

# On the 200th Birthday of Franz Schubert

**F**ranz Schubert was born on January 31, 1797, in Vienna. By the time of his death in November 1828, at thirty-one years of age, he had left behind an unbelievably rich body of work, including over six hundred songs, fifteen piano sonatas, fifteen string quartets, quintets, piano trios, eight symphonies, six masses, numerous *Singspiele* and opera fragments, and many other compositions, especially for piano, and chamber music.

In 1808, shortly before the death of Joseph Haydn, Schubert entered the Vienna Court Orchestra as a choirboy, and became a student at the city-run boarding-school. He began to show his extraordinary musical gift at a very early age, and during his school years he was immersed in the great works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Among his music instructors was Antonio Salieri, who had been associated with Mozart. Schubert had already begun to compose when he was a small child, and while a student, he composed his first *lieder*. He was only seventeen years old when he wrote “Gretchen am Spinnrad,” his breakthrough into musical mastery.

After a brief stint as a teacher’s assistant, Schubert devoted himself entirely to music, with the financial assistance of just a few friends. It was also his friends who made repeated attempts to open his way to broader audiences, and to get him recognized as a major composer. The famous singer Michael Vogl, who was well versed in the poetry of Classical antiquity, was especially helpful in making Schubert’s *lieder* better known. Nevertheless, throughout his lifetime, Schubert never enjoyed universal recognition; letters to Goethe went unanswered, and the big publishing-houses were more than hesitant about publishing his works.



Photo: Corbis-Bettmann

In his *lieder*, Schubert connects the language of poetry with music in a unique way, thereby giving rise to a completely new unity.\*

His selection of poems for musical setting, is significant: Alongside works by the greatest poets, such as Schiller (he set 42 poems by Schiller alone!) and Goethe, Matthias Claudius, and Ludwig Uhland, there are simple poems by his friends, whom he immortalized through his settings. His two great song cycles, *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Die Winterreise*, were settings of poems by Wilhelm Müller, who later became known as “Müller the Greek.” During the last years of his life, Schubert also delved into the poems of Heinrich Heine (who, like Schubert, was born in 1797).

In 1827, one year before Schubert’s death, Ludwig van Beethoven passed away. Although Schubert had followed Beethoven’s work with reverential admiration, there probably was never any closer contact between the two. Beethoven certainly did know about Schubert’s works, however, and the two had many friends in common. For example, Beethoven was present at a private performance of Schubert’s A minor Quartet (“Rosamunde”) by the “Schuppanzigh Quartet,” which had had the honor of premiering many of Beethoven’s own quartets. The musician Anselm Hüttenbrenner, a close friend of Schubert, was present at Beethoven’s deathbed.

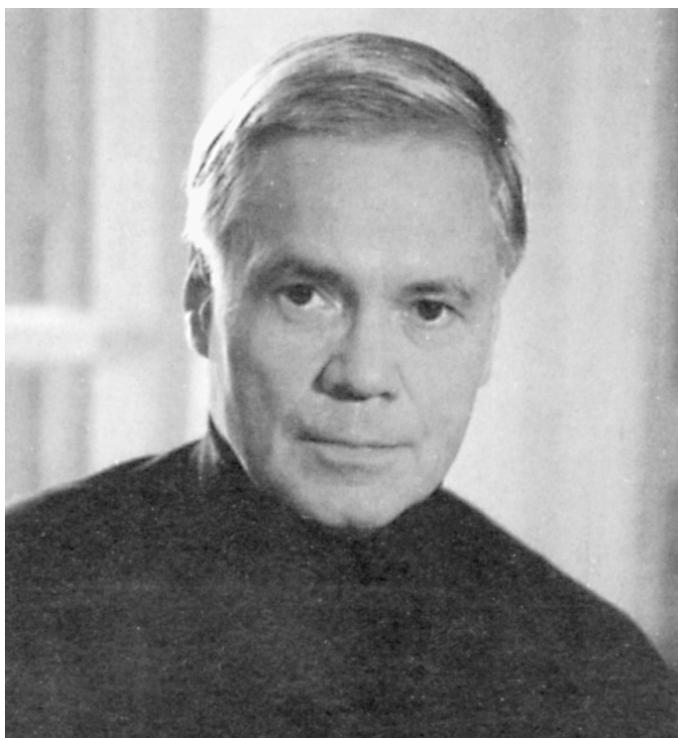
On the occasion of Schubert’s 200th birthday, *Fidelio* spoke with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Norbert Brainin, two artists whose careers have been bound up with Franz Schubert’s works in special ways.

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\* For an imaginative introduction to Schubert’s handling of the musical setting of poetry, see Stephan Marienfeld, “The *Schöne Müllerin* and the Mathematical Sublime: Elevating the Irony and Metaphor of Folk Poetry,” *Fidelio*, Fall 1995 (Vol. IV, No. 3).

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau,  
Baritone

‘Between the  
notes, that’s  
the main thing’



*Professor Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau was interviewed  
for Fidelio on Oct. 22, 1996, in Berlin, by Ortrun  
Cramer and Stephan Marienfeld.*

**Fidelio:** At the beginning of next year, we will celebrate Schubert’s 200th birthday. This will be the occasion for many concerts and readings, in many cities, such as the big concert series in Cologne, of which you are now the artistic director, and which you have kicked off with a lecture. In the course of this concert series, every song that Schubert ever wrote will be performed . . .

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** . . . all of them, with only a few exceptions.

**Fidelio:** We would like to dive in with our first question: What, in your estimation, is Schubert’s special significance? Why should we, today—in an era threatened with economic, moral, and cultural crisis—bother ourselves about Schubert?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** I am not of the opinion, that works of art must be unconditionally linked to what was happening at the time they were created. Admittedly, it is *really* our duty, as artists, to hold up a mirror to our own era; but, on the other hand, these works have lives of their own, and they’re still alive today. The reason why Schubert is celebrated so much today, lies rather in the fact that there has been nobody else like him—not before him, not after him. Today, the *lied* genre is long dead; the art-song no longer exists. Yes, songs for voice and piano are still being written; but, to describe these as *lieder*, would be the height of impudence in most cases. Schubert brought this form to perfection over the course of only a few years. And therefore, it’s important that we orient ourselves toward this man. It’s a question of his musical nature—something that is no longer possible today, in that form.

