

## FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797-1828)

*Rosamunde Overture, D. 644*

Austrian composer **Franz Peter Schubert** (1797-1828) wrote some 600 Lieder, seven complete symphonies, the famous *Unfinished Symphony*, liturgical music, operas, and a large body of chamber and solo piano music. He is particularly noted for his genius for original melodic and harmonic writing. While Schubert had a close circle of friends and associates who admired his work, wider appreciation of his music during his lifetime was limited at best. He was never able to secure adequate permanent employment and, for most of his career, he relied on the support of friends and family. His father, Franz Theodor Florian, was a parish schoolmaster, and his mother, Elizabeth Vietz, had been a housemaid for a Viennese family prior to her marriage. Of the Schubert's fifteen children, ten died in infancy. At the age of five, Franz began receiving regular instruction from his father and a year later was enrolled at the Himmelpfortgrund School. His formal musical education also began around the same time. His genius was already beginning to show itself in his compositions, and Antonio Salieri became aware of the talented young man and decided to train him in composition and theory.

At the end of 1813, he completed his academic studies and entered his father's school as teacher of the lowest class. For over two years he endured the drudgery of the work, which he performed with very indifferent success. 1816 saw the first real change in his fortunes when Franz von Schober, who had heard some of Schubert's songs, offered to house and support Schubert so that he would have the freedom to practice his art in peace. His father's consent was readily given and, before the end of the spring, he was installed as a guest in Schober's lodgings. By 1820, he began to assume a more prominent position and address a wider public. Still, however, publishers held obstinately aloof, and it was not until *Erlkönig* was presented at a concert that Anton Diabelli hesitatingly agreed to print some of his works on commission. The first seven opus numbers appeared on these terms, and then the commission ceased and he began to receive the meager pittances which were all that the great publishing houses ever accorded to him.

The works of his last two years reveal a composer increasingly meditating on the darker side of the human psyche and relationships. His compositions reached extraordinary depths in several chillingly dark songs of this period. His health deteriorated in the midst of this creative activity (he had battled syphilis since 1822) and his final illness may have been typhoid fever. He died in Vienna at the age of 31 on November 19, 1828 in the apartment of his brother, Ferdinand. By his own request, he was buried next to Beethoven, whom he had adored all his life.

The overture attached to Schubert's music for Helmina von Chézy's play *Rosamunde* was originally composed as part of an earlier set of incidental music for Georg Ernst von Hofmann's play *Die Zauberharfe* (*The Magic Harp*), and was first heard in that context on August 19, 1820, more than three years before *Rosamunde* was introduced on the same stage. The play was a complicated and colorless tale by Georg von Hofmann, and there was very little time to compose the score. To meet his deadline, Schubert raided his own manuscripts and borrowed material from the introduction and coda of an overture "in the Italian style" that he had composed three years earlier in November 1817. *Die Zauberharfe* was poorly received at its August 19 premiere, closing after only two performances. This is one of Schubert's finest orchestral pieces, filled with ingratiating tunes and demonstrating his characteristic warm-heartedness and good humor in a masterly utilization of the orchestra's resources.