

done *thoughtfully*. It must be “both free and rigorous.” Nobody wrote like that, before Beethoven.

**Fidelio:** Getting back again to the Schubert-Beethoven connection: If you associate Schubert’s later works, especially the quartets, with Beethoven’s late works, did the two men know each other intimately on this level of compositional artistry?

**Prof. Brainin:** No, not intimately. Schubert tried to write the same kind of music; it was just in the air of Vienna those days, you might say. Because music had not been “invented,” it was just there. But Schubert was not as far advanced as Beethoven. And what did Schubert *know* about Beethoven? He would have knelt down before him. Many have remarked, “Beethoven is something monumental,” but they really didn’t understand him. Schubert, on the other hand, *knew* it, but he himself had not progressed as far.

**Fidelio:** One more question on the C Major Symphony. You said that in his quartets, he was practicing for the symphony—that is, he was studying the art of applying four-part polyphony on a symphonic scale—an art which Beethoven had brought to a pinnacle . . .

**Prof. Brainin:** . . . [T]hat is what’s so special about this

symphony; and that is why it is Schubert’s greatest work. In his selection of themes and motivic kernels, there is, of course, a big difference between the symphony and the quartets; the former is “orchestral,” and the others are “instrumental”—though always based on the singing voice. What unites them, however, is especially their extended treatment: this “Schubertian expansiveness,” or “divine length,” as Schumann later called it, which all composers after him, strove to emulate.

**Fidelio:** Schubert’s works are particularly interesting, of course, from the standpoint of the relation between the human singing voice and the poetic idea—an idea which is expressed in a particular speech form, a prosody, from which motivic seed-elements emerge, which can be further worked up in a particular form.

**Prof. Brainin:** That’s precisely the way Schubert composed songs. He always let himself be inspired by the poetry, that’s clear. Sometimes he even wrote the poetry himself, sometimes not. It was always something that spoke to his heart; it wasn’t always the very best poetry, but, deep within him, it touched something, which then brought forth the idea for a song.

**Fidelio:** From the standpoint of a string quartet player,

## Robert Schumann on the C Major Symphony: ‘A unique way of treating instruments . . . as if they were human voices’

*While on a trip to Vienna in 1838, Robert Schumann paid a visit to Franz Schubert’s brother Ferdinand, who allowed him to look through the unpublished Schubert compositions in his possession; among these was the C Major Symphony. They agreed to send it off to Leipzig, where, on March 23, 1839, it was performed for the first time, under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn. Schumann writes:*



Corbis-Bettmann

Robert Schumann

I’ll say it outright: Whoever doesn’t know this symphony, doesn’t know anything about Schubert yet, even though, after all that Schubert has already bestowed upon Art, many might see this as a degree of praise scarcely to be believed. . . .

Here we find, in addition to masterly compositional technique, life in every fiber, coloration down to the finest nuance, meaning everywhere, the clearest expression of detail, and over everything, there is poured a romanticism such as we have already experienced elsewhere

in Schubert. And this divine length of his symphony . . . .

We always have to call it an extraordinary talent, when a person who has heard so few of his own instrumental works performed during his lifetime, is able to arrive at such a unique way of treating instruments, as well as the orchestral ensemble, which often talk across to each other, as if they were human voices and chorus. Outside of many Beethoven works, I have never been so taken off guard and surprised by this similarity to the singing organ . . . .