But, all of his external circumstances—the oppressive and confined surroundings he grew up in, the difficult circumstances under which he had to learn, and how his life was plagued by illness, and how short it was—all that is quite irrelevant. After all, in those days, people tended to die young.

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau has played a key role as a singer in shaping musical life from the end of World War II down to the present day. His numerous recordings attest to his standard-setting *lieder* interpretations. Above and beyond this, he has made a name for himself as the author of numerous books on *lieder* and song, and has also appeared as an orchestral conductor. He currently devotes his time to teaching and promoting young artists.

Rather, I believe that it is very good, if, with the aid of his songs, we can be reminded, among other things, of the social conditions under which Schubert had to work. Completely aside from the fact that the songs themselves have such a whirling life of their own, which you can never completely grasp, but which you can perhaps approximate in little pieces, without ever really reaching it. And all this is bound together in one single mind, with one single way of experiencing music.

**Fidelio:** You're saying you would not necessarily look at a work of art in connection with the realities of its own era, since it has its own intrinsic value.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** I'm saying that about art in general. That doesn't mean a *l'art pour l'art* ["art for art's sake"] standpoint, but, art should not be an appendage of the times. Rather, it is *permitted* to reflect the times, but it is not *required* to do so, or, so I have found. It stands on its own—or, at least, it used to. The big question is whether it could still do so today; I doubt it. When I see what passes for "creative" today, it's pretty poor pickings.

**Fidelio:** People generally emphasize the fact that Schubert had a wealth of opportunities to dip into the latest works of contemporary poets.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** That's true. But, on the other hand, if Schubert were alive today, he would find even richer fields to plow. He would see, spread before him, an infinite spectrum of lyrical poetry, which simply did not exist in his own day. Because lyrical poetry was still relatively new; it only first emerged with Klopstock, or, if you will, you might go back to Gryphius. This was a completely new mode of expression. It emerged, at the very latest, during the Enlightenment.

**Fidelio:** Schubert was apparently rather arbitrary in his selection of poems to compose . . .

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Not at all, I don't believe so. It's simply absurd, when, as often happens, people do up a balance-sheet of the 100 good poems which he set to music, against the other 400 which were not so good. For one thing, he gives them a wide variety of treatments, and does magnificent justice to the good poems. But, above all else, he let himself be guided by musical aspects: What is rhythmical, what is harmonic? How can a melody be built up? The composition of a single melody is born out of a bit of text, perhaps the first line, but it can also be the entire strophe; it can even be the poem's overall form.

**Fidelio:** So, a poem is already a sort of musical score?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Yes, that's so. Many, many composers have only found their way to a certain form, through familiarizing themselves with texts. A famous example is Nietzsche, who was a musical dilettante, but who wanted to compose anyway. And Hans von Bülow, after looking over his compositions, gave him this very intelligent advice: "Write songs, and stick to the text. Then you will find at least *one* red thread, or a guiding hand, that will show you the way." And so it came to pass, that his songs were far and away the best musical pieces he ever produced.



*Fischer-Dieskau (left) with the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. "After he had inspired me to the 'Four Serious Songs' of Brahms at a manorhouse in Salzburg, he treated me as his own son."*

**Fidelio:** There were some poems which Schubert rejected . . .

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Not all that many! There were a few which were not suitable for musical setting, but which he liked anyway, and he tried to adapt them. On a number of occasions, these attempts failed, such as, for example, in his cycle of three hymns by Novalis, which simply didn't work; but things like that happen. Brahms believed that there was no need to publish absolutely everything that Schubert ever wrote. When Schubert's collected works came out, Brahms said that "Schubert himself would never have allowed it; it will denigrate him, if you actually print everything he ever wrote, since there are weak pieces here, too." But I must say that, in comparison to other composers, the weak Schubert pieces are quite rare. . . .

**Fidelio:** Brahms also said that “There’s something you can learn from every Schubert song.”

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Of course. But Brahms himself was extremely self-critical; he was always pruning and polishing his works. Those things that he actually published, were correct down to the dots on the “i’s,” and nothing could be altered.

**Fidelio:** Going further into the content of the poetry: For Schubert, there was yet another, spiritual level with which he conversed, while composing his songs.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Yes, there is the widest imaginable array of references in his works—more of them biographical, than with other composers. He selects poems that coincide with his situation at the moment, and that express what he has experienced, or can imagine experiencing. Perhaps this is why he composed so many poems written by his own friends, since they certainly must have had some insight into what he was going through.

**Fidelio:** Many poems which Schubert set to music, had also been previously composed by others before him, such as Reichardt and Zelter. Why are Schubert’s different?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Reichardt is perhaps his most immediate predecessor. Schubert copied out some of Reichardt’s songs by hand, in order to practice that way of writing, and to familiarize himself with the declamatory style, only sparsely underlaid with chords. Reichardt’s “Prometheus” can really be seen as a run-up to Schubert; I think Schubert’s own “Prometheus” profited from it. And who else? Well, of course, as a young beginner, he adopted Zumsteeg as his model, setting the same texts as he did. But then Schubert raced ahead. It’s a unique course of development.

**Fidelio:** People say that “Gretchen am Spinnrad” was his one great, audacious leap. From then on, he was a genius.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** He was so, even before that. But, you must admit that the art-song was indeed perfected around that time.

**Fidelio:** But, did Schubert develop even further after that, or is he already complete by that point?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** There was continued development, of course. But “Gretchen am Spinnrad” did represent a huge leap; there really aren’t any forerunners. It was like a bolt of lightning.

Afterwards, of course, there was even more development. Schubert repeatedly revisited the old forms, his early style, and tried to give them new life. But then he would very quickly abandon them again. Toward the end of his life, one can sense that he was no longer

thinking his way into the minds of others, causing them to speak on his behalf, but that he was now speaking for himself. Up to that point—approximately up to the time when he composed “Einsamkeit,” I’d think, when he was in Zseliz in Hungary—he makes others speak for him in his songs. But then, with this song “Einsamkeit,” which he himself described as the best song he had ever written up to that point, he attains a level on which he truly and entirely identifies himself with what he has composed. For example, by studying his two different settings of Goethe’s “An den Mond,” you can reconstruct a picture of how rapidly he developed over a very short time. The first version is lovely and pretty, and thoroughly listenable, but it’s not nearly as important as the second one, composed shortly thereafter, which is laid out completely differently, with a totally different arrangement of strophes—everything is different.

