nie vorbei.

Ich sende sie viel tausendmal  
Auf Kundschaft täglich hinaus,  
Vorbei an manchem lieben Ort,  
Bis zu der Liebsten Haus.

Dort schaut sie zum Fenster heimlich hinein,  
Belauscht ihren Blick und Schritt,  
Gibt meine Grüße scherzend ab  
Und nimmt die ihren mit.

Kein Briefchen brauch ich zu schreiben mehr,  
Die Träne selbst geb ich ihr,  
Oh, sie verträgt sie sicher nicht,  
Gar eifrig dient sie mir.

Bei Tag, bei Nacht, im Wachen, im Traum,  
Ihr gilt das alles gleich,  
Wenn sie nur wandern, wandern kann,  
Dann ist sie überreich!

Sie wird nicht müd, sie wird nicht matt,  
Der Weg ist stets ihr neu;  
Sie braucht nicht Lockung, braucht nicht Lohn,  
Die Taub' ist so mir treu!

Drum heg ich sie auch so treu an der Brust,  
Versichert des schönsten Gewinns;  
Sie heißt – die Sehnsucht! Kennt ihr sie? –  
Die Botin treuen Sinns.

#### **The Pigeon Post**

I have a carrier pigeon in my sachel,  
who is completely devoted and loyal,  
she never falls short of my target  
or ever flies past it.

I send her many thousand times  
out on daily errands,  
out past many beloved places  
to the house of my darling.

There she looks furtively in at the window,  
spying on her gaze and step,  
playfully delivers my greetings  
and receives hers in return.

I don't need to write notes anymore,  
I entrust actual tears to her;  
oh, she surely never miscarries them,  
so eagerly does she serve me.

By day, by night, waking, in dreams,  
it's all the same to her;  
as long as she can wander free,  
she is more than rich!

She never wearies, she never tires,  
her course is always fresh;  
she requires no lure or reward,  
my pigeon is so loyal to me!

Therefore I cherish her so tenderly on my breast,  
assured of the loveliest prize;  
her name – Longing! Do you know her? –  
The messenger of a faithful heart.

translations © Pamela Dellal