

Schubert

Symphonies No.4 "Tragic" & No. 5

Netherlands Chamber Orchestra

Gordan Nikolić leader



HYBRID MULTICHANNEL



SUPER AUDIO CD

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Symphony No. 4 in C minor, D. 417 “Tragische” - Tragic (April 1816)

1	Adagio molto – Allegro vivace	9. 57
2	Andante	11. 15
3	Menuetto (Allegro vivace – Trio)	4. 00
4	Allegro	10. 25

Symphony No. 5 in B flat, D. 485 (September until October 3, 1816)

5	Allegro	7. 39
6	Andante con moto	10. 25
7	Menuetto (Allegro molto – Trio)	5. 12
8	Allegro vivace	8. 30

Netherlands Chamber Orchestra

Leader: **Gordan Nikolić**

Recording venue: Yakult Hall, Beurs van Berlage, Amsterdam (12/2008)

Producer: Job Maarse

Balance engineer: Jean-Marie Geijsen

Recording engineer: Roger de Schot

Editing: Roger de Schot

Total playing time : 67. 54

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Franz Schubert is not considered a heavy-weight with regard to the development of symphonic music. In fact, during his own lifetime his symphonies were hardly ever performed. The crowning glory of his oeuvre – the *Great C-major Symphony* – even had to wait until 1839 to receive its première, over 10 years after the death of the composer. Robert Schumann, who was the one to dust off this symphony, said the following of Schubert on that occasion: “The imaginative artist, whose paintbrush was drenched as much in moonbeams as in sunbeams, and who following Beethoven’s nine muses might well have borne us a tenth”. Though this remark mirrors Schumann’s admiration for Schubert as a symphonic composer, it also places his oeuvre in Beethoven’s shadow; a rather uncomfortable position for many a composer.

We would do well to realize that Schubert and Beethoven were contemporaries. Although Beethoven was, of course, 27 years older, both composers breathed the same Viennese air for at least part of their creative lives. By the time Schubert had completed his *Symphony No. 1* in 1813, Beethoven had just blotted the last double bar of his *Symphony No. 8*. The six symphonies written by Schubert in the following years were all finished before Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*, apart from the *Great*

C-major Symphony. The latter was written between 1825 and 1826, two years after Beethoven completed his last symphony.

Schubert wrote a total of 13 symphonies and symphonic fragments, of which he only actually completed seven. He wrote symphonies throughout his entire lifespan, proving that he too considered this to be the most important musical genre. The “highest and most brightly gleaming summit of the more recent instrumental music” – as the symphony was described in 1806 by E.T.A. Hoffmann – deserved this top position. After all, a composer of this genre was faced with the difficult task of “uniting all customary orchestral instruments, whilst expressing their characteristic peculiarities, in the performance of such a drama and thus [...] getting each individual instrument to work only to the benefit of the entire orchestra”. Subsequently, Hoffmann names Mozart, Haydn and specifically Beethoven as the most important composers of this “opera of the instruments”.

Schubert must have come into contact with Beethoven’s symphonies at still an early age. In 1808, he was admitted to the “Königlich und Kaiserlich Stadtkonvikt”, where students not only received excellent academic schooling, but were also trained to almost the level of professional musicians. The Konvikt had its own orchestra,

which performed symphonic works after supper on a daily basis. The music stands were filled with works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, as well as those of now almost forgotten composers, such as Krommer, Kozeluch, Cherubini, and Méhul. As demonstrated in a statement from his friend Josef von Spaun, Schubert played the violin in the orchestra: "I was the leader of the second violins, and young Schubert stood behind me, playing from the same score. Presently, it became clear to me that the little musician far surpassed me in his sense of timing. This awakened my interest in him, and I noticed that the otherwise rather silent and indifferent lad would always dive headlong into the ideas behind the beautiful symphonies that we played". This training enabled the young Schubert to develop his musical taste. Thus, for instance, he loathed the music written by the highly popular Krommer: "Schubert immediately reacted with indignation when such a work was programmed, and would repeat during performance: 'Oh, how feeble!'" Spaun wrote. "He just could not understand how people could perform such rubbish, as he called it: after all, Haydn had surely written more than enough symphonies".