**Fidelio:** At your lecture in Cologne, you emphasized that Schubert usually composed bunches of poems by the same poet.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Yes, as much as possible, quite often.

**Musikalische Akademie,**  
die heute am Pfingstsonntage den 26. May 1822,  
zum Vortheile der öffentlichen Wohlthätigkeits-  
Anstalten  
im K. K. Hoftheater nächst dem Rärnthnerthore  
gegeben werden wird.

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**Erste Abtheilung.**

1. Ouverture zu der Oper: Iphigenia, von Cherubini.
2. Die Kraniche des Ibykus, von Fr. Schiller, vorgetragen von Hrn. Anschütz, k. k. Hofchauspieler.
3. Adagio und Rondeau für die Violine, von Baillot, gespielt von Hrn. Escudero, Schüler des Hrn. Baillot.
4. Geist der Liebe, von Martini, in Musik gesetzt von Fr. Schubert, gesungen von Hrn. Barth. Zige, Nejebske und Nestrov.
5. Arie aus der Oper: La donna del lago, von Rossini: „O tu chio chiamo,“ gesungen von Dlle. Eckelin.

**Zweite Abtheilung.**

1. Ouverture von Herrn Fr. Schobertlechner, Kapellmeister am k. k. Hofe zu Lucca.
2. Variationen für das Pianoforte, mit Orchester-Begleitung, komponirt und gespielt von Herrn Fr. Schobertlechner.
3. Der Christabend, Gedicht von Fr. Kind, vorgetragen von Dlle. Weber, k. k. Hofchauspielerinn.
4. Romanze: „Die Ihr die Triebe des Herzens kennt,“ aus der Oper: Die Hochzeit des Figaro, von Mozart, mit deutschem Texte, gesungen von Dlle. Eckelin.
5. Introduction und Variationen für das Waldhorn, gespielt von Hrn. Vergonzl, worin derselbe verschiedene Instrumente nachahmen wird.

Herr Hofopern-Kapellmeister M. Umlauf hat die Leitung aller Musikstücke, und der k. k. Hofopern-Orchester-Director und Mitglied der k. k. Hofkapelle, Hr. Katter, die Direction des Orchesters gefälligst übernommen.

Alle übrigen vordenannten Künstler haben sich nur in der edlen Absicht, den wohlthätigen Zweck zu fördern, zur Wittwirkung bereitwillig herbeigelassen.

*Music Academy concert program, May 1822, when Schubert's works were not well known, features his lied "Geist der Liebe." In addition to musical works, poems—for example, "The Cranes of Ibykus" of Friedrich Schiller—were performed on the program.*



Autograph of "Gretchen am Spinnrad" ("Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel") (1814), Schubert's first masterpiece of lied composition. "The song represented a huge leap; there really aren't any forerunners. It was like a bolt of lightning."

**Fidelio:** And therefore he was seeking not just to compose a poem, but rather he was trying to grasp the poet's underlying character.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** That's right. Which is why, in my *lieder* concerts, I always strove, when possible, to sing only the works of a single composer, so that the audience could be gradually drawn into a particular creative genius' way of thinking, and could follow him. If you only do little clusters—three or four songs by one, and another, and then yet another—you lose the opportunity to think your way into the composer's mind, since, after all, most of these pieces are quite brief.

**Fidelio:** You said "this particular creative genius." I'd like to make that into a motto, since the composition of *lieder* distinguishes itself by the fact, that it works explicitly with metaphors. A while ago, Lyndon LaRouche wrote an interesting article, in which he demonstrates that creative mentation, creative insight, is mediated through metaphor. Metaphor as a thought-form . . .

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** In music, you have to speak about a form-form, of adopted formal elements that are applied in order to express certain specific things. Because painting with music, that's something completely different.

**Fidelio:** No, that's not what I mean. LaRouche is talking

existed *in that form*, the solution to self-imposed or pre-existing paradoxes that were impenetrable from the standpoint of currently existing knowledge and experience. It is precisely this step of coming to grips with what is incommensurable, the paradox, that must be communicated. And therefore, the challenge is to express this through metaphor, to evoke a mental image which can express precisely that creative process which I myself am going through.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** That will have much less relevance for Romanticism, I think. In Romanticism, the main determinant is the mood, the atmosphere. And in that regard, you could also describe Schubert as a Romantic. The mood of the poem. After all, lyrical poetry's main concern is to express, in this way, a fleeting constellation of various elements.

**Fidelio:** Schubert presses forward into the *core* of the poem, which he creates anew, in musical form. That is the idea of metaphor. This process cannot really be expressed in words alone. Furtwängler spoke about how he played what lies between, or behind, the notes.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** That's something else again. Now you're talking about interpretation. He himself has supplied the proof that things aren't so easy, when it comes to composition, whereas, as an interpreter, he was able to scale incredible heights.

**Fidelio:** But the idea of a poem does not exist in the individual words on the page, but rather in the whole.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** And that's so, even in Eichen-dorff, even though every word he uses is actually a symbol of some sort. But once you've analyzed everything, you still don't have an interpretation—not by a long shot. The interpreter is concerned with other things. You said it: between the notes, that's the main thing.

**Fidelio:** The idea is therefore to follow the spoor, to attempt to rediscover the creative process which the composer himself has gone through.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Yes, as much as that's possible; but, no one can fully attain that. All you can do, is try to trace things back: Where did this idea come from? Where did he pick up on it, and what is actually new here?

**Fidelio:** But, isn't that precisely what makes for the riches contained in Classical art?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** No; the real riches lie in the capacity—at

least, for the era I'm looking at, between 1800 and 1900—not so much to reconstruct the form or the structure (all that has to be there, too), but rather to recreate the personalities who are there, speaking, singing, writing. To add your own personality to it, and to merge with it. And woe be it, when there's no pliant personality to do the interpreting, because then we arrive at the way Beethoven is often done nowadays: rushed through, at a rapid tempo, metronomically. That doesn't do justice to these pieces. He himself, as a pianist, took great liberties. We know from contemporary reports, that he was a highly gifted improviser; and, that alone already gives you an incredible freedom to take liberties. So, "Classical" cannot mean metronomic!

