11 Beethoven's songs and vocal style

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When the poet Ludwig Tieck sought to distinguish the styles and methods of instrumental music from vocal music in 1798, he set a precedent for championing the freedom and independence of instrumental music to express the inexpressible and sounded one of the principal themes of German early Romanticism. E. T. A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is perhaps the most famous example of the enthusiasm for this newly heightened appreciation of the power of instrumental music.[1] The consequences of this new perspective for vocal music were, however, less immediately exciting. Music for the voice was confirmed as being in subordination to language and related to everyday experience, for, according to Tieck, "it is, and always will be, elevated declamation and speech."[2] Romantic poets might still strive for the expression of the ineffable in their language, but their aspiring to the potential of instrumental music was essentially a yearning for what they could never claim in their own sphere. In his novella *Musical Joys and Sorrows*, Tieck's characters discussed whether an ideal singing voice might not bring poetic expression nearer to the ineffable. In the words of the fictional singing teacher Hortensio:

> A tone if it is correctly produced must rise up like the sun, clear, majestic, becoming brighter and brighter, the listener must feel in it the infinitude of music. The singer must not give the impression that he cannot sustain the tone to the end.[3]

Yet the results of Hortensio's teaching, as described by Tieck, were not encouraging; his pupil sang like "a calf being led to the slaughter, with not a trace of style or method."[4]

The kind of vocal production Tieck apparently preferred was inspired by J. A. Schulz's *Lieder im Volkston* of 1782: a simple, unadorned vocal style, following closely the contours and rhythms of the text, and sung from the heart.[5] The possibility of song speaking directly from the heart was viewed as the source of its authentic and distinctive power. For the poet Achim von Arnim, even if instrumental music approached the ineffable, "the power of simple song allows everyone to call mightily into the heart of the world."[6] This kind of straightforward conceptual distinction – instrumental music reaching outwards, vocal music inwards – was

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clearly attractive to writers of the time. The songs of Schulz and Reichardt were praised for avoiding the complexity of symphonic music and for the intimacy of their melodies that anyone might sing and identify with. Beethoven's symphonies earned praise for astonishing audiences with their boundlessness, yet Tieck was not afraid to criticize Beethoven's songs and other vocal works for failing to honor generic distinctions with their inappropriate complexity and restlessness. In fact it was probably inconceivable to him that one artist should encompass both musical viewpoints. And if a choice had to be made between considering Beethoven as an instrumental or vocal artist his choice fell, not surprisingly, on the former.[7]

How Beethoven himself might have viewed the matter is less easy to determine. There is certainly much evidence that he found it hard to gain a natural vocal style. Through his teacher Neefe in Bonn, Beethoven would undoubtedly have been aware of the aesthetics of a simple vocal style. Like Schulz and Reichardt, Neefe was taught by Johann Adam Hiller, once described as the vocal composer closest to the heart of the German people in the late eighteenth century.[8] Composed under Neefe's influence, Beethoven's first surviving song is a setting of a poem by Bürger, a poet dedicated to writing truly popular poetry, whose texts were often set by Neefe and Schulz. Yet the simple melody of Beethoven's "Schilderung eines Mädchens" WoO 107 of around 1783 fits awkwardly with the words and blurs the rhyming pattern of the poem's first two lines. Such awkwardness might be expected from a young composer. However, when he came to set Matthisson's "An Laura" WoO 112 about a decade later, Beethoven was still struggling to find an appropriate vocal idiom. Reichardt once said it was very difficult to create a song in the true style of folksong;[9] according to Schulz, one had to capture the essence of folksong's language of the heart and not merely imitate external character.[10] The young Beethoven was quite capable of the latter, as suggested by his "Trinklied" WoO 109 and "Punschlied" WoO 111 of around 1790, but in such occasional drinking songs he was not concerned about individuality or originality. "An Laura" was a quite different case. The stretching of the vocal line in the first bar shows the composer grasping at the poetic image of Laura in paradise, but the melody's high-points strain against the flow of the text and undermine the song's simplicity (Example 11.1).

