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Originally presented as a lecture, this document was created in 2012 and aims to (1) to place Schubert in historical context (2) to discuss music written in Vienna during Schubert’s time, and (3) to look briefly at Schubert’s sacred music. It is reprinted with permission for use by the Centrum Foundation. Centrum inserted hyperlinks to audio files below.

1. Schubert and early 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Vienna

Quite a number of years ago (48 to be precise) I had the opportunity of spending two years as a postgraduate student at the Academy of Music in Vienna. By then, almost 20 years after the end of the Second World War and ten years after the end of the post-war division of the city into four zones supervised by the Allies (American, British, French and Russian) and the re-establishment of Austrian sovereignty in May 1955, Vienna had begun to recapture something of its glorious musical past. The two composers who symbolised this, of course, were the two who had been born and bred in Vienna – Franz Schubert (31 January 1797 – 19 November 1828) and Johann Strauss II (1825 – 1899). Whereas Strauss travelled throughout Europe with his waltz melodies, delighting audiences and becoming internationally famous, Schubert never set foot outside Austria during his all-too-brief life. His music took longer to make an impact. But when the breakthrough was eventually made – and in this country it was thanks largely to the efforts of Sir George Grove and Sir Arthur
Sullivan in the second half of the 19th century – it didn’t take long for Schubert to be given his place in the pantheon of the truly great composers.

Franz Schubert was a prodigiously gifted composer of both sacred music (incl. several motets and six Mass settings) and secular music (instrumental, orchestral, operatic and vocal, incl. more than 600 song settings). He lived most of his short life in Vienna, apart from two short periods as music tutor of the daughters of the Count Esterházy in Zseliz (Hungary, part of the Hapsburg Empire at the time) and the occasional summer walking tour in Upper Austria and the Salzburg region. After receiving his early musical education from his father, brothers and the local church organist, he was awarded a choral scholarship at the Hofkapelle (the Vienna Boys’ Choir is the present-day equivalent!) where he was taught by the court organist Wenzel Ruzicka and the court music director Antonio Salieri (rather unsympathetically portrayed in the play and film Amadeus) and became a student at the attached Imperial Seminary. After leaving the seminary in 1813 he lived at the family home in the Viennese suburb of Josefstadt for about three years, studying successfully at the Imperial teachers’ training college and then working as one of his father’s assistants at the local school. During these years, in which he also continued to have regular composition lessons from Salieri, he wrote an enormous amount of music, including three piano sonatas, three string quartets, five symphonies, six operas, four Masses, several motets, a number of partsongs and about 300 solo songs. At the end of 1816, when he was nineteen, Schubert made the decisive move to leave home and continue his career in the more central part of Vienna, staying in different lodgings until his premature death from typhoid fever in 1828.

He continued to compose in all genres, made friends with artists and poets whose verses he set to music, and gradually had some of his works performed and published, but failed to make the same decisive breakthrough in Vienna during his lifetime achieved by his older contemporary, Ludwig van Beethoven, who also lived and worked in Vienna after moving there from Germany in the early 1790s.

Schubert’s most popular works, which include the two-movement “Unfinished” Symphony D759 (October-November 1822), given its first performance in Vienna nearly 40 years after his death, the “Great” C-major symphony D849 (1825-6), the “Trout” Quintet D667 (Autumn 1819), the three “late” String Quartets in A minor D804 (Feb-March 1824), D minor D810 (March 1824) and G major D887 (June 1826), the C-major String Quintet D956 (Sept-Oct
1828) and a number of fine songs, culminating in the song cycles Die Schöne Müllerin D795 (summer/autumn 1823) and Winterreise D911 (Feb-Oct 1827), both settings of poems by Wilhelm Müller, and the two groups of songs to texts by Heine and Rellstab (Schwanengesang D957, 1828), illustrate his ability to combine great melodic fluency with intense harmonic richness. **Here is an example of this potent combination:**

Ex. 1: **Lachen und Weinen D777** (1823) – a setting of Friedrich Rückert’s poem. The poet reflects on the inevitable fact that “when you’re in love, laughter and tears can come at any time, and for so many reasons”. The song is in a major key but there are some poignant minor-key moments. As Graham Johnson aptly says, “Schubert’s major-key music is often suffused with an undercurrent of sadness”