**Fidelio:** LaRouche describes the *lied* as a kind of Rosetta Stone, which assists us in approaching and understanding the larger, more extensive works of chamber music, all the way to the symphony. You can see this very concretely in Schubert, taking the example of those songs which he went on to develop in other forms.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** But then, considerable difficulties soon crop up. I'm thinking of the young Hugo Wolf, who sought Brahms out in order to show him his compositions, only to receive the curt verdict: "Go to the Academy, to Mr. Hellmesberger, and learn how to compose." You can see the extent to which a highly intelligent, intel-



The Granger Collection, N.Y.

**Right:** Schubert's close friend, the singer Michael Vogl, helped to make his songs better known to the public. (Pencil drawing by Leopold Kupelwieser, 1821.) **Above:** In "Schubert Evening at Joseph Spaun's Home," Vogl sits beside Schubert at the piano. (Watercolor by Moritz van Schwind.)

lectually active man can have no comprehension of a young, gifted genius—and for many reasons! Stylistically, Wolf travels on such entirely different pathways—an entirely different declamatory manner, a special ear for the sound of words. The young Wolf was one of those people who would recite a poem to themselves a hundred times, until they had found the music that goes with it. Whereas, with Brahms, the creative process proceeds quite differently.

I believe Schubert had many different methods for familiarizing himself with a poem: reading it aloud and silently, always thinking up new ideas about it, first letting various things knock around inside his head, until he finally decides what to do. Unfortunately, most of that is

impossible to reconstruct in detail—as little possible, as it is for us to imagine how Michael Vogl sang—now, that I’d really like to know, too! Or, how Schubert played the piano: it’s very difficult to get a sense of that in retrospect. I believe he was a very quick pianist; his contemporaries speak of the “neatness of his playing.” Surely, he was one of those people who, if he came into a room and heard someone practicing, would be the first to



say: “Why so slow?” Schubert has this tendency—in contrast to Brahms, for whom precisely the opposite was the case. “Why are you rushing like that? Stop and consider, that if you’ve got 4/4, first do it in 8/8, and then you’ll advance a little ways.”

**Fidelio:** For you, is Schubert the center of everything else, as he is for almost all *lieder* singers?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Perhaps not the sole center, but certainly the brightest one. There are others, too: Schumann, Brahms, and Wolf. And also Beethoven, in his own way, although for him, the *lied* brought him into a sphere which was somewhat difficult for him; he didn’t like to work with texts. He did it anyway, because it affected people far and wide—it sold better than purely instrumental music. He therefore wanted to confront this in himself, because he wanted to compose operas, but he didn’t have much luck in that. Had Beethoven been able to carry out all his plans to fruition, then, for example, today we would have his opera *Macbeth*, a *Faust*, and many others. He would have contracted himself to write a whole series of operas. But then nothing came of it, after Napoleon’s occupation. But Beethoven’s preoccupation with words, and with *lieder*, extends well into his middle period.

**Fidelio:** Do you see similarities in the way Beethoven and Schubert created songs?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** In *Wachtelschlag*, which both of them composed, quite a number of similarities, some of which, of course, are conditioned by the poem’s intrinsic rhythm.

But, in general, both men were immersed in the music that had been composed up to that time. Both composers had heard the young Hummel perform on the piano, both of them had attended Schlegel’s lectures in Vienna, and so forth. There are many commonalities, from which they certainly did draw their own conclusions.

**Fidelio:** I’d like to loop back into this again: the imparting of ideas, creative ideas. Permit me to ask, once more, how you approach this question, first, as a singer, and now, as a teacher? Do you see any change? Is there any development in one or another direction?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** No. Within each individual young person you meet, you have the same fields to plow. The trick is just to wake them up, to sharpen their ears for what’s already there in the music. The prerequisites remain unchanged. And when young people have grasped that, part of it comes back to the teacher. It’s not all that different with the orchestra. There are orchestras that seem to be encased in dough, so that first you have to break through the normal routine, and clear out the openings.

**Fidelio:** What, then, is the role of primary education, in elementary schools, and at home with the family, when we see today, for example, that the study of the Classics is being increasingly pushed to the sidelines in normal school curricula?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** I don’t think it has anything to do with it. Take Zelter, for example: the son of a master mason and a clothmaker’s widow, and absolutely not involved with music, nobody in the family. He wasn’t yet twelve years old, when he first exhibited a love for music, and then he developed this unbelievably quickly, without the aid of a music teacher. He built himself an organ out of little slats of wood which you could step on. It didn’t produce any sound, of course, but he could hear the tones in his imagination, since he had keys he could press. He took a piece of wood and made believe he could play the violin, until his father hit on the idea: “You’re always making music; should I give you a violin?” “Yes!” And so, he began to scratch away at that. And that’s how it started out; later, he became *the* counterpoint teacher here in Berlin. There are many examples like that: Dvořák, a butcher’s son: there was no talk of music previously.

You have to make a distinction between creative, and re-creative. With creative people, truly new horizons open up. But the re-creative person relies on individual abilities; his “education” never ends. And, I try to give a little nudge to what’s possible for an interpreter to do.

The interpreter has to practice by himself, discovering the possibilities of his own voice, but this experience really remains his alone. He has to learn to be critical of himself, and must find out precisely where his vocal organ possesses the most beautiful tonal possibilities. Others can use only very vague words to impart this to him. You could also suggest it to him in sound, but he has to find his *own* sound! And, of course, his own personality, too, for expressing what must be expressed.

**Fidelio:** In other recent interviews, you mentioned that in our society, education of the personality gets short shrift.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** No, not education of the personality, that I don't believe. What concerns me, is the general social tendency to enforce a level, above which nothing rises and stands out. Anyone who draws attention to himself as an individual, is viewed with suspicion. We acquired this tendency, of course, from America, and we must resist it: levelling, and imitation of what others are already doing.

