

FRANZ SCHUBERT

and his Merry Friends



BY OPAL WHEELER AND SYBIL DEUCHER

ILLUSTRATED BY MARY GREENWALT

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Written by Opal Wheeler and Sybil Deucher

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Opal Wheeler Sybil Deucher and illustrated by Mary Greenwalt.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHILL WIND swept down the chimney and rattled the doors and windows of Schoolmaster Schubert's house on the street called "The Gate of Heaven," just outside Vienna. Over the doorway hung the sign, "The Red Crab," that creaked and swung on its rusty hinges.

It was cold and draughty on the second floor of the old house, for Schoolmaster Schubert earned little money teaching the boys in the Lichtenthal school and found it difficult to buy enough fuel to keep his family warm.

Early on this bitter January day a little boy was born in the Schubert home. His father carefully laid him in the low cradle that he had made of rough pieces of pine wood and pulled it close to the clay hearth, where his new son would be snug and warm.

The very next day the new baby was carried to the parish church nearby and christened Franz Peter Schubert.

The winter was long and hard but little Franzl grew rapidly and before he could talk or even stand on his short chubby legs, he sang sweetly and clearly.



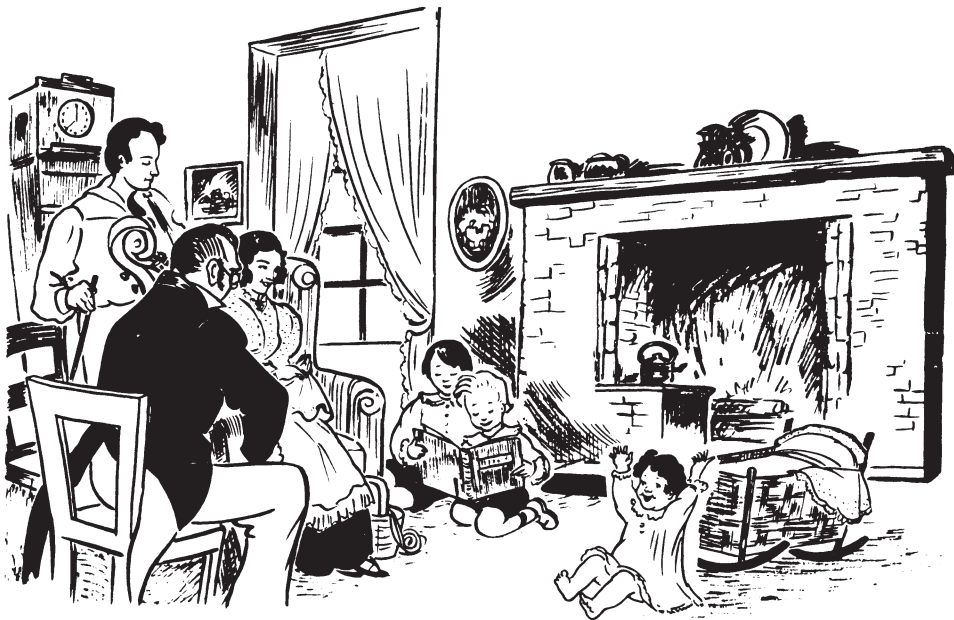
Every evening he waited for his father's footsteps to sound on the outside stairs for then there would be music, after Mother Schubert had given them their evening meal.

But Franzl cared little about his supper and would sing loudly, beating time on the table with his spoon.

"Hush, little one," said his mother. "It is not yet time for music. You must be patient until your father is ready to play."

His brothers, Ignaz and Ferdinand, watched with delight as the little brother waved his arms in time to his singing.

"Listen to our Franzl, good wife — already he sings real tunes," said Schoolmaster Schubert. "Some day we may have a singer in our household, Elizabeth."



Father Schubert took his instrument from the tall cupboard and soon the deep tones of his cello and the high clear notes of Ignaz's violin sounded through the house. Little Franzl sat on the floor close by, bending and swaying to the music.

“Our small son enjoys the evening concerts,” said Father Schubert, putting down his bow.

“Yes, Theodor — I never saw such a child!” answered Mother Schubert from her high-backed chair where she sat busily mending. “He sings from morning until night and seems to care for nothing else.”

It was not long before Franz Peter picked out tunes for himself on the old worn-out hackbrett, or piano. He made up little exercises and played them over and over, his dark curly head bent closely over the keys.

