VANCOUVER RECITAL SOCIETY

2025 26 SEASON

A SCHUBERT AFFAIR: 3 SONG CYCLES IN 3 CONCERTS

Thursday, March 19, 2026
Friday, March 20, 2026
Sunday, March 22, 2026

TELUS STUDIO THEATRE,
CHAN CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

It is our great joy and privilege to present all three great Schubert Song Cycles in one weekend. A rare event indeed! These masterworks of lieder will be performed by two exceptional artists, who are world renowned and also very dear to the VRS, Benjamin Appl and James Baillieu. The intimate Telus Studio Theatre at UBC, located within the Chan Centre, is the ideal setting for this project, just as it was many years ago for the complete Shostakovich String Quartet Cycle with the Jerusalem Quartet.

Of course, we could not have managed to do this without the support of our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and Ann Harding and Allison Hart who are, together, sponsoring all three performances.

And speaking of managing things, we have to thank Alex, our Box Office and Production Manager, for getting the piano to the Chan Centre and for finding Millen who will be operating the projection of texts and translations for the concerts, and David Humphrey, Chan Centre Manager of Production, who is helping with all the technical aspects.

We are also grateful to the Chan Centre and its staff for their support of our events in their wonderful building.

Whether you're attending one, two, or all three of these performances, I am sure they will have a profound effect on you!

Thank you for being here with us.

Sincerely,

Leila

CELLPHONES

The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，谢谢您的合作。

A SCHUBERT AFFAIR: 3 SONG CYCLES IN 3 CONCERTS

BENJAMIN APPL, baritone
JAMES BAILLIEU, piano

March 19, 20 & 22, 2026

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

PROGRAM 1

Thursday, March 19, 2026 – 7:30 pm

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Die Schöne Müllerin

See pages 6–19
for program and notes

PROGRAM 2

Friday, March 20, 2026 – 7:30 pm

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Schwanengesang

See pages 20–31
for program and notes

PROGRAM 3

Sunday, March 22, 2026 – 3:00 pm

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Winterreise

See pages 32–49
for program and notes

Pre-concert talks:
45 minutes before each performance,
in the Royal Bank Cinema

Benjamin Appl, baritone

Early Life & Education: Benjamin's musical journey began when he was a chorister with the renowned Regensburger Domspatzen, later continuing his studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London. He was mentored by the legendary Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

This Season: Some of Benjamin's recent recital debuts include Carnegie Hall, San Francisco Performances, Dallas Opera, Celebrity Series of Boston, New York's Park Avenue Armory (of all three Schubert song cycles), Sydney Opera House, Mozarteum Salzburg, Festival de Saint-Denis, and three presentations of Winterreise by the Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona. A creative and innovative programmer, Benjamin seeks out diverse and enriching onstage partnerships including with pianists James Baillieu, Graham Johnson, David Fray, Alice Sara Ott, Lucas & Arthur Jussen, and Kit Armstrong; the Armida String Quartet; accordionists Martynas Levickis and Ksenija Sidorova; and lutenist Thomas Dunford.

Photo credit: David Ruano

On the opera stage, Benjamin recently performed the role of Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* at the Hamburgische Staatsoper and Opéra Rouen, made his role and house debut as Harlequin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona, and looks forward to his upcoming house and role debut at the Teatro Real Madrid as Mercutio in *Roméo et Juliette*.

Recordings: In 2025, Benjamin released two albums, each devoted to a significant figure in his musical career: *Lines of Life* dedicated to György Kurtág and *For Dieter* to his longtime mentor and teacher Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Other recent standout recordings include *The Christmas Album* (2024) with the Regensburger Domspatzen, *Forbidden Fruit* (2023), Schubert Lieder with orchestra (Münchner Rundfunkorchester), Hans Sommer songs (RSB), Schumann duets with Ann Murray, and a Wigmore Hall Live Schubert recital with Graham Johnson. His Sony debut album *Heimat* was Gramophone-nominated and won the Prix Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (2017–18).

Did you know: Beyond the concert hall, Benjamin has starred in a filmed realization of Schubert's *Winterreise* in the Swiss Alps, commissioned by the BBC and SRF and broadcast on BBC Four in 2022. He also presented BBC Radio 3's *A Singer's World* and appeared in *Breaking Music,* a film exploring the meeting of Argentinian tango and German lied. Benjamin is Professor of German Song at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Benjamin Appl is represented by Jensen Artists, New York, USA

James Baillieu, piano

Photo credit: David Ruano

Early Life & Education: Born in South Africa, James studied at the University of Cape Town and the Royal Academy of Music in London with Michael Dussek, Malcolm Martineau and Kathryn Stott.

Performances: Highlights of the 2025–26 season include tours to the United States, Canada and Europe, including recitals in New York, London, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, Washington D.C. and Barcelona. Further highlights include a Wigmore Hall residency comprising three recitals with different partners, and recitals at La Monnaie and Kölner Philharmonie with Véronique Gens. Supplementary to his performance career, James will participate in the jury of the Tenor Viñas Competition and coach with the Welsh National Opera Associate Artist programme.

Recordings: Recording projects include *Forbidden Fruit* (Alpha Classics), *Winterreise* (Alpha Classics) and *Heimat* (Sony Classical) with Benjamin Appl, the complete works of CPE Bach for violin and piano with Tamsin Waley-Cohen (Signum Records), and albums on the Chandos, Opus Arte, Champs Hill, Rubicon and Delphian record labels as part of his critically acclaimed discography.

Awards & Prizes: James was prize winner of the Wigmore Hall Song Competition, Das Lied International Song Competition, and the Kathleen Ferrier and Richard Tauber Competitions, and was selected for representation by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2010. In 2012 he received a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship and a Geoffrey Parsons Memorial Trust Award. In 2016 he was shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society Outstanding Young Artist Award.

Did you know: James Baillieu is a Senior Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, a coach for the Jette Parker Artists Program at the Royal Opera, a course leader for the Samling Foundation, and is head of the Song Program at the Atelier Lyrique of the Verbier Festival Academy. He is International Tutor in Piano Accompaniment at the Royal Northern College of Music and a trustee of the Countess of Munster Musical Trust. Highly sought after for masterclasses worldwide, recent sessions of learning have brought him to the Aldeburgh Festival; Cleveland Institute of Music; Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Development Program; Friends of Chamber Music in Portland, Oregon; the Vancouver Academy of Music, Canada; and to the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

James Baillieu is represented by Étude Arts, New York, USA

Program 1 – Die Schöne Müllerin

BENJAMIN APPL, baritone
JAMES BAILLIEU, piano

Thursday, March 19, 2026 – 7:30 pm

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Die Schöne Müllerin

Das Wandern
– Wandering

Wohin?
– Where to?

Halt!
– Stop!

Danksagung an dem Bach
– Thanking the Brook

Am Feierabend
– Workday's End

Der Neugierige
– Curiosity

Ungeduld
– Impatience

Morgengruss
– Good Morning!

Der Müllers Blumen
– The miller's flowers

Tränenregen
– Rain of Tears

Mein!
– Mine!

Pause
– Interlude

Mit der grünen Lautenbande
– The Lute's Green Ribbon

Der Jäger
– The hunter

Eifersucht und Stolz
– Jealousy and Pride

Die liebe Farbe
– The Beloved Colour

Die böse Farbe
– The Hated Colour

Trockne Blumen
– Dried Flowers

Der Müller und der Bach
– The miller and the brook

Des Baches Wiegenlied
– The Brook's Lullaby

(approx. 60-75 minutes)

Program Notes – Die Schöne Müllerin

Schubert is credited with single-handedly transforming the German lied from its status as a form of home entertainment, mostly cultivated by amateurs and largely ignored by serious composers, into a worthy vehicle for artistic expression at the highest level. What distinguished Schubert's contributions to the genre is the way in which he brought the full range of musical resources – harmony, melody, texture and declamatory style – to bear on the expression of the poetic text.

From his first essays in the form in 1814 until his death in 1828, he produced an astonishing variety of works for solo voice and piano – over 600 in all – that brought a new vividness and immediacy of expression to musical settings of lyric and narrative poetry from the emerging Romantic movement of the age.

The movement's emphasis on the psychology of the solitary individual, along with its admiration of folklore and its worshipful yearning for communion with Nature, seemed tailor-made for musical setting, with the solo singer as the archetypal Romantic hero.

At the same time, the piano was undergoing major improvements that increased its range, its strength of tone and its expressive potential, making it a miniature orchestra capable of providing a theatrical "backdrop" behind the singer's voice, or even of engaging with the singer in dramatic dialogue.

These traits are especially well demonstrated in Schubert's early song cycle *Die Schöne Müllerin*, based on poems by the German Romantic poet Wilhelm Müller (1794–1827), a close contemporary of Schubert.

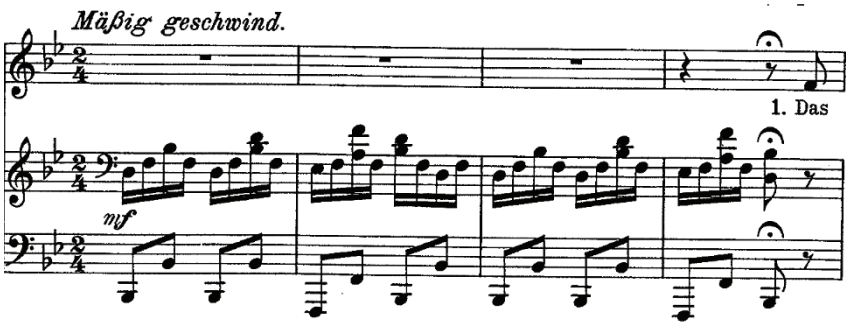
Selecting 20 of Müller's *Seventy-Seven Poems from the Posthumous Papers of an Itinerant Horn-Player* (1821), Schubert creates a narrative arc depicting the bumpy love life of a sensitive young man who has a typically German love of the countryside and who projects his entire inner world onto his natural surroundings.

In this work we see the dramatic action solely through the eyes of our hero, who is a journeyman miller – already a nostalgic, quasi-heroic figure at a time when the Industrial Revolution was replacing traditional rural crafts with factory work in big cities with the aim of increasing economic output.

* * *

Das Wandern (Wandering)

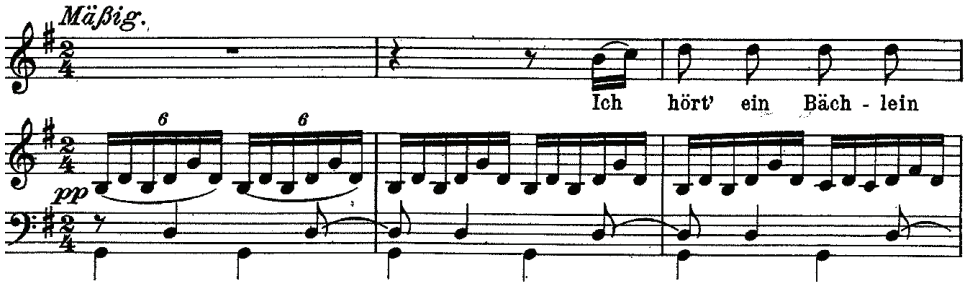
The story begins with our young man strolling happily though the woods thinking of the flowing water and grinding millstones that are the basic tools of his trade. The naively simple pattern of broken chords in the piano accompaniment evokes both his walking pace and the repetitive mechanical actions of a working mill.



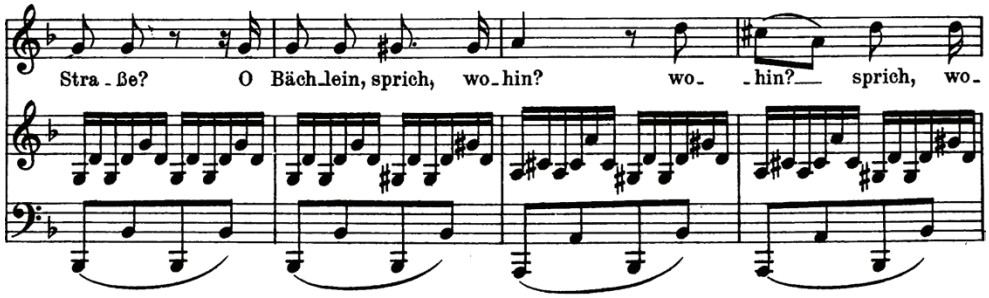
The constantly leaping intervals of the vocal line express his unbounded joy at the wide-ranging freedom he feels when he is alone in Nature.

Wohin? (Where to?)

But his solitary state does not last long as he soon encounters a babbling brook, one that will become his friend and intimate confidant as the story proceeds. The gentle but energetic rippling of the brook is communicated in the busily circling broken chords of the piano accompaniment.

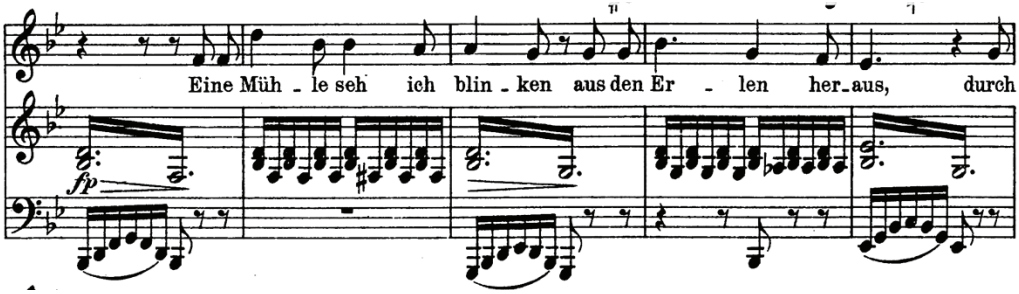


The melody is pure folk song, and the harmonies remain utterly simple, only becoming more active when he asks his genial new companion the major question on his mind: "Where are you leading me to?" (Wohin?).



Halt! (Stop!)

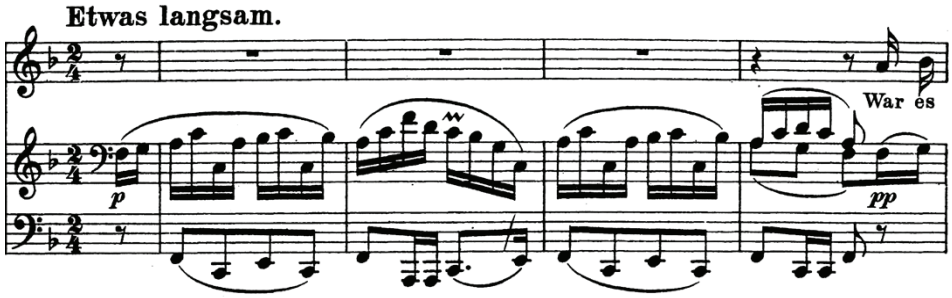
He stops in his tracks, and there it is: his first sighting of a human habitation, one that is presented as every bit as lovely as the natural setting in which it sits. The cheerily busy sound of the mill (in tremolos) is to him a "sweet song" (Süsser Mühlengesang), not a mindless clattering of machines as in a factory.



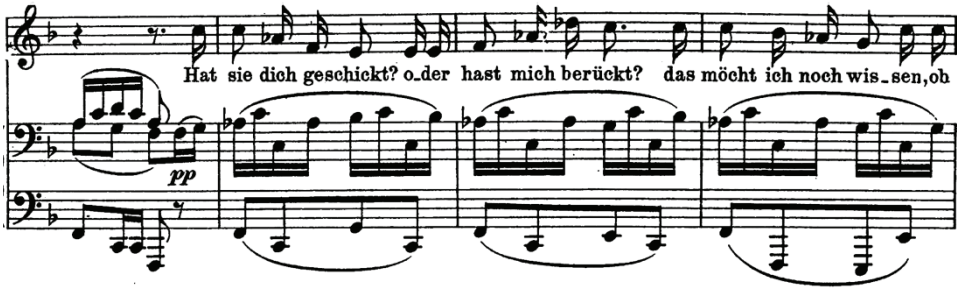
"Is this where you meant to take me to?" he asks the brook.

Danksagung an dem Bach (Thanking the Brook)

Now comes a change of pace to suit the daydreaming nature of the scene, as the narrator stands contemplating the mill in front of him, with the tantalizing thought that the mill master just might have a beautiful daughter working with him.



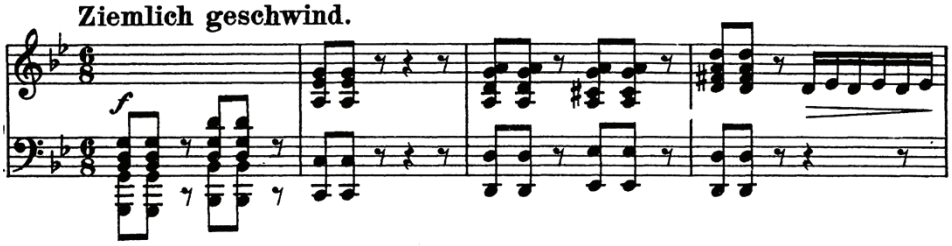
As frequently happens in Schubert's harmonic rhetoric in this work, the major mode changes to the parallel minor when the narrator's cast of mind becomes inward-focused as he asks: "Hey, brook, did the young woman inside put you up to this?"



He thinks, you see, that there is a mill maid inside, one who might even have been in touch with the brook since all creatures, human and imagined, are connected in this traveller's view of the natural world.

Am Feierabend (Workday's End)

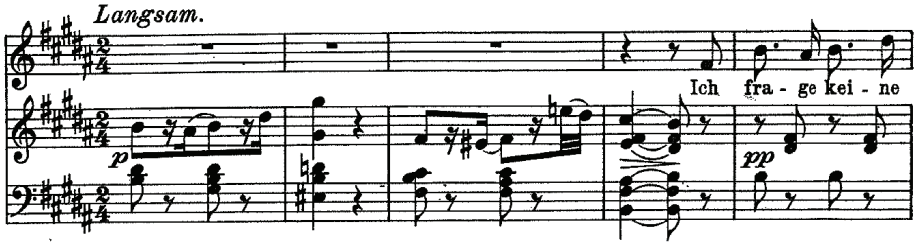
The young man has now been hired at the mill and rests at the end of the day. The sound of heavy hammer blows and then 16th-note busyness in the piano marks the action of heavy machinery, as well as his roaming thoughts about his work performance that day.