When, for example, a member of an orchestra wants to do something especially good, he is looked upon with suspicion, because the apparatus says, "We're doing our jobs here, and doing it on a certain level; but anything beyond that. . . ." That's why orchestra directors have a much tougher time than they used to. Whenever someone came, who had the aura of a special genius, all the musicians would immediately perk up and sit on the edge of their chairs.

**Fidelio:** That evokes the stock image of the chamber musician, the orchestra musician, who doesn't know how to sing. You yourself are also active as a conductor. What can you, as a singer, impart, which others, perhaps, cannot?

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** To be able to breathe, for example. All music has to speak in some form or other. It is desirable that people make music on the breath, with the breath. That's one basic prerequisite, but there are many, many others. Of course, if these things are overdone, they can lead to bombast and pretentiousness; indeed, there have already been quite enough composers, who have likely trod a dangerous path, such as Bruckner, for example. Today, people are attempting to compensate for this, by simply playing him down as he is in the printed score; but, that wasn't his original intent, either.

It's not often that we are blessed with a structural genius in performance such as Furtwängler, who approached everything that welled up—crescendos and decrescendos, accelerandos, ritenutos—from the standpoint of structure. He always obeyed the laws that were

there in the piece. That's what makes his performances so genuine and convincing.

**Fidelio:** To what extent do you see in that, Beethoven's famous "as free as it is rigorous," which he prefixed to his "Grosse Fuge"? By which he certainly meant its mode of composition, although you could just as well take it as instructions for what the interpreter is supposed to do.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Well, let's hope he can do it! That's the question.

**Fidelio:** There exists a universal lawfulness which gives unity to the Many that is our universe. Johannes Kepler pursued this question intensively; Goethe speaks later on about "that which holds the universe together in its innermost essence."

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** In music, this unity has been sliced up. A lawfulness which Goethe still believed in, which he tried to fathom in the young Mendelssohn by having him play for him: what existed at that time? what followed? how did things actually go? He always wanted to grasp the connectedness of a given domain, and yet, the connectedness of the musical domain would never really open up for him. And then, Schönberg came along later, and said: I'm going to take a radical step, and this will all be taken care of: the end of musical history, it's over. Ever since then, we've been dancing, in convulsive spasms, around contorted musical questions.

Artistically, we are sick in body and soul. What the way out is, is unclear to me. And what unity is to be had, at a time when orchestras are dying out, and when opera houses are about to close their doors; what's going to come next—when nothing new in music, for the orchestra, is truly lasting: pieces are performed once, and then they're thrown away. It's all quite demoralizing.

**Fidelio:** If I may follow up with one more question. That's certainly true: on the one hand, you have the economic pressure, while on the other, there is such a great hunger for music, for concerts.

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** It has never been as great as it is right now.

**Fidelio:** But, what will happen to this hunger? Will it be fed with acrobatic tricks, with some glitz . . .

**Prof. Fischer-Dieskau:** Each individual person can only try their best to counteract it.

**Fidelio:** Let's hope that such efforts are not in vain! Professor Fischer-Dieskau, thank you for speaking with us.

—translated from the German  
by John Sigerson

Norbert Brainin,  
Primarius of  
the Amadeus Quartet

‘We aimed  
solely at *truth*’

**Fidelio:** Professor Brainin, even though it seems at first paradoxical: You, in particular, a master of Classical *chamber music*, seem to have been fated to lay out your thoughts on Schubert’s “Great” Symphony in C Major. Can you give us some details about this?

**Prof. Brainin:** We know, from a letter which Franz Schubert wrote to his friend Leopold Kupelwieser [SEE box, page 67], that by 1824, Schubert was already planning to write a “great symphony,” what four years later became the Symphony in C Major. In that letter, dated March 31, 1824, he wrote, interestingly, that he intended to pave his way “to the great symphony,” by composing string quartets—quartets on a grand style, of symphonic proportions. These quartets, from a stylistic standpoint, were still chamber music—I really don’t like the term “chamber music”; I’d prefer to speak of the “small ensemble” style—but they are nevertheless equivalent to a great symphony, from the standpoint of their content and length.

**Fidelio:** You’re speaking here about the “late quartets,” beginning with the “Rosamunde” Quartet?

**Prof. Brainin:** Yes. From this period, 1824 to 1826, dates his composition of the “Rosamunde” Quartet in A minor, Op. 29, followed by the “Death and the Maiden” Quartet in D minor—so called because of the variation movement, which is based on his song of the same name—and, finally, Schubert’s last quartet, the Quartet in G Major, Op. 161. The first movement of this last quartet had its debut at the only public concert of Schubert’s compositions held during his lifetime; that was on March 26, 1828.

Shortly before that, Schubert had completed his C Major Symphony; actually, it was supposed to have been the centerpiece of this concert, but the orchestra members, who at that time were mostly amateurs, could not (or, would not) learn their parts in such a short time, and so the symphony was dropped. Instead, various songs and choruses, one of the two “new piano trios,” and also the “first movement of a new string quartet” (Op. 161) were performed, with Schubert in the audience. The concert was a great success.



EIFRNS/Stuart Lewis

Professor Norbert Brainin (right) talks with Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., Washington, D.C., 1994. Helga Zepp LaRouche looks on.

Professor Brainin was interviewed for *Fidelio* on Oct. 13, 1996, in Weimar, Germany by Ortrun and Hartmut Cramer.

So, by composing string quartets, Schubert wanted to “pave the way to the great symphony.” And in this respect, we notice something very interesting in Schubert’s work: For him, the year 1819/20 was a kind of watershed; it was during that year, that he changed his entire *mode* of composition. From then on, he no longer wrote “entertainment music” for his friends, but, rather, he wrote music that was *deadly serious*. The last work in the old mode is the “Trout” Quintet, and the first one in the “new” mode is the so-called “Quartet Movement,” the only quartet movement he ever wrote in C minor, toward the end of 1820. This latter work is written in a completely different style than the previous one.