But none of this deterred Schubert from making his first attempts in the field of orchestral music. At first, he just wrote over-

tures, but in 1813 his official Symphony No.1 saw the light of day, composed as a farewell present to his friends at the Viennese Stadtkonvikt.

During the years that followed, Schubert gradually gained a reputation as a composer. There was increasing interest especially in his lieder and chamber music; also, his volumes of waltzes and German dances were in great demand. On the other hand, his publishers did not see the point of publishing his symphonies. This was most certainly due to the state of music in Vienna. Contrary to cities such as Mannheim, Paris and London, Vienna did not play a major role in the development of orchestral music. The city did not have a sizeable professional orchestra. Apart from the small Hofmusikkapelle, there were only a few minor theatre and opera orchestras. Many aristocratic music-lovers had been forced to let their court musicians go after a succession of wars and economic crises; and as a result, orchestral music had become mainly the domain of the many (semi-)amateur orchestras. Not only was Beethoven the most important composer in Vienna, he was also a celebrated virtuoso pianist, who performed regularly in the salons of the aristocracy. He had the necessary status and connections to gather at times the best professional musicians for his

concerts, supplemented by talented amateurs. However, Schubert did not have such status and therefore he had to rely mainly on amateur orchestras in order to get his symphonies performed.

One of those orchestras was the ensemble ensuing from a string quartet formed around the Schubert family, which met regularly in the house of Schubert's father. In his *Musikalische Skizzen aus Alt-Wien* (= musical sketches from olden Vienna), Leopold von Sonnleithner mentions 35 of these small orchestras, and writes specifically about this ensemble as follows: "Here, Haydn's symphonies were played through in arrangements for string quartet, performed in double strength. Two evenings per week were set aside for this kind of gathering. It soon became apparent that Schubert senior's residence was too small; however, the merchant Franz Frischling was kind enough to make available his residence in the Dorotheergasse 1105. There, the skilled violinist Josef Prohaska directed a small orchestra".

Towards the end of 1815, the musicians were again forced to move; this time, because the audience flocking in was beginning to overflow the space available. Subsequently, new accommodation was found in the house of violinist Otto Hartwig.

Schubert completed his Symphony No. 4 on April 27, 1816. It was probably performed by Hartwig's ensemble, despite the 'large' size of the orchestra required, which included four horns. For a long time, the title *Tragische* (= tragic) was misleading. People even began to suspect Schubert of making a joke. But as was the case in Brahms' *Tragische Overture*, or Mahler's Symphony No. 6, the term should once again be interpreted as "in the spirit of a Greek tragedy": an instrumental drama, to quote E.T.A. Hoffmann. In this symphony, the existent tension between the various keys employed by Schubert is especially remarkable. According to the theoretician Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, the key of C minor represents "a declaration of love and, at the same time, a lamentation of impossible love. All pining, yearning, sighing of the love-drunk soul is contained within this key". In the slow introduction to the first movement, the wrenching chromaticism immediately arrests the attention. In the contiguous *Allegro vivace*, Schubert makes a sudden shift from E-flat major to E major, and shortly afterwards to C major: more or less unheard of in the nineteenth century! The *Andante* is written in A-flat major, a key Schubert was fond of using, and designated by Schubart as "the grave

tonality": "Death, the grave, decomposition, judgement, and eternal rest are all encompassed within its scope".

The chromaticism in the minuet – that has the character of an unruly scherzo here – also repeatedly puts the listener on the wrong track. The restlessly driving final movement modulates to C major, and the symphony concludes with a significant bar of rest, following three great blows.