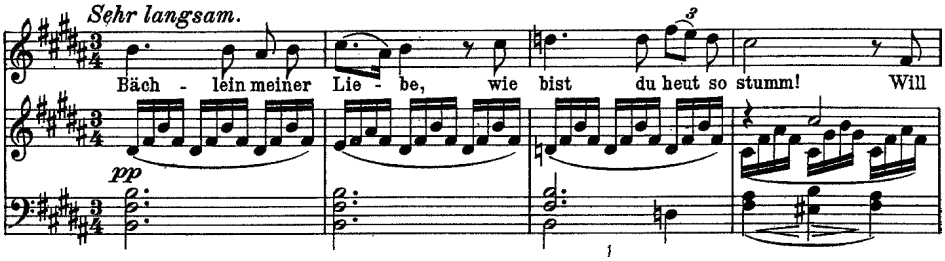
He wishes he wasn't such a weakling so that he could impress the young woman working alongside him. A slower middle section reveals how she says "Goodnight" to all the workmen, and yet he can't seem to catch her attention.

Der Neugierige (Curiosity)

Another change of pace comes as he struggles with the eternal question that has puzzled aspiring lovers since time immemorial: "She loves me, she loves me not." The piano's coy opening evokes perfectly his quizzical mood.

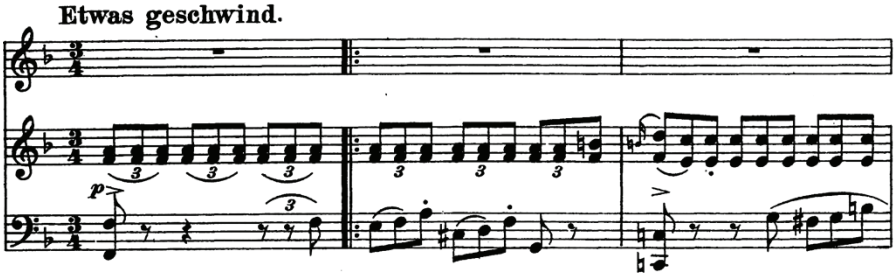


With so much at stake, he does what any sensible love-struck young man would do. He asks his BNF (best natural friend), the brook.



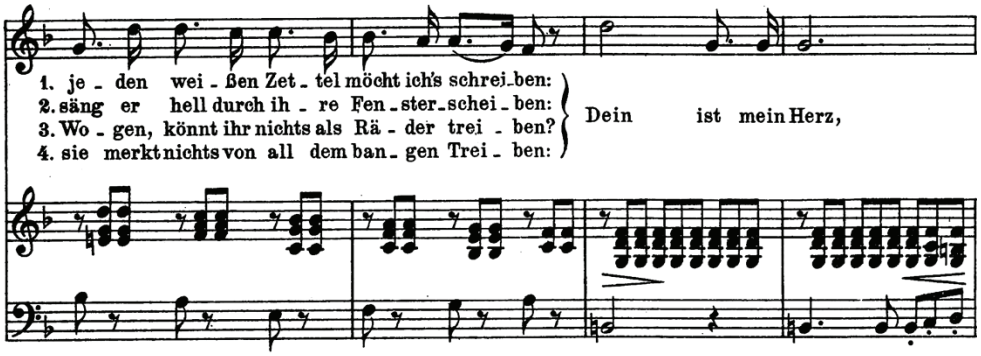
Ungeduld (Impatience)

He is getting closer to taking action now, with the nervous speed of the accompaniment expressing the jumpiness he feels while trying to think of ways of getting his message across.



He thinks of carving his love-message into tree bark, or etching it into a stone, maybe even training a bird to go twitter at her – the natural world being his go-to support group in times like these.

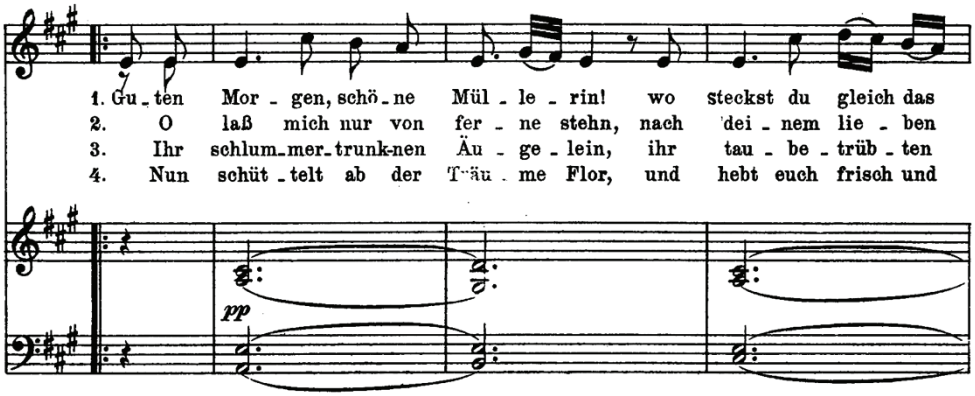
The message he wants so urgently to be delivered is simple: "My heart is yours!" (Dein ist mein Herz!)



In a breakthrough moment, he even thinks of approaching her directly – but only to gaze longingly, blush and sigh in her general direction.

Morgengruss (Good Morning!)

Plucking up the courage to confront his fears, he walks up to her and says good morning (Guten Morgen), but then shyly turns away.

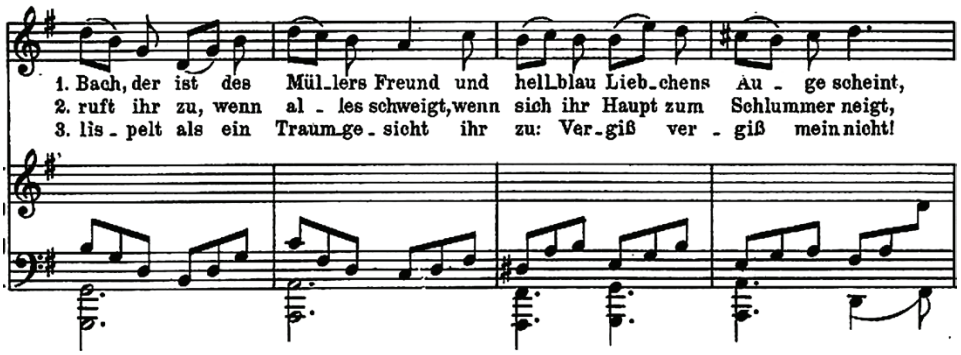


Not to worry, though. He has a Plan B that is bound to work. He will just stand outside her window and wait for her to emerge, at which point the fragrance of the dew-laden flowers and the trilling of the lark will inevitably put her in the mood for love.

Der Müllers Blumen (The Miller's Flowers)

Well, that didn't work, but he has still another idea. Once again, he is going to use Nature as his go-between, planting flowers from the bank of the brook in the planter outside her window. The flowers will convey the love message he is too bashful to present himself.

And because the brook is the miller's friend (providing the energy to run the mill), he can count on both of them to put in a good word for him with the mill master's daughter.

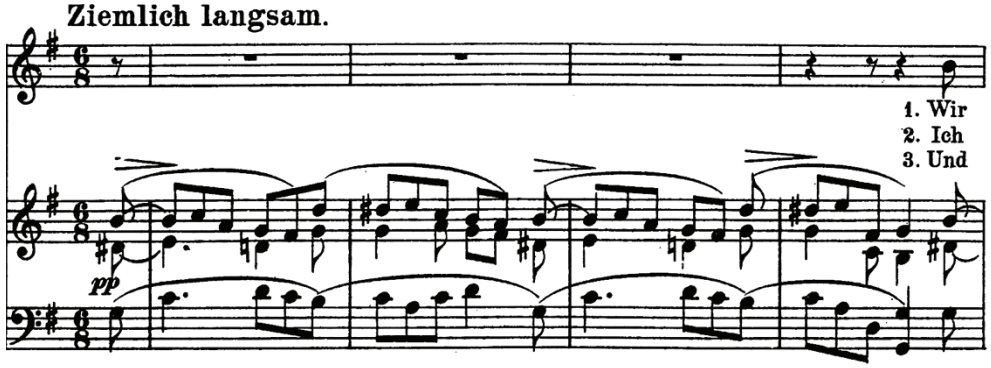


He wants the flowers to whisper "Forget me not" to her when she closes her eyes to go to sleep and in the morning. Then when she wakes up and opens the shutters, she will see dew on the flowers, which he thinks she will take as the tears he is willing to shed for her.

Schubert sets this hopelessly naïve thought with the gentle simplicity that expresses it best.

Tränenregen (Rain of Tears)

He finally gets to share a tender moment sitting by her side down at the brook, but he is still too shy to look at anything but her reflection in the water. It being nighttime, the full moon makes the brook's surface into a silvery mirror. The harmonies of the opening convey the tender yearning he feels.

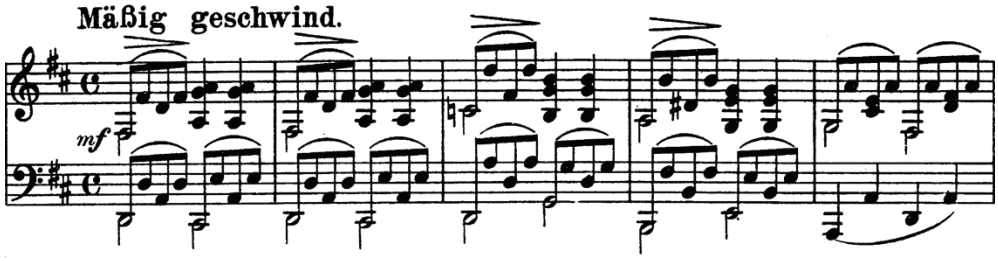


And the vocal line is just as charmingly simple and sincere. But with the first drops of rain, she suddenly gets up and goes home, leaving him sitting there all wet – in more senses than he knows.

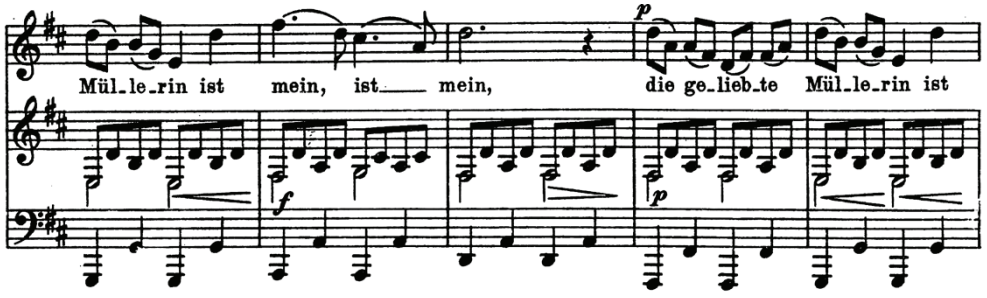
Mein! (Mine!)

And... he's done it! What "it" is, exactly, is not clear, but he can now confidently declare that "she is mine" (Mein).

The introduction, being just a series of cadences, is awkwardly celebratory, hammering home the idea that he has "concluded" the courtship, and with a happy result.



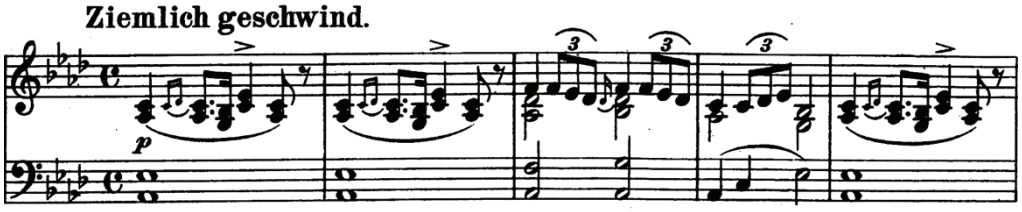
And of course he can't wait to tell all his friends – his friends in the natural world, that is: the brook, the birds in the forest, the flowers, the sun. He is so excited that his melodic line is often just a bunch of leaps and jumps.



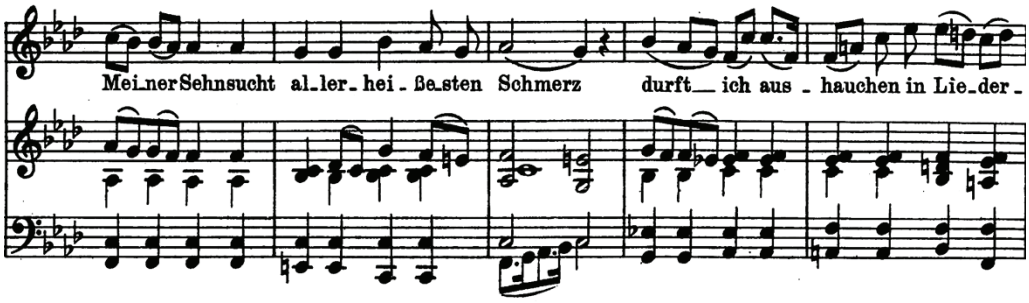
Pause (Interlude)

Another old “friend” of the narrator is his lute, his old partner in song, which he used to play when singing of the pain of unrequited love. But now he just hangs it on the wall, wondering if any new songs will ever come to him.

The introduction features a lute-like twiddle that becomes a kind of refrain throughout the song, expressing with its harmonic stability the bewildered numbness he feels at finally arriving at the fulfillment of his dreams.



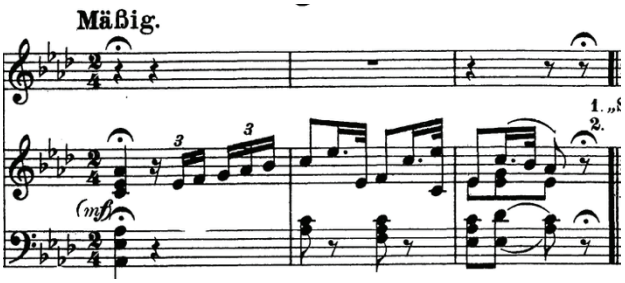
Note how the major mode changes to minor when he later sings of his former yearning (Sehnsucht). It’s as if he almost misses being filled with emotion, even if it’s a sad emotion.



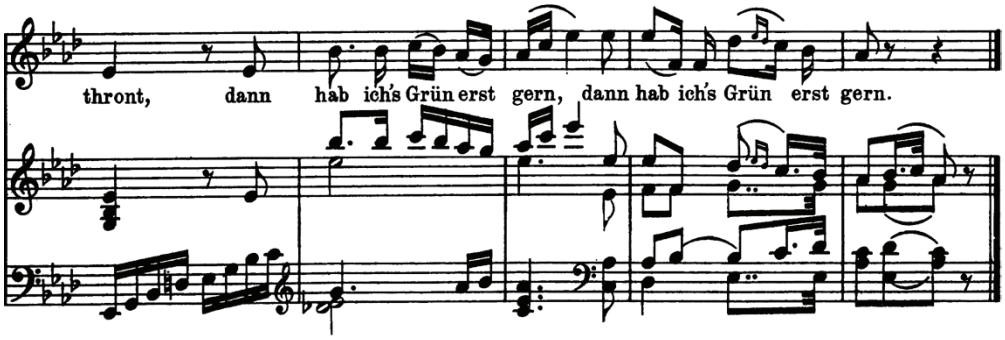
Mit der grünen Lautenbande (The Lute's Green Ribbon)

The young man's new "girlfriend" notices the green ribbon holding his lute to the wall and casually lets it drop that, oh by the way, "green is my favourite colour, don't you know?" (Ich hab' das Grün so gern!). Uncharacteristically quick on the pick-up this time, he gives her the ribbon to put in her hair.

This is a playful scene with the piano part being unusually coy and spritely in support of the young man's newfound self-confidence.



By the end, the young man convinces himself that even though he is covered white with flour, green is now his favourite colour, too.



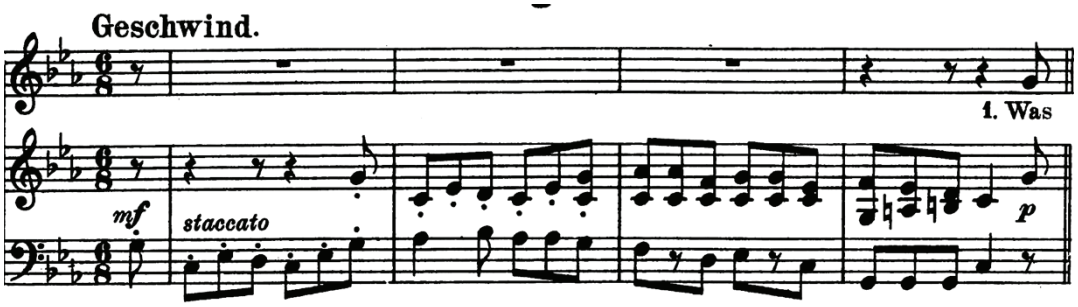
But there is, of course, another layer of meaning simmering unspoken in this scene. Discerning audience members might raise an eyebrow of concern at how the naïve young man rationalizes his new colour preference with the notion that it represents newness and freshness, how "our love is evergreen" (Weil unsre Lieb' ist immergrün).

Because in matters of the heart, green also has quite another meaning.

Der Jäger (The Hunter)

Audience members with a broad command of Western culture will have noted by now that green is also the colour of envy. So who should now appear but a big strapping hunter (Jäger) with a manly beard and a loaded gun, emerging out of the forest, on the look-out for "game."