Beethoven's discomfiture with vocal writing was compounded by his well-known reluctance to present images in his music and to aim for the immediately graspable, even in song.[11] Schiller spoke of folk-like songs as a natural vehicle for what he called the "naive" artist, one who limits himself to speaking directly out of his experience and showing the sublime within the everyday.[12] This contrasts with the "sentimental" artist

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Example 11.1 "An Laura" WoO 112, mm. 5–11

who struggles with his material, seeking to convey through it and beyond it his idea of a greater reality.[13] It is much easier to identify Beethoven with the second of Schiller's artistic categories, and if he still persisted with song and other vocal idioms, it may be that he saw them as a means to a greater compositional end. As a young man, his wish to impress musical circles in Vienna and conquer all areas of composing activity undoubtedly formed part of his motivation.[14] But in the composer's late period, when his drive to introspection appeared most strongly, his sense of the wider significance of vocal idioms emerged in a highly distinctive fashion. The most famous example of this is undoubtedly the Ninth Symphony. In the finale, as Robert Winter has observed, Beethoven placed two kinds of vocal style side by side, "the step-wise, even-rhythmed flow" of the popular style and the "angular dance-like bursts" borrowed from the instruments.[15] These are both dissolved later in the finale in the emphatic music for the "Seid umschlungen," which seems to belong to no recognizable vocal style, except that its modal character has encouraged some writers to identify it with a chorus in ancient Greek drama.[16] At the decisive moment of resolution and climax the popular "Ode to Joy" theme is bound with the "Seid umschlungen," the two having probably been conceived together,[17] to suggest that contrasting styles can be synthesized to form a unity. The musical categories of the vocal and instrumental, the simple and the complex, the angular and the smooth are transcended in honor of Beethoven's conception of an all-embracing symphonic style.

Yet the fact that the moment of stylistic dissolution in the Ninth Symphony is still associated with vocal textures makes it a provocative gesture on Beethoven's part. In his late works the composer is usually assumed to have absorbed vocal styles into the instrumental: witness the eloquent quasi-vocal styles which Joseph Kerman has identified in the late quartets.[18] But, the Ninth Symphony's "Seid umschlungen," which Wagner said showed Beethoven drawing a new power from the prosodic rhythm of the words themselves,[19] suggests the direction might be reversed and the vocal seen to encompass the instrumental. A similar con-

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clusion might be drawn from Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. Writers have observed how the instruments often appear to take the initiative from the voices, by preempting an expressive statement of the text or continuing and completing the vocal lines.[20] Yet in a letter to Zelter of 1823, as part of his attempt to interest the composer in his work, Beethoven discussed the possibility of adapting the *Missa solemnis* for *a cappella* performance, a principle which he praised with reference to the works of Palestrina, the composer who Beethoven believed established the model for true church music.[21]

From our experience of the late works, it seems Beethoven relished confounding expected aesthetic notions. Thus one should not be surprised at his directly challenging Tieck's categories and seeking to find the sublime and immeasurable within vocal music, even within vocal styles more traditionally conceived than those in the Ninth Symphony and *Missa solemnis*. The song-cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98 of 1815, the "quiet herald of the late style,"[22] has long been accepted as Beethoven's successful transformation of a familiar folksong idiom. The linking of simple strophic songs into a continuously unfolding network of tonal and thematic relationships is recognized as one of the most poignant examples of Beethoven drawing out immediate musical details to encompass the immeasurable.[23] His setting of the first phrase of the text, "Auf dem Hügel sitz' ich spähend" (On the hill I sit gazing), captures the sense of distance that the poet feels between himself and his beloved, and also establishes a measure of the musical distance to be covered by the cycle as a whole. For at the moment of vocal emphasis upon the tonic, the melodic fulfillment of the high E♭ on the first beat of m. 3, the piano withdraws its rhythmic and harmonic support, seeming to provoke the expressive falling away in the voice's following descending sixth, E♭ to G. And when the piano does enter on the second beat of m. 3, it substitutes the submediant for the more expected tonic chord (Example 11.2).

