A Search for Schubert’s Voice in the Symphonies

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In Memory of Walter “Doc” Daniel Marino (1912-1999),
for sharing your love of music with me in my early years and always treating me like
one of your own grandchildren
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Introduction

Schubert, Beethoven, and the World of the Sonata

For all of his life, Franz Schubert was known as a composer of songs. Even in his obituary, his friend Leopold von Sonnleithner wrote that Schubert’s “chief predilection was to clothe in sound the verses of the most excellent poets and to render them musically in the form of songs.”¹ Yet Schubert was also a composer of symphonies. He completed seven symphonies and left three incomplete, including his famous “Unfinished.” Unlike his songs, of which 200 were in print at the time of his death,² none of Schubert’s symphonies were published or performed in his lifetime.³ In fact, the publication of the first of Schubert’s symphonies did not occur until 1840, twelve years after the composer’s death. To Schubert, then, contrary to the generally accepted opinion, songs defined his public face while symphonies remained a private genre, hidden from the public eye. As a result, Schubert’s voice took much longer to develop within the symphonic form than in his songs. At the same time, these circumstances allowed Schubert to experiment in his symphonies and create something entirely new. According to Antonin Reicha, composers “who depend on the public sacrifice the interest of art for a desire to please the

² Ibid.
³ There is some debate as to whether a private orchestra performed Schubert’s Fourth Symphony but it is generally accepted that none of Schubert’s Symphonies were published or performed by a large orchestra while he was alive. Maurice Brown, Schubert Symphonies, BBC Music Guide (BBC: London, 1970), 18.
multitude”. Thus, by developing his symphonies in relative privacy, Schubert was able to fully explore the genre.

There is a strong shift in compositional style between the first six symphonies and the final four, a shift that cannot be explained as a response to public critique. The first six symphonies borrow many stylistic features from Haydn, Mozart, Rossini, and Beethoven, making it difficult for the listener to discern Schubert’s own voice. For Schubert as a composer of symphonies, Haydn and Mozart represented Classical tradition, Rossini embodied the popular taste of music in Vienna at the time, and Beethoven became a symbol of the ideal. After writing roughly a symphony a year between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, Schubert suddenly stopped and was unable to produce a full symphony until seven years later. The result of these seven years of gestation was the “Great” Symphony, in which the influences of Haydn, Mozart, and Rossini have, for the most part, vanished, while Beethoven, the ideal, shines through even more strongly. As Richard Taruskin writes, Schubert evidently considered his first six symphonies “all to be student pieces and not representative of what he could write—a truly Beethovenian ‘grand symphony’”

Schubert struggled with how best to interpret Beethoven’s influence, and this challenge marks the development of his own style in his symphonies. Several authors, such as Carl Dahlhaus, Charles Rosen, and James Webster, have written

about how Schubert stood in Beethoven’s shadow, particularly in instrumental genres. As a contemporary of the mature Beethoven, Schubert was placed in a unique position. The public was already familiar with Beethoven’s works and eagerly awaited future compositions. Schubert thus not only had to consider the norms from the canonical works of Haydn and Mozart, but also had to heed the precedence of Beethoven in symphonies. Schubert was well aware of this challenge, even in his student years. “Secretly, in my heart of hearts,” he confessed to Josef von Spaun, the conductor of the student orchestra at Schubert’s school, “I hope to be able to make something out of myself, but who can do anything after Beethoven?”

Schubert included several allusions to Beethoven in his works, which is not surprising given Beethoven’s overwhelming presence in the world of symphonic composition. Christopher Reynolds defines allusion as “an intentional reference to another work made by means of a resemblance that affects the meaning conveyed to those who recognize it. Intentionality is an important element, however problematic it may be to determine.” Schubert’s near-quotations of Beethoven’s Prometheus Ballet as the primary theme of his Second Symphony serves as an example of an allusion. Any listener familiar with Prometheus would recognize the theme, and Schubert repeats it so often that it becomes ingrained in the listener’s mind.

Undoubtedly, Schubert meant for this theme to be heard. While few references are as obvious as this one, several other Schubert symphonies also have allusions to

6 Schubert was 27 years younger than Beethoven but died only a year after Beethoven.
Beethoven’s works. Yet not all of Schubert’s allusions mark dependence on other composers. By learning how to control references and allusions to others’ works, in his “Great” Schubert was able to successfully reference Beethoven without becoming overwhelmed by his influence.

According to Spaun, Schubert’s desire to modernize Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg’s songs prompted his illustrious career as a composer of songs, a genre that Schubert would largely pioneer.⁹ Although Zumsteeg’s influence on the young Schubert’s career is not insignificant, it cannot be compared to Beethoven’s lasting effect. The difference is not just the obvious discrepancy between the stature of these two composers: it is also the difference between the two genres. In contrast to songs, in which Schubert enjoyed relative creative freedom, he found the symphonic genre already well established. Rosen argues that Schubert’s generation believed that symphonies had a definitive style set by Haydn and perfected by Mozart and Beethoven.¹⁰ This set form was sonata form, which, according to Leonard Ratner, rose to “prominence in the mid-eighteenth century without a clear prehistory.”¹¹ In the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century, analysts, such as Reicha, sought to define sonata form and understand the structures behind Mozart and Haydn’s symphonies. Rosen asserts that “sonata form could not be defined until it was dead”: by the time Carl Czerny claimed to have classified it in 1840, “it was already part of history.”¹² Rosen sees sonata form as “a

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way of writing, a feeling for proportion, direction, and texture rather than a
type.

By the nineteenth century there was a “recipe” for sonata form, and,
much to Rosen’s chagrin, the vast majority of sonatas from the early nineteenth
century were written using this inflexible formula. Rosen compares writing
sonatas in this style as akin to composing Baroque fugues in Haydn’s time.

There was obviously a need for innovation. Thus Schubert, like other composers of
symphonies from the nineteenth century, was obliged to approach symphonic
writing in a new manner if he wanted to stay relevant.

Experimenting with sonata form became the most important way of
innovating symphonies in the early nineteenth century. Rosen observes that in the
classical symphonies the length of sections increased while proportions of the
individual phrase remained intact, contrasting this approach to sonata form to the
elaborately detailed works of Weber and Hummel, a style he believes does not fit
into the “tightly organized sonata style.” He considers classical sonata form to be
“essentially melodic,” with the exposition becoming “a succession of themes,
separated by connecting developments.” Ratner adds tonal polarity to this list of
important features to classical sonata form, dubbing the traditional harmonic
scheme (I-V (III), X-I) “key-area form.”

According to Rosen, Beethoven expanded
the form by focusing on polarization, not only in terms of tonic and dominant
oppositions but also, and most significantly, in terms of themes. Thematic progress

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 31.
15 Ibid., 32.
16 Rosen, Sonata Forms, 281.
17 Ibid., 282.
18 Ratner, Classical Music, 218.
would become so important to Beethoven that Carl Dalhaus called his sonata forms “dramatic-dialectic.”

This style captures the emotion and sentiment of the Romantics but at the same time still reflects classical models. Despite his move away from classical models, Beethoven remains, in Rosen’s view, an extension of Haydn and Mozart and thus a late eighteenth-century rather than a purely nineteenth-century composer.

Where does Schubert fit into this history of sonata form? One can easily say that he followed a path similar to Beethoven’s in the sense that he also built on the principles of classical sonata form, especially in his earlier works. Yet Rosen sees Schubert’s works as a completely new approach to sonata form, declaring that “Schubert’s innovations in sonata forms are less extensions of classical style than completely new inventions, which lead to a genuinely new style—at least one that cannot easily be subsumed in classical terms.”

By calling Schubert’s sonata forms “lyric-epic,” Dahlhaus distinguishes them from both classical and Beethovenian models. Though Schubert did experiment with thematic development, he primarily focused on key relationships, particularly on third-related keys, and he was willing to sacrifice the progressive model of Beethovenian sonata form in favor of static key cycles. In order to compose a “truly Beethovenian grand symphony,” Schubert needed to compromise between his more static “lyric-epic” style and the “dramatic-dialectic” style of Beethoven. Thus, the first movement of the “Great

20 Rosen, Sonata Forms, 282.
21 Ibid., 287.
Symphony, which Schubert considered his greatest work, features a unique tonal map based on relationships by thirds and structural ambiguity that disregards the traditional formal boundaries of classical sonata form yet at the same time captures the Beethovenian sense of progress. The symphonies preceding the “Great” can be considered Schubert’s experimentations to achieve such synthesis.

I have divided Schubert’s symphonies into three groups, each represented in a chapter: student works (Symphonies nos. 1-3), transitional works (Symphonies nos. 4-6), and mature works (Symphony no. 7 in E Major, Symphony No. 8 “Unfinished,” and Symphony no. 9 the “Great”). 23 Though Schubert considered his first six symphonies to be his “student works,” 24 I discuss them into two categories. In the first three symphonies, Schubert generally stuck to the norms of classical sonata form, while in the Fourth through Sixth he used advanced experimentation and showed a better understanding of musical allusions. For each of these periods, I chose a symphony that I consider the most emblematic of Schubert’s progress. From the student works in chapter one, I analyze the Second, which contains much experimentation in form but maintains, to some extent, the tonal polarity of classical sonata form. From the transitional works in chapter two, I chose the Fourth Symphony, the first symphony in which Schubert uses third-related key cycles, a feature that will appear in several of his later works. Finally, from the mature works in chapter 3, I focused on Schubert’s crowning achievement, the “Great” Symphony, the cumulation of Schubert’s experimentation. Narrowing my work down further, I

23 For the sake of clarity, I have labeled the first unfinished symphony “Symphony no. 7 in E Minor,” which is its title in English-language scholarship. German-language scholarship considers the “Great” to be Symphony no. 7 and does not assign numbers to the unfinished symphonies.
24 Taruskin and Gibbs, The Oxford History of Western Music, 547.
analyze Schubert’s use of sonata form in the first movements of these three symphonies, focusing specifically on how he interpreted classical sonata form, how he used unusual tonal maps and how he incorporated references to Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

The analysis of these works demonstrates a progression of Schubert’s development as a composer of symphonies. The Second Symphony shows that although Schubert was thinking about unconventional key relationships and innovative formal structures, he remained trapped in his emulation of Beethoven. The Fourth expands on many of the techniques used in the Second and is one of Schubert’s earliest works to be based on a key cycle of third relationships. In both of these early works Schubert still struggles with Beethoven’s influence, grappling to find the proper balance between his own style and Beethoven’s commanding presence. At the end of this progression lies the “Great,” a work that captures both Schubert’s “lyric-epic” and Beethoven’s “dramatic-dialectic” styles. The “Great” is the expression of Schubert’s voice within the context of a grand symphony. Schubert achieved his goal.
Schubert finished his Second Symphony in B-flat Major in 1815 at the age of 18. The piece took him nearly fifteen weeks to complete, far longer than the eight days in which he would write his third symphony. As the peculiar features of the Second Symphony show, Schubert seems to have spent this extra time reflecting on new approaches to symphonic composition. The exposition is monstrously long, turning almost into a movement in itself. Strangest of all, after seemingly setting up a secondary theme in minor (see the half cadence in measure 48), Schubert changes course, fragmenting and developing the primary theme before leading to the real secondary theme in the subdominant in measure 80. Adding to this formal confusion, at the end of the exposition he returns to the primary theme. Although played now in the dominant key, the return of the first theme still has the effect of a recapitulation. Because of this strong sense of recapitulation, one almost expects the movement to end. Yet once again defying expectations, Schubert moves into a development with a completely new theme. Schubert’s daring creates something that both adheres to and at the same time defies the conventions of sonata form—a vision of the past with an eye to the future.

