

ever setting of this evocative poem of longing (D. 310 and 310a, both dating from 18 October 1815: tracks 1 and 2 respectively, most sensitively sung by Elly Ameling, responding to Schubert's markings of 'mit Ausdruck' for D. 310 and 'mit höchstem Affekt' for D. 310a, and with the first version transposed from A_♭ to G_♭ major, presumably for greater comfort, the second in its original key of F major). A few days later, on 23 October 1815, Schubert produced his only setting of that other famous expression of longing, Mignon's 'Kennst du das Land?' D. 321 (CD 11, track 12: also sung by Elly Ameling), notable for the early appearance of the questioning motif (augmented sixth to dominant) which was to form such a significant part of Schubert's musical language in the later vocal and instrumental works.

Like so many nineteenth-century song composers, Schubert was also fascinated by the quasi-ancient atmosphere evoked in the poems of 'Ossian' (James MacPherson). Most of his Ossian settings date from this period, and they evoke some fine performances on these discs. Certain other poetic themes recurring in Schubert's oeuvre make an early appearance here. Several genuinely titled 'swansongs' appear before the famous collection of D. 957 published under that title posthumously; these include two from among altogether seven Kosegarten settings composed on one day, 19 October 1815, the lover's farewell (in 17 verses) 'Idens Schwanenlied' D. 317 (CD 11, track 8 sung by Elly Ameling) and the solemn seven-verse 'Schwanengesang' D. 318 (CD 11, track 9: Michael George), both reasonably enough performed with a selection of their verses only.

If ever we needed reminding, this collection makes us vividly aware of the richness of Schubert's song production. In many of these early songs the later Schubert can be seen emerging, for example in the freely ranging tonal structure of 'Adelwold und Emma', and in the adventurous exploration of key incorporated even into some of the much shorter settings. The accompaniments cover a wide range of styles, and the use of meaningful, brief piano preludes, interludes and postludes is already present. The vocal range and word-setting often stretch the voices but equally often provide distinctively grateful material for the expressive lied singer – a species most splendidly represented on these discs.

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Discs 13–19

Discs 13–19 contain over 170 songs written during a twenty-month period from March 1816 to November 1817. For the first ten of these months, Schubert was still living with his father and working at his father's school. His frustrations with school teaching are well known, and in December of 1816 he finally moved out of the family home to live with Schober, a somewhat licentious figure whose carnal exploits seem to have encouraged Schubert in the same direction, which may well have resulted in the syphilis that brought about his untimely end. As things turned out, Schubert lived with Schober only until the end of August 1817, when the latter's sick brother unexpectedly returned home from the military to die; thus, for the last three months in which the music on these discs were composed, Schubert found himself back at his father's home.

It seems that the liberation that Schubert felt away from home was less conducive to composing song, as he produced about one-third the number of

songs during his sojourn with Schober, although many of his famous songs date from this period: 'Der Tod und das Mädchen' (D. 531), 'Ganymed' (D. 544), 'Der Jüngling und der Tod' (D. 545) and 'Die Forelle' (D. 550). Interestingly, the majority of the settings of Mayrhofer's poetry also date from the time he spent at Schober's, and there is one setting of a text by another friend, Spaun. One can almost sense how members of Schubert's circle plied him with their own poetry as an antidote to Schober, whose rebellious nature they often resented. However, Schober also supplied the composer with three poems of his own – one the famous 'An die Musik' (D. 547). On his departure from the Schober household, Schubert composed 'Abschied von einem Freunde' (D. 578), a setting for Schober to Schubert's own words. The private nature of this setting is reflected in both the choice of form (stanzaic) and of accompaniment (it reverts to the *Volkslieder* aesthetic). There is a sense of weariness in the setting, a reluctance to leave the tonic as much as the 'home', as the voice circles around a small set of pitches. Edith Mathis sings this aptly, although the repetition – for me – is almost too much to bear.

During the 20 months represented by discs 13–19, Schubert's friends first sought to promote his music outside their own circle. Spaun famously wrote to Goethe in April 1816, presenting him with settings of his poetry and asking him to agree to be the dedicatee in a publication; this effort came to nothing. In fact, it would also be some years to come before Schubert's first publication. By contrast, Schober hounded Johann Michel Vogl, a notable opera singer, until he reluctantly agreed to meet Schubert. On their first meeting in March 1817 he reportedly sang 'Augenlied' (D. 297), but his interest piqued after singing 'Memnon' (D. 541) and 'Ganymed' (D544). Schober's efforts were not only more successful but his introduction of the young composer to Vogl resulted in an extraordinary musical partnership that lasted Schubert's whole life.

