

Eric Sams

Schubert and OED2

The Musical Times, July 1979 (pp. 577-578) © The Estate of Eric Sams

Schubert: Thematisches Verzeichnis seiner Werke by Otto Erich Deutsch; new edn. by Walther Dürr, Arnold Fell, Christa Landon and Werner Aderhold (Neue Schubert-Ausgabe, VIII, 4). Bärenreiter

Otto Erich Deutsch once said ruefully that all reference books should be first published in their second editions. In a way, that wish has now been fulfilled; this updated version (OED2 for short) of his thematic catalogue is destined, Oedipus-like, to eliminate and replace its founding father OED1. But the original name survives, and justly; for Deutsch served Schubert selflessly all his life, even in exile and adversity. It was his fate, as of many pioneers, neither to go far enough nor always in the right direction. Even on its first publication (in English, 1951) his Schubert catalogue was seen to be fallible though formidable; and he himself began and continued the work of correction and addition later also associated with the names of Maurice Brown and Reinhard von Hoorickx. In the interim there has been an exponential intensification of Schubert scholarship. The devoted private amateurs have been extensively supplemented, not to say supplanted, by salaried or grant-aided international teams of full-time professionals. The power-base is again firmly established in Germany and Austria, where most of the scholarship and the manuscripts (not necessarily respectively) are now to be found. OED2 is winningly dedicated by the *Internationale Schubert Gesellschaft* at Tübingen to "the genius of Franz Schubert and his native city of Vienna", with due acknowledgement to the munificence of that municipality. All ought to be remarkably well that ends so well; and one can certainly join in the general chorus of congratulation and rejoicing at this resplendent achievement. All concerned will just have to acquire, somehow, this new and comprehensive catalogue of 1000 works in 700 closely packed but clearly printed pages. As its bulk (19 x 28 x 4 cm) suggests, it is a real milestone; as its price implies, it may well be worth its weight in gold. Certainly it far outdoes OED1 in length as well as weight. But its depth of reasoning and argument is not, in my view, commensurately impressive. That comparison and that criticism are now documented in more detail.

First, the factual data. Almost every entry in OED1 has been modified, often very substantially, whether by addition or correction or both, in the light of new or reconsidered evidence. The further information includes incipits that really do begin the work in question; thus the piano prelude of each song is cited as well as its opening vocal phrase. For strophic songs, the number of verses is given; for all works, complete or not, the number of bars is shown, in each movement. Then there are extra *Gesamtausgabe* references, old and new; many more autographs and vastly more copies are all recorded in greater detail (including shelf-marks); complete title-page citation is given for all first editions up to 1880; and so on. But the basic numbering and method are left unchanged. So OED1 remains within the new version as a massive skeleton; and OED2 is like a giant refreshed. This spectacular triumph of scholarly competence and collaboration will especially impress all other compilers; they can best appreciate the amount of sheer brain-bruising toil involved even before the actual thinking begins. Unhappily the former activity tends to inhibit the latter, which is one reason why few scholars make exemplary scholiasts; and in any event fact-finding is always vulnerable to fault-finding. Diligent reading discloses, setting aside the occasional misprint, rather too many lacunae, e.g. in the poetic source (D131), the musical forces (383), first performance (167), *Gesamtausgabe* reference (316), *Neue Ausgabe* reference (672), first editions (619), date of composition (823), opus number (923), an incipit (881), a manuscript location (840), among other points and other examples. I have mainly chosen those where OED1 does better, to show that it is not entirely annihilated. More seriously, the notes (*Anmerkungen*), though in general a striking improvement, are still often fallible and sometimes downright feeble.

