

FRANZ SCHUBERT AND HIS WORLD



*Edited by
Christopher H. Gibbs and Morten Solvik*

FRANZ SCHUBERT AND HIS WORLD

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AND MORTEN SOLVIK

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Preface

Dein Freund Schubert. These were probably the last words the composer ever wrote, about a week before he died on 19 November 1828, at age thirty-one. They were the conclusion to a heart-wrenching letter to Franz von Schober, his closest friend, that began: “I am ill. I have eaten nothing for eleven days and drunk nothing. And I totter feebly and shakily from my chair to bed and back again.”¹ He then made the simple request that Schober send him some novels by James Fenimore Cooper.

Schubert’s last letter points to some defining dimensions of his all-too-brief life: that friends and family were at its center (he was living at the time with his older brother Ferdinand, having recently moved from Schober’s place); that literature was a consuming passion; and that serious illness led to early death. An obituary a few weeks later observed that the composer “lived solely for art and for a small circle of friends.”² To this constellation of friendship, art, and a life of seemingly endless potential cut short, we should add another crucial element: Vienna. Unlike great predecessors who moved to the gloried “city of music,” Schubert was born and remained there, with only infrequent excursions not far away.

An understanding of the music Schubert wrote during his brief career benefits enormously from awareness of the social, cultural, intellectual, and political context in which he lived and worked. This book, the twenty-fifth in the Bard Music Festival series published by Princeton University Press, aims more than ever to be true its title: to explore a particular composer’s world, a world that in Schubert’s case proved quite limited in duration, geography, and professional opportunities, but that nonetheless nourished astounding creative achievements, not only from contemporaries in music, such as Beethoven, but in the other arts as well.

One of the many enduring myths about Schubert is that he was largely unrecognized during his lifetime, a sad situation allegedly allayed to some extent by a devoted circle of friends who embraced his music. The reality seems to have been much more complex. He enjoyed considerable success, both in Vienna and beyond, with his songs and small-scale pieces, most intended for domestic consumption. A culture of intimate music-making is epitomized by the Schubertiades of the 1820s, evenings devoted to his music at which Schubert and others played for friends and invited guests. Schubert’s ambitions, however, went much farther, extending to what he once described to a publisher as his “strivings

after the highest in art.”³ He ultimately produced a staggering quantity of music, although most of it remained unpublished during his time. Already as a teenager he composed a large number of chamber, orchestral, sacred, and dramatic pieces, but it was in his twenties that he claimed real ownership of these genres. (Had he been of the mindset of Johannes Brahms, he probably would have destroyed much of his early instrumental music.) Many of these large-scale works were never performed in his lifetime and some were therefore unknown even to certain friends who viewed him, as did the public in general, principally as a composer of Lieder. Franz Grillparzer, Austria’s leading writer and an acquaintance, captured contemporaneous perceptions in the epitaph he crafted for Schubert’s grave: “The Art of Music Here Entombed a Rich Possession, But Even Far Fairer Hopes.”⁴

The idea of an unfinished career finds expression in Schubert’s most popular instrumental work, his Symphony in B Minor—the “Unfinished”—composed in 1822, and actually just one of a handful of his unfinished symphonies. When the work was finally premiered more than forty years later, in December 1865, critic Eduard Hanslick noted the “excited extraordinary enthusiasm” of the audience and how after hearing only a few measures “every child recognized the composer, and a muffled ‘Schubert’ was whispered in the audience . . . every heart rejoiced, as if, after a long separation, the composer himself were among us in person.”⁵ Three years later Schubert’s close friend Moritz von Schwind created his famous sepia drawing of a Schubertiade at Josef von Spaun’s house (see Figure 1 on page 68). Schwind also worked on a version in oils, which appears on the cover of this book, but it was not yet completed when the artist died in 1871.⁶ The unfinished state of both the symphony and painting helps remind us of Schubert’s unfinished life, suggesting a figurative “program” to various pieces that have none declared, not just the “Unfinished” Symphony, but also the “Quartettsatz,” “Reliquie” Piano Sonata, and other marvelous torsos.

