

SCHUBERT

German Dances, Ländler and Écossaises

Yang Liu, Piano and Fortepiano



Franz Schubert (1797–1828) Dances, Ländlers and Galops

These short pieces belong to the forgotten genre of ‘social music’ – works suitable for amateur musicians to perform together, including part-songs, works for piano four-hands and dances for solo piano. Precisely because such works were popular *then*, they tend to be overlooked *now*, because popular music, by definition, is attuned to its time and oblivious to posterity. *Then*, of course, is the period of Schubert’s Vienna, where the composer was born in January 1797, when Beethoven was 27 years old, and where he died in November 1828, when Beethoven was 20 months in the tomb. The younger man had revered and learned much from the *Meister*, mastering the categories in which Beethoven had excelled (the piano sonata, the string quartet, the symphony) and carving out his own place in music history by producing over 600 songs. Based on texts by poets both unmatched and unknown, Schubert’s output soon rendered him synonymous with the German Lied.

Indeed, it was as a Lieder composer that Schubert enjoyed a certain celebrity. The great instrumental works we think of as representative of the summit of his art – the string quintet, the later symphonies, the final piano sonatas – did not become known until the 1850s and beyond. In his own time, in addition to the Lied, he was known as the composer of the dances we hear here, which were popular within the middle-class society to which Schubert belonged, where undemanding music was in demand. The Viennese pianos of the era were framed in wood and constructed with a light and responsive action whose hammers, covered in leather, produced a sound that was clear and transparent and markedly different, especially in the low register, from a modern Steinway grand. On this recording you will hear both a modern Steinway and a six-and-a-half-octave fortepiano built by R.J. Regier in 2008 and modelled on a Viennese instrument from the mid-1820s by Conrad Graf (1782–1851), a maker well known to Beethoven, Schubert and many pianists of the era.

① The opening work on the programme, the lively *German Dance in C sharp major* (1815), is characteristic of most of the dances recorded here. It is composed of regular phrases in groupings of two, four and eight bars; questions and answers; antecedents and consequents. Such ‘quadratic’ phrasing is the coin of the realm of Western music, both learned and popular, from the 18th century to the present. ‘Learned’ music challenges listeners with deviations from the norm; ‘popular’ music fulfils listeners’ expectations and departs from the established format on only rare occasion.

② We encounter one such occasion in the *German Dance in G flat major* (1821), whose second half comprises two four-bar phrases, but whose first half consists of two six-bar phrases: 2+2+2. It is said that Schubert was not a dancer, but he surely smiled when those around him found themselves off-balance at the end of his opening *salvo*. The ‘complicated’ key signatures of these first two works (seven sharps and six flats) point to one of Schubert’s far-reaching contributions to the development of his art: his masterful treatment of keys and of the harmonic, or ‘tonal’, perspective of music. The elegance of his melodies is easy to observe but his genius with harmony is more profoundly responsible for our emotional response to his music. Because of its harmonic construction, the second half of this G flat major dance begins with what sounds like the end of a unit, and not the beginning.

③ The lively *Écossaises*, two-part dances in duple metre, are not necessarily of Scottish origin but may rather represent the French conception, as *Oxford Music Online* has it, of what a Scottish dance ought to be. The contrasting *Écossaises* here, apparently composed in 1815 and 1816, are unlikely to have been conceived as a cycle, but their brevity renders their succession inevitable.

④ The *Two German Dances, D. 841* (1825), return us to ternary metre, and to a binary form of (4+4) plus (4+4), with both halves repeated. In the second half of the first dance, you will hear a momentary flight of harmonic imagination, a tiny splash of colour on an otherwise subdued tableau.

5 The *Twelve German Dances*, D. 790 (1823), follow a similar pattern, with the harmonic surprises occurring more in the second halves than in the first. The phrasing of all twelve is furthermore perfectly regular except in the second half of the opening dance, which offers *ten-bar* units, and the second half of the last, which carries a *six-bar* unit. A zealot might wish to hear this as a sign of Schubert's larger circular conception.

