Pianists Martha Fischer and Bill Lutes fell in love the same time they were falling for the music of composer Franz Schubert.

In fact, their romance was partly Schubert’s doing.

While graduate students at the New England Conservatory of Music, Fischer and Lutes often got together to play, sing or listen to recordings of the brilliant Austrian composer’s work. The pair eventually came to Madison and now have been married 31 years.

This week, together with friends, they’re throwing Schubert a party.

Fischer and Lutes’ second annual “Schubertiade” takes place at 8 p.m. Friday in Mills Hall on the UW-Madison campus. The evening of Schubert’s remarkable music will take the form of a “house concert” in the style of Schubert’s day.

“Schubertiades” were actual entertainments when Schubert was alive in the early 19th century. The Austrian composer himself was there, surrounded by a dazzling array of friends and fans.

“They were parties, where he was holding court at the piano,” said Fischer, a professor of piano and collaborative piano at UW-Madison. “His friends would all get together and have an evening of music and fun. They would dance, and they would sing, and Schubert would bring out some of his latest compositions.”

“There was drinking and cavorting,” added Lutes. “We won’t have drinking, but we might have a little cavorting. The idea, really, was that it was a celebration of this amazing young genius and his music, by people who knew and loved him.”

Schubert “was very sociable and very likeable. They referred to him as ‘little mushroom.’ He was very short and kind of stocky, and not particularly handsome in the conventional way, but very likeable.”

Friday’s concert is timed to coincide with the 218th anniversary of Schubert’s birth on
Jan. 31, 1797.

The Schubertiade will feature a special appearance by cellist Norman Fischer, a professor at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music and also Martha Fischer’s brother. The two will perform Schubert’s “Arpeggione” sonata.

Lutes and Martha Fischer also will perform piano duets by Schubert (the composer wrote “one gem after another,” notes Fischer). Other performers include violinist Leslie Shank and singers Jennifer D’Agostino, Cheryl Bensman Rowe, Daniel O’Dea, Joshua Sanders, Michael Roemer and Paul Rowe.

The stage for the night will be designed to be warm and welcoming, decorated with rugs, lamps and upholstered furniture. Audience members can sit onstage near the performers or in the auditorium seats in Mills Hall.

Divided by an intermission, the concert will first focus on Schubert’s early creative life, from 1812-1818, and include songs in German set to poems by Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Johann Mayrhofer, who became one of Schubert’s closest friends.

The first half will close with Martha Fischer performing Schubert’s “Erlkonig,” a terrifying, four-minute ride at breakneck speed on piano, along with singer Paul Rowe.

The Schubertiade’s second half will focus on music from the last decade of the composer’s short life.

Weakened by syphilis in his mid-20s, Schubert died at age 31.

“He did have respites from it, but never in those days could you recover from it completely,” Lutes said. “So he knew he was a marked man at an early age and he didn’t have much time to do what he had to do.”

Poignantly, much of the music Schubert wrote during his illness “has a different quality about it,” Lutes said. “Almost a seizing of the preciousness of life and the awareness of our mortality. You sense all of those things in his music.”

Among his huge body of work, Schubert’s songs offer a special insight into both the poems and the music that moved him, Fischer said.

“It’s just one of the great privileges of life for me, and I know for Bill, to participate in this repertoire and share it with an audience,” she said.

If you go
What: Schubertiade, an intimate "house concert" of music by Franz Schubert

Where: Mills Hall, UW-Madison Humanities Building, 455 N. Park St.

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Tickets: $10 at the door. Students (all ages) admitted free.

On the Web: www.music.wisc.edu