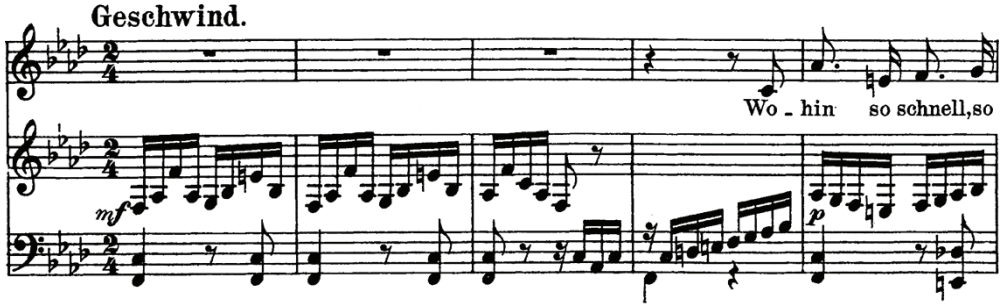
The young man's reaction is uncontrolled panic, conveyed by the constant breathless patter of 8th notes in 6/8 meter that starts with the piano introduction and then never stops.



This musical device brilliantly represents not just the hunter deftly sneaking up on his "prey," but also the young man's racing heartbeat as he impotently shouts insults at his rival in love, likening him to a wild boar in the night coming to root around in the young woman's cabbage patch.

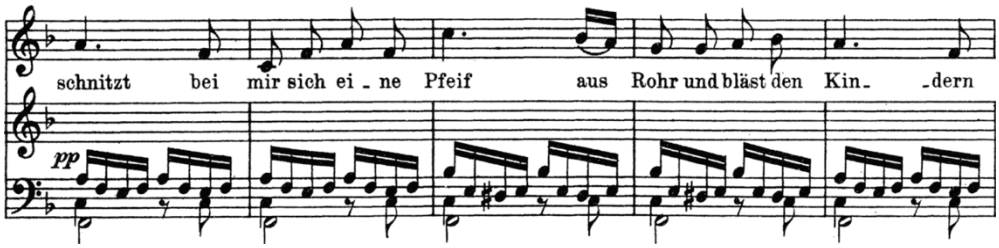
Eifersucht und Stolz (Jealousy and Pride)

This is where a young lad in a sticky fix has most need of his best mates for friendly advice, so of course our narrator heads off to the brook to vent. His tormented mood is conveyed by the fury of the piano introduction, which bristles with a scrambled, slightly all-over-the-place-at-once pattern of 16th-note motion.



It turns out that his fears are well founded, as he reports seeing the young woman – *his* young woman – waiting at the gate for the hunter to come back from the forest so that she can flirt with him.

And as usual, our young man wants someone else to do the talking, so, mixing jealousy with pride (as the title tells us) he instructs the brook to reproach her for her inconstancy – but definitely *not* to tell her how unhappy he is.



Putting on a brave face by playing the "happy hubby" card, he tells the brook to let her know in passing that, oh don't you know, he is down by the water cheerfully whittling reed stocks to make a country flute in order to play songs for children.

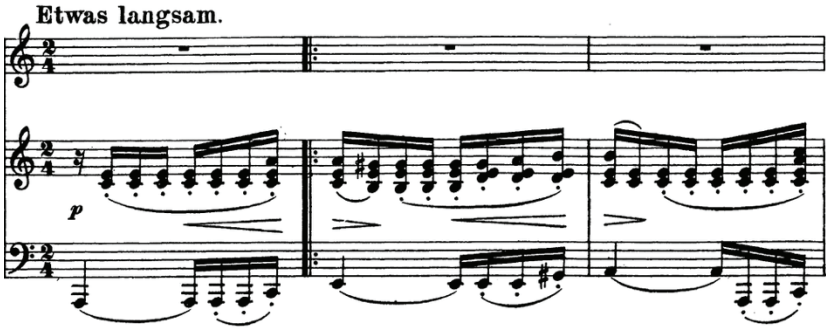
Die liebe Farbe (The Beloved Colour)

Our narrator turns from extroverted venting to introverted grieving as he obsesses over green, his erstwhile girlfriend's favourite colour.

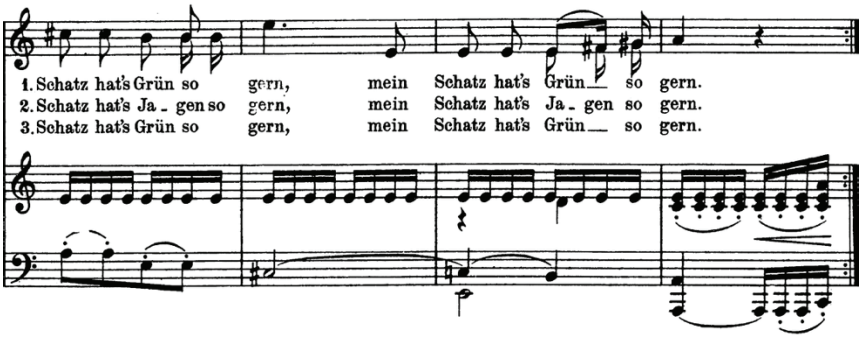
In his delusional state he wants to dress in green, to wander in the greenery of the forest or on a green heath.

The piano introduction sets the tone once again: slow and in a pathetic minor key, downcast and almost weeping.

In the middle of the texture is an ostinato pulse of a single pitch that subtly chimes in every single bar, representing the intractable nature of the situation, which he is reluctant to acknowledge.

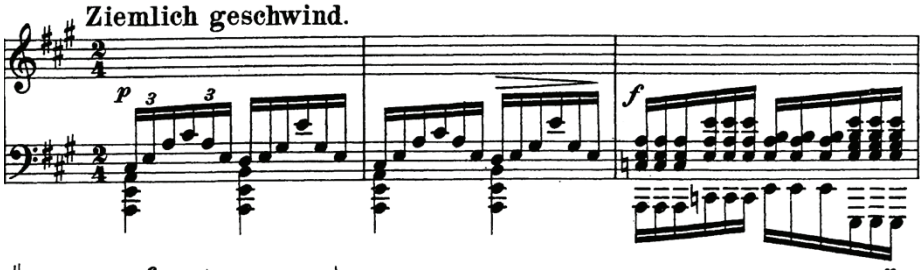


The seemingly cheerful refrain revelling in how the young woman really likes the colour green (Mein Schatz hat's grün so gern) at first turns the harmonic colouring from minor to major, but in the closing bars it sinks back hopelessly into the minor mode.



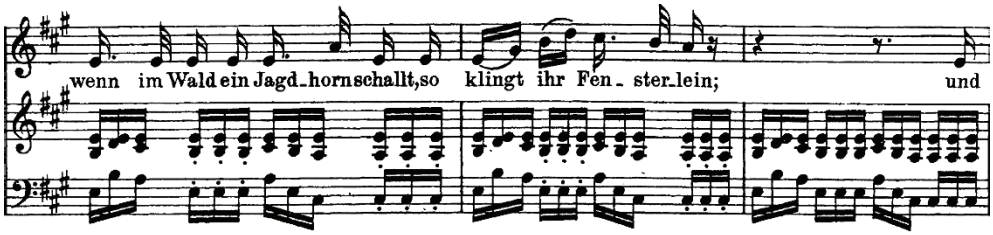
Die böse Farbe (The Hated Colour)

Grief turns to bitterness, and the transformation of the major mode to the minor is dramatically repeated in the piano introduction.



Now he hates everything green: the leaves on the trees, the grass, everything. He just wants her to give him back the green ribbon from her hair, and then he will bid her "Farewell." The tone is declarative and spirited, with constant alternations between major and minor and between leaping melodic fervour and tragic resolve.

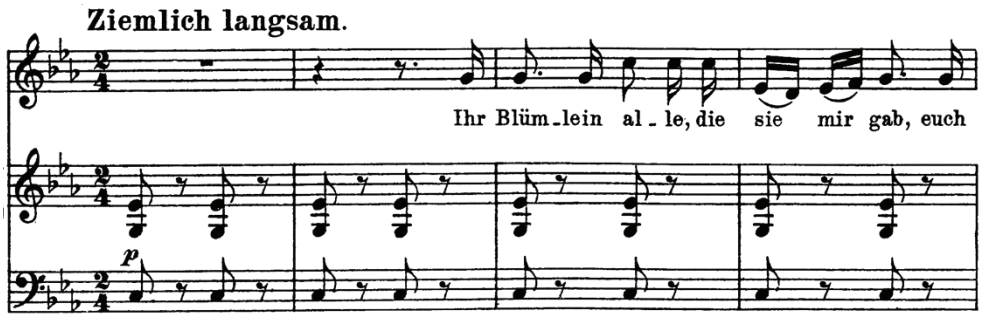
Note how Schubert depicts the sounds of hunting with typical horn textures when the young man punishes himself with thoughts of his rival, the hunter.



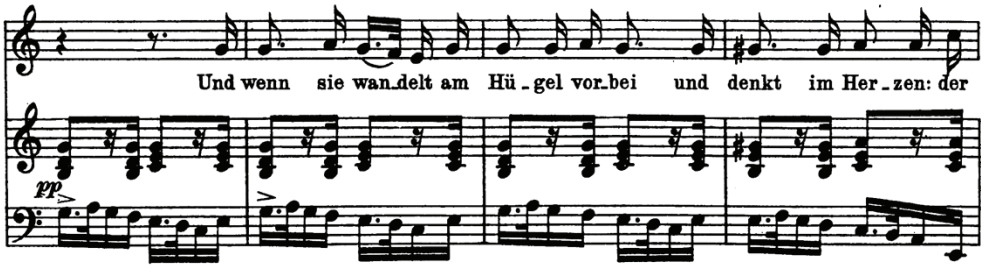
Trockne Blumen (Dried Flowers)

Bitterness then turns to moping, reaching a new level of self-pity when he thinks of the flowers she gave him, now all dried up (like her love for him) and in a vividly imagined death fantasy he sees their withered stems placed on his grave. When she passes by she will see them, he thinks, and remember him as having truly loved her.

Accordingly, the pace is that of a hushed funeral march.



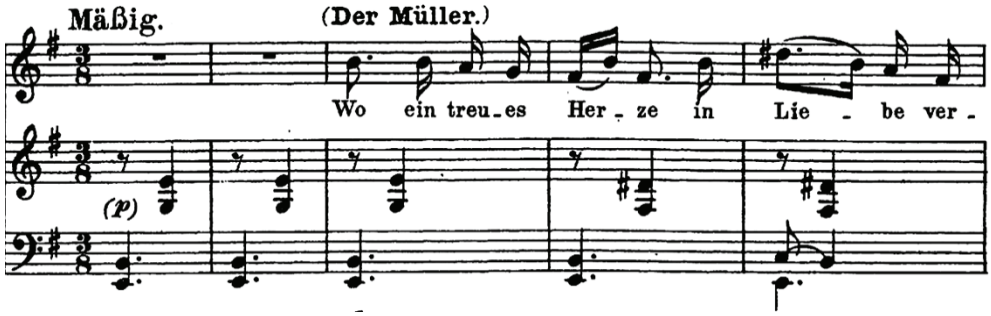
When he imagines her walking by, the dotted-rhythm figure in the bass evokes her footsteps in a major key,



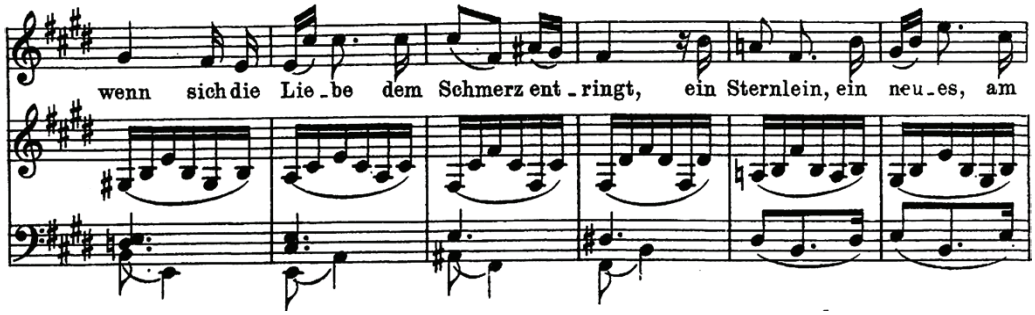
but the song ends in the *minor* mode, reflecting the dire nature of his situation.

Der Müller und der Bach (The Miller and the Brook)

Before taking such a major step – like, for example, *dying* – our young man once again consults his best friend the brook. This song is structured as a dialogue, with the miller (our young hero) relating how all Nature (a stand-in for his inner world) is in retreat: the lilies are wilting, the moon hides behind the clouds and even the angels sob at the thought of his death.



But then the brook chimes in, changing the tone to that of the parallel major key, and counters that when love passes through a trial of sadness and loss it produces something even more beautiful than before: multi-coloured flowers, a new star in the sky and angels that come down to earth.



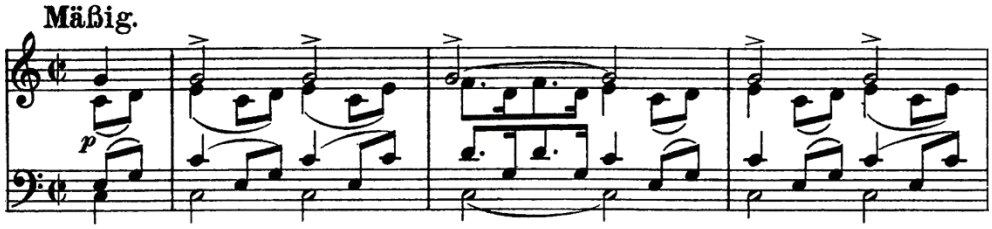
The young man takes this more upbeat view under advisement but nevertheless asks the brook if that riverbed of his might be a comfy place to lay his head – on the off chance that he might want to drown himself.

Des Baches Wiegenlied (The Brook's Lullaby)

The song cycle ends with a lullaby, the longest work in the collection, as the ever-faithful brook sings our hero to sleep. Just where that resting place is remains ambiguous.

Either he has gone full-on Ophelia and taken the plunge to lie on the riverbed forever, or the "cool bed" being prepared for him is on the peaceful banks of the brook itself.

Like the famous Brahms Lullaby (Wiegenlied), this one has a serene and comforting pedal point in the bass.



What is clear is that our young man is now safely distant from everything that can harm him. The brook will keep the young woman away, and the sound of the hunting horns, eerily suggested in the inner voices of the lullaby refrain, are now transformed into a source of calm repose.

While the woman in his life let him down, his only real friend, the brook, stays steadfastly with him till the end, renewing that faith in Nature that first prompted him to venture out into the woods as the song cycle began.

Program notes by Donald G. Gíslason, 2026

Program 2 – Schwanengesang

BENJAMIN APPL, baritone
JAMES BAILLIEU, piano

Friday, March 20, 2026 – 7:30 pm

Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

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CHAN CENTRE
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Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Schwanengesang (Swan Song)

Liebesbotschaft
– Message of Love

Kriegers Ahnung
– Warrior's Foreboding

Frühlingssehnsucht
– Spring Longing

Ständchen
– Serenade

Aufenthalt
– Resting Place

In der Ferne
– In the Distance

Abschied
– Farewell

Der Atlas
– The Atlas

Ihr Bild
– Her Likeness

Das Fischermädchen
– The Fisher Maid

Die Stadt
– The Town

Am Meer
– By the Sea

Der Doppelgänger
– The Double

Die Taubenpost
– Pigeon Post

(approx. 50-65 minutes)

Program Notes – Schwanengesang

Schwanengesang is not a song cycle, as it lacks a narrative thread, but rather a song collection, composed by Schubert just before his death in 1828 and put on sale under this name the following year by his publisher, Tobias Haslinger, who thought it would sell well if marketed as Schubert's "last farewell to song," his "Swan Song."

The collection comprises 14 songs by three contemporary German poets. The first seven songs are to poems by Ludwig Rellstab (1799–1860), the multi-talented littérateur and arch-conservative music critic (famous for giving Beethoven's Sonata Op. 27 No. 2 its title "Moonlight").

The following six are settings of poems by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), a cosmopolitan poet of humour and irony who combined a light touch with an aphoristic density of thought.

The final, "encore" song sets the words of the Austrian imperial bureaucrat Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804–1875).

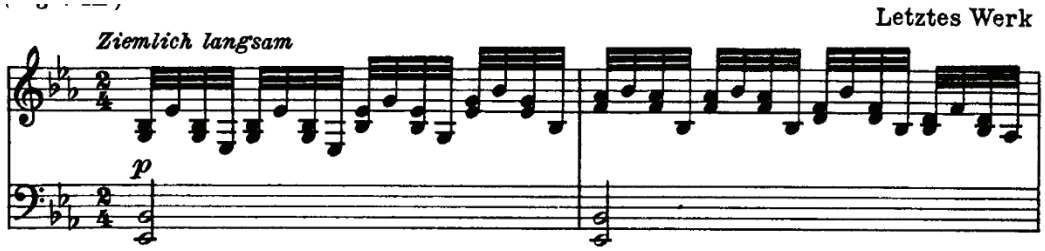
* * *

Liebesbotschaft (Message of Love)

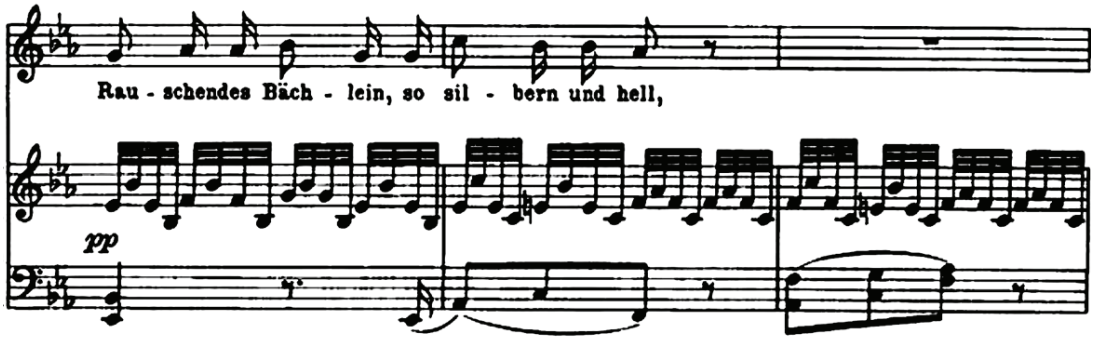
Themes of lost love and communion with nature dominate the Rellstab songs. A typical example is Liebesbotschaft, in which a young lover asks the burbling brook to take his message of love downstream to his beloved, who lies daydreaming at the river's edge.

