

**Schubert and Improvisation for Social Dancing: A Cotillon**  
**by David Neumeyer**  
**The University of Texas at Austin**

From a conference paper read for the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Indianapolis, 2010

File created on 18 April 2015.

My thanks to UT-Austin DMA student, Josh Straub, for the performance heard in the audio file.

The compilation in the audio file attempts to draw together elements of physical space, social environment, dancing, and music making through a performance of a five-minute, speculative "reconstruction" of an episode from a cotillon as Franz Schubert might have played it. Table 1 at the end of this file lists the Schubert dances and any changes made in them. The score is available in a separate PDF file.

It is important to understand that "dancing" in the period between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the Restoration of the monarchy in France (1830) was not by any means a uniform kind of entertainment. Among what are commonly thought of as dance types, the cotillon was actually at least as much parlor game as dance. A close relative of the contredanse and, like it, consisting of a series of "tours and figures," the cotillon was very popular in Vienna, and usually had a waltz as a "tour" (that is, a refrain, musically a kind of rondeau theme). Walburga Litschauer and Walter Deutsch say that the cotillon was a favorite dance in Schubert's circle, and in one reminiscence his friends were said to have insisted that he string his waltzes into "endless cotillons" for house balls or for the dancing that often went late into the night after a Schubertiade performance.

The cotillon required frequent repetition of strains, particularly the principal one. The number of repetitions depended on the *Vortanzer*, or caller (some published instructions, for example, stretch 24 bars of music across 80 or more bars of dancing). Using the three-layer texture of the waltz (as played on a piano) and "endless cotillons" as the design, I have constructed a five-minute segment as outlined in the table below.

The design of the piece is essentially that of a dance refrain (nos. 2, 4, 6, & 8) with multiple trios (nos. 3, 5, 7, & 9). To these I have added common elements of early nineteenth-century performance and dance practice: an improvised prelude (adapted from a published composition by Henri Herz) and beginning and ending promenades (nos. 1 & 10), the first of which would probably be done by the company as a march and the last either as a march or, more likely, as some waltzing (that is, the consistently circular figures we now associate with that dance). What the group does with nos. 2-9 depends on the Vortanzer.

I have not attempted to situate the dances chronologically. Roughly put, Schubert's dances fall into two groups: early (1815-1822) and late (1823 and after). The first includes many dances obviously meant first of all for dancing and often repeated in more than one manuscript collection -- like the famous *Trauerwalzer*, D365n2. The second group includes some simple dance series as well but also sets probably meant as cycles and, at least sometimes, performed as such. In the cotillon fragment, I have drawn freely on both groups.

More interesting than this loose replication of spur-of-the-moment decisions to play some particular waltz from his repertory, I have drawn on the combination of a slightly bored Schubert and a deeply entrenched performance practice dictating variation in playing repeats to transform the refrain gradually into another Schubert waltz. The idea is that, as the cotillon wore on, Schubert took the opportunity to play with variants of the dances, especially the refrain, of course, due to its frequent repetition. In this instance, by the time we reach no. 8, the alterations finally turn D365n6 into a condensed version of D779n13, played here in Ab rather than in A major.

Table 1: Cotillon fragment: elements, functions, sources, keys

Piece	Function	Source(s)	Key(s)
Prélude	Prelude (as if improvised)	from Henri Herz, <i>Nouvelle tyrolienne originale: variée pour le piano</i> , Op. 154, transposed from C to Ab, ending altered and expanded	Ab
Waltz 1	Promenade	Schubert, <i>German Dances</i> , D783n6; transposed from Bb to Ab. Segment 1-2b (= repeat of the second strain) varied slightly (DN)	Ab
Waltz 2	A / theme (re-frain)	<i>Original Dances</i> , <b>D365n6</b> . D365 was Schubert's first dance publication.	Ab
Waltz 3	Trio 1	D365n7 = 3-1a, 3-2b; 3-1b is a variant by Schubert from a different set; 3-2a is a simplified version of 3-2b (DN)	Ab
Waltz 4	A reprise	<b>D365n6</b>	Ab
Waltz 5	Trio 2	<i>12 Ländler</i> , D790n10. The manuscript of this set was purchased and later published by Brahms.	B
Waltz 6	A reprise	<b>D365n6</b> . 6-1a is original, the others (reprise of the first strain and both statements of the second strain) are my variations.	Ab
Waltz 7	Trio 3	D790n5. 7-1a is transposed down a minor 3rd, 7-1b and 7-2a are the original; 7-2b is transposed down a minor third.	g# / b / B / g# / Ab
Waltz 8	A reprise	8-1a is my simplified variant of <b>D365n6</b> , 8-1b and 8-2a,b are based on <i>Valses sentimentales</i> , D779n13 (in condensed form)	Ab
Waltz 9	Trio 4	<i>Wiener-Damen Ländler</i> , D734n15, transposed from G to F.	F
Waltz 10	Promenade	<i>Wiener-Damen Ländler</i> , D734n16, transposed from G to F.	F