

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, D. 485

FRANZ SCHUBERT

B. January 31, 1797 in Vienna

D. November 19, 1828 in Vienna

Premiered posthumously on October 17, 1841 in Vienna.

Scored for flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, and strings (approx. 26 minutes).

Schubert's Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat Major is a work of Classical-period restraint, of Mozartean grace – both its dimensions and spirit being closer to the symphonic ideals of the eighteenth century than those of the more expansive nineteenth. That the music lacks the emotional urgency of the composer's "Unfinished" Eighth Symphony or the majestic scope of his Ninth, the "Great" C Major, is understandable in view of Schubert's youth when he fashioned it. He was not yet twenty when he completed the score in the autumn of 1816. Like so many of his works, this one was created for the enjoyment of his circle of musical friends. The composer participated regularly in an amateur chamber orchestra that met in the home of a Viennese musician, Otto Hatwig, and it was there that the Fifth Symphony received its first reading.

The modest occasion for which Schubert composed this symphony finds reflection in its modest orchestration. Only a single flute and pairs of oboes, bassoons and horns complement the usual string choir. Clarinets, trumpets and percussion are conspicuous in their absence. Schubert, however, makes a virtue of this reduced orchestra, providing it with music whose intimacy and delicate scoring would hardly be appropriate to a larger ensemble.

The work follows the classic symphonic format of four movements. The first, marked simply Allegro, opens with a scant four measures of introduction before launching into its principal subject. This is a winsome melody enriched by discreet echoes in the bass instruments. Presently a second theme, somewhat lighter in character, appears in the violins and quickly is taken up by the woodwinds. Schubert's development of these ideas is highly inventive, frequently involving the combination of fragments from each theme in counterpoint.

The second movement forms the heart of this symphony. Here Schubert treats two themes in alternation — the first being a lyrical idea introduced in the strings, the second emerging from a series of yearning woodwind phrases. The composer leads these subjects through far-flung harmonic provinces, their excursions making for one of the most beautiful of all his symphonic movements.

The minuet third movement, in the dark tonality of G minor, is surprising in its violence and recalls the corresponding movement in Mozart's Symphony No. 40, written in that same key. Schubert balances this unexpected bit of *Sturm und Drang* with a bucolic central section, or "Trio." He then banishes any lingering shadows with a bright and high-spirited finale.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Schubert's Symphony No. 5 Sept. 12, 15-16, 2001, with Itzhak Perlman conducting.

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Schubert, Symphony No. 5, Karl Bohm conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra,
Deutsche Grammophon 447443.