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

In the summer of 1819, the twenty-two-year-old Franz Schubert (1797–1828) went on a vacation with his friend Johann Michael Vogl to Steyr in Upper Austria, a bit southeast of Linz, at the confluence of the rivers Steyr and Enns. Vogl, who was twenty-nine years Schubert’s elder, had been born in that area and since 1794 had performed as a baritone at the Court Opera in Vienna, where his distinctions included singing the role of Don Pizarro in the 1814 premiere of Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. In the summers of 1819, 1823, and 1825 Schubert accompanied Vogl on vacations to Upper Austria, where the singer still had a circle of friends.

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, though it was said that he didn’t play very well. He held at-home musical soirées in his house on the main square in Steyr, and Vogl sometimes stayed with him during his visits. Actually, Vogl and Schubert did not lodge with him during their 1819 visit, although they would do so on both of their later trips to town. In any case, during that first trip they spent evenings making music at Paumgartner’s home on the town square, a building that today is adorned with a historical 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 his D minor Septet, Opus 74), the unusual instrumentation of which—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 and which tells the tale of a fisherman ensnaring a wriggling trout to an alarmed onlooker’s distress. While still on vacation, the composer set down some sketches for the composition, forever known as the *Trout* Quintet, and he completed the piece on his return to Vienna in September.

In truth, the dating of this work is no watertight matter since the documentary evidence concerning its genesis, which principally consists of a recollection penned by one of Schubert’s friends forty years after the fact, could be taken to refer to any of the composer’s three visits to Steyr. Even the manuscript of the *Trout* Quintet has gone missing, so we lack the physical evidence it might provide. And yet there are compelling musical arguments that connect this work to the first of Schubert’s Steyr vacations. Over the course of several years, Schubert wrote out five versions of his song, each differing in subtle details from the others. The theme he uses in the *Trout* Quintet aligns most perfectly to a version of the song that he inscribed in 1818—which is

to say, the most up-to-date version that existed in 1819, but not in 1823 or 1825. Then, too, the *Trout* Quintet displays certain distinctive features of structure and harmonic behavior, and even aspects of keyboard writing (such as the prevalence of using the piano as a melody instrument, 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 in the 1820s.

Schubert's variations on "*Die Forelle*" are confined to the fourth of the quintet's five movements, but references to the song also appear in 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. The quintet is plotted rather after the fashion of a by-then-old-fashioned serenade, alternating fast movements with slower ones.

The opening *Allegro vivace* takes off with a flourish—a grand chord from the ensemble and a leaping "Trout" arpeggio from the piano. The action takes its time moving into full gear, but before long the viola and cello set up a pulse that provides a vigorous underpinning to Schubert's spacious melodies. Three leisurely tunes provide the stuff for the next movement, a liberally ornamented *Andante* that achieves a deeply Schubertian sense of melancholy; and, at the center of the work, the *Scherzo* bristles with energy derived from the upturned eyebrow of its initial four-note motif.

Next comes the set of six variations on the song's opening strain (or five variations plus a coda). The opening statement is reserved for the warm-voiced strings alone, and the first three variations respectively feature the piano, the viola and cello (as a pair), and the double bass. With the fourth variation, Schubert embarks on a more profound transformation of the melody; its blustery minor-key opening yields easily to major-key taming. In the fifth variation, the cello further adapts the theme into an emotional highpoint that encompasses concern and nostalgia. But these shadows are swept away by the final variation (or coda), where the piano finally sings forth with the leaping accompaniment that was original to the song. Again mirroring the simple good humor of a Haydnesque serenade, Schubert ends his quintet with an invigorating *Allegro giusto* finale, replete with references to the high-kicking "Hungarian Gypsy" style.

Paumgartner and his friends apparently 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 outer world until after the composer's untimely death. In 1829, the publisher Joseph Czerny brought out the posthumous first edition of this much-loved chamber work. In an advertisement, he proclaimed confidently, "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." —**James M. Keller**

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