Most of you will know by now that, in about a month’s time and over a period of eight days, BBC Radio 3 intends to broadcast more or less every note written by Schubert. The first day will be devoted to one year – 1815 – and it was in March and April of this year that Schubert wrote his second Mass in G D167 and the Stabat Mater D175 respectively. To put these works in historical context and to look briefly now at what kind of city Vienna was at this time and what music was being written and performed there, we should perhaps start with the Congress of Vienna that was convened in the Austrian capital towards the end of 1814 to establish a balance of power in Europe at the end of the Napoleonic wars and to ensure that most of Europe returned to its former pre-Napoleonic state and hereditary rulers were able once again to take up the reins of power in their own countries. Napoleon, one of the greatest military geniuses in history, had conquered a significant part of Europe, including Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, and much of Switzerland, Germany and Italy. He had entered Vienna twice (in November 1805 and in May 1809, causing loss of life and property as a result of military bombardment on the second occasion). In August 1806, Francis had abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor Francis II but had kept the title Emperor Francis I of the Hapsburg Empire. After a series of major military setbacks, Napoleon has been finally defeated and banished to the island of Elba. Three of these setbacks were celebrated musically by Beethoven and Schubert. The Battle of Vittoria in June 1813 gave rise to Beethoven’s orchestral work, “Wellington’s Victory” op.91, the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 was celebrated in one of Schubert’s early songs, **Auf den Sieg der Deutschen** D81 (written in the autumn of 1813 for voice, two violins and cello and almost certainly intended
for purely domestic performance) and the march of the allied forces on Paris in March 1814 was the occasion for another Schubert song, *Die Befreier Europas in Paris* D104 (May 1814).

Various changes were made at the Congress to “re-draw” the political map of Europe. Austria, for instance, had lost some of its Hapsburg Empire but was now able to begin re-occupying most of its former territories with the exception of Belgium which was united with Holland. But the Congress also became famous for its lavish entertainments, including various balls and a magnificent sleighing excursion. Vienna may have been only a smallish city at the time (in 1824 there were about 300,000 living there, but only 50,000 of these, mainly members of the aristocracy and upper middle class, actually residing within the city walls; and these walls were not removed until later in the century when the famous “Ringstrasse”, an inner ring road, was built), but Francis and his brilliant foreign minister, Prince Metternich, ensured that, in spite of the criticism “le congrès ne march pas, il danse”, important political decisions were worked out which not even Napoleon’s famous escape from Elba and his return to France could alter. Napoleon was definitively defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, just a week after the Congress officially ended. Summing up Emperor Francis and Metternich’s achievements, Hans Urbanski writes that “they had communicated to their guests something of their amiable calm, something of their ironic detachment, and it can be safely assumed that they had brought an element of reconciliatory goodwill into the spirit of the debates. The world was not at all badly run for the brief moment when it revolved around Vienna.”1 And yet the conservative reaction to the revolutionary social and political activities of the past 30 years resulted inevitably in a considerable amount of restraint and coercion. After a period of peace it was not long before the Romantic ideals of nationalism and liberalism began slowly but surely to push back the political barriers. Even with the Hapsburg Empire there were stirrings of revolt as early as the 1820s, but thanks largely to Emperor Francis, who firmly believed in absolute monarchy and, particularly, Metternich who became his chancellor in 1821, there was the iron fist of oppression (censorship and a very active secret police in Vienna) beneath the seemingly carefree and untroubled surface.

We associate the Biedermeier style with this period in German and Austrian history. Biedermeier indicated an acceptance of the status quo and a reluctance to change it, and

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the conservative Biedermeier style was essentially a middle-class style that came into prominence in the years following the Congress of Vienna and lasted until the late 1830s or early 1840s. It was associated, often in a derogatory fashion, with middle-class comfort. In Biedermeier painting, subject matter was sentimentally treated. According to Robert Waissenberger, “light music, the cultivation of home décor and the emergence of a certain popular culture constituted the essence and typical identity of Biedermeier style.”