The melodic and harmonic emphasis upon G and C in this example, mediant relationships that both link closely to the tonic triad and suggest a potential for open-ended harmonic departure, anticipates the subsequent course of the cycle. G becomes the tonality of the second song, and C that of the fifth. Even the flatward pull of the subdominant A♭, as represented by the tonality of the third and fourth songs, might be said to relate to the "falling away" from the tonic seen in Example 11.2 in helping avoid any large-scale assertion of the dominant. The subdominant is taken up at the beginning of the sixth song, as part of the drawing together of the threads of the cycle in a close reworking of Example 11.2. The melodic resolution onto the high E♭ is now supported by tonic harmonization in the piano, as though some of the emotional distance between the lovers

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Example 11.2 *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98, first song, mm. 1–3

Ziemlich langsam und mit Ausdruck

Auf dem Hü - gel sitz' ich, spä - hend

were resolved. In the words of the poet, his songs have helped to create a link between them. Yet as the echo of the first song comes back at the beginning of the sixth verse to reinforce this poetic notion, the C minor triad of Example 11.2 returns too, reintroducing the sense of harmonic space. Even in the motivic reminiscence over the tonic E♭ at the end of the piano postlude, the sound of the falling sixth leaves an impression of melodic openness. At the end of the cycle one knows that the poet and his beloved will always remain apart and the musical image of Example 11.2 retains some of its immediate impact, even when having been composed out as the basis for a large-scale tonal and thematic process.

In *An die ferne Geliebte* Beethoven is acknowledged to have reconciled the simplicity of a traditional folksong aesthetic with his characteristic concern for the immeasurable. However, writers are more reluctant to allow any such creative transformation of folksong ideals to have taken place within the collections of folksong melodies which he arranged for George Thomson between 1809 and 1816.[24] It is true that the compositional circumstances seemed less propitious. In the song-cycle there is evidence that Beethoven worked directly with the poet Alois Jeitteles; but in the folksong collections Thomson provided him with the melodies ready-made and gave precise instructions for their arrangement. Despite Beethoven's repeated requests, Thomson did not send him the texts along with the melodies.[25] There were thus an unusual number of constraints upon him. However, if one accepts that Beethoven was particularly concerned to explore the idea of musical boundaries in the late style, then it is possible that he might have found such extreme limitations challenging. As he noted in his diary, "[t]he Scottish songs show how unconstrainedly the most unstructured melody can be treated by harmonic means."[26]

The Welsh folksong "When Mortals all to rest retire" WoO 155 no. 15 certainly supports such a positive interpretation. Beethoven pointed out enthusiastically to Thomson how he had extracted a repeated-note motif from the melody given to him and made a feature of it in his introduction.[27] From the beginning the attention of the listener is thus drawn to

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Example 11.3 "When Mortals all to rest retire" WoO 155, no. 15, mm. 1–7

this punctuating cadential figure which underlies the rhyming sequences in the first four bars of the vocal melody. However, such cadences remain marked only on the melodic surface, for underneath Beethoven inserts a C pedal which blurs the voice's patterns (Example 11.3). Such procedures become more extreme as the song progresses, since almost every vocal cadence is undermined by some overlapping of the expected tonic and dominant chords. The effect is greatly to extend the line of the song; the repeated notes of the motif pass into the bass-line's pedals to create a most unexpected flattening out of harmonic perspective. In his letter to Thomson, Beethoven wrote that he hoped the rhythm of the verses, when added, would help to stress the motif which he had highlighted; but in a sense the poetic impact of his music was assured. For the relationship here between the vocal line and its harmonization focused attention on the detail of the words and their immediate meaning, whatever they might be, while simultaneously suggesting the more elusive resonance which is the secret of all poetic utterance. Thus by working with the detail of the vocal melody, Beethoven again succeeded in bringing his characteristic concern with harmonic extension into the confines of a simple song and linking it to a poetic text.

