

The Prolific Song Output and Seasonal *Sehnsucht* of Franz Schubert and Taylor Swift

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The juxtaposition of the nineteenth-century German lied composer Franz Schubert and the twenty-first century country/pop songwriter Taylor Swift serves as the inspiration for this article. Schubert composed over 630 songs before his death at age thirty-one; Swift had written over 250 songs by age thirty-five. The prolific song output of Schubert and Swift is a correlation between these two composers, along with a common theme of *Sehnsucht* associated with the seasons. From *Winterreise* to “Cruel Summer,” both Schubert and Swift are masterminds who provide the vocal repertoire with a plethora of songs about longing, friendship, and the seasons of life.

IN 2019, AN ONLINE ARTICLE published by the UK radio station Classic FM drew an unexpected parallel between two songwriters from different centuries: Franz Schubert and Taylor Swift.

If we were to align her song output with a classical equivalent, it would be the songs of Franz Schubert. Although the technical challenges of his song cycles are not insignificant, a truly great performance relies on the singer’s ability to tell a story. So let’s get Taylor working on a recording of *Die schöne Müllerin*, right?¹

Unfortunately, that article does not credit the author of this clever juxtaposition of the nineteenth-century German lieder composer and the twenty-first-century country/pop songwriter, which serves as the inspiration for this article. Franz Schubert (1797–1828) composed over 630 songs before his death at age thirty-one; Taylor Swift (b. 1989) had written over 250 songs by age thirty-five. The prolific song output of both Schubert and Swift is a correlation between these two “thirtysomething” composers. Although they are no longer in their thirties, other prolific popular songwriters such as Elton John or Bob Dylan might seem more obvious subjects for comparison with Schubert, but something else seems to connect the early romantic Schubert with Swift, the songwriter of “New Romantics.” Belgian artist Michaël Borremans, who designed the set for the Muziektheater Transparant production of *Winterreise*, D. 911, described “his love of music by everyone from Franz Schubert to Taylor Swift”² with a specific mention of Swift’s “Fortnight.” Swift’s melancholic song seems to speak to Borremans, whose paintings seem to “exude the same infinite melancholy, the lonely soul” of Schubert’s *Winterreise*.³ As we examine their song output through their thirties, the common thread of *Sehnsucht* also ties together this unlikely pairing of composers.

SCHUBERT: FROM “AN DIE MUSIK” TO SCHWANENGESANG

With an oeuvre topping six hundred songs, Franz Schubert is recognized as the most prolific composer of German lieder. His songs still comprise a cornerstone of the art song repertoire. His first song, “Hagars Klage,” D. 5, was written when he was fourteen, and his final song “Die Taubenpost,” D. 965A—the final song of his posthumously published *Schwanengesang*—was composed the month before he died. With so many songs to consider, it is difficult to identify his arguably best songs. Certainly, most NATS members know “An die Musik,” D. 547, is a “national anthem” of sorts for the organization, with it being sung to open national conferences and other events.

Schubert’s two song cycles, *Die schöne Müllerin*, D. 795 and *Winterreise*, D. 911, are significant in the development of the genre as well as his own development as a composer.³ Schubert scholar Susan Youens has studied the cycles at length and notes their impact.

With the Müller-Schubert cycles the song cycle attains the length and profundity of the major classical genres—symphony, string quartet, sonata—at a time when it was not very prestigious to be considered primarily a “Lieder-Komponist,” a song composer, like Schubert.⁴

Designating Schubert’s so-called “best songs” is a subjective and perhaps controversial task; nevertheless, some critics have made their top picks. The British music magazine *Bachtrack* submitted the following top ten list.⁵

1. “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” D. 118
2. “Erlkönig,” D. 328
3. “Der Leiermann,” no. 24 from
Winterreise D. 911
4. “Des Baches Wiegenlied,” no. 20 from
Die schöne Müllerin, D. 795
5. “Der Doppelgänger,” no. 13 from
Schwanengesang, D. 957
6. “Im Frühling,” D. 882
7. “Auf der Donau,” D. 553
8. “Kennst du das Land,” D. 321
9. “Du bist die Ruh,” D. 776
10. “Die Forelle,” D. 550