6 In the last of the *Three German Dances*, D. 971, published in 1823 but written we know not when, Schubert toys with his listeners' expectations, using quavers now as upbeats, now as downbeats – a sign of the way he must have performed these pieces himself: playfully, without metrical exactitude, with flexible rhythm and tempo.

7 He does the same in the last of the *Three German Dances*, D. 973 (probably from 1823), where we hear an accented note on the weak second beat of the 3/4 bar. In the opening movement of Beethoven's '*Eroica*' *Symphony*, this effect is used to mighty advantage. Here, it startles and enchants.

8 Most of these dance sets suggest no larger structural conception, but the *Six German Dances*, D. 820 (1824), arranged in two sets of three, are linked by explicit instructions to return, after the second and third numbers of each set, to the first. This creates two rondo-like patterns of A–B–A–C–A.

9 The little *Cotillon* (contradance, quadrille) in E flat major, D. 976, was probably composed in 1817: Schubert scholars offer this date on the basis of the presence of a tune similar to this one in the finale of the *A major Violin Sonata*, D. 574, which was written in August of that year. In the absence of other evidence, such a conclusion is not absurd. But other composers have been known to reuse in their maturity tunes from their youth. *Caveat lector*.

10 The *Two Ländler in E flat*, D. 980b (1816), follow logically after the *Cotillon*, in the same key. The German word refers to a popular 18th-century dance form, in 3/4-time, that was largely superseded by the waltz.

11 Schubert uses a wide variety of keys in these dances, but the *Six Ländler*, D. 970 (1818–20), are all in three, four or five flats. Because they mostly remain in the major mode, the stormy moves to the minor in the second halves of numbers 2 and 3 of this group provide a shock.

12 The *Two German Dances*, D. 769 (1824), are couples-dances, like the *Ländler* (in which, as *Oxford Music Online* explains, couples turned with arms interlaced), and the waltz (in which couples turned swiftly while in close embrace).

13 The first three of the *Four Comic Ländler*, D. 354 (1816), have identical left-hand accompaniments of crotchet upbeats to minim downbeats. Is this what Schubert meant by 'komische'? All four are in D major. Did Schubert think of that key as humorous?

14 The *Three Écosaises*, D. 816 (1824), though written twelve years later than the *Viennese Dances* that follow, are of a simplicity that would suggest, if we didn't know better, a work from his youth.

15 The *Twelve Viennese Dances*, D. 128 (1812), which are indeed from his youth, have an *eleven-bar* introduction, and a number of other phraseological oddities that lead a listener to wonder if the 15-year old composer was not yet the master of quadratic phrasing, or whether he was already toying ironically with his listeners' – and dancers' – expectations of symmetry.

16 The *C major Minuet*, D. 995 (1811), with its dotted rhythms, has something of a military bearing. (You might think of the opening of *The Star-Spangled Banner*.) But marching in 3/4-time is not common, to say the least. The gentle fragment from the *Ländler*, D. 980c, is revealing, because in its twelve incomplete bars it offers enough information for us to be certain that Yang Liu's completion, in 16 bars, is precisely what Schubert had in mind. The selection from the *Six Minuets for Winds*, D. 2d returns us to the battlefield. (You might think of the opening of *La Marseillaise*!) Here the fortepiano is heard to great advantage, because *fortissimo* rattles the bones of the original instrument.

17 In the 14th of these *36 Original Dances*, D. 365 (1816–21), a harmonic slight-of-hand takes us momentarily from the key of D flat major (five flats) to the distant key of A major (three sharps). Such a subtle manoeuvre, which requires

an augmented-sixth chord to return us to D flat, is characteristic of Schubert's 'learned' music. Here, in comfortably repetitive circumstances, in which each new dance is tantamount to a variation on a theme, it is a microscopic miracle. Another surprise occurs in the 22nd waltz, which starts in B major and, rare for this entire grouping, ends in the relative minor, G sharp. The 27th waltz reverses the procedure, beginning in C sharp minor and ending in the relative major, E. The 34th waltz begins with two bars of accompaniment, *Om-pah-pah, Om-pah-pah*. 'You are wondering what I am going to do with this,' Schubert seems to be saying. What he does is to offer yet more proof of his astounding imagination, his ability to invent an almost infinite variety of pianistic effects, his improvisatory magic.

