FRANZ SCHUBERT’S DRAFT FOR HIS FANTASIA IN F MINOR FOR PIANO DUET, OP. 103

Abstract

Franz Schubert’s Fantasia in F minor for Piano Duet, Op. 103 (D. 940), is one of the most beloved compositions in the Romantic piano literature. Examination of Schubert’s autograph sketchbook, where the composer wrote in his own handwriting the original version of the score, reveals the existence of a march in D major that does not appear in the published score and is not heard in performance. This paper discusses the significance of the march in light of a musical fragment or unfinished piece of music. If in the public version of the composition the march is not heard, what impact does this have on our perception of the work, and what status should be given to the march? A question like this arises only when one considers a piece of music that has been discarded as possessing a higher level of importance than even the composer may have given it. The unused march in D major provides the scholar and lover of Schubert’s music with such an opportunity.

Keywords: Franz Schubert, Piano, Romantic Music

F. SCHUBERT’IN KENDI EL YAZMASI NOTLARINDA BULUNAN PIYANO IÇIN YAZDIĞI FA MINÖR DUETI, OP. 103 ÖZET


Anahtar Kelimeler: Franz Schubert, Piyano, Romantik Dönem Müziği

1 Yrd. Doç. Dr., Ipek University, Musicology, abirson@ipek.edu.tr
**INTRODUCTION**

Studies of composers’ sketchbooks are prone to questions concerning their value for expanding the body of knowledge about the musical works they represent. This is because, quite often, sketch studies only provide us with more questions than they do answers; they cannot offer us—any more than the final versions can—ultimate truths on how music must go as dictated by the masters from whose pens they were drafted. What they can do, however, is provide glimpses into moments in the evolution of a composition. In the various stages of this process, scholars can trace where certain choices were made by the composer, what these choices were, and how they effected the final outcome of the completed work (if, indeed, the work was completed). The interpretation of autograph sketches as such can often lead to the enhancement of our very understanding of a musical work. In this respect, one of the most rewarding sketches of all is Franz Schubert’s preliminary draft for the famous Fantasy in F minor for piano duet, Op. 103.

The Fantasy, begun in January of 1828, is widely regarded as one of Schubert’s finest achievements for four-handed piano. It was composed during one of Schubert’s many extended stays at the home of his longtime friend, Franz von Schober. The somber and often tumultuous mood projected in this fantasy was perhaps foretold by the rather serious tone Schubert and his circle of friends were in from the very beginning of the year. The previous few years had been rough on the so-called “Schubertians,” whose friendship grew over the years around love for Schubert’s music—as well as their own artistic interests. The year 1828 would be no easier, with many of the group’s members about to travel down different walks of life; Moritz von Schwind (painter of the famous “Schubert-Abend bei Josef von Spaun”) was to move to from Vienna to pursue his career as an artist, and Josef von Spaun (one of the founding members of the group) was to be married. The year, of course, would ultimately see Schubert’s death in November after a long bout with syphilis. Given the turbulent social setting for this first work of 1828, it is no wonder that Schubert had such a productive year for writing large, contemplative works in all mediums, the first of which was the Fantasy in F minor for piano four hands. The final version of the Fantasy must have been completed from this preliminary draft in February 1828, for Schubert offered the work to the music publishers B. Schott’s Sons of Mainz, on February 21, 1828, but the fair copy he made was not ready until April (Brown 1978, 86-7). The work was dedicated to Karoline, Countess Esterházy, and published posthumously by Anton Diabelli in March, 1829 (Reed 1987, 158-9).