The span of Schubert’s active public career lasted less than fifteen years, from 1814 to 1828. It is fitting that this book should appear in 2014, and that the Bard Music Festival honors Schubert during its twenty-fifth season, as the year marks the bicentennial of his miraculous masterpiece *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, whose composition on 19 October 1814 is often hailed as the “Birthday of the German Lied.” In political history, the year also had profound consequences for Schubert and his contemporaries, as it saw the convening of the Congress of Vienna, held between September 1814 and June 1815 to negotiate borders and balances of power in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. A period of reaction in Austria under the

powerful Prince Clemens von Metternich led to censorship and repression that crucially defined aspects of Schubert's world.

A better appreciation of this time and place reveals matters that contemporaries, especially close friends, would have understood but that have since been obscured or forgotten. Despite the focus of much recent Schubert scholarship on ahistorical analytic matters, there have nonetheless been enormous strides in advancing archival and documentary knowledge of Schubert's world, all building on the pioneering work of the great Schubert scholar Otto Erich Deutsch (1883–1967). The publications of the Internationales Franz Schubert Institut between 1987 and 2005, the journal *Schubert: Perspektiven*, abundant conference reports, contributory volumes, and monographs continue to enlarge our historical understanding of the composer.

One result is that the image of Schubert has changed considerably, from the familiar one of a poor, shy, largely unappreciated figure, surrounded by merry friends, who composed "clairvoyantly," to a darker portrait of one who struggled valiantly with health, depression, career, and political repression.⁷ The revisionist portrait is built on a firmer documentary basis and is surely more nuanced, although of necessity it is still often speculative and hampered by large holes in the historical record, not least because so few verbal documents survive from Schubert himself. The most sensational repositioning of Schubert, which generated the most heated debates, concerns his sexual life, an issue still far from resolved (and probably unresolvable) that is not much discussed in this book.⁸ What has proved salutary is the more skeptical and subtle examination of Schubert's own writings and of those about him, which helps construct a much more psychologically complex and professionally confident figure than the clueless one earlier trivialized in sentimental fiction, operettas, films, and biographies.

There remain large gaps to fill, facts to find, and secrets to solve, a project this book seeks to advance. The order of the chapters presented here combines the roughly chronological with the thematic. The first three in various ways consider Schubert's social sphere, his famous "circle of friends." In some of the book's essays, scholars revisit, revise, and expand their own earlier work. Twenty years ago Rita Steblin, a Canadian scholar living in Vienna whose formidable archival work on Schubert and Beethoven has yielded fascinating finds (and sometimes controversial interpretations), discovered newsletters of the so-called Unsinnsgesellschaft (Nonsense Society). Schubert participated in this secret society, made up largely of artists and poets, along with some familiar friends, notably Leopold and Josef Kupelwieser, but also with

individuals previously not known to have had any contact with him. The Unsinnsgesellschaft was active from April 1817 to December 1818, when Schubert was in his very early twenties. The surviving newsletters—the *Archive of Human Nonsense*—reveal a subculture in which code names, secrets, playfulness, and irreverence were paramount values. They shed new light on some of Schubert’s compositions and contain marvelous illustrations, a few included here, that add to the limited supply of contemporaneous images of the composer.

Schubert had graduated a few years earlier from the Vienna Stadtkonvikt, an elite boarding school to which he had won a scholarship because of his musical gifts and where he began to forge lasting friendships. His somewhat older school friends (and then friends of these friends) initially guided his career, suggested (and sometimes wrote) poems for him to set to music, and helped to facilitate various career opportunities. Most of these young men were musical, but not professional musicians. David Gramit, in his presentation of three translated articles from *Beiträge zur Bildung für Jünglinge* (Contributions to Education for Youths), offers another window into Schubert’s early social milieu, an altogether more serious one than that associated with the Unsinnsgesellschaft. This short-lived annual appeared for just two years (1817–18) and contained essays, poems, translations, dramatic scenes, and other edifying offerings. Today we might think of it as akin to a literary journal put together by smart graduate students at a good university. One encounters earnestness, ambition, and idealism, a search for virtue, truth, and the good—all appropriate to the age of the contributors.

