

Music as Mirror

3 - Music for the Home: Schubert's Piano Trio in B-flat Major

Vienna: the heart center of Western music as of the turn of the 19th century.



That all changed after the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15.



CONGRES DE VIENNE.
GRANDS DES PLÉNIPOTENTIAIRES
DES SEPT PUISSANCES EUROPÉENNES
DU TRAITÉ DE PARIS.



Under the Chancellorship of Klemens von Metternich, Austria became a police state, filled with spies and with a stringent policy of censorship over all of the arts.



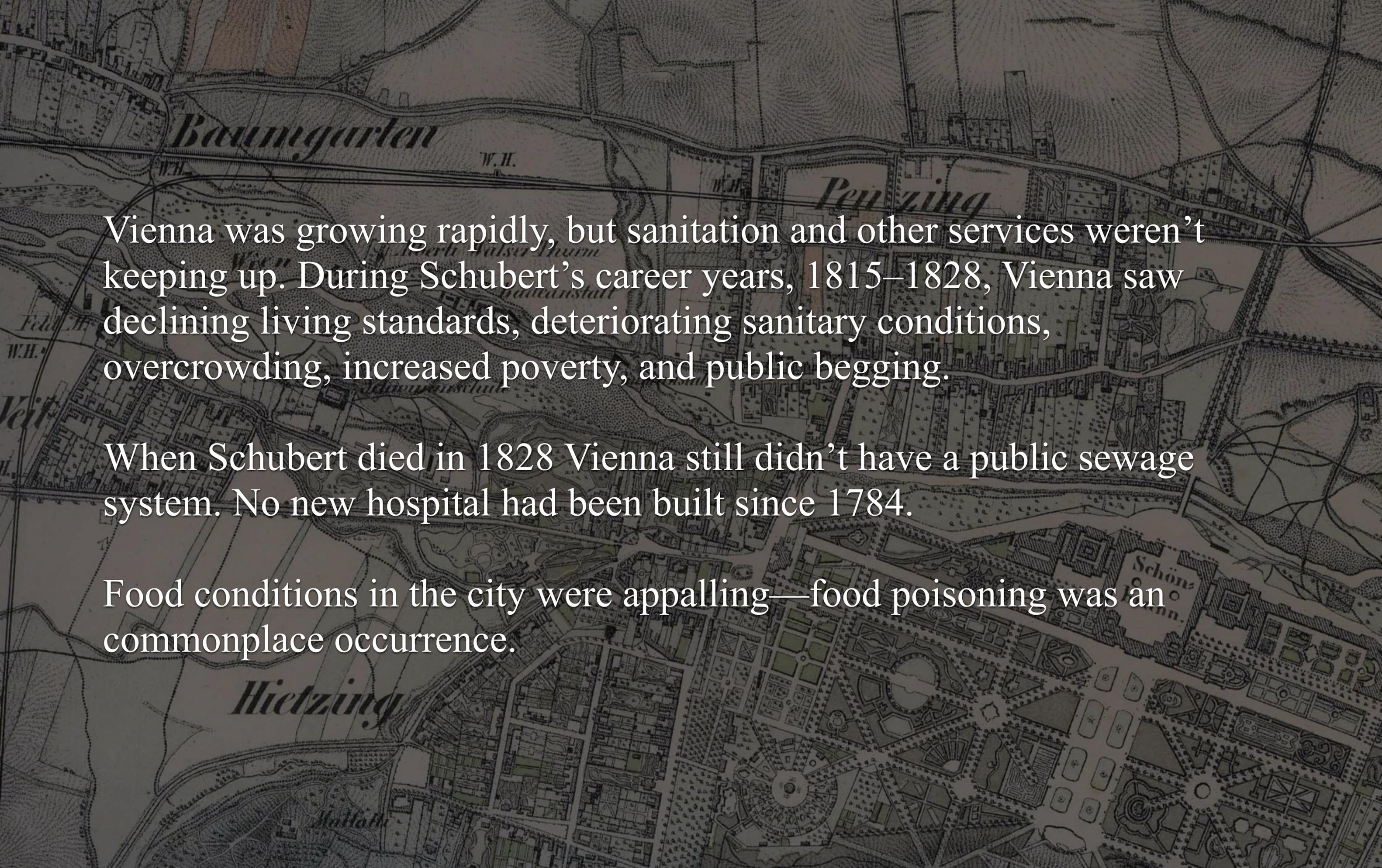
“Today’s youth cannot imagine the humiliating pressure on our creative spirits under which we, as young people— aspiring writers and artists—suffered. The police in general and censorship in particular weighed on us like a monkey we could not get off our back.”

—Eduard von Baurenfeld





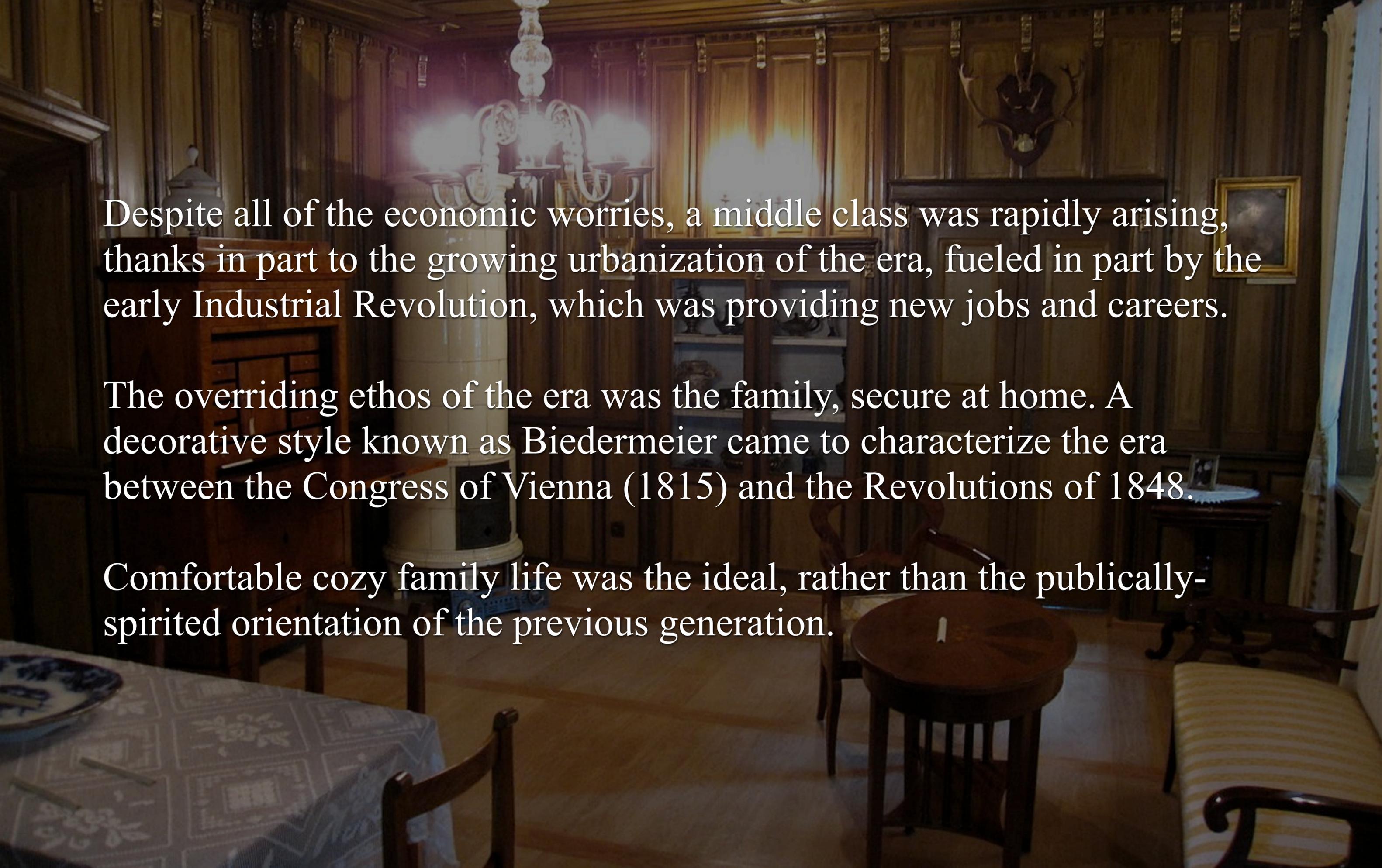
Johann Mayrhofer wrote texts for forty-seven Schubert songs and was Schubert's housemate from 1818 to 1820. He became a censor at the end of 1820. His relationships with his friends became deeply strained as a result, and he committed suicide in 1836.

A detailed historical map of Vienna, Austria, showing various districts and landmarks. The map is rendered in a dark, monochromatic style with white text and lines. Key districts labeled include Baumgarten, Penzing, and Hietzing. The Danube River is visible on the right side. The map shows a dense urban layout with streets, buildings, and parks.

Vienna was growing rapidly, but sanitation and other services weren't keeping up. During Schubert's career years, 1815–1828, Vienna saw declining living standards, deteriorating sanitary conditions, overcrowding, increased poverty, and public begging.

When Schubert died in 1828 Vienna still didn't have a public sewage system. No new hospital had been built since 1784.

Food conditions in the city were appalling—food poisoning was an commonplace occurrence.

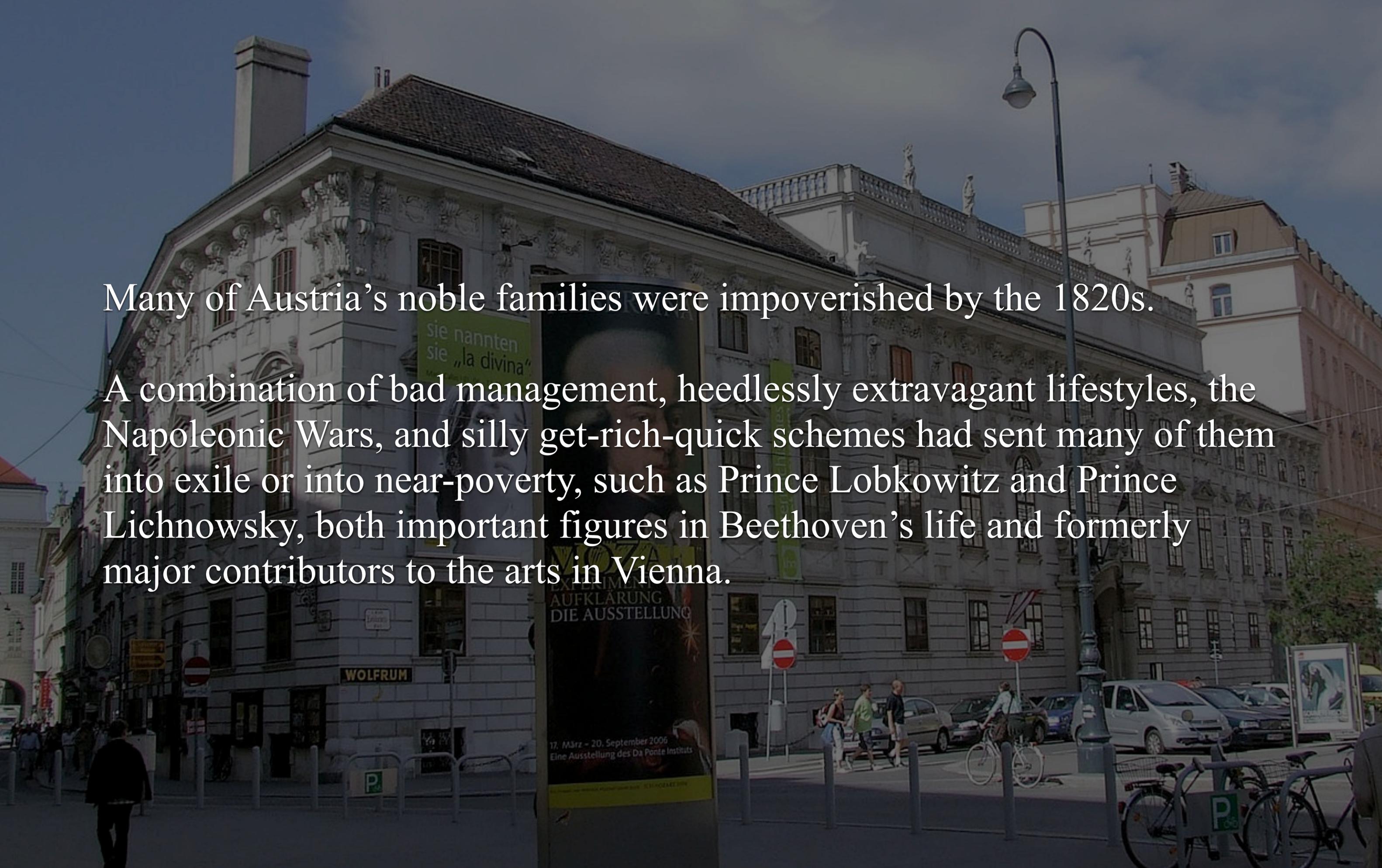
A dimly lit, wood-paneled room, likely a dining room or parlor. The walls are covered in dark wood paneling. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. In the center, there is a white, cylindrical stove or heater. To the right, a wooden dining table is set with a white tablecloth and a blue patterned tablecloth. A chair with a yellow and white striped seat is visible in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is cozy and traditional.