For a young composer such daring experimentation is unusual, especially considering that Schubert’s First Symphony clung to tradition and classical

procedure. This use of experimentation shows that Schubert sought to construct a creative space for himself. Beethoven, even before he had composed the Ninth, had shown the world how one could push the limits of conventional forms. Schubert aspired to stretch these limits as well. His Second Symphony contrasted greatly with his First and later his Third Symphonies, breaking with some of the formal procedures Schubert had so faithfully followed in the First and the Third. This experimentation in the Second Symphony laid ground for Schubert’s future innovations of sonata form and prompted him to think beyond tradition.

In contrast to the experimentation used in his Second, Schubert’s First Symphony, composed in 1813, follows closely a Mozartean model. Schubert does not question the formal boundaries of sonata form as understood in the nineteenth century. He begins the symphony with an emphatic expression of the tonic, a feature that will appear in all of his early symphonies. In comparison to his later symphonies, in particular the “Great,” Schubert’s introduction is short and fairly formulaic, merely modulating between different modes of the tonic and the dominant. He starts the primary theme with the same emphatic tonal gesture as he used in the beginning of the movement, landing on it strongly, as Beethoven did in the “Eroica” Symphony (see example 1).26
Example 1. Primary theme from Schubert’s First Symphony

As can be seen from this example, Schubert contrasts this emphatic initial tonic note with a light fast violin melody that, as Maurice Brown notes, is merely a decorated D
major scale. As Mozart had done in several of his symphonies, Schubert begins the transition by repeating the primary theme, then breaking it down in order to increase energy. He also relies heavily on modulation and oscillation to build energy.

Ideally, this energy spurs the modulation to the dominant. Before meeting this goal, Schubert moves first to B minor, then to E minor, the parallel minor of V/V. While the modulation to E is a logical step and seems to indicate that the transition will soon land on the dominant, Schubert’s use of minor mode, which deletes the leading tone to A, confuses the tonal direction. He returns to D major briefly before modulating to A, but even then refuses to secure A major by oscillating between A major and A minor. The “transition-that-isn’t” was not a novel feature: Mozart used it in several of his early works, including his Figaro Overture. It also appeared in Beethoven’s First (see examples 2a-c).

Example 2. Transitions from Schubert’s Second, Mozart’s Figaro Overture and Beethoven’s First

Example 2a. The second half of the transition from Schubert’s First

28 Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 42.
Example 2b. End of the transition and beginning of the second theme from Mozart’s *Figaro Overture*[^30]

2c. End of the transition from Beethoven’s First Symphony\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{transition.png}
\end{center}

All three composers avoid arriving on the dominant in the bridge. Both Beethoven and Mozart end the transition on a dominant chord, but neither fully modulates to the dominant key until the appearance of the second theme. Similarly, Schubert ends on a dominant chord and uses a four-measure transition to modulate to the dominant key.

As this transition shows, although Mozartean in its formal conception, Schubert’s First also has Beethovenian features.\textsuperscript{32} As a second theme, Schubert features a lyrical melody, based on a theme taken from the finale of Beethoven’s ballet \textit{The Creatures of Prometheus} (Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus), Op. 43 (1810). The similarities between the two themes can be seen in Example 3 below:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example3.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{31} Ludwig van Beethoven, \textit{Ludwig van Beethovens Werke} (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1862), 6.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 40.
Example 3. (a) Transposed version of a theme from the finale of Beethoven’s *Prometheus* Ballet; (b) Second theme from Schubert’s First Symphony (both taken from Newbould, 41)  

![Example](image.png)

The theme marked (a) is the transposed version of a melody used in the finale of *Prometheus*, which Beethoven later recycled in *Eroica*, while the theme marked (b) is Schubert’s second theme in his First Symphony. The resemblance between the two themes is unmistakable. Since second themes allow a composer to create a lyrical resting place, one might expect Schubert, primarily a composer of songs, to choose a lyrical melody as his second theme. By referencing an instrumental work, Schubert shows his growing confidence within the instrumental genre.

Because it contains a clear reference to *Prometheus*, Schubert’s second theme area inevitably highlights the link between Schubert and Beethoven, even in such an early work. Brown argues that the different treatments of these similar themes by the two composers demonstrate their very different outlooks on thematic and symphonic writing. Beethoven uses the theme as a “short, striking thematic figure,” focusing on progress. Schubert, on the other hand, extends the theme, allowing it to “saturate every bar of the symphonic movement.” Already, Brown warns that

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33 Example taken from ibid., 41.
analyzing Schubert with Beethovenian models leads to a misinterpretation of Schubert, citing how it is unfair to consider that Schubert’s lyrical themes are incapable of the same level of intellectual treatment as Beethoven’s striking themes.\(^{35}\) Though the comparison between the two composers begins with Schubert’s First Symphony, the discussion of how best to analyze Schubert in regards to Beethoven becomes more important in Schubert’s later, more mature works. For now, Schubert is still a student, learning from the models of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

Brown’s comparison of Schubert’s and Beethoven’s treatments of the *Prometheus* theme concerns the second theme area in Schubert’s First Symphony. After its succinct first statement ending in a perfect cadence at measure 97, Schubert extends this theme significantly, treating it almost as a development. Despite the fact that Schubert handles the theme differently than Beethoven in this context, the developmental extension of the second theme was also a technique Schubert might have learned from Beethoven. As Brian Newbould argues, because symphonies were growing significantly in size in the late Classical and early Romantic periods, composers were faced with the problem of creating sufficient variety in their expositions and recapitulations. One method to overcome this challenge, used by both Schubert and Beethoven, was to create tonal variety within a generally exclusively two-key area.\(^{36}\) Some composers, including Schubert in his Second Symphony, used a third tonal area, while another technique, used by

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 7-8.
\(^{36}\) Newbould, *Schubert and the Symphony*, 42.
Beethoven in the recapitulation of his Second Symphony and Schubert in the
exposition of his First Symphony, was to extend the second theme by treating it as a
development, which creates an additional developmental area in the symphony.

The actual development of the First is short and harmonically less ambitious
than the developmental sections of Schubert’s later works. In fact, it can be seen as
the continuation of the exploration of the second theme. For tonal variety, Schubert
relies on modal mixture, already seen in the introduction and the transition. Though
the development gives the composer an opportunity to explore distant keys,
Schubert never ventures further than E major and D minor. He begins the
development by oscillating between A major and A minor, then moves to E major
and A major, and finally moves between D minor and A minor with an A pedal tone
that allows him to return to the tonic D major for the recapitulation. The
recapitulation brings back the tonic, but instead of the first theme, the tonic key is
marked by the return of the introduction. This is another Mozartean feature, found
in Mozart’s Serenade for Orchestra No. 9 in D major, K 320 “Posthorn.”
Brown notes
that by bringing the introduction back in the recapitulation, Schubert makes it a
cohesive part of the first movement. This technique will appear not only in the
Third Symphony, but also in several of Schubert’s mature works, most notably in the
“Great” Symphony.

However conventional, the First Symphony already shows habits beginning
to form. To list the most prominent, Schubert spends a significant amount of time

37 Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 49.
38 Brown, Schubert Symphonies, 7.
with the second theme. He tended to feature an extended second theme area and would further develop the second theme rather than the first in his developments. Furthermore, his interest in key relationships, represented in the First in his reliance on modal mixture and oscillation between keys, would become much more prominent, both in his later symphonies and in his later instrumental works.\footnote{Charles Rosen, \textit{Sonata Forms} (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980), 287.}

Finally, Schubert’s reliance on Mozart and Beethoven will play a major role in his later works, though Beethoven will become much more important to Schubert as his work matures.

Even between the First and Second Symphonies, one can see how Beethoven’s influence has become more significant. Whereas in the First Beethoven’s \textit{Prometheus} provided Schubert with a model for his second theme, in the Second he uses a theme from \textit{Prometheus} as his first theme. Example 4 demonstrates the similarities between Schubert’s and Beethoven’s themes (see examples 4a-b).
Example 4a. The first violin melody from the primary theme of Schubert’s Second Symphony in B-flat major

Example 4b. A theme from Beethoven’s Prometheus Overture (transposed)

Both melodies are played first by the first violins alone, then repeated by the rest of the orchestra. Although less clearly alike than in the First Symphony, the two themes are similar enough to suggest that Schubert meant for this allusion to be heard.

By referencing Beethoven’s Prometheus Ballet Schubert creates a thematic link between the First and the Second Symphonies. Prometheus is a Greek

mythological character who steals fire from the gods in order to save humanity from inevitable death. Beethoven’s ballet features the presentation of fire as a symbol for the musical awakening of mankind. Does Schubert’s allusion to Prometheus indicate that he is placing himself in the role of the legendary titan? He draws inspiration from the “music gods,” namely Mozart and Beethoven, yet at the same time seeks to establish his own voice. Stealing the fire could stand for Schubert’s urge to break with the tradition to which he so clearly clings. Although his use of Beethoven’s theme suggests a program, there is no indication that in the Second Symphony Schubert had programmatic or narrative purposes. Instead, the presence and repetition of the Prometheus theme seem to be emblematic of Schubert’s symphonic vision, namely his unique approach to sonata form.

By using Prometheus as the basis for his primary theme in the Second, Schubert shows how his confidence has grown since his First Symphony. For the young Schubert, starting the Second Symphony with a reference to Prometheus might represent his chance to explore the symphonic world and reach beyond the limits set by Mozart and classical style. In order to do this, he experiments liberally with sonata form. Schubert uses expectations built in his First Symphony and in nineteenth-century understanding of sonata form in order to create a sense of anticipation that is never fully met. His usage of form is so untraditional, Charles Rosen states that Schubert’s interpretation of sonata forms can be labeled a “genuinely new style,” distinct from both classical models and Beethoven.42

42 Rosen, Sonata Forms, 287.
Yet despite this experimentation through form, Schubert is still strongly tied to the past. Beethoven has come to represent the future and innovation in Schubert’s music, in a sense the ideal Schubert wishes to achieve, but his influence takes over the Second Symphony. In his discussion of Schubert, Rosen argues that Schubert’s reliance on musical source material amounts to little more than “a kind of involuntary memory, an exterior stimulus to [Schubert’s] creative imagination.” Sometimes, however, the source is more relevant, and in these cases the adaption of the course is often a failure.\(^4\) By making the *Prometheus* reference so obvious and so prominent in his Second Symphony, Schubert, to some extent, loses his own voice. Though Schubert seeks to break with the “music gods,” he speaks in their voice by referencing their works and their methods. In his later years, Schubert will acquire the ability to successfully reference his idols, Mozart and Beethoven. According to Rosen, in these later works “some of the borrowings are transformed into pure Schubert; the source is irrelevant.”\(^4\) While Schubert was still developing into a composer of symphonies, the sources of his inspiration remained relevant even in the midst of an experimental form.

