

# Franz Schubert

## Symphony No.9 in C

### “The Great”



Royal Flemish Philharmonic  
Philippe Herreweghe



**Franz Schubert** (1797 – 1828)

## **Symphony No. 9 in C, D. 944, “The Great”**

- |                                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| 1 Andante – Allegro ma non troppo | 14. 31 |
| 2 Andante con moto                | 13. 11 |
| 3 Scherzo (Allegro vivace)        | 14. 14 |
| 4 Allegro vivace                  | 15. 53 |

### **Royal Flemish Philharmonic**

conducted by: **Philippe Herreweghe**

Recording venue: Queen Elizabeth Hall, Antwerp, Belgium (7/2010)  
Recording producer: Andreas Neubronner  
Balance/Recording engineer: Markus Heiland  
Editing: Markus Heiland, Andreas Neubronner  
Recording: TRITONUS Musikproduktion Recording Service, Stuttgart

Total playing time : 57. 49

### **Difficult and bombastic**

Actually, the story is so great that we just have to tell it. When discussing Franz Schubert's symphonic oeuvre, we cannot avoid mentioning the touching desperation with which musicologists have approached the numbering of his symphonies. Anyone trying to understand this must be prepared for a tough lesson in mathematics, as the choice of numbers generally assigned to Schubert's symphonies may well cause some confusion. For instance, this CD would have you believe that Schubert's *Great* C-major Symphony is No. 9 in the line-up. However, this symphony is also at times referred to as No. 8. There is a highly chaotic story behind this anomaly. Up until the *Little* C-major Symphony No. 6 dating from 1818, all is clear: Schubert's first six (completed) symphonies all received a number in chronological order. The confusion begins subsequently. After having completed his Symphony No. 6, Schubert composed two additional movements, which were linked together at a much later date to create the well-known *Unfinished* Symphony. As these two movements were not discovered until much later, the symphony subsequent to his sixth – the *Great* Symphony, thus entitled so as to distinguish it from his other symphony in C major, the *Little* Symphony No. 6 – became known as his No. 7. After the discovery of Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony, a new edition of his symphonies was prepared. It was then decided to call this one his No. 8, and the *Great* Symphony was advanced to become his No. 9. If you have been reading carefully, you will have noticed that this left the number seven as a blank: a numeric hiatus for which as yet no elegant solution has been found. Thus, Schubert's (non-existent) Symphony No. 7 has likely become the best-known phantom composition in the history of music.

Are you clear so far? Good, then now we can make it slightly more complex. Naturally, there is a reason why musicologists left the seventh position open. This is, of course, due to the (likewise complicated) story behind the creation of the *Great* Symphony. The manuscript of this symphony is dated “March 1828”, the year in which Schubert died. And for a long time, it was assumed that this symphony was indeed written in 1828. However, research shows that Schubert had already completed this symphony in 1826, although he did not plan to publish it until two years later. Thus, with an eye to the promotional attraction of a ‘recent’ work, Schubert decided to date the symphony “March 1828”. The musicologists who had left the number seven position vacant had no idea of this at the time: however, they did know that Schubert had been working on a symphony in 1825-26. No way could they have suspected that this was, in fact, the *Great* Symphony, considering the misleading date given to it by Schubert. Thus they left the number seven position

open, hoping that the symphony, which was believed to be lost, would turn up one day, thus making it possible to allocate the No. 7. Ergo: by moving the *Unfinished* to the vacant number seven, the *Great* would then become the number eight in line. However, no consensus has been achieved as yet on this step.

Of course, all this has nothing to do with music. Or does it? The chaotic numbering would never have existed, if the Viennese music scene had not behaved with such indifference towards Schubert's music. Within the musical establishment, the composer ranked rather low. Not that the Viennese public was totally insensitive to his music: between 1821 and 1828, over 100 of Schubert's compositions were published, which demonstrates that the composer was certainly not unknown to them. However, the large quantity of these works is not actually representative for his oeuvre. Allow us to make a comparison: when Beethoven died in 1827, the majority of his important works had already been published. Yet when Schubert died the following year, the amount of works published, in fact, covered no more than about a quarter of his total oeuvre. Also, the selection of works that had appeared in print was not exactly flattering to the artistic merits of the composer. To be sure, a number of his greatest *Lieder* had been published, yet during his lifetime a mere two (!) of his chamber-music works were thus made available. And the situation becomes even weirder when taking a close look at Schubert's orchestral music: not a single note of these compositions was actually published before his death. Therefore, if the root of the numeric confusion surrounding his symphonic works can be blamed on any one factor, the choice candidate would certainly be the lack of interest of the Viennese in Schubert's orchestral music: contemporary publishers generally considered his works to be “schwierig und schwülstig” (= difficult and bombastic).

Thus, it will not come as a surprise that Schubert never actually heard a performance of innumerable works, amongst which his *Great* Symphony. The exceptional quality of this composition, with which Schubert wished to rival Beethoven's symphonic oeuvre, was not discovered until 1838, when Robert Schumann paid a visit to Ferdinand, Schubert's brother. Ferdinand allowed him to look over his brother's unpublished legacy, and Schumann was immediately intrigued by the ambitious design of his last symphony. He then managed to convince his bosom friend Mendelssohn to add the work to his programming with the Gewandhausorchester, and that is how the *Great* Symphony finally received its (posthumous) première in 1839. However, in later years, getting this symphony performed remained a hard task. When Mendelssohn attempted to conduct the work in London, the orchestra burst out laughing at the ‘bizarre’ writing for the strings in the finale. In

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Paris, too, the composition met with resistance, and was not in fact performed until 1851. Only during the second half of the nineteenth century was the artistic quality of the symphony finally recognized.