Franz Peter could not see very well even though he wore thick steel-rimmed glasses every day. Many times he would stumble and fall when he played games with his merry friends. He wished that he did not have to wear the spectacles and could see as clearly as other boys.



Someone was always calling:

“Your glasses, Franz — you have forgotten them!”

Near the Schubert home was a large factory where pianos were made and Franz Peter went there with his cousin as often as his mother would allow him.

The two boys eagerly watched the different parts of the instruments as they were fitted together and then hurried to the warehouse where the shiny new pianos stood waiting to be sold.



They rushed from one instrument to another and climbed on the high stools to play on the polished keys. Franz picked out little tunes and taught them to his cousin, his short stubby fingers running swiftly over the keys.

“Now you play on the high notes of another piano while I stay here and play the piece on the low keys — then it will sound like a duet!” cried Franz, his dark eyes shining behind his steel-rimmed glasses.

The boys played on and on, shrieking with delight, and ran from one piano to another to try out the tone of the different instruments.

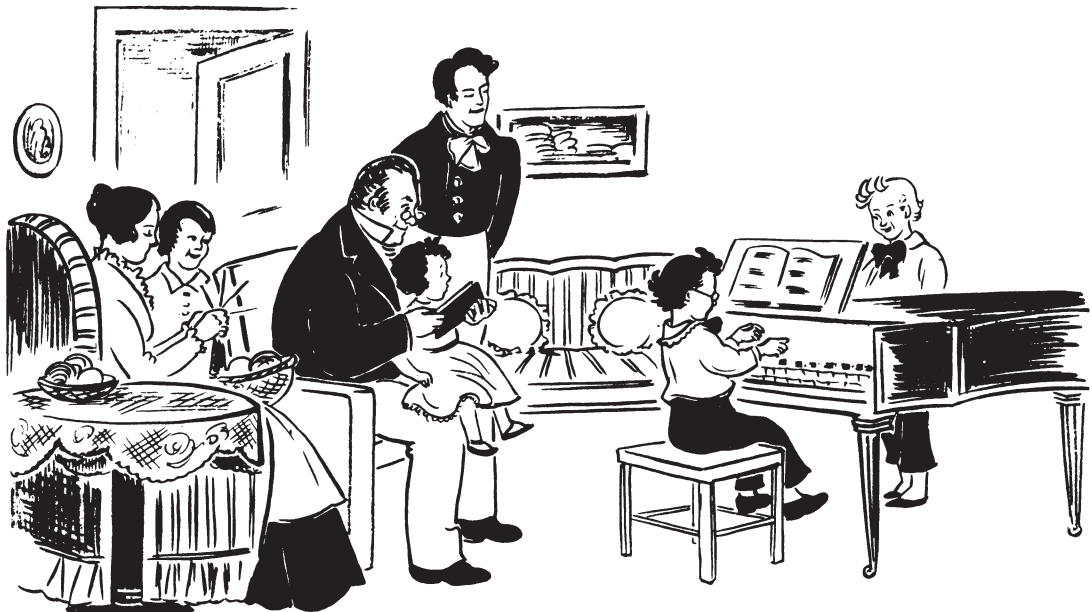
It was cold in the factory but they would not leave until it became too dark to see the keys.

In the evening, after Schoolmaster Schubert came home from his day's work, he gave Franz lessons on the violin and before long he was able to play easy duets with his father.

His brother Ignaz helped him with the piano and in a short time Franz went far beyond his older brother.

“Now you can go on alone for you have learned all that I have to teach you,” said Ignaz.

Father Schubert called his family earlier than usual on Sunday mornings for he wanted everyone to be on time for the services in the parish church of Lichtenthal.



