

Reports

First Summer School of the Schubert Research Centre, Vienna: “Sexuality and Gender in Schubert’s Time”, 5-7 September 2022

The *Kommission für Interdisziplinäre Schubert Forschung* – known in English as the Schubert Research Centre – was founded in April 2021. Its aim is to enable scholars from a variety of disciplines and countries to come together and understand more about the world of Schubert and his contemporaries. As well as academic conferences and public relations, the Centre also has initiatives designed to encourage students to probe key issues from Schubert’s time, and how they relate to our world today.

Last year, I was fortunate to be chosen as a participant of the SRC’s inaugural Summer School, held in English over three days at the *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Austrian Academy of Sciences). I am most grateful to the ÖAW not only for initiating this event aimed at supporting upcoming scholars, but also for generously subsidizing both travel and accommodation expenses for all the participants, which enabled me to take part and visit Vienna for the first time, a long-held dream of mine. Entitled “Sexuality and Gender in Schubert’s Time”, the composer himself loomed large in proceedings that were held in a building that formed part of the University when Schubert was alive, and that was stationed opposite the *Stadtkonvikt* where he was educated.

The six teachers and sixteen students (ranging from undergraduate through to doctoral studies) represented a diverse spread of academic disciplines including musicology, history, literature studies, gender

studies, cultural studies, and creative arts and health. Participants from German-speaking and anglophone countries were in the majority (as may be expected from the current centres of Schubert studies), but participants also came from further afield, such as Poland and India. The varied educational and life experiences of each of the participants contributed toward a rich tapestry of conversations and debates woven over an introductory session, five themed sessions, a *Schubertiade*, a guided Schubert tour, a meal together, and a final summary. In the spirit of the Summer School's dialogic nature, this report includes reflections from several of the students, gathered through personal correspondence.



Participants of the 2022 Schubert Summer School, in front of a painting of the decidedly less diverse membership (c.1900) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, in the Clubraum of Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2.

The **introductory session**, led by convenor, Univ.-Prof. Dr. phil. Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl (Professor in the Department of Art, Music and Dance Studies, University of Salzburg), summarised the aims of the SRC and Summer School, and allowed each teacher and participant to introduce themselves to the group. Then we moved swiftly into the first themed session, “**Schubert’s Sexuality**”. This was led by Prof. em. Dr. Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen (Emeritus Professor of Musicology, University of Zurich) and revisited the infamous musicological debate of the 1980-90s using contemporary academic discourses surrounding gender and sexuality. As Reuben Bance (undergraduate student, Music, UK), summarises: “One of the main focus points of the Summer school was a discussion of the benefits of analysing history – including Schubert – through a non-normative (“queer”) lens, along with examining the institutional reactions against using such a lens, with a particular focus on the [Rita] Steblin – [Maynard] Solomon debate several decades ago.”

Topics discussed included: the notion of ever-changing projections in music reception history; whether there are any “permanent” extra-musical features in the musical fabric of pieces; the concept of shared communities generated between queer people across times and cultures; and the importance of queer visibility in the musical canon. Responses to these ideas were by no means homogenous. The most vocal disagreements appeared to be about the nature of knowledge, science, and language, displaying the differences – to characterise it somewhat crudely – between the tenets of musicology (an anglophone “humanities” discipline dealing with the hermeneutic readings of texts, and the interrogation of cultural constructs and scholarly biases) and *Musikwissenschaften* (a Germanic “science” discipline rooted in philology, music analysis, and historical evidence). Proponents of each did not necessarily align with

geographical background. As Johanna Jastrinsky (Masters student, Education and Performative Music & Dance Studies, Austria), argues: “I have come to the conclusion that historical biographies should allow for a variety of interpretations, and Schubert’s is no exception. In general, researching the past and interpreting sources involves a subjective point of view, which I believe should be marked as such.”

Three sessions considered the social fabric of Schubert’s time on a broader scale, with a special focus on gender. In “**Historicizing Gender**”, Ass.-Prof. Dr. Anke Charton M.A. (TT Professor of Theatre and Society and 2020-2023 Elise Richter Fellow, University of Vienna) raised the key issue of mediation, arguing that our interactions with historical facts and materials are governed by shifting conventions that are contingent on our time, background, and various frames of reference. Schubert’s life and times became a focal point to pursue different questions regarding topics of identity, particularly the issue of whether people who were perceived as a certain gender felt that way themselves. Although concepts such as gender dysphoria and the gender continuum were not available in the early nineteenth century, there is evidence of multiple ways of presenting gender at the time; Heather Hadlock’s 2015 chapter “Different masculinities: androgyny, effeminacy, and sentiment in Rossini’s *La donna del lago*” (in Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe & Jeffrey Kallberg (eds.), *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, Cambridge University Press, 170-213) was a particularly eye-opening required advance reading. Other topics discussed included the homoromantic (though not necessarily sexual) relationships of the era; the interplay between class boundaries and gender boundaries; and the ways in which written history is purposefully curated – all, of course, relevant to the life of Schubert.