The main reason it took so long for Schubert's Great Symphony to be appreciated as a masterpiece is his original treatment of the structure and orchestra. Thus the symphony commences with an attractive *Andante* that seems more like a fully-developed opening of the symphony than a languid introduction. The opening section (two horns playing a delicate melody in *unisono*) is subjected to a small series of variations, in which Schubert explores the contrast between *piano* and *forte*. After a third variation (in which the woodwinds repeat the introductory melody), Schubert suddenly boosts the tempo, landing unexpectedly, after a number of obscure harmonic twists and turns, in the *Allegro ma non troppo*, which is the actual main part of the movement. The rhetoric is weird and wonderful: Schubert manages to create a totally different character without too much alteration of the tempo. Even the virile main melody can be interpreted as a variant to the horns that provided such a delicate introduction to the symphony. When the bashful intro returns at the end of this movement, it is completely transformed: not only does it ring out *fortissimo*, it has also discarded any timidity and has now acquired the triumphant character typical of a finale. Whether or not the melody should now be played faster or slower than in the intro is a question capable of giving any conductor nightmares.

The orchestral genius applied to the remaining movements is equally remarkable. For instance, the abrupt alternations in harmony in the *Andante con moto*, which begins with an enigmatic march rhythm above which hovers a lament played by an oboe solo. When the oboe melody returns (following a middle movement full of soothing string sounds), Schubert counters this with ironic brass-band motifs in the brass – perhaps the source from which Mahler drew his inspiration towards the end of the nineteenth century? Plenty of originality in the *Scherzo*, in which Schubert presents the listener with a whole bunch of themes and a wide range of tone-colouring. Ultimately, the finale opens with a conspicuous intro, which merges into an energetic whirlwind that comes to a sudden halt after 90 seconds, only to subsequently resume its advance in all intensity. Pay special attention to the clarinets: about halfway through this finale, they make a not too subtle reference to the *Ode an die Freude* from Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Thus, the ambitious epithet of the "Great" for this symphony is justified in more than one sense.

Tom Janssens

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

## Philippe Herreweghe

Philippe Herreweghe was born in Ghent. There he studied medicine and psychiatry at the university and piano at the Music Academy. He founded the Collegium Vocale Gent, La Chapelle Royale and, later, the Ensemble Vocal Européen, thus establishing himself as a specialist in renaissance and baroque music. Since 1991, he and the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées have applied themselves to playing romantic music on period instruments. From 1982 to 2001, he served as Artistic Director of the Festival of Les Académies Musicales de Saintes. At the start of the 2008-2009 season, he became the principal guest conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic. In his capacity as principal conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, Philippe Herreweghe has been focusing for the last ten years on interpreting the pre-romantic and romantic repertoire adequately and refreshingly.

He has also appeared as guest conductor with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Concerto Köln, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and other illustrious orchestras and ensembles. Some of his most significant recordings include the vocal masterpieces of Bach (such as the St. Matthew and St John Passions, the Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio), an anthology of the French 'Grand Motet', the requiem masses by Mozart, Fauré and Brahms, oratorios by Mendelssohn, and Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. With the Royal Flemish Philharmonic he recorded the complete symphonies of Beethoven, next to recordings of Mendelssohn and Stravinsky, in collaboration with the international label PentaTone.

The European musical press acknowledged Philippe Herreweghe's artistic vision by proclaiming him Musical Personality of the Year in 1990. In 1993, Philippe Herreweghe and the Collegium Vocale Gent were appointed Cultural Ambassadors in Flanders. A year later he was awarded the Order of the Officier des Arts et Lettres and in 1997, Philippe Herreweghe received an honorary doctorate from Louvain University. In 2003, he was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in France.

## Royal Flemish Philharmonic

A modern and stylistically flexible symphony orchestra, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic demonstrates an artistic flair which allows for a variety of styles - from classical to contemporary - in a historically authentic manner. Chief Conductor Edo de Waart is responsible for the orchestra's main repertoire. Drawing on his vast orchestral experience, as former chief conductor of the San Francisco and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, he contributes to the unique character of

the Royal Flemish Philharmonic. He works in close co-operation with Principal Conductor Philippe Herreweghe, who makes use of his specific background in his readings of (pre)Romantic music. Martyn Brabbins is Principal Guest Conductor, former Chief Conductor Jaap van Zweden retains his affiliation with the orchestra

Thanks to its own series of concerts in large venues, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic occupies a unique position in Flanders. The orchestra has earned itself a recurring spot on the annual programmes of the Queen Elisabeth Hall and deSingel in Antwerp, the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, de Bijloke Music Centre in Ghent and the Bruges Concertgebouw. Alongside its regular concerts, the Philharmonic attaches great value to developing educational and social projects, offering children, youngsters, and people with different social backgrounds the opportunity to get acquainted with the symphony orchestra from close quarters.

The Royal Flemish Philharmonic has also been a guest of some major foreign concert halls: the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna, the Festspielhaus in Salzburg, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Suntory Hall and the Bunka Kaikan Hall in Tokyo, the Philharmonie of Cologne and Munich, the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, the Palace of Art in Budapest and the National Grand Theatre of Peking. International concert tours through various European countries and Japan are a constant item on the yearly calendar.

In collaboration with the publisher, Lannoo, the Philharmonic is currently developing a series of audio books for children. The Royal Flemish Philharmonic is frequently broadcast on its media partner, Radio Klara, and on the digital television broadcaster, EURO1080. Several of the orchestra's CDs received acclaim by the professional press, including the recent recordings of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Stravinsky conducted by Philippe Herreweghe (PentaTone). The orchestra's recent releases include Shostakovich' Fifth Symphony with Jaap van Zweden (*Naïve*) and recordings of Mortelmans and Vieuxtemps with Martyn Brabbins (*Hyperion*).

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