Susan Richter currently holds the chair for Early Modern History at the University of Heidelberg. Her Habilitationsschrift, Pflug und Steuerruder. Zur Verflechtung von Herrschaft und Landwirtschaft in der Aufklärung, was published by Böhlau earlier this year.


In Schubert: Interpretationen, Ivana Rentsch and Klaus Pietschmann bring together leading musicologists predominantly from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland to produce, individually and collectively, a sense of the current status and emerging trends in Schubert scholarship. The essays exemplify the trend of the last fifteen or so years to place music into dialogue with the texts and interpretive methods of theoretical, historical, and cultural analysis. While the editors outline in their preface how biography and historical context are important reference points in these essays, one of the great virtues of this volume is that it does not presume to create too trim a fit between the man who suffered and the mind that created. It fills out the historical record but stops short of presenting the composer’s music as a simple tit-for-tat consequence of his life; it allows the creative mind its own mysterious ways. Two hundred years after his death, we are well and truly instructed in both the sentimental Schubert and the postmodern Schubert. Rentsch and Pietschmann’s volume of essays reminds us that the essential Schubert is still the secluded inner being, the one scholars find difficult to access, the composer who continues to play hide-and-seek in the pages of the Neue Schubert Ausgabe.

Schubert: Interpretationen is the third of a series of studies published in conjunction with the journal Schubert: Perspektiven. The aims of this volume chime nicely with those of the series which addresses repertoire neglected in Schubert studies. Those who follow the series will notice immediately that this multi-authored volume is built differently from its predecessors: Christina Blanken’s monograph, Franz Schuberts “Lazarus” und das Wiener Oratorium zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts (2002), and Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl’s Franz Schubert. Das fragmentarische Werk (2003). Yet all three books are bound by a common understanding that Schubert continues to confront and provoke his audiences, and to demand fresh interpretations from performers, critics, and analysts. In a different way to their predecessors, Rentsch and Pietschmann have acceded to this demand and have filled the volume with new work. Schubert: Interpretationen offers us fourteen essays well organized into three categories: eight representative case studies of a variety of Schubert’s works, two essays on Schubert’s compositional process, and four on aspects of reception history.

In this context, the opening section on musical materiality begins with Walther Dürr’s probing discussion of Schubert’s Ossians Gesänge composed in 1815/1816. Dürr’s arguments on Schubert’s early engagement with strophic song are characteristically well marshaled, his analysis of Schubert’s Ossian settings, trenchantly expressed. His encyclopedic knowledge of
Schubertian song is evident not only in the selection of these songs which range from Schubert’s first Ossian Lieder—“Kolmas Klage” (D 217), “Das Mädchen von Inistore” (D 281) and “Ossians Lied nach dem Falle Nathos” (D 278)—to dialogic songs—“Cronnan” (D 282), “Schilrich und Vinvela” (D 293), and the tercet, “Bardengesang” (D 147), for two tenors and bass—to epic scenes such as “Lodas Gespenst” (D 150) and “Die Nacht” (D 534). It is also evident in his understanding of Schubert’s compositional process. The subtlety with which Dürr locates one influence of the second Berlin school in Reichardt’s cyclical sets of three strophic songs and identifies the metrical freedom Schubert enjoyed in setting prose texts offers new insight into Schubert’s compositional process as well as neglected repertoire.

Klaus Pietschmann’s treatment of “Italianatà bei Schubert” is again superb. He opens with a brief exploration of Schubert’s engagement with Italian musical culture: his compositional studies with Salieri, the four canzonettas for voice and piano to texts by Vittorelli and Metastasio (D 688), the two overtures “in Italian style” (D 590 and D 591). He then swiftly moves on to a discussion of Schubert’s Drei Gesänge op. 83 (D 902), which were dedicated to the Italian baritone, Luigi Lablache (1794–1858), when the set was published by Tobias Haslinger. Pietschmann transfers Haslinger’s dedication to Schubert when he argues very convincingly that Schubert composed “Il modo di prendere moglie” with Lablache in mind. He also puts forward (albeit very tentatively) the biographical proposition that Schubert’s Drei Gesänge may have been conceived as an attempt to curry favor for the position of Operatic Kapellmeister in the Spring of 1827. Pietschmann’s argument throws new light on the famous letter to Kupelweiser of March 31, 1824, in which the composer temporarily turned his back on his engagement with opera and thus helps contextualize his subsequent return to this genre with Der Graf von Gleichen (D 918), which he began composing on June 19, 1827.