Schubert emphasizes the relevance of the *Prometheus* theme by letting it permeate the entire first movement.\(^4\) Even during the more lyrical second theme, Schubert references the fast moving primary theme by placing an eighth-note motive in the bass. While this motive is not taken directly from the primary theme, it continues the fragmentation and development started in the bridge and is based off

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\(^4\) Ibid., 286-87.
\(^4\) Ibid., 286.
a motive used in the primary theme. As a result, the entire exposition seems to be centered on the return of this *Prometheus* theme. When following a lengthy transition and second theme Schubert brings back the primary theme in measure 184, the listener feels almost a sense of conclusion, even though the theme returns on the dominant. Prometheus has returned with the fire after a tumultuous journey.

Schubert’s experimentation with form is most evident in the bridge section between the first and second themes. In contrast to the First, which obediently lands on the dominant despite some harmonic wandering, Schubert avoids the dominant F major (V) in the Second Symphony until long after the second theme has been established. The bridge begins similarly to the First, with a repetition of the primary theme. As the primary theme fragments and begins to build energy, Schubert suddenly modulates to C minor, a subdominant, rather than the expected dominant. At first it appears that Schubert is using the same technique he used in the First, prolonging the transition by using the parallel minor of V/V. Yet instead, Schubert places a measure-long pause following a half cadence in C minor. This set-up would be considered conventional were it not for the use of C minor. By complicating the key, Schubert creates the first disturbances in the form.

Following the pause, the bridge remains in C minor and fragments the primary theme, treating the section as if it were the development section, not the second theme. This begs the question, is this indeed the second theme? The use of the subdominant is untraditional but not unheard of, as is the use of the primary theme as a second theme. Yet unlike most secondary theme areas, this section lacks stability. Had Schubert merely repeated the primary theme in minor, this segment
could be considered the second theme. But instead he fragments the primary theme and begins to modulate, first to G minor, then to A-flat major, the flat six, and finally to another subdominant, E-flat major. This is a strong example of what Rosen calls a “genuinely new style” in Schubert’s music.46

Following the bridge Schubert continues to play with ambiguity in form, to the point of exaggeration. While this section demonstrates his innovations, it also highlights Schubert’s lack of restraint. As he becomes more experienced, he will learn how to balance innovation with conciseness. For now, Schubert’s bridge and second theme will remain exceptionally long.

Unlike the pseudo second theme, the real second theme lacks any preparation. The arrival of the second theme comes as a surprise since Schubert has greatly diminished the energy built by the beginning of the bridge (measures 35-47) and retained a static feel instead. Continuing with the use of unconventional keys, Schubert sets the second theme in E-flat major (IV). While the second theme clearly breaks with the bridge, remnants of the primary theme remain in the bass line of the new theme, which repeats an eighth-note motive that oscillates between E-flat and F. Although not taken directly from the primary theme, the contour of this motive is similar to that of the primary theme. Furthermore, the flute at measure 86 plays an actual fragment of the primary theme, showing the remaining influence of the Promethean primary theme.

Schubert only focuses briefly on the actual second theme. The bridge and second theme combined last for 156 measures, yet he only spends 45 measures on

46 Ibid., 287.
the second theme, allowing instead the bass line’s reference to the primary theme to
grow into yet another static, developmental section. As part of the continued
evolution of the primary theme, Schubert eliminates the quarter notes that broke up
the runs from *Prometheus* and uses pure eighth-note runs in their place, making
thus the theme more similar to its Beethovenian origin. Even Schubert’s
accompanying chords reference Beethoven’s accompaniment (see example 5).47

**Example 5. Bridge-like portion of the second theme area from Schubert’s
Second Symphony in B-flat major**

Though the original *Prometheus* motive is missing, Schubert captures the effect of the primary theme with the energy-building eighth-note runs, which provide a change from the more lyrical second theme. This section becomes a second bridge. Instead of extending his own second theme, Schubert relies on *Prometheus* and Beethoven and thus lets *Prometheus* overwhelm the exposition.

Despite letting Beethoven dominate the sonata’s thematic material, Schubert continues his exploration of different key areas, which is both new ground for sonata form and an area of personal interest to Schubert. A three-key exposition was not unheard of: after all, Beethoven himself had toyed with unusual tonal areas. Yet Schubert’s use of an entire extended second theme in the subdominant represents a break with traditional sonata form. Schubert would come to use three-key expositions so often in his later works that James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy would dub the technique “trimodular block.”48 A relatively new idea, the three-key exposition could be seen as a reinterpretation of techniques Beethoven used.

Graham Hunt compares Schubert’s use of trimodular blocks to both Beethoven’s *Coriolan* Overture and Cherubini’s *Les deux journées* (The Two Days) Overture.49 Schubert indeed follows the same general structure as these two canonical works, but he also changes the focus of the exposition. Hunt notes that Schubert often emphasizes the second key area, as can be seen in Schubert’s drawing out the bridges surrounding his second theme area. Yet in emphasizing this key area, which is centered around subdominant keys, Schubert was faced with the challenge of

49 Ibid., 80-81.
arriving to the dominant before the end of the exposition in order to facilitate the
move to the tonic for the recapitulation.\textsuperscript{50}

According to Newbould, this added modulation was a welcome challenge to
Schubert since he had explored the relationship between keys from a young age.\textsuperscript{51}
Thus, the aforementioned development-like section in the midst of the second
theme acts as a second bridge, but this time it arrives at the dominant. Schubert uses
sequential modulation and modal mixture to ease into the development, moving
from E-flat major to C minor to A-flat major to F minor (with a hint of F major) to G
major before finally landing on a half cadence, on a C major chord, which functions
as V of the dominant, F. Like in the bridge of his First Symphony, Schubert
introduces a few measures of a chamber setting to land on a new theme, this time
using the violins. Even in this section he seeks to confuse the key, placing one
measure in D minor, the parallel minor of the anticipated F major, before finally
arriving on the dominant.

The third key section of the exposition is, perhaps, the most surprising part
of Schubert’s exploration of form. Rather than introducing a new theme, Schubert
returns to the primary theme, bringing back the \textit{Prometheus} theme yet again. By
returning to this theme Schubert gives the end of the exposition three functions:
closing material, second secondary theme, and recapitulation. The most obvious
approach to this section is to consider it closing material. After all, Schubert has
featured a second theme that, according to the standards of sonata form, should be

\textsuperscript{50}Newbould, \textit{Schubert and the Symphony}, 62.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 62.
followed with a closing section that segues into the development. Yet while the 
return of the primary theme does eventually lead to the close of the exposition, this 
section does not just act like a typical closing section, that is to say, a section that 
merely brings a movement to a close. Schubert treats it instead as he did the second 
theme in his First Symphony, developing it further before leading it finally to the 
conclusion of the exposition.

In addition to closing material, the return of the Prometheus theme can also 
be considered a second secondary theme. By setting up the return of the primary 
theme—that is to say, ending the previous section on a half cadence—and placing it 
in the dominant, this section has the effects of a second theme. In contrast, the first 
second theme lacks any concrete transition, is in the subdominant key, and is placed 
between two development-like bridge sections. Had Schubert shortened the bridge 
and the first second theme, this return to the primary theme would have felt like the 
only second theme. While this use of sonata form is unusual when compared to his 
First and Third Symphonies, Schubert would use three themes in some of his later 
works, most notably in his unfinished string quartet, Quartettsatz. Quartettsatz 
develops this three-theme sonata form slightly differently, using three distinct 
themes, but, nonetheless, indicates that some of this early experimentation had a 
lasting effect on the mature Schubert.

The most unusual aspect of Schubert's exposition is that it can be treated as a 
mini-movement in itself. If one considers the primary theme—however short it may 
be—as the exposition, the bridge and the first second theme as the development 
section and the second secondary theme as the recapitulation, the exposition fits
into sonata form on its own, albeit with the wrong key for the recapitulation. When the exposition ends, one almost expects the entire movement to end, given the section’s duration and the semblance of sonata form within this section. The length of the exposition, 255 measures (excluding the introduction), sets it apart from the First, which has a 168-measure exposition, and the Third, the exposition of which is even shorter with 69 measures. By doubling the length of this section and including a repetition of the primary theme, Schubert stretches the formal boundaries of the conventional form, creating his own version of sonata form.

Mozart’s model, the basis for form in Schubert’s First Symphony, is missing from the exposition. While Beethoven does provide some structural inspiration, this use of form within form appears to be an example of Schubert’s own experimentation, as Coriolan, which is generally considered to be the structural inspiration for the Second, does not use such a structure. Essentially, Schubert has laid the foundations for innovation.

Schubert continues to experiment with tradition in the recapitulation. While the treatment of this section answers some questions created by the exposition, it brings up many others. Though he repeats the entire exposition, save a few adjustments, as one would expect in classical sonata form, Schubert once again shows his innovation through unexpected key areas. Rather than starting the

recapitulation with a double return, Schubert brings back the primary theme in the subdominant E-flat. There has been much speculation as to why Schubert chooses this key. According to Mosco Carner this strategy allows Schubert “to repeat the exposition wholesale a fourth up without having to modify the modulation of the bridge passage between first and second subjects.”\textsuperscript{53} Newbould takes issue with this analysis, arguing that “it was necessary in the recapitulation to replace a modulation up a fourth with one up a fifth”; Schubert thus had to modify the bridge in order to use it in the recapitulation.\textsuperscript{54} By withholding the double return until the repetition of the primary theme after the bridge and second theme, Schubert creates a stronger sense of resolution and arrival at the end of the movement. This satisfying double return is, perhaps, the reason for including a third key area in the exposition and for repeating the primary theme at the end of the exposition.