Indeed, it seems appropriate while reflecting on Graham Johnson's monumental project that makes all of Schubert's songs available to the modern listener to revisit the reactions of some of Schubert's contemporaries on their first acquaintance with this music. A number of the earliest reviews mention songs from discs 13–19; their comments and criticisms have loomed large in the reception of Schubert's music and place in history. On the positive side, they admired Schubert's lyrical gift and his ability to reflect the crux of a text in his accompaniments. By contrast, they often had difficulty coming to terms with his treatment of harmony and form. To be sure, he was capable of writing strophic song, as we have just seen in the case of his song for Schober. However, he was equally capable of complicating strophic settings: compare two strophic songs that are next to each other on these recordings: 'Die Liebe' (D522) and 'Trost' (D523), both sung again by Mathis. The first is a straightforward setting, which is to say it is all safely in one key. The second modulates from G# minor to E major, despite a text repetition for the first and last lines of each strophe (somewhat like the song for Schober) – a textual feature which is clearly audible, thanks to Mathis's characteristic crystal-clear diction. In putting harmonic uncertainty over the first statement of each stanza, Schubert interprets the poetic speaker in 'Trost' as hesitant rather than fully ready to meet death.

How did Schubert's early critics receive his more substantial songs? The first extensive review appeared on 19 January 1822 in Vienna's *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. Most of its detailed comments are devoted to the recently published 'Memnon' (D. 541), 'Antigone und Oedip' (D. 542), and 'Am Grabe Anselmos' (D. 504). This anonymous reviewer praises – amongst other things – Schubert's

ability to match the expression of the words with music 'of stirring truthfulness'.¹ His comments on D. 542 are especially interesting: as he hears it, the style of Antigone's prayer is appropriately childlike, though pious, and 'touchingly expresses the sentiments of the daughter who willingly offers to sacrifice herself for her father'.² He notes that Schubert uses a recitative style 'effectively', as she wakes her father. There follows the 'uneasy groans of the awakening old man', an arousal that Thomas Hampson masterfully evokes. The rest of Oedipus's portion of the song is, according to our anonymous reviewer, then given over to a style that is 'truly royal and elevated, closing worthily with the spirits' call accompanied by terrifying chords'. The next review to appear was written by Friedrich von Hentl and appeared in the *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst* on 23 March 1822. He too scrutinizes *Antigone und Oedip*, but, despite a generally sympathetic review, is less impressed by its fluctuating styles. He argues that musical unity was lost in the service of 'musical painting of details', which he regarded as carried out to a 'farfetched' degree.³

The question of whether Schubert found the right balance in matching words and music is one that occupied commentators for some time to come. To be sure, early nineteenth-century critics were measuring Schubert's settings against the *Volkslieder* aesthetic, and, whatever Schubert's Biedermeier pretensions, he certainly took his musical style beyond the capabilities of those without substantial musical training. Indeed, it seems that the greatest complaint of his contemporaries is that Schubert shifts style so quickly and often within a single song – a complaint levied against Mozart's operas, no less. To modern ears taking in these recordings – and especially listening to the songs in chronological order – one can only marvel at Schubert's breadth of style and his distinctive response to each text or indeed to each section of a text or even to each word.

There are singers in this collection who are to Schubert's songs what Schubert was to his texts. That is to say, they bring a sensitivity and diversity in their voice to the notes in Schubert's scores. Every performance by Thomas Hampson is stellar in this respect, as he evokes the majestic, the disdainful, the fearful the tender, especially in the Mayrhofer settings. The mezzo-soprano Ann Murray is ubiquitous but presents an amazing breadth of style; or note the contrasting demeanour of Sarah Walker's voice for the lighter and darker topics of the five Jacobi songs (D. 462–6). Marie McLaughlin is another particularly striking example. Compare her interpretations of Antigone in 'Antigone und Oedip' and 'Gretchens Bitte' (D. 564). The versatility in her voice means that she finds that childlike, yet pious, tone that Schubert's anonymous reviewer detected in Schubert's setting of the text of 'Antigone und Oedip'; yet she is equally capable of adopting the voice of a woman who is far from innocent in order to perform the role of Goethe's Gretchen. Indeed, the beauty of tone in McLaughlin's voice makes Gretchen's prayer an utterly moving plea.