Despite all of the economic worries, a middle class was rapidly arising, thanks in part to the growing urbanization of the era, fueled in part by the early Industrial Revolution, which was providing new jobs and careers.

The overriding ethos of the era was the family, secure at home. A decorative style known as Biedermeier came to characterize the era between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the Revolutions of 1848.

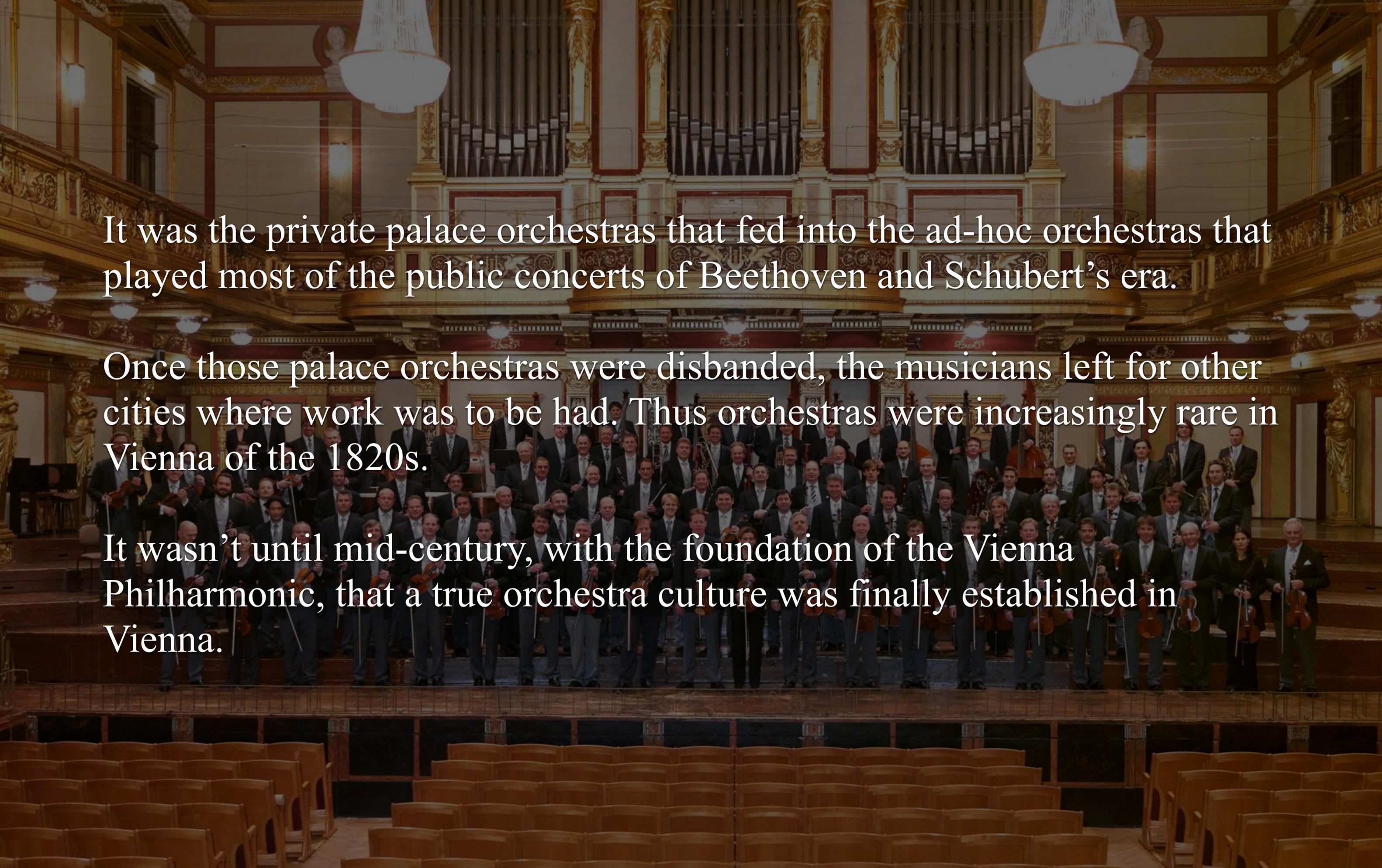
Comfortable cozy family life was the ideal, rather than the publically-spirited orientation of the previous generation.





Many of Austria's noble families were impoverished by the 1820s.

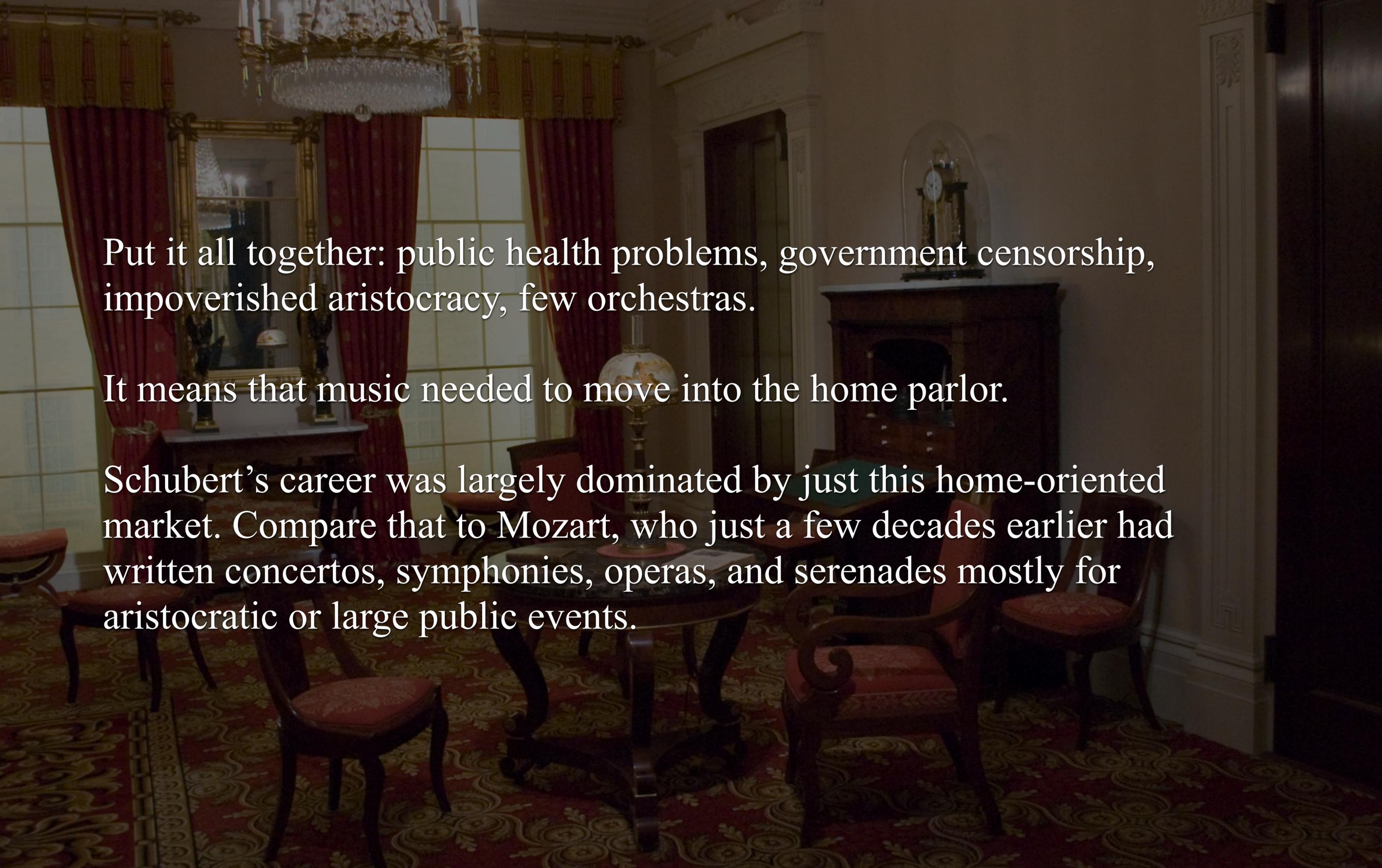
A combination of bad management, heedlessly extravagant lifestyles, the Napoleonic Wars, and silly get-rich-quick schemes had sent many of them into exile or into near-poverty, such as Prince Lobkowitz and Prince Lichnowsky, both important figures in Beethoven's life and formerly major contributors to the arts in Vienna.

A large orchestra of musicians in formal attire is performing in a grand, ornate concert hall. The musicians are arranged in multiple rows on a stage, with some holding violins and others holding larger instruments. The hall features high ceilings with chandeliers, ornate architectural details, and a balcony with a decorative railing. The foreground shows rows of empty wooden seats.

It was the private palace orchestras that fed into the ad-hoc orchestras that played most of the public concerts of Beethoven and Schubert's era.

Once those palace orchestras were disbanded, the musicians left for other cities where work was to be had. Thus orchestras were increasingly rare in Vienna of the 1820s.

It wasn't until mid-century, with the foundation of the Vienna Philharmonic, that a true orchestra culture was finally established in Vienna.

A dimly lit, ornate parlor. In the center, a round wooden table is surrounded by several chairs with red upholstered seats. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. To the left, a window is framed by heavy red curtains. In the background, a wooden cabinet holds a clock. The room is decorated with a patterned rug and a large mirror on the wall.