As Barry Cooper has pointed out, the folksong collections are full of

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such imaginative touches,[28] and one wonders whether having a pre-existing melody was not a significant release for the composer, relieving him from the burden of having first to find a natural-seeming vocal line. Looking over the whole of Beethoven's song output, it was certainly some time before he reached the subtle manipulation of vocal details seen in these examples from his late period. As the composer himself said in a letter to the librettist Friedrich Kind:

> When sounds stir within me I always hear the full orchestra; I know what to expect of instrumentalists, who are capable of almost everything, but with vocal compositions I must always be asking myself: can this be sung?[29]

Thus the greatest of Beethoven's early songs are not surprisingly those where an instrumentally conceived texture or idea forms the point of departure and the voice is pushed beyond its natural confines, seeking to maintain its balance amongst a flow of rhythmically generated figures.

A famous example of such instrumental inspiration is Beethoven's song *Adelaide* op. 46 of 1794, which has been seen to outstrip his instrumental works of the same early Viennese period in its daringly expansive formal outline. The piano's triplet accompanying texture provokes a stream of melodic variation in the voice as well as an increasingly wide circle of tonal modulation. An overriding balance of melodic contour and tonal shape is retained throughout the song, but there are few obvious signposts of thematic return such as one might expect from a more tightly constructed instrumental movement. Instead the voice maintains certain recognizable cadential patterns and preserves a general impression of matching phrase-shapes, even though the actual motivic details of the melodic line are constantly changing. There is thus a sense of mutual responsiveness between the voice and piano throughout the song's expansive dimensions. The voice varies its settings of the name "Adelaide" in response to the instrumental momentum, but also offers an important thread of continuity for the whole, the concentration on the beloved's name representing a vestige of song-like containment.

Some commentators have felt that Beethoven's *Adelaide* actually transcends the boundaries of song and should be defined as an aria or cavatina.[30] The distinction between genres is difficult to make.[31] Certainly in Vienna, lyrical poems of the kind connected with the emergence of the *Lied* were often set in elaborately Italianate fashion, as well as in *Volkston* styles.[32] And even the song-composers of North Germany, like Reichardt, regularly drew on the operatic traditions of German *Singspiel.* If one looks at Beethoven's first operatic arias, "Prüfung des Küssens" WoO 89 and "Mit Mädeln sich vertragen" WoO 90 of around 1790 to

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1792, and compares them with his first song in quasi-operatic style, "Selbstgespräch" WoO 114, written at the same time, the vocal style of the arias seems more contained, even though they blend aspects of Italian style into their *Singspiel* idiom.[33] Both of the arias begin with short balanced phrases, and these remain the basis of the continuing dialogue between voice and instruments, serving as a point of departure and return. The word-setting is effective and unpretentious, if rather neutral when compared with the heightened treatment of similar melodic patterns in "Selbstgespräch." In the song the two-bar piano introduction initiates a rising flow of sixteenth notes which is taken up directly by the voice, and helps extend its simple step-wise phrases into a sweeping seven-bar phrase ending in the dominant.

Thus the intensity of the vocal writing in this quasi-operatic song is markedly greater than in the examples in *Singspiel* style, reflecting a different kind of involvement with the text. Indeed in song the text has always the potential to be claimed by the composer as an intimate confession in a way impossible within opera, and the choice to adopt an operatic style is often perceived to come from the composer's own feeling for the text, not merely from a desire to impress his audience or a particular singer. When Beethoven came to set Bürger's two poems "Seufzer eines Ungeliebten" and "Gegenliebe" WoO 118 in 1794 he probably knew the simple settings by Schulz. Yet he chose to adopt an exaggeratedly operatic idiom for his setting of the first poem, complete with *opera seria*-style recitative. The first impression this gives is one of formality; the style of the song is actually very close to the concert aria *Ah! Perfido* op. 65, which Beethoven composed in 1795 under Salieri's instruction, in order to improve his command of Italian declamation. The gracious triple-meter melodies in E♭ into which both song and aria resolve are so similar in contour that one can sense how Beethoven must have borrowed the style from his teacher or other Italianate models.