While recapitulations generally stay in the tonic, as in Schubert’s First Symphony, in the Second Schubert begins it in the subdominant, creating a connection to the first second theme. Instead of moving to the dominant, as he did in the exposition, however, he uses the bridge to return to the tonic, but not before featuring yet another subdominant, G minor. By using G minor instead of F minor—which would parallel the modulation in the exposition from B-flat major to C minor since F minor is minor ii of E-flat major—Schubert sets up the return to the tonic in the first second theme through the relative minor. Yet when the tonic returns, it does not feature the \textit{Prometheus} theme but the first second theme. This allows

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 67.
Schubert to clarify the role of the first second theme as an actual second theme rather than merely a new theme introduced in the bridge. The appearance of this theme also helps prolong the double return. This unexpected key and prolonged double return obscure the exact start of the recapitulation. In sonata forms, recapitulations are marked by the return of both the first theme and the tonic key, but measures 334 through 403 are an exact repetition of the first two themes of the exposition without the return of the tonic. Schubert had already used a staggered double return and an unusual recapitulation in his First Symphony and would continue this trend in his later works.

In contrast to his exposition, Schubert follows the model set by his First Symphony in the recapitulation of the Second Symphony. The recapitulation, although starting in the subdominant key, is a complete repetition of the exposition with a short coda to conclude the movement. Schubert uses the primary, Prometheus theme as the basis for his coda, placing thus one last reference to the Greek titan before the ending. Schubert, who ended his first three symphonies with an exact repetition of the exposition, did not view the recapitulation as a section where he could experiment. Considering that few composers would stay in the tonic and repeat the exposition exactly in the recapitulation, Schubert’s approach is more reminiscent of textbook form. Yet one must keep in mind that Schubert was only seventeen when he composed his Second Symphony and was thus still learning. In his later works, Schubert would become more adventurous in the recapitulation.

Innovation in the development once again plays with expectations. While the exposition and, by extension, the recapitulation feature highly developmental
passages with much modulation and fragmentation, the development of the Second Symphony itself begins with stability. In contrast to the First and Third Symphonies, which explored the second theme further in the development, in the Second

Schubert ignores the secondary theme and merely hints at the primary theme with a moving bass line. In place of these themes, he chooses to introduce an entirely new theme. As Newbould points out, this theme is suspiciously similar to the second subject in Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony (Symphony No. 41), as illustrated in the example below (see example 6).

Example 6. (a) Motive from Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony. (b) Motive from the development section of Schubert’s Second Symphony (both taken from Newbould, 64)

The motive marked (a) is taken from Mozart’s Jupiter and the motive marked (b) is the main motive of the new theme in Schubert’s Second. Newbould also points out the similarity between the placement of these motives, since both Mozart and

55 Example taken from Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 64.
Schubert use the themes in a contrapuntal context. It is clear that Mozart’s influence has a strong hold on the development section in Schubert’s symphony.

It might be significant to consider the mythological connection between Prometheus, the protagonist of Beethoven’s ballet music quoted by Schubert in his Second Symphony, and Jupiter, the character alluded to by Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony. Jupiter was the king of the gods in Roman mythology and his Greek counterpart, Zeus, was the god who punished Prometheus for his actions. In this case, it appears that to Schubert, Mozart becomes the most significant “god.” Schubert is breaking with the standards set by Mozart, but at the same time cannot free himself from Mozart’s influence. Like his treatment of the Prometheus theme, Schubert makes the reference to Jupiter fairly obvious.

Schubert’s reliance on Mozart in the development shows a deviation from the models set by the exposition. While it is undeniable that Mozart influenced Schubert’s use of form in the First Symphony, the exposition of the Second Symphony frees itself from Mozartean precedence and relies solely on Beethoven. To Schubert, Beethoven appears to have represented an ideal, a role model to build on in his symphonic works. The fact that the exposition of the Second Symphony is highly experimental and shows Beethovenian influence is no coincidence. In contrast, for Schubert Mozart embodied tradition. This juxtaposition of Mozart and Beethoven is unusual given the roles these two composers occupied in Schubert’s imagination. The development section provides an opportunity for composers to experiment and push the limits of their themes. One would expect Beethoven’s

56 Ibid., 64.
influence to appear in this section. Schubert defies expectations by turning to Mozart and therefore to tradition. It seems that at the time of his Second Symphony Schubert was still caught between his desire to break away from tradition and to follow conventional models. His later works will show an increased tendency towards experimentation, but in 1815 Schubert is still firmly rooted to tradition.

In the development, Schubert treats the new theme as he did the primary and first secondary themes. The structure of the theme resembles a period with developmental features, barely different from the periods used for the first and second themes. The development theme starts in D-flat major, the flat six of the dominant key achieved at the end of the exposition. After the theme ends on a D-flat major half cadence, Schubert begins the developmental process. As is typical of a development, the texture turns imitative, using the new theme in what Newbould calls “overlapping imitations.” Schubert begins building energy by highlighting the runs in the bass line with a forte marking, but confuses the direction shortly after by fragmenting these runs. He uses this fragmentation to modulate to E-flat major, a key that here will serve as the key of the recapitulation, preparing for the return of the primary theme in measure 334. Due to its relatively short length (only 66 measures) and new thematic material, the development feels like yet another episode in a rondo form, or, thinking in sonata terms, as a third secondary theme.

Although Schubert clearly relied on the principles of sonata form while writing the first movement of the Second Symphony, the movement also displays elements of a rondo form. By shortening the development significantly and

57 Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 64.
emphasizing the importance of the first second theme in the recapitulation, Schubert turns these sections into episodes the appear between the frequently returning primary theme. He carefully connects the sections with retransitions, devoting several measures of each “episode” and the “rondo theme” to setting up the next section. Despite the fact that a traditional rondo would return to the tonic for each repetition of the return, Schubert uses the tonic, subdominant and dominant keys for the various appearances of the primary theme. As can be seen in his treatment of sonata form, Schubert enjoyed stretching the limits of form, innovating it here by combining it with rondo principles, which would be more appropriate for a fourth movement. By melding these two forms, Schubert combines two contrary principles: that of the forward moving, teleological sonata, and the more static, cyclical rondo. The combination results in a static first movement that defies the progress of a typical first-movement sonata form. This tendency towards static forms, emphasized by Schubert’s tonal experimentation and his repetition of themes, would become highly important in Schubert’s later works. Essentially, it would become one of the defining characteristics of his music, as well as an obstacle in his quest to compose a grand symphony in the style of Beethoven.

Schubert’s innovative Second Symphony contrasted greatly with both his First and Third Symphonies and laid the groundwork for future works. While his Ninth and Unfinished Symphonies had no such extended expositions, they, like the Second, ventured outside the conventional expositions of classical sonata form. The flat submediant key area, which in the Second Symphony appeared in the development as the flat sixth of the dominant key, becomes a substitution for the
dominant key in Symphony No. 4 and other works. Some more conventional aspects of the first three symphonies, such as the treatment of the development and influence of classical models, would also remain in Schubert’s later works.

Development of the second, rather than the first theme in the First and the Third Symphonies will become a typical feature of Schubert’s sonata forms. The prominent influence of Mozart and Beethoven would also remain critical in his later symphonies, although Beethoven would become more significant as Schubert’s ideal, while Mozart’s influence would slowly fade with the notable exception of the Fifth Symphony (which I discuss in the following chapter).

Yet as these early symphonies show Schubert stays captive of his musical “gods,” he also began to understand how to make his own voice heard. Beethoven and Mozart helped provide the models, but Schubert would eventually grow and develop his own style. The student works—the first three symphonies—that lay the groundwork for Schubert’s later innovations would give way to the transitional works, leading to the completion of Schubert’s symphonic goal: to write a “truly Beethovenian ‘grand symphony.’”

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CHAPTER TWO

The Transitional Symphonies

Following the completion of his first three symphonies, Schubert was faced with the challenge of composing something different. The first three symphonies, while somewhat experimental in structure, generally relied on Classical models of tonal polarity. Even the Second Symphony, which was by far the most unusual of the three in terms of sonata form, eventually followed the conventional tonal trajectory of moving from tonic to dominant and back. In the Fourth Symphony Schubert decided to take two new approaches. The first was to compose the piece in C minor, which produced his first symphony in a minor key. The second was to forgo the Classical model of tonic-dominant polarity in favor of exploring new key relationships, which enabled him to develop a Romantic approach to sonata form. This new approach to keys, however, does not mean that Schubert had entirely separated himself from Classical influence: his themes remained indebted to works by Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven. The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Symphonies were thus Schubert’s transitional works, representing his attempts to create a Romantic symphony yet retaining enough from Classical works to keep him from fully realizing this goal. In the Fifth Schubert gives up the Beethovenian model in favor of Mozart, while in the Sixth he appeals to the Viennese public by using Rossini Overtures as a model. Although both the Fifth and Sixth show signs of the struggle between Romantic and
Classical idioms, it is the Fourth that best embodies this period in Schubert’s symphonic works.

Building off the foundation in form laid by his first three Symphonies, in the Fourth Schubert extensively explores new relationships between structural keys. His use of C minor connects the Fourth to several canonical works, most notably to Beethoven’s Fifth (1808), as well as to Haydn’s Creation (1798) and Mozart’s “Dissonance Quartet,” K. 465 (1785). Despite these ties to the past, the tonal structure of the symphony reflects a Romantic attitude. In his previous symphonies Schubert experimented with some symmetrical key relationships, namely, as in his Second, beginning the recapitulation in the subdominant in order to mirror the modulation to the dominant in the exposition. In the Fourth Symphony he takes this sense of symmetry a step farther by exploring third relationships and key cycles. Because of such an unconventional use of keys, a feature common in several of his instrumental pieces, several scholars, such as Rose Subotnik and Susan McClary have characterized Schubert’s use of tonality as “the arbitrariness of free choice” and drifting “freely through enharmonic and oblique modulations.” In contrast to these views, Richard Cohn suggests that Schubert developed a systematic model of third relationships. Cohn uses the poetic image of a “star cluster” to describe these

59 "Whereas the premises of a high classical composition were inseparable from a generally accessible sense of the infinitely variable sign system underlying them, the premises of a work by Schubert in his later years or by Berlioz might shrink to a combination of intervals and progressions implicitly evoking little more generalizable than a sense of the peculiarity, or indeed, the arbitrariness of free choice.” Rose Subotnik, Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 184. “The second movement of the ‘Unfinished’ appears to drift freely through enharmonic and oblique modulations, rather than establishing a clear tonic and pursuing a dynamic sequence of modulations.” Susan McClary, “Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert’s Music,” in Queering the Pitch, ed. Philip Brett et. al. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 223.
relationships, emphasizing that Schubert disregards the tonic-centered “solar system” of Classical sonata form in favor of “a network of elements and relations, none of which hold prior privileged status.” Schubert’s preference for a model based on a relationship of thirds is evident in the Fourth because it is the first time in a symphony that Schubert uses the flat sixth (A-flat Major) as the key for his second theme area. In this world of Romantic harmony, sonata form does not carry the same importance as it had in the previous three symphonies. Although one can easily find the exposition, development, and recapitulation, it is difficult to feel the sense of progress that normally drives a sonata because the peculiar key relationships create a static first movement that lacks the tonal polarity of Classical sonata form.