Put it all together: public health problems, government censorship, impoverished aristocracy, few orchestras.

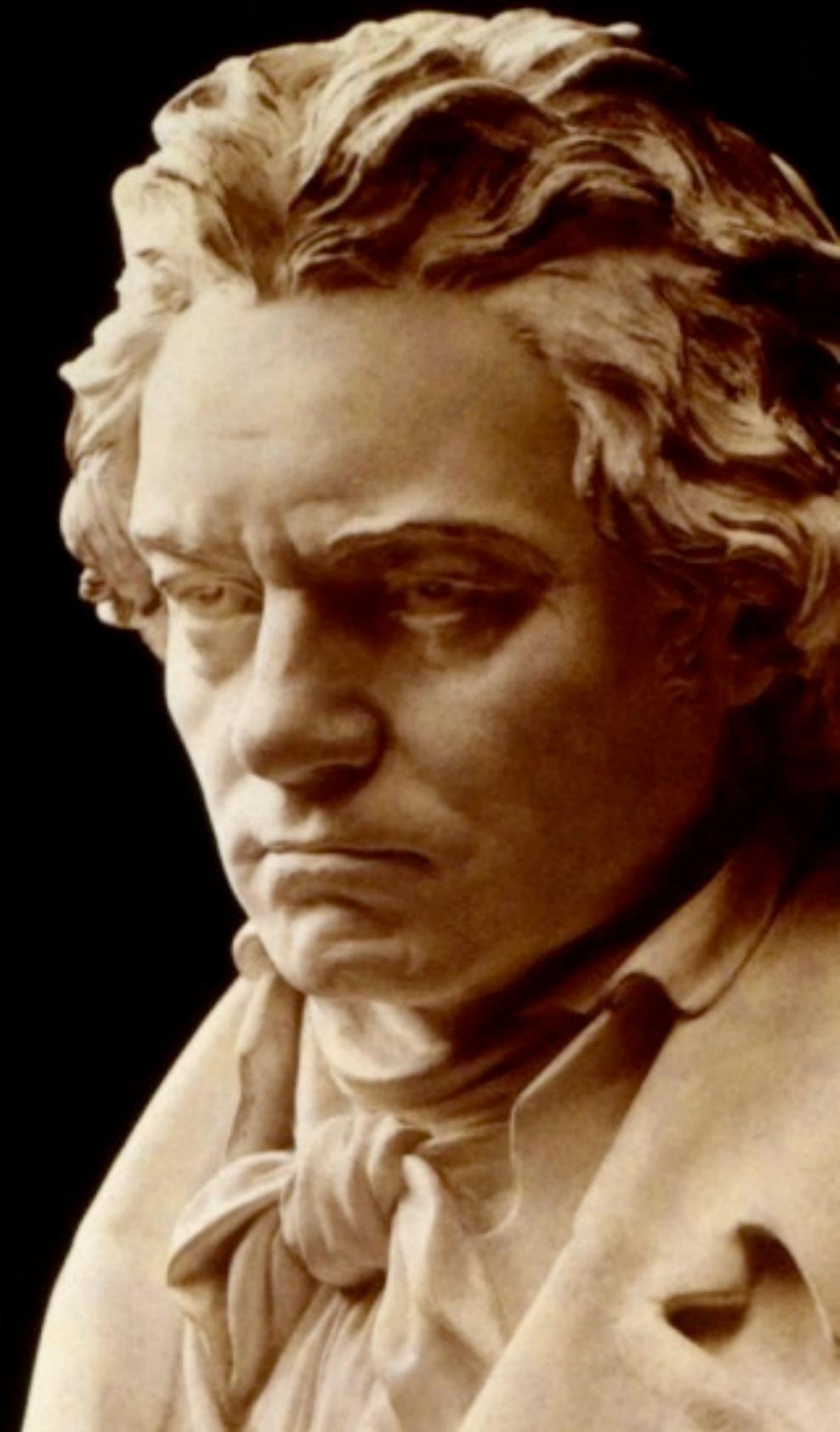
It means that music needed to move into the home parlor.

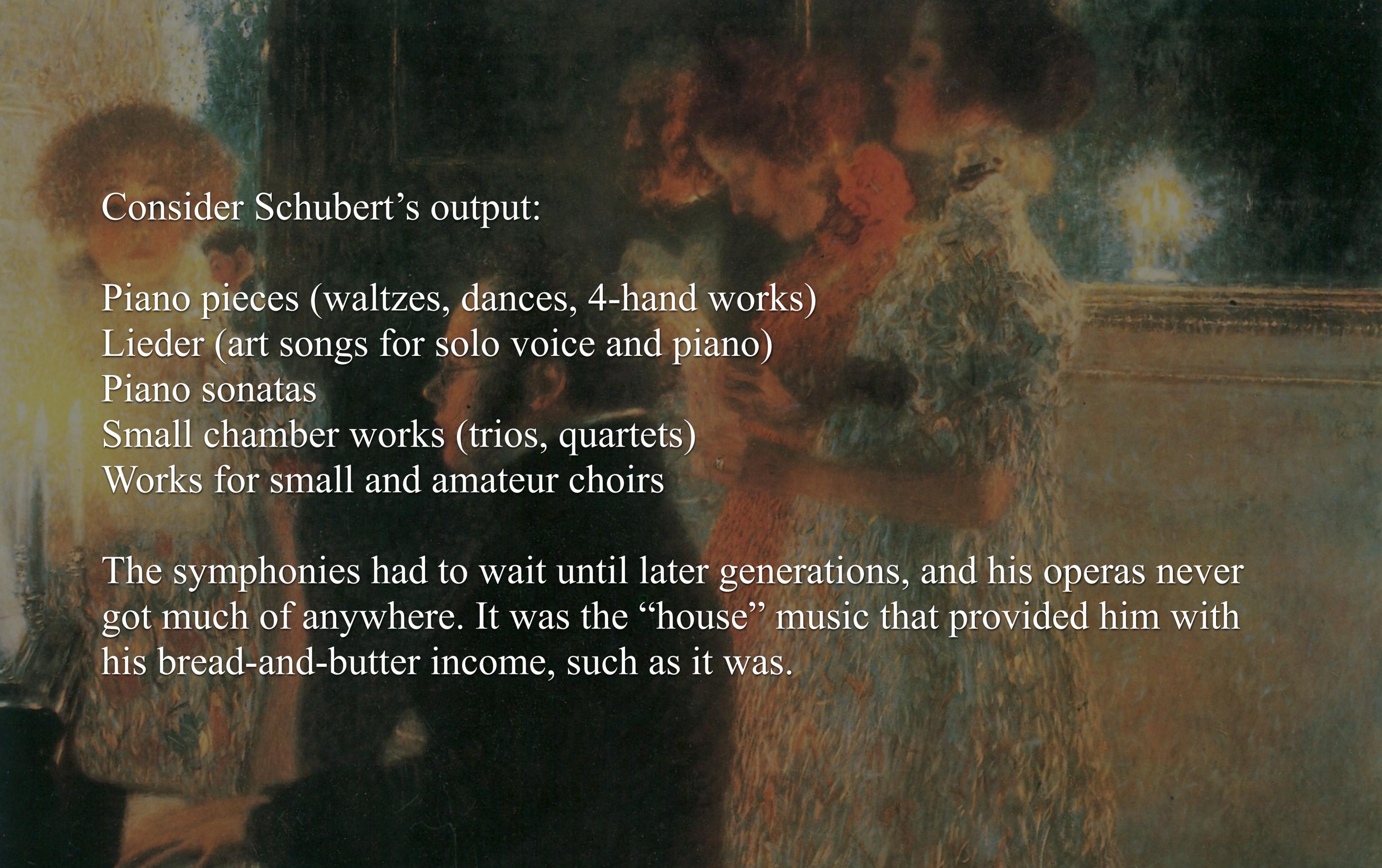
Schubert's career was largely dominated by just this home-oriented market. Compare that to Mozart, who just a few decades earlier had written concertos, symphonies, operas, and serenades mostly for aristocratic or large public events.

Ludwig Van Beethoven

Beethoven wrote mostly piano sonatas and string quartets in the 1820s, because that's what publishers wanted. A string quartet was about the biggest ensemble that was economically viable on a regular basis.

Beethoven's large works of the 1820s such as the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa solemnis* give testimony to his extraordinary public stature: no other composer in Vienna in that era could have gotten funding for those.





Consider Schubert's output:

Piano pieces (waltzes, dances, 4-hand works)

Lieder (art songs for solo voice and piano)

Piano sonatas

Small chamber works (trios, quartets)

Works for small and amateur choirs

The symphonies had to wait until later generations, and his operas never got much of anywhere. It was the “house” music that provided him with his bread-and-butter income, such as it was.

Franz Schubert.

Allegro moderato.

Violino.

Violoncello.

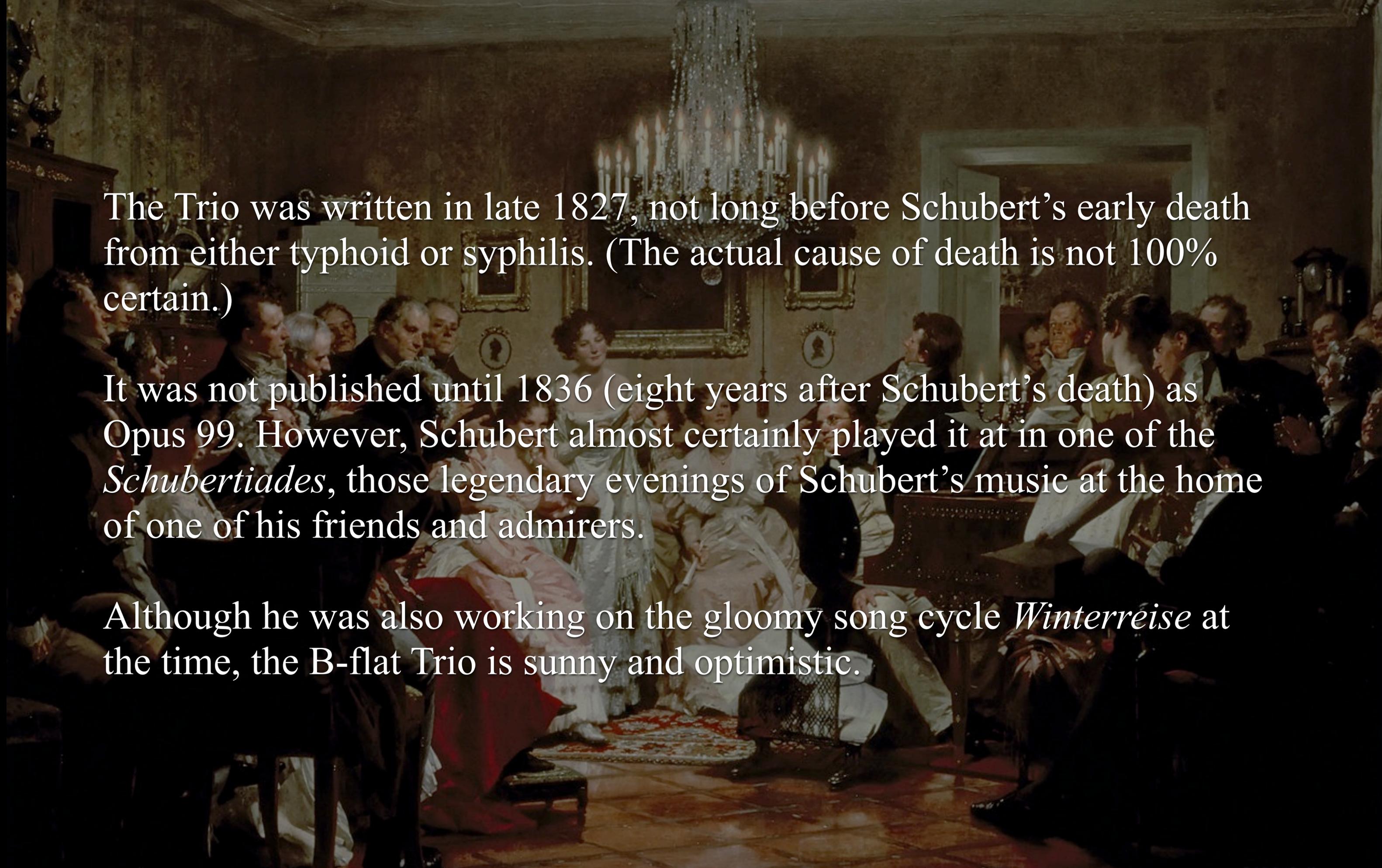
Allegro moderato.