There is good reason to be grateful to Graham Johnson that we even get to hear 'Gretchens Bitte'. It is one of a number of songs that he included in the collection which has come down to us as a fragment. In this case, he and McLaughlin recorded a completion by Benjamin Britten (his contribution begins at 3'58" on the track), which is certainly admirable, even if it contains Schubertian clichés,

¹ Translations are taken from Otto Erich Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: A Documentary Biography* (London, 1946): 207.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 217.

albeit inspired by 'Ganymed' (D. 544). Most of the other completions are by Reinhard Hoorickx, but when none exists Johnson has included performances of fragments, treating us to some additional Schubertian moments. It may be fair to say, however, that 'Gretchens Bitte' is the most exquisite among these; given that scholars have most recently suspected that the rest of the song was lost rather than abandoned, this seems a particularly tragic loss.

Earlier scholars had assumed Schubert abandoned the setting, having 'lost his way' from a harmonic point of view just before the fragment breaks off. To be sure, the dozen or so bars beforehand do indeed seem to modulate expeditiously; yet no part of Schubert's setting can be said to stand still harmonically. The opening begins in B \flat minor and soon moves, as might be expected, to the relative mediant, D \flat major. Next, it turns to D \flat minor and then, of all places, to A major. Despite these apparently violent moves, Schubert was not accused of having 'lost his way' here, anchoring as he did these harmonic shifts in the vocal line's insistence on D \flat /C \sharp . Listen to how, in the first minute and a half of the performance, McLaughlin caresses this note at the beginnings and ends of phrases, while its harmonic identity changes around it. The modulations at the end of the fragment are no starker; it is just that Schubert chooses to emphasize the pitches that differ between the harmonies rather than those they share in common. This decision may have been motivated by the words: the poem speaks of Gretchen's broken heart at this point.

Of course, reactions to Schubert's harmony hold a legendary status in Schubert reception. The 'terrifying chords' noted by our first reviewer to conjure up the spirits' call in 'Antigone und Oedip' turn out to be just as terrifying for critics. The reviewer was referring to the passage at 5'04" with juxtaposed A \flat and E major sonorities. Interestingly, these involve the same relationship of E major to C major found at the end of the fragment of 'Gretchens Bitte', in which some scholars suggested Schubert lost his way. A similar move in 'Schlummerlied' (D. 527) – though in reverse order from F major to A major – was identified as a 'desperate modulation' by another early critic, G.W. Fink, writing on 24 June 1824 for the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.⁴ One might legitimately wonder how so-called 'terrifying chords' that represent spirits' calls and Gretchen's broken heart can also wind up in a lullaby. Undoubtedly Fink's conservatism (he praises Schubert when he uses perfect cadences) led him to find these harmonies 'desperate', for their presentation in the lullaby is altogether smooth.

'Schlummerlied' illustrates just how easy it was for Schubert to make a transition from F major to A major appear seamless. The second lines of each stanza of this strophic setting end with an A in the voice, harmonized by F major, and then each third line resumes with repeated As, now harmonized by A major. This is also the passage with the marvellous ringing tones in the upper register of the piano. Indeed, another prominent pitch in this song is C. The voice begins and ends the song with this pitch, and its frequent return creates an apt hypnotic effect; the fact that the voice ends on C instead of the tonic (F) suggests the boy in the song has succumbed to the 'Traumgott' ('god of dreams'), leaving the piano to bring about the song's closure. Edith Mathis makes this song sound easy, and the crystal clarity of her voice, as well as her ability to lend each repeated pitch a slightly different quality, ensures that their repetition is not piercing but positively alluring.

⁴ Ibid., 354.

The harmonic move I–III[♯] (in ‘Schlummerlied’) and I– \flat VI (in ‘Antigone und Oedip’) that caught the attention of (and sometimes disconcerted) Schubert’s contemporaries is exactly the kind of harmonic move that has caught the imagination of recent music theorists espousing a neo-Riemannian approach. David Kopp, for instance, has written a book on such chromatic mediant, which he labels M^{-1} and M transformations respectively (in more conventional neo-Riemannian terms they are LP and PL transformations respectively).⁵ The main difference behind diatonic and neo-Riemannian conceptions is that, in diatonic terms, such harmonies appear distantly related (indeed they are to be found far from each other on the circle of fifths, but more to the point the A \flat –E in ‘Antigone und Oedip’ is strictly speaking I– \sharp V, not I– \flat VI), whereas in neo-Riemannian terms they are close: the distance between C and E major triads, for example, is two semitone displacements; the pitch C moves down by semitone to a B (which is the so-called L or *Leittonwechsel* transformation) and the G moves up by semitone to a G \sharp (the so-called P or Parallel transformation), while E is shared by both.

