

*Theme and Variations from Octet in F Major, Op. 166*

Franz Schubert/Verdehr Trio

Schubert (1797–1828) was coming out of a discouraging period of his life at the onset of 1824. He had been ill, too poor to pay his rent, and he was unable to have his operas produced. He wrote to a friend, “Every night when I go to bed I hope I may not wake...I live without pleasure or friends.” After a hiatus of three years, he turned again to writing purely instrumental music: quartets, German dances, variations, and the *Octet in F Major, Op. 166*, written between in February/March of 1824.

The eight-movement “suite” was composed to the order of Count Ferdinand of Troyer, an amateur clarinetist and member of the household of Beethoven’s patron and friend, Archduke Rudolph. At the count’s request, the work was modeled after Beethoven’s *Septet, Op. 20* with subtle and obvious links between the two (the movements correspond almost identically). However, Schubert’s own characteristics and maturing style are clearly established. Schubert wrote the octet, along with the composition of two string quartets, as a means of getting on the “way to the great symphony.” The *Octet* is his only chamber work with winds, scored for string quartet, double bass, clarinet, bassoon and horn, and it is almost orchestral in color.

The *Theme and Variations*, the fourth of six movements and sandwiched between a *Scherzo* and *Minuet*, is an *Andante* with variations and reminiscent of the old serenade form. A positive and happy mood prevails throughout the piece, and its rhythms and splendor of coloring have been likened to Beethoven’s *Scene by the Brook*.