Pianoforte.

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first movement of Schubert's Piano Trio No. 1. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Violino and Violoncello, both with a tempo marking of 'Allegro moderato.'. The second system is for the Pianoforte, also marked 'Allegro moderato.', and shows a complex texture with many chords. The third system continues the piano part with similar dense textures. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major: I

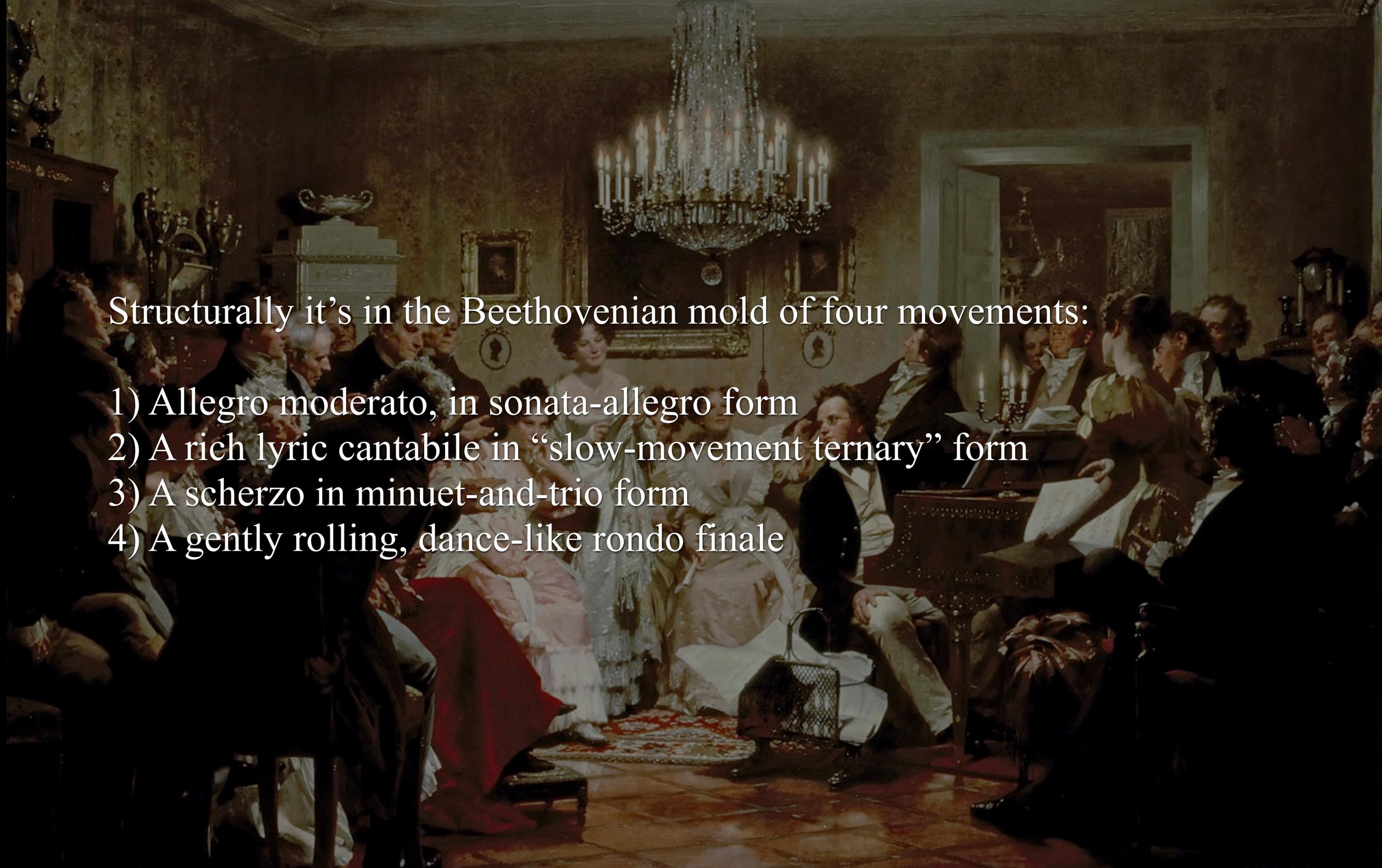
Henryk Szeryng, *violin* / Pierre Fournier, *cello* / Arthur Rubinstein, *piano*

The background image is a painting of a grand, ornate interior, likely a drawing room or a concert hall. It is filled with numerous people, both men and women, dressed in formal 19th-century attire. The room features a large, multi-tiered chandelier hanging from the ceiling, which is lit. The walls are decorated with framed pictures and busts. The overall atmosphere is one of a sophisticated and elegant social gathering.

The Trio was written in late 1827, not long before Schubert's early death from either typhoid or syphilis. (The actual cause of death is not 100% certain.)

It was not published until 1836 (eight years after Schubert's death) as Opus 99. However, Schubert almost certainly played it at in one of the *Schubertiades*, those legendary evenings of Schubert's music at the home of one of his friends and admirers.

Although he was also working on the gloomy song cycle *Winterreise* at the time, the B-flat Trio is sunny and optimistic.

A grand, dimly lit ballroom with a large chandelier and many people in 18th-century attire. The room is filled with guests, some seated at tables and others standing. The lighting is warm and focused on the chandelier, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The architecture is ornate, with high ceilings and decorative wall panels.

Structurally it's in the Beethovenian mold of four movements:

- 1) Allegro moderato, in sonata-allegro form
- 2) A rich lyric cantabile in “slow-movement ternary” form
- 3) A scherzo in minuet-and-trio form
- 4) A gently rolling, dance-like rondo finale

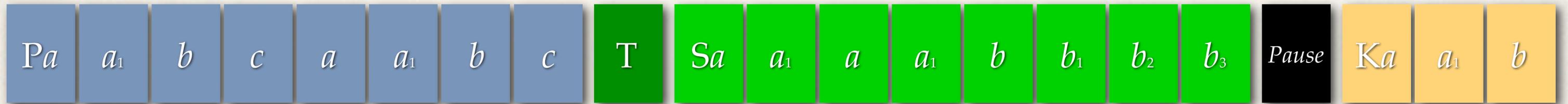
A grand, ornate ballroom with a large chandelier and many people in 19th-century attire. The room is filled with guests, some seated at tables and others standing. The lighting is warm and the atmosphere is formal.

But it's not remotely Beethovenian otherwise. The Trio is filled with great tunes, is uncomplicated emotionally, and avoids the intensive development so common to Beethoven, especially in his later years.

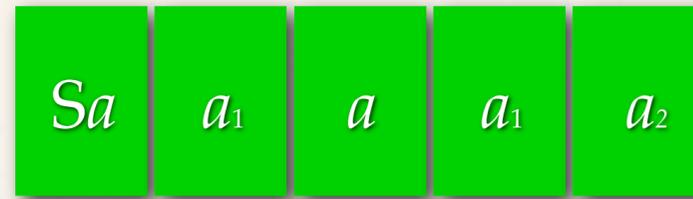
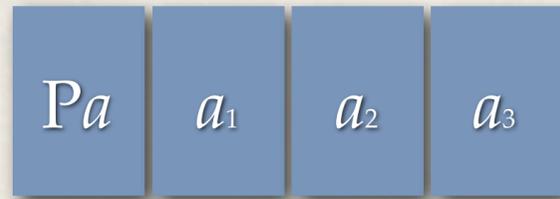
Instead it is filled with dance rhythms and often repeats materials just for the fun of repeating them.



Exposition



Development



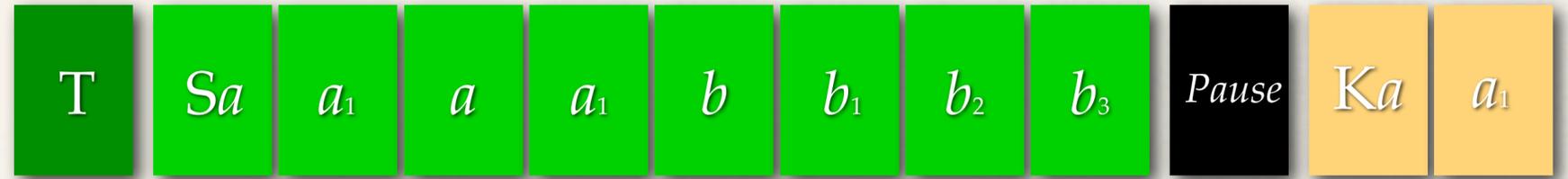
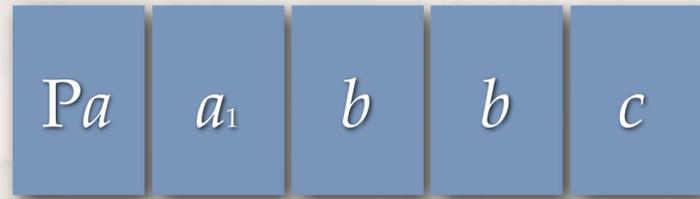
Retransition



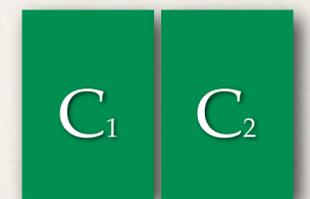
False Recaps



Recapitulation



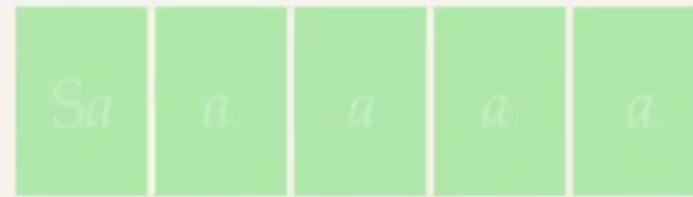
Coda



Exposition



Development



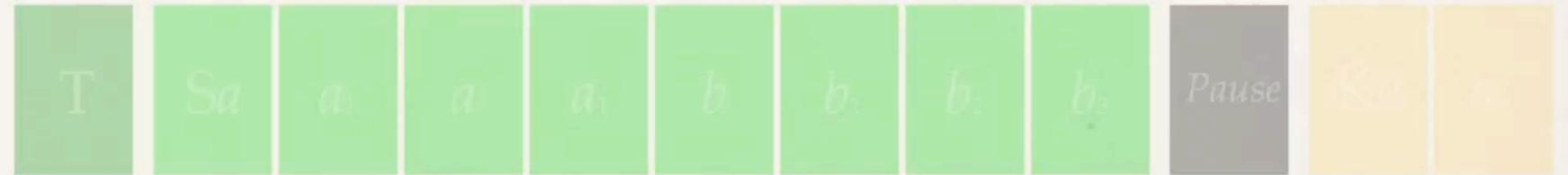
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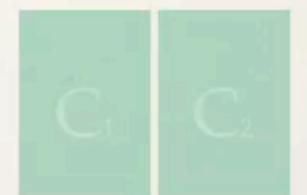
False Recaps