Just like Beethoven, who was capable of composing two such completely different symphonies as the Fifth and the Sixth almost simultaneously, Schubert also created his Symphony No. 4 and No. 5 in quick succession. And again like Beethoven, Schubert's successive symphonies could not have been more different. His Symphony No. 5 was completed on October 3, 1816 and also performed during a concert in Otto Hartwig's residence. From the orchestral parts that remain, we can deduce that the orchestra consisted of six first and six second violins, six violas, two cellos and two double-basses. Furthermore, Schubert outlined a modest wind section, with just one flute, two oboes, two bassoons and two horns.

The Symphony No. 5 does not contain any major drama, *Sturm und Drang* or passionate major-minor contrasts. In this

symphony, it appears that Schubert used the charming, subtle and elegant side of Mozart as a source of inspiration, thereby putting pen to paper to create one of his most insouciant works. Nevertheless, this symphony remains a surprise from the first to the last bar, but the surprise lies mainly in the details. For instance, who before Schubert had ever come up with the idea of replacing the slow introduction with a four-bar motif, consisting of chords in the winds followed by a descending run in the strings, to lead into the first theme?

Nevertheless, Schubert's early symphonies can hardly be called revolutionary, as were those written by Beethoven. Motivated by the technical possibilities and undoubtedly also by the taste of the musicians in the amateur orchestras for which he composed his works, Schubert drew his conclusions from the Classical style of Haydn and Mozart, and continued to build on this foundation. Therefore, it is even more astounding that he would later take an enormous step as a symphonic composer, creating a completely new 'romantic' sound in his Symphony in B minor, the *Unvollendete* (= unfinished), which dates from 1822.

Ronald Vermeulen

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Gordan Nikolić

Gordan Nikolić was born in 1968 and began playing violin at the age of seven. In 1985, he entered the Musikhochschule Basel to study with violinist/conductor Jean-Jacques Kantorow. Four years later, he graduated with the highest honours, as both teacher and soloist. He also worked with Lutoslawsky and Kurtág and developed an interest in both Baroque and contemporary music. He is the recipient of several international awards, which include the Tibor Varga, Niccolò Paganini, Città di Brescia, and Vaclav Huml prizes.

In 1989, he was appointed Leader of the Orchestre d'Auvergne, which he conducted regularly from his leader's chair: for instance, during a tour of Germany in 1993. In 1996, he was appointed Leader of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, and later he also became Leader of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. In 1997, he was invited to become Leader of the London Symphony Orchestra.

In 2005, Gordan Nikolić was invited by the London Symphony Orchestra to be the soloist in three important projects: Schumann's Violin Concerto under Daniel Harding, Brahms's Violin Concerto under Sir Colin Davis, and Beethoven's Triple Concerto,

with pianist Emmanuel Ax and cellist Tim Hugh, under Bernard Haitink at the Barbican Centre in London.

He has conducted the Chamber Orchestra of the London Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre National d'Île-de-France, the Manchester Camerata, and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, among others: during the 2005/2006 season, he conducted the Orchestre de Lille.

Since 2004, he has been Artistic Director of the Nederlands Kamerorkest (= Netherlands Chamber Orchestra), which is based in Amsterdam. With this orchestra, he has programmed various memorable productions, such as Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* with kinetic painter Norman Perryman, and Weill's *Die sieben Todsünden* with theatre company Dogtroep. Nikolić has already recorded several CDs with the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, which include works by Britten, Bartók and Hartmann, among others.

In 2000, he was appointed "Prince Consort Professor" for string ensembles at the Royal College of Music. Since September 2003, he has also been a professor at the Guildhall School of Music. In the Netherlands, Nikolić also teaches at the Rotterdam Academy for Classical Music.

Gordan Nikolić has a special interest in

chamber music, and is regularly invited to perform at various festivals. These include the Musique à l'Empéri Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Daytona Music Festival, Chaise-Dieu Festival and the London Proms, where he has performed with such musicians as Vladimir Mendelssohn, Pieter Wispelwey, Christophe Coin, Eric Le Sage, Maria João Pires, Mikhail Pletnev, Emmanuel Ax, Leif Ove Andsnes and Tim Hugh. Recently, he has joined the Vellinger String Quartet.

