Schubert's two piano trios date from the final years of his life when, frustrated by his lack of success at opera and dissatisfied with his song writing, he turned to instrumental music. They were written after his Octet and late string quartets but before his 2-cello string quintet. They are both very substantial works, matching his contemporary 'Great' C major symphony in length and musical depth. Despite Schubert's failing health and erratic mood swings, the Bb Trio is radiant. Robert Schumann wrote of it: "One glance at Schubert's Trio and the troubles of our human existence disappear and all the world is fresh and bright again." The glorious opening theme in unison on violin and cello is confident and optimistic. It also contains two ideas, one local, one global, which reappear in various forms throughout the piece. The local idea is the triplet – crochet pattern under [1]. The global idea is the pattern of the first four bars: simply put, "slow, slow, quick, slow". The same pattern reappears immediately in the tender second theme introduced by the cello. After an expansive development of this material Schubert gives us three false starts for the recapitulation in 'wrong' keys.

The glorious Andante with its opening cello theme joined rhapsodically by the violin was, incredibly, an afterthought. Schubert originally wrote a slow Adagio, which was posthumously published as a Notturno in Eb D.897. Its opening theme (illustrated) is a slowed down version of the opening of the first movement. It is not clear why Schubert rejected it, but we are lucky that he did since the replacement Andante is one of those movements that you cannot imagine being without – and we do still have the Notturno.

The Scherzo and Trio are based on the Ländler and the waltz respectively. The opening figure of the Scherzo is based on the local triplet-crotchet figure of the first movement, whereas the first four bars of the Trio are in its global 'slow, slow, fast, slow' pattern. This global pattern also appears in 2-bar units in the 8-bar opening of the Rondo last movement with the dotted rhythm providing the 'quick' quality.