Recapitulation



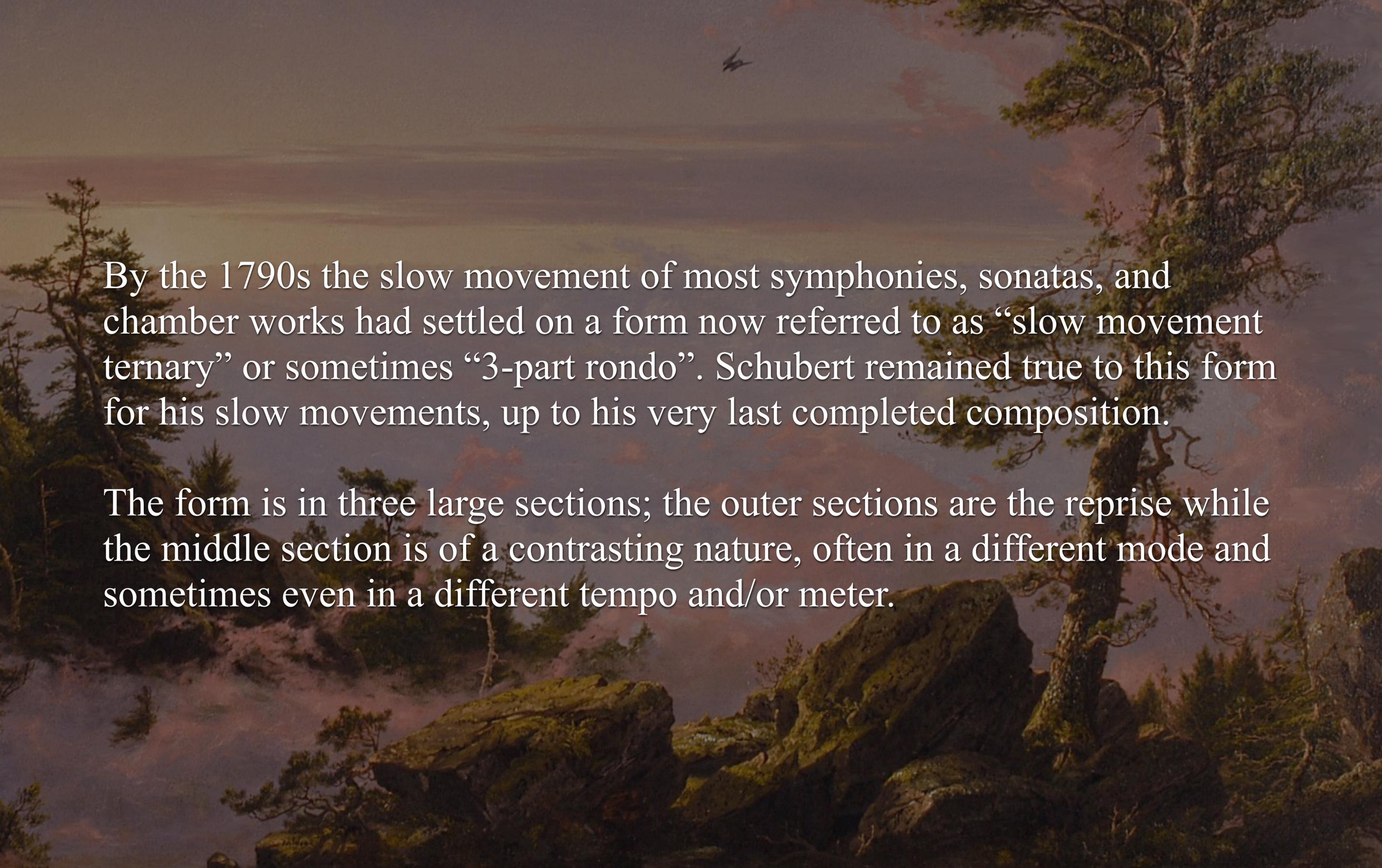
Coda





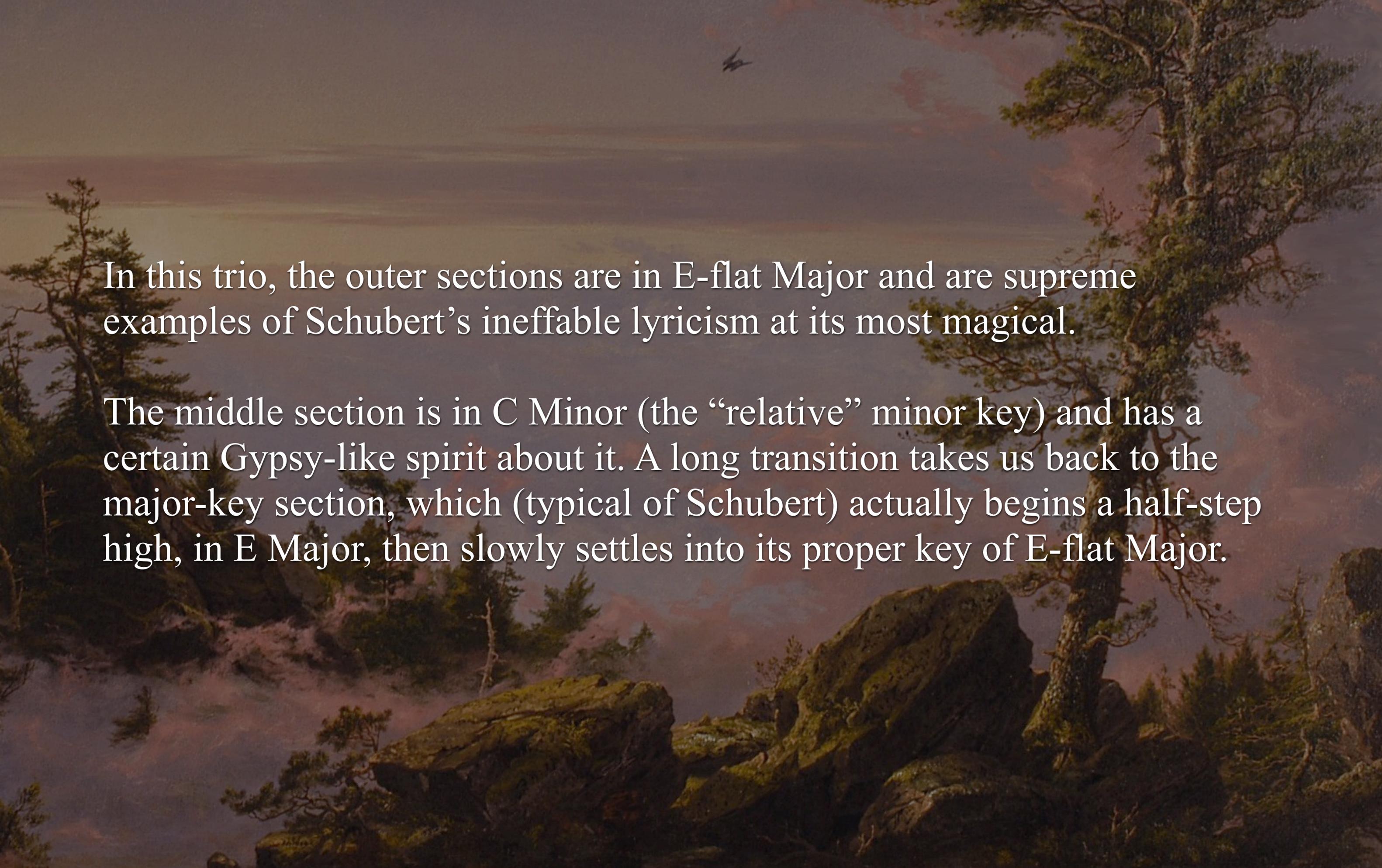
Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major: II

Jacques Thibaud, *violin* / Pablo Casals, *cello* / Alfred Cortot, *piano*

A scenic landscape featuring a large, gnarled tree on the right side, a bird in flight in the upper center, and a body of water in the background. The foreground is dominated by large, moss-covered rocks. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

By the 1790s the slow movement of most symphonies, sonatas, and chamber works had settled on a form now referred to as “slow movement ternary” or sometimes “3-part rondo”. Schubert remained true to this form for his slow movements, up to his very last completed composition.

The form is in three large sections; the outer sections are the reprise while the middle section is of a contrasting nature, often in a different mode and sometimes even in a different tempo and/or meter.

A scenic landscape painting of a mountain peak. The foreground is dominated by large, dark, moss-covered rocks. Several pine trees of varying sizes are scattered across the scene, some growing on the rocks and others on the slopes. The background shows a vast, hazy mountain range under a soft, overcast sky. A single bird is captured in flight in the upper center of the frame. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

In this trio, the outer sections are in E-flat Major and are supreme examples of Schubert's ineffable lyricism at its most magical.

The middle section is in C Minor (the "relative" minor key) and has a certain Gypsy-like spirit about it. A long transition takes us back to the major-key section, which (typical of Schubert) actually begins a half-step high, in E Major, then slowly settles into its proper key of E-flat Major.

This performance, captured by HMV in 1926 at the dawn of electrical recording technology, is surely the most bewitching ever recorded.

Jacques Thibaud, Pablo Casals, and Alfred Cortot were each artists of strong individuality, but together they forged a new musical personality that played with one voice.

Nota bene: Casals's exquisite performance of the opening cello solo.



Photo Jaellier

Jacques THIBAUD Pablo CASALS Alfred CORTOT



I accompany the performance with 19th century landscape paintings, mostly from the Hudson River School (Thomas Cole, Frederic Church) with some Bierstadt's thrown in for a bit of added drama.