A noteworthy and gratifying feature of this volume of essays is that it quotes liberally from the composer’s vocal music, as exemplified in Arne Stollberg’s discussion of Schubert’s masses. Stollberg’s essay is cogently conceived, opening and closing with an exploration of the sacred function of art as perceived by Schubert and his contemporaries, most notably Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena Romantics. Endorsing the religiosity of “Ellens Gesang” (D 837–9), Stollberg turns to the representation of the Deus Pater omnipotens in one of Schubert’s three settings of texts by Johann Ladislaus Pyrker: “Die Allmacht” (D 852). Stollberg’s interpretation of musical gesture and mediant relations in this Lied, but also in the the vocal quartet “Gott in der Natur” (D 757), the A flat major mass (D 678) and the “Great” C major symphony (D 944), raises interesting issues concerning poetic substance, and religious expression in secular art. This reading has at its core a common preoccupation with listening—listening for values, religious and aesthetic, as codified in Schubert’s art—and shows most convincingly that poetic criticism and technical analysis have much in common.

Stollberg’s essay dovetails with Anselm Gerhard’s discussion of the Gesellschaftsmusik of the late Schubert. Critical fascination with late style in Schubert has reached a high tide. Analyses abound of the late piano sonatas, particularly the A major and B flat major sonatas (D 959 and D 960), the unfinished symphony, the two late piano trios (D 898 and D 929), the String Quintet (D 956), the late Lieder and song cycles. Lieder was the genre that established Schubert’s reputation and it was in the Goethe settings that Schubert’s strength was fully revealed. Gerhard addresses this unique grafting of Goethe’s verse in his opening discussion of “Gesang der Geister über den Wassern” (D 714), the confidence, compositional stride, and musical force of which he perceives as epoch making. Rather than build on this recognition with a close reading of this setting, Gerhard elects to discuss neglected repertoire—the Seidl setting “Nachthelle” (D 892) for tenor, TTBB choir and piano—as a measure of the seriousness of
Schubert’s endeavor within this genre. Re-reading the oft-quoted letter to Leopold von Sonnleithner from the Spring of 1823, Gerhard raises the proposition that Schubert’s search for a new form may have referred to vocal literature rather than string quartets. His ensuing discussion of tripartite form and metrical manipulation in later Lieder creates a unifying arch to Dürr’s discussion of Schubert’s early Ossians Gesänge.

It would be wrong to deny Schubert his light touch, and Anselm Gerhard and Hermann Danuser couple “casual music” with works where his note is weightier and his carrying power far stronger. As Gerhard couples “Nachthelle” (D 892) with the more popular setting of Grillparzer’s Ständchen “Zögern, leise” for alto solo, male-voice choir and piano (D 920), Danuser links Schubert’s Marche Militaire (D 733), with his Allegro in A minor (D 947). The powerful note of certitude that Danuser hears in Schubert’s military marches is associated with the persistent drive in Schubert’s “Lebensstürme.” One of the aims of the volume—to root Schubert’s music in the local as well as the universal—is evident in Danuser’s reading of the marches as a musical mirror of Metternich’s repression, as a reflective artistic criticism of the military function of the march and its political connection with the police and informer apparatus of the Austrian monarchy. Danuser then places before us three late masterworks for piano four-hands—Schubert’s Fantasie in F minor (D 940), the Allegro in A minor (D 947), and the Rondo in A (D951)—whose compositional command endorses the belief that all reality comes to us as the reward of labor. From this trilogy he selects for close reading the Allegro in A, which is of a more refined epic design than the military marches, and shows how its polarities are strongly rooted in the cultural, political, and intellectual impulses of its own age. The musical multiplicity of Schubert’s engagement with the piano duet, his manipulation and subversion of classical-style conventions of return and closure lead Danuser to expand on the recognition of Schubert by Adorno and Hinrichsen as a true classicist in this genre, and proclaim his contribution as postmodern.