**Fidelio:** The “Trout” Quintet and the “Quartet Movement” are quite close to each other, timewise . . .

**Prof. Brainin:** . . . [Y]es, they are separated by only a little more than a year. And they’re very close, too, when you consider that during the four years before then, Schubert hadn’t written any quartets at all—his previous one, the E Major Op. 125, No. 2, which dates from 1817, actually doesn’t count; I’ve never been able to play it right with my quartet—and another four years were to pass before he composed his next one, the “Rosamunde” Quartet. But from the standpoint of genre, the “Trout” and the “Rosamunde” quartets are even closer still, since, outside of the opera *Die Zauberharfe* (*The Magic Harp*), Schubert only composed a very few songs during that time. So, in comparison to his usual output, Schubert wrote *very little* during those fifteen months, and *absolutely no* works in the “small ensemble style.”

Schubert’s early quartets date back to 1812, 1813, and 1814. His very first quartets were still quite simple, since Schubert was only fourteen or fifteen years old—practically still a child. But already only two years later, at the age of sixteen, seventeen years, he was writing *masterpieces*. The three most important quartets from this period, are the E-flat Major, B-flat Major, and G minor.

The B-flat Major Quartet, Op. 168—the Opus numbers are all very high, but they don’t go chronologically—was a string *trio* in its first version. Schubert’s working approach therefore matches the praxis of Mozart and Beethoven, who also composed string trios in order to practice for writing quartets.

Later on, he rewrote this original string trio as a quartet; some say he just “added a second violin to it.”

But, of course, it’s not so simple.

The result, was a true masterpiece. Also, the quartets in E-flat Major and G minor are thoroughly typical Schubert works. And it’s amazing, virtually unbelievable, that a youth of sixteen or seventeen could write such music. It’s like Felix Mendelssohn, who, at sixteen or seventeen, wrote the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as well as his Octet and at least two string quartets, all of them *masterful*. It’s hard to imagine how such a thing is possible. Mozart also wrote masterpieces very early in life, but I think he was a “late bloomer” in comparison to Schubert and Mendelssohn.

But, back to his *mode* of composition: Schubert had



*The Amadeus Quartet.*

models he could follow. In order to practice for his late string quartets, Mozart—and I’m not talking about his Six Quartets Dedicated to Haydn, in which he had already applied the new style of *Motivführung* [motivic thorough-composition], but rather, his three “Prussian” Quartets K. 575, 589, and 590—Mozart wrote his so-called “Divertimento.” This string trio, K. 563, however, is a divertimento in name only. It was a preparatory exercise. But, as is always the case with Mozart, whenever he does something like that, he ends up with well-nigh the best that had ever been produced in the genre! It was the same with Beethoven: all of his string trios were preparatory work for his six quartets Op. 18. And, as I have already said, Schubert’s late quartets are basically exercises in preparation for the great C Major Symphony.

**Fidelio:** Couldn’t you generalize your point, and say that the symphony developed out of the string quartet—not



More than other composers, Schubert often worked entire melodies or motivic kernels from his lieder into chamber music. Shown here: Autograph of "Die Forelle" ("The Trout"). Schubert gave the song elements instrumental treatment in the "Trout" Quintet (1819).

personal matter. It didn't have anything to do with his formal style. I don't know when he first consciously applied the compositional method of *Motivführung*. As far as I know, this method can be found in all of

out of quartet as a form, but rather, from the fact that the four instruments . . .

**Prof. Brainin:** . . . four-voiced polyphony . . .

**Fidelio:** . . . form, as it were, the true nucleus—LaRouche speaks of the "torso"—of the orchestra?

**Prof. Brainin:** Absolutely. This really goes back to Haydn, since he not only invented the string quartet, he also invented the instrumentation of the symphony orchestra. Later on, of course, it was extended, but the instrumentation of the Classical symphony—a string quartet, supported by the contrabass, with the addition of a few wind instruments—this actually comes from Haydn.

During the year before the C Major Symphony, which was completed in early 1828, Schubert had written *Die Winterreise*, and after finishing the symphony, he wrote his genial C Major String Quartet. The posthumously published, fantastic B-flat Major Sonata was also composed during this period—quite late, in September 1828, only shortly before his death. The Octet (1824), and, really, both of the two piano trios from 1827, also belong to the preparatory phase leading to the C Major Symphony.

**Fidelio:** You said that, for Schubert, there was a kind of caesura, a "watershed," between 1819 and 1820. Can you put your finger on the reason for this?

**Prof. Brainin:** I think that with Schubert, it was a purely

his works. The fact remains: Around that time, he had wanted to resume his study of counterpoint, because he wanted to learn even more. He never got around to doing that, because he died so early, in November 1828, at barely thirty-two years of age. Perhaps his mind's eye had been focussed on developing along the same lines as Beethoven did; but he never got that far, even though these grand "late" works of his already contain everything in them. In the works that Schubert wrote toward the end of his short life—in the marvelous piano sonata, in the quartets, and also in the C Major Symphony—we find four-voiced polyphonic composition on a level of development comparable to that of Beethoven's late works.

Four-voiced polyphony—this style, in which, on the

**Norbert Brainin** made chamber music history as first violinist of the unforgotten Amadeus Quartet. This quartet's activities revolved around the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and, especially, Schubert. Following the death of the violist Peter Schlof in 1987, the Amadeus Quartet stopped giving concerts; its surviving members currently teach, and promote young quartets from around the world.

one hand, each voice has its own independent existence, and yet, at the same time, is an integral part of the whole—that is Beethoven’s great accomplishment. Of course, this has much to do with *Motivführung*, since each voice is composed strictly according to the method of motivic thorough-composition. Each is clearly recognizable, and is a unity in its own right, but nevertheless everything fits together. This method was composed, for the first time at this level of perfection, into his Quartet Op. 59, No. 2—at many points there, although not consistently throughout. Beethoven only first achieved true perfection throughout, in his late works, Op. 127, 130, the “Grosse Fuge” Op. 133, as well as in Op. 131 and 135. This “as rigorous, as it is free,” is entirely typical for him. The “*Tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée*,” which he wrote above his “Grosse Fuge”: now, that’s a real contradiction!