2. Music in Vienna during Schubert’s time

Vienna was a city with conservative musical tastes. The German-born Beethoven who came to live in the city in the 1790s and remained there until his death in 1827, could not fail to make his mark, but, with one or two exceptions, his works were infrequently performed. According to Sigrid Wiesmann, “by and large, the city’s musical taste remained centred on the works of Haydn and, to a lesser degree, of Mozart, until Vienna too was seized by the Rossini fever that swept through Europe after 1813, when [the operas] Tancredi and L’italiana in Algeri caused a sensation.” Other composers and instrumentalists who lived and worked in Vienna either briefly or for longer periods included Johann Nepomuk Hummel (singspiels, church and chamber music, piano concertos), Franz Xaver Süssmayr (singspiels), Sigismund von Neukomm (songs, German and Italian operas, church music), Antonio Salieri (music director at the Viennese court; German and Italian operas), Joseph Weigl (Salieri’s successor at the Viennese court; German and Italian operas), Václav Tomášek (mostly piano music, but also some vocal, instrumental and orchestral music), Jan Václav Voříšek (piano music, as well as some vocal and orchestral music), Ignaz Moscheles (piano music), Carl Czerny (a vast amount of piano music, but also some instrumental, orchestral, sacred and secular vocal music), and Anton Diabelli (music publisher and composer of works for piano, classical guitar as well as songs and church music). The two great theorists, Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and Simon Sechter, also worked in Vienna.

**Opera:** Italian opera has always been popular in Vienna and this was certainly the case in the first quarter of the 19th century. German operas or Singspiels (with spoken dialogue), for instance Beethoven’s Fidelio (a reworking in 1814 of the earlier Leonore composed in

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2 Waissenberger, op. cit., p. 7.
1805 and revised in 1806) were less successful, and attempts to give operas such as Weber’s *Der Freischütz* and *Euryanthe* and some of Schubert’s operas a higher profile in the 1820s largely foundered. After the great success of *Der Freischütz* at its first performance in Berlin in June 1821, the opera was performed at the Kärntnerthor theatre in Vienna at the beginning of November, but in a heavily cut version. Weber himself conducted the opera without cuts in Vienna in March 1822, but what little success it experienced was soon eclipsed by a series of Italian opera performances between the end of March and July 1822, with Rossini in attendance. Towards the end of September 1823, Weber paid another visit to Vienna to rehearse his new opera *Euryanthe*. It was premiered on 25 October but was withdrawn after two performances. Schubert fared no better with his own operatic efforts, including nearly 20 finished and unfinished singspiels and two large-scale operas – *Alfonso und Estrella* D732 and *Fierrabras* D796 - composed between 1811 and 1827. Only three of these – *Die Zwillingsbrüder* D647, a one-act singspiel (1819), *Die Zauberharfe* D644, a magic play with music (1820) and *Rosamunde* D797, a “romantic play with music” (1823) – were performed during Schubert’s lifetime, the first at the Kärntnerthor theatre in 1820 and the second and third at the Theater an der Wien in 1820 and 1823 respectively. Franz Liszt was responsible for the first performance of the much more ambitious three-act opera *Alfonso und Estrella* (1821/22) in Weimar in 1854. *Fierrabras*, another full-scale three-act opera was composed in 1823 in response to a commission by Josef Kupelwieser, manager of the court opera (Kärntnerthor theatre) but, following Kupelwieser’s resignation in October 1823, plans to stage it were abandoned and it was not performed until 1897 in Karlsruhe in an adapted version conducted by Felix Mottl.

