



# Vanishing Sensibilities: Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann

*Kristina Muxfeldt*

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## **Vanishing Sensibilities: Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann** Kristina Muxfeldt

*Vanishing Sensibilities* examines once passionate cultural concerns that shaped music of Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann, and works of their contemporaries in drama or poetry. Music, especially music with text, was a powerful force in lively ongoing conversations about the nature of liberty, which included such topics as the role of consent in marriage, same-sex relationships, freedom of the press, and the freedom to worship (or not). Among the most common vehicles for stimulating debate about pressing social concerns were the genres of historical drama, and legend or myth, whose stories became inflected in fascinating ways during the Age of Metternich. Interior and imagined worlds, memories and fantasies, were called up in purely instrumental music, and music was privately celebrated for its ability to circumvent the restrictions that were choking the verbal arts.

Author Kristina Muxfeldt invites us to listen in on these cultural conversations, dating from a time when the climate of censorship made the tone of what was said every bit as important as its literal content. At this critical moment in European history such things as a performer's delivery, spontaneous improvisation, or the demeanor of the music could carry forbidden messages of hope and political resistance--flying under the censor's radar like a carrier pigeon. Rather than trying to decode or fix meanings, Muxfeldt concerns herself with the very mechanisms of their communication, and she confronts distortions to meaning that form over time as the cultural or political pressures shaping the original expression fade and are eventually forgotten. In these pages are accounts of works successful in their own time alongside others that failed to achieve more than a liminal presence, among them Schubert's *Alfonso und Estrella* and his last opera project *Der Graf von Gleichen*, whose libretto was banned even before Schubert set to work composing it. Enlivening the narrative are generous music examples, reproductions of artwork, and facsimiles of autograph material.

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