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Theory 142

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Geforne Thränen

The works of Franz Schubert were an amalgam of some of the greatest creative and thought provoking works that bridged the worlds of the Late Classical and Early Romantic periods. Schubert was a composer that during his time had to compete with the likes of contemporaries such as Beethoven. He was also a man that had to deal with many strifes, as seen in the song cycle, *Winterreise*.

Schubert is best known for his melody and harmony that appears in his lieder, along with his setting of *Ave Maria*, *Symphony No. 9 in C Major*, and his *Symphony in B Minor*. Schubert's early life composed of being born into a Viennese family where his father was a schoolmaster and his mother was a maiden who saw to domestic duties throughout the household. He was also one of four children, one of these siblings was Maria Theresa (Szeto). Schubert's father was also a man of high character that was recognized in Viennese society, even establishing a productive and notable school (Russ). The Schubert family was highly musical and they even formed their own string quartet together, where Franz played the viola (Szeto). He then continued his music education under the instruction of his father and brother, Ignaz. From here, Schubert then went to play organ and study music theory under the auspices of his parish church organist (Eldridge). Eventually in 1808, he was able to win a scholarship to attend Stadtkonvikt, the most prestigious boarding school for Viennese commoners (Geoffrey). At one point, he was even able to

study with the famed composer Antonio Salieri, while Salieri was still at the height of his fame. This time that Schubert spent at Stadtkonvikt proved to be invaluable as he was able to harvest the skills of violin playing, orchestral conducting, choral composition, piano playing, and organ skills.

After his time at Stadtkonvikt, he began to study independently with Salieri in the area of composition. Much of this time that he spent, was still as a young man; thus, many of his works showed the promise of genius and reflected the style of his compositional teacher (Szeto). During this time period, he composed five string quartets, three masses, three symphonies, and his first full length opera (Eldridge). Yet, all of this would have never come to fruition if Schubert would have been admitted into the Austrian military for service when he applied, yet he was rejected for his stature (Russ). Schubert's main compositional tool was his melodies; from which he was able to derive the implicit harmonies, and modulations that came from the phrases (Geoffrey). Many of the unfinished sketches from his writings are only melodies that show this direct relationship between the contour of the line and the implicit harmonies that were to follow (Szeto).

Schubert in his later life had much success compositionally as his style matured more and more. This was the fruit of his own labors, as also he was able to befriend many contemporaries to get more of his works published (Russ). This was where Schubert seemed to lack in many circumstances. Schubert was never able to publish any of his own works without the help of some established publisher, which deeply hurt him (Eldridge). From this inability, came his rise to choose compose specifically for whatever sold the best and put his name on the map; this being his lieder.

By the time that *Winterreise* was being published, Schubert had much success in Vienna, most of which can be attributed to what he made of so little (Geoffrey). From his ability to do so, he made friends with Wilhelm Müller, who was an established poet known for his words that helped create sympathy for the Greeks who were in the midst of a struggle for freedom against the Ottoman Turks (Eldridge). Müller was a revolutionary himself as he took part in the Prussian uprising against Napoleon in 1813-1814 (Russ). When Franz decided to set *Die Winterreise* to song, the simple and folk like nature of the verse lent to the melodies that were at play in the music (Geoffrey).

Geforne Thränen is the third movement in the *Winterreise* song cycle and plays as one of the most intensely sorrowful songs within the cycle. It evokes the mood of someone who seems to be lost in their own world of pity and loathing, almost not knowing where to go. At the same time, there also seems to be almost an anger to the sadness that the character is feeling in this moment of time. From this sadness and anger, there definitely arises conflicting emotions that confuse the character. Yet, the triumphant end of the piece seems to take the ending that the character finds some sort of resolve in their anger over their own situation. The text of *Geforne Thränen* reads as so:

Frozen drops are falling Down from my cheeks. How could I have not noticed That I have been weeping ?

Ah tears, my tears, And are you so tepid That you freeze to ice Like cool morning dew ?

Yet you burst from the wellspring Of my heart so burning hot, As if you wanted to melt The entire winter's ice !