A remarkable feature of Schubert's style is his use of texture and harmonic colour to paint the dramatic content of the text. His piano accompaniments often depict vividly in sound the setting or natural backdrop evoked in the lyrics.

In this song the flow of the brook is represented by the gently rippling figuration of the piano that first strikes the ear as the work opens.



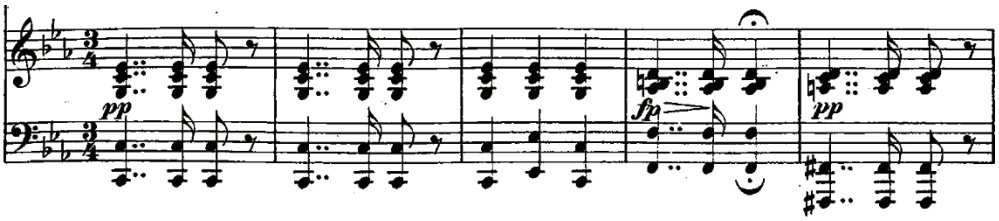
The piano and voice are virtually in duet, with the brook's eagerness to do the lover's bidding conveyed in the way it regularly answers back the singer's phrase endings from the bass register.



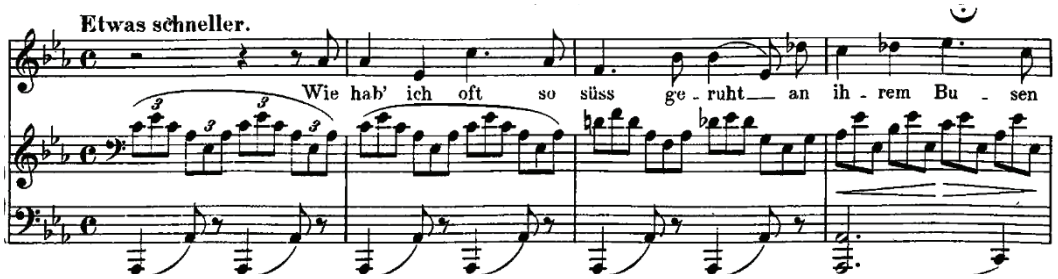
Indeed the intimacy of the scene is reinforced by this ever-present murmured backdrop of the piano, which sets up the entry of the voice at the beginning, coddles it in a warm sonic blanket throughout and concludes the song with a long postlude after the vocal line is finished, encouraging you to follow in your mind's eye the brook travelling to its intended destination.

Kriegers Ahnung (Warrior's Foreboding)

Kriegers Ahnung is much less upbeat, describing, as it does, the scene of a young soldier sitting around a campfire with his comrades-in-arms the night before a battle. The cloud of foreboding that hovers over them all is conveyed in the funereal pace and harmonic restlessness of a piano introduction that evokes the sound of muffled drums.



The soldier exhales grim thoughts of his impending death, but the tone changes markedly and the harmony becomes more stable at the thought of his beloved: "How oft have I dreamt upon her warm breast."

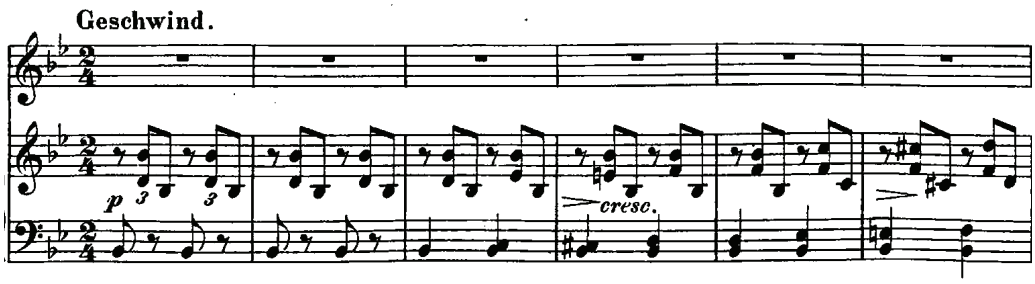


And the texture and tone change twice more before finally returning to the funereal pace of the opening. The song concludes with the grimly ironic thought that he will soon "rest well and sleep deeply" (Bald ruh ich wohl und schlafe fest). His final "Goodnight" addressed to his beloved has thus hidden within it the unmistakable sound of a "Farewell."

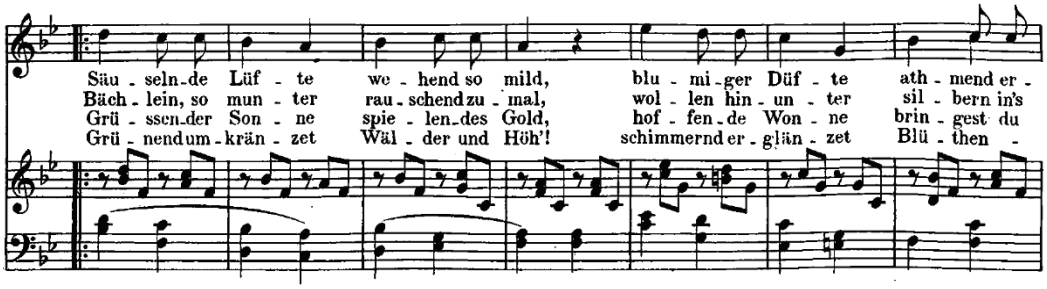
Frühlingssehnsucht (Spring Longing)

Frühlingssehnsucht paints the breathless enthusiasm of a love-besotted singer being driven squirrelly by the (to him) mysterious yearnings he is experiencing with the arrival of spring.

His racing heartbeat is ably evoked in the pervasive romping rhythm of the piano accompaniment.



Seeking answers in nature, he pauses quasi-comically at the end of each stanza to ask a different element of the natural world — first the breezes, then the brooks and the sun and finally the woods — what the meaning might be of these nascent feelings that are making him go all a-tingle.



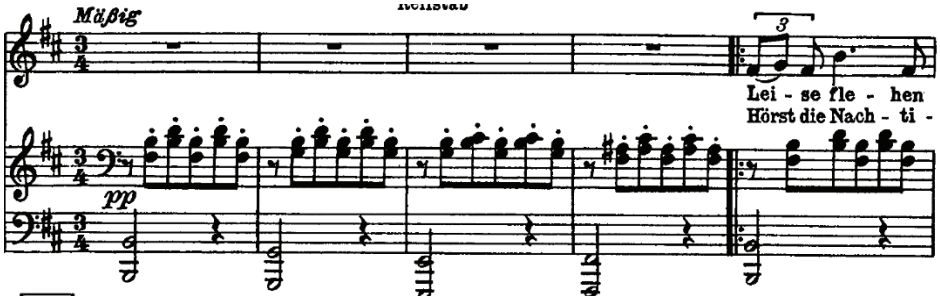
The answer he arrives at in the end is as vague as the feelings he is experiencing.

Without being in any way specific, he concludes that it's "Nur du!" (Only you).

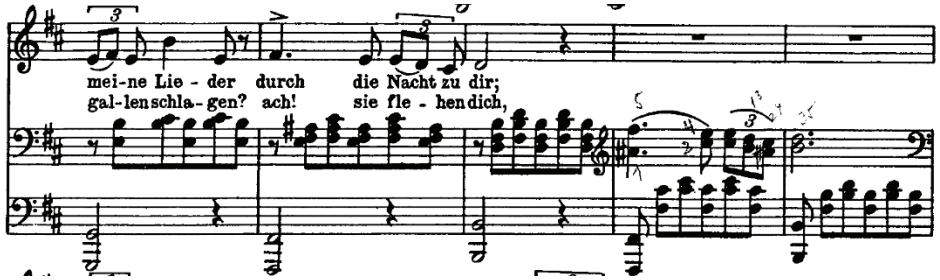
Ständchen (Serenade)

Ständchen is one of Schubert's best-known melodies, evocative of the stillness of the night and the lover's heightened awareness of the sounds of nature that surround him.

The piano introduction is deeply mysterious "night music," its staccato articulation imitating the plucking sound of a serenader's guitar.



But the guitar, whether it's in the hands of this wannabe Don Giovanni or his sidekick Leporello, is more than just accompaniment, as it frequently chimes in to echo the serenading singer's sentiments, as at the end of the first phrase.



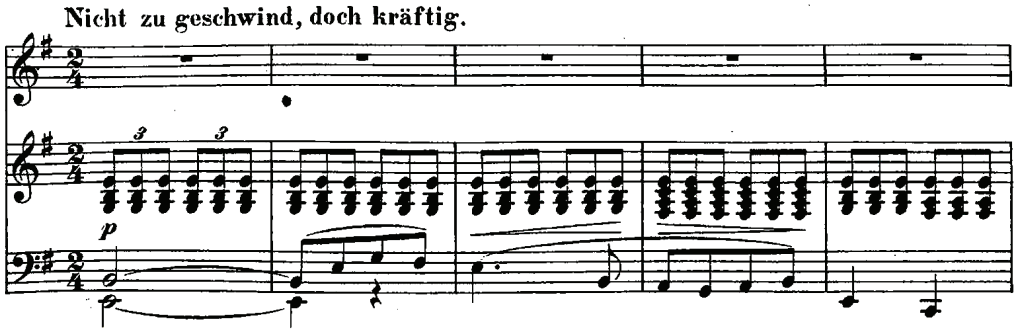
The minor-mode colouring that persists throughout gives us a hint that even though the song ends with a major cadence, the yearning evoked by this harmonic colouring will likely persist long into the night without resolution.

Aufenthalt (Resting Place)

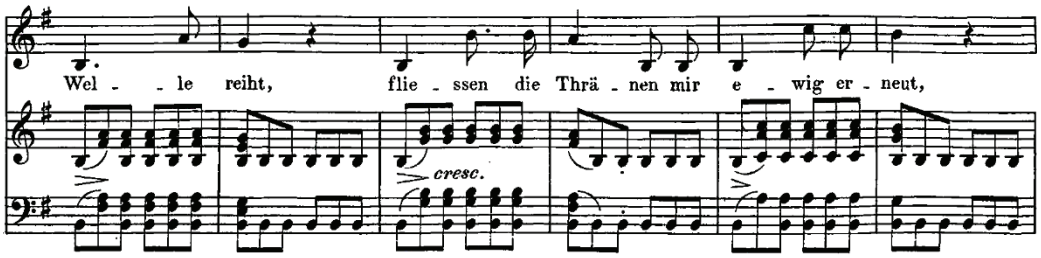
The sobbing singer of Aufenthalt seems no more lucky in love than his serenading predecessor.

Stopping to consider his downcast fate by the side of a surging river next to massive boulders with a loudly echoing forest behind him, he seems just another massive element of nature, one with a voice.

The throbbing pulses of the piano accompaniment paint the natural world as less distant, as more of a participant in the lover's suffering.



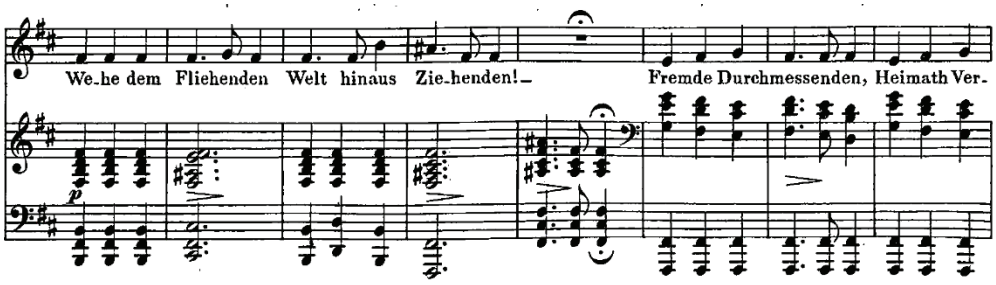
The vocal line, full of bold leaps and dramatic outpourings of emotion, blends sonically into its equally impressive surroundings.



While no specific love object is mentioned, it is intimated that the singer's pain is love related.

In der Ferne (In the Distance)

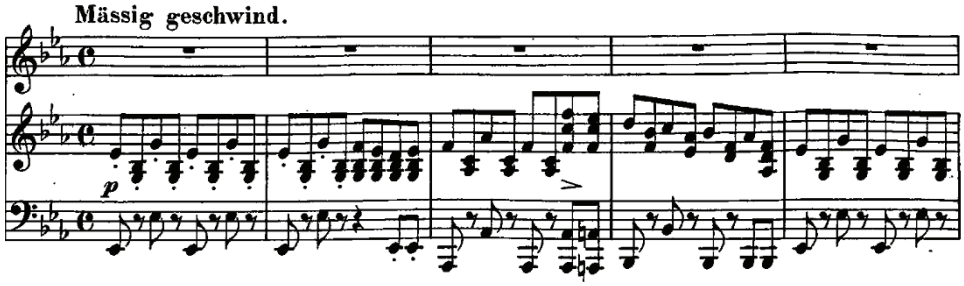
Even more desolate is the mood of In der Ferne, with its theme of exile conveyed through a sparseness of texture and the obsessive repetition of melodic phrases.



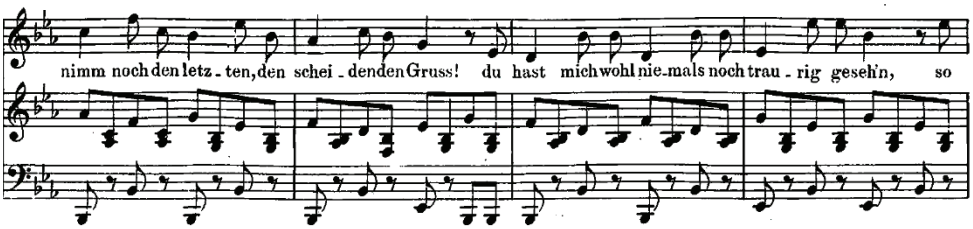
The tone is stern, the references abstract and general, until in a closing lyrical section the singer addresses the whispering breezes and gently rippling waves in his natural surroundings in order to reveal that it is he who is fleeing to exile after a particularly painful breakup.

Abschied (Farewell)

A much different take on the subject of leaving is presented in Abschied. Here we are to imagine the singer trotting away from town on horseback, happy to be going, and having one last look at his surroundings despite disappointment in love. The prancing hoof-steps of the lover's mount are picturesquely painted in the staccato articulations of the piano accompaniment.



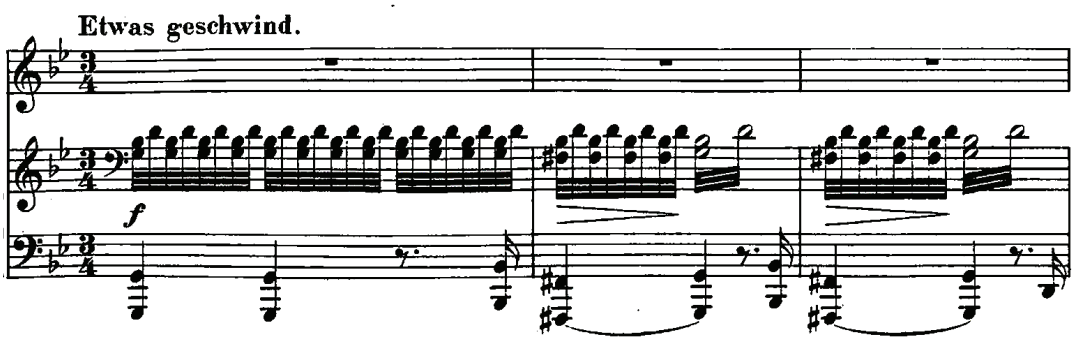
The good-riddance bravado he displays in his departure is communicated in a melodic line full of spritely leaps.



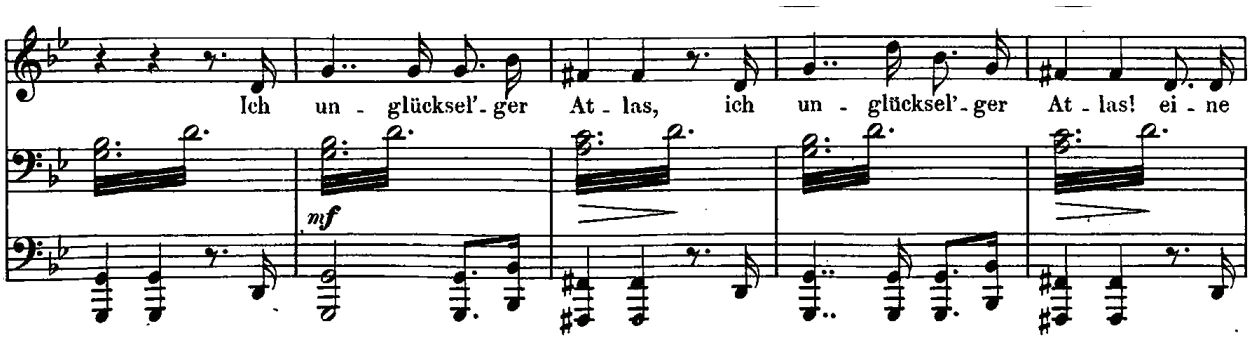
This parting song is remarkable for its complete absence of melancholy. The singer is obviously leaving on his own terms, and his contentment in having to leave is given every time he merrily repeats the refrain Ade! (Adieu).