The draft originally consisted of 13 folios, a collection which has since been divided into three sections. The first separation of the leaves was committed by Schubert himself when he was to move out of Schober’s home in August of 1828. He took the first ten folios of the sketchbook with him to his brother’s home, the pages containing the music of the fantasy up to the end of the third (Allegro vivace) section. The final two folios, 12 and 13, came to light only in the nineteen-fifties when a descendant of Schober’s, then living in Vermont, brought them forth. They reveal the initial etchings of the final section, from the climactic fugal passage onwards. Examination of these pages reveals certain interesting points: that Schubert clearly had trouble composing out this fugal section, and also that the beautifully dissonant plagal cadence, which occurs from mm. 567-571, was not an original feature of the sketch. The intervening folio that would connect the first large chunk of music to this ending section, and presumably containing the start of the recapitulation, is still missing.
The Draft of the Fantasia In F Minor, Op. 103

The chief interest in the sketchbook lies in the remains of a march in D major, labeled in the autograph as *Tempo di Marcia*, originally to be a part of the scherzo. This episode is unknown, for Schubert ultimately rejected it in favor of the one in the final version marked *con delicatezza* (m. 273) (Brown 1961, 294). This omission is significant because not only does it leave out an entire section of music, but it dramatically alters the structure of the Fantasy itself. The final version of the Fantasy begins this third division, *Allegro vivace*, with an A section in F-sharp minor (m. 164). This is followed by the aforementioned *con delicatezza*, in D major, serving as the B section. Rounding off the ternary form of this scherzo is the return of the A section in F-sharp minor, which ultimately leads back to the opening theme in F minor for the recapitulation. In the sketch, the march in D major is repeated after the A section in F-sharp minor is heard in for the second time, what in the final version led directly to the return of the opening theme.

The march then, not the F-sharp minor A section, presumably originally led back to the return of the recapitulation; an assumption is required here, provided that we do not have the intervening folio which includes this connection. If the march were to lead back to the recapitulation in F minor, the symmetrical key structure of the Fantasy as a whole—the four linked “movements” having the key scheme F min/F# min/F# min/F min—would have been destroyed. This seems unlikely, however, considering the existence of only one other folio on which to include all this music. Perhaps the connection was never even made and this is the reason for the folio’s disappearance. He could also have included the march in the place of the *con delicatezza* and proceeded to the recapitulation in the same manner as he did in the final version. If nothing else is certain, the presence of the march in the sketchbook for Schubert’s Fantasy in F minor is extremely compelling, with ramifications that greatly affect our understanding of the work, even extending to the aesthetics of the Romantic period and to the very concept of a fantasy.

What occurs in the sketchbook up until the *Tempo di Marcia* provides evidence on Schubert’s compositional process. The music is written with fluidity, almost entirely devoid of revision, consisting primarily of the melodic line of the first piano. In fact, the only page with a major correction is 6-verso, on which the second phrase of the *Allegro vivace*’s A section begins. This was not at all unusual for a draft of Schubert’s. In fact, the relative ease with which Schubert sketched his compositions was noted in sketch studies as early as the late nineteenth century, when W.S. Rockstro, a contributor to Sir George Grove’s first *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1883) wrote:

“Schubert’s method of working differed entirely both from Mozart’s and Beethoven’s. He neither prepared a perfect mental copy, like the former; nor worked out his ideas, as did the latter, from a primordial germ; but wrote almost always on the spur of the moment, committing to paper, as fast as his pen could trace them, the ideas which presented themselves to his mind at the instant of composition—proceeding, in fact, as ordinary men do when they sit down to write a letter. . . By far the greater number of his manuscripts remains untouched, exactly in the condition in which they first saw the light.” (Rockstro 1883, 531)

Rather than raise the issue of a comparison between the sketchbooks of Mozart and Beethoven with Schubert’s, which do seem to represent the happy medium between the almost perfect precision with which Mozart drafted and the chaotic illegibility of the constantly cross-
Franz Schubert’s Draft For His Fantasia In F Minor For Piano Duet, Op. 103

referring Beethoven, this essay is concerned more pointedly with the manner in which Schubert himself composed. If Schubert’s first inclination was correct for him often enough during his career that the majority of his manuscripts do not feature excessive revisions, what reasons could there have been for the rejection of the D major march? Furthermore, the march is composed all the way through, presumably to the recapitulation, indicating that there was nothing inherently wrong with it and that it could have at one time served as a part of the completed Fantasy.