As these two opening chapters show, Schubert was engaged with different social networks, but posterity has nevertheless loosely lumped them all together as a monolithic “Schubert Circle,” the individuals who populate Schwind’s composite Schubertiade illustrations. John M. Gingerich demonstrates that this was not the case and examines overlapping spheres in which Schubert participated, sometimes at the periphery or, with Schober, at its center (leading Schubert to coin the name “Schobert”).⁹ In the fall of 1824 a major conflict divided the circle around Schubert and Schober over an issue that superficially seems a mere test of loyalty. But the subsequent paths of various members reveal fissures that mirror divergences between early and late Romanticism, or more precisely, between the Friedrich Schlegel of 1799 and the same Friedrich von Schlegel of the 1820s, which means that they were also profoundly divided over religious and political issues. Gingerich traces the connections various members of the group had to both early and late Schlegel, some of them intense and personal, as well as the varied

involvement of the painters in the circle with the so-called Nazarenes, a movement in German painting also influenced by the Romantic writer. The essay reveals a Schubert circle profoundly divided over some of the central ideological, social, and artistic controversies of the time, and to a surprising extent personally engaged with some of the main actors in those controversies.

The next three essays touch on Schubert's engagement with dramatic works, each from a very different vantage point. In the first, coeditor Morten Solvik explores the *Liederspiel*, a form of semi-dramatic, domestic music-making associated with simple strophic songs. He lays out for the first time in English a case he has made in earlier work concerning Schubert's 1815 settings of twenty poems by Gotthard Ludwig Kosegarten, demonstrating that they form a group of *Lieder* for three singers portraying the tragic tale of an amorous adventurer and his forlorn mistresses. Schubert's path-breaking later song cycles to poems by Wilhelm Müller, *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823) and *Winterreise* (1827), are much more familiar today and have obscured this earlier practice, a type of song performance in private salons involving amateur acting and multiple characters. In what emerges as something of a detective story, Solvik examines Schubert's manuscripts for the Kosegarten songs, as well as musical evidence based on tonal planning, head motives, and other compositional devices, to make the case that the composer conceived these *Lieder* as a unified set telling a Biedermeier story of love gone astray.

In addition to such domestic spheres, including the Schubertiades, Schubert regularly attended a reading group that discussed contemporary authors including Goethe, Heinrich Heine, Heinrich von Kleist, and Ludwig Tieck. Theater was a preoccupation for the Viennese in general and an area in which Schubert also hoped to succeed as a public figure—he wrote more than a dozen theatrical works, from brief *Singspiele*, to incidental music, to full-scale operas. Anselm Hüttenbrenner described his friend's typical day: Schubert would get up early and compose from six to one, he “never composed in the afternoon; after the midday meal he went to a café, drank a small portion of black coffee, smoked for an hour or two and read the newspapers at the same time. In the evening he went to one or other of the theaters.”¹⁰ Even if Hüttenbrenner exaggerated the frequency of Schubert's theatrical attendance, there is little doubt he and his friends went to a great many plays, folk theater, and operas. Lisa Feurzeig considers how the Volkstheater tradition, plays by Ferdinand Raimund and Adolf Bäuerle with music by Wenzel Müller and Joseph Drechsler, may have found echoes in pieces by Schubert, including the “Wanderer” Fantasy, *Winterreise*, and *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*.¹¹

Schubert's theatrical aspirations are most apparent in his full-scale operas *Alfonso und Estrella* (1822) and *Fierabras* (1823), neither of which was staged during his lifetime. In the midst of the Rossinimania that captivated Vienna in the late teens and early 1820s, Schubert held out hopes that German opera might succeed. The triumph of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* in 1821 made this seem reasonable, just as the failure two years later of the same composer's *Euryanthe* is partly responsible for dashing those hopes. Schober wrote the libretto for *Alfonso*; the two friends enjoyed a secluded period in the fall of 1821 working together on the project, which was completed in January. Decades later Schober brought the opera to the attention of Franz Liszt, with whom he was closely associated at the time in Weimar. Liszt adored Schubert's music—he once called him “the most poetic of musicians”—and although he harbored reservations about *Alfonso*, he nonetheless mounted its much belated premiere in 1854.¹² He also wrote an extended essay about the work, which Allan Keiler introduces and translates here. Liszt does not pull his punches, pointing to the faults in the opera, but also to its many marvels.