Despite the early date of the Fourth (Schubert composed it less than a year after his Third), the symphony demonstrates Schubert’s maturing approach to sonata form. Compared to the Second, the Fourth shows more restraint within the form—recall, for instance, the overly long secondary theme area in the Second Symphony. In terms of key relations, however, the Fourth shows less restraint. Conventional tonal polarity, in which James Webster sees an important feature of the eighteenth-century sonata form, gives way here to the tonal instability of the themes. This tonal instability, as Webster writes, weakened “the structural significance of the exposition as a large-scale half-cadence moving to the

dominant.”^{61} By removing the dominant, Schubert indeed completely eliminates any sense of a “large scale half cadence.” In contrast to the exposition of the Second Symphony, which eventually settles in the dominant after a lengthy section in the subdominant, the only section of the exposition of the Fourth that features the dominant is the three-measure retransition before the repeat (see example 1).^{62}

Example 1. Schubert, Symphony no. 4, D 417, first movement, mm. 132-135

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61 James Webster, “Schubert’s Sonata Form and Brahms’s First Maturity,” *19th-Century Music* 2, no. 1 (July 1, 1978): 18.

In fact, in the entire first movement the dominant appears only at the beginning of the recapitulation. Even then it is in minor mode, a key that eliminates the leading tone and thus cannot act as an area of polarization. This avoidance of the dominant becomes prominent in several of Schubert’s later works, leading Webster to conclude that Schubert had an “aversion to the dominant.”

As opposed to the introductions of Schubert’s first three symphonies, which, despite their occasional harmonic exploration, remained generally short and formulaic, the introduction to the Fourth is more integrated into the movement as a whole and prepares the listener for the unusual key areas that will occur later on. In the first ten measures of the Fourth, Schubert takes the listener to the most remote key possible: G-flat major, a tritone away from the home key of C minor (see example 2).
Example 2. The first ten measures of Schubert’s Fourth Symphony

The appearance of this G-flat major cadence creates a sense of tonal instability, especially because it is the first strong cadence of the movement. This moment is fleeting though, as the introduction quickly moves via B-flat minor to G minor, an unusual progression that exacerbates the tonal instability of the introduction. Rather than moving to the conventional replacement of the dominant key, the relative major, Schubert instead uses the dominant minor, which deprives the
listener of a satisfying dominant seventh prior to the primary theme. The only appearance of a B-natural, the leading tone, is played pianissimo by the second oboe on the last beat of the introduction. Like the modal ambiguity caused by G minor, this lack of a firm dominant-seventh chord serves as a preview of what is to come in the remainder of the movement.

However unconventional in its tonal plan, the introduction is built on the model of various familiar pieces that are also in C-minor. Unlike the Prometheus theme from the Second Symphony, Schubert does not quote one particular work but seems to have been inspired by several different compositions. Brian Newbould asserts that the introduction theme draws inspiration from Haydn’s Creation.65 Susan Wollenberg adds Mozart’s “Dissonance” Quartet as an additional influence, detectable both in Haydn’s Creation and Schubert’s Fourth Symphony (see example 3).66


As can be seen above, all three introductions feature a fairly static baseline with a staggered, high-register melody. As he had in all of his early symphonies, Schubert begins the introduction with an emphatic expression of the tonic, a feature that also
appears in “Chaos.” These references do not carry the same importance as the *Prometheus* theme in the Second Symphony but nonetheless remain relevant within the introduction. Charles Rosen argues that Schubert, in comparison to Beethoven, struggled with integrating references into his own works. Whereas Beethoven, Rosen writes, “adapted his sources to more dramatic purpose,” heightening their effect, making them more powerful and increasing their range, Schubert, when the source was relevant for him, namely it was not “a kind of involuntary memory, an exterior stimulus to his creative imagination,” failed to integrate them fully into his works.  

In the introduction, the sources might not be as relevant as in the case of his quoting *Prometheus* in the Second Symphony, yet the obvious ties to Classical works restrain Schubert in his process of developing his own symphonic voice.

Perhaps the primary theme is most telling of Schubert’s still maturing sense of symphonic composition. The theme itself betrays Beethoven’s influence, recalling the second theme of his Sonata “Pathétique” and the primary theme of his String Quartet No. 4 (see example 4).  

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Example 4a-c. Primary Theme from Schubert’s Fourth Symphony, the second theme from Beethoven’s “Sonata Pathétique” and the first theme from Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 4."}

Example 4a. Schubert’s Symphony No. 4

![Schubert's Symphony No. 4](image)

4b. Beethoven’s Sonata “Pathétique”

![Beethoven's Sonata “Pathétique”](image)

4c. Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 4

![Beethoven's String Quartet No. 4](image)

As can be seen from these examples, all three pieces share a common key, C minor, and also some melodic features. The three-note anacrusis to the primary theme in the Fourth Symphony is similar to the three-note anacrusis in the second theme of the Sonata “Pathetique,” as can be seen in the third measure of example 4b. The leap followed by a repeated note of arrival, as is seen in the first two beats of the primary theme of the Fourth is similar to the leaping figures in the primary theme of the String Quartet, which begin in the fifth measure of example 4c. It might be that Schubert’s choice of setting the primary theme solely in the strings reflects his models, as these two works are solo and chamber pieces. Furthermore, both of these Beethoven works are considered “eighteenth-century” Beethoven, tying Schubert further to Classical works.70

Schubert’s choice of key itself might reflect a Classical mindset. He sets his symphony in C minor, a key described by Francesco Galeazzi as “the tragic key, suitable for expressing great misfortunes like the deaths of Heroes (morti di Eroi),”71 and, most notably, the key Beethoven used in his Fifth Symphony and in the second movement of his Third. Yet Schubert’s Fourth contains little of the tragic sentiment so prevalent in Beethoven’s Fifth and other C-minor pieces. Though the Symphony is entitled “Tragische,” or Tragic, Schubert did not add the title until long after its composition.72 Maurice Brown suggests that Schubert may have intended the title to be ironic, a reference to a poor performance of the Fourth by a private orchestral

70 Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 93.
72 Newbould, Schubert and the Symphony, 90.
society. Brown bases this suggestion on Schubert’s youthful and often ironic use of titles in his earlier works. For example, a manuscript of the *Funeral Music*, D. 79 from Schubert’s school days, entitled “Franz Schuberts Begräbnis-Feier” (Franz Schubert’s Funeral), was intended to portray Schubert’s “demise as a scholar at the Vienna Konvikt” rather than Schubert’s actual death. Other scholars, such as Newbould, suggest that Schubert felt pressure to characterize his C-minor Symphony as a *Sturm und Drang* work due to classical norms, and thus the connections between Schubert’s choice of key and canonical works in that key imply a turn to the past. Even Brown acknowledges the expectation created by the title, calling it “a step in the direction of Beethoven.” Of all the C-minor works Schubert might have had in mind, it is indeed Beethoven’s Fifth that carries the heaviest associations with the past and proves most difficult to avoid as a comparison.

In making the association between Schubert’s Fourth Symphony and Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, one risks analyzing Schubert’s instrumental works using Beethoven as a model. As Webster argues, the tendency to interpret Schubert’s preference toward symmetry “as a symptom of Schubert’s inability to master the implications of his novel procedures for the large instrumental forms” implies the critic’s explicit or implicit acceptance of Beethoven as a norm.

Both Beethoven and Schubert built on the Classical model of sonata form, but each

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73 Maurice Brown, *Schubert Symphonies*, BBC Music Guide (BBC: London, 1970), 18. Brown writes that the Fourth was composed after Schubert’s schooling days, and thus could not be performed by a school orchestra. Schubert may have had a private orchestra perform it, but there is no record of a public concert in these years.
74 Ibid., 18.
75 Newbould, *Schubert and the Symphony*, 90.
77 Webster, “Schubert’s Sonata Form and Brahms’s First Maturity,” 20.
developed it in a different way. Carl Dahlhaus labels these contrasting approaches to sonata form “dramatic-dialectic” for Beethoven and “lyric-epic” for Schubert. This distinction places the two composers on opposite ends of sonata-form spectrum: Beethoven caring about progress and reaching a set destination whereas Schubert “meandering” around the theme, exploring different key relationships with little thought on progress. In his description of the first movement of Schubert’s G-Major String Quartet, Dahlhaus suggests that Schubert struggled within the confines of sonata form to the extent that parts of his works break off unnaturally in an effort to stay within Classical sonata norms. Schubert adheres to sonata form principles enough that one can recognize the basic elements of the form, but places more emphasis on principles foreign to the Beethovenian model. Dahlhaus’s Beethovenian bias becomes apparent when he argues that Beethoven’s sonata principles followed the “logic of musical discourse,” in other words that Beethovenian sonata form takes the most rational approach for its time period. Although biased, Dahlhaus’s comparison serves as a useful outline of the different approaches to form in Schubert’s Fourth and Beethoven’s Fifth.

The first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth focuses on progress. Each section pushes, both harmonically and melodically, towards resolution. E.T.A. Hoffmann sees in Beethoven’s music awe, fear, terror, and pain as tools to awaken “infinite

79 Ibid., 2.
80 Ibid., 1.
81 Ibid., 7.
yearning,” identifying these features as the essence of Romanticism. This feeling of yearning directly relates to Beethoven’s emphasis on progress and tonal polarity. After all, one cannot fully express yearning without the leading tone giving a promise of arrival. Beethoven uses conventional key areas for a minor symphony, moving from the tonic (C minor) to the relative major (E-flat major) in the exposition, exploring several key areas, such as F minor and G minor in the development, and featuring a double return at the beginning of the recapitulation before repeating the second theme in C major and finally ending with a C minor coda. The harmonic exploration so prevalent in Schubert’s Fourth is noticeably absent. In its place, Beethoven focuses on motivic development. His meticulous organization becomes most important when considering motivic development, as Hoffmann writes, “one would think that such ingredients [two and three bar phrases] could result only in something disjointed and hard to follow, but on the contrary it is precisely this overall pattern, and the constant repetition of short phrases and single chords, which maintains the spirit in a state of ineffable yearning.” This motivic development, which Webster contrasts with tonal polarity and which he identifies as a sign of Romanticism, places Beethoven’s Fifth in the “Romantic” category of sonata form. Yet although one can see certain aspects of Beethoven Fifth as Romantic, Beethoven’s handling of form is quite different from Schubert’s. For Schubert Beethoven’s Fifth is thus both a model to idolize and to overcome.

83 Ibid., 244.
In contrast to Beethovenian motivic development, Schubert focuses on harmonic development, exploring key relationships and, as Dahlhaus argues, illuminating the theme from “different sides.” Several scholars view key relationships in Schubert’s music as disorganized in comparison to the sonata principles underlying Classical works and Beethoven’s symphonies. Emphasizing the increasing sense of individuality apparent in Romantic composers, Subotnik argues that, in these works, the dual structure so prevalent in Classical works gave way to new experimentation following Beethoven. These composers’ exploration allowed them to develop a firm sense of individuality and separate themselves from Classical tradition. Subotnik includes Schubert in this group and argues that his experimentation, in particular in his later works, took predictable structures from Classical tradition but broke them down into merely a combination of intervals and progressions, turning convention into something “peculiar” and “arbitrary.”