Mag. Dr. Karin S. Wozonig, Ph.D (Lecturer in Modern German Literature, University of Vienna)'s session "**Love, Desire, and Poetry**" pointed towards the ways in which nineteenth-century poetry was created as both an answer to everyday life, and as a construction of reality. The contemporary concept of "*Geschlechtscharaktere*" (character of the sexes) defined men and women according to the division of labour, which took place in public and private spheres of life respectively. Dr. Wozonig provided the opportunity to read and analyse the poetry of Schubert's contemporaries, including Betty Paoli, Annette von Drost-Hülshoff, Wilhelm Müller, Eduard Mörike, and Bettina von Arnim, with an eye to hidden meanings. "**Gender Norms**", Mag. Waltraud Schütz, PhD (Research Associate in History of the Habsburg Monarchy, Austrian Academy of Sciences)'s session was similarly hands-on, with an introduction to textual source criticism and source interpretation. After a historical outline highlighting the ways in which politics (including family laws), women's associations, and an increasing interest in human anatomy all shaped gender norms from the mid-eighteenth-century onwards, we analysed textual sources from the Viennese Schubert birth centenary celebrations in 1928, which revealed how the composer was painted in gendered terms and seen to embody "feminine" ideals of charity and modesty.

A different focus came to the fore in the session led by Dr Mark Seow (Cambridge AHRC DTP1 Postdoctoral Fellow, Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge), "**Performing Queerness**". Taking as its starting point Philip Brett's seminal 1997 article, "Piano Four-Hands: Schubert and the Performance of Gay Male Desire" (*19th-Century Music* 21(2), University of California Press, 149-176), the discussions focused on the ways in which musical performances can be read as text. Using video clips, aspects of different musicians'

dress, movements, and gesture, along with the use of performance space, were analysed in relation to gender, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships. This concept of “everything counts” was particularly striking for Ally Zlatar (PhD candidate in Creative Arts and Health, Australia/UK), who wrote: “As a visual artist, my intentions were to learn more about Schubert and expand my understanding of embodied artists, sexuality, and gender within creative practice. [... Educator] Mark Seow (Cambridge) particularly stood out for me as his experience with Schubert’s work blended past, presence and permanence in a way that was highly engaging and deeply personal.”

Dr Seow also linked these themes to the previous night’s *Schubertiade* featuring Irma Niskanen (baroque violinist and faculty member of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) and Joonas Ahonen (pianist and member of period ensemble Rödberg Trio and contemporary ensemble Klangforum Wien, playing a Biedermeier-period Viennese fortepiano on this occasion). Niskanen and Ahonen – who tend to play in different musical circles, but are in fact wife and husband – brought a very special communicative quality of mutual “give-and-take” to their playing, resulting in a highly coordinated and compelling performance of Schubert’s Sonatas for Piano and Violin in A minor D385, A major D574 (Allegro moderato only), and G minor D408, finishing with the Allegro Assai from Beethoven’s Sonata for Piano and Violin in G major, Op. 30/3, interspersed with commentary.

A further “outside the classroom” activity was a **guided Schubert walking tour** that included the museum at Schubert’s birth house in Lichtental, the Schubert statue in the Stadtpark, and a wander through some of the historical centres of the city-centre. While

enjoyable, this tour held on the last day unfortunately coincided with very hot and sunny weather, and many of the participants ended up dropping out at various stages due to fatigue. **Mealtimes**, however, provided a good opportunity to continue conversations with participants and professors, particularly during the celebratory Summer School dinner at Glacis Beisl, but also during optional lunches at Café Prückel, Rossini Wien, and Inigo, which enabled us to sample some of the city's range of delicious foods.

Overall, the Summer School was a highly enjoyable and stimulating three days that enabled us to learn more about Franz Schubert's life, social context, and reception history through the lens of sexuality and gender. The fact that it took place in the delightful city of Vienna really brought the historical material to life. The only negative aspects were the tiring (3.5-hour long) sessions, and a perhaps-unavoidable consequence of the subject matter: that the discussions of aspects of identity – which in some cases touched on issues and lived experiences that were deeply personal to those present – did occasionally lead to some participants feeling uncomfortable or unable to share some of their opinions in this academic forum.

However, in the main the conversations remained very open and respectful, and the sense of camaraderie despite different perspectives was one of the most positive aspects for many participants. As Emily Abbott (undergraduate student in Music, UK) wrote: “The Schubert Summer School as a whole was a brilliant opportunity to engage with academics from all over the globe. Hearing viewpoints [...] from such a range of people was an extremely unique experience and one I will certainly treasure. Not only did we each have our own academic backgrounds to draw upon during our long discussions, but our own life experiences. The space

for academic discussion created by the Summer School was one of encouragement and inclusion – it was a delight to be a part of!” Likewise, Moritz Michel described to me how he at first felt out of his depth as a German undergraduate student (in Music) having to speak in English. However, the participation of others encouraged him to get involved: “It was the single best atmosphere of a discussion I ever experienced. Filled with respect everyone listened, we exchanged ideas for the different scientific fields or even our own cultural background. This etiquette – respect and interest – followed us throughout every discussion we had.”

The final **summary session** chaired by Dr Lindmayr-Brandl was a good opportunity to reflect on the many new ways of thinking learned and different points of view shared over the three days. In one sense, the Summer School raised more questions than answers, and left much to be pondered over. As Moritz Michel continued, “It did not matter [whether we] have a precise answer, the journey was its own reward. After all, I don’t feel like I can tell you whether Schubert was gay or not. But I do know the possibilities that are created by a healthy environment in a discussion setting. I do know how much richer every opinion and experience will make a discussion if listened to.” The success of the Summer School, then, depended not only on the fascinating sessions expertly planned and led by the committee of professors and musicians, but also on the enthusiastic curiosity and engagement of the participants. My heartfelt thanks go out to them all.

Further information about the SRC Summer School 2022 can be found at <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/kis/activities/summer-school>.

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