The final three chapters explore the intersection between intention and reception, Schubert's goals as a composer and the manner in which he has been understood by posterity. Schubert won his first and most enduring fame with Lieder, the genre in which he produced his initial masterpieces to texts by Goethe and that engaged him to the very end (the playfully serious *Die Taubenpost*, on a poem by the Viennese poet Johann Gabriel Seidl about an esoteric mode of communication employed by both lovers and spies, was apparently the last piece he wrote). His songs have invited an astonishing range of scholarly attention and approaches. Recent German-language scholarship in particular has become attuned to political imagery in numerous poems that he chose to set in the repressive post-Napoleonic chill that came over Vienna just as his career was starting up. The hopes of so many in his generation for a spring-like renewal after the war were frustrated by an interminable winter. Kristina Muxfeldt's essay explores how Schubert's music deftly reshaped words and allowed unsuspected meanings to resound in the changing political climate. In a time of censorship, music with words, such as songs and operas, had to receive official approval, but Muxfeldt argues that Lieder nonetheless offered Schubert an expressive realm for political thought, “freedom of song, if not speech,” as she puts it.

Beethoven was the commanding musical presence in Schubert's world and the composer he most revered. Coeditor Christopher Gibbs returns to a topic broached in earlier writings to propose that Schubert

composed the Piano Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 100, in honor of Beethoven. We know Schubert was deeply affected by the master's death and participated in his funeral on 29 March 1827. The following November, just as Beethoven's gravestone was dedicated, he began composing the trio, which premiered publicly on 26 March 1828, the first anniversary of Beethoven's death. Various strains of biographical and musical evidence converge to suggest that Schubert wrote the piece as a *tombeau de Beethoven*, which may explain why many listeners have perceived a ghost haunting the work ever since.

Schubert died less than eight months after the premiere of the E-flat Piano Trio and a few days later he was buried, supposedly at his expressed request, near to Beethoven. The two composers became increasingly united in death, their graves a pilgrimage site, and the musical values embodied by their compositions compared and contrasted. The continual posthumous discovery of ever more of Schubert's music meant that his achievement seemed more in line with Beethoven's.

With Schubert's premature passing he entered not only a realm of myth making, but also of contest for his legacy, a subject Leon Botstein considers in the final chapter. Among the posthumous careers of the great Classical and Romantic composers Schubert's is unprecedented and extraordinary: most of his significant instrumental, dramatic, and religious music was released in the decades following his death, a steady stream of masterpieces that surprised and delighted many. The discovery of new marvels—Hanslick commented that it appeared Schubert was “composing invisibly”¹³—made it seem as if he were still alive, a contemporary not only of Mendelssohn and Schumann (both of whom died well before the premiere of the “Unfinished” Symphony), but also of Wagner and Brahms. Thus Schubert could be enlisted or dismissed as a continuing presence in the contested musical politics of the century, and not simply invoked as a departed master. His close identification with Vienna accelerated, and choral groups such as the Wiener Männergesangverein and Schubertbund claimed him as a native son. Botstein takes the story into the twentieth century, including the 1928 centennial of Schubert's death, when he continued to be extravagantly celebrated and condescendingly diminished by individuals and groups with larger ideological agendas.

Great historical figures are, of course, always ripe for reassessment, provoking studies that can reveal, with the benefits of hindsight, new perspectives on the distant past while also inevitably reflecting current concerns and attitudes. Anniversary years add impetus, as shown by *Schubertjahre* in 1897, 1928, 1978, and 1997. As the Bard Music Festival

and this book series celebrate their silver anniversary, we are halfway now from the Schubert bicentennial to the next big anniversary in 2028. Among leading composers of the past two and half centuries Schubert, with his largely uneventful and poorly documented life, and his extraordinary posthumous career, turns out to be a fascinating and unusually inviting figure for continual reappraisal.

