

ANAM AT THE CONVENT: SCHUBERT OCTET

WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 3PM
 ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828) Octet in F Major, D. 803 (1824)

60'

- i. Adagio - Allegro*
- ii. Adagio*
- iii. Allegro vivace*
- iv. Andante*
- v. Menuetto. Allegro*
- vi. Andante molto - Allegro*

Shannon Rhodes * (WA) violin 1
Olivia Kowalik * (NSW) violin 2
Helena Burns * (QLD) viola
Heesoo Kim * (QLD) cello

Maddison Furlan * (VIC) double bass
Karen Chen * (NSW) clarinet
Stephanie Sheridan * (WA) bassoon
Tom Allen * (VIC) horn

Approximate duration: 65 minutes

** Denotes ANAM musicians supported by ANAM Syndicate donors or foundations.*

Olivia Kowalik plays a Pressenda 1849 Violin 'Richard Pollett' on loan to ANAM from Janet Holmes à Court AC.

Shannon Rhodes plays an Antonio Costa Violin on loan to ANAM from Jannie Brown and a Hill and Sons bow donated to ANAM by The Bryce Family.

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WHAT'S NEXT

If you enjoyed this performance, be sure to check out these upcoming ANAM events:

MIRRORS IN MIRROR
 Friday 27 March, 7pm
 Rosina Auditorium, Abbotsford Convent

Arvo Pärt's music seems to come from a place beyond stillness. The spare sounds of his *Spiegel im Spiegel* frame long silences and lasting resonances. Kate Moore's *The Art of Levitation* occupies a similar contemplative dimension: like a form shimmering on a desert horizon, hovering on the edge of nothingness. To close the evening, we are called back once more to the world with Schubert's delightful Octet.

SACRED: SEVEN LAST WORDS
 Thursday 2 April, 7pm
 The Good Shepherd Chapel, Abbotsford

Affinity Quartet returns to ANAM, leading a trio of ANAM string quartets in a meditative exploration of Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ*. Nine luminous wordless prayers in the form of movements will fill the nave of the Good Shepherd Chapel as we celebrate the artform of the string quartet. Come join us for what will be a sacred and ruminative Thursday evening, right beside the Convent.

ANAM respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands spread across Australia on which we work and live. We uphold and honour their continued relationship to these sites, we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

A BIGGER CANVAS

Looking through Franz Schubert's catalogue year by year, 1824 stands out as quite peculiar. The unrivalled king of German Lied turned away from song, penning only seven across the year. The melodist set himself larger challenges and longer works, pushing chamber music further than anyone had dreamt before.

In the year before, 1823, the fragility of Schubert's own mortality became more apparent to him as his syphilis took hold. Syphilis was not the easily treatable bacterial infection we know it as today, but a death sentence with a long, painful spiral into pain and incapacitation, made all the worse by the ineffective treatments of the time. As painful rashes tortured Schubert across 1823, increasingly keeping him house-bound, he would surely have understood that what little of his life remained would be years if suffering, if even that long.

"Secretly I still really hope to be able to make something of myself, but who can do anything now after Beethoven?"

– SCHUBERT, ca. 1813

There's plenty of evidence in records left by Schubert's friends of his deep adoration for Ludwig van Beethoven – though an anecdote that he sold his schoolbooks to be able to afford a ticket to the premiere of *Fidelio* is less likely, his Variations on a French Theme (D. 624) are dedicated to Beethoven by "his worshipper and admirer, Franz Schubert." In Beethoven, Schubert saw not only an idol but an inspiration as to how he could follow in the giant's footsteps.

Prior to 1824, Schubert's larger scale works had not found great success – his piano sonatas remained unpublished and his operas continued to be poorly received. It was only in 1821 that Schubert's works began to receive positive public recognition with the premiere of his song *Erlkönig*. Songs lacked the prestige of longer chamber and symphonic works, and Schubert's intricate songcraft left him in a lesser category to Beethoven. His turn to larger forms in 1824 was both a preparation for a 'great' symphony (what would become the C Major, D. 944) and an effort to be taken more seriously in the compositional world – ever more potent a task given the death sentence of his syphilis.

In writing the Octet and two remarkable quartets, *Rosamunde* and *Death and the Maiden*, Schubert says: "I have tried my hand at several instrumental works." Whether modesty or humility, the Octet alone is far beyond an attempt at chamber music. It is a pinnacle of form and style. Commissioned by Count Ferdinand Troyer, likely as an imitation of Beethoven's popular Septet, op. 20, the six-movement structure of the Octet copies the Septet, with the same tempi and key relationships. But where Beethoven's Septet comes in at just over 40 minutes, Schubert's Octet comes in at just over an hour, and with the addition of a second violin, adds to the instrumental possibilities, demonstrating his mastery of chamber writing.

Count Troyer was an avid amateur clarinettist, and Schubert crafts a challenging and prominent line for Troyer, who played in the work's premiere. The horn too demands endurance and agility, especially in the first movement – perhaps acknowledging this, a generous 40 bar rest is given to the horn at the beginning of the second movement. In fact, no single instrument can be singled out as more virtuosic or difficult than another, and even professional ensembles are daunted by the scale of the Octet. Tonight's players began studying the work late last year, which is remarkable given even the recent *Kurtág and Friends* program was assembled in a matter of weeks.

Within the work, Schubert weaves numerous themes, both of folk origin and from previous works. The first movement, whose dotted rhythms become a motif throughout the entire Octet, takes its theme from his earlier song *Der Wanderer*, and the Theme and Variations from a duet in his opera *The Friends of Salamanca*. But most familiar to the audiences of the time would be the folk *G'stampfer* and *Ländler* of the scherzo and trio, respectively – a rollicking dance seemingly at odds with the melancholy persona of the composer. But what has always made Schubert special is his ability to weave emotion, and even in the darkest moments lies a glimmer of hope peeking through a phrase or even a chord.

Written by Alex Owens, ANAM Music Librarian,
Robert Salzer Foundation