**Orchestral music:** There was no sizeable concert hall in Vienna for the performance of orchestral music until the Musikverein was built in 1870. In the earlier part of the century large-scale musical events were either held in one of the aristocratic palaces in the city, which were really too small, or in one of the city theatres (the Theater an der Wien, for instance) or court ballrooms (“Redoutensäle”), which were often difficult to light and heat and did not have favourable acoustics; and so an event like Beethoven’s famous concert in December 1808, which included performances of his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the G-major Piano Concerto and the Choral Fantasy and went on for four hours, must have tried the patience of even the most passionate music-lover. Concerts invariably consisted of a
mixture of instrumental and vocal items. There were no purely “orchestral concerts” until much later in the century. Although the Society of Musical Friends (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde) was founded in 1818, it wasn’t until 1842 that a regular series of “Philharmonic Concerts” took place in Vienna. Initially, the Gesellschaft’s musical resources consisted of about 70 string and wind players and a chorus of 120-140 singers, made up of a mixture of professional musicians, students and competent amateurs. Schubert’s early symphonies were no doubt privately performed. We know that Symphony no. 5 in B flat D485 was written in the autumn of 1816 for a semi-professional orchestra which met at the home of one of his acquaintances, Otto Hatwig and was first performed there. His Symphony no. 6 in C D589 was completed in February 1818 and may also have been privately performed in the same year. It was the first of his symphonies to be performed publicly – at a Gesellschaft concert in Vienna on 14 December 1828, a few weeks after his death. The next symphony to be performed publicly was the “Great” C major (Leipzig, March 1839). The first public performances of the other symphonies were Symphony no. 5 (Vienna, October 1841), Symphony no. 4 (Leipzig, November 1849), Symphony no. 8 (“Unfinished”; Vienna, December 1865), Symphony no. 2 (London, October 1877), Symphony no. 1 (London, February 1881) and Symphony no. 3 (London, February 1881).

**Domestic music making and the salon:** Music practices in the Schubert household in Lichtental were a regular weekly event during the second part of 1814 and in 1815. It became necessary, later in 1815, to move to a neighbouring house where there was more room. Dances and arrangements of orchestral music would have been performed and, as Schubert had begun writing string quartets as early as 1811, it is likely that some of them, including D112 in B flat major (September 1814) and D173 in G minor (March/April 1815) would have been played. In the later 1810s and 1820s, the so-called Schubertiads, informal social gatherings of Schubert’s like-minded friends, poets, playwrights, painters and musicians, provided an opportunity for the first performances of his songs and intimate piano pieces for two- and four hands – the Impromptus, Moments musicaux, and Marches. There were some private but very few public performances of his chamber music (violin and piano duos, string trios, piano trios, string quartets, piano quintet, string quintet, octet) during his lifetime and the only works in this genre to be printed while he was alive were the String Quartet in A minor D804 (composed February/March 1824; printed Vienna 1824) and
the Piano Trio in E flat major D929 (composed November 1827; printed Leipzig 1828).
Schubert was particularly fond of improvising for dances, and it is not surprising that he composed many dances of the type that would be danced regularly on ballroom or tavern floors in Vienna at the time. A number of his sets of dances (waltzes, minuets, Deutsche [German dances], Ländler and Ecossaises) were published during his lifetime. But music was only a part, albeit an important one, of salon activity, the social season being from autumn until late spring. A typical middle- or upper-class salon, held in the house of a high-ranking member of the civil service, would usually be hosted by the lady of household, would start with tea in the afternoon and would continue with conversation, parlour games, reading and writing of literature and poetry, music-making and dancing. One of the best-known Viennese hostesses was Caroline Pichler, and Schubert occasionally performed at her social gatherings.

Ex.2: [Minuet from 3rd movement (Minuet and Trio) of String Quartet in G minor D173 (March/April 1815)]