Der Atlas (The Atlas)

The poems of Heinrich Heine, many of them concerned with the theme of alienation, are much more compact and pack a bigger poetic punch. Der Atlas (Atlas) receives from Schubert the heavy treatment its theme deserves. This lament of the god-man who carries the weight of the world on his shoulders is admirably conveyed, first by the weighty tectonic movements in the low register of the piano, and then by pervasive tremolos to stress the muscular tension running through the tendons and muscles of this superhero.



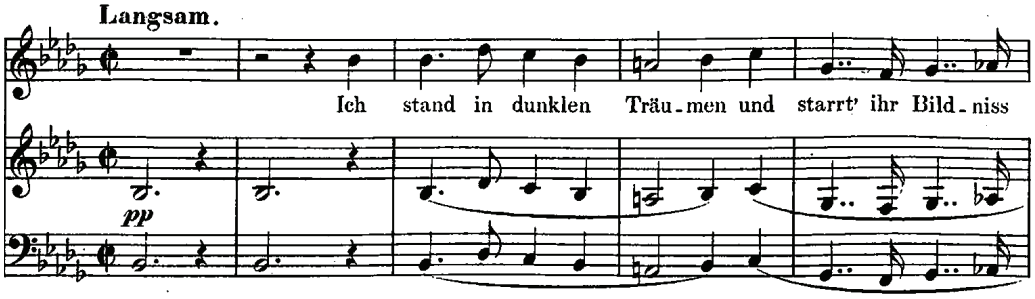
The strain, effort and heavy puffing of the protagonist are reinforced by the pervasive use of double-dotted rhythms in the wide-ranging vocal line.



This song destroys the idea that Schubert is merely a composer of delicate shades of feeling and petal-sniffing states of mind.

Ihr Bild (Her Likeness)

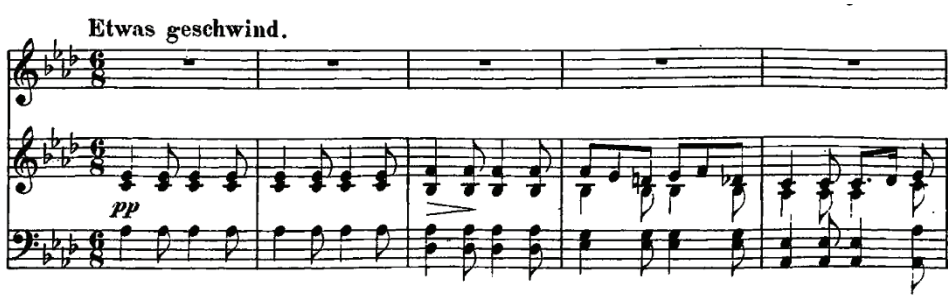
Much more spare in texture is Ihr Bild, in which the concentrated gaze of the lover upon his beloved's portrait is evoked in unison passages between voice and piano.



The sense of loss he feels speaks loudly in the quiet progress of this lament.

Das Fischermädchen (The Fisher Maid)

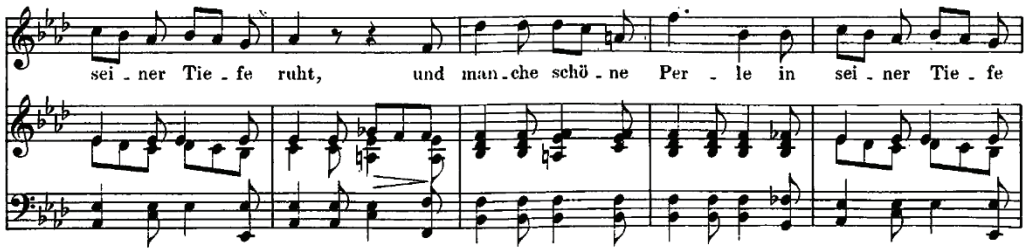
The subtle ironies of Heinrich Heine's Das Fischermädchen are well observed in Schubert's setting of this poem, a little sea-shanty that captures well the irony of the role-reversal inherent in this seaside seduction scene. The jocular tone and eye-twinkling demeanour of the young man's come-on is quickly established by the lilting rhythm of the piano's opening.



We are to picture a "sensitive New Age guy" who sits dreamily on the shore, trying to entice the strong, capable girl out earning a living on the waves to come be with him.

This gently rocking rhythm proclaims the young man's relative innocence in affairs of the heart while at the same time imitating the action of the young fisher maiden as she rows ashore.

Obviously a young man of a metaphorical cast of mind, he pitches to her that his heart is a vast sea for her to explore,

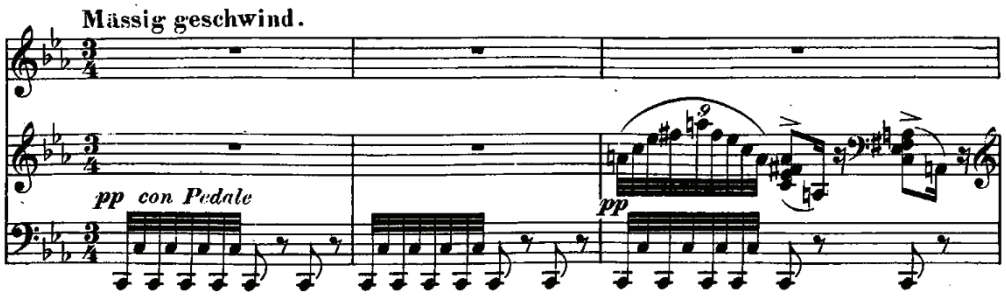


with many a pearl hidden in its depths for her to dive down for (Und manche schöne Perle in seiner Tiefe ruht).

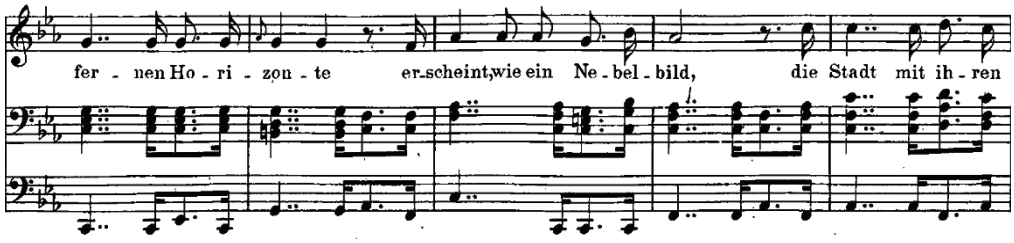
Die Stadt (The Town)

A much more seriously poetic scene is summoned up in Die Stadt, which features an ex-lover being rowed over the water to the city where his pain originated.

The pictorial element in the piano accompaniment is particularly impressive here, with ominous octave tremolos reminding us of the singer's tragic past while arpeggiated diminished 7th chords paint the morning sun shimmering off the waves.



The vocal line is almost dead, hardly moving, as the singer views the foggy outline of the place he is approaching.

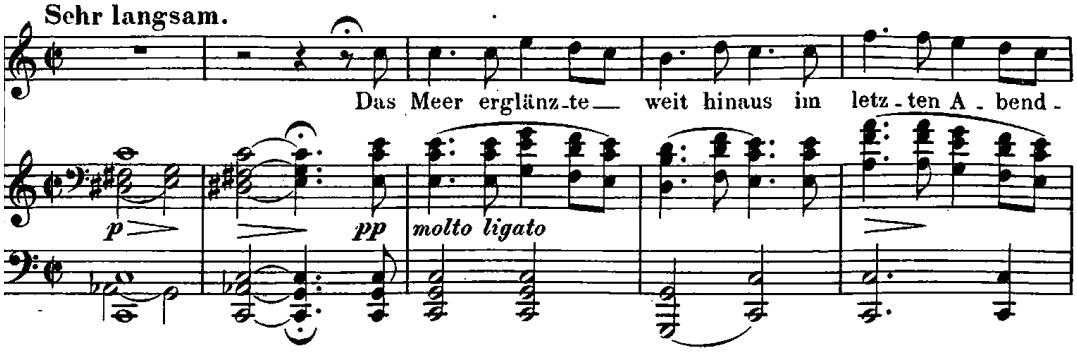


It gathers in intensity, however, to reach a climax of emotion in its final utterance.

Am Meer (By the Sea)

Schubert paints the double-edged experience of love particularly well in this seaside scene, with a pair of lovers sitting seemingly impassive to the fading splendour of the day at sunset, a symbol of a relationship grown cold.

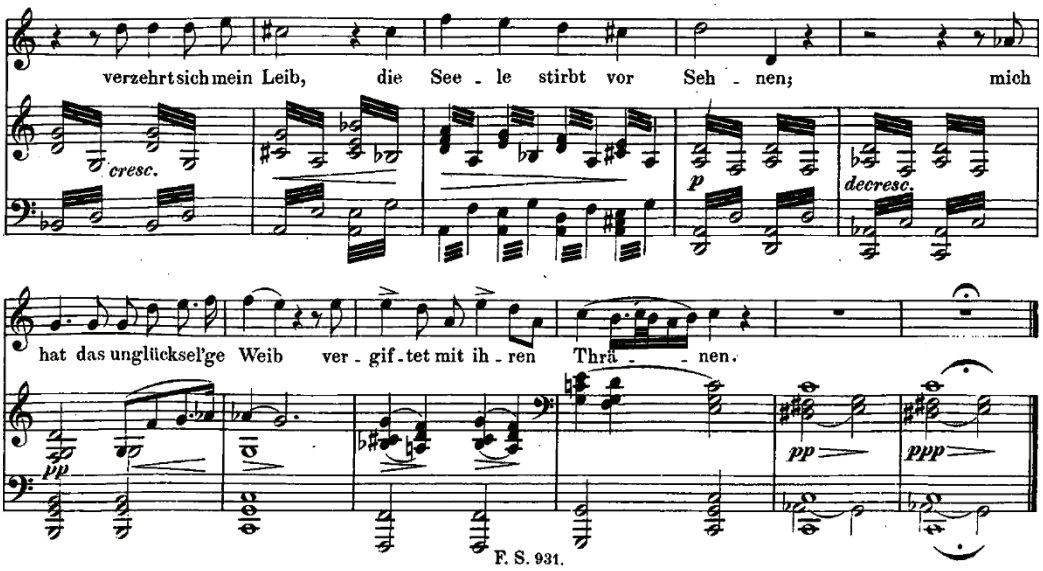
The hymnlike reverence of this peaceful scene comes across in the simple barebones pairing of voice and accompaniment:



But this apparent calm hides much deeper currents of emotion, urged into the open when the young woman bursts into tears, causing the young man to drop to his knees to kiss them away from her hands.

This drama is conveyed in a complete change of mood as tremolos roil the calm surface texture of the music.

And therein lies the rub, as the young man is caught longing once again for her love.

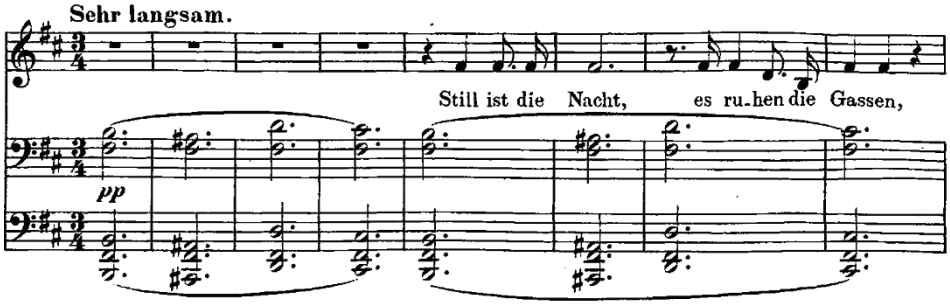


And in a stinging final line, typical of Heine, he declares, "That unhappy woman has poisoned me with her tears."

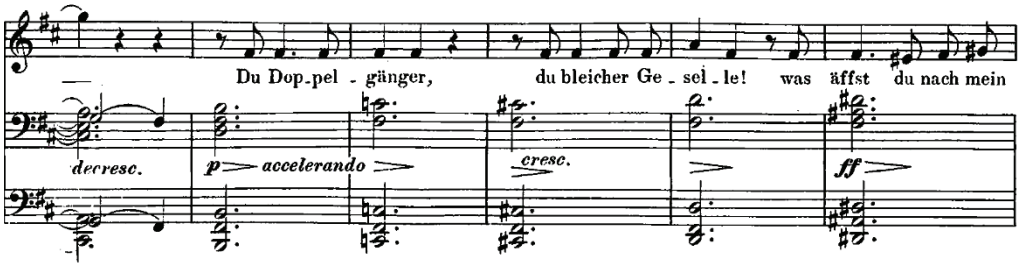
Der Doppelgänger (The Double)

The most unusual song in this collection is undoubtedly Der Doppelgänger, in which we see a man standing in front of the house where his love once lived. But then, like Scrooge being shown a sad episode from his former life by the Spirit of Christmas Past, he sees a figure under the light of the moon just off in the distance, a figure equally lost in sad remembrance, an image of himself.

The scene is eerily still, with the vocal line hardly moving at all.



But the emotional intensity slowly rises as the man, shuddering in terror, confronts the ghostly figure, accusing him of "aping" the pain of his love.

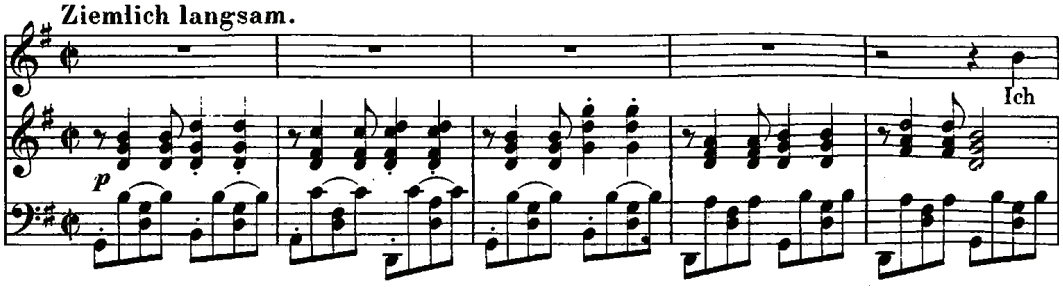


The impassive, slow-moving chords of the accompaniment give no comfort at all to the lonely voice of the protagonist as he realizes he is descending into madness. Schubert gives the scene a tragic dimension of fateful inevitability by having the singer circle round the same pitch over and over, and by placing the singer's vocal declamation over a recurring passacaglia pattern low in the piano accompaniment.

This is a song without a melody, symbolic of a situation without hope, as dark as anything out of Mussorgsky.

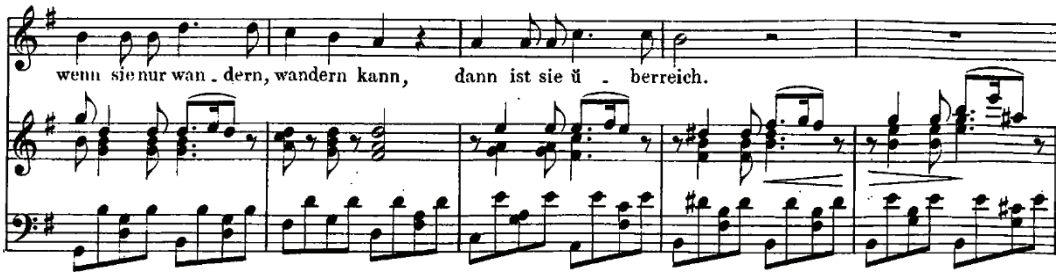
Die Taubenpost (Pigeon Post)

The song collection ends on a note of optimism, however, with Die Taubenpost, a song with a gentle Viennese lilt that merrily praises the contributions of avian postal delivery to the cause of true love.



This is another "love messenger" song, but the messenger this time is a carrier pigeon who acts as an avian postal "go-between," flying back and forth between two young people in love.

The buoyant optimism and lovestruck cheerfulness of the young man is perfectly conveyed by the infectious rhythm of the piano accompaniment, which often adds cutesy little dotted rhythms to the dancelike flow of the song.



* * *

So while this is not a song collection that Schubert himself put together, but rather an artificial confection created by a music publisher, it nevertheless provides in its wide range of expression and textural inventiveness an unusually full picture of Schubert's musical imagination.

Program notes by Donald G. Gíslason, 2026

Program 3 – Winterreise

BENJAMIN APPL, baritone
JAMES BAILLIEU, piano

Sunday, March 22, 2026 – 3:00 pm
Telus Studio Theatre,
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

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CHAN CENTRE
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Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Winterreise (Winter Journey)

Gute Nacht – Good Night

Die Wetterfahne – The Weathervane

Gefrorne Tränen – Frozen Tears

Erstarrung – Numbness

Der Lindenbaum – The Linden Tree

Wasserflut – Flood Water

Auf Dem Flusse – On the River

Rückblick – Looking Backward

Irrlicht – Will O' The Wisp

Rast – Rest

Frühlingstraum – Dream of Spring

Einsamkeit – Solitude

Die Post – The Post

Der Greise Kopf – The Old Man's Head

Die Krähe – The Crow

Letzte Hoffnung – Last Hope

Im Dorfe – In The Village

Der Stürmische Morgen – The Stormy Morning

Täuschung – Illusion

Der Wegweiser – The Sign Post

Das Wirtshaus – The Inn

Mut – Courage

Die Nebensonnen – The Sun Dogs

Der Leiermann – The Hurdy-Gurdy Man

(approx. 70-75 minutes)

Program Notes – Winterreise

The art songs of Franz Schubert lie at the foundation of the lied genre itself, and at the pinnacle of Schubert's lieder output stands *Die Winterreise*, a song cycle remarkable for its vivid musical portraits of the human heart smarting from the pains of love lost and stoically resigned to the approach of death.

