

**Professor Youens's Abstract for the Harrison Lecture,
Wednesday 23 November 2016, 6pm
Organ Room, RIAM**

**Reentering Mozart's Hell: Schubert's "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus, D. 583"
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In September 1817, Schubert went back to a poem he had earlier tried to set to music more than a year earlier, in March 1816---an attempt he abandoned after fourteen measures. But in 1817, he succeeded in magnificent manner, with one of his greatest essays in *ombra* style (the eighteenth-century conventions of music for the supernatural in opera, ballet, and more): his second setting of Friedrich Schiller's early poem "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus," D. 583. As a mass of nameless, faceless souls are forced into the deepest pit of everlasting punishment (a blend of Greek mythology and Christian tradition), Schubert deploys all the conventions of *ombra* music, meant both to harrow and to thrill, to invoke awe and fear: a dark, brooding tonality, disjunct motion in melodic lines and harmonic progressions, dissonances, dotted rhythms, syncopations, chromaticism, repeated notes, pedal points, sighing figures, *tremolandi*, and tonal instability. Schubert would have known the famous passages in this style in Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Don Juan* ballet and many other works, given the vogue for scenes of furies, demons, and hell in Viennese dramatic works. Most of all, he would have been very familiar with *ombra* style in Mozart, in *Idomeno* and, first and foremost, *Don Giovanni*. Both in the Damnation Scene in the Act II finale and in the first section of Schubert's "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus," we encounter what some earlier theorists call the "passus duriusculus," the "harsh passage," or a chromatic ascent or descent. I often wonder whether Schubert chose his repeated figure at the start of this mammoth song for the sheer appropriateness of the term: it is indeed a "harsh passage" we hear and almost *see* in "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus." It is my speculative belief that it was from Mozart's shattering damnation of his amoral archetype that Schubert derived his model for music designed as "chromaticism within chromaticism," intensifying the "harsh passage" to an even greater degree: a rising chromatic scale is itself repeated sequentially to a rising chromatic pattern (other aspects of Mozart's Hell are also present and accounted for in Schubert's through-composed, tightly organized artifact of immensity). We know that Schubert revered Mozart, that he measured himself against Mozart's achievement on more than one occasion; in this setting of Schiller's vivid poem, he challenged one of the most unforgettable scenes in all of opera and created one of the most terrifying Lieder of them all.