Grove Music Online

Scherzo

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Abbreviations

Scherzo

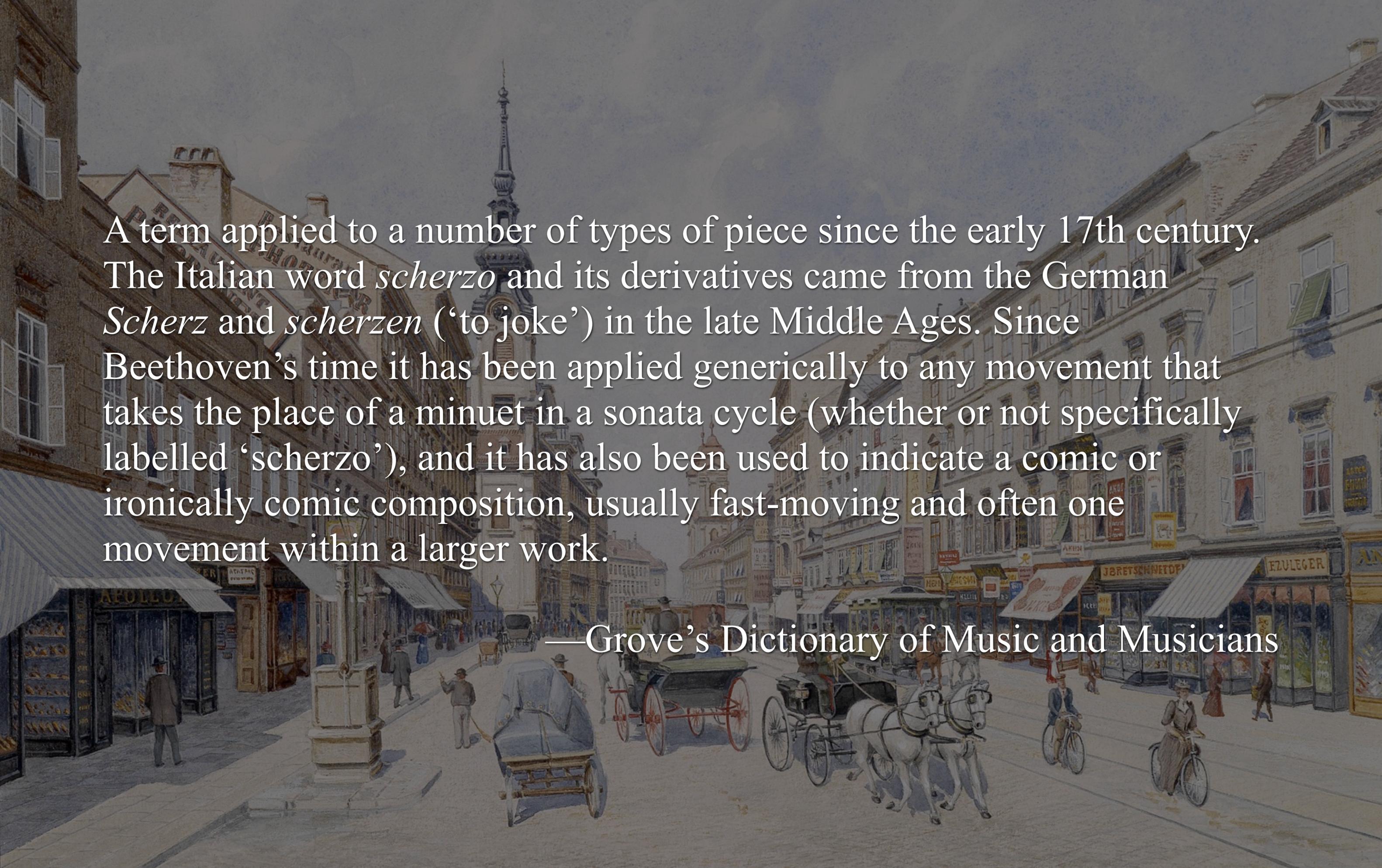
(It.: 'joke').

A term applied to a number of types of piece since the early 17th century. The Italian word and its derivatives came from the German *Scherz* and *scherzen* ('to joke') in the late Middle Ages. Since Beethoven's time it has been applied generically to any movement that takes the place of a minuet in a sonata cycle (whether or not specifically labelled 'scherzo'), and it has also been used to indicate a comic or ironically comic composition, usually fast-moving and often one movement in a larger work.

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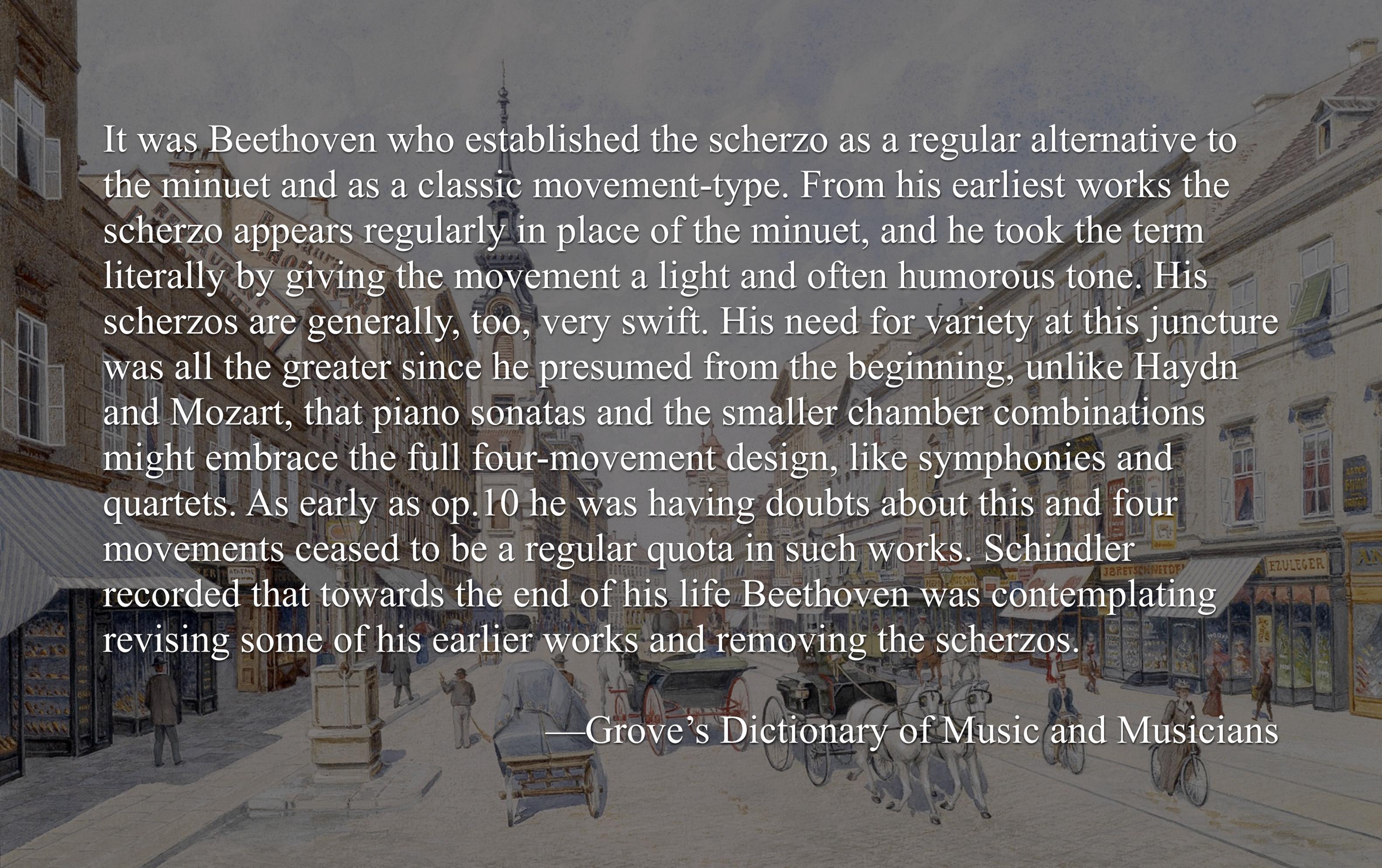
Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major: III

Jascha Heifetz, *violin* / Emmanuel Feuermann, *cello* / Arthur Rubinstein, *piano*



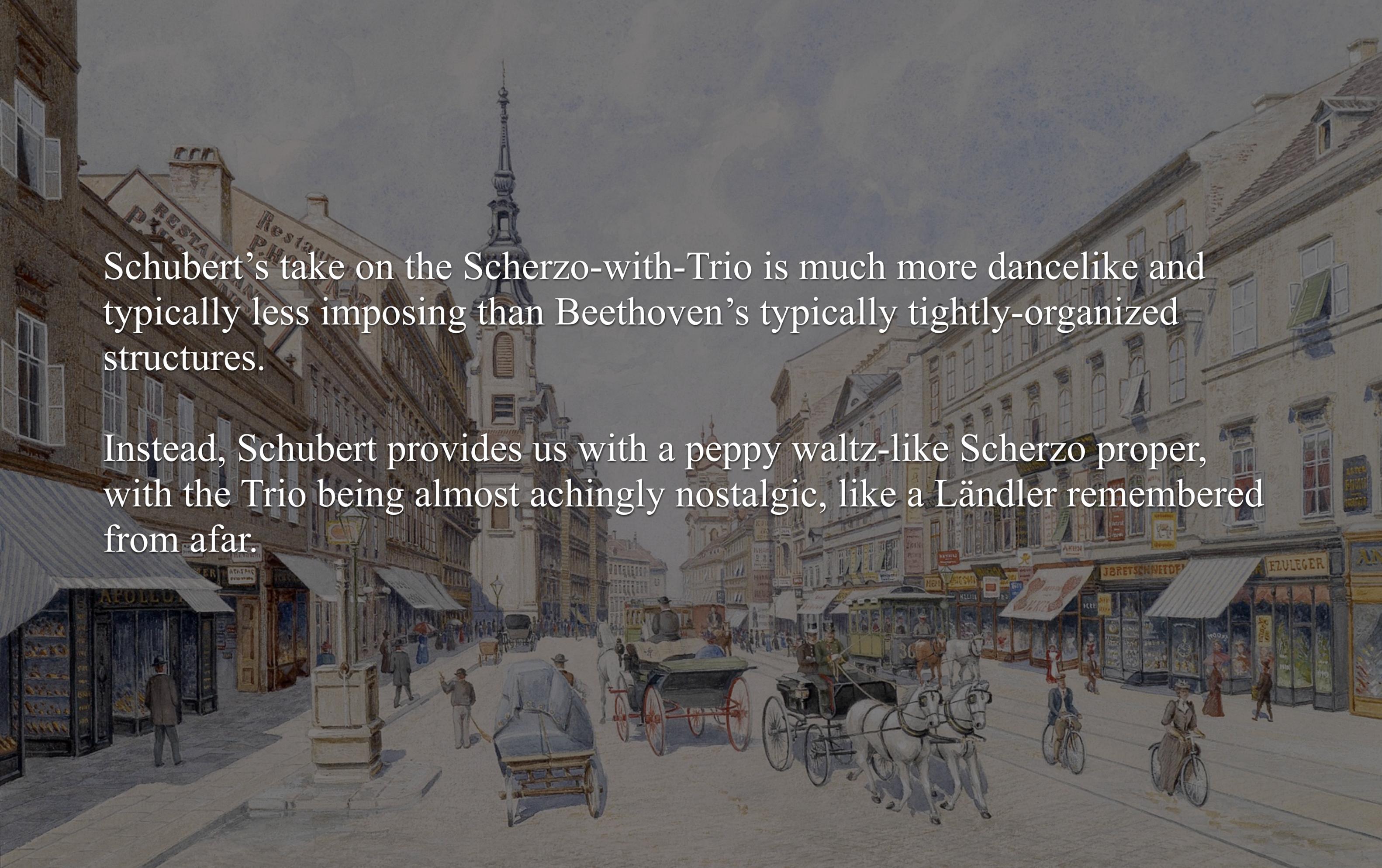
A term applied to a number of types of piece since the early 17th century. The Italian word *scherzo* and its derivatives came from the German *Scherz* and *scherzen* ('to joke') in the late Middle Ages. Since Beethoven's time it has been applied generically to any movement that takes the place of a minuet in a sonata cycle (whether or not specifically labelled 'scherzo'), and it has also been used to indicate a comic or ironically comic composition, usually fast-moving and often one movement within a larger work.

—Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians



It was Beethoven who established the scherzo as a regular alternative to the minuet and as a classic movement-type. From his earliest works the scherzo appears regularly in place of the minuet, and he took the term literally by giving the movement a light and often humorous tone. His scherzos are generally, too, very swift. His need for variety at this juncture was all the greater since he presumed from the beginning, unlike Haydn and Mozart, that piano sonatas and the smaller chamber combinations might embrace the full four-movement design, like symphonies and quartets. As early as op.10 he was having doubts about this and four movements ceased to be a regular quota in such works. Schindler recorded that towards the end of his life Beethoven was contemplating revising some of his earlier works and removing the scherzos.

—Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians



Schubert's take on the Scherzo-with-Trio is much more dancelike and typically less imposing than Beethoven's typically tightly-organized structures.

Instead, Schubert provides us with a peppy waltz-like Scherzo proper, with the Trio being almost achingly nostalgic, like a Ländler remembered from afar.



The performance is by the “Million-Dollar Trio”, made up of RCA Victor’s three most stellar artists on their respective instruments:

Jascha Heifetz, violin

Emmanuel Feuermann, cello (later replaced by Gregor Piatigorsky)

Arthur Rubinstein, piano

The recording was made in 1941 at RCA’s Hollywood studio.

Compound Song Form

Scherzo

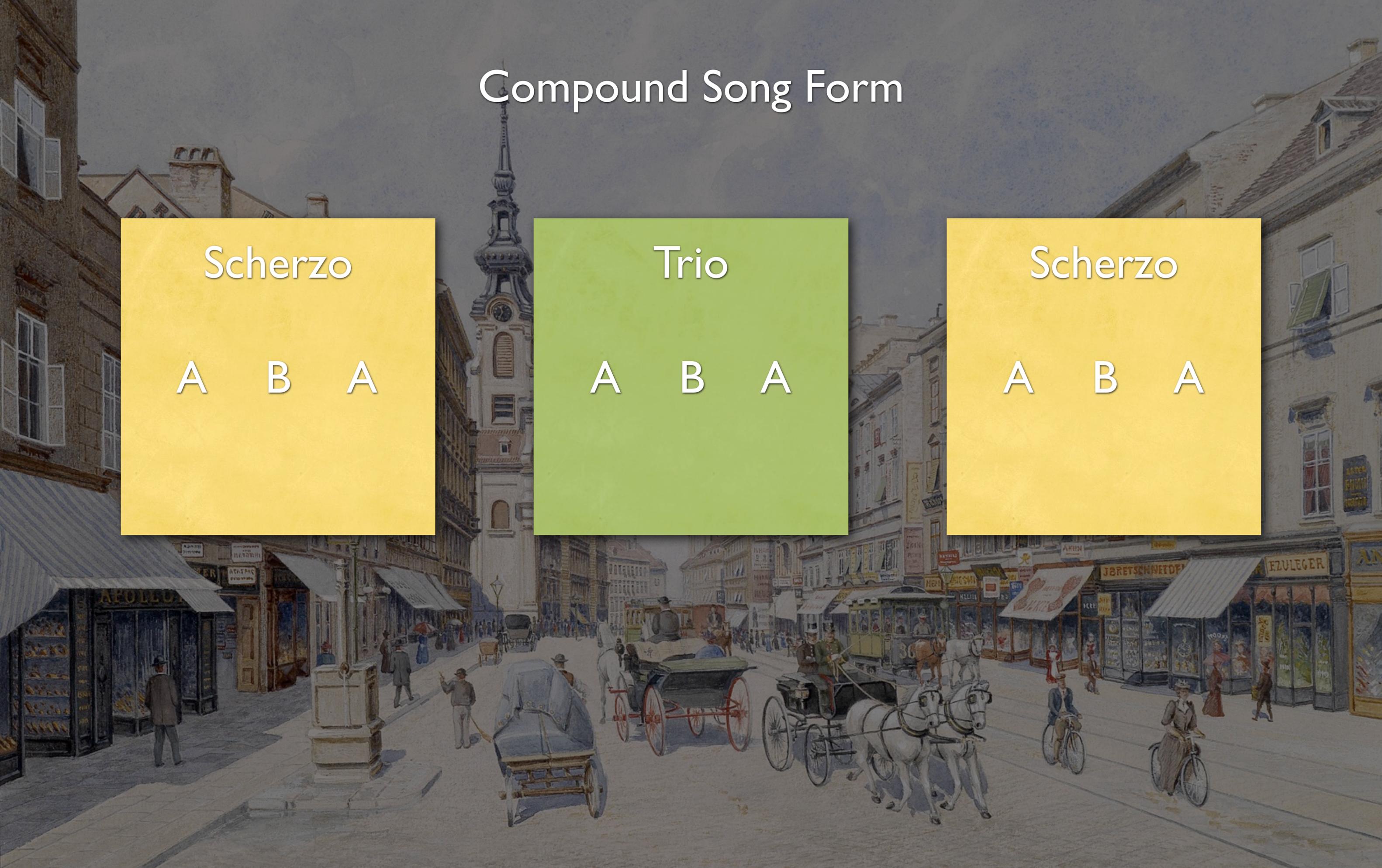
A B A

Trio

A B A

Scherzo

A B A



Scherzo

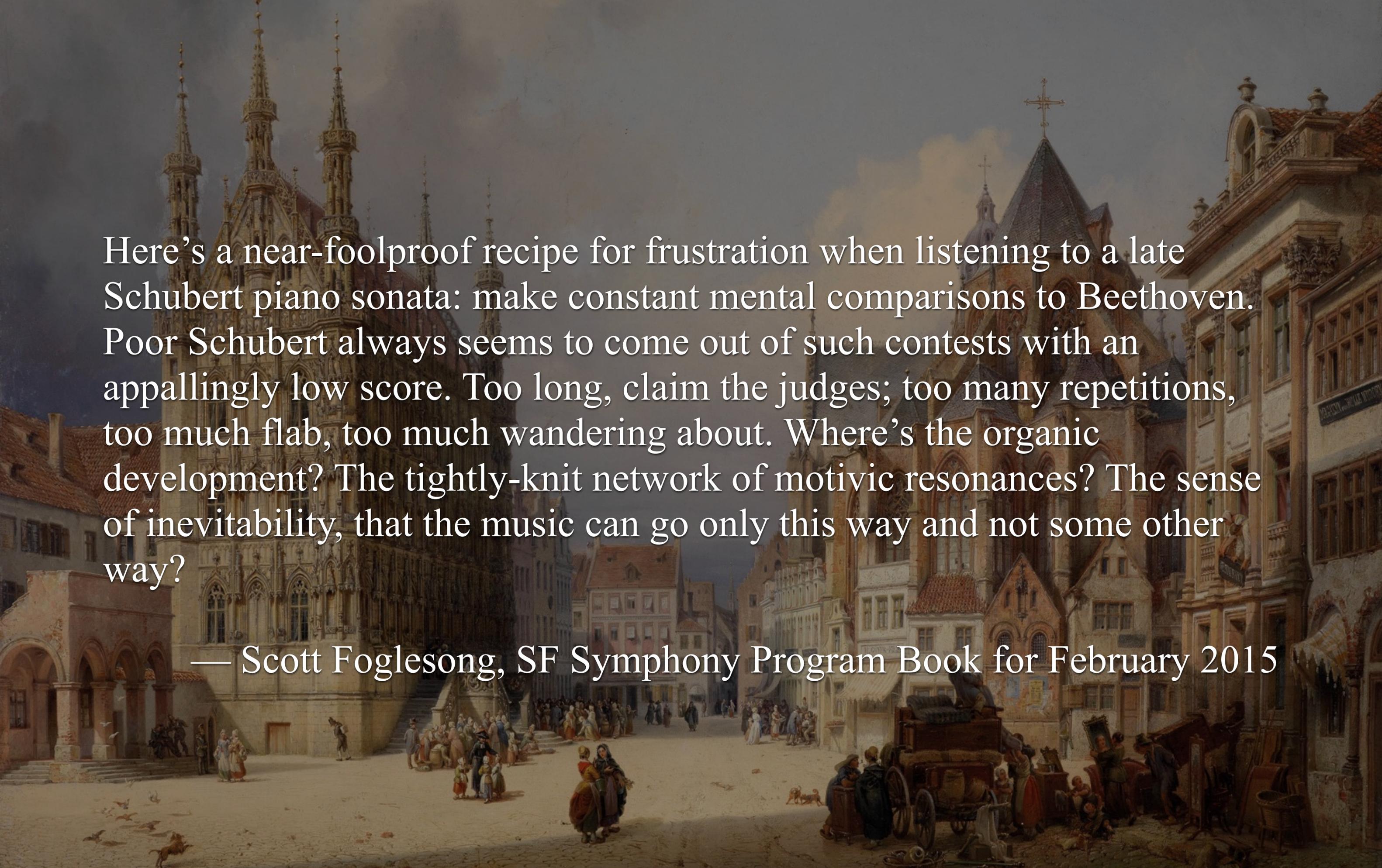
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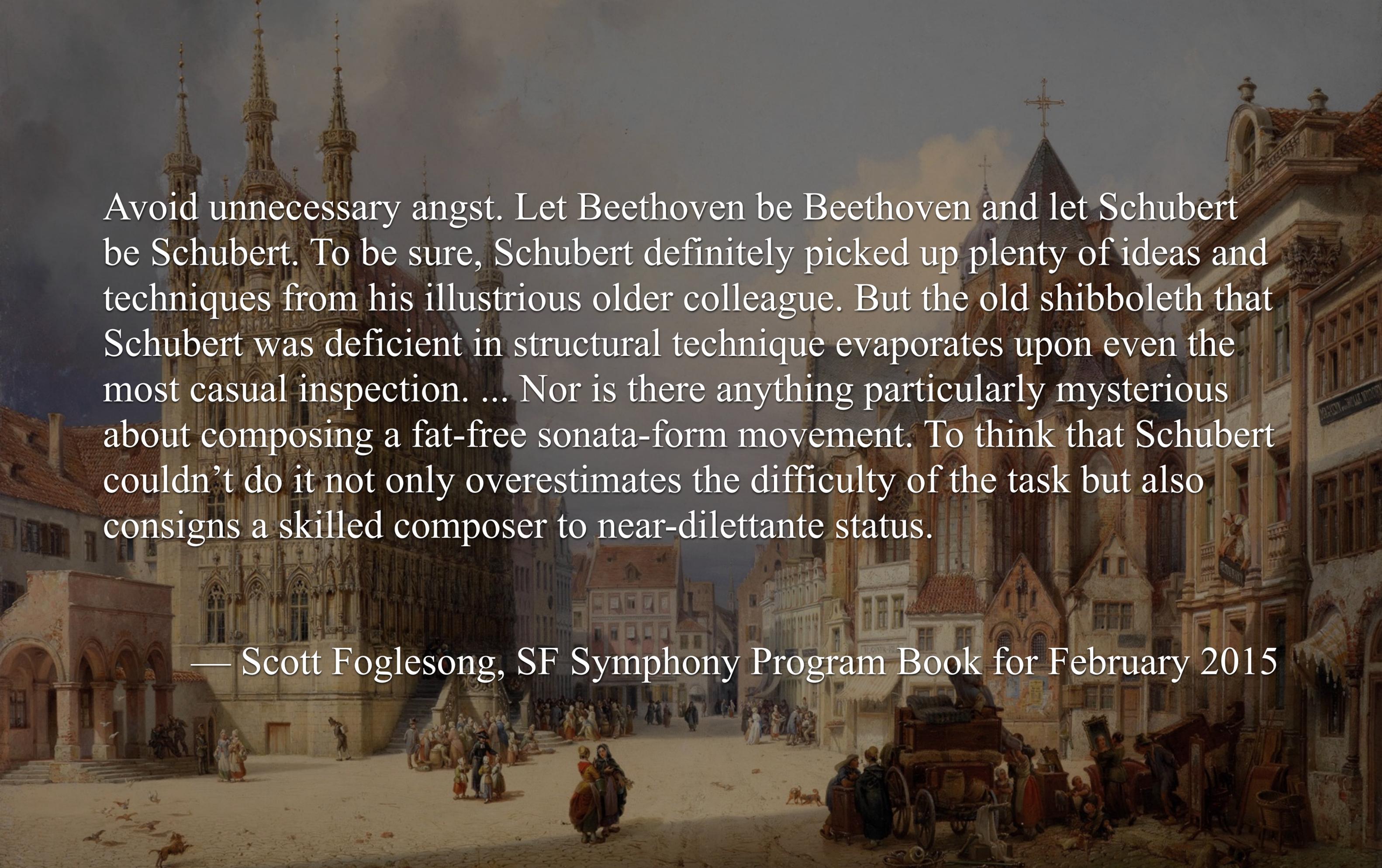
Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat Major: IV