The sense of formality remains throughout *Ah! Perfido*, even when an Allegro in C minor follows the calm of the Adagio. For here Beethoven turns back to the *tutti* style of the first recitative passages and encapsulates it in a grand declamatory gesture for the voice. He then alternates this style with a slower, more melodic figure in E♭ reminiscent of the Adagio, thus bringing together the material of the work in an ordered sequence. In "Seufzer," the calm of the E♭ aria style is brushed away with far greater spontaneity than in *Ah! Perfido*, as the first song is linked with the second. The continuously flowing instrumental semiquavers of "Gegenliebe" suggest a passionate immediacy as the poet stops looking at the rest of creation, whose happiness he cannot share, and demands a response from the beloved herself. The style of this second setting is still as expansive as

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Example 11.4 "Gegenliebe" WoO 118, mm. 1–8

Allegretto
wüßt' ich, wüßt' ich, daß du mich_ lieb und wert ein biß-chen hiel-test und von
dem, was ich für dich._ nur ein Hun-dert-teil - chen fühl-test;

an aria in the scale of its rhythmic repetitions, but if the instrumental flow were removed the voice might be singing one of Schulz's appealingly direct folksong-style melodies (Example 11.4). The awkward text setting is not in keeping with Schulz's style, but when heard in context it becomes the natural consequence of the voice being pushed forwards by the piano's rhythmic intensity.

The particular effect Beethoven achieves in "Gegenliebe" is of a simple vocal style being emotionally transported by the accompaniment into a tumbling flow. A critic attaching importance to idiomatic vocal styles might complain that an instrumental texture was in danger of swallowing up the vocal line, but in this song Beethoven had certainly succeeded in one primary objective of a vocal composer, that of conveying emotion through the voice. The style of melody in Example 11.4 is immediately familiar as the basis for the Choral Fantasia and the "Ode to Joy" theme of the Ninth Symphony, as well as for the more exultant vocal styles of *Fidelio*. It also contributed much to Beethoven's successful song-settings of Goethe's poems in the later 1790s, "Maigesang" op. 52 no. 4 and "Neue Liebe, neues Leben" op. 75 no. 2. With such a style Beethoven was able to capture the concentrated energy and excitement of Goethe's verse in a way that eluded the simpler settings of Zelter and Reichardt.

It is well known that Goethe himself did not approve of Beethoven's expansive instincts in setting verse, believing that all song-composers should keep within the formal boundary of the poem, avoiding textual repetition and all kinds of open-ended musical development. Beethoven was quite prepared to challenge poetic authority if necessary; he once said

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to Czerny that the composer needed to rise above the poet in his settings.[34] However, his respect for Goethe was such that he was prepared to try keeping to his strictures, if only as an experiment. When in 1808 he composed four settings of Goethe's famous lyric for Mignon "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" WoO 134, he attempted to honor the extreme compression of the single-stanza poem and its relentless rhymes. In the first three songs the sense of a tightly enclosed form is reinforced by the second half of the poem being set as a strophic repetition of the first. In each case the entire song is dominated by the first line's simple descent to the tonic, with little resistance from the piano textures and only a slight rise of vocal contour at the third line of the poem before the first half of the song closes with a repetition of the first vocal phrase. This pattern of enclosure is rendered more poignant in Beethoven's fourth version of the poem by a greater textural expansiveness and a delay in the moment of return until the last two lines of the poem. Yet even here the sense of musical restriction is so strong that Mignon seems to be speaking in a numbed voice, without the intensity characteristic of Goethe's poem. Beethoven himself seems to have had a disparaging view of these songs and noted on the autographs that he did not have time to finish a good setting.[35] Yet he still published them in 1810, as though wishing to point out all the problems caused by conforming to Goethe's commands.

There is little doubt, however, that the struggle to create a self-contained song form – without inhibiting instincts for musical growth and contrast – engaged Beethoven's interest even if he required greater flexibility in the realization than ever Goethe envisaged. Even in his early song output one can find isolated examples, such as his setting of Hölty's "Klage" WoO 113 (c. 1790), where the composer seems to be testing the boundaries of simple sectional forms and turning the formal limitations to his advantage. From the opening of "Klage" he engages in a careful balancing act with the vocal line, making it hover between closure and openness while the piano underlines the melodic details rather than immediately urging the voice into expansiveness (Example 11.5). The melodic pause upon the mediant at the end of the first two-bar vocal phrase both hints at a further descent to closure on the tonic, and a holding off from E to allow the vocal line to expand. After the impact of the E♯ in the third bar, pushing the vocal line away from the tonic, the rhythmic pattern and melodic contour of the phrases does become freer. So the piano's breaking open of the cadence to the first section of the song, ready for a much more expansive second section, still comes as a response to the vocal detail as it unfolds. The quasi-operatic style of the second section brings an unexpectedly vivid contrast, a fully dramatic presentation of the poetic change of tense as the poet moves from considering his