**Light music:** The Strauss dynasty ruled the lighter side of Viennese musical life throughout the greater part of the 19th century, but due credit should be given to Joseph Lanner (1801-1843) who has just as much right to the title “father of the Viennese waltz” as the older Strauss. Lanner’s reputation as one of the most important dance composers during the first half of the nineteenth century grew from unpretentious beginnings. Initially he led a small group of musicians who played dance music in Viennese taverns and coffee-houses. Johann Strauss I joined this growing band in 1823 and, in 1825, when it was decided that the band was large enough to be divided into two, he became conductor of the other half. In 1827 the two conductor-composers came to an amicable agreement to go their separate ways, Lanner continuing to build his reputation by playing in the most prestigious dance cafés in Vienna and travelling throughout Austria, Strauss venturing further and taking his orchestra to Germany, France, Belgium, England and Scotland. Whereas one of Lanner’s children, Katharina, made a name for herself as a famous ballerina, three of Strauss’s children, Johann II, Josef and Edward, built on their father’s reputation and made the Viennese waltz into an art-form of almost symphonic proportions.
Sacred music: The opportunity of hearing sacred music (the Masses and smaller sacred works of Joseph and Michael Haydn, Mozart, Salieri, Eybler, Preindl, Seyfried and others) in the context of the Roman Catholic liturgy was and still is one of the many musical attractions of Vienna. The main locations were the church attached to the court (where Schubert would have sung regularly on Sunday mornings as a choirboy), St. Stephen’s Cathedral, St. Augustine’s and the churches of St. Anne, St. Peter, St. Michael and St. Charles (Karlskirche) and a new synagogue (completed in 1825) for which Beethoven, Schubert and several other composers were asked to write music. Schubert responded with a setting of Psalm 92. Most of Schubert’s sacred music was composed for churches in the Vienna suburbs, e.g. the parish church in Lichtental that was near the family home and the church in Alt-Lerchenfeld where his brother Ferdinand was choir director.

3. Schubert’s sacred music

Schubert’s first complete setting of the Mass was preceded by several smaller sacred works, some of an experimental nature. They include a fragmentary Gloria and Credo from a Mass in F D24E (1812), a Salve regina in F major D21 (June 1812), a Tantum ergo in C D739 (1814) and some settings of individual movements from the Mass, viz. four settings of the Kyrie (in D minor D31, 25 September 1812; B flat major D45, 1 March 1813; D minor D49, 15 April 1813; F major D66, 12 May 1813) and one of the Sanctus (in B flat D56, April 1813). While the B flat major Kyrie was probably no more than an exercise, the other three Kyrie movements were almost certainly intended as first movements of complete settings of the Mass. Although he got no further than the first movement, there is plenty of evidence to confirm that Schubert was not only attempting to set the liturgical texts imaginatively but was also searching for ways of giving coherence to the musical flow. His knowledge of the church music of composers like Michael and Joseph Haydn (the latter’s six Mass settings in particular), Mozart and his teacher Salieri proved invaluable, of course, but already he was beginning to show, as in his contemporary secular works, that he could provide his own solutions to problems of continuity.

These first attempts at church music were made during Schubert’s final months as a choirboy at the Hofkapelle and student at the attached Stadtkonvikt (Royal Seminary). From the autumn of 1813 for about three years Schubert lived at the family home, and for the
first ten months of this period (until August 1814) he studied successfully at the Imperial Teachers’ Training College to be an assistant elementary schoolteacher. For the remainder of the time he was employed as one of his father’s assistants at the school in the Säulengasse, Lichtental. He also continued to have composition lessons twice a week from Salieri and renewed his involvement with musical activities at the local parish church where his former teacher, Michael Holzer, directed the choir, his brother Ferdinand was unpaid organist and, according to the church archives, there was a larger than usual body of singers and instrumentalists available, particularly for festival performances. Given the strictures of the anti-clerical reforms made during Emperor Joseph’s reign in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the situation regarding the performance of sacred music was unusually healthy for a church in the suburbs. Although a general ban had been imposed on the participation of female vocalists in the church, Holzer availed himself of the special exemption granted to the female relatives of choir directors and school teachers to ensure that the parish church choir was kept in good shape.\footnote{See Otto Biba, “Besetzungsverhältnisse in der Wiener Kirchenmusik”, in Roswitha Karf, ed., \textit{Zur Aufführungspraxis der Werke Franz Schuberts} (Munich-Salzburg, 1981), p.183f. Biba also discusses church music practice in Vienna at the time, as well as the vocal and instrumental forces available, in “Kirchenmusikalische Praxis zu Schuberts \textit{Zeit}”, \textit{Franz Schubert – Jahre der Krise 1818-1823. Arnold Feil zum 60. Geburtstag} (Cassel, 1985), 113-20.} The works of Joseph and Michael Haydn (particularly the latter), Albrechtsberger, Dittersdorf, Vanhal and Winter were performed regularly.