Songs from his two cycles and final song collection take spots three through five, while the top two spots are both settings of poems by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The high quality of the poetry and Schubert’s astute text setting contribute to their placement at the top of the list. Furthermore, these two songs are well known for their distinctive accompaniments: the famously fiendish octave reiterations of “Erlkönig” and the recurring spinning wheel motif of “Gretchen am Spinnrade.” In an interview with *Fidelio Magazine*, German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau pondered the groundbreaking importance of “Gretchen” in the development of lieder: “There was continued development, of course. But ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ did represent a huge leap; there really aren’t any forerunners. It was like a bolt of lightning.”⁶

So are Schubert’s so-called best songs his most performed songs? Some of the songs on the *Bachtrack* top-ten list might be too challenging for student singers, either technically or dramatically. Still, Schubert songs continue to constitute a major part of the repertoire that students study and sing. As voice teacher Katherine DeBoer asserts: “Schubert is a fine pedagogue . . . students will find great satisfaction in singing Schubert: a wealth of tuneful melodies, a wide range of subject matter, and accessibility.”⁷ To this end, the Joan Boytim First/Second Book of Solos series includes several Schubert songs such as “Lied der Mignon (Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt),” D. 877, no. 4, “Der Neugierige,” D. 795, no. 6, “Schäfers Klagelied,” D. 121, and “Die Post,” D. 911, no. 13.

Vocologist Paul Patinka has done an analysis of entries in the 2017–2018 NATS National Student Auditions.⁸ The detailed data reveal that NATS students offered 127 different Schubert songs; here were the top ten, including their number of occurrences:

1. “Lachen und Weinen,” D. 777—86
2. “Gretchen am Spinnrade”—84
3. “An die Musik,” D. 547—82
4. “Ständchen,” D. 957, no. 4—78
5. Tie: “Die Forelle,” D. 550, and “Lied der Mignon”—57
6. “Heidenröslein,” D. 257—55
7. “Nacht und Träume,” D. 827—50
8. “Seligkeit,” D. 433—34

9. “Der Tod und das Mädchen,” D. 531—30

10. “Rastose Liebe,” D. 138—27

Of course, Schubert predates Spotify by two centuries, but the streaming music service tracks his most-streamed songs. These numbers change daily, but typically, the top two are “Ständchen” from *Schwanengesang* and “Ellens Gesang III (Ave Maria),” D. 839.

SWIFT: FROM “OUR SONG” TO THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT

At the age of thirty-five, Taylor Swift had already written over 250 songs. Her first song, “Lucky You,” was written when she was twelve; it was recorded but never released. Two songs from her self-titled debut album are notable: “Our Song” (2007) was her first single to reach no. 1 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart, and “Teardrops on My Guitar” won the 2008 BMI Country Awards Song of the Year. In 2024, Swift released her eleventh studio album, *The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology*, a double album comprising thirty-one songs. That same year, Swift became the first artist to win the Grammy Award for Album of the Year four times; her wins are for *Fearless*, 1989, *Folklore*, and *Midnights*. She has been nominated for the Grammy Award for Song of the Year eight times—for “You Belong with Me,” “Shake It Off,” “Blank Space,” “Lover,” “Cardigan,” “All Too Well (10-minute version),” “Anti-Hero,” and “Fortnight”—yet she has never won. Critic Ben Sisario reflects on this surprising losing streak:

That Swift has still never taken the song of the year prize remains one of the mysteries of the modern Grammys. She would seem to be a perfect candidate for the prize: an intentional and famously personal writer, serious and respectful of the craft, both an innovator and a traditionalist. The role of songwriter has been key to her identity as an artist since the beginning.⁹

Still, Swift received other songwriting accolades in 2024: Swift won Pop Songwriter of the Year at the 2024 BMI Awards, and *Rolling Stone* named “Mean” the Best Country Song of the century. Previously, *Rolling Stone* ranked three of her songs in their list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time: no. 69, “All Too Well”; no. 320, “Blank Space”; and no. 400 “Cruel Summer”—“a synth-pop epic with one of her best bridges.”¹⁰