One reason for the revision may have been that the theme created for the march features a dotted rhythm on repeated notes, a motive used predominantly throughout the rest of the Fantasy. Its replacement, con delicatezza, represents the complete opposite effect through the use of light eighth-note arpeggios and neighbor-note runs. This makes the music of the con delicatezza more consistent with the F-sharp minor A section that began the Allegro vivace. Perhaps Schubert thought that using a march with dotted rhythms would have been too much for the Fantasy as a whole, considering the nature of the opening and Largo (second section) themes. Furthermore, the march is in common time, while the con delicatezza is in ¾ time, as is the material from the rest of the Allegro vivace. This is further indication that Schubert was looking for consistency in his musical material for this third movement. Though he likely did not consider the march a mistake while he was composing it, for he did complete it without finding it dissatisfying, it is significant that the section for which Schubert substituted his Tempo di Marcia contrasts both in style and meter to the march that it replaced.

Adding to its interest, the removal of the march from the completed version of the work alters our perception of it as sketch and gives it the qualities of a fragment. The march became fragmented when Schubert disconnected the first ten folios of the sketchbook from the rest, separating it from its hypothetical joint with the recapitulation. Though these folios contain the music from the beginning of the Fantasy, up to and including the march, and could have been considered “fragmented” in the sense that they are all dislocated from the Fantasy’s conclusion, the march is the only element that is not present in the published score, and will be considered a fragment on its own. This is significant because the previously unknown Tempo di Marcia is the final musical idea of the portion of sketchbook that Schubert felt important enough to take with him to his brother’s home. Perhaps Schubert kept these specific pages and neglected to take the rest in order to salvage this march for potential use in another work. Whatever the reason, his preservation of the pages containing the march provides more than just a sketchbook; it offers one of the most interesting of the composer’s fragments available for study.

The historical context behind the concept of fragment at the time of this sketchbook’s creation is certainly provocative. The term fragment, when thinking along eighteenth-century lines, meant an unfinished work that should have been completed but, by inherent flaw or some other practical reason, was left alone. The fragment in the nineteenth century, however, had achieved an artistic significance all its own. Works were being left unfinished intentionally, the aesthetic being of music that gave the impression of either beginning in the middle or having no conclusion. The phenomenon came into being with the early Romantic movement in Germany—the circle of young artists, philosophers, scientists, and poets in Jena during the last years of the eighteenth century—and was for a brief time their principal form of expression (Rosen 1995, 48). Schubert himself was a composer of intentional fragments, for example the three separate versions of his setting of Goethe’s poem Nähe des Geliebten, D. 162, in two of which the singer’s final note is not the tonic note but rather the third or the fifth scale degree,
evading the conclusive perfect authentic cadence and leaving the song open-ended (Kramer 1997, 137).

Schubert’s march, though clearly the more traditional, unintentional kind of fragment, could be thought of with the aforementioned Romantic conditions in mind. Having once been part of a completed work and ultimately rejected, the Tempo di Marcia exists as a fragment with a unique experience. Whereas “fragment” works, like Nähe des Geliebten, give the impression either of beginning in the middle or having no end, the Tempo di Marcia in D major actually meets both of these conditions. Though its beginning is not musically attached to the rest of the Fantasy and it therefore could potentially exist on its own as a self-contained march, it functions as a segment of the third movement of the Fantasy. It is therefore music that essentially begins in the middle, if the work as a whole is kept in mind. When the march reappears on the recto side of the tenth leaf from the sketchbook, it does so without its connection to the recapitulation of the opening material, giving it obvious properties of a fragment that has no end. This characteristic offers very interesting insight into the significance of the D major march, for the more conventional Romantic fragment only gives the impression of exceeding its formal boundaries; indeed, that is part of its very charm. In the case of the Tempo di Marcia, we can actually obtain this perspective of knowing the remainder of the larger mass from whence it came; we have essentially witnessed the birth of a Romantic fragment.

The existence of the Tempo di Marcia also has consequences in terms of the work’s form. While it does not superficially alter the overall structure of the Fantasy to a great extent, Schubert’s inclusion of it in two portions of the third movement marks a deviation from the plan of the final version, in which the con delicatezza is heard only once. More to the point, however, his omission of the march from the final version of the Fantasy is not only significant in that it leaves out an entire section of music: it turns the overall perception of the work on its head. If the final copy was not the originally-intended version, there actually exist two potential versions. Certainly, Schubert did not intend for an interpretation of this kind, yet the possibility of an alternate bears a certain weight on the conceptualization of the fantasy as a form. The fantasy has existed throughout history as a way for the composer to transcend the rigidity inherent within strict forms. That a revision of this type—a direct substitution of one large chunk of music for another—could occur within the construction of a fantasy is indicative of the characteristics of the form itself.