Schubert’s output in discs 13–19 is characterized by an exploration of the limits of tonality, and the harmonic move just described is pervasive in the repertoire of these discs. Some of the most obvious examples are: the first jarring harmonic turn in ‘An den Tod’ (D. 518), a song which is chillingly interpreted by Brigitte Fassbaender, and ‘Der Flug der Zeit’ (D. 515), where the shift from E major after the third phrase to C major for the fourth and fifth phrases, and immediately back again, are again deliberately unsettling. Another example appears between the two sections following the opening recitative in ‘Uraniens Flucht’. They relate by chromatic mediant, A major to F major, a transformation that boosts the sense of ‘majesty’ that Schubert demands for the latter of the two sections.

However, it is also worth listening out for Schubert’s use of common tones as a means of shifting key. A stunningly beautiful enharmonic shift underscores ‘du bist, du bist es nicht Urania!’ about half way through ‘Uraniens Flucht’. As Jupiter questions her, the music lands on A \flat minor, with a C \flat in the vocal line; when Urania replies ‘Ich bin’s’, her answer falls to a B \sharp for ‘bin’s’ and she unwittingly brings about an enharmonic shift – unwitting because she prepares the way first for the astonished Gods to take up her B, underscored by a rumbling B major, and second for Zeus to disown her in the key she provoked, E major.

Examples of harmonic turns around a single pitch are both plentiful and an illuminating way to listen to Schubert. Witness the description above of the D \flat /C \sharp at the opening of ‘Gretchens Bitte’. But to end, I cite one more example from our conservative contemporary of Schubert’s, Fink, who described ‘Auf der Donau’ (D. 533) as an illustration of Schubert’s ‘modulation mania’.⁶ Listen to how soft it seems to modern ears: it is an apparently gentle setting of, as the title suggests, life on a boat on the Danube. Stephen Varcoe’s voice is appropriately gentle – yet perhaps on close hearing there is something unsettling about the way the key drifts away from the tonic, capturing in music how boaters who don’t pay attention can find themselves in a vessel that has drifted to unsafe waters. Schubert achieves this affect in Section A of the song by bringing in a new harmony each time the voice sings an E \flat . The section has literally drifted from E \flat to C \flat major. The return of the A section is no longer in the home key, but in F \sharp minor instead – Schubert has even changed the mode. To take in the

⁵ David Kopp, *Chromatic Transformations in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁶ Deutsch, *Schubert*, 355.

new (harmonic) vista, Schubert composes a moment's silence before its re-entry, a silence that Johnson and Varcoe exaggerate to magnificent effect. It seems hard for us to imagine that these shifts in key, for at least one pair of nineteenth-century ears, constituted 'modulation mania'.

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Discs 20–26

Volumes 20 to 26 of Hyperion's new chronological edition of Schubert's complete songs encompass music written between November 1817 and March 1823. The time covered, then, is less than five-and-a-half years, but spans a large portion of Schubert's short career (as readers learn from instalments of the brief but informative 'Schubert Calendar' that precedes each year's songs in the accompanying book of texts): from just before the publication of Schubert's first song and the beginnings of his public reputation through numerous publications and growing renown, but also through his first convalescence from the syphilitic infection that would eventually prove fatal. Within those years are contained an enormous wealth of songs, and a variety that will demand attention below. Schubert's activity in song had, to be sure, slowed by this time, but despite a creative pace far more moderate than that of, say, 1815, this segment of the collection includes some 125 distinct works. Those works are distributed somewhat unevenly throughout the period, but even discounting several fragments here presented in hypothetical completions, the average still works out to well over 20 songs per year.

Such historical and biographical observations are an almost inevitable result of Hyperion's decision to repackage its Schubert Edition, transforming it from a diverse collection of individual discs organized by singer, theme, poet, or sometimes a somewhat obscure mix of those and other criteria – including, of course, what remained to be recorded in the project (the 'accompanist's memoirs' that form another new part of the accompanying notes [pp. iv–x] give Graham Johnson's account of the process) – into a first-to-last record of a life's work in song. I will consider further aspects of that transformation below, but the one that, for me at least, demanded first consideration is the spectre that must haunt any such presentation of Schubert's songs in recorded form, that of their single illustrious predecessor, the Deutsche Grammophon edition of the songs for male voice, recorded by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore in 1970 and 1971. That comparison is particularly inevitable for me because my preparation for this review marked the first time I have immersed myself so intensely in so many Schubert songs (again, chronologically ordered) since my experience as a graduate student in musicology in the twilight of the LP era. Preparing for a dissertation still somewhat nebulously focused on Schubert's lieder, which, being neither a singer nor a pianist, I knew at best fragmentarily, I undertook what seemed the obvious course of remedial action: learning them from the magisterial collection that, in the words of Fischer-Dieskau himself, sought 'to reveal the great range of riches – aesthetic, historical, and of ideas – which Schubert's music possesses', and to 'bear witness to the universality of Franz Schubert, who is still widely