Unlike Schubert, Swift never set poetry by Goethe or Heinrich Heine. Still her lyrics contain direct references to Dylan Thomas (“The Tortured Poets Department”) and Aristotle (“So High School”), as well as literary allusions to William Shakespeare (“Love Story”), Nathaniel Hawthorne (“Love Story” and “New Romantics”), Charles Dickens (“Getaway Car”), William Wordsworth (“The Lakes”), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (“The Albatross”), J. M. Barrie (“Cardigan” and “Peter”), Lewis Carroll (“Wonderland” and “Long Story Short”), F. Scott Fitzgerald (“This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things” and “Happiness”), and Charlotte Brontë (“Dear Reader”).¹¹ Interspersed with hidden meanings or “Easter eggs,” her texts are written in a confessional style. Swift scholar James E. Perone states that “despite some people’s misgivings about the deeply personal nature of Swift’s work, Taylor Swift remains one of the most successful singer-songwriters of the twenty-first century.”¹²

So are Swift’s so-called best songs her most performed songs? Patinka’s data from the 2017–2018 NATS National Student Auditions list only three entries of Taylor Swift songs (“Begin Again,” “Ours,” “Safe and Sound”)¹³ but this was before the introduction of separate CCM categories. However, the karaoke website Singa did track their most popular Taylor Swift karaoke songs in 2023.¹⁴ The top ten were:

1. “Love Story”
2. “Shake It Off”
3. “You Belong with Me”
4. “Blank Space”
5. “Anti-Hero”
6. “22”
7. “I Knew You Were Trouble”
8. “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together”
9. “All Too Well”
10. “Enchanted”

The *Los Angeles Times* took this a step further with their power rankings of Swift karaoke songs, rated on how hard and how fun they are to sing. According to their rankings, the easiest songs are “All Too Well,” “Style,” and “You Need to Calm Down,” and the more vocally difficult songs are “Bad Blood,” “Shake It Off,” and “I Knew You Were Trouble,” while the most fun songs to sing are “Love Story,” “You Belong with Me,” and “Anti-Hero.”¹⁵

TABLE 1. Seasonal associations of songs by Schubert and Swift

SPRING	WINTER
Am Bach im Frühling, D. 361 (FS)	Back to December (TS)
An den Frühling—3 versions: D. 283, 338, and 587 (FS)	Der Wintertag, D. 984 (FS)
Frühlingsgesang—2 versions: D. 709 and 740 (FS)	Forever Winter (TS)
Frühlingsglaube, D. 686 (FS)	New Year's Day (TS)
Frühlingslied—4 versions: D. 243, 398, 914, and 919 (FS)	Snow on the Beach (TS)
Frühlingssehnsucht, D. 957, no. 3 (FS)	'Tis the Damn Season (TS)
Frühlingstraum, D. 911, no. 11 (FS)	Winterlied—2 versions: D. 242 and 401 (FS)
Im Frühling, D. 882 (FS)	Winterreise, D. 911 (FS)
SUMMER	AUTUMN
August (TS)	All Too Well—Sad Autumn Girl Version (TS)
Cruel Summer (TS)	An den Mond in einer Herbstnacht, D. 614 (FS)
Die Sommernacht, D. 289 (FS)	Herbst, D. 945 (FS)
Mailed—4 versions: D. 129, 199, 202, and 503 (FS)	Herbstlied, D. 502 (FS)
	Red (TS)

Spotify was created in 2006, the same year Swift released her first album. These numbers change daily, but in 2024, her top-streamed song was “Cruel Summer,” with over two billion streams since its release in 2019.

SCHUBERT AND SWIFT: *SEHNSUCHT* AND THE SEASONS

Sehnsucht or longing is a common sentiment in the songs of both Schubert and Swift. Schubert composed many songs with *Sehnsucht* in the title (D. 52, 123, 180, 310, 359, 481, 516, 636, 656, 877, 879) and Swift's song lyrics reference “longing glances” (“Foolish One”), “longing stares” (“Illicit Affairs”), and “my longings” (“The Black Dog”). Moreover, each seems to associate longing with certain seasons of the year and reveals a predilection for particular seasons. (See table 1.)

For Schubert, the seasons of longing are spring and winter. Seventy-five Schubert song texts reference spring and forty-five reference winter, while summer and autumn are mentioned ten times and fifteen times, respectively.¹⁶ Schubert's songs portray longing for spring (“Frühlingssehnsucht,” D. 957, no. 3), belief in spring (“Frühlingsglaube, D. 686”), and a dream of spring (“Frühlingstraum, D. 911, no. 11”). For instance, in “Frühlingstraum” blooming flowers are associated with the bloom of love: “Ich träumte von bunten Blumen ... Ich träumte von Lieb um Liebe.” In contrast, through-

out *Winterreise*, winter represents “the misery caused by the loss of his beloved”¹⁷ as portrayed by Schubert in the stark landscape of the musical journey from the first song, “Gute Nacht,” to the twenty-fourth and final one, “Der Leiermann.”

