

38. Schubert

Der Doppelgänger

(for Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

Background information and performance circumstances

Biography

- Franz Schubert was born in 1797 in Vienna.
- He died in 1828 in the same city.
- Schubert is remembered above all for songs for solo voice and piano, but made major contributions to orchestral, chamber and solo piano music.

For general background:

- See 'Schubert, Franz (Peter)' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Macmillan, 2001), available in some libraries and by subscription online. Figure 10 shows part of Schubert's manuscript of 'Der Doppelgänger'.
- Visit http://www.naxos.com/person/Franz_Schubert/21172.htm#disco
- Listen to other songs by Schubert.
- Listen to performance(s) of 'Der Doppelgänger' other than that on the anthology CD.
- Search for 'Der Doppelgänger' on iTunes, for example.

'Der Doppelgänger':

- Was composed in August 1828.
- Was part of a group of songs published in 1829 as 'Schwanengesang' ('Swan song' – meaning that they were Schubert's last).
- Sets a poem by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), whose title signifies 'The Ghostly Double': the poet looks at the house where his beloved used to live, and in terror sees his double (himself as he once was) standing there in distress.
 - the Anthology has a translation, page 539.
 - for an alternative translation see <http://plexipages.com/reflections/doptrans.html>
- Is a 'lied'. A lied is a Romantic-period 'art' (not 'folk') song with German text, normally for voice and piano, with a close expressive union between music and text.

Performing forces and their handling

- '*Der Doppelgänger*' is for one male voice and piano. (NB: In the anthology the vocal part is printed an octave higher than sung).
- Schubert did not specify tenor, baritone or bass – he headed the vocal stave 'Voce' ('voice').
- Peter Schreier on the anthology CD is a tenor, but the song is sometimes sung by a baritone, transposed down if convenient.

The full vocal range is wide – from B below tenor C to G an octave and a minor 6th higher.

The *tessitura* is frequently low, with the voice in the bottom 5th of its range on account of the 'dark' text. Occasional impassioned use of high notes is all the more dramatic (especially the top F sharps and G at 'eigne Gestalt', Bars 40–42).

The piano part is mostly low and dark with bass clefs for both hands (except for Bars 13-14 and 23-24), reaching a low octave F sharp, starting *fff*, at 'manche Nacht'... Bars 52–55.

Texture

The texture is homophonic.

The voice has the main melodic interest.

The piano part is almost entirely homorhythmic or chordal (with block chords) as at the start.

- It has mostly chords containing five notes – but only because there is much parallel doubling*
- It often has just two 'real' parts – double octaves at the top, middle and bottom (= one part), plus octave F sharps (= second part). See Ex. 1 (a)
- It has some chords with six or seven notes – four-part harmony with doublings (eg. on 'Schatz', end of verse 1, line 2, Bar 12, where the chord is V^7c (C sharp, E, F sharp and A sharp). See Ex. 1 (b)


*The parallel octaves between highest and lowest notes are not 'illegal' consecutive octaves, but just octave doublings. Such parallelism, much of it at *pp*, together with 'hollow' thirdless chords (eg. Bar 1) enhances the ghostly, sinister effect of the music.

Ex. 1 (a)

Sehr langsam



12 (b)



Structure

- Heine's poem has three stanzas, each with four lines.
- Schubert sets each stanza differently for maximum expressive effect – ie. the song is through-composed.
- The piano has an introduction, postlude and two brief interludes (half way through stanza 1 and at the end of it, Bars 13–14 and 23–24).

Schubert unifies the song as follows:

- The opening four-chord progression reappears several times as an ostinato, and a variant of it also recurs (see table below).
- The music for lines 3–4 of verse 1 is a repeat (slightly modified) of the music for lines 1–2.

- The music for line 3 of verse 2 is a repeat (slightly modified) of line 1. Lines 2 and 4 have less in common musically, in particular ending differently so that Schubert can respond appropriately to the climactic moment in line 4 ('meine eigne Gestalt' – 'my own appearance').

verse	location/line	Voice	piano
1	introduction (Bars 1–4)		4-chord ostinato, original form (with B–A#–D–C# in outer parts – 'ostinato 1')
	line 1		The same again. Like line 1, most lines last for four bars
	2		new 4-chord progression related to previous one (with B– A natural –D–C# in outer parts – 'ostinato 2')
	interlude		echo of voice part from line 2, with previous chord prolonged
	3	similar to line 1	ostinato 1
	4	similar to line 2	ostinato 2
	interlude		as previous interlude
2	1	different from verse 1	ostinato 1
	2	different from verse 1	ostinato 2
	3	similar to verse 2, line 1	ostinato 1
	4	something in common with verse 2, line 2	ostinato 2, but with fourth chord modified for greater intensity
3	1	compare verse 1, line 1	to maintain tension, a chromatically-ascending variant of ostinato 1 (B–C natural–C#–D)
	2	New	D# minor I–V. Sense of urgency: this line lasts for only two bars
	3	New	same two-bar chord progression
	4	New	leading back to B minor I
	postlude		ostinato 1 with last chord changed (see section on Harmony below), then tonic pedal with tierce de Picardie

