

# *Masters of Music*

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMPOSERS

The Life and Times of

*Franz Peter Schubert*



by John Bankston



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Born in Boston, Massachusetts, John Bankston has written over three dozen biographies for young adults profiling scientists like Jonas Salk and Alexander Fleming, celebrities like Mandy Moore and Alicia Keys, great achievers like Alfred Nobel, and master musicians like Mozart. An avid reader and writer, he has had a lifelong love of music history. He has worked in Los Angeles, California as a producer, screenwriter and actor. Currently he is in pre-production on *Dancing at the Edge*, a semi-autobiographical film he hopes to film in Portland, Oregon. Last year he completed his first young adult novel, *18 to Look Younger*.

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**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** This story is based on the author's extensive research, which he believes to be accurate. Documentation of such research is contained on page 46.

The internet sites referenced herein were all active as of the publication date. Due to the fleeting nature of some Web sites, we cannot guarantee they will all be active when you are reading this book.

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\* For Your Information

# Masters of Music



## *Idolizing Beethoven*

**L**udwig van Beethoven was dying. He was suffering from kidney and liver disease, perhaps made worse by alcohol. By February of 1827, he knew his life would soon be over. Beethoven was famous in a way no composer before him had been—not Wolfgang Mozart, not Joseph “Papa” Haydn.

While many of Beethoven’s fellow citizens in Vienna were aware of his illness, one man—a virtually unknown young composer—was especially distressed by the great man’s struggles.

The composer was Franz Schubert, an early part of the Romantic Movement in music. Beethoven was Schubert’s idol. As a teenager, Franz loved his work so much that he sold some of his school books to pay for a ticket to a performance of Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio*. Later, he dedicated a set of piano variations to Beethoven with the words “by his admirer and worshipper, Franz Schubert.” And his Ninth Symphony contains part of the “Ode to Joy” theme that Beethoven used in his own Ninth (“Choral”) Symphony.



*Franz Schubert drew inspiration from the great composers who came before him, like Beethoven, Wolfgang Mozart and Joseph Haydn. Yet during his brief lifetime, he not only carved out his own style, but later became the composer most identified with the Romantic movement in music.*

“His ideal was Beethoven,” school friend Benedikt Randhartinger once recalled. “All other composers mattered little to him.”

According to one story, Beethoven took the time to read some of Schubert’s work as he lay on his deathbed. Reading through those compositions, Beethoven exclaimed, “Truly, in Schubert there is a divine spark!” He saw in the man’s work a genius few had recognized.

But no one is sure if the two men actually met face to face. Although they only lived a few miles from each other, their lives were worlds apart. Beethoven was celebrated, Schubert obscure, a 30-year-old who’d spent his life struggling against poverty, depression and a disease which was slowly killing him. Unable to support a wife and family, he’d never married. And until recently, music publishers had rejected his work.

A friend of both Schubert and Beethoven, Anselm Hüttenbrenner, was by Beethoven’s bedside on the evening of March 26. Suddenly a flash of lightning illuminated the room. The composer raised his arm, his fist tightly clenched. Then he fell back onto his bed.

Ludwig van Beethoven was dead.

Three days later, 20,000 mourners attended the funeral. Schubert was one of 36 torchbearers who walked alongside the coffin as it was carried to the gravesite, an enormous honor for the young man.

A poet named Franz Grillparzer, a friend of Schubert’s, delivered the funeral oration. “He was an artist,” Grillparzer said, referring to Beethoven. “Who shall stand beside him?”

Afterwards Schubert hung out with friends until the night's wee hours, talking about Beethoven. Although he mourned the loss of his idol, it's possible that Schubert believed that Grillparzer's words were directed at him. All he needed was a bit more luck, some dedication and his work could be as admired as Beethoven's.

But there would be no luck.

In less than two years, Franz Peter Schubert died. Though he was buried just a few yards from his idol Beethoven, it seemed that his reputation went into the ground with him. Even one of his friends, referring to two of Vienna's most famous composers, wrote that "In spite of all the admiration I have felt for my dear friend, we shall never make a Mozart or a Haydn out of him."

The friend was wrong. After his death, Schubert's works were discovered. It took several decades, but Schubert's reputation has grown immensely despite his lack of success in life. Today he is regarded as one of our great composers. ◆

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