For Swift, the seasons of longing are summer and autumn. In “Forever Winter” she writes: “I’ll be summer sun for you forever, forever winter if you go.”¹⁸ Many of her songs portray the excitement of summer romance, but perhaps none more so than “Cruel Summer,” which “paints the picture of an emotional rollercoaster of a summer—new love and its uncertainties.”¹⁹ “So much for summer love”²⁰ she says in the bridge of “August.” Her album *Red* is especially associated with fall: in “Red,” the romance does not last past summer, and the autumn leaves fall as the relationship falls apart in “All Too Well.” For the latter, she even recorded a “Sad Autumn Girl Version,” a specifically “seasonal interpretation of the song”²¹ with piano accompaniment.

SCHUBERT AND SWIFT: SOLO ENDEAVORS AND SCRUTINY

Besides the great German romantic poets Goethe and Heine, Schubert also composed songs to poetry written by some of his friends, including Johann Mayrhofer (“Am See,” D. 746; “Auf der Donau”; “Der Alpenjäger,” D. 524; “Einsamkeit,” D. 911, no. 12; “Erlafsee,” D.

586; “Nachtviolen,” D. 752; and others) and Franz von Schober (“An die Musik,” “Frühlingsgesang,” D. 709 and 740; “Genügsamkeit,” D. 143; “Jägersliebeslied,” D. 909; “Mondenschein,” D. 875; “Pilgerweise,” D. 789; and others). In the romantic period, Lieder composers did not typically write their own song texts. There is only one example of a completely solo art song endeavor for Schubert as composer and poet: “Abschied (Lebe wohl! du lieber Freund!),” D. 578. Pianist Graham Johnson notes:

This song is the only one in the canon where Schubert set his own words. It is a touching farewell to his friend Franz von Schober who was leaving Vienna. The music is heartfelt but simple, as if Schubert was embarrassed (or at least thought it inappropriate) to lavish ornate invention on his own literary efforts. *Pièce d’occasion* it certainly is and was probably penned, words and music almost simultaneously, within a few minutes.²²

The song is an example of a highly personal composition, written for a real-life occurrence and for a close friend or “lieber Freund.” The strophic setting in B minor is so sorrowful that it seems to portray the pain of a final farewell.

Collaborating or cowriting is common practice in popular music. Swift often cowrites with her music producers (Max Martin, Jack Antonoff, and Aaron Dessner) and fellow artists (Ice Spice, Ed Sheeran, and Lana Del Rey), even friends and lovers (Zoë Kravitz, Calvin Harris, and Joe Alwyn—a.k.a. William Bowery). When British singer/songwriter Damon Albarn claimed that Swift does not write her own songs, she swiftly fired back on social media: “I write *all* of my own songs. Your hot take is completely false and so damaging.”²³

As of 2024, Swift has been the sole composer and lyricist of 124 songs, nearly half of her total song output. Of these solo songwriting endeavors, many are songs about romantic relationships: “Back to December,” “Begin Again,” “Dear John,” “Enchanted,” “Love Story,” “Lover,” “My Tears Ricochet,” “Red,” “The Black Dog,” “Today Was a Fairytale,” “The Story of Us,” and “This Love.” Other songs, such as “Mean” (her first songwriting Grammy win, for Best Country Song) address her mean-spirited critics. In a commentary on Amazon Music for the release of *The Tortured Poets Department*, Swift shared the inspiration for another song that seems aimed at the concept of critiques.

“Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?” was a song I wrote alone sitting at the piano in one of those moments when I felt sort of bitter about just all the things we do to artists as a society and as a culture . . . what we do to our writers and our artists and our creatives. We put them through hell. We watch what they create then we judge it. We love to watch artists in pain.²⁴

Since she is the sole creator of the song, criticism of it might sting more because it feels more personal. An analysis by Sheridan Walter asserts that the song “Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?” is itself a critique, positing that it “not only narrates a personal journey but also acts as a critique of contemporary celebrity culture.”²⁵

We can only wonder how Schubert might have dealt with the scrutiny of online music critics and social media trolls. Scholar Christopher Howard Gibbs writes that “Schubert was one of the most widely published and performed composers active in Vienna during the 1820s. Reviews and advertisements often referred to him as a ‘popular composer’”²⁶ but he did not receive global fame during his lifetime. Swift was named *Time* magazine’s 2023 Person of the Year during her global Eras Tour. The magnitude of her popularity has reached such heights that Sinéad O’Sullivan argues that “any critique of Swift’s work that doesn’t consider her role as one of the most prominent narrators of our time” in her article “Why Normal Music Reviews No Longer Make Sense for Taylor Swift.”²⁷

THE STUDY OF SCHUBERT AND SWIFT

Scholarly study of Schubert’s songs has been a major component of the collegiate music history curriculum. In the field of musicology, top Schubert scholars include Christopher Howard Gibbs, Brian Newbould, Lorraine Byrne Bodley, and Susan Youens. Youens has written many books about Schubert’s songs including *Retracing a Winter’s Journey: Franz Schubert’s Winterreise*; *Schubert’s Poets and the Making of Lieder*; *Schubert, Müller, and Die schöne Müllerin*; and *Schubert’s Late Lieder: Beyond the Song-Cycles*.²⁸

In his native city of Vienna, the Schubert Research Center at the Austrian Academy of Science holds an annual Schubertian conference. In cooperation with the Pierre Boulez Saal, Liedakademie des Heidelberger Frühling Liedzentrum, and his Hampson Foundation,

baritone Thomas Hampson curated an event entitled 2024 Schubert Week, which included workshops and master classes comparing and contrasting lieder by Schubert and Hugo Wolf.

In 2023, Bryan West became the first full-time Taylor Swift journalist when Gannett Newspapers hired him for the newly created position based in Nashville. Swift study had already entered university coursework. In 2022, New York University presented a class on Swift, led by *Rolling Stone* senior writer Brittany Spanos. The same year, “The Taylor Swift Songbook” was a course offered at the University of Texas at Austin; professor of English Elizabeth Scala (@swiftieprof) said the course would examine how “Swift draws on richer literary traditions in her songwriting, both topically but also formally in terms of how she uses references, metaphors, and clever manipulations of words.”²⁹ And in 2023, Harvard University started a course called “Taylor Swift and Her World,” taught by English professor Stephanie Burt. The class continued in 2024, with “students comparing Ms. Swift’s songs to works by poets and writers including Willa Cather, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth” as well as Sylvia Plath.³⁰ While these courses seem focused on Swift as a lyricist, music historians examining Swift as a composer include James E. Perone (professor emeritus of music, University of Mount Union), Christa Bentley (assistant professor of musicology, University of Arkansas), and Sharri K. Hall (President Scholar in historical musicology at Harvard University). Hall (@thecontempmusicologist) posts TikTok videos commenting on Swift’s songs, including one stating that “Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?” was her “favorite song that Taylor has written and produced all by herself since *Speak Now*.”³¹ Instead of studying Schubert sketches and facsimiles in libraries, Swift musicologists can study the iPhone voice memos she has released of first drafts of songs such as “I Know Places” and “Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?”

STUDYING SCHUBERT AND SWIFT: FRIENDSHIP IN “ABSCHIED” AND “YOU’RE ON YOUR OWN, KID”

As previously mentioned, Schubert was both composer and poet for his song “Abschied,” which he wrote as a farewell to his friend Schober. The final stanza of his

self-described “Trauersang” or mourning song brings the song to a bittersweet conclusion:

Lebe wohl, du lieber Freund!	Farewell, you dear friend!
Wenn dies Lied dein Herz ergreift,	If this song has touched your heart,
Freundes Schatten näher schweift,	Your friend’s shade will hover closer to you.
Meiner Seele Saiten streift.	It will strike the strings of my soul.