McClary also views Schubert’s use of tonality as random, characterizing his exploration of key relationships as “drifting.” Instead of attributing his unusual use of keys to Romantic ideology, McClary sees both Schubert’s use of keys and his lyricism in sonata form as expressions of his supposed homosexuality. Even before McClary, Maynard Solomon came to the conclusion that Schubert was homosexual. He based this hypothesis on Schubert’s bachelorhood, the lack of records indicating

85 Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 183.
86 Ibid., 184.
any affairs with women, and his all-male group of friends.\textsuperscript{88} McClary pushes Solomon’s hypothesis further by suggesting that Schubert’s homosexuality influenced his compositions. Assuming that Schubert was homosexual, McClary asserts that his deviance in sonata form was not only a separation from Classical tradition but also an attempt to reject heterosexual norms in a society that did not accept his true identity.\textsuperscript{89} In McClary’s view, Schubert’s “drifting” thus becomes an expression of Schubert’s true feelings, an attempt to portray his alienation from society.\textsuperscript{90} While sociologically relevant, both arguments overlook an important feature in several of Schubert’s works: the logic of key relationships, organized around the flat sixth.

The Fourth Symphony relies heavily on relationships by flat sixth, not only in Schubert’s choice to place the second theme in A-flat major, the flat sixth of C minor, but also in a cycle he uses at the end of the exposition (see example 5).\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 223.
Example 5. The second theme and closing of Schubert’s Symphony No. 4
Ex 5 cont.
Ex. 5 cont.
Ex. 5 cont.
As can be seen at the beginning in the sixth measure of example 5, Schubert ends the bridge on an A-flat major cadence and immediately begins the second theme in A-flat major. When the second theme lands on a resolute A-flat major cadence, which can be seen in measure 5 on the second page of example 5, Schubert begins to modulate. Had he used tonic-dominant relationships, the new section would arrive on E-flat major, the dominant of A-flat major and the relative major of C minor, in other words the second theme would follow the Classical model (tonic to relative major). Instead, Schubert modulates to E major, a seemingly unrelated key to both the tonic, C minor, and the flat sixth, A-flat major. Yet when one changes the spelling to the enharmonic F-flat, which is the flat sixth of A-flat, it becomes clear that Schubert based this modulation on a relationship of thirds. This relationship becomes cyclical when the second theme modulates from E major to C major, returning thus to the tonic. For a movement in sonata form this is extremely unconventional because it undermines the tonal polarity between the tonic and the relative major. But in the cycle that Schubert has laid out, C major is the logical next step due to its flat-sixth relationship to E major. The exposition ends on A-flat major, completing the cycle started by the second theme. Whereas Schubert’s key choices may seem random for Subotnik and McClary, such a prevalence of third relationships indicates that Schubert used a cyclical tonal model as the basis for the exposition and that his choice of keys was well thought-out, organized, and based on a specific model as opposed to being a random subjective choice.

This cyclical tonal model becomes extremely prevalent in Schubert’s later works, leading Richard Cohn to dub it the “Hexatonic model.” Cohn considers this
model to be distinct from the traditional diatonic system and offers it as an alternative to what Subotnik and McClary consider “absoluteness, arbitrariness, or aimlessness.” Cohn argues that his cycle fits well into Schubert’s works in sonata form because Schubertian harmony de-emphasizes diatonic relationships and emphasizes voice-leading efficiency, as is evidenced by Schubert’s use of modal mixture, his tendency to use third relationships, his modulation through the enharmonic seam, and his division of the octave into equal parts. Using these traits as a guide, Cohn divides the twelve tones into four cycles based, and names each for a different geographical direction (see example 6).

Example 6. Cohn’s Map of triads based on voice-leading efficiency

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92 Cohn, “As Wonderful as Star Clusters,” 214.
93 Ibid., 215.
94 Ibid., 216.
Whereas Cohn does not specify why he gives each cycle a geographic designation, merely writing that it is for heuristic purposes, he seems to follow the circle of fifths, as C, in the Northern cycle, is directly across from its tritone, F-sharp, in the Southern cycle. Furthermore, A, which is equidistant from C and F-sharp, is placed in the Eastern cycle, across from E-flat in the Western cycle. The cycles can also interact in a relationship by fifths and through other relationships, such as relative major or minor or even through the Neapolitan (see example 7).  

Example 7. Cohn’s Interaction among the four cycles

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95 Ibid., 217.
The cycle in the exposition of the Fourth fits into Cohn’s “Northern” cycle and remains in this cycle for its duration. As opposed to the random, subjective choice of keys described by Subotnik and McClary, a hexatonic model shows Schubert’s organized approach to harmony. Cohn’s cycles appear in two other areas of the first movement and use both tonic-dominant and Neapolitan relations to arrive to Schubert’s desired key. The first instance occurs in the second part of the introduction (see example 8).96

Example 8. The second half of the introduction from Schubert’s Fourth Symphony

Following the jarring G-flat major cadence, the introduction moves to B-flat minor, the next step on Cohn’s “Southern” cycle. From B-flat minor, Schubert modulates briefly to D major, the third and final key of the Southern cycle, and uses that key as a dominant to his intended destination, G minor.

The other appearance of a cycle occurs in the recapitulation. Schubert never uses a double return but instead begins the recapitulation in G minor, the dominant minor. From there he uses the bridge to modulate to E-flat major for the repetition of the second theme. This E-flat major, which we would expect to appear in the exposition and not the recapitulation, undermines once again any sense of tonal polarity. Yet moving to E-flat major from G minor fits into Cohn’s Western cycle. This shows that Schubert was more focused on exploring key relationships than creating a tonally progressing first movement. From the E-flat major second theme, Schubert does not finish the Western cycle he has set up but moves to E major, the enharmonic spelling of F-flat, which is the Neapolitan of E-flat. With this arrival, Schubert is able to cycle the movement back to C, albeit C major instead of minor.

These hexatonic models provide a solid basis for Schubertian harmony. Although Cohn has based his system on Schubert’s B-flat Major Piano Sonata, D. 290, which was composed in 1828, long after he composed the Fourth Symphony (April 1816), the presence of the hexatonic models in the Fourth shows that Schubert was thinking about key relationships from an early age. The hexatonic models provide a new method of analysis, separate from the Beethovenian structures that are so often used when analyzing Schubert. Just as Dahlhaus emphasized the

97 Cohn, “As Wonderful as Star Clusters,” 218.
“dramatic-dialectic” and “lyric-epic” distinction between Beethoven and Schubert, the hexatonic model can be considered a contrast from the diatonic progress-oriented model used by Beethoven. For once, Schubert can be analyzed on his own terms.

Schubert’s development of a new tonal model demonstrates both the progress he had made since his first three symphonies and the groundwork for his later works. In a world dominated by the grandiose, teleological Beethovenian model, Schubert was able to create his own style of sonata form that exemplified what Dahlhaus dubbed “lyric-epic” form. Although still considered one of his student works, the Fourth thus began a process of tonal exploration that set the stage for Schubert’s later works.98 The three-key exposition from the Second and the third-related cycles from the Fourth become the models for the “Great” Symphony, which Schubert considered “a truly Beethovenian ‘grand symphony.’”99

98 Richard Taruskin Oxford History of Western Music, vol. 3, 144.
99 Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE

Mature Works

Next to the “Unfinished,” the “Great” Symphony is Schubert’s best-known symphonic work.¹⁰⁰ Until the mid-twentieth century, the “Great” was one of only two Schubert symphonies performed regularly and thus, for a long period of time, it gave the public the only insight into Schubert’s symphonic writing.¹⁰¹ The “Great” is heavily indebted to Schubert’s experimentation in the first six symphonies, in particular with regards to his treatment of Romantic harmonies within Classical models. Brian Newbould contrasts the “Great” Symphony, which he calls “the last symphony by a great Classical symphonist,” with the “Unfinished” Symphony, which he considers Romantic. What gets lost in such a contrast, however, is the continuing presence of Beethoven as a model, as well as the common tonal structure based on third relationships. Though in the “Great” Schubert does reinstate some of the tonal polarity necessary to Classical sonata form, he only arrives on the dominant in the closing material of the exposition, after a long tonal cycle based on a relationship of thirds. Rather than a Classical symphony, the “Great” represents a merging of Schubert’s symphonic traits as established by his previous six symphonies—tonal exploration and Beethovenian influences—with an abandonment of the Classical

¹⁰⁰ The “Great” Symphony is referred to as the Seventh in German-language and as the Ninth in English-language scholarship. In order to avoid confusion, I will call it the “Great” in this chapter.
references so important in his earlier works. Schubert thus achieves his goal of composing a symphony that incorporates a sense of Beethovenian progress with his own symphonic vision.

It is impossible to ignore Beethoven when talking about symphonies composed in the nineteenth century. Though Schubert did develop sonata form in a different manner than Beethoven, in “lyric-epic” form as opposed to “dramatic-dialectic,” his first six symphonies show internal struggle on how to incorporate Beethovenian influences without compromising his own style. For example, though the Second Symphony has an unusual structure and some key exploration, Schubert centers it around the melody taken from Beethoven’s *Prometheus*. The *Prometheus* theme engulfs the Second, overshadowing Schubert’s own melodies. Furthermore, Schubert uses an exposition with three key areas (as opposed to the conventional two), a technique that, according to James Webster, was inspired by Beethoven’s *Coriolan* overture. Beethoven overwhelms the Second Symphony to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish which elements are pure Schubert and which are taken from Beethoven. Thus, although Schubert does begin to separate his symphony from Classical sonata form, he is unable to overcome Beethoven’s influence.

In a similar vein, the Fourth Symphony begins to display more of Schubert’s “lyric-epic” style, but the references to Beethoven remain, both in the theme and in

the implications of choosing C-minor as the tonic key. Schubert again tries to reconcile the two styles but becomes too entrenched in historical references to balance the two. In the first six symphonies, Beethoven represented the elusive ideal: a continued presence in Schubert’s symphonies that he was unable to match in his own style. It was probably because in the “Great” he was able to meld these styles and thus achieve the ideal that Schubert considered it to be his “greatest composition.”  

The “Great” Symphony is the only completed symphony of Schubert’s mature period, namely the only symphony he completed after 1818. Between 1813 and 1818, in a period generally considered to be Schubert’s student years, he had composed roughly one complete symphony a year; after 1818 he did not complete a symphony until the “Great” in 1826. For Schubert, the distinction between these two periods of symphonic writing was that of student works building on a Classical model versus mature works.  