— Christopher H. Gibbs

NOTES

1. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Eric Blom (London, 1946), 819–20.
2. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, trans. Rosamond Ley and John Nowell (London, 1958), 10.
3. Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 740.
4. See Ernst Hilmar, “Zu Grillparzers Inschrift auf Schuberts Grabdenkmal,” *Schubert durch die Brille* 29 (2002): 125–28.
5. *Hanslick’s Musical Criticisms*, ed. and trans. Henry Pleasants (New York, 1978), 102.
6. For more about Schwind’s drawing and painting, see Maurice J. E. Brown, “Schwind’s ‘Schubert-Abend bei Josef Spaun,’” in *Essays on Schubert* (New York, 1966), 155–68.
7. Christopher H. Gibbs, “‘Poor Schubert’: Images and Legends of the Composer,” *Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge, 1997), 36–55.
8. Maynard Solomon first raised the issue of the composer’s possible homosexuality in “Franz Schubert’s ‘Mein Traum,’” *American Imago* 38 (1981): 137–54. His argument achieved wide notoriety with the article “Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini,” *19th-Century Music* 12 (Spring 1989): 193–206; and responses in “Schubert: Music, Sexuality, Culture,” a special issue of *19th-Century Music* 17 (Summer 1993).
9. Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 98.
10. Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, 183.
11. Concerning possible influences of popular theater on Schubert’s own dramatic music, see Mary Wischusen, “Franz Schubert and Viennese Popular Comedy,” in *The Unknown Schubert*, ed. Barbara M. Reul and Lorraine Byrne Bodley (Aldershot, 2008), 83–97.
12. Janita R. Hall-Swadley, ed. and trans., *The Collected Writings of Franz Liszt*, vol. 2: *Essays and Letters of a Traveling Bachelor of Music* (Lanham, 2012), 327.
13. Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, 383.

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Ginger Shore has overseen the process since 1996 and retires this year; our thanks to her for dedication to these volumes, for always keeping things moving forward, and for her sensitive oversight of design issues. Irene Zedlacher, executive director of the Bard Music Festival, brings her keen editorial eye to reading the book and deals with many other matters to make things run smoothly. Don Giller has set the musical examples since the series began and we thank him for his careful work. We are grateful to Erin Clermont for copy-editing, Karen Spencer for the layout, and Ruth Elwell for indexing.

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We would also like to thank our families for their patience and support as we put together this book in countless email exchanges, Skype calls, trans-Atlantic trips, and long nights of editing. We are grateful for their care and understanding.

Finally, when a publisher asked Schubert about the dedication of one of his pieces, the composer responded: "The work is to be dedicated to nobody, save those who find pleasure in it. That is the most profitable dedication." In that spirit we wish to thank and dedicate this book to that most precious and endangered group in classical music, the generous music-loving patrons and benefactors who have made the Bard Music Festival possible year after year.

Christopher H. Gibbs, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
Morten Solvik, Vienna, Austria

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FRANZ SCHUBERT AND HIS WORLD

Schubert: The Nonsense Society Revisited

RITA STEBLIN

Twenty years have now passed since I discovered materials belonging to the Unsinnsgesellschaft (Nonsense Society).¹ This informal club, active in Vienna from April 1817 to December 1818, consisted mainly of young painters and poets with Schubert as one of its central members. In this essay I will review this discovery, my ensuing interpretations, and provide some new observations.

In January 1994, at the start of a research project on Schubert iconography, I studied some illustrated documents at the Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien (now the Wienmuseum am Karlsplatz), titled “Unsinniaiden.”² The documents comprise forty-four watercolor pictures and thirty-seven pages of text recording two festive events celebrated by the Nonsense Society: the New Year’s Eve party at the end of 1817 and the group’s first birthday party on 18 April 1818.³ The pictures depict various club members, identified by their code names and dressed in fanciful costumes, as well as four group scenes for the first event, including *Vivat es lebe Blasius Leks* (Long live Blasius Leks; Figure 1), and two group scenes for the second event, including *Feuergeister-Szene* (Fire Spirit Scene; Figure 6 below).⁴ Because of the use of code names—and the misidentifications written on the pictures by some previous owner of the materials—it was not initially possible to interpret these documents correctly.⁵