Lebe wohl, du lieber Freund! Farewell, you dear friend!³²

The song is written in B minor—the same key he later used for his famous “Unfinished” Symphony, Symphony no. 8 in B minor, D. 579—and evokes a melancholic mood. Swift sets a somewhat brighter tone in “You’re on Your Own, Kid” (from *Midnights*) with the key of D major, the relative major of B minor. There is also a contrast in tempo: “Abschied” is marked “mässig” (or *moderato*) while “You’re On Your Own Kid” is brisker at 120 bpm (or *allegro*). The bass line is a continuous eighth-note pattern, giving the *Midnights* song rhythmic energy and impetus; there is no lingering lyricism like in the repeated triplets of Schubert’s melody on “Lebe wohl” in “Abschied.” Cowritten with Jack Antonoff, the lyrics from the bridge of “You’re on Your Own, Kid” reflect the feelings of someone who—unlike Schubert—has already come to terms with the loss of friendship and is ready to move on.

’Cause there were pages turned with the bridges burned.
Everything you lose is a step you take.
So make the friendship bracelets, take the moment and
taste it.
You’ve got no reason to be afraid.³³

The practice of making and sharing friendship bracelets has become a common ritual among fans at her concerts. This practice came to represent “the communal experience of being a Swiftie. The most perfect element of this practice is how people immortalize their favorite lyrics and Taylor moments in their bracelets.”³⁴ While Schubert’s friends and admirers did not exchange friendship bracelets, “Schubert’s entire existence seems unusually involved with a group of friends” who “actively promoted his music with publishers and performers” and who, after his death, “told Schubert’s story to posterity.”³⁵

SUMMARY: SCHUBERTIADES TO ACOUSTIC SETS

While there may not be an “Invisible String” tying Franz Schubert and Taylor Swift together, these two songwriters do share some similarities. Both began writing songs in their teen years and continued composing into their thirties. Both are prolific songwriters overall and demonstrate periods of particularly high productivity. In 1815, Schubert wrote roughly 150 songs—on October 15, 1815, alone he wrote eight songs: D. 302–309 (“An die Geliebte,” “Labetrunk der Liebe,” “Die Macht der Liebe,” “Mein Gruß an den Mai,” “Skolie,” “Die Sternenwelten,” “Wiegenlied—Schlumm’re sanft,” and “Das gestörte Glück”).

Thus far in the 2020s, Swift has released four albums of new songs (*Folklore*, *Evermore*, *Midnights*, and *The Tortured Poets Department*) alongside previously unreleased “From the Vault” songs on her rerecorded albums *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)*, *Red (Taylor’s Version)*, *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)*, and *1989 (Taylor’s Version)*. These twenty-six vault tracks garnered more hits for Swift. For instance, “Is It Over Now?” from *1989 (Taylor’s Version)* debuted as her eleventh no. 1 single on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Although he put “All Too Well (10-Minute Version)” at no. 1, *Billboard* writer Jason Lipshutz ranked “I Can See You” from *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)* at no. 2 but called it “the most thrilling never-before-heard track.”³⁶ Swift directed the song’s accompanying music video in which she and her music are symbolically rescued and freed from a vault.

As discussed previously, Swift is known for writing songs about her romantic interests, ranging from film actors (Taylor Lautner, Jake Gyllenhaal, and Tom Hiddleston) to fellow singers (Joe Jonas, John Mayer, Harry Styles, and Matty Healy). Schubert also found musical inspiration in his romantic interests through Therese Grob and Countess Caroline Esterházy. Therese Grob was the soprano soloist for the premiere of his “Mass in F minor,” D. 105. “Schubert’s boyhood love for Therese inspired” a collection of seventeen songs he dedicated to her.³⁷ In the final year of his life, he dedicated his “Fantasia in F minor,” D. 940, for piano (four hands) to the countess, his piano pupil. “These two musical muses . . . are the only women connected with Schubert in any romantic way” which has led to specula-

tion about Schubert’s love life and his “passing infatuations with musical friends such as [Wilhelm] Müller.”³⁸ While the true romantic history of Schubert may never be known, some songs from the Therese collection may provide insight into his romantic psyche. Both “Trauer der Liebe,” D. 465, and “Mailed,” D. 503, depict pairs of doves personifying lovers or husband and wife. In “Trauer der Liebe,” Schubert sets a poem by Johann Georg Jacobi including the line “suchte mir ein liebend Herz” or “I sought a loving heart.” Perhaps Schubert, like Swift, was also seeking to fill a “Blank Space.”