Until recently, there was a fierce debate about the date of the “Great.” Several of Schubert’s friends, among them Joseph von Spaun, Moritz von Schwind, and Schubert’s brother, Ferdinand, claimed that Schubert began a symphony in 1825 while on holiday in Gmunden and Gastein in Northern Austria. This symphony is now known to be the “Great,” but was not referred to specifically as such in the writings of Schubert’s friends, leading some scholars, most notably George Grove, to

104 John Reed, Schubert: The Final Years (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 80.
106 Reed, Schubert: The Final Years, 72.
speculate that this was an entirely different work. Adding to this uncertainty as to what symphony was composed in Gmunden and Gastein, the manuscript of the “Great” has “March 1828” written on the first page, which is generally where Schubert would write the date of the beginning of a work. Drawing on these facts and the faulty assumption that the Vienna Music Society, the group for which Schubert wrote the “Great,” did not possess the score until after 1838, Grove came to the conclusion that Schubert composed a different symphony in 1825, which he dubbed the “Gastein” Symphony, and that the “Great” was not written until 1828.107 This theory has largely been disproven since, based on records indicating that Schubert gave the “Great” to the Vienna Music Society in 1826, receiving 100 florins in return,108 and the assumption that March 1828 corresponds to the date when Schubert began to write a fair copy of the already completed work.109 While having a debate over dates may seem trivial, it can be justified considering the difference between Schubert’s mindset in these two periods. In 1825, Schubert, due to illness, devoted nearly all of his time to composition, to the extent that a friend complained: “If you go to see him during the day, he says, ‘Hello, how are you?—Good’ and goes on writing.”110 In 1828, compositional work intensified, spurred by a sense of urgency, undoubtedly affected by his worsening illness, which would lead to his

107 Ibid., 86.
108 Ibid., 79.
death in November of the same year.\textsuperscript{111} The “Great” was Schubert’s crowning symphonic achievement, but it was not his swan song.

The “Great” was the first completed symphony that Schubert composed with a professional orchestra in mind—in this case the Vienna Music Society—as opposed to just for himself and his friends. Indeed, Leopold von Sonnleithner, a close friend of Schubert’s and a member of the Vienna Music Society, wrote that “Schubert composed mostly as a the result of an inner urge or to please friends, without any questions of a fee. Only extremely seldom did he receive (except from his publisher) a gift for a dedication.”\textsuperscript{112} In his student days, as David Schroeder describes, Schubert had access to a group of friends who were willing to perform his first six symphonies, albeit in a private setting. In these years he was unable to attract the attention of a professional orchestra due to his reputation as a composer of songs.\textsuperscript{113} Schroeder furthermore cites the disbandment of Schubert’s circle of friends shortly after the completion of his Sixth Symphony (1818) as a turning point in the composer’s career, arguing that this loss of a private orchestra prompted Schubert to create a symphony on a grander scale.\textsuperscript{114} For the first time, Schubert thus composed a work that needed to appeal to the larger public, and was not appropriate for the extreme experimentation evident in his earlier symphonies.

While his previous symphonic works had developed purely in his private circle,

\textsuperscript{112} Reed, \textit{Schubert: The Final Years}, 79.
\textsuperscript{113} David Schroeder, \textit{Our Schubert: His Enduring Legacy} (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 127 and John Reed, \textit{Schubert: The Final Years}, 80.
\textsuperscript{114} Schroeder, \textit{Our Schubert: His Enduring Legacy}, 127.
Schubert was pressured in the “Great” to compose a symphony that represented himself but at the same time fit some of the norms of early nineteenth century.

Beethoven’s symphonic legacy loomed over Schubert during the composition of all of his works. Although it might sound contradictory, of Schubert’s symphonies the “Great” is most indebted to Beethoven’s influence, yet at the same time most emblematic of Schubert’s own style. It is no coincidence that Schubert began composing the “Great” in 1825, shortly after the premiere of Beethoven’s Ninth. The mass appeal of Beethoven’s symphonies led Schubert to adopt some of Beethoven’s techniques. Thus, the distinction between Schubert’s “lyric-epic” and Beethoven’s “dramatic-dialectic” styles, as described by Carl Dahlhaus, becomes blurred in the “Great,” in the sense that Schubert merges Beethoven’s sense of thematic progress with his own tonal exploration by thirds.\textsuperscript{115}

One example of Schubert’s new attitude towards sonata form is the introduction to his “Great” Symphony. Instead of the short, formulaic introductions of the first three symphonies or the tonally ambiguous introduction he used in the Fourth, Schubert’s introduction to the “Great” is tonally stable and features a significant theme that nearly takes the place of the primary theme. He replaces the emphatic statement of the tonic at the beginning, which he had used in the first six symphonies, with a quiet horn theme (see example 1).\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Dahlhaus, “Sonata Form in Schubert”, 1.
Example 1. Horn theme from the introduction of the “Great” Symphony

The use of common time and the dotted rhythms indicate a slow march, which, although marked *piano*, eventually fading to *pianissimo*, creates a sense of progress as one would expect in Beethoven’s forward moving symphonic procedures. Yet Schubert does not use techniques, whether thematically, structurally, or harmonically, that would necessarily encourage progress. First, the phrase structure of the theme lacks the symmetry of an eight-bar melody. Rather than dividing the theme symmetrically (4+4), Schubert articulates it as 2+1+2+1+2 with the one-measure motives stalling the expected progress. Schubert highlights this articulation later in the introduction by changing the color, giving the two-measure motives to the strings and the one-measure motives to the woodwinds. What once seemed to be a progressing march theme, upon closer inspection proves to be static.

Second, Schubert’s placement of the march theme does not fit into a Beethovenian model. Such a march would generally act as a primary theme, starting slowly then building momentum to take the exposition into the second-theme area. Instead, Schubert traps the theme in a static theme and variations cycle centered on the tonic, an extremely unusual procedure for an introduction. This use of a static structural principle inside the progress-oriented sonata form was not a new
technique for Schubert, but an expansion of his experimentation in the Second
Symphony. Recall the rondo principle present in the first movement of the Second, a
structure centered on the *Prometheus* theme with an excessively long second theme
area that first appeared in the subdominant before arriving to the dominant.
Whereas in the Second Schubert's unconventional treatment of sonata form lacked a
sense of restraint and balance, in the “Great” we find balance despite the formal
ambiguity. This sense of balance derives from the reinterpretation of the tonally
stable introduction as a quasi-primary theme area and the actual primary theme as
a bridge. This new ability to play within form without losing a sense of balance
shows Schubert’s maturing approach to sonata form.

Finally, though the sense of progress implied by the use of a march theme
suggests a Beethovenian model, the tonal map of the introduction is purely
Schubertian. The introduction begins in the tonic C major and moves briefly to E
minor, the relative minor of the dominant. While this modulation may seem unusual,
Schubert previously used it in his Fourth Symphony as part of a cycle based on third
relationships, which Richard Cohn has dubbed a “Northern” cycle (C-A-flat-E).117
Indeed, Schubert completes the cycle in the introduction by arriving at A-flat major
twenty-five measures later as a part of an episode-like section within his theme and
variations. A similar cycle appears also in the introduction to the Fourth Symphony,
but it is by no means as tonally stable as the cycle in the “Great.” Significantly, in the
“Great” Schubert centers the cycle around the tonic, returning repeatedly to the

117 Richard L. Cohn, “As Wonderful as Star Clusters: Instruments for Gazing at Tonality in Schubert,”
*19th-Century Music* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 216.
home key of C major during the introduction. Though the introduction eventually settles on an extended dominant pedal that will lead to the primary theme, it does so only after returning to the tonic for the third time, defying expectations of an introduction to wander, both thematically and tonally.

Schubert’s use of sonata form in the “Great” both builds off of experiments in his first six symphonies and tries new approaches. The structural ambiguity does not end at the introduction but continues through the whole movement. As in his previous six symphonies, one can generally identify the introduction, exposition, development, and recapitulation, but Schubert blurs the lines between the sections in the “Great.” These unusual constructional features are part of what Maurice Brown calls Schubert’s “philosophy of sonata-form,” namely how Schubert interprets sonata form after Beethoven. Schubert captures Beethoven’s sense of progress and forward motion in his themes, yet traps them within his own static cycles, as can be seen in the introduction. This reconciliation of styles demonstrates Schubert’s forward-thinking attitude: drawing on the legacy of Beethoven while innovating sonata form.

The introduction, which could almost act as a movement itself, eventually gives way to what in traditional sonata terms would be considered the primary theme. Yet unlike the theme-centered introduction, the primary theme area is fairly fragmented, acting more as a transition than a theme (see example 2).

118 Brown, Schubert Symphonies, 49.
As can be seen in example 2, Schubert divides the phrase into two-measure modules with alternating call and response patterns between the strings and the winds. The energetic transition from the introduction contributes to a sense of progress in the primary theme, giving it the feel of a bridge. Yet unlike a bridge, the primary theme is tonally static, as it should be, and even on a harmonic level it is fairly unadventurous, moving from I to V and then back to I. Like the introduction, the primary theme gives the sense of progress without actually moving. Coming after such a theme-based introduction complicates the role of the primary theme. In
terms of traditional sonata form, the theme Schubert presents at the *Allegro, ma non troppo* must be the primary theme. Yet it is the thematic significance and tonal stability of the slow introduction that suggests “primary theme,” while the fragmented, forward-moving *Allegro* theme indicates “transition.” This structural ambiguity seems to be an expansion of the structural experimentation in the Second Symphony. Both symphonies play with the listeners’ expectations: the Second with its dramatic pause in the bridge that would generally indicate the arrival of the second theme area but instead continues with the bridge, and the “Great” with its unclear division between the introduction and primary theme. Schubert even uses a similar tonal map in both works. The Second lands on the subdominant at the beginning of the second theme and eventually moves to the dominant, though by doing so interrupts the sense of progress so necessary to Classical sonata form. The “Great” also passes through the subdominant, albeit briefly, and uses a cycle based on a relationship of thirds to arrive at the dominant. On a tonal level, the Beethovenian sense of progress remains somewhat present in the “Great,” meaning that Schubert chooses to end the exposition on the dominant as opposed to the subdominant (as he does in the Fourth Symphony). Yet at the same time Schubert undermines the progress by making the movement static in every other sense. Thus, Schubert creates a grand symphony in the style of Beethoven without surrendering completely to a Beethovenian sense of progress.
The second theme consists of a melody that Susan Wollenberg has described as “exotic confected ‘orientalism’” (see example 3).¹²⁰

**Example 3. The second theme area from Schubert’s “Great” Symphony**¹²¹

Wollenberg must have had in mind Schubert’s choice of instrumentation, namely his setting of the melody in the oboe and bassoon, as well as the trills beginning in the seventh measure of the theme. This more exotic theme contrasts with the dramatic tone of the primary theme area and bridge, bringing to mind the Turkish March

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from Beethoven’s Ninth, not so much as a quotation or reference but as a potential model for this section. Schubert increases the unusualness of this theme by setting it in E minor, the relative minor of the dominant. This move from C major to E minor repeats the modulation from C major to E minor in the beginning of the introduction and reinforces Schubert’s reliance on thirds. As the second theme area moves into a more developmental area, Schubert relies yet again on the tonal progression we have encountered in the introduction, in which he returned to the tonic shortly after modulating to E minor. Here Schubert does not return to the tonic, but instead features several dominant-seventh chords that threaten to land on C major (see example 4).122

Example 4a-b. Cadences landing on the dominant seventh of C major in measures 186-8 of Schubert’s “Great” Symphony.