Conceived as a journey into the cold of winter, it sets to music a selection of poems by Wilhelm Müller published in 1823 and 1824 under the title *Seventy-Seven Poems from the Posthumous Papers of a Travelling Horn-Player.* Unlike the composer's previous song cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin* (set to texts by the same poet), *Winterreise* presents more of a slide show than a plot, as all of the important action has taken place before the narration begins. The narrator-singer is heard in conversation with his own heart, by turns reflective, questioning, ironic and finally resigned. In this speculative frame of mind, he drifts fluidly between the world of his dreams and the bitter reality he faces.

At issue is a love affair gone wrong. The wanderer's beloved has broken off their relationship to marry a richer man, leaving him despairing and alone with his thoughts, which travel through dark territory as he traverses village and country settings after leaving her house.

The work was composed in two separate parts in 1827, the year before Schubert's death, making the terminal illness from which he was suffering one obvious point of reference. But the poems from Wilhelm Müller's collection provide apt imagery for such a presentation of moods, with their recurring themes of loneliness and isolation, watchwords of the emerging Romantic movement in art.

The cast of characters with whom the narrator interacts are elements of the natural landscape (sun, wind, trees and leaves, flowers, rivers and snow, crows and ravens), elements that form symbolic company for his journey. Schubert's achievement in setting these poems is to give musical life to these images, not only in the contours of the singer's melody, but especially in the pictorial vividness of the piano score. The piano serves as more than mere accompaniment: it often acts out the role of the external surroundings through which the singer travels.

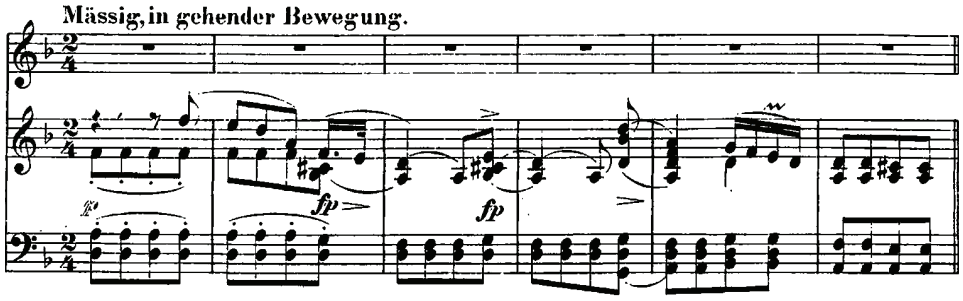
And yet a paradox pervades this piano score. It is both richly allusive and unusually austere. Benjamin Britten, in discussing Schubert's artistry, outlines the performers' challenge in these terms:

> One of the most alarming things I always find, when performing this work, is that there is actually so little on the page. He gets the most extraordinary moods and atmospheres with so few notes. And there aren't any gloriously wishy-washy arpeggios to help you. You've got to create the mood by these few chords. He leaves it all very much up to the performers.

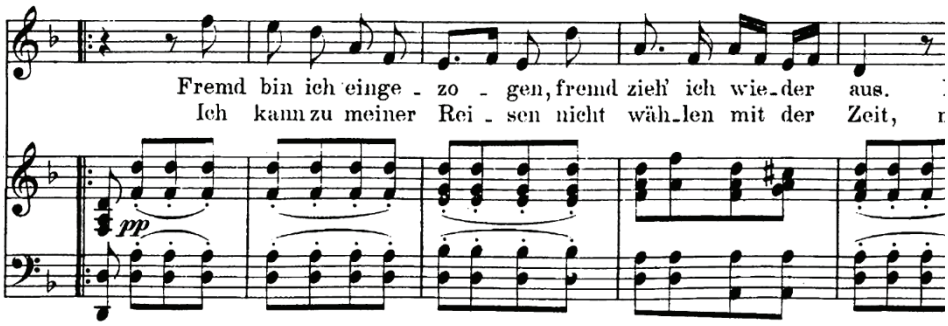
PART ONE

Gute Nacht (Good Night)

Our traveller's grim journey begins as he bids farewell to the house of his beloved, slipping off into the night accompanied only by the shadow of the moon. The piano introduction establishes his even walking pace but is punctuated by sudden off-beat accents emblematic of his inner turmoil.



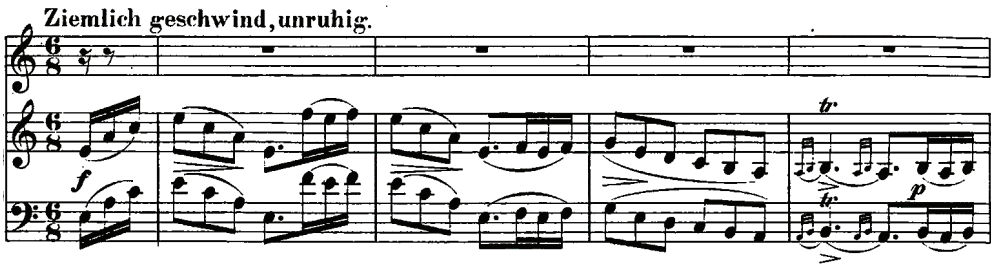
The poetic theme tying the song cycle together — alienation from emotional fulfilment and from earthly existence — is summarized in the very first line he sings: "A stranger I came, a stranger I depart."



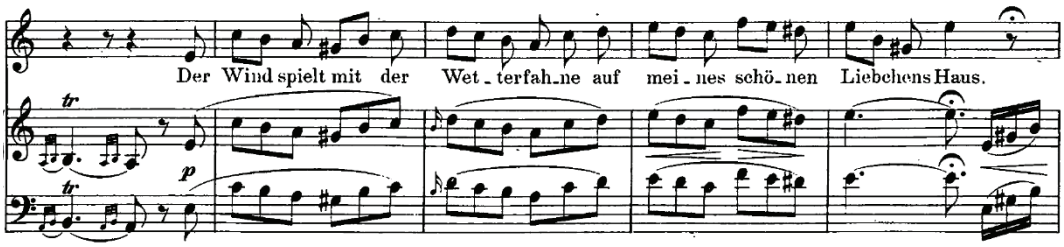
The narration shifts musically with the narrator's psychological state. His present sadness is portrayed in a minor key (above) and happier memories in a major key. But he alternates between the two when repeating the bitterly ironic phrase "Love wanders willingly" (Die Liebe liebt das Wandern).

Die Wetterfahne (The Weathervane)

The piano imitates a weathervane spinning furiously atop his beloved's house as the singer entertains thoughts about those inside.



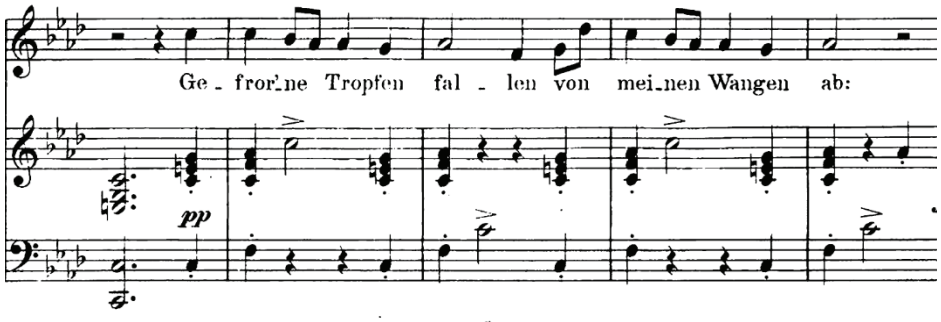
Do their affections also change with the wind? Why should they care about him, when their daughter is marrying a rich man?



The musical texture is brilliantly evocative, with many unisons between piano and singer making you feel the bitter chill in the air and trills evoking the wind blowing the weathervane around on its spindle.

Gefrorne Tränen (Frozen Tears)

The text of this song mixes anger and irony. Against an eerie backdrop of dainty drip-drip sounds in the piano, often punctuated by sudden sforzando accents, the singer asks how his tears can have frozen to his cheek so soon.

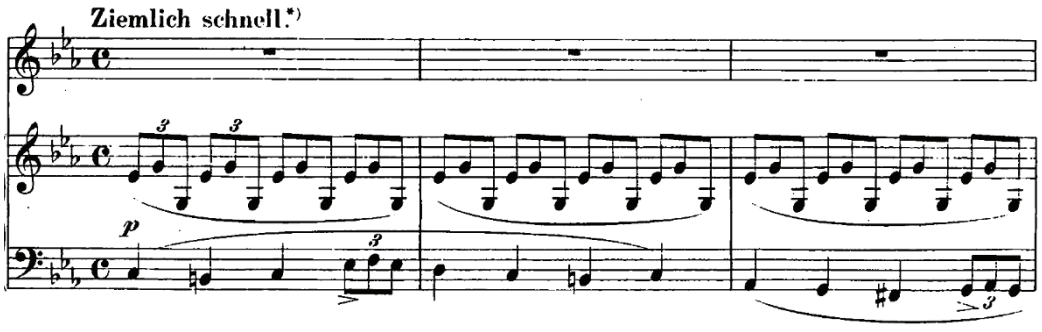


These tears, he notes with amazement, were hot enough to melt ice when they poured from his heart. Major and minor harmonies alternate to evoke both the warmth of emotion he feels inside and the chill he experiences outside while standing in the wintery air. Meanwhile, the doggedly regular quarter-note pace of the piano accompaniment keeps the "drip-drip" image continually fresh in the ear.

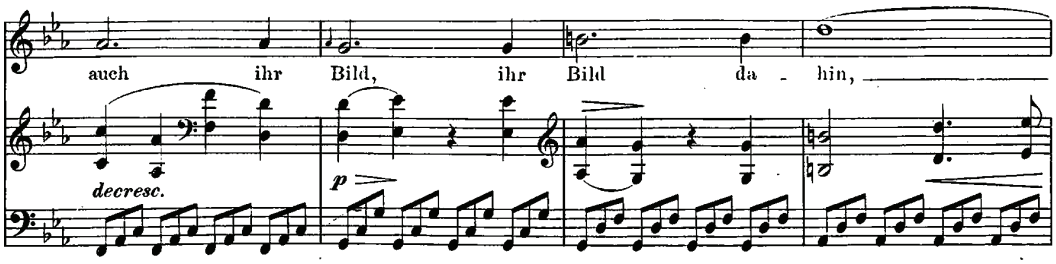
Erstarrung (Numbness)

Stunned senseless by the loss of his love, our traveller searches frantically for her footprints in the snow to remind him of happier times when they would walk together. But the flowers have died, the grass lies pale on the cold ground, and everywhere he looks all is dead, just like his frozen heart.

In this strange take on the classic Petrarchan portrayal of love in terms of fire and ice, the agitated piano accompaniment



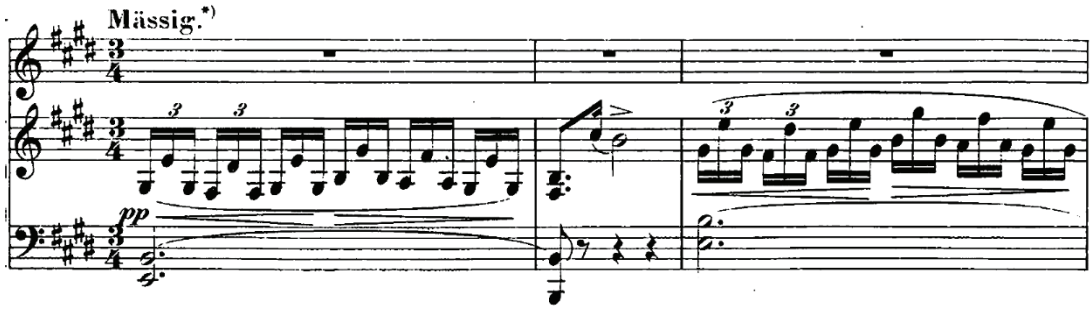
portrays the raging urgency of the protagonist's inner turmoil as he furiously searches for any scrap of evidence that he was once happy.



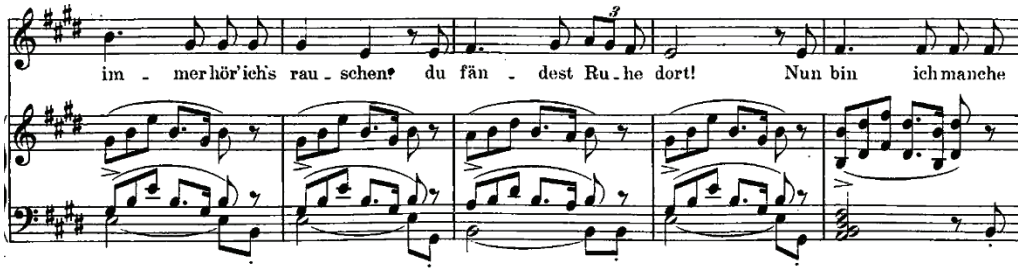
The plaintive attempts at the end to avoid cadencing, repeating over and over "Ihr Bild" (her likeness), paints his desperation and his inability to let go of the memories he cherishes.

Der Lindenbaum (The Linden Tree)

In this song we hear the first intimation of death, chillingly portrayed in the piano accompaniment's imitation of a wind blowing through the fluttering leaves.



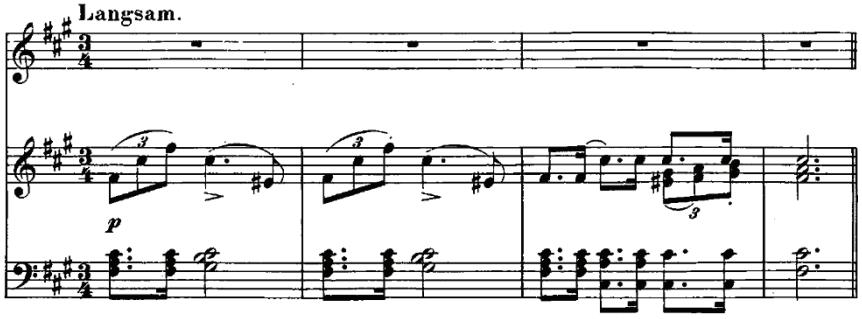
Our poet passes by a tree into which he had carved words of love. The mood then momentarily changes from nostalgic regret to consolation and peace at the thought that this tree, once the emblem of his happiness, now offers him rest — *eternal* rest — beneath the canopy of its branches (i.e., as a gravesite).



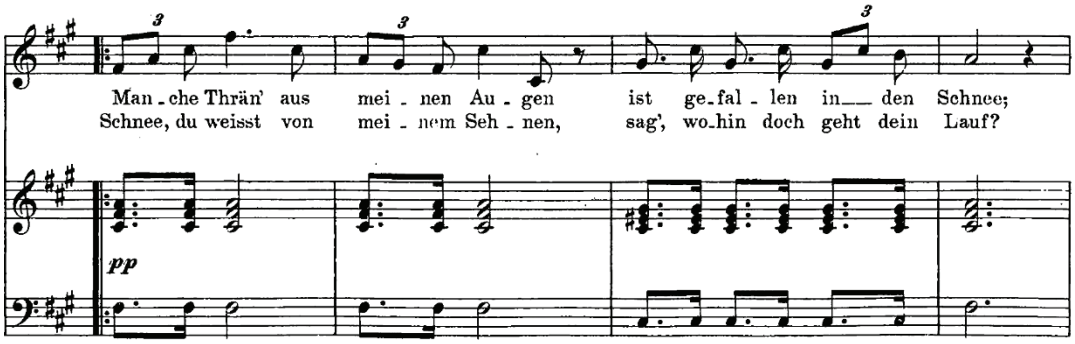
English tenor Ian Bostridge has pointed out that the linden tree was a popular meeting place in German towns. With this resonance of German nationalism in the setting of its text, it is not surprising, then, that this simple tuneful melody lives on outside of Schubert's song cycle as the well-known German folksong *Am Brunnen vor dem Tore.*

Wasserflut (Flood Water)

More hot-tears-to-frozen-snow imagery comes in this eerily calm, almost stately song. The piano introduction, full of thoughtful pauses, establishes a mood of curious introspection.



The protagonist muses on how the snow will absorb his tears and so, like a trusted confidant, understand his pain.

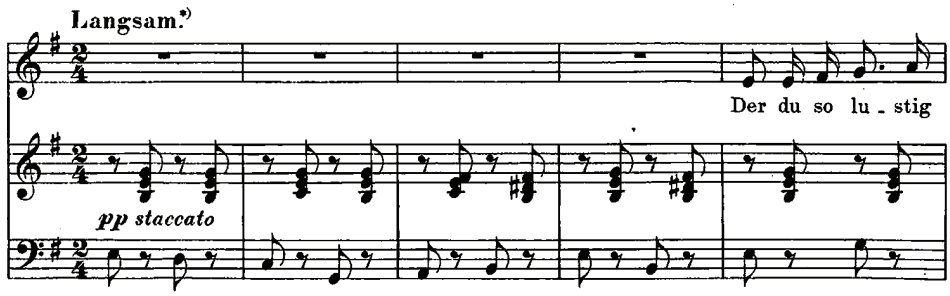


Then with the spring thaw they will flow together into the stream, and his tears will glow hot once again when the stream passes by her house.

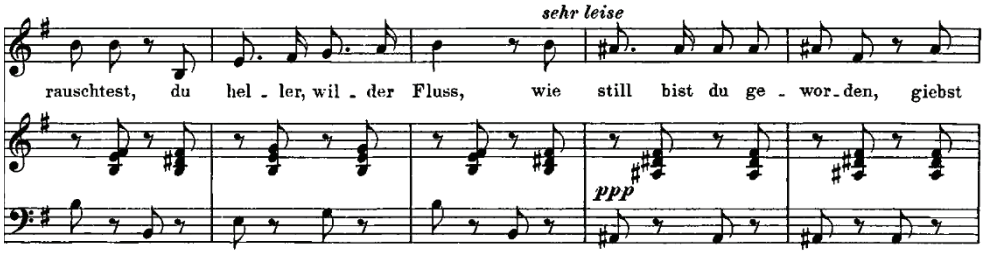
Here we find a classic example of the “pathetic fallacy” in Romantic poetry, in which Nature is imagined as reflecting and experiencing human emotions.