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Example 11.5 "Klage" WoO 113, mm. 5–15

contented past to facing a desolate present. Yet musically Beethoven prevents this section settling too much into its own style. It is drawn into a final third section and tolling cadences which announce musical closure and the poet's imminent death. The first section's hovering between openness and closure is thus acted out, if in rather rougher strokes, in the contrasting vocal styles of the following two sections. Detail and form develop together, even if without the immediate harmonic and motivic logic that one comes to expect from the later Beethoven.

"Opferlied" WoO 126 of 1794 presents perhaps a better example of a song in which the details of the vocal line continue to be stretched out in an unbroken chain, so that the whole song is heard as one all-inclusive musical phrase. With a restraint reminiscent of Gluck, Beethoven strips away the voice and piano parts to the barest melodic and rhythmic outlines. But he draws the vocal line beyond a simple step-wise profile with judicious use of melodic leaps, making each step in the steady syllabic sequence reach beyond the immediate phrase to the larger melodic sweep. "Opferlied" was a favorite song of Beethoven's, representing a vocal style of calm exultation such as balanced the overspilling joy characteristic of "Gegenliebe." He used a similarly taut but restrained style for five of his six Gellert songs op. 48 of 1802, achieving particularly in the third song, "Im Tode," a remarkable intensity in the subtle but relentless extension of a single vocal phrase. Such unity of mood was most appropriate for these hymn-like poems, though in ruling out any elements of contrast or expansion, such an idiom remained limited and failed to provide a real answer to the ambitious aspirations for song revealed in "Klage." In a sense Beethoven created the greatest realization of this hymn-like style

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Example 11.6 "Kennst du das Land?" op. 75 no. 1, mm. 1–7

Ziemlich langsam

Kennst du das Land? wo die Zi-tro - nen blühn, im dun-keln Laub die Gold-o - ran - gen glühn

outside song, in his sonatas, quartets, and symphonies where he could weave it into contrasts on a much larger scale.

The promise of "Klage" remained largely unfulfilled until Beethoven's engagement with the poems of Goethe finally bore fruit in two undisputed masterpieces, "Kennst du das Land?" op. 75 no. 1 of 1809 and "Wonne der Wehmut" op. 83 no. 1 of 1810. In setting the first poem, another lyric for Mignon, Beethoven employed a clear strophic form as with his setting of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," but now he charged the form with much greater emotional complexity in a way that Goethe found both provocative and disturbing.[36] At first Beethoven makes Mignon ask her question – "Do you know the land?" – as though the answer were quite straightforward and near-at-hand. The rise and fall of the syllabic phrases, the balancing of tonic and dominant harmonies, create an immediate image of simplicity (Example 11.6). Yet a basic reversal has taken place in the usual succession of "question and answer" phrase-shapes. The "answer" or closing melodic statement comes first in mm. 1 and 2, followed by a question which ends up on the dominant. When this pattern is repeated with further emphasis on the dominant in m. 7, Beethoven uses it as the opening for a sudden contrast of key and pianistic texture. The motif of the first two bars returns seven bars later at the close of the section, but it has lost its aura of simplicity and it too now hovers on the dominant. And although the next section brings a balancing emphasis upon the tonic A major, the lurch into a faster 6/8 tempo suggests that without this greater urgency the "answer" would be in danger of slipping away. Taking his interpretation of Goethe's poem as a whole Beethoven makes it clear that there is no doubt in Mignon's mind of the land she is yearning for. With the three strophic repetitions there is an overall balance between phrases, between tonal "question" and "answer," even with the textural intensifications of the third verse. Yet given the strange shifts from section to section within each verse Beethoven also manages to suggest the greater restlessness which underlies Mignon's desire for her homeland, the longing for spiritual peace which in some sense evades all resolution.