A few months later, in April 1994, I discovered a second set of papers, housed in the manuscript collection of the Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek (now Wienbibliothek) in Vienna’s City Hall, and these made it easier to unravel many of the society’s secrets.⁶ This second set of materials had been purchased in 1937 from a descendant of the club’s vice-editor, code-named Zeisig (a type of finch).⁷ It consisted of handwritten newsletters titled *Archiv des menschlichen Unsinnns* (Archive of Human Nonsense). One numbered issue of the newsletter was apparently produced each week, although the collection contained only twenty-nine newsletters, those between 17 April 1817 and 10 December 1818 (nine from



Figure 1. *Vivat es lebe Blasius Leks: Zur Unsinniade—5^{ter} Gesang*
(Long Live Blasius Leks: For the 5th Song of Nonsense), 31 December 1817.
Watercolor by Carl Friedrich Zimmermann (Aaron Bleistift).

1817 and twenty from 1818). Each issue, penned in *Kurrentschrift* (German running script) and usually eight pages long, begins with a motto and ends with a watercolor picture; in between are humorous and rather off-color texts spoofing contemporary politics, social mores, scientific discoveries, art, drama, and literature, each signed with the writer's code name. At the beginning of the first issue, in Zeisig's hand, is a key headed "Namen der Unsinnmitglieder" that identifies most of the club members—twenty-two in all. This is what made it possible to link the newsletters to the documents in the Wienmuseum and, after intensive biographical research on the club's participants, establish Schubert's important role in the secret society.

Most of the members were young painters—students at the Vienna Art Academy—with code names that reflect their profession: for example, August Kloeber (1793–1864), famous for the portrait he sketched of Beethoven in 1818, was called Goliath Pinselstiel (Giant Paintbrush) and Johann Nepomuk Hoechle (1790–1835), who would paint Beethoven's studio a few days after the composer's death, was called Kratzeratti Klanwinzi (Little Scratcher). Three Kupelwieser brothers are also clearly

identified on this list: Blasius Leks (Josef), Chrisostomus Schmecks (Johann), and Damian Klex (Leopold).⁸ Not all of the club's members are initially listed; Schubert's name, for example, is missing. Moreover, various code names that occur in the newsletters or on the individual portraits, for example that of Quanti Verdradi (Totally Mixed-Up), whom I have identified as Schubert's friend Franz von Schober, are also not on the initial list. Compounding this, at least two-thirds of the newsletters originally produced by the club are now missing (including the twenty-three issues immediately after the first one), a loss that makes a definitive interpretation of all the complicated allusions difficult.

Schubert's connection to the society was referred to in at least two memoirs by his friends but was misinterpreted by the great scholar Otto Erich Deutsch (1883–1967), who was only aware of another group, the so-called Ludlamshöhle (Ludlam's Cave). The first reference comes from Heinrich Anschütz (1785–1865), a famous Burgtheater actor, who delivered Franz Grillparzer's celebrated oration at Beethoven's funeral. He wrote in his memoirs:

I had spent my first Christmas in Vienna at the end of 1821. . . . This Christmas was of special interest to me because it brought Schubert to my house for the first time. Franz Schubert was one of the most active members of the late Nonsense Society. In this my brothers had been most intimately associated with him for years and it was through my [brothers] that he came to my house.⁹

There is no reason to doubt Anschütz's assertion about Schubert's active participation in the "late" Nonsense Society—"late" meaning that the group no longer existed in 1821. Moreover, the first two names on the list of Nonsense Society members are the actor's two brothers: "Anschütz Eduard . . . Schnautze, Redacteur" and "Anschütz Gustav . . . Sebastⁿ Haarpuder" (see Figures 2–4).¹⁰ Eduard Anschütz (ca. 1797–1855) was actually the club's leader, as well as the main editor (*Redacteur*) of the newsletters; most of the texts were written in his hand. His code name Schnautze, meaning (big) snout, is an anagram of Anschütz.

The second reference to the Nonsense Society, although the group was not mentioned by name, appears in an obituary for Schubert by Eduard von Bauernfeld (1802–1890):

At the time Schubert came out into the world several young men in his native city, mostly poets and painters (e.g. the

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