

PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

Franz Schubert – *She Was Here*

*Born January 31, 1797, Himmelpfortgrund northwest of Vienna, Austria.
Died November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria.*

Oswaldo Golijov – *She Was Here*

Born December 5, 1960, La Plata, Argentina.

She Was Here

Four Songs by Franz Schubert orchestrated and with an introduction by Oswaldo Golijov

She Was Here, Golijov's orchestration of four songs by Schubert, with an added introduction, was completed in 2008. The first performance was given by Dawn Upshaw, with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Douglas Boyd conducting, on April 24, 2008. The score is dedicated to the memory of the director Anthony Minghella, who died in 2008. *She Was Here* calls for soprano solo and an orchestra consisting of two flutes, piccolo and alto flute, oboe and english horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet and basset horn, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, trombone, tuned glass, triangles, tam-tam, suspended crotales, harp, celesta, and strings. Performance time is approximately fourteen minutes.

These are the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first performances of Golijov's *She Was Here*.

For many years, Schubert was known primarily as a song composer. Even during his lifetime, he was already called the King of Song. Schubert wrote songs throughout his career, sometimes almost daily—in 1815, the peak of his productivity, he composed 145 songs alone, including *Der Erlkönig*, one of the greatest masterpieces in the literature—and sometimes with an almost casual ease—a setting of “Hark, hark, the lark,” from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is said to have been written

spontaneously on the back of a beer-garden menu. According to a popular story, perhaps apocryphal, when Beethoven, Schubert's only true musical peer in Vienna at the time, was shown several of Schubert's songs only days before he died, he said, "Truly in Schubert there is a divine spark."

Nearly two centuries later, Osvaldo Golijov was drawn to Schubert's songs for the same reason this extraordinary body of music is still revered: in these small, intimate pieces, Schubert looks deeper into the human soul than anyone before—and very few composers since—dared. With the simplest of means, he can conjure unimaginable bliss, and—sometimes even in the same song—he also takes us to the very edge of madness and despair.

The four songs Golijov chose to orchestrate and gather together as this mini-cycle called *She Was Here* were all written in the 1820s—the same decade that also saw Schubert's untimely death—at thirty-one, he died the youngest of all the major composers. The first two, "Wandrer's Nachtlied II" and Mignon's Song, "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," are both settings of poetry by Goethe. In all, Schubert set more than seventy texts by Goethe, whom he had idolized since he read *Faust* at the age of seventeen. (The admiration was not reciprocal: when Schubert's life-long friend Josef von Spaun collected several of Schubert's Goethe songs and sent them off to the poet in 1816, hoping that he would recognize in them a genius comparable to his own, Spaun received no answer; ultimately the package was returned.)

"Wandrer's Nachtlied II," probably composed in a group of Goethe settings in December 1822, captures the stillness and inner peace of one of Goethe's most celebrated poems. Schubert wrote four different versions of Mignon's "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," from the novel *Wilhelm Meister*, for voice and piano. The last, composed in January 1826, creates an unforgettable sense of longing and despair. "Nobody understands another one's pain, nobody understands another one's joy," Schubert himself had written in 1824. "One always believes one is going toward each other, and one only goes side by side. Oh, it is torment to him who understands this."

The third song is a setting of a poem by Friedrich Rückert that Schubert composed late in 1822 or early the following year. The poem itself does not have a title. "Das sie hier gewesen"—She was here—was apparently Schubert's working title, and it has become Golijov's title as well. The last song, Matthäus von Collin's "Nacht und Träume," composed in the winter of 1822–23, is one of Schubert's most famous works, remarkable for the way it uncovers depths of feeling beneath its gentle, placid surface. In each of these four songs, Golijov has left Schubert's melodies unchanged, but the accompaniments, transferred

from the nineteenth-century parlor piano to the modern orchestra, reveal his characteristic ear for unforgettable colors and brilliant effects. *She Was Here* finds unexpected common ground between Schubert's hometown of Vienna and the wide world which Golijov continues to explore in his own music today.

Oswaldo Golijov on *She Was Here*

Among the new musical worlds that Schubert predicted are the vastness of Russia; the lyrical minimalism of Philip Glass (as in the slow movement of the Piano Sonata in B-flat major, the opening of the Fantasy in C for violin and piano, and the beloved song "Nacht und Träume"); the fragility and intimacy of Hugo Wolf, and, beyond him, the ambiguous scent of the Vienna of Alban Berg, a hundred years after Schubert's own disappearance (in "Dass sie hier gewesen"); the irony of Stravinsky and Kurt Weill (in "Lied der Mignon"); and, perhaps most daringly, the sound of longing for a sweet, peaceful death ("Wandrer's Nachtlied").

These orchestrations were written at a time of loss and sadness. But Schubert brings consolation, especially in the last two songs, when he shows that past, present, and future, in time, are only illusion. At least while the music lasts.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

© by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. All rights reserved. Program notes may not be reproduced; brief excerpts may be quoted if due acknowledgment is given to the author and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

These notes appear in galley files and may contain typographical or other errors. Programs and artists subject to change without notice.