Schubert also has many of his signature musical principles and stylings at play within this movement from *Winterreise*. Harmonic content is one of these categories of musicality that

Schubert applies well in this movement. The most notable to myself is the fact that Schubert uses many types of modulations within the contexts of the song. The two most commonly used of these are the phrase modulation and the monophonic modulation. With the very first system of the piece he takes the piece from the original key of F minor to Ab major in an instant through a common chord modulation, yet he instantly takes it back to F minor through a brief one measure monophonic modulation. Again, at the end of the second system Schubert goes to Ab major with a common chord modulation and continues in that tonal center with a long phrase of tonic and dominant. Going into the fourth system, the piece changes moods and goes back into the original key of F minor, with this section's end it is seen that Schubert clearly establishes the relative key relationship. Then with another monophonic modulation, Schubert takes the listener to a distant key area of Eb minor which then goes to Ab major once more. Again another distant modulation is used using a secondary leading tone of the bVII chord in Ab to arrive in Gb major. Schubert ends with reusing modulations from the beginning of the piece and once more returning to Gb major through the same method in system four on the second page. One other notable modulation technique that Schubert utilizes is the German augmented sixth chord which he uses in both instances to get out of Gb major and into F minor.

The formal structure of the piece is also more complicated than I had originally assumed. Overall, the song follows a ternary form. However, the A section of the piece is used through most of page one, stopping at the second measure of the fourth system. Then, section B begins and carries until the fourth measure of the first system on page two. This is a short B section, but this is because the A prime section, I believe, is composed of a binary form with variations. The reason that I think as such is due to the way that the text is set, and how the melodic contour,

though similar, is leading to very different places in all instances. With the way that the voice is leading the harmonics as well, most of the sections are able to be divided at where the different phrase modulations fall. I would lay “a” from system one measure four to system two measure two, “b” begins at system two measure two and goes to system three measure two, “a1” starts at system three measure two and ends at measure six, “b1” goes from system three measure six to the end of the piece.

As for the text setting of this piece the melodies match the mood perfectly, and yet unexpectedly. The listener never truly has a sense of where the line is willing to go harmonically, which goes much to illusion of being lost and confused. The phenomenon that I would like to mention comes at the last page with the line, “*des ganzen Winters Eis*” which translates to “the entire winters ice. In the context of the poetry, this is a very low, sad, yet angsty moment. This text only falls in one of two places, cadences in F minor or Gb major. But specifically, the cadence at the end where the melodic line sounds with the contour of a triumphant yell, this ice cold line of despair turns into a turning point for the character. It is assumed by myself that the individual has found some sort of angry solace in the fact that he is not able to control his despair, thus he will use it in anguish for the rest of his days.

Citations

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III.

Gefro'rne Thränen.

Text/ly: Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827)
Compos/ly: Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Modulation

A-B-A'

ab a'b'

Nicht zu langsam.

Singstimme.

Pianoforte.

pp

decresc.

PT

Fm: V i V i V i fp VII VI-M² iv iv^o VII⁶ Ab: IV⁶⁻⁵ I⁴⁻⁵ I monophonic modulation

Ge - fro'ne Tropfen fal - len von mei-nen Wangen ab: ob es mir denn ent-

Frozen drops were falling down by my cheeks how could I

gan - gen, dass ich ge - weinet hab? dass ich ge - weinet hab?

have noticed that I have been weeping? that I have been weeping?

APP

Ei Thränen, meine Thränen, und seid ihr gar so lau, dass ihr er-starrt zu

Ah tears my tears and are you so tepid that you freeze to

decresc.

pp

I Fm: IV⁴⁻⁵ V I V⁷ I⁴ V⁷ I V⁷ I⁴ V⁷ I V⁷ I⁴ V⁷ I I⁴ V⁷ B

monophonic modulation

F S. 880.

monophonic modulation to Ebm Ausgabe 1891

Ei - se, wie kühl - ler Mor - gen - thau? Und dringt doch aus der Quel - le der
ice like cool morning dew yet you burst from the wellspring
 Brust so glühend heiss, als woll - tet ihr zer - schmel - zendes ganz - en Wint - ers Eis, des
of my heart is burning hot as if you wanted to melt the entire winter ice
 ganz - en Wint - ers Eis, ihr dringt doch aus der Quel - le der Brust so glühend heiss, als
the entire winter ice you burst from the wellspring of my heart is burning hot
 woll - tet ihr zer schmel - zen des ganz - en Win - ters Eis, des ganz - en Win - ters
as if you wanted to melt the entire winter ice
 Eis. *ice*
 F. S. SS0. *monophonic modulation*