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Schubertiade, Jiayan Sun, piano

Music: Faculty Performances

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3-5-2020

## Recital 5: The Schwanengesang Poets: Rellstab, Heine, and Seidl: Program

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# *Schubertiade V*

*The Schwanengesang Poets:  
Rellstab, Heine, and Seidl*

William Hite, tenor  
Jiayan Sun, piano

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Thursday, March 5, 2020

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

# PROGRAM

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## Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

*Texts by Ludwig Rellstab (1799–1860)*

Liebesbotshaft, *from* “*Schwanengesang*,” D. 957, no. 1  
Herbst, D. 945  
Frühlingssehnsucht, *from* “*Schwanengesang*,” D. 957, no. 3  
Ständchen, *from* “*Schwanengesang*,” D. 957, no. 4  
Lebensmut, D. 937

*short pause*

*Texts by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), from “Schwanengesang,” D. 957, nos. 8–13*

Der Atlas  
Ihr Bild  
Das Fischermädchen  
Die Stadt  
Am Meer  
Der Doppelgänger

*short pause*

*Texts by Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804–1875)*

Bei dir allein, D. 866  
Das Zügelglöcklein, D. 871  
Am Fenster, D. 878  
Der Wander an den Mond, D. 870  
Die Taubenpost, *from* “*Schwanengesang*,” D. 957, no. 14

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Josten Performing Arts Library has created a LibGuide to facilitate access to literature and resources on Schubert’s life and work.

<http://libguides.smith.edu/schubertiade>

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*Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices before the performance.*

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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A season of Schubert, even if overseen by a pianist, cannot be complete without a *soirée* of song. Indeed, at Schubert's own *Schubertiades*—the word refers to a small party linked to a serious house concert well supplied with singing—the composer himself presided from the keyboard. In fact, the notion of the performance of *Lieder* by a “vocalist” and an “accompanist” has always ruffled my feathers: the persons harmoniously articulating the melodies and melodiously articulating the harmonies are persons, on this stage, of equal and identical importance.

This evening we shall not hear Schubert's “Swansong,” *Schwanengesang*, in its original guise, although the artists' selection, like that collection, contains works that reflect the contrasting elements of the composer's life. Two of *Schwanengesang's* fourteen songs were sung at the composer's funeral in 1828: “Der Doppelgänger” (“The Ghostly Double”) and “Die Taubenpost” (“Pigeon Mail”)—the first, a meditation on death; the second, an airy paean to life.

Unlike *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, *Schwanengesang* is not a song “cycle”: that is to say, it is not a group of musical settings of poems by a single writer, thematically (poetically) related, and like in tone and form. It is rather a grouping together of settings of seven poems by Ludwig Rellstab and six poems by Heinrich Heine which Schubert happens to have set down in the same manuscript, which he dated August 1828. It was the publisher, Tobias Haslinger, to whom Schubert's brother Ferdinand gave the manuscript, who added at the end Schubert's setting of Johann Gabriel Seidl's poem “Die Taubenpost,” Schubert's very last song; who then brought out the collection in May 1829, a few months after the composer's death; and who affixed to it his own cleverly invented title of *Schwanengesang*.

Now, a surprising quantity of ink has been spilled over the questions of whether Schubert *intended* to complete one or perhaps two *separate* song cycles on poems by Rellstab and Heine, and of why Tobias Haslinger added the final song, by the lesser known poet, at the last possible minute. Schubert's intentions in this regard are impossible to know, but speculation nonetheless thrives, because these works, as Haslinger himself put it in the advertisement for his collection, represent “the last blossoms of Schubert's noble spirit [...] proclaiming in the most verifiable manner the professionalism of his richly endowed mastery.” Speculation thrives because of our general fascination with the final act of the life of a genius, especially one who left the world too soon, at the apex of his artistry.

What remains most controversial, beyond the presence in the collection of “Die Taubenpost,” the final song of *Schwanengesang* and, appropriately, the final

song on this evening's *Schwanengesang*-plus, is its *nature*, its *quality*. It has been heard as inappropriately lighthearted, especially following upon the darkly brooding poems by Heine and upon the heels (as it does in the original collection) of the most ghostly song of them all, "Der Döppelgänger." It has been seen as a crass commercial maneuver on the part of a publisher who, by adding a pop tune, would alert potential buyers of the essentially entertaining character of the whole. It has been criticized as antithetical to the essential ethos of Schubert's final days and final musical style. To which I would say (as one who learned the song before knowing anything about Schubert, *Lieder*, or 1828)—*Ursinn!* Nonsense! The German word is here because in his early years Schubert belonged to a secret club of young painters and poets known as the *Unsinns-gesellschaft*, or Nonsense Society. (Indeed, the word *Unsinniade*, pertaining to a meeting of the club, may have led, according to the Schubert scholar Rita Steblin, to the word *Schubertiade* itself.) "Der Taubenpost" is certainly charming and apparently unassuming, but, like the final B-flat Sonata, which Jiayan Sun finds tinged with anxiety, the final song, too, is not care free.