**Fidelio:** From a formal-logical standpoint, an insoluble contradiction, a true paradox.

**Prof. Brainin:** But this dictum of his, is true for all music—for composition as well as for performance. It is a sort of *leitmotiv* of the art of Classical composition. And it is we

artists who must bring such contradictions to bear in our interpretation. That goes without saying. And also for Bach, because he, too, is both “rigorous and free” at the very same time. And, as a musician, you must find a way to execute that; this places demands on our artistry; all of our creative powers go into it.

**Fidelio:** If we may return to Schubert: What was the nature of the crucial difference at the watershed you were speaking about earlier? Did Schubert more clearly grasp this “as rigorous, as it is free” contradiction, following 1819/20?

**Prof. Brainin:** Possibly. I don’t know exactly; all I know, is that a change in Schubert’s thinking occurred between these two works—the 1819 “Trout” Quintet, and the Quartet Movement, which was written a good year later. Beyond that, no one really knows exactly why he wrote this movement; and it’s also unclear, what this movement belongs to. Did he conceive of it as a separate movement, or as part of an entire quartet? And, if it was the latter, or

was intended to be so, did he do any further work on it, or, have the other parts been lost? All these things are simply not known. Therefore, I can’t say.

**Fidelio:** But it *is* known—you already mentioned it—that, just as with Haydn, whose quartet output, following his revolutionary “Russian” Quartets Op. 33, had a lapse of almost ten years, Schubert also had a long lapse between his early and his later quartets; and the only



“An excursion of Schubertians,” memorialized by Schubert’s friend, the artist Leopold Kupelwieser. Above: The journey to Atzenbrugg; Schubert and Kupelwieser are standing at the back of the carriage. Right: Schubert (bottom left) provides piano accompaniment for the amateur theatrical. (Oil painting and watercolor by Kupelwieser, 1820.)

work that lies in between, is this “Quartet Movement.”

**Prof. Brainin:** Yes, and therefore the last “early” quartet, written before this Quartet Movement, was the above-mentioned one in E Major, in 1817. It is written in a style that is completely different from the other ones—in what you might call a virtuoso style. Purely instrumental, very technically demanding, completely out of keeping with what was later taken up again, in the quartets written from 1824 onward, in a much-improved form.

**Fidelio:** When one studies Schubert’s works, one is particularly struck by the fact that, more so than other composers, Schubert quite often worked entire melodies or motivic kernels from his *lieder* into his chamber music. When you say that the later quartets, such as the “Rosamunde” and the “Death and the Maiden”—all of which have such elements—are the antecedent form of his symphonies, how would you rank them?

**Prof. Brainin:** The motivic kernel of the “Rosamunde” Quartet comes out of the incidental music for the play

*Rosamunde, Prinzessin von Zypern* (*Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus*). Much of this work contains things which he used elsewhere. For example, not only does the entire A minor Quartet consist of motivic elements from *Rosamunde, Prinzessin von Zypern*—we find one theme, for example, in the Scherzo, while the second movement comes from the “Entr’acte,” the music that bridges from one act to the next—but he also made variations for the piano out of it.

**Fidelio:** But he wrote the orchestral version first?

**Prof. Brainin:** Yes, absolutely.

As for the “Death and the Maiden” Quartet: The song that bears the same name consists of two parts; in the quartet, he only uses the part that has to do with Death. This he made into the theme of the second movement, and of the variations.

emerges as the winner, and the march to death is a joyous one. As with the D minor Quartet, here, too, it is a ride into death; only here, in the G Major Quartet, it is a joyous ride; in the D minor Quartet, on the other hand, a deathly serious, despairing feeling prevails.

The C Major Quintet is related to the symphony, in that Schubert wrote it in the same state of mind of that year; the same goes for *Die Winterreise*, which was composed the year before. Schubert sang and played it for his friends; they didn’t like it at all!

**Fidelio:** You have reported that you performed the D minor Quartet with your Amadeus Quartet quite often in concert. Why this quartet in particular?

**Prof. Brainin:** On the one hand, this was in accord with the public’s wishes; our audiences wanted to hear us play it. This is certainly related to the fact that it was one of the first works that we had recorded back then.

On the other hand, we played the work in a very special manner—but one which, for me, was really quite normal. Looking back at it today, I know that it was unique. None of the other quartets have played it that way, because they didn’t know how they should do it; because they didn’t have the right concept. To this very day, no one else has played it that way. Either they haven’t cared to do it, or they have been unable to do so. They have sentimentalized everything.

**Fidelio:** Is a special technique required to play this work the way the Amadeus Quartet played it?

**Prof. Brainin:** Technique—naturally. If one interprets the way the Amadeus Quartet does, one must

acquire a certain technique that enables one to do it. It wasn’t anything new; rather, it was rediscovered.

But, most importantly: in this way, you can achieve freedom. And, actual freedom exists within the bounds of a certain legality, a certain rhythm. To put it quite crudely: You play in time with each other; and, within the framework of this “playing in time,” your playing becomes free. Every now and then, you may lengthen something a bit, but, that must be balanced out somehow, by taking away from somewhere else. That’s just an abstract concept; it’s called *rubato*. But, a *rubato* must be



The Granger Collection, N.Y.

But the entire piece, the entire D minor Quartet, is permeated by a longing for death. It’s very easy to recognize. The end, the final movement, is like a gallop into death; it has an air of hopelessness, and also it ends in D minor. Interestingly, there’s something similar in the G Major Quartet: the counterposing of G Major to G minor. This dualism, this contradiction, is a dramatic element; it starts right at the beginning: The opening harmony is a G Major chord, and the next one is in G minor. The tension between major and minor permeates the entire work; it is only finally resolved in the coda. In the end, major

done *thoughtfully*. It must be “both free and rigorous.” Nobody wrote like that, before Beethoven.

**Fidelio:** Getting back again to the Schubert-Beethoven connection: If you associate Schubert’s later works, especially the quartets, with Beethoven’s late works, did the two men know each other intimately on this level of compositional artistry?

**Prof. Brainin:** No, not intimately. Schubert tried to write the same kind of music; it was just in the air of Vienna those days, you might say. Because music had not been “invented,” it was just there. But Schubert was not as far advanced as Beethoven. And what did Schubert *know* about Beethoven? He would have knelt down before him. Many have remarked, “Beethoven is something monumental,” but they really didn’t understand him. Schubert, on the other hand, *knew* it, but he himself had not progressed as far.