The essays by Gerhard and Danuser are framed, or rather enfolded, by two essays on Schubert’s Lieder and piano music, the first by Laurenz Lütteken; the second on Schubert’s Allegretto in C (D 346), by Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl. Lütteken conjures up a scene at the beginning of Act Two of Alfonso und Estrella to examine the “Lied vom Wolkenmädchen” sung by King Froila. The motif of the Harper, that runs like a red thread throughout this volume, makes his second appearance in this essay as Lütteken locates this orchestral Lied in the bardic songs of David, Ossian, and Goethe’s Harfner. Within this tradition, he explores a prominent reception trope—the trope of memory—to throw new light on the song’s dramaturgical meaning.

Lindmayr-Brandl reconsiders how Schubert’s music is often heard to embody a recollective impulse where repetition is seen as a powerful existential condition of the composer’s art. She questions our allegiance to cyclicity through her reading of Allegretto in C (D 346), a fragmentary, single-movement work of compelling appeal, the course of which signifies for her the composer’s development and leads her to proclaim this work as the progenitor of his “late” style.

The second group of essays explores two modes of musical discourse: the concertante and compositional closure. Schubert’s “heavenly length” has been the site of much recent activity in musical thought, prompting Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen to write his Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der Sonatenform in der Instrumentalmusik Franz Schuberts as early as 1994, and Xavier Hascher his Schubert, la forme sonate et son évolution in 1996. Analyses abound which chart modernity’s fascination with Schubert’s handling of sonata form and the way in which his music seems somehow to stage the dilemmas of Schubert’s subjectivity, of which Hugh
McDonald’s article, “Schubert’s Volcanic Temper” (Musical Times 119, 1629 [1979], 949–52), is a famous example.

In this present volume, Wolfram Steinbeck addresses the related issue of Schubert’s penchant for repetition and “inability” to provide closure. He argues that Schubert’s instrumental works embody a specific concept of closure—finality as self-reflection—a poetic gesture that expresses the composer’s manic fear of finality. In support of this belief, he chronicles the persistence of this topos in a veritable anthology of examples culled from Schubert’s late works including the “Grand Duo” (Sonata in C, D 812), the Quartet in G (D 877), and the Sonata in C minor (D 958), in which the Hauptthema continually returns (in part or in toto) only to lead us into more distant tonal regions. Common to these examples is the author’s belief that Schubert’s music somehow codifies real-life experiences and values, and offers a privileged testimony to the composer’s struggles.

Steinbeck’s essay is paired with a chapter by Giselher Schubert, who avers that the concertante in Schubert’s instrumental works remains clothed in the loose lineaments of musical suggestion. Opening with a reappraisal of Liszt’s “improvement” of the “Wanderer” Fantasy in C (D 760), he deliberates on virtuoso moments in Schubert’s music that resist critical efforts to be explained in concertante terms. The garland of works he discusses ranges from such early repertoire as the Sonata in A for violin and piano (D 574), the Concerto in D (D 345), the Polonaise in B flat (D 580), and the Rondo in A for violin and orchestra (D 438)—the latter of which he wrote for his brother Ferdinand—to such late violin repertoire as the Rondo in B minor (D 895) and the Fantasy in C (D 934), written for the violin virtuoso, Josef Slawjk. In the historical reception and performance history of Schubert’s late Fantasy in C, the private nature of Schubert’s virtuosic expression has forced writers—beginning with Schubert’s earliest critic—to pause in their commentaries on the music and bend their critical narratives in an attempt to comprehend the concertante twists and turns of Schubert’s musical plot. The interiority that Giselher Schubert speaks for implies a deep sense of the composer’s individual engagement in works that now wield the broad power of universality.