Auf Dem Flusse (On the River)

The strange tiptoe pace of this song gives it an aura of mystery, established first in the piano introduction.



The singer wonders in a whisper at how the stream, once bright and wildly flowing, is now strangely rigid and still with a cover of ice. The word “still” is genuinely chilling the way Schubert sets it.

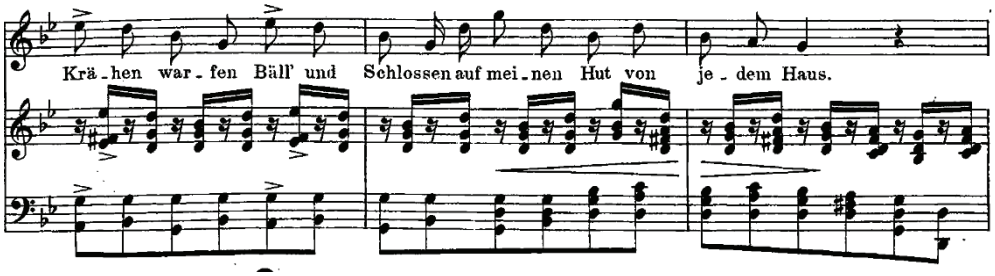


Carving the story of his love affair into the ice, he thinks his heart is just like this stream: frozen cold on the surface but raging like a torrent beneath.

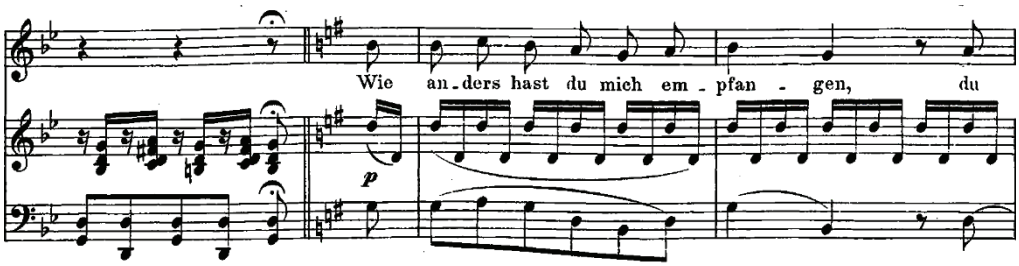
In the quick succession of his thoughts, the mood changes frequently as they become more intensely focused, with the piano joining in to describe with increased animation the heartbeat of emotion lying under the surface of the ice.

Rückblick (Looking Backward)

Beset by the elements of Nature as he breathlessly escapes the town where she lives, the wanderer glances back at the place that was once so pleasant to his memory. The piano accompaniment's choppy texture describes the disordered nature of this chaotic retreat, as crows cast snowballs and hailstones at him as he flees down the street.



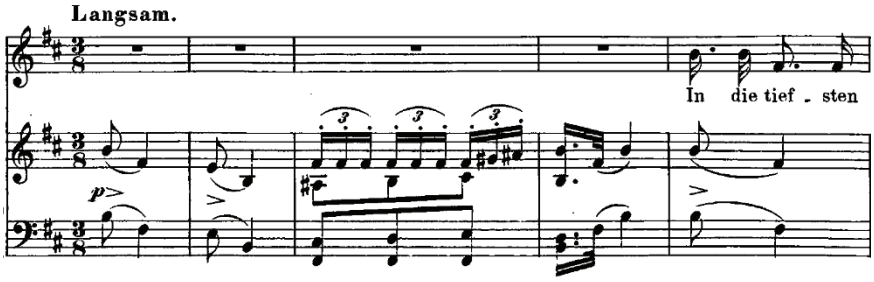
And yet the memory of how welcoming this town was to him when he was courting suddenly overtakes him — now in a major key.



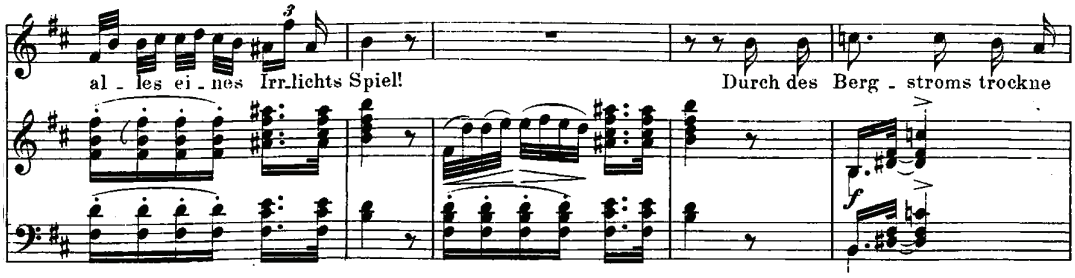
Like many of the songs in this cycle, this one is divided clearly into major- and minor-mode sections, as the singer's thoughts and memories vacillate between sad and happy.

Irrlicht (Will O' the Wisp)

The singer is then distracted by the flickering light of a will o' the wisp, imitated in the flickering repeated notes of the piano introduction.

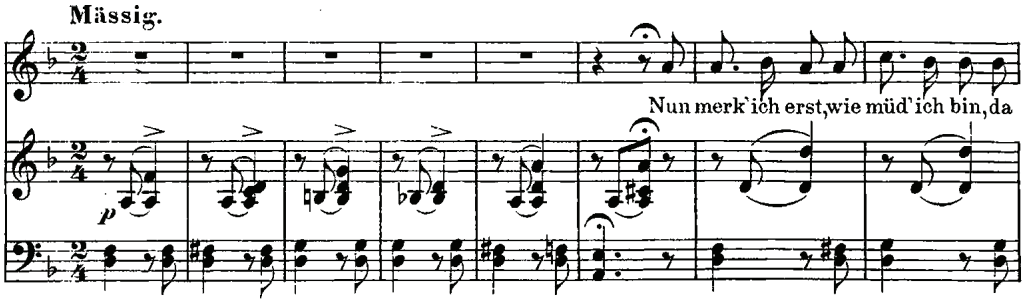


This symbol of the illusory nature of human hopes and sorrows leads him astray into a mountain chasm. To the sympathetic accompaniment of the piano echoing his thoughts he reasons that as rivers lead to the sea, so human miseries, like the will o' the wisp, are but a game, all leading to the grave.



Rast (Rest)

Only now does our singer notice how tired he has become (wie müd' ich bin) with all this tramping on his journey. A drowsy piano introduction finds him pausing to rest.

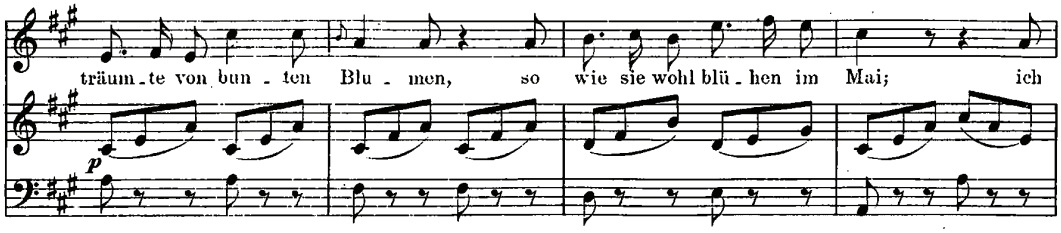


He shelters in a little hut, but this bodily respite from the cold and wind only allows him to feel more keenly the burning sting of jealousy in his heart.

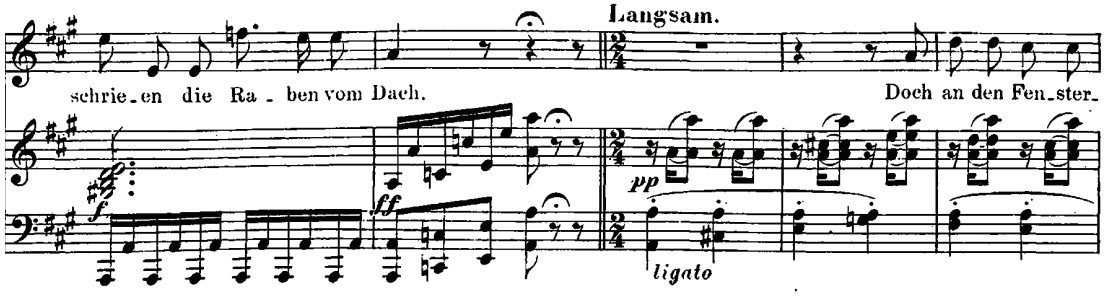
The concentration of thought that has overtaken the singer is conveyed in a florid and speech-like, but often "un-melodic", vocal line.

Frühlingstraum (Dream of Spring)

This is one of Schubert's happiest melodies as we find our protagonist lost in a dream of springtime.



But his reverie is often interrupted by the rooster's call and the rude shrieking of crows, only to have him drift off again into his former dreamlike state.

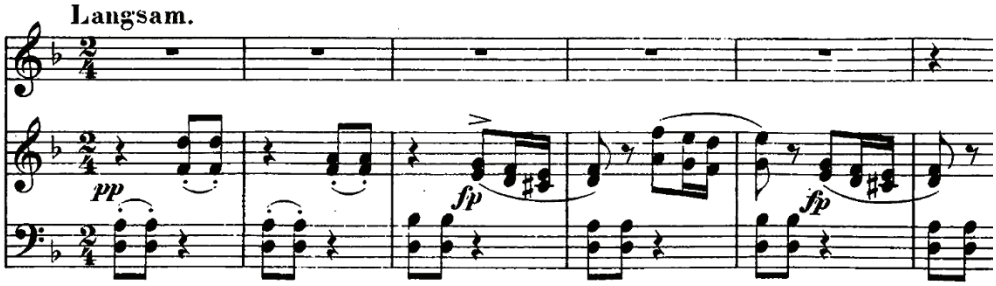


The change of mode from major to minor at the very end conveys his hopelessness. When will the ice-flowers in the window turn green? When will he hold her in his arms?

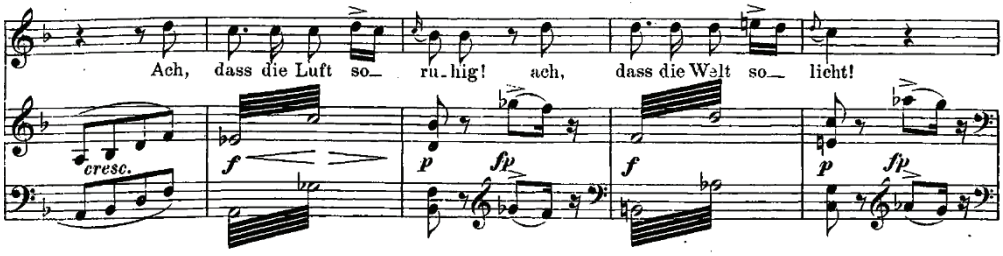
The answer to both questions is: never.

Einsamkeit (Solitude)

The slow trudging pace of the piano introduction paints the singer's despair as he travels on his way, lonely as the cloud slowing drifting overhead, in step with the piano, above the tops of the trees.



The stillness in the air, the brightness of the scene (die Luft so ruhig, die Welt so licht), are no help to his pain, which surges back to torment him.



When storms raged, he regretfully concludes, he was less miserable than this.

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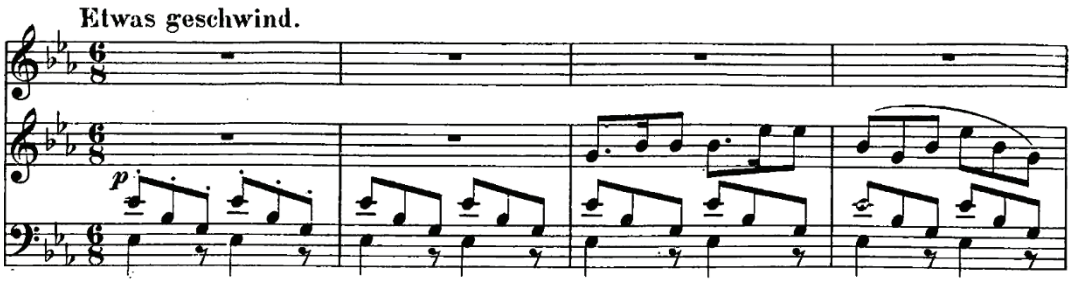
PART TWO

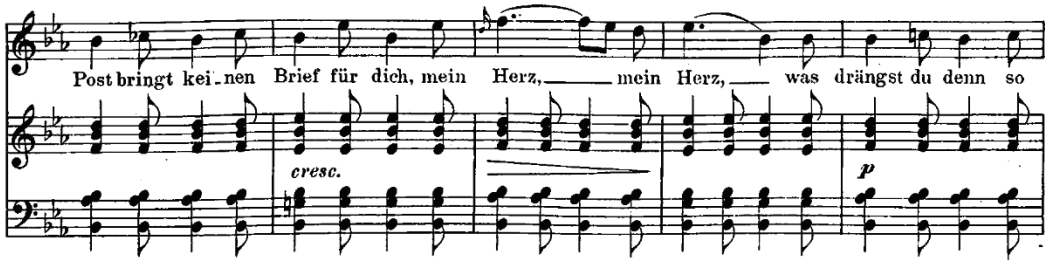
Die Post (The Post)

Setting in motion the second half of this song cycle are the gallop of horses' hooves and the triadic call of the post-horn.



These sonic cyphers signal the arrival of the mail coach, an event that our singer welcomes with unbounded enthusiasm.

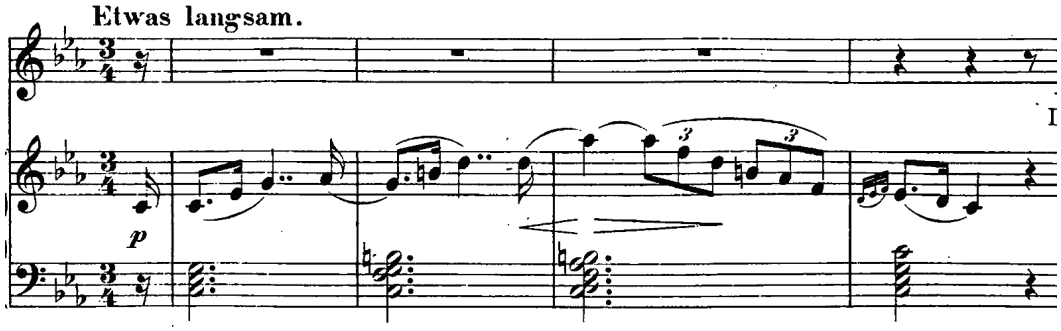
Even though it brings no letter from her, he still involuntarily feels his pulse speed up to match the rhythm of the post coach, a rhythm that merges with the rhythm of his heart.



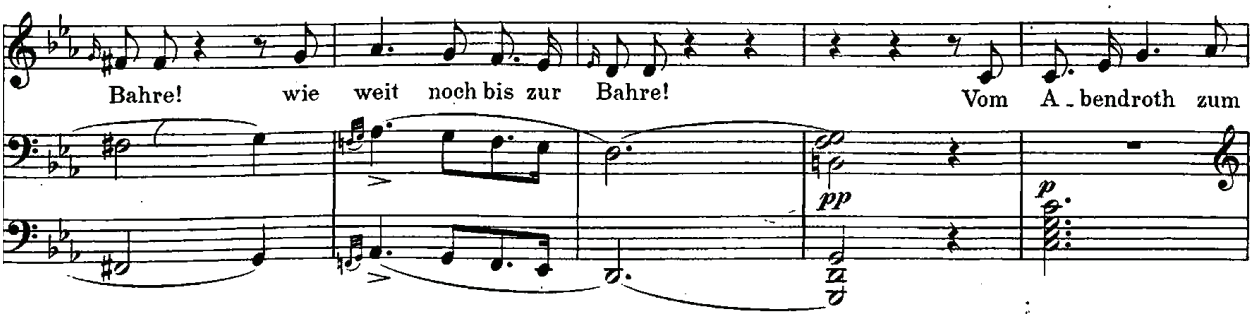
And yet, the upbeat tone of this song is just an ironic set-up for emotional travails to follow.

Der Greise Kopf (The Old Man's Head)

Eeriness returns in a song shrink-wrapped around the text rather than arranged in stanzas. The tortured harmonies and wildly wandering melody of the piano introduction lead us in to an atmosphere of anguished speculation.



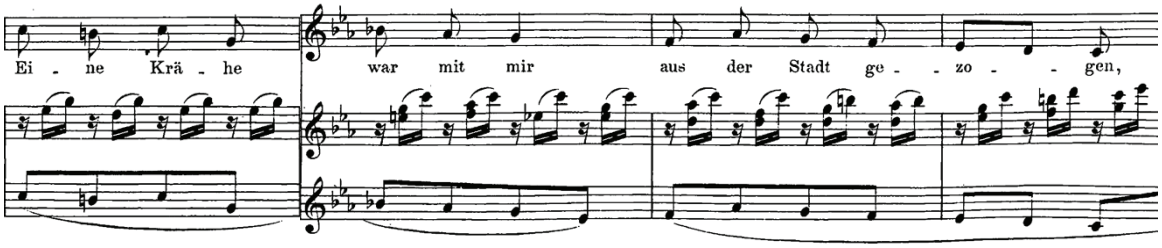
The frost now settling on the singer's head has made him into an old man, a welcome thought, he thinks at first. Then horror sets in as he realizes he is still young, with so very far yet to travel to the grave (wie Weit noch bis zur Bahre).



The sparseness of the piano part creates a chilling stillness as sonic backdrop to these dark thoughts.

Die Krähe (The Crow)

Circling overhead, a crow has been following the wanderer as he travels out of the town.