I looked first at that much debated crux, the Gmunden-Gastein Symphony n849. OED1 says, with rather typical flatness and lack of argument, "lost". OED2, equally typically, faces firmly both ways: "lost-may well be identical with D944" (i.e. the Great C major). It adds some 1000 words of laborious yet inadequate background comment, and concludes lamely: "the documents taken together permit the supposition that Schubert in 1825 was working on D944, but the possibility that there was a Gastein symphony as such cannot be completely excluded". By an inexorable Gresham's law, such equivocation devalues the currency of scholarship. The evidence assimilates D849 with D944; for the separate and distinct existence of the former there has never been any hard evidence at all; the onus of proof must rest on a hypothesis so far-reaching as the total loss without trace of a whole symphony; ergo, that hypothesis must now be abandoned. When we turn to the piano sonatas, a genre rightly attracting much current interest and endeavour, we can catch the *Anmerkung* in the act of inventing a new work to plague later generations of commentators. The G major Sonata n894 was dated October 1826 and headed "IV Sonate" by Schubert. This, opines the annotator, "seems to refer to" the publication of D845

as his *Première*, and D850 as his *Seconde, Grande Sonate*, in March and April 1826 respectively. So “whether he intended to compose a third, or whether a sonata has been lost, must remain open”. But it would surely be far better shut. A closer look at OED2 confirms that the two publishers were different; and that one of them later published D568 as the *Troisième*. So there is hardly any gap to fill. In any event, the inference from a numerical Roman cardinal to two verbal French ordinals seems rather retrograde. And a more interesting explanation is thereby obscured, namely that Schubert's IV on D894 relates to his I-III for the so-called last three sonatas D958-60, with the inference that they (like n944, for example), were fair-copied much later than they were sketched; The over-generous tendency to readmit lost works by the back door is further evidenced, I think, by item 24 of Appendix I, i.e. dubious or unauthentic works “Kantate auf den Vater, 21 September 1816”. The note should at least have referred readers to D80, a work of 18,3 otherwise answering that description. Another genre in notable need of further research is the songs. Here again some of the commentary is unhelpful, not to say obstructive. Thus on p.xix of the Vorwort the unwary reader is sent to the Schochows' *Franz Schubert: Die Texte seiner einstimmig komponierten Lieder und ihre Dichter* (1974) for the complete original texts. But the note here to, for example, D771, by correctly identifying the probable source, confirms that the Schochows are carefully comparing, and recording the wrong one; a warning, was needed rather than a recommendation. Another example: D300, *Der Jüngling an der Quelle*, to words by Salis, is not readily datable; the autography is lost. But in it goes at “1816 or 1817 (?)” on the ground that although the Witticzek copy is dated as late as 1821, the song was “surely written no later” than 1817 and probably not before 1816, for all, Schubert's other Salis settings date from that: period'. How could such conspicuous nonsense; cross anyone's mind undetected, let alone escape into print? By exactly the same argument, one could show that n23 for example was surely composed in January 5 1827, like all Schubert's other Rochlita settings, whereas it is in fact dated 1812. It is no surprise, then, to discover that on the admittedly; often vexed and vexing question of chronology, too much attention has been paid to such notions and too little to more objective paper-dating techniques and methodologies (though what seems to be the: useful and original contribution made by Ernst Hilmar's handwriting studies deserves an appreciative word). Thus the second setting of *An den Mond* D296 is still implausibly assigned to “1815 or 1816 (?)” on the sole basis of a question-begging rigmarole beginning “Deutsch supposes”. More cogent is Robert Winter's comment in *The Musical Times* of June 1978; paper studies point to a rather later date. So, finally, any loss of confidence in the reasoning powers evinced in OED2 may evoke dubiety about some rather basic questions of authenticity, e.g. whether *Die Advokaten* D37, a schoolboy work adapted from Anton Fischer is really entitled to its main-sequence status, and conversely whether the new-composed parts of the Matiegka arrangement II, 2 (formerly D96) are rightly excluded.

However, all such points must of course be seen in perspective, against the background of large scale positive achievement and the understandable wish to commemorate Schubert's 150th death-day, rather than await his 200th birthday. And it is even arguable that the admixture of copious fact and dubious inference will provide a new generation of young Schubertians with both the wherewithal and the incentive for significant future studies. Here, say what one will, is by far the fullest and finest Schubert catalogue of all time, the indispensable instrument of further research.