Moving into the broader issue of reception history and performative issues in Schubert’s works, Karol Berger purports to show how the player piano as a literary trope shares important features with mechanical images in contemporaneous Schubert settings: “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (D 118), the beginning of Die schöne Müllerin (D 795), and the end of Winterreise (D 911). Erich Wolfgang Partsch uncovers a neglected model of musical experience in his essay on Schubert’s songs with guitar accompaniments, addressing curious omissions from current musicological scholarship on Schubert and the salon including Schubert’s tercet with guitar accompaniment, Zur Namensfeier meines Vaters (D 80), and Baron von Schlechta’s transcription of “Die Nacht” with guitar accompaniment. The latter is interesting because Schlechta attributes the accompaniment to the composer, who, in the course of his lifetime, allegedly owned a couple of guitars, one of which has been handed down to us by his brother, Ferdinand. Surveying nineteenth-century guitar practice, Partsch moves beyond the drawing room to offer compelling evidence of several performances of male-voice quartets with guitar accompaniment in Viennese theaters as well as keen insight into the publication of 30 editions of Schubert’s songs with guitar accompaniment during the composer’s lifetime. As with many essays in this volume, Partsch’s chapter is abundantly adorned with musical examples which range from “Schäfers Klagelied” (D 121) to “Hänflings Liebeswerbung” (D 552) to “Nacht und Träume” (D 829).

Beatrix Borchard’s chapter illustrates how new musicology’s critical engagement with gender and the ideology of femininity broadens performance possibilities for Schubertian song

Manuela Jahrmärker’s discussion of the 1988 Vienna production of Schubert’s opera Fierrabras (D796) by Ruth Berghaus in some ways links back to Ivana Rentsch’s earlier contribution which draws on Christina Martin’s treatment of the evolution from Schubert’s Lied setting of Schiller’s Die Bürgschaft (D246) to the eponymous ill-fated opera project (D435), “Schuberts Bürgschaften. Epische und dramatische Tondichtung im Lied (D 246) und im Opernfragment (D 435),” in Michael Kube, ed., Dichtungen Friedrich Schillers im Werk Franz Schuberts. Schubert Jahrbuch 2003–2005 ([Duisburg: Deutsche Schubert-Gesellschaft, 2007], 69–73). Jahrmärker brings fresh nuance to our understanding of Fierrabras’s (D 796) commanding presence within recent operatic culture. All in all, this section addresses, albeit in a very novel way, the broader question of reception, of Schubert’s impact on his world and ours. Schubert emerges from these essays as a discerning musician, facing the usual problems of marketing and production, as concerned with the real as with the ideal.

Those who have followed the Schubert: Perspektiven series have developed an ardent respect both for the journal and for the supplementary studies. This multi-authored volume brings together a group of musicologists eager to view Schubert’s music through a cultural-historical lens and address existing lacunae in current scholarship. Apart from some editorial mishaps—the misspelling of Walther Dürr’s name at the beginning of the volume, for example, the misnumbering of Die schöne Müllerin as D 827 (173–74), and the absence of a strong editorial hand in the only English-language essay—this book makes a fine contribution to Schubert studies. The topics addressed—neglected Lieder and repertoire including Schubertian opera, guitar transcriptions, piano four hands, violin and piano duet repertoire, Italian songs, and male-voice settings; duets; fragmentary and virtuosic works; gender and interdisciplinary studies—are prime categories for contemporary cultural studies. The scholars engaging these themes show how music in general and Schubert in particular participate in defining them for historical interpretation. Their contributions represent a collective attempt to re-imagine Schubert’s legacy and describe what is striking about his music. The Festschrift is a fitting tribute to Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, a Schubert scholar who is known for his skill and elegance in combining historical and analytical approaches to music. That he is a leading proponent of this combination is evident in his highly-acclaimed monograph, Franz Schubert (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), and in his directorship of the journal, Schubert: Perspektiven, a leading source of original articles in Schubert studies. As is fitting for a scholar of such standing, Schubert: Interpretationen is a splendid volume of essays offering a depth of insight and richness of detail that merit several readings.

LORRAINE BYRNE BODLEY
Maynooth University

Lorraine Byrne Bodley is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) and Director of Research in the Department of Music at Maynooth University and was recently elected to the Royal Irish Academy. She is currently writing a biography on Schubert for publication with Yale University Press.