18 The album closes with *D. 925* (1827), the 'Galop from Graz' – a town 200 kilometres south of Vienna, where Schubert was a visitor in 1827, and where a flirtation with his hostess may have caused his heart to gallop in the manner of this final, fleeting piece.

Peter Bloom



Yang Liu

Pianist Yang Liu attracts worldwide audiences with her profound musicianship and extraordinary virtuosity. Since her concerto debut at the age of 14 with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, she has performed extensively throughout the US, Europe and China at numerous prominent venues, and has also performed in many festivals and masterclasses. Liu has won several prestigious competitions, including First Prize at the Toronto International Piano Competition, Second Prize at the Serge & Olga Koussevitzky Young Artist Awards and Fourth Prize at the Fifth International Fryderyk Chopin Competition for young pianists, among others. She received both Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from The Juilliard School and a Masters of Musical Arts degree from Yale School of Music, and is currently finishing her Doctoral of Musical Arts degree at Peabody Conservatory. During recent years, Liu has also devoted her passion to music education. While teaching actively in the New York region, she has served as the assistant of keyboard studies at Peabody Conservatory and is on the piano faculty at Smith College.

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Schubert was known in his time primarily as a composer of songs, but he was also a master of the dance form and wrote prolifically for a middle-class society eager for domestic entertainment. He loved Ländler (triple time country dances), the Écossaises (supposedly Scottish), and the rich variety of genial German dances. Viennese pianos of the day produced a sound that was clear and transparent, very different from modern instruments, and in this recording Yang Liu plays on a Steinway grand and a copy of a mid-1820s fortepiano by Conrad Graf, a maker well known to Schubert.

**Franz
SCHUBERT**
(1797–1828)

German Dances, Ländlers and Écossaises

<p>1 German Dance and Trio in C sharp major, D. 139 (1815) 1:50</p> <p>2 German Dance in G flat major, D. 722 (1821) 0:42</p> <p>3 8 Écossaises, D. 977 (c. 1815–16) 3:01</p> <p>4 2 German Dances, D. 841 (1825) 1:31</p> <p>5 12 German Dances (Ländler), Op. 171, D. 790 (1823) 9:10</p> <p>6 3 German Dances, D. 971 (pub. 1823) 2:03</p> <p>7 3 German Dances, D. 973 (c. 1823) 2:19</p> <p>8 6 German Dances, D. 820 (1824) 4:49</p> <p>9 Cotillon in E flat major, D. 976 (c. 1817) 0:35</p> <p>10 2 Ländler in E flat major, D. 980b (1816) 0:54</p> <p>11 6 Ländler, D. 970 (1818–20) 3:37</p>	<p>12 2 German Dances, D. 769 (1824) 1:11</p> <p>13 4 Komische Ländler, D. 354 (version for piano) (1816) 2:01</p> <p>14 3 Écossaises, D. 816 (1824) 1:00</p> <p>15 12 Viennese German Dances, D. 128 (1812) 9:33</p> <p>16 6 Minuets, D. 2d (1811): No. 1 in C major (draft for piano); 2 Ländler in D flat major, D. 980c (pub. 1930): No. 2 (original fragment completed by Yang Liu); 6 Minuets, D. 2d: No. 2 in F major (draft for piano)* 6:49</p> <p>17 36 Originaltänze, Op. 9, D. 365 (1816–21) 21:52</p> <p>18 Grazer Galopp in C major, D. 925 (1827) 1:58</p>
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* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Yang Liu, Piano **3–15 18**, **Fortepiano** **1 2 16–17**

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