In May 1814 Schubert received an invitation to compose a Mass for the centenary jubilee celebrations of Lichtental church. This was to be the first of six complete settings of the Mass he composed between 1814 and 1828. He worked painstakingly on this Mass in F D105 while revising the singspiel \textit{Des Teufels Lustschloss}, composing some songs as well as the String Quartet in B flat D112. He took the rehearsals and conducted the performance on 25 September. The exact number of performers is not known, but it is estimated that there would have been space for 62 – about 35 singers (including soloists – probably drawn from the choir, one of them being the 16- or 17-year old Therese Grob, to whom Schubert was greatly attracted at the time), fourteen string players, among them the celebrated violinist, Josef Mayseder, thirteen woodwind and brass players, timpani and organ (played by
Ferdinand). Many of the instrumentalists were personal friends of the composer. Salieri was present and was clearly very proud of his young pupil’s achievement. The impression the Mass made on some of the influential people present may have resulted in its being performed at the beginning of October in the court church of St. Augustine, but there is no indication that this happened or that either Schubert or his friends were involved in a “repeat performance”. An alternative *Dona nobis*, which Schubert wrote in April 1815, may have been composed specifically for another performance of the work in Lichtental on Trinity Sunday (25 May) in 1815.

We have Therese Grob to thank not only for some of the fine songs Schubert wrote at this time but also the soprano parts in the subsequent Masses in G major D167 (March 1815), B flat major D324 (begun November 1814) and C major (June/July 1816) as well as smaller sacred works like the *Offertorium* in C, *Totus in corde langueo* D136, *Salve regina* in F major D223 for soprano and strings (July 1815; wind parts added in January 1823) and the *Tantum ergo* in C major D460 (August 1816). It is highly probably that these smaller sacred works were interpolated as additional items in the so-called Proper parts of the Mass, namely Gradual (between *Gloria* and *Credo*), Offertory (between *Credo* and *Sanctus*) and Communion (after the *Agnus Dei*). Although there is no direct evidence, two of the smaller sacred works possibly sung as part of the Proper during the performance of the F-major Mass in September 1814 were the *Salve regina* in B-flat major D106 (as an Offertory item) and the *Tantum ergo* in C D739 (as a Communion item).

The Mass in G major D167 is a *Missa brevis* and is a much more compact work than the ceremonial F-major Mass. It was almost certainly written for normal Sunday use at Lichtental, took Schubert only six days to compose (March 2-7, 1815), and was scored originally for strings and organ. Schubert later added optional parts for trumpets and timpani, and his brother Ferdinand was responsible for the further addition of oboe and bassoon parts in the 1840s. One of the most striking features of this work is the conciseness of both the movements with the most words, viz. the *Gloria* and the *Credo*. While certain phrases in the text are omitted (“Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris” in the *Gloria*; “Credo in

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unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam” and “Et expect resurrectionem” in the Credo), these do not amount to more than a small percentage of the whole, and so we have to focus more on the crisp treatment of the words and the through-composed nature of the musical settings. There is some contrast between solo voices and choir in the middle section (“Domine Deus”) of the Gloria and a more impassioned rendition of the words “Crucifixus etiam pro nobis” and “Et resurrexit” (with more active string parts) in the Credo, but the tempo remains the same from beginning to end in both movements. Although there is a uniform tempo, the structure is quasi-tripartite in both movements. In the Credo, for instance, the material from the beginning of the movement (“Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem”) returns at the words “Credo in Spiritum sanctum Dominum”. The texture of both Gloria and Credo is almost entirely homophonic, but in the “Osanna” section of the Sanctus and in the Benedictus Schubert shows that he can handle fugal and, indeed, canonic textures with ease – and he does so in a manner that is far from learned. It is not easy to suggest Proper items that would have been used in conjunction with this more modestly scored Mass, as the contemporary smaller sacred compositions, namely the Stabat mater in G minor D175 (4-6 April 1815), the Offertory Tres sunt in A minor D181 (10-11 April 1815) and the Gradual Benedictus es in C D184, 15-17 April 1815) use larger orchestral forces. Indeed the latter two works may have been intended for the possible performance of the F-major Mass the following month, while the Stabat mater would probably have been excluded on liturgical grounds as it cannot be fitted easily into any normal pattern of worship. Of the twenty verses of the sequence, Schubert sets only the first four (bars 5-62) which he repeats (bars 74-127) after a short orchestral interlude. In the coda there is another repeat of the fourth verse with an additional repeat of the final line (bars 140-43). The avoidance of a perfect cadence in G minor as the chorus enters with the opening words of the fourth verse in bar 116 is particularly striking. In fact this perfect cadence is delayed until bar 143 as the result of a sequence of diminished seventh harmonies and interrupted cadences. By repeating the earlier orchestral material (bars 64-73) at this juncture, Schubert