Florestan Trio (Anthony Marwood, *violin* / Richard Lester, *cello* / Susan Tomes, *piano*)



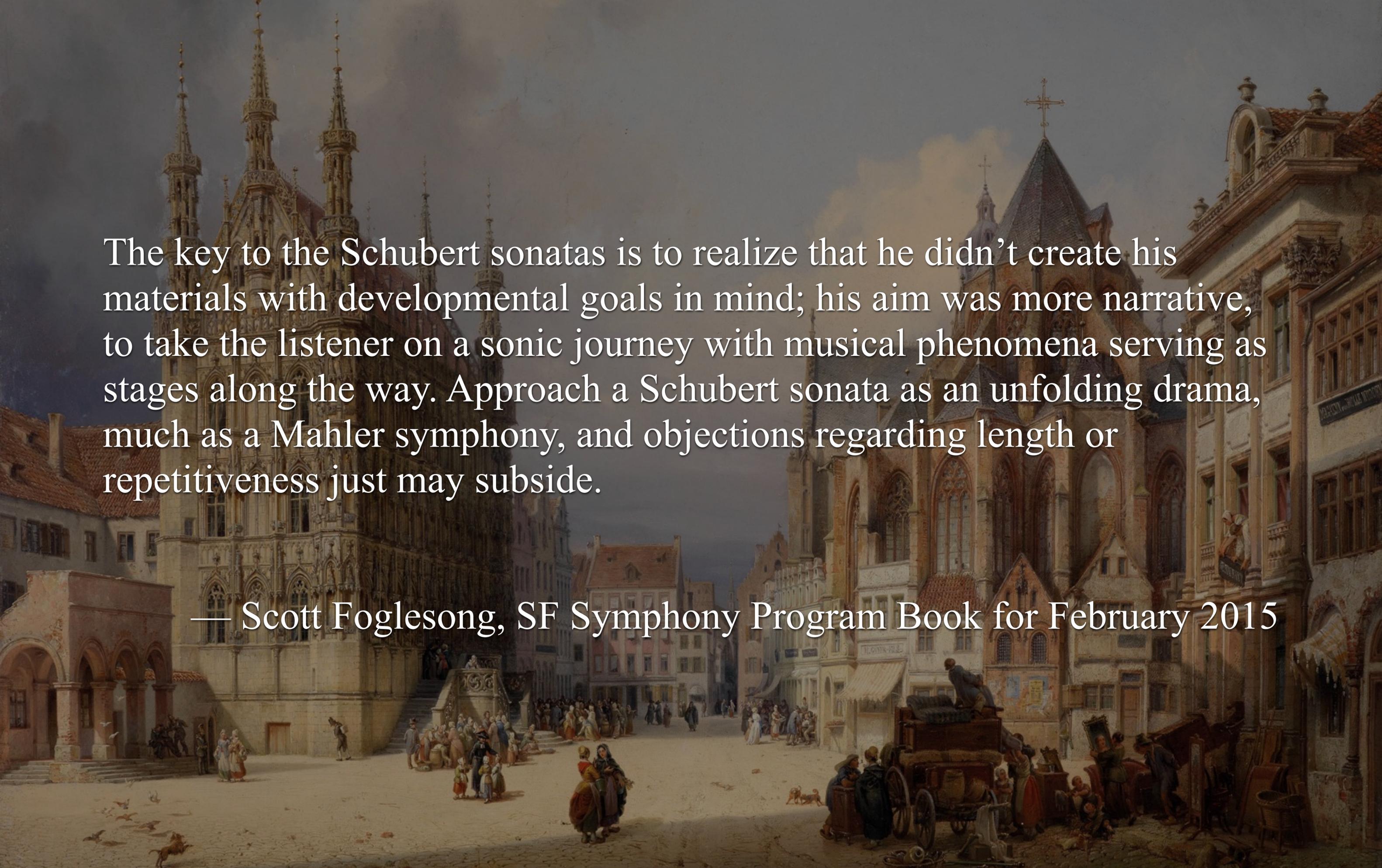
Here's a near-foolproof recipe for frustration when listening to a late Schubert piano sonata: make constant mental comparisons to Beethoven. Poor Schubert always seems to come out of such contests with an appallingly low score. Too long, claim the judges; too many repetitions, too much flab, too much wandering about. Where's the organic development? The tightly-knit network of motivic resonances? The sense of inevitability, that the music can go only this way and not some other way?

— Scott Foglesong, SF Symphony Program Book for February 2015



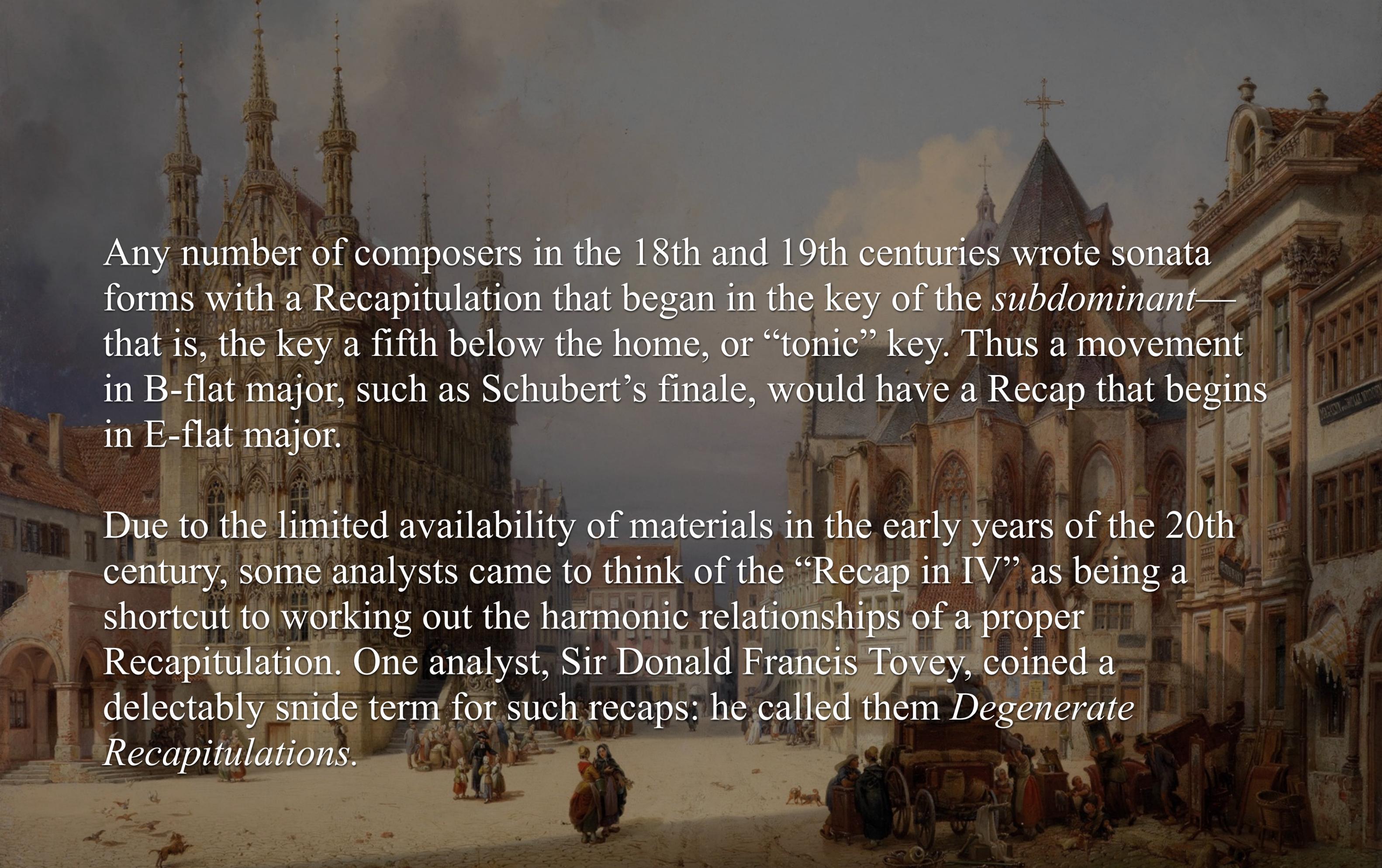
Avoid unnecessary angst. Let Beethoven be Beethoven and let Schubert be Schubert. To be sure, Schubert definitely picked up plenty of ideas and techniques from his illustrious older colleague. But the old shibboleth that Schubert was deficient in structural technique evaporates upon even the most casual inspection. ... Nor is there anything particularly mysterious about composing a fat-free sonata-form movement. To think that Schubert couldn't do it not only overestimates the difficulty of the task but also consigns a skilled composer to near-dilettante status.

— Scott Foglesong, SF Symphony Program Book for February 2015



The key to the Schubert sonatas is to realize that he didn't create his materials with developmental goals in mind; his aim was more narrative, to take the listener on a sonic journey with musical phenomena serving as stages along the way. Approach a Schubert sonata as an unfolding drama, much as a Mahler symphony, and objections regarding length or repetitiveness just may subside.

— Scott Foglesong, SF Symphony Program Book for February 2015



Any number of composers in the 18th and 19th centuries wrote sonata forms with a Recapitulation that began in the key of the *subdominant*—that is, the key a fifth below the home, or “tonic” key. Thus a movement in B-flat major, such as Schubert’s finale, would have a Recap that begins in E-flat major.

Due to the limited availability of materials in the early years of the 20th century, some analysts came to think of the “Recap in IV” as being a shortcut to working out the harmonic relationships of a proper Recapitulation. One analyst, Sir Donald Francis Tovey, coined a delectably snide term for such recaps: he called them *Degenerate Recapitulations*.

The performance is accompanied by images of—what else?—Vienna.





References

EMI

BEETHOVEN : "Erzherzogtrio"
"Archduke" Trio
Trio "l'Archiduc"

SCHUBERT : Klaviertrio B-dur
Piano Trio in B flat major
Trio avec piano
en si bémol majeur D. 898

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PABLO CASALS

