

Franz Schubert's most prolific year as a composer came in 1815, which witnessed the completion of his second and third symphonies, two full-scale Masses, several chamber works, and an astonishing one hundred forty-four songs, including his masterful setting of Goethe's *Erlkönig*. At a time when much of the German-speaking world was celebrating Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo and Americans were awaiting the newly chartered railroad on the Atlantic coast, Schubert was quietly putting forth dozens of compositions, many of which would become staples of the nineteenth-century repertory. His works from that time demonstrate a remarkable depth of expression and level of compositional maturity, especially notable given that in January of that year he celebrated but his eighteenth birthday.

In a musical culture that centered almost exclusively in Vienna, Schubert stands out as a rarity. Unlike Mozart, Beethoven, and a handful of other successful composers whom the Viennese gladly claimed as their own, Schubert was native to that city, and remained there until his brief life was cut short by typhoid fever in 1828. Schubert's widespread fame and respect largely arrived posthumously: during his lifetime he labored under the daunting shadow of Beethoven and the fanatic popularity of Rossini. Drawing from a small but committed circle of friends and fellow artists, he supported himself through teaching and publication, living in relative obscurity. Indeed, his manuscript copy of *Erlkönig*, which he submitted to the preeminent publishing firm Breitkopf und Härtel, was rejected and then mistakenly returned to another bearing his surname, and the *Mass No. 2 in G Major*, performed this afternoon, was not to be published until decades after his death. Small in stature (he stood less than 5'2") and prone to bouts of illness, Schubert never married, devoting himself instead to composition, teaching, and salon performances. His music ultimately came to embody a unique Classical-Romantic aesthetic, steeped in the formal traditions of the eighteenth century but deeply imbued with the harmonic and expressive spontaneity of the nineteenth.

Schubert's *Mass No. 2 in G Major*, composed in a mere six days in March 1815, is modestly scored for soprano, tenor, and bass soloists, mixed chorus, organ, and strings. Gentlest of Masses, it was intended for performance in Schubert's parish church, in which his earlier Mass had been well-received. The *Mass* is compositionally conservative: the soloist passages are lyrical and unpretentious, the texture is largely homophonic, and the harmonies are smooth and restrained. Several passages, particularly in the *Credo*, present nearly textbook examples of the *stile antico*, an approach to sacred composition that harkens back to the controlled dissonance and clear text declamation mandated by the Roman Catholic church during the Counter Reformation. But Schubert's *Mass* is no pedantic exercise: passages of soaring lyricism abound, punctuated by Schubert's penchant for unconventional harmonic fluidity. Both were to become hallmarks of the Romantic style.

The "Kyrie," with its traditional three-part structure, is framed by the chorus; the writing is harmonically stable and rhythmically agile. The central "Christe" section is taken up by the soprano soloist; it is believed that Schubert intended it for the singer Therese Grob, to whom he unsuccessfully proposed marriage some months earlier. Darker in color, the "Christe" contrasts with the surrounding choral passages by suggesting a more personal and direct plea for mercy. The "Gloria" takes a jubilant turn, until the soprano and bass soloists enter with the more plaintive "Domine Deus," supported by choral declamations of "miserere nobis."

The hypnotic "Credo," entrusted in full to the choir, recalls Baroque ostinati in its detached bassline, supported by homophonic choral writing and a few harmonic surprises. Only twice is the homophony broken by strong declamatory octaves, both times in response to text that

underscores the triune. And twice Schubert includes in the strings the well-established figure of a descending chromatic line from tonic to dominant, widely understood in the Renaissance and Baroque eras as an expression of lament. For all its traditional reverence, Schubert's only significant departure from Catholic tradition occurs in this movement: he deliberately omitted the phrases *Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam* and *Et expecto resurrectionem* ("I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church" and "I expect the resurrection"), indicative of his rather liberal view toward Christianity. Later publishers stubbornly reinserted both phrases but it is Schubert's original version that will be sung today.

The "Sanctus" begins majestically, accompanied by dotted rhythms suggestive of the French Overture style. Further allusions to Baroque styles of composition continue in the Benedictus. It begins with all three soloists; the soprano figure is taken up contrapuntally by the tenor and bass, and the movement concludes with a rousing four-part fugue for the chorus. The Mass concludes tranquilly with the "Agnus Dei," alternating between soloists and chorus and thus giving expression to both collective and personal pleas for mercy.