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6 The Stabat mater (“At the cross her station keeping”) was originally a form of medieval Latin chant and was first used liturgically as a sequence in the late 15th century. It was removed from the liturgy in the middle of the 16th century as a result of reforms imposed by the Council of Trent (1545-63), but was revived in 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII. The text is attributed to Jacopone da Todi (d.1306), but some believe that it was written by St. Bonaventura (d.1274). As the appropriate liturgical position for the Stabat mater sequence, as revived by Pope Benedict XIII, is before the Gospel on the two feasts of the “Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin” (the Friday in the fifth week of Lent and 15 September).
continues the harmonic uncertainty in the orchestral postlude (bars 144-56) until the final seven bars. His use of expressive “sighing” figures, an arresting feature of the later Deutsches Stabat Mater (D383) as well, is reminiscent of Gluck, a composer he held in high esteem.

With the third Mass – in B flat major D324 – we return to something of the grandeur of the first Mass, albeit on a smaller scale. It was composed in the final months of 1815, probably for performance at Lichtental, and although most of the corrections in the autograph were made during the period of composition, a few were inserted later, possibly in conjunction with the first performance of the work. We also know, from a letter Schubert received from his brother Ferdinand – on a tour of inspection in his capacity as school inspector – that the Mass was performed several years later “with a great deal of enthusiasm and really well” in Hainburg, Lower Austria during the summer of 1824.

In the Mass in C major D452, composed in the months of June and July 1816 and possibly given its first performance in the late summer of early autumn at Lichtental, there is a more sensitive handling of the text and a new harmonic adventurousness (in the middle section of the Gloria and final section of the Credo, for instance) that can also be found in another fine sacred work in C major written shortly afterwards - a celebratory setting of the Magnificat D486, composed in September 1816 no doubt for performance at Vespers in Lichtental. Schubert later revised the instrumentation of the C-major Mass, adding parts for oboes (or clarinets), trumpets and timpani, for a performance in the church of St. Ulrich (or Maria Trost) in Vienna on 8 September 1825, in which his brother Ferdinand possibly participated either as organist or choir director. About two months before his death and possibly with another performance in mind, Schubert composed an alternative choral setting of the Benedictus to replace the original solo soprano setting.  

After the Mass in C, three years elapsed before Schubert attempted the composition of another Mass – the Mass in A-flat major D678, the first of two extremely fine works, both of