Tonality

- The song is minor as this suits the sinister text – almost everything is in B minor.
- No major-key passages, although the second and third chords of ostinato 2 contain A natural. If this seems to hint at D major, the fourth chord (with A sharp) is contradictory.
- The chromatically-ascending phrase in verse 3 (Bars 43–46, B–C natural–C sharp–D in outer parts) continues to D sharp and four bars of D sharp minor. This key is a major 3rd above the tonic B minor, a distant and striking 'tertiary' relationship.

Harmony

The harmony is functional, but with some unusual aspects for the 1820s:

1. Prominent 'incomplete' chords, notably:

- The very first chord, which lacks a third. It sounds bare and desolate, but at this point is ambiguous too – major or minor?
- The second chord: B minor Vb without C sharp.
- The third chord: D and F sharp in this context signify Ib without its root B.
- The fourth chord: C sharp and F sharp signify V⁷c without E and A sharp. This chord sounds very bare, consisting entirely of perfect intervals – octaves, 4ths and 5ths.

2. Slow harmonic rhythm, sometimes very slow (note the three bars of V⁷c at 'Schatz' and the following interlude, bars 12–14). Initially slow rate of chord change suggests stillness ('still ist die Nacht'), but later obsession and desolation.

3. Associated with the slow harmonic rhythm is the very long dominant pedal (F sharp), from the start until almost the end of verse 2, and in several briefer stretches of verse 3.

This is an internal pedal because it is in middle of the texture.

- The chord that follows the vast F sharp pedal is electrifying. The notes C natural E G A sharp form a (German) augmented sixth chord, but the G eventually moves back to F sharp, to anticipate the start of another dominant pedal.

4. There is a momentary false relation, as a demisemi-quaver A natural sounds above the A sharp of V^7c in both piano interludes (eg. Bar 13).

5. Half way through the piano postlude (Bar 59) a C major chord replaces the expected incomplete V^7c . This is, in B minor, the chord on the flat second degree of the scale (the flattened II, a 'Neapolitan' chord more frequently encountered in first inversion as the Neapolitan 6th).

Note also:

- The prominent (German) augmented 6th chord (Bar 51) leading into the triple *forte* start of the extended $Ic-V^7-I$ perfect cadence at the end of verse 3.
- The closing *tonic* pedal, giving a strong sense of finality, and the extremely quiet tierce de Picardie following the plague inflection. Is this a ray of light, or ironic?

Melody

Melodic interest is almost entirely in the voice part, but note the distinctive shape of the opening four-chord motif with diminished 4th A sharp – D, and in each interlude the piano's echo of the preceding vocal phrase.

The voice part

- In verse 1 moves narrowly within the minor 7th from low B to A
 - beginning on a monotone F sharp (word painting for 'stillness').
 - continually returning to this note.
 - with a few leaps of a 4th or 5th, plus some stepwise movement and outlining of triad.
- In verse 2 the range expands upwards – perhaps initially in response to 'in die Höhe' ('aloft'); but the first long top F sharp emphasises 'Schmerzens(gewalt)' (= 'pain'), and the top G on '(Ge)stalt' (= 'appearance') represents the poet's devastating recognition of himself.
- Verse 3 begins (like verse 1) on a monotone F sharp. From the second line ('Was äffst du') it ranges more widely than verse 1, with a climactic top F sharp on 'man(che)' (= 'many').

Word setting is

- syllabic
- but with a five-note melisma on '(in) al(ter Zeit)' (= 'so long ago') for emphasis
- and occasionally with two notes on a single syllable*

*The word 'melismatic' is not normally applied where a single syllable has just two or three notes.

Rhythm and Metre

The voice part closely matches the rhythm of the text. In general,

- Strong syllables have relatively long notes on accented parts of the bar and/or beat. (Sometimes such notes are relatively high – most notably at '(Ge)stalt').
- Weaker syllables have relatively short and unaccented notes .

This declamatory treatment – perhaps slightly reminiscent of recitative – is enhanced by the treatment of most lines of text as two short phrases separated by rests. Each segment of text is sung once only, without any words being repeated.

The metre is simple triple (3/4).