

Benjamin Beilman, Violin; David Finckel, Cello; Wu Han, Piano
New Orleans Friends of Music, Tuesday, October 7, 2025

PROGRAM
The Complete Piano Trios of Franz Schubert

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major (Op. 99, D. 898)

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

1. Allegro moderato
2. Andante un poco mosso
3. Scherzo: Allegro
4. Rondo: Allegro vivace

Piano Trio No. 2 in E-flat Major (Op. 100, D. 929)

Schubert

1. Allegro
 2. Andante con moto
 3. Scherzo: Allegro moderato
 4. Allegro moderato
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PROGRAM NOTES

by Marc Loudon

Extended program notes are provided on the FoM website in advance of each concert. These contain more detail than those in the program.

[*Note:* Performance links provided in these notes are generally available *YouTube* links that in some cases start with advertisements. You can skip the ads by clicking on the “Skip” message that will appear on the lower right of the video after a few seconds.]

Schubert, for most his life, composed in the shadow of Beethoven. By the time he walked in Beethoven’s funeral procession in early 1827, Schubert was, to be sure, known as a capable and prolific composer, but he was yet to produce the major works reminiscent of those that defined the greatness of Beethoven. All this was about to change. Faced with a fatal disease, Schubert entered into a frenzy of composition in his final two years in which he produced his last three, monumental, piano sonatas, the huge C major quintet, and the two magnificent piano trios that comprise tonight’s program. These trios have become epic pillars that bridge the final quartets of Beethoven and the chamber music of Brahms. When Schubert, on his deathbed on November 19, 1828, at the age of 31, turned to the wall and said, “This is my end,” he didn’t know that this really wasn’t his end—rather, the beginning of his recognition as one of the great composers of the age, who took his final rest in a Viennese cemetery near the great Beethoven.

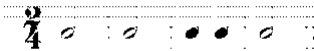
A performance of the two piano trios together takes about 90 minutes, but the trios are so engaging that we are scarcely conscious of the length.

The **Piano Trio No. 1** was begun in 1827. (Schubert worked on it along with his song cycle *Winterreise*). The first movement (the longest movement of the trio) reminds us of Schubert’s famous *Trout Quintet*, in which the piano has the melody and the strings provide the “movement of the brook” beneath. An upward scale on the piano leads to the second theme, first stated by the cello.

The second movement starts as a beautiful song without words (anticipating Mendelssohn), with the melody on the cello that moves to the violin. The movement becomes more agitated, its development then exploring an amazing array of keys. Ultimately, there is a return to the original melody, and the movement ends peacefully.

In the charming Scherzo, which is in typical A–B–A form, the “B”, or Trio, section is a Ländler, a type of folk song in $3/4$ time that is believed to be a precursor of the waltz.

The final movement, a rondo, is in $2/4$ time. Typically, when there are two beats per measure, the measures are laid out in groups of two or four. Listen for the very unusual aspect of this movement in which, after the first cadence, followed by a measure of silence, Schubert uses the rhythmic figure



— and then, subsequently, begins to leave off the final half note, thus creating the illusion of $3/2$ time. Shortly, he moves seamlessly into actual $3/2$ time, and then later back into $2/4$ time. This rhythmic sleight-of-hand, which occurs twice within the movement, leaves us deliciously off balance for a short time.

Following is a link to a performance of the Trio No. 1 by the Eben Trio:

[Performance of Op. 99 by the Eben Trio](#)

The Piano **Trio No. 2** in E-flat major for piano, violin, and cello, D. 929, was one of the last of Schubert's compositions, and is dated November 1827. It was published as Opus 100 in late 1828, shortly before the composer's death and first performed at a private party in January 1828 to celebrate the engagement of Schubert's school friend Josef von Spaun. The Trio was among the few of his late compositions Schubert heard performed before his death. Schumann wrote, “a Trio by Schubert passed across the musical world like some angry comet in the sky.” More intense than the Piano Trio in B-flat major, it flairs with passion, pathos, and anger, as well as joy, grace and triumphant beauty.

The first movement, in sonata form, is full of Schubertian lyricism and energy, with as many as six separate thematic ideas in the exposition alone.

The ravishingly beautiful second movement is a somber march in the relative minor key. The main theme of this movement was used as one of the central musical themes in a number of films, including *The Piano Teacher*, the HBO miniseries *John Adams*, and the BBC documentary *Auschwitz: The Nazis and 'The Final Solution'*.

The third movement is a scherzo in traditional A–B–A form but with an ingenious Schubertian twist: the outer sections are a strict canon (that is, imitation) at the unison between the piano and strings, with the entries of the parts separated by six beats.

The final movement is another march, this one in $6/8$ time. Twice in the movement we are treated to dazzling virtuosic displays by, first, the pianist, and then the strings. The somber theme of the second movement makes two appearances in the movement; but, near the end, the sun comes out as this theme is transformed into a major key.

Musicologist Kai Christiansen writes

A casual listen to Schubert sometimes provokes the reaction that he is a bit long-winded, maybe even a bit repetitive. A more attentive listening reveals that Schubert never says the same thing twice. With his masterful handling of an ever-changing texture, his uncanny use of color within a chamber ensemble, his expert rhythmic sense and his

exotic, emotionally keen harmonic modulations, Schubert always invests his recurring thematic material with new meaning, ultimately building a large-scale narrative where nothing is redundant and everything [is] necessary. His music demands from the listener only an equivalently generous presence of heart and mind.

The following link is to a performance that is noteworthy not only for its excellence, but also for the authentic use of very little vibrato in the strings and a gorgeous fortepiano. Enlarge the YouTube window, if possible, as the video is very high quality and there are wonderful parts of the video that focus on the individual players.

[*Performance of Op. 100 Trio at the Hochrhein Musikfestival Solsberg*](#)