

## **SOU Chamber Music Concerts ~ Program Notes**

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### **Concertante**

**Friday, March 4, 2005, 8 pm**

Beethoven: Septet in E-Flat Major, Op. 20 (1800)

Schubert: Octet in F Major, D 803 (1824)

### **Beethoven**

#### **Septet in E-Flat Major, Op. 20 (1800)**

The 18th century became the great era for wind music. Most royal courts and many aristocratic households employed wind bands - *Harmoniemusik*. While only the wealthiest courts could afford full orchestras, the wind band timber and volume - pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns, and (sometimes) clarinets - became the preferred ensemble for royal entertainment and prestige, both indoors and out. Equally popular in court and village, *Harmoniemusik* composers found audiences for either light popular fare or more complex and sophisticated efforts. Mozart's wind serenades (K. 375 & K. 388) and his Quintet for Piano and Winds (K 452) rank among his greatest compositions. Beethoven's Septet, Op. 20 for winds and strings (1800) aims for the lighter serenade tradition, however, though it also contains hints of the revolution to come. The audience response was immediate, and it became one of the most popular compositions during his lifetime. It proved so popular that Beethoven's particular instrumentation also became the standard for the next generation of septet composers.

As a young composer, both in Bonn and after moving to Vienna in 1792, Beethoven accommodated the popularity of wind music. He wrote prolifically for a variety of wind ensembles until 1800. (Beethoven also included his first symphony on a public concert in April of 1800 with the Septet, and the press commented on the remarkable prominence of his wind writing.) After 1800, however, both the decline of royal and aristocratic cultural prominence, as well as the rise of the civic-sponsored indoor public concerts (which negated the outdoor disadvantage of the strings) contributed towards a marked shift away from wind popularity. Beethoven's career mirrored this larger cultural shift, as he abandoned independent wind compositions after 1801 - content to incorporate them ever more skillfully into the orchestral fabric of his symphonies and concertos.

Beethoven wrote the youthful Septet in a popular style. Both the multi-movement 18th-century Serenade genre (two slow movements, and two dances) and the breezy nature of the melodic material and wind-string dialogue reflect this lighter vein. However, the year 1800 also witnessed Beethoven's completion of his Op. 18 string quartets and first symphony, already heralding aspects of his future genius. The mixture of all these elements appears in the Septet as well. He sets the opening **Allegro con brio** in a bright, lyrical style. But Beethoven also became known for integrating the distinct sections of sonata form. Hence material from the opening four bars of the introduction recurs in the exposition, development and extensive coda section.

He opens the charming sonata-form **Adagio cantabile** with a lyrical theme for the clarinet, which then shifts to counterpoint during the violin repetition. Listen for the later horn solo and its dramatic modulation near the end of the development, heralding the recap and the return of the clarinet's opening theme. While Mozart and other 18th-century composers employed two minuets in their serenades, Beethoven looks ahead with both a **Minuet** (3rd movement) and an energetic 19th-century **Scherzo** for the fifth movement. In between, Beethoven's penchant for structural innovation appears in the 4th-movement **Andante** theme and variations. Not content with the usual variations in melody and mode, he concludes it with another extensive coda. And after a colorful, minor-mode introduction, Beethoven fashions a high-spirited **Presto** finale, complete with horn calls.

## **Schubert**

### **Octet in F Major, D 803 (1824)**

Beethoven's popular Septet led directly to this Octet by Schubert. Count Ferdinand Troyer asked Schubert to compose a piece "exactly like the Beethoven Septet" in 1824. Schubert produced a similar six-movement work that, at first glance, seems closely modeled on its distinguished predecessor. Like Beethoven, he sets it in a light, popular style, with slow introductions for the first and last movements, two slow movements, both a minuet and a scherzo, and the same key scheme for the six movements. The similarities end there, however. Beethoven wrote the Septet at the beginning of his career, while every page of Schubert's Octet sparkles with the magic of his mature chamber music style - written only four years before his death in 1828.

More profound differences also emerge. Beethoven's Septet was performed in public the year it was written, and published two years later. All of Beethoven's major works were published during his lifetime. Schubert's Octet received only a private performance the year he wrote it, and it wasn't published until 1853. Only a quarter of Schubert's work saw publication during his lifetime, primarily his ever-popular vocal music. The public had to wait almost a generation after his death to discover his equally astounding creativity as an instrumental composer - the 9th Symphony (1839), the String Quintet (1853), his greatest quartet - the G Major (1853), and his 8th Symphony, the "Unfinished" (1865).

The year 1824 witnessed Schubert's final maturity as a chamber music composer, with the Octet as well as the A Minor quartet and D Minor "Death and the Maiden" quartets. The G Major Quartet (1826) and the String Quintet lay directly ahead. The opening sonata-form **Allegro** movement reveals aspects of Schubert's dramatic departures from the heritage of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Instead of simply setting the secondary theme in the dominant, Schubert changes key within the theme. With Schubert's love of major-minor contrast, this new clarinet theme opens in D minor, and postpones the arrival of the dominant C major until the very last bar. He also expands upon Beethoven's instrumentation not only by adding a second violin part, but also writing a more independent bass part as well. Having written the "Trout" Quintet with double bass a few years earlier, Schubert uses a solo double bass at the end of the development to herald the approaching recap.

Schubert's sonata-from **Adagio** opens with the longest wind solo of the Octet, a lovely 12-bar theme for the clarinet. In the violin repetition, listen for the delightful clarinet counterpoint - and a typically abrupt and distant Schubertian modulation at the end. The lively **Scherzo** opens with full string and wind choirs, setting up the following, delightful clarinet solo against unstable harmonies and yet another new color for the trio - a walking bass-line accompaniment for the cello. Like Beethoven, Schubert sets the 4th-movement **Andante** as a theme and variations. Schubert borrows the theme from a duet in his operetta "Die Feunde von Salamanka." After the opening of the graceful **Menuetto**, Schubert recalls his Scherzo with another harmonically unstable passage accompanying clarinet and violin solos. This time he extends the chromatic detour, however, with harmonies seldom if ever encountered in Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven minuets. Schubert's minor-mode introduction to the **Allegro** extends beyond Beethoven with dramatic string tremolos to heighten the drama - and a recall later in the recap to enliven the structure of this robust sonata-form finale.

Program notes by Ed Wight