He has performed as a soloist with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orchestre Symphonique de Bâle, the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam, the Israel Chamber Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra. In 2001, he played the Walton Violin Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra under André Previn. In 2003, he performed the Brahms Double Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Haitink, which was recorded for the 'LSO Live' label, as well as Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 1 in five concerts in Holland. He gave the première of James MacMillan's Violin Concerto, *Deep But Dazzling Darkness*, under the baton of the composer with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Gordan Nikolić has made many recordings for various labels (including

Olympia, Lyrinx and Syrius), exploring the lesser-known violin repertoire. One of his recordings, dedicated to Vivaldi, was nominated "Recording of the Month" in Holland, and his Bach recording received an award from DRS3, Switzerland's cultural radio channel.

Gordan Nikolić plays a Lorenzo Storioni violin dating from 1794.

Nederlands Kamerorkest

The Nederlands Kamerorkest (= Netherlands Chamber Orchestra) was founded in 1955 and gave its first concert that year during the Holland Festival. Szymon Goldberg – the legendary violinist, conductor and pedagogue – was artistic director of the ensemble for the first 22 years. Goldberg then appointed David Zinman as second conductor (alongside himself) and, jointly, they raised the level of the orchestra to equal that of any top international chamber ensemble. They were succeeded in 1979 by Antoni Ros Marbà, who led the orchestra until 1986. From 1986 to 2002, Hartmut Haenchen was chief conductor of the ensemble, with Philippe Entremont as permanent guest conductor.

Since 2003, Yakov Kreizberg has

been chief conductor of the Nederlands Kamerorkest. In September 2004, top violinist Gordan Nikolić was appointed Artistic Director and Leader of the Nederlands Kamerorkest. As such, he regularly leads the orchestra from within.

The Nederlands Kamerorkest gives about 25 concerts per year in the major Dutch concert halls, including the Concertgebouw. Each season, the orchestra also accompanies a number of productions of the Nederlandse Opera at the Muziektheater in Amsterdam. Apart from the many Rossini and Mozart operas, the orchestra has performed numerous contemporary operas to great critical acclaim. For instance, the world-première of Alexander Knaifel's *Alice* in September 2001; and the production of *Tea* by the Chinese/American composer Tan Dun in January 2003 was also a major success. In March 2005, the orchestra accompanied Bellini's opera *Norma*, and performances of Rossini's *Il barbiere de Siviglia* are scheduled for January 2006. In autumn 2006, the orchestra will accompany the Nederlandse Opera in the Mozart-Da Ponte trilogy at the Amsterdam Muziektheater.

The Nederlands Kamerorkest has toured extensively to countries such as the United States, Middle and South America,

Canada, Australia, Japan, China and almost all European countries. It has performed at many festivals, including the Wiener Festwochen, Prager Frühling, Edinburgh Festival, Granada Festival and La Folle Journée (Nantes 2002).

Since its foundation, the Nederlands Kamerorkest has worked with prominent guest conductors such as Darius Milhaud, Rudolf Barshai, Carlo Maria Giulini, Erich Leinsdorf, Yehudi Menuhin, Hans Vonk and Edo de Waart. The numerous world-famous soloists who have performed with the orchestra include Elly Ameling, Maurice André, Martha Argerich, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Alfred Brendel, Gidon Kremer, Radu Lupu, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Isabelle van Keulen, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Marie-Claire Alain, Han de Vries and Mstislav Rostropovich. During a successful three-year project, Christian Zacharias performed Mozart's complete piano concertos from behind the piano.

The Nederlands Kamerorkest has an extensive repertoire available on CD. Some recordings dating from the LP era – which include a Mozart Piano Concerto featuring Martha Argerich, and Szymon Goldberg's Bach programmes – have since been re-released on CD for their historic value, and new CD recordings on the PentaTone label are scheduled.

(Please surf to www.orkest.nl to view the orchestra's comprehensive discography.)

During the 2005-2006 season, the Nederlands Kamerorkest celebrated its 50th anniversary with an anniversary concert at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, among others.



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