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Example 11.7 "Wonne der Wehmut" op. 83, mm. 1–4

Andante espressivo

Trock-net nicht, trock-net nicht, Trä-nen der e-wi-gen Lie - be!

"Wonne der Wehmut" is perhaps an even more remarkable example of Beethoven's new ability at this period to plumb the tensions of musical contrast and return within a basically simple vocal style and tight formal framework. The paradoxical message in Goethe's poem that only by keeping the tears of grief flowing can the unrequited lover experience a full life, is fully met by the ingenuity with which Beethoven spins out the precisely paired rhythms of his first two bars into longer and longer vocal phrases (Example 11.7). The piano's thirty-second notes create the immediate image of flowing tears, which is soon matched by all manner of rhythmic and harmonic extensions to the vocal line. Yet the voice continues to be directed toward matching cadence-points based on the two-eighth-note patterns underlying Example 11.7, patterns which constantly renew expectations of a return to the tonic. Thus the poet's flow of tears is interpreted quite appropriately by Beethoven as part of a conscious directing of the emotional instincts and a controlled response to the workings of passion. At no point are the flowing textures allowed to mask the song's underlying patterns of formal containment.

Such a meeting of emotional expression and rational control in song should warn commentators against dismissing Beethoven's *Lieder* as peripheral to his true oeuvre (as Carl Dahlhaus has implied).[37] The persistence with which the composer pursued effective and satisfying song styles speaks much for his commitment to the genre and for its links with his main compositional concerns, particularly with his urge to unite the sensuous and rational, as reported by Bettina Brentano.[38] The final and perhaps unexpected stage in his struggle with song idioms came with a series of ten songs extending from "Der Gesang der Nachtigall" WoO 141 of 1813 to "So oder so" WoO 148 of 1817. For these songs join with the folksong settings commissioned by Thomson and *An die ferne Geliebte* in revealing Beethoven's return in his late period to the issues of Schulz's folksong aesthetic. Having failed to find a natural *Volkston* manner in his first songs, the composer now found his way back to nature "by the paths of reason and freedom," to quote Schiller.[39] Certainly his setting of "Der

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Example 11.8 "Der Gesang der Nachtigall" WoO 141, mm. 7–12

Hö - re, die Nach - ti-gall singt: der Früh-ling ist wie-der ge-kom-men! Wie - der-ge-kom-men der Früh-ling und

deckt in jeg - li-chem Gar - ten Wohl - lust - sit - ze, be-streut mit den sil - ber-nen Blü - ten der Man - del.

Gesang der Nachtigall" by Herder, one of the main early Romantic folk-song collectors, shows great ease in its appropriation of a tuneful pastoral idiom. The song combines a naive imitation of the nightingale's song in the piano prelude with the subtleties of a teasingly repetitive line for the voice. Although on the surface the voice's infectious dactylic rhythms seem to fall entirely into straight one-bar phrases, subtle elisions also pull them into a longer six-bar shape. Only the two-bar refrain is allowed to remain simple and self-contained, so keeping the pastoral image intact (Example 11.8).

With this song Beethoven could lay claim to having completed his distinctive appropriation of the vocal styles of his time, from the expansively operatic to the most simple folksong style. He could also claim to be capable of adjusting the formal context for his appropriation from the large scale of symphony and opera to the smallest scale of the *Lied*, and to be able to reverse expectations of a particular style from within its smallest details. Thus the subtle play of openness and closure, of instrumental and vocal perspectives, which is so valued in *An die ferne Geliebte* and seen as the beginning of a rich history for the nineteenth-century *Lied* grew out of a whole range of songs which betray the same vital expressive potential. Beethoven's struggle to find a distinctive vocal style can in no way be allowed to have inhibited his success in vocal music. Indeed, perhaps it should be recognized that the struggle itself became an important means of his realizing some of his deepest compositional concerns, and of showing precisely how the simple and immediate might lead toward the immeasurable.

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