

Royal Festival Hall
Sunday August 17 at 7.45 p.m.

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

GENERAL MANAGER: JOHN DENISON, C.B.E.

THE GREATER LONDON COUNCIL presents

SOUTH BANK SUMMER MUSIC

SUNDAY, 17 AUGUST, 1969

7.45 p.m.

STALLS

30/-

GANGWAY 3

ROW SEAT

S 12

GREEN
SIDE

Please enter the
auditorium by

DOOR

4

LEVEL

4

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau *baritone*
Daniel Barenboim *piano*

Schubert
Winterreise, D911

Winterreise (Journey in Winter), D911
Schubert (1797-1828)

In 1827, the year before his death, Schubert returned to Wilhelm Müller, the poet of *Die schöne Müllerin* written four years earlier, and set the whole of his cycle of twenty-four poems called *Winterreise*. He composed the first twelve songs in February, completing the cycle in the following October. Müller wrote in his diary that 'a kindred soul may be found who will hear the tunes behind the words and give them back to me'. His wish was fulfilled to overflowing by Schubert's genius. Müller's verses may be naïve and sentimental, as a contemporary magazine suggested, but they were obviously congenial to the composer and, as the same paper also remarked, 'The emotions contained in the poems are as deeply reflected in his own feelings, and these are so brought out in sound that no one can sing or hear them without being touched to the heart.'

They cost Schubert much effort and he was near exhaustion by the time he completed the cycle, though it is open to doubt whether, as Johann Mayrhofer, civil servant and poet, commented, 'winter was on him' or that his own melancholy led to the melancholy of the songs. He certainly said that he was unfit for society, yet he continued his usual round of pub and party life. The haggard look may well have been the result of his complete absorption in his composition and in the almost fevered state of his imagination during those months. As his friend, Joseph von Spaun, put it, 'No one who ever saw him at his morning's work, glowing and his eyes aflame, yes, and positively with a changed speech . . . will ever forget it . . . I hold it beyond question that the excitement in which he composed his finest songs, *Winterreise* in particular, brought about his untimely death.'

Spaun also speaks, in his reminiscences, about the arresting impression made on a few of Schubert's friends when he sang through the cycle for them at his lodgings 'with much emotion in his voice'. They were disturbed by the unremitting gloom of the songs, caring only for *Der Lindenbaum* - which, incidentally, has achieved the status of a folk-song in Germany. The composer's faith in his masterpiece was unshaken and his friends soon realised their mistake when they heard Johann Michael Vogl, the Viennese baritone and the composer's close friend, interpret them; indifference changed to admiration. Since then they have never failed to make a profound and lasting impression on audiences.

In *Winterreise*, as in *Die schöne Müllerin*, the hero is a rejected lover but the difference between them is that here the lover has been turned down before the cycle has begun so that all twenty-four poems are of a depressed nature, thus challenging the composer to avoid monotony in depicting the lonely traveller's journey across the bleak winter countryside. It is a challenge Schubert meets by the extraordinary variety of his response to Müller's vivid imagery. Besides, Schubert had suffered enough himself to know how to express the desolation of the soul found in the poetry, and he elevated the self-pity of the words, not by any psychological insight, but by seeming simplicity of his music. His identification with his

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