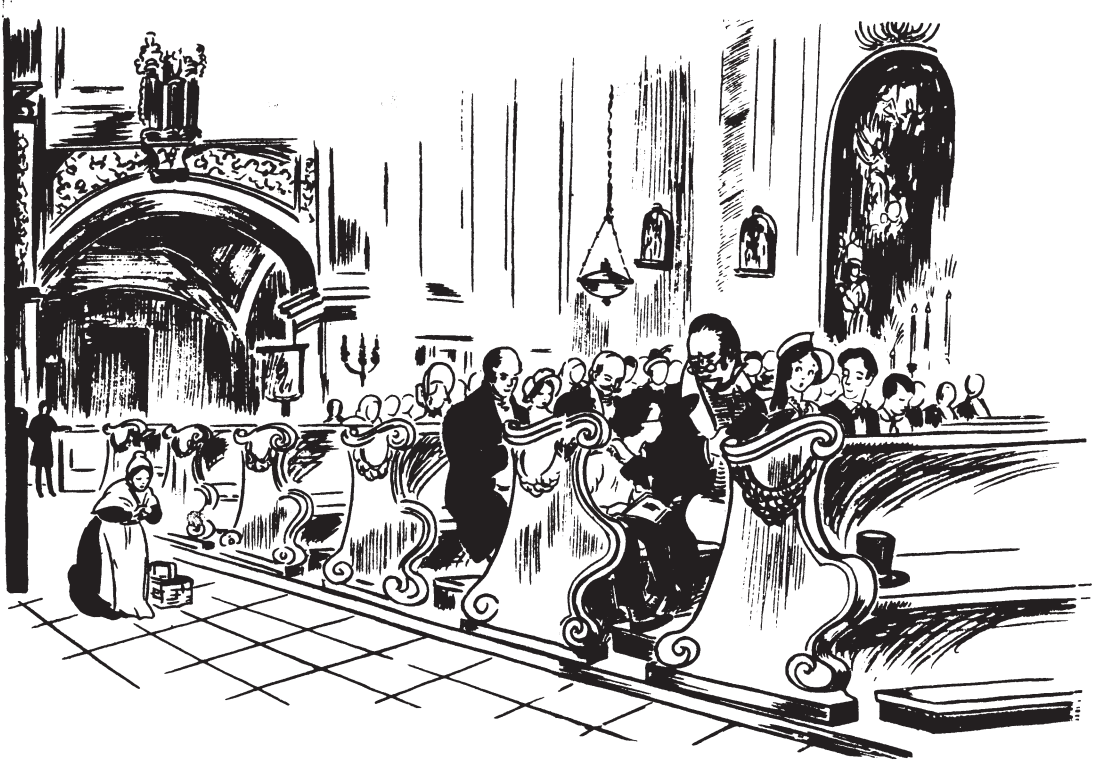


Franz Peter sat next to his father and was quiet as long as there was music. When it was over he became restless and the hard bench was very uncomfortable.

“Be quiet, Franz! You must sit still and listen to the service.”

“But I would rather sing in the choir with the boys,” whispered Franz.

“Perhaps later we shall speak to the director. But now you must be patient until the service is over.”



There stood Michael Holzer, the fat, jolly choirmaster in his long robes, directing the small orchestra and the singers.

When the organ sounded its last notes and the people were leaving the church, Franz and his father went to find the choir leader.

“Good day, Herr Holzer. I have brought my young Franz to see you. He thinks he would like to sing in your choir.”



“Indeed!” said the director, looking down at the small, dark-skinned boy. “He looks a little young, but we will see what he can do.”

“You will find that he reads his notes well and that his time is good,” said Father Schubert. “His brother Ignaz and I have taught him music at home.”

Herr Holzer opened a large book to a difficult song. Franz sang it so easily that before he had finished, the director turned to the schoolmaster.

“But, my good friend — why have you not brought this boy to me sooner? He has a fine voice indeed. Of course he must have more training, so he shall come to me at once for lessons.”

“Then will I sing in the choir with the other boys?” asked Franz, eagerly.

“First you must learn more about singing, so tomorrow you will come here and we will begin to work,” said the choirmaster.

The next day Michael Holzer was surprised to find that his pupil knew so much about music. And now Franz worked very hard and in a few weeks he was happy to be singing with the boys on Sunday mornings, high in the choir loft.

There were lessons on the organ and on the piano, too. But most of all, Herr Holzer was delighted when his pupil was able to make beautiful compositions from little melodies or themes that he played for him.

One afternoon Schoolmaster Schubert came to see the choirmaster.

“And how does the music go with my young Franz, Herr Holzer?”

“Ah, my good Schubert, I have never had such a pupil! Whenever I bring him anything new, I find that he already knows it!”

“Then do you think that he would be able to enter the court choir school in Vienna?”

“That is hard to say, my friend, for even though Franz has a fine voice, there is little chance of his being taken into the Convict. Only eighteen boys are admitted and there are always many waiting to join.”

“But just today I have heard that there is a place for one boy. Franz would learn other things besides music and that would be well, indeed, for some day he must become a schoolmaster, like all the Schuberts.”

“It is said to be the finest school in Vienna, with the greatest masters in all the city,” answered Holzer.

“Many times I have tried to enter Franz there so that we would have one less to provide for in our home. It would mean much to have him live at the Convict where he would be clothed and fed as well.”