



# Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession

*Ian Bostridge*

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An exploration of the world's most famous and challenging song cycle, Schubert's *Winter Journey* (*Winterreise*), by a leading interpreter of the work, who teases out the themes—literary, historical, psychological—that weave through the twenty-four songs that make up this legendary masterpiece.

Completed in the last months of the young Schubert's life, *Winterreise* has come to be considered the single greatest piece of music in the history of Lieder. Deceptively laconic—these twenty-four short poems set to music for voice and piano are performed uninterrupted in little more than an hour—it nonetheless has an emotional depth and power that no music of its kind has ever equaled. A young man, rejected by his beloved, leaves the house where he has been living and walks out into snow and darkness. As he wanders away from the village and into the empty countryside, he experiences a cascade of emotions—loss, grief, anger, and acute loneliness, shot through with only fleeting moments of hope—until the landscape he inhabits becomes one of alienation and despair. Originally intended to be sung to an intimate gathering, performances of *Winterreise* now pack the greatest concert halls around the world.

Drawing equally on his vast experience performing this work (he has sung it more than one hundred times), on his musical knowledge, and on his training as a scholar, Bostridge teases out the enigmas and subtle meanings of each of the twenty-four lyrics to explore for us the world Schubert inhabited, his biography and psychological makeup, the historical and political pressures within which he became one of the world's greatest composers, and the continuing resonances and affinities that our ears still detect today, making Schubert's wanderer our mirror.

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