As was the case for the concept of the fragment, the nineteenth-century philosophy concerning a fantasy had special connotations for the Romantic period. A traditional fantasy is defined as a work whose form is spurred on by the imagination of the composer (Randel 1999, 222). For the Romantics, however, the fantasy went beyond the idea of a piece arising essentially from improvised or improvisatory material. To them, the fantasy provided the means for an expansion of forms, both thematically and emotionally (Drabkin 2001, 555-56). This need arose from the strictures of Classical sonata form, which by this time had become rigid in its conventions. The Romantic composer, out of necessity for innovation, placed a fresh perspective on the sonata design through the use of the fantasy. As a result the 19th-century fantasy grew in size and scope to become as musically substantial as large-scale, multi-movement works. The four fantasies of Schubert (the Wandererfantasie and ‘Graz’ Fantasy for piano solo, the Fantasy in F minor for piano duet and the Fantasy in C for violin and piano) were the first to integrate fully the three- or four-movement form of a sonata into a single movement (Drabkin, 555-56).
While the concept of combining a multi-movement work and traditional sonata form within his fantasies was in itself innovative, the appearance of the D major march presents an even more intriguing possibility for the conception of Romantic fantasy and the expansion of forms. The existence of two versions of the Fantasy is interesting because, at the moment where the con delicatezza/Tempo di Marcia begins, the performer could potentially have a choice in terms of which one to play. Though the sketch is comprised mostly of the melody for the first piano, the remainder of the music is present in the fair copy of April, as well as the published score. Therefore, as it appears in the original sketch, the Fantasy is whole enough to warrant possible completion. In order to complete the first version, one would require only a harmonic realization and a connection to the start of the recapitulation for a fully-completed alternative. The fantasy can thus be understood as having two third movements, which can be taken at equal value since the sketch of the march can be reconstructed as a part of the original completed version of the fantasy. This provides the listener with an option of paths to take. This would have to be considered the ultimate experience for the Romantic, the creation of a work of music that perpetually exists in two planes, the very offer of a choice being the artistic achievement. This creates a fork in the road, so to speak, at this juncture, offering a dramatically different interpretation of the fantasy through manipulation of its form.

Conclusion

The draft of Schubert’s Fantasy in F minor, Op. 103, is certainly one of the premier examples of what the study of a composer’s sketchbook has to offer. As a sketch, it has piqued our curiosity for its inconsistencies with the final version; indeed that is when a sketch is at its most interesting, when deviations from the final script open doors to insights about the piece that otherwise would never have been possible. In learning of the existence of the Tempo di Marcia, an interesting fragment idea was uncovered, tying the Fantasy into the greater concept of what the Romantics thought of when they heard a “fragment.” Did a fragment have a different meaning to Schubert while he was composing than it did to Mozart? If a Romantic fragment could have existed as a work of art on its own, could that enhancement of value have motivated Schubert to preserve the sketch pages containing it more than it would have to Mozart? Considering the possible reinstatement of the fragmented Tempo di Marcia likewise offered interesting insight into the work, this time pertaining to its form. How does the form change, if at all, with respect to Schubert’s revision? What does it mean to have two potentially equivalent versions of the same work? Does this meaning change at all given the Romantic conditions as applied to formal musical construction? Issues such as these only become useful when one is willing to ponder sketches for what they could possibly signify, rather than ignore them completely due to frustrating lack of coherent musical insight. Schubert’s sketch for his Fantasy in F minor, Op. 103, came alive again, for the moment, and issues with which he himself may have dealt, or never thought of, were revisited, rethought, and revised with modern sensibility. After undertaking this project, the Fantasy will never sound the same to me again; it will live forever in its moments of creation.
REFERENCES