You have the texts and translations of the poems; you will enjoy finding the main poetic themes and hearing the musical equivalents that Schubert discovered for them, for it must be remembered that a *Lied* (we use the German word because we refer to a musical setting of a poem of *literary* import, and because, if it's German, it's *got* to be serious)—a *Lied* is nothing more or less than a composer's individual *reading* of the poem that she or he has chosen to set. In the opening song, "Liebesbotschaft" ("Love's Message"), for example, you will hear, in the piano, the "rauschendes Bächlein" ("murmuring brook") that flows towards the narrator's beloved: Schubert is the greatest of all masters when it comes to representing water in music. In "Ihr Bild" ("Her Portrait"), you will hear, in the stark, twice-repeated octaves, an apparent allusion to the "Augenpaar," the two glistening eyes of the narrator's beloved, as he stares at her likeness through the darkness of a dream. And so, subtly, adroitly, does Schubert proceed.

In the notes for Jiayan Sun's concerts, I have made much ado about keys: these are the building blocks of the *major-minor tonal system*, which is the musical equivalent of the *solar system* itself. In the large-scale compositions, you cannot change the key without destroying the structure. On the small scale, however, on the level, for example, of the individual song, you *can* change the key without damage: singers regularly transpose songs from their original keys to keys that suit their voices. I am advised that Mr. Hite sings the songs in their original keys. The key *relations* here, between one song and the next, because he has chosen the order of the songs, are his.

Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1866) was a pianist, a poet, and a music critic who, in the course of the eighteen-thirties, became a highly influential figure on the German musical scene. At least fifty of his poems were set by the composers of his era, including ten by Schubert alone, in 1828. In his memoirs, Rellstab tells us that he gave some of his poems to Beethoven in 1825, and when that master died, he retrieved them and passed them along to Schubert. Rellstab's memoirs were published in 1861, thirty-five years after the fact. Beethoven's amanuensis, Anton Schindler, rather said that Schubert found the Rellstab poems himself, while looking through Beethoven's papers. *Caveat lector.*

Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804-1875) was a Viennese poet, schoolteacher, and bureaucrat. He was a personal acquaintance of Schubert's, he wrote an elegy at the time of the composer's death, and was the father of the man who later married Franz Schubert's niece. He was conservative as a political thinker and conservative as a writer. A critic said of a collection of his poetry that "the poems are pretty, but for the purpose of musical composition one could wish for a more careful linguistic finish and desire at least that they should be free of false accents and make fewer words on that which they express" (which seems to be another way of saying that they are verbose). In a book on *Schwanengesang*, Martin Chusid quotes a letter that Schubert wrote to Seidl, in the summer of 1828, which begins: "Most highly esteemed Herr Gabriel! Enclosed I send you back these poems, in which I could discover *absolutely nothing poetic or useful for music.*" Presumably, "highly esteemed" is an exaggeration of the sort common among friends, which may be why the criticism is expressed in such stark terms. Be that as it may, Seidl, today, like others among Schubert's poets, is remembered, if at all, thanks to the great composer.

Heinrich Heine (1796-1856), on the other hand, did not depend on Schubert for his celebrity. *Die Heimkehr* (*The Homecoming*; 1826), the collection of eighty-eight poems from which Schubert selected six (numbers 8, 14, 16, 20, 23, and 24), and Heine's other poetry (*Die Heimkehr* became the fifth part of the 1827 *Buch der Lieder*, which was reissued at least a dozen times over the following fifty years), would find an exalted place in the history of nineteenth-century German lyric poetry. In the less exalted field of music history, Schubert's six Heine settings (like Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* on poems by Heine, set down thirteen years later) are conspicuously prized as objects of fastidious musical analyses and, far more important, of warm musical appreciation.

The hallmarks of Heine's poetic style, irony and detachment, are not readily translated into music. Do you hear them here?

—Peter Bloom  
*Grace Jarbo Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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**William Hite** is critically-acclaimed artist who has appeared in opera, concert, chamber music and solo recital in a career that has spanned over three decades. His reputation as an expressive and engaging artist has led to appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, Odyssey Opera, Dresdner Philharmonie, American Symphony Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Evansville Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, Boston Baroque, Tafelmusik, Philharmonia Baroque, Washington Bach Consort, New York City Ballet, the Mark Morris Dance Group and Emmanuel Music, under the direction of Bernard Haitink, Seiji Ozawa, James Levine, Rafael Frübeck de Burgos, Christopher Warren-Green, Nicholas McGegan, Jane Glover, Robert Spano, Grant Llewellyn, Gil Rose, Leon Botstein, John Harbison, Julian Wachner and Peter Schreier.