**Fidelio:** One more question on the C Major Symphony. You said that in his quartets, he was practicing for the symphony—that is, he was studying the art of applying four-part polyphony on a symphonic scale—an art which Beethoven had brought to a pinnacle . . .

**Prof. Brainin:** . . . [T]hat is what’s so special about this

symphony; and that is why it is Schubert’s greatest work. In his selection of themes and motivic kernels, there is, of course, a big difference between the symphony and the quartets; the former is “orchestral,” and the others are “instrumental”—though always based on the singing voice. What unites them, however, is especially their extended treatment: this “Schubertian expansiveness,” or “divine length,” as Schumann later called it, which all composers after him, strove to emulate.

**Fidelio:** Schubert’s works are particularly interesting, of course, from the standpoint of the relation between the human singing voice and the poetic idea—an idea which is expressed in a particular speech form, a prosody, from which motivic seed-elements emerge, which can be further worked up in a particular form.

**Prof. Brainin:** That’s precisely the way Schubert composed songs. He always let himself be inspired by the poetry, that’s clear. Sometimes he even wrote the poetry himself, sometimes not. It was always something that spoke to his heart; it wasn’t always the very best poetry, but, deep within him, it touched something, which then brought forth the idea for a song.

**Fidelio:** From the standpoint of a string quartet player,

## Robert Schumann on the C Major Symphony: ‘A unique way of treating instruments . . . as if they were human voices’

*While on a trip to Vienna in 1838, Robert Schumann paid a visit to Franz Schubert’s brother Ferdinand, who allowed him to look through the unpublished Schubert compositions in his possession; among these was the C Major Symphony. They agreed to send it off to Leipzig, where, on March 23, 1839, it was performed for the first time, under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn. Schumann writes:*



Corbis-Bettmann

Robert Schumann

I’ll say it outright: Whoever doesn’t know this symphony, doesn’t know anything about Schubert yet, even though, after all that Schubert has already bestowed upon Art, many might see this as a degree of praise scarcely to be believed. . . .

Here we find, in addition to masterly compositional technique, life in every fiber, coloration down to the finest nuance, meaning everywhere, the clearest expression of detail, and over everything, there is poured a romanticism such as we have already experienced elsewhere

in Schubert. And this divine length of his symphony . . .

We always have to call it an extraordinary talent, when a person who has heard so few of his own instrumental works performed during his lifetime, is able to arrive at such a unique way of treating instruments, as well as the orchestral ensemble, which often talk across to each other, as if they were human voices and chorus. Outside of many Beethoven works, I have never been so taken off guard and surprised by this similarity to the singing organ . . .

## ‘I want to pave my way to the great symphony’

*From a letter written by Schubert to his childhood friend, the painter Leopold Kupelwieser, in Rome, March 23, 1824.*

Dear Kupelwieser,

I have been feeling the urge to write you for some time now, but I never knew which way to turn. But now the opportunity has come up via Smirsch, and so, finally, I can completely pour out my soul to someone. . . .

In a word, I feel like the most unfortunate, most miserable human being on the face of the earth. Imagine a person whose health just doesn't want to ever again get back to normal, and who, out of despair over this,

keeps getting worse at what he does; imagine a person, I say, whose brightest hopes have come to naught, for whom love and friendship offer nothing but pain at most, whose (incipient, at least) enthusiasm for Beauty, is in danger of being snuffed out; and ask yourself whether that isn't a miserable, unfortunate man? . . .

On songs, I haven't done much new; instead, I'm testing myself out on a number of instrumental things, since I composed two quartets for violins, viola, and violoncello, and an octet, and want to write yet another quartet; generally, in this way, I want to pave my way to the great symphony.



Leopold Kupelwieser

might you address the following question: You said earlier, that the Amadeus Quartet had a very special sense and feeling for “Death and the Maiden,” and also played it accordingly—quite differently from the way it is played nowadays.

**Prof. Brainin:** If I might be permitted to put it this way: Most quartets' interpretations of it have been wrong: they have sentimentalized it. Schubert's “Death and the Maiden” is *dramatic*, but they have completely excluded this dramatic element. And the audiences have responded to the sentimentality. We, on the other hand, played it *without* sentimentality; we aimed solely at *truth*, which was much more at work here, than mere sentimentality. We turned everything that people had imagined Schubert to be, upside-down, and did it differently.

**Fidelio:** Earlier as well, audiences have always wanted this sentimentality. And whoever yields to that, can, of course, get through life relatively easily. . . .

**Prof. Brainin:** . . . absolutely; easy *business!*

**Fidelio:** Today's cultural world is confronted with a certain dilemma: On the one hand, people attend concerts because they must satisfy their craving for real culture, for *truth*; but, on the other hand, standing there on the stage you have the young artists, who practice like mad and accomplish enormous technical feats, and yet the overall result is often unsatisfying.

**Prof. Brainin:** “Enormous technical feats. . .”—yes, on a certain level. But I fear that this level is pretty superfi-

cial—generally speaking, that is, only generally.

For instance, a conservatory teacher once sent a very gifted Korean girl to me. She played me Schubert's “Duo”—also called a sonata—Op. 162, very nicely, to be sure; but I immediately noticed that certain nuances had been inserted, that had absolutely nothing to do with Schubert. Completely made up! Just in order to do *something*. But the whole had been perverted, *tonally*. And I showed her that there was not the slightest reason to insert these nuances, that they just weren't valid. Because the very first thing one must do, is capture the “right tone” for playing a piece or an individual phrase; only after that, can you go on to talk about other things. And once you have managed to do that, other, entirely different nuances come out—the very nuances that are actually in the music. That's a typical example.

Many teachers grope around for something to tell their students; they start out by telling them nonsense, and by saying they should play with “imagination” and “fantasy.” But what's fantasy? You have to have the *right* fantasy. And what's the right fantasy? You must discover something that is already there; don't just make things up. The inventor doesn't make things up, he is a *discoverer*; basically. And if you don't know anything, and haven't discovered anything, that's when you start to get sentimental.

**Fidelio:** Thank you, Professor Brainin, for speaking with us.

—translated from the German  
by John Sigerson