Schubert and Swift may seem strange song-fellows if you compare their typical performance venues. Usually, Schubert’s songs were first performed not in recital halls but in small-scale settings such as private homes; Schubert might sing his own songs or play the piano while his friend baritone Johann Michael Vogl sang.

The principal reason we associate Schubert’s music with such intimate gatherings is that they had a name: Schubertiades, unpublicized events devoted primarily or exclusively to his music. Usually given by the composer’s more well-to-do friends and patrons (although not the high-ranking men that supported Beethoven), they offered an informal, sociable atmosphere that often included recitations, eating, drinking, and dancing. The number of participants at a Schubertiade could range from a handful to over a hundred, and their frequency varied; some years saw weekly gatherings (or more), other years saw none. We know of some Schubertiades held in other cities when Schubert would visit, some were held in his absence and after his death.³⁹

While Swift has appeared in intimate settings such as NPR’s Tiny Desk concert series, she usually performs concerts in large stadiums; her worldwide multiyear Eras Tour demonstrated the scope and scale of her current reach. Amidst its grandiose production values and carefully choreographed numbers, the Eras Tour spotlighted a solo acoustic set in which Swift sang two surprise songs while accompanying herself on first guitar and then piano. For instance, in the film *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* (2023), which was recorded during her concerts in Los Angeles, she performs “Our Song” on guitar and “You’re on Your Own Kid” on piano. Beginning with a November 2023 concert in Buenos Aires, she started doing mashups comprised of two or three songs. On December 8, 2024, the closing night

of the Eras Tour, she paired “A Place in This World” with “New Romantics” for her guitar mashup, and performed a medley of “Long Live,” “New Year’s Day,” and “The Manuscript” on piano. This practice of a mini “Swiftiade” seemed to create a sense of intimacy and connection with her audiences, even when they numbered in the tens of thousands.

The twenty-first century popstar songwriter and nineteenth-century *Liederfürst* or “Prince of Songs” both make their marks with their prolific song output of hundreds of songs. English writer Patrick Maxwell described Schubert as “so caught up in the tragedy of his own life, yet possessed with his music” and called his song-cycles “full of love-struck, pitiable characters”⁴⁰—the same might be said of Swift, the self-proclaimed tortured poet. Many of her songs are replete with obsessive heartbreak and *Sehnsucht* or longing. Swift asks “How Did It End?” and Schubert declares “Du liebst mich nicht,” D. 756; “Rastlose Liebe,” D. 138, was “Red” (or maybe “Maroon”).

Time will tell if Swift’s output eventually reaches Schubert’s level of six hundred-plus songs. In an interview on *The Tonight Show* in 2022, Swift pondered her productivity:

There’s something so mysterious about writing, but I’ve found that the more I write the more I keep writing. I don’t know what’s been going on but in the last six or seven years, I’ve just been constantly making things and the more things I make the happier I am. So I just continue to do it.⁴¹

From *Winterreise* to “Cruel Summer,” both Franz Schubert and Taylor Swift are masterminds who provide the vocal repertoire with a plethora of songs about longing, friendship, and the seasons of life. Once Paul Patinka completes their upcoming analysis of data from the 2022–2023 National Student Auditions, it will be interesting to see which of their songs were programmed by NATS teachers, and if their prolific song output leads to repeated performances by student singers in auditions and recitals.

In a review of Carnegie Hall’s SongStudio 2024, Rick Perdian described the final recital as “transformed into the present-day equivalent of a Schubertiad” while adding, “Sooner or later, someone will program Taylor Swift on a recital.”⁴² Perhaps someone will program Schubert and Swift on the same recital, using their shared themes

as a connection. Schubertian John Gilhooly, executive director of the London recital venue Wigmore Hall, opined that: “Taylor Swift seems to channel many of the same themes explored by composers of French and German song from the nineteenth century, although appears to have a rather wider audience!”⁴³ He also shared his strong connection with Schubert’s music: “It probably sounds a bit odd, but I think of Schubert as a personal friend who has accompanied me a great deal throughout my life, and I suspect he will accompany me every day until the grave.”⁴⁴ This sentiment is similar to that expressed by many Swifties. Maybe the songs of Taylor Swift and Franz Schubert have more in common than one might think, and maybe a mashup of “Rastlose Liebe” and “This Love” (both written in E major) isn’t as farfetched as it might seem.

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