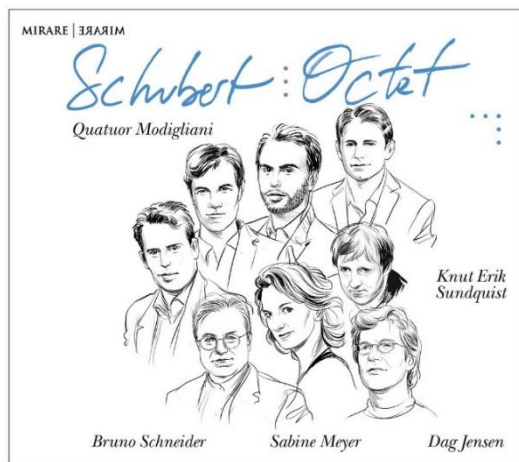




Achieving new dimensions

The Modigliani Quartet and colleagues present a new recording of the Schubert Octet



Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Octett in F major D 803

- [1] ADAGIO – ALLEGRO – PIÙ ALLEGRO
- [2] ADAGIO
- [3] SCHERZO: ALLEGRO VIVACE
- [4] ANDANTE – UN POCO PIÙ MOSSO – PIÙ LENTO
- [5] MENUETTO: ALLEGRETTO
- [6] ANDANTE MOLTO – ALLEGRO – ANDANTE MOLTO – ALLEGRO MOLTO

Quatuor Modigliani

Sabine Meyer *clarinet*
Bruno Schneider *horn*
Dag Jensen *bassoon*
Knut Erik Sundquist *double bass*

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“In fact, in this way I want to pave my way to a big symphony.” (Franz Schubert)

The idea that a composer may have used chamber music as a field for experiment while preparing to write symphonic works is often pure speculation, but in the case of Franz Schubert it is unequivocally based on his own personal testimony. This is all the more astounding considering that Schubert had already written six symphonies by the time he started composing the Octet. By “big” symphony he probably meant a more monumental work in the mould of Beethoven's Ninth, and that work did indeed follow: the around 60-minute-long “Great” C major symphony.

Hence the Octet was meant to lead to such greatness — but many would say Schubert already achieved it with this work. The example set by Beethoven is also evident in the instrumentation: Schubert added just a second violin to the clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola and violoncello used in the older master's Septet. This unique combination makes it possible to create contrasting tone colours and to alternate between the intimacy of chamber music and brilliant virtuosity, with the latter task particularly entrusted to the clarinet, the horn and the first violin.

The sequence of the six movements is also arranged like that of the Beethoven Septet. The first and last movements are preceded by slow introductions (still rare in chamber music at the time), and the Andante variations of the fourth movement are flanked by a Scherzo Allegro vivace and a Menuetto. This similarity may have partly to do with the tradition of the divertimento, a very widespread form in the 18th century, but it also certainly makes the influence of Beethoven's model on Schubert even more apparent.

So it is a milestone in chamber music that the prize-winning Modigliani Quartet has taken on. Many critics feel that this ensemble is now among the best in the world, as was reflected by its being the very first quartet to perform in the Great Hall of the newly-built Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg in 2017. It was also here that the Schubert Octet was first performed by the same ensemble as on this CD.

Whereas the quartet's last album, "Portraits", featured 13 miniatures, this one presents just a single work, albeit one of considerable dimensions, both with regard to duration and instrumentation. The Modigliani Quartet, founded in 2003, has joined here with four other top-class soloists of great renown: Sabine Meyer, Bruno Schneider, Dag Jensen and Knut Erik Sundquist. The quartet already played the Schubert Octet with the same colleagues in the Konzerthaus Dortmund in 2014, though then still with its former first violinist – in 2016, Amaury Coeytaux took over from Philippe Bernhard in the position. Concerts with the Schubert Octet were and are planned for 2020, but some were cancelled or postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the Modigliani Quartet will still perform the Schubert Octet this year, with the same ensemble as on the CD, in Düsseldorf (8 November), Florence (14 November), Varese (15 November) and Milan (16 November).

All the musicians involved say they are united by the artistic vision of a perfect sound that they continually work on like a kind of sculpture. In view of this, Harald Eggebrecht's praise of the quartet in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* can certainly be applied to the enlarged ensemble as well: *"It is a pleasure to hear with what élan, playful humour and youthful energy the four play here without descending into casualness. The balance of the four voices, delicacy of sound, harmonic and dynamic alertness and rhythmic rigour always remain in their sights. It all sounds effortless, sovereign and exceptionally supple."*

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