Mr. Hite's upcoming engagements include the role of Henry Gray in Rosner's *The Chronicle of Nine* which he will sing and record with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Zadok, the High Priest in Handel's *Solomon* with the Cantata Singers, *Messiah* with Chicago's Apollo Chorus, and a solo recital of Schubert *Lieder* at Smith College with Jiayan Sun. Recently he sang the title role in the world premiere of Eric Sawyer's opera *The Scarlet Professor*, *Messiah* with the Charlotte Symphony, Massimo in Gluck's *Ezjo* with Odyssey Opera, Mozart's *Apollo et Hyancithus* with Emmanuel Music, Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* at the Token Creek Music Festival, *St. Matthew Passion* with the Buffalo Philharmonic, and *Elijah* with the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra. The music of Britten has been a feature of recent seasons with performances of *War Requiem* at Symphony Hall in Boston, *Serenade* with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Xalapa (Mexico) and *Nocturne* with the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra.

The tenor's operatic credits include leading roles in *The Rake's Progress*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'Ormindo* (Cavalli), and *Euridice* (Peri). His numerous performances at the Boston Early Music Festival include Matthison's *Boris Gondenow* and Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*. Mr. Hite created the role of Chevrus in *The Garden of Martyrs*, by Eric Sawyer. Other premieres include pieces by Theodore Antoniou, Ellen Ruehr, Lew Spratlan, Scott Wheeler and Salvatore Macchia.

Mr. Hite's extensive discography now contains over 40 recordings spanning a wide spectrum of musical idioms. He may be heard in *The Complete Songs of Virgil Thomson for voice and piano* on New World Records, *Messiah* on Clarion, *Acis and Galatea* on NCA, the *St. John Passion* on Koch, and *Mozart Requiem* on Denon. William Hite has sung in music festivals at Tanglewood, Santa Fe, Token Creek, and Vancouver and at the Athens Festival, Festival Mitte Europa, Holland Early

Music Festival and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. He is an Associate Professor of Voice at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Please visit [www.williamhitetenor.com](http://www.williamhitetenor.com)

Praised by the *New York Times* for his “revelatory” performances, and by the *Toronto Star* for his “technically flawless, poetically inspired and immensely assured playing,” pianist **Jiayan Sun** has performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Chinese and RTÉ (Ireland) National Symphony Orchestras, the Fort Worth and Toledo Symphony Orchestras, the Toronto and Aspen Concert Orchestras, the Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, and he has conducted from the keyboard the Meiningen Court Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast by the BBC, the RTÉ, China Central Television, and classical music radio stations in North America. He has performed at and participated in the Verbier Festival, the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Aspen Music Festival, the Sarasota Music Festival, and PianoTexas. Under the mentorship of Sir András Schiff, he was invited to give a number of solo recitals in Europe as part of Schiff’s “Building Bridges” project for the 2017–2018 season.

Jiayan Sun has been awarded prizes at many of the major international piano competitions, including third prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, second prize at the Dublin International Piano Competition, fourth prize and the audience prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, first prize at the inaugural CCC Toronto International Piano Competition, and others. Playing early keyboard instruments and studying historical performance practice have played a significant role in his musical activities, with critically acclaimed appearances with the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall.

Hailing from Yantai, China, he received Bachelor’s, Master’s and the Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Yoheved Kaplinsky and Stephen Hough. His other mentors include pianists Malcolm Bilson, Richard Goode, Robert Levin, and harpsichordist Lionel Party. His devotion to the art of composition led him to study with the composer Philip Lasser. As the Iva Dee Hiatt Visiting Artist in Piano at Smith College, he presented Beethoven’s complete piano sonatas in chronological order in the 2018–2019 season.

For more information, please visit <http://www.jiayansunpianist.com>.



*Thank you!*

We have raised \$1909 from last Thursday's concert, to support people fighting the coronavirus in Hubei Province, China, the epicenter of the outbreak.

All your contributions have been transferred to the bank account of the Hubei Charity Federation. The receipts may be examined upon request.

Your generous support is greatly appreciated.

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*Schubertiade*

Jiayan Sun, piano

Eight Recitals at 8 PM on Thursdays

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall

Free and open to the public

Next Concerts:

**VII. April 2, 2020**

Piano Music for Two-Hands and  
Four-Hands

with **Monica Jakuc Leverett,**  
Graf Fortepiano

**VIII. April 16, 2020**

Piano Sonatas 3: F-sharp Minor,  
D. 571; D Major, D. 850;  
B-flat Major, D. 960

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