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7 The Mass in C major (without alternative Benedictus) was first published by Diabelli as op.48 in September 1825 and dedicated to Michael Holzer, Schubert’s former teacher. As three of Schubert’s smaller sacred works – the Tantum ergo in C D739, Totus in corde in C D136 and the Salve regina in F D223 were published at the same time as opp.45, 46 and 47 – there is a strong possibility that two and possibly three of these pieces were also included in the performance of the Mass on 8 September. There are modern editions of both the C major Mass, with alternative Benedictus and the B-flat major Mass in the Neue Schubert Ausgabe I/2, ed. and with foreword by Rossana Dalmonte and Pier P. Scattolini (Cassel: Bärenreiter, 1982).
them important additions to the choral repertory. The A-flat Mass was begun in November 1819 but was not completed in its original version until 1822 and in a revised version until late 1825. Schubert probably spent some of the summer and autumn months of 1822 putting the finishing touches to the Mass and he seems to have been well pleased with his efforts. “My Mass in finished, and is to be performed before long”, he wrote to his friend Josef von Spaun. “I still have my original idea of dedicating it to the Emperor or Empress, as I think it is a success.” Schubert had plans for a performance early in 1823 but neither this performance nor one planned by Johann Rieder, an acquaintance of his brother Ferdinand and a schoolmaster and choirmaster in the Währing district of Vienna, in 1824 appears to have materialised. Schubert may have been offered the vacant post of court organist in 1825 but he evidently decided to set his sights higher on another unfilled post, that of assistant court music director. This spurred him on to revise the A-flat major Mass and he no doubt hoped that this revision, completed early in 1826 and involving several changes ranging from small details to complete recomposition (the Gloria fugue, for instance), together with the publication and performance of some of his sacred music in September 1825, would strengthen his application. When he finally made his formal application for the post on 7 April, 1826, he specifically mentioned “five Masses, with accompaniments for larger and smaller orchestras, which have already been performed in various Viennese churches” – and this confirms a performance, albeit unrecorded, of the Mass in A flat at some point in the years 1825-26. But Schubert was unsuccessful in his application and event his attempt to interest the court music director Eybler came to nothing. Eybler conceded that it was good but, unfortunately, not written in the style that the Emperor liked. In truth, in its large dimensions and increased orchestral demands, it exceeded the normal requirements of a church service at the time.  

Schubert’s sixth complete setting of the Mass – in E flat major D950 – was composed in the final year of his life. Although “June 1828” is the first date to appear on the score of this Mass, it is known that Schubert began sketching it earlier. What is less certain is the precise

8 From Schubert’s letter to Spaun, Vienna, 7 December 1822; see Otto Erich Deutsch, The Schubert Reader, p.248.
9 See Deutsch, op. cit., pp. 520-21.
10 The Mass in A flat, one of several works offered to the publisher Schott in February 1828, was not published in Schubert’s lifetime. It did not appear in print until 1875 when it was published by Schreiber in Vienna. The score of the revised version was not published until 1887 (as part of the old Schubert Gesamtausgabe).
reason for his composing the work, apart from the fact that it was his response to a commission, or at least a request from a former acquaintance, Michael Leitemayer, founder of a new church music society, Verein zur Pflege der Kirchenmusik and choirmaster of the Trinity Church in the Alsergrund (the church where Beethoven’s funeral service was held at the end of March 1827). It was in this church that the Mass received its first performance on 4 October 1829, nearly a year after Schubert’s death. Although Leitemayer appears to have been responsible for the preliminary rehearsals, it was Ferdinand Schubert who conducted both this performance and the second performance six weeks later in the church of Maria Trost where he was choirmaster. There is no mention of any Proper items in newspaper reports of both performances,11 but the motets Intende voci D963 and Tantum ergo in E-flat major D962, both completed in October 1828, can be regarded as companion pieces to this Mass. Both motets have the same plagal (minor subdominant) cadences as at the end of the “Dona nobis pacem” in the Mass in E flat. They are written for similar resources – SATB chorus and orchestra – including a tenor soloist in Intende voci and a quartet of soloists in Tantum ergo, but there is no organ part, as the organ in Holy Trinity Church was tuned to the older mean-tone temperament. The eucharistic Tantum ergo hymn is particularly associated with the Feast of Corpus Christi, a moveable feast that occurs between the end of May and the end of June. The Tantum ergo in E flat is Schubert’s sixth and final setting of the hymn. In its concentrated emotion and inspiration and in its harmonic richness it is unsurpassed.

**Ex 3:**  Part of Tantum ergo in E flat D962 performed by Lucia Popp (soprano), Brigitte Fassbaender (alto), Adolf Dallapozza (tenor), Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone) with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus cond. Wolfgang Sawallisch

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11 These reports in the Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung 127 (22 October 1829), pp.519-20, and Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung 51 (Leipzig, 23 December 1829, cols. 843ff. can be found in Waidelich, ed., Franz Schubert Dokumente, pp. 553-60 and 566. A third performance of the Mass, given by students at the Conservatory, was reported in the Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung 11, pp. 86-7; see Waidelich, ed., loc.cit., pp. 571-2.