122 Ibid., (128) 12.
Emphatic dominants identical to these two also appear in mm. 156-58. Both sets of chords follow sections that build energy, giving the repeated statements of the dominant-sevenths almost a sense of retransition. Yet a retransition to the tonic would be entirely inappropriate at this point in the movement: after all, we have just moved away from the tonic, a modulation reinforced by the statement of the second theme in E minor. Instead of returning to the tonic, which would upset the balance of this structurally ambiguous piece, Schubert moves to A-flat minor, the flat-sixth of the tonic C major. The appearance of A-flat minor and the subsequent arrival at the dominant complete the repetition of the tonal progression used in the introduction: in both, Schubert moves from C to E to C to A-flat and ends the section in the dominant G major, the only difference between the two progressions being the use of A-flat minor in the second theme as opposed to the A-flat major of the introduction.

This specific third related cycle not only appears in the “Great,” but also in Schubert’s earlier works. The arrival of A-flat minor is reminiscent of the Fourth Symphony, which replaces the expected dominant in the second theme area with the flat sixth. In the “Great,” Schubert balances this unusual key choice with finally modulating to the dominant G major, a key in which the closing material of the movement appears. In doing so, Schubert satisfies the requirement of the tonal polarity important to Classical sonata form in the sense that the exposition begins in the tonic and ends in the dominant, yet he also thwarts any sense of progress by placing the “Northern” key cycle (C-E-A-flat) in between these two keys. As he has
done in the introduction, Schubert plays with the expectations of progress-oriented sonata form and employs "lyric-epic" techniques that make the "Great" his own.

Schubert uses the second half of the second theme area as a development-like section in the "Great," a technique that also appeared in the Second and Fourth Symphonies. The section between the exotic second theme in E minor and the appearance of A-flat minor acts almost purely as a development, fragmenting the second theme and modulating in Schubert's favored third related cycle. The placement of a developmental section within the exposition is unconventional, although might be explained by the structural ambiguity of the introduction. Schubert has already shown an interest in structural ambiguity in the first half of the exposition, apparent in his use of the introduction as the primary theme. Though he adjusts for this ambiguity by treating the primary theme area as a bridge, Schubert opens the door to a flexible structural map. This developmental second theme area is merely another aspect of this structural ambiguity, enhancing the flexibility of the form. In order to balance this ambiguous form, one might expect that such a second theme area would take the place of a development, especially given that Schubert had used fairly tonally stable and brief developments in his previous six symphonies. Instead, Schubert features his longest and least tonally stable development yet, fragmenting both the horn theme from the introduction and the second theme. Following this fairly traditional development, Schubert arrives at the recapitulation with the first double return he has used in any symphony. These moments of structural conventionality are nods to the norms of Classical sonata form in the midst of a structurally ambiguous movement. Schubert's lyricism and
tendency towards static forms are still present, yet he is able to draw on convention, however briefly, without compromising his vision.

John Reed describes Schubert’s efforts in the “Great” as a successful attempt to “marry his own lyrical and harmonic genius to the proportions of a grand symphony.” The second theme area functions both as lyrical-static and as developmental dynamic section. This developmental aspect of the second theme is highly representative of Schubert’s personal style to the extent that Beethoven’s influence is hardly present apart from the seeming use of the Turkish march as inspiration for the second theme. While the second theme area, due to its treatment as a development, may seem dynamic, Schubert hinders its progress by trapping it in a key cycle and using static, lyrical melodies (as he has in the introduction).

Several scholars have noted the increased sense of lyricism in Schubert’s instrumental compositions. Brown discusses how Schubert’s “incomparable song-technique,” or what Dahlhaus calls the “lyric-epic style,” takes over in several sections of the “Great.” Joseph Wechsberg sees nearly all of Schubert’s melodies as lyrical. Wechsberg argues that Schubert’s lyricism is a feature that often frustrates scholars who attempt to analyze his instrumental works through purely instrumental forms without taking into account song structures.

Throughout the second theme area, sections of lyricism appear in the form of fragments of a lyrical melody, in particular in the latter portion of the theme area. These fragments act first as remnants of the lyrical horn theme from the

introduction, echoes of this horn theme. Yet the fragments quickly build energy and thus turn into developmental motives, creating a sense of almost Beethovenian motivic progress (see example 5).  

Example 5. The horn in C and trombone melody in cut time from the second theme area of Schubert’s “Great” Symphony (mm198-231)

Except the first note, the three measure motives are a nearly exact repetition of the second measure of the introduction theme (see example 1). By all conventional standards other than its placement, this section acts as a development, fragmenting a previously heard melody and using these fragments to move to a new key. Yet this

fragmented melody also shows glimpses of Schubert’s lyricism by being, as most of Schubert’s melodies, vocally inspired.¹²⁷

Lyric as it is, this melody changes its character significantly in this section. When it first appears at the beginning of the movement, it is played quietly by the horn, fading away in the end. In contrast, in its fragmentation, the theme gains energy. It begins pianissimo and gradually becomes louder and more forceful, especially when Schubert adds the trombones. Fragments of this theme appear in three other places in the first movement: in the development, during the repetition of the second theme area in the recapitulation, and at the end of the coda (see example 6).¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Wechsberg, Schubert, 197.
Example 6. Introduction theme played in the coda in Schubert's “Great” Symphony
In this final section, the theme has grown from its original piano to forte, and is played by the entire orchestra. Schubert develops the theme throughout the movement, much like he did with the Prometheus theme in the Second. In doing so, Schubert adheres to Beethoven’s structural procedures without becoming lost in references.

Unlike the Prometheus theme, the horn theme of the “Great” is entirely Schubertian. Not only is it a lyrical, singable melody, but also prominently features thirds. Reed relates it to two Schubert songs: the first a setting of Goethe’s Gesang der Geister über den Wassern (The Song of the Spirit over the Waters) (1820) for men’s choir and string orchestra; the second a hymn called Die Allmacht (The Almighty) (1825), written on the same trip to Gastein as the “Great” (see example 7a-b).

Example 7a. First three measures of Schubert’s Gesang der Geister über den Wassern (taken from John Reed)

129 Reed, Schubert: The Final Years, 96.
130 Ibid., 96.
Example 7b. First four measures of Schubert’s *Die Allmacht* (taken from John Reed)

As can be seen above, the rhythms in both pieces, as well as the movement by thirds in the melodic line of *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* are reminiscent of the horn theme of the “Great.” Based on these parallels, namely the intersection of nature from *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* and God from *Die Allmacht*, Reed calls the horn theme “a hymn to the glory of the natural world” and thus considers the “Great” a culmination and summation of Schubert’s idea of “natural beauty as the vesture of God.” In his assessment, then, Schubert’s “Great” is a quintessentially Romantic symphony.

In contrast, Newbould maintains that the “Great” is the “last symphony by a great Classical symphonist” because, in contrast to the programmatic *Symphonie Fantastique* and Beethoven’s Ninth, it is the only symphony in the 1820s that developed “from inception to culmination, in a purely instrumental medium.” Although Newbould does acknowledge the Romantic character of the horn theme, he insists that Schubert, unable to ignore Romanticism in the 1820s, merely “open[s] the door on Romanticism,” while retaining Classical style in general in the

131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., 97.
133 Ibid., 93.
“Great.”¹³⁵ If the horn theme had appeared only in the introduction, Newbould’s argument may have held true. But like the Prometheus theme in the Second, the horn theme in the “Great” acts as the anchor of the movement, appearing so often that it becomes the essence of the piece.

Did Schubert use Classical models in his “Great” Symphony? Yes, Mozart and Haydn had a profound effect on Schubert’s music and some principles of Classical sonata form crept into the “Great,” most significantly the return to the dominant at the end of the exposition. The presence of these models, however, does not justify calling the “Great” a Classical symphony, especially when one considers Beethoven’s impact. Instead of arguing over whether the “Great” is a Classical or Romantic symphony, one must accept that Schubert drew on aspects of both. After all, he was very much a transitional composer. Thus, it is better to refer to the “Great” as the result of Schubert’s innovative approach to sonata form, which enabled him to capture the Beethovenian sublime through “lyric-epic” style. As Reed and Dahlhaus dub it, the “Great” is a marriage between Schubert’s “lyric-epic” style and the proportions of a grand symphony.¹³⁶

Although it was never performed in his lifetime, Schubert’s “Great” Symphony became an important part of his symphonic legacy.¹³⁷ It rose to prominence when an abridged version was performed in 1839, eleven years after

¹³⁵ Ibid., 215-16.
¹³⁷ The Vienna Music Society was unable to perform the “Great” when Schubert presented it to them in 1826, so they instead performed his Sixth Symphony, which became known as the “Little” C major Symphony. Ibid, 81.
the composer’s death. Robert Schumann was particularly inspired by the “Great,” calling it a work of “heavenly length.” Some, such as John Bell Young, claim that the influence of the “Great” was as significant as that of Beethoven’s Ninth. Young maintains that “it would be difficult to imagine even a single composer who followed in Schubert’s footsteps who does not owe a debt to [the “Great.”]” As an example of this overarching influence, Young cites the opening of Das Rheingold, which, despite Wagner’s dislike of Schubert, contains hints of the harmonic expression used in the opening of the “Great.” While Schubert may not have had such a profound impact on the symphony as Beethoven, his “Great” represented an influential new approach to sonata form that challenged the notion that there was no need for symphonies after Beethoven. In the end, Schubert was able to achieve his symphonic goal: produce a grand symphony in his own style.

The success of the “Great” Symphony demonstrated that Schubert could capture the Beethovenian sublime without losing his distinct style. His achievements in the “Great” are, inevitably, the result of the years Schubert spent exploring sonata form. The symphonies from his early works solidified habits and allowed Schubert to experiment freely, essentially laying the foundation for the “Great.” By 1825, he had reached an understanding of the symphony that was on par with Beethoven. The symphonies of Schubert, who died at the early age of 31, may not have left as resounding a legacy as Beethoven’s works. Had he lived longer, Schubert might have been able to match Beethoven’s influence in the symphonic

139 Ibid., 51.
140 Ibid.
genre and provide an alternative approach to classical sonata form in the early nineteenth century. Although, like most composers of his generation, Schubert began his symphonic journey by relying on the models provided by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, by the end of his life he proved himself worthy to stand in their company.
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