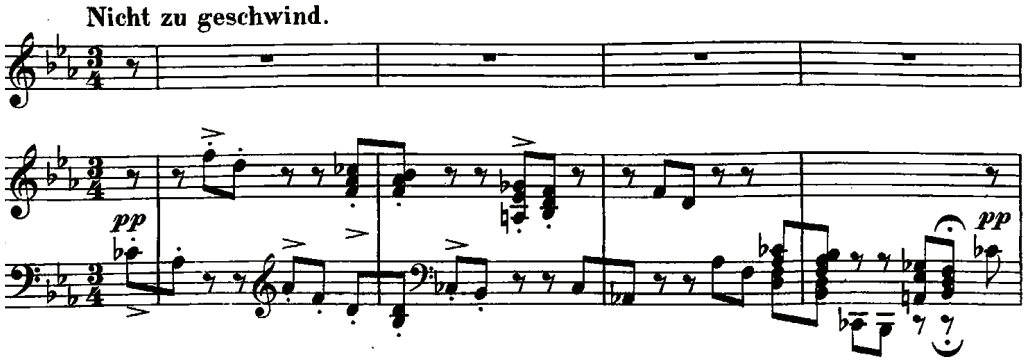


Is it waiting to feast on his carcass? Will this crow, unlike his beloved, stay with him till he dies?

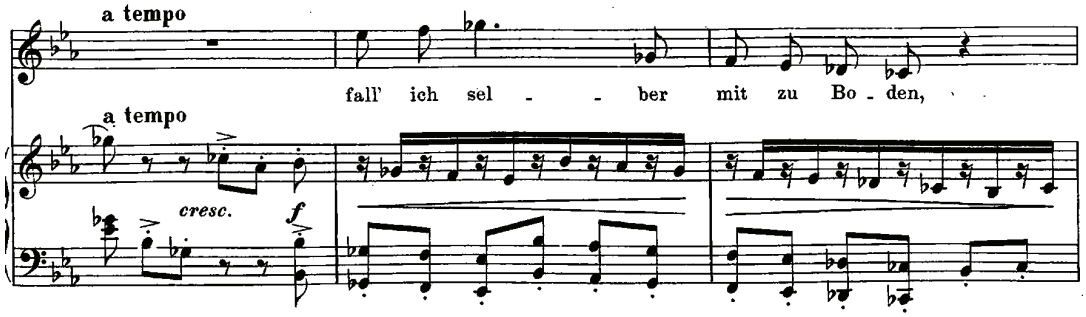
The piano, brilliantly imitating the circling path of the crow, twinkles and wafts high above the singer, creating a pictorial image in music of the two figures, one in the sky, the other walking below on the earth.

Letzte Hoffnung (Last Hope)

The traveller identifies with a lone leaf hanging on a barren tree, waiting to fall. The piano introduction paints it twisting in the wind.



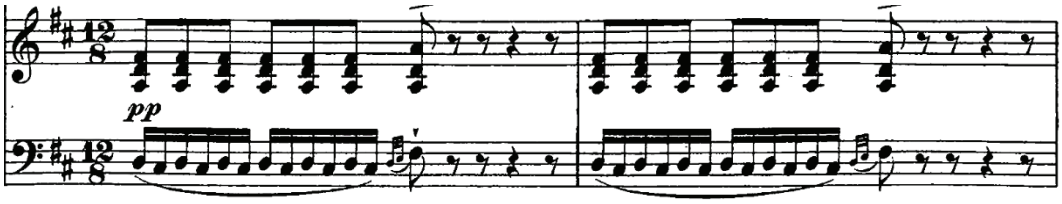
If it falls, so too do his hopes fall to their grave.



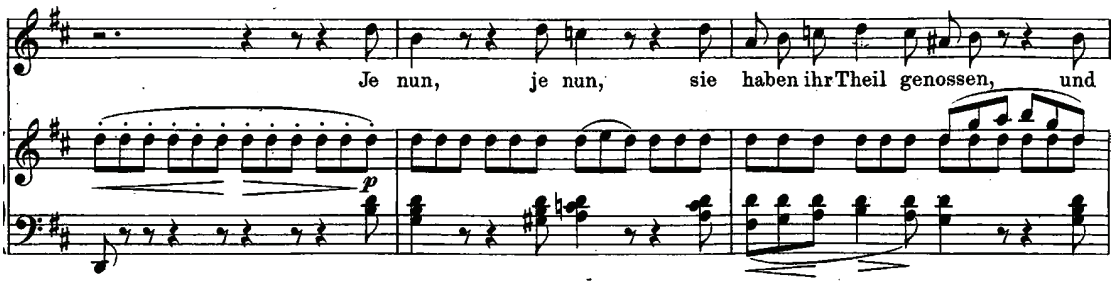
The piano paints a vivid picture of leaves falling all around him. There is so little rapport between the piano and the voice, the piano seems so convincingly exterior to the singer's concerns, that one thinks of the tone and texture of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Im Dorfe (In the Village)

As he passes through a village, dogs growl at him from the lower regions of the piano texture, rattling their chains.



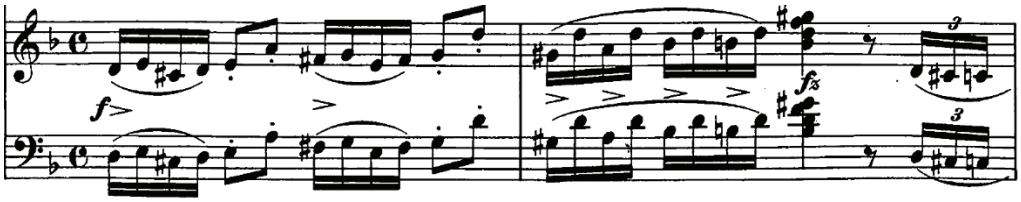
Then he thinks to himself: "Well good for them, they have had their share of the good and the bad (sie haben ihr Teil genossen), let them now sleep."



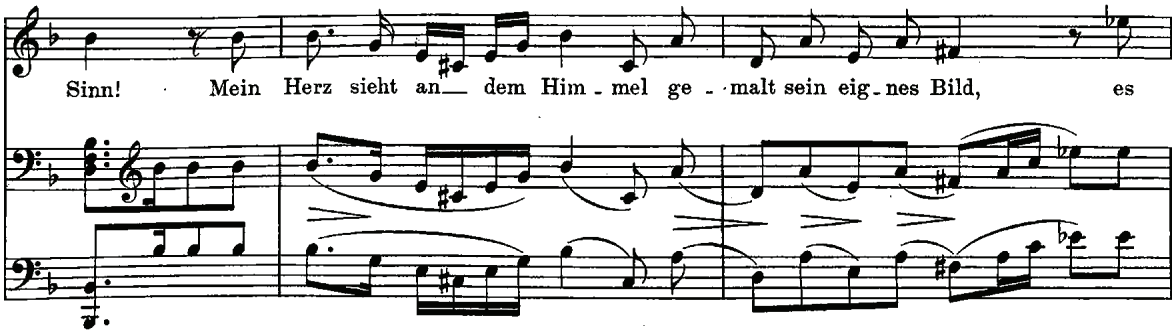
Everyone is now in their beds, dreaming. Why should he stay with these dreamers, when his own dreams are all over?

Der Stürmische Morgen (The Stormy Morning)

With the courage of desperation, the traveller faces an early morning storm that tears the heavens apart.



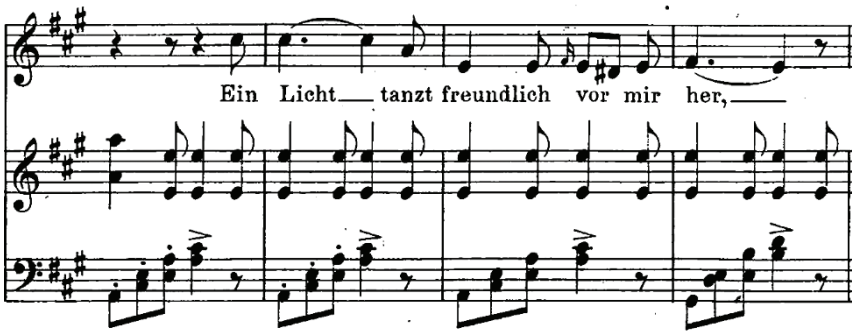
Raging in the cold of winter, it is the very image, he says, of his own heart (sein eignes Bild).



Unisons between piano and singer once again evoke the blowing of the wind and a bitter chill in the air.

Täuschung (Illusion)

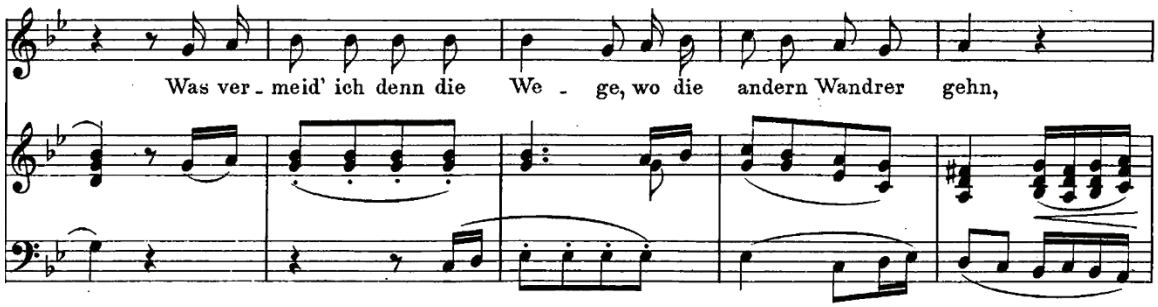
He sees a light dancing in the distance, which might be a warm house with a loving soul inside.



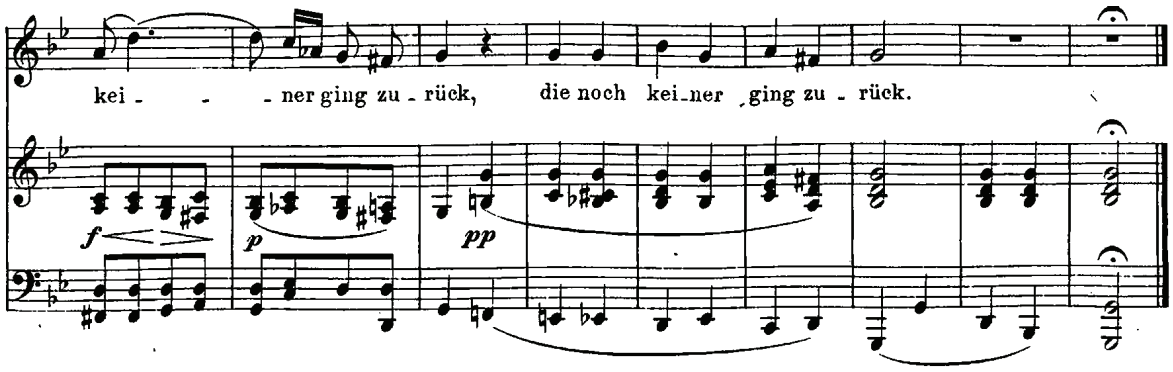
In the dream world he now inhabits, even an illusion brings him welcome comfort.

Der Wegweiser (The Sign Post)

Avoiding the busy byways, he heads for wild and desolate places, ignoring every sign post but one.

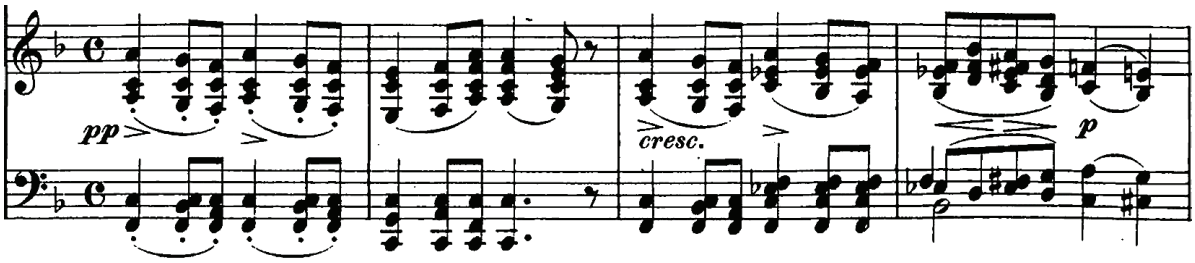


Here is another foreboding of approaching death: the path indicated to him is one "from which no one has returned" (die noch keiner ging zurück).

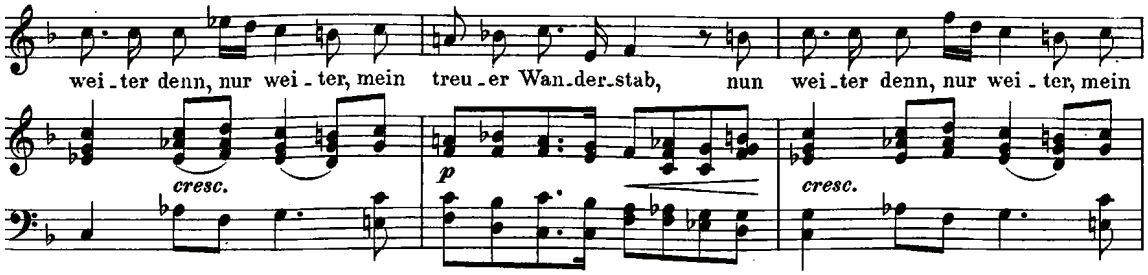


Das Wirtshaus (The Inn)

Liturgical solemnity, combined with a grim determination, pervades the scene as the traveller stops at a cemetery filled with garland-bedecked graves that beckon him like a welcoming inn.

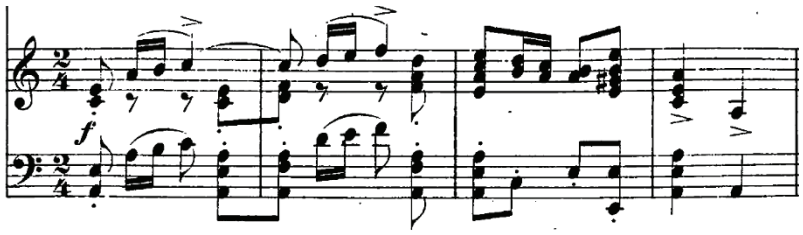


All its rooms, however, are taken and he is turned away, so he resolutely resigns himself to continue, with his walking stick, on his journey (weiter denn, nur weiter, mein trueuer Wanderstab).

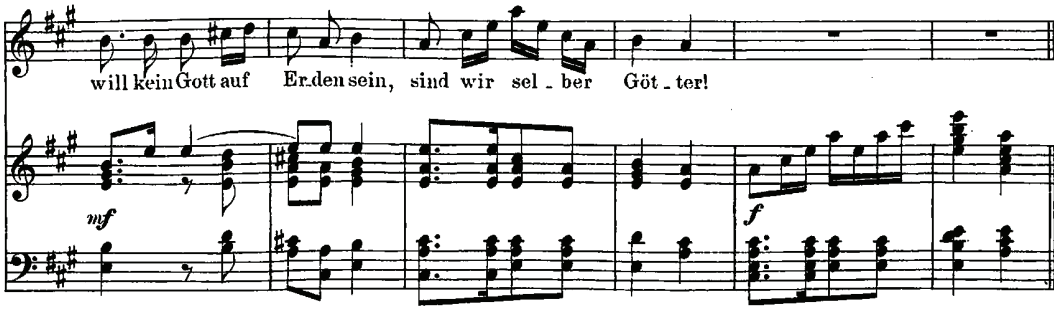


Mut (Courage)

A plucky spirit overtakes him as he bans defeatism to face wind and weather.

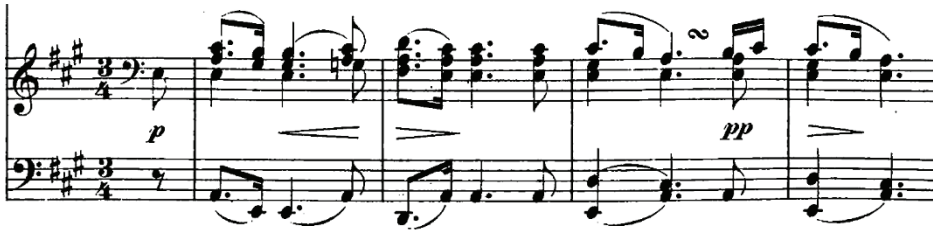


Quick changes between major and minor tonalities from phrase to phrase embody the difficulties he faces and the courage he uses to face them. He ends with a bold claim: “If there is no God, then we ourselves are gods!”



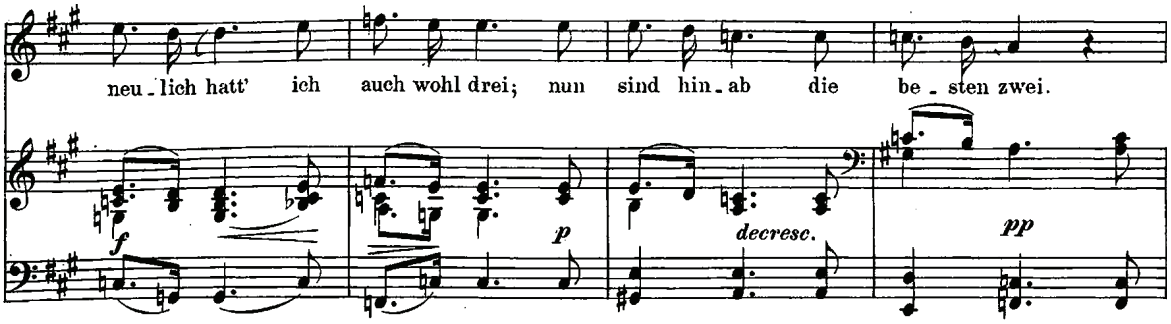
Die Nebensonnen (The Sun Dogs)

He sees three suns in the sky and stares at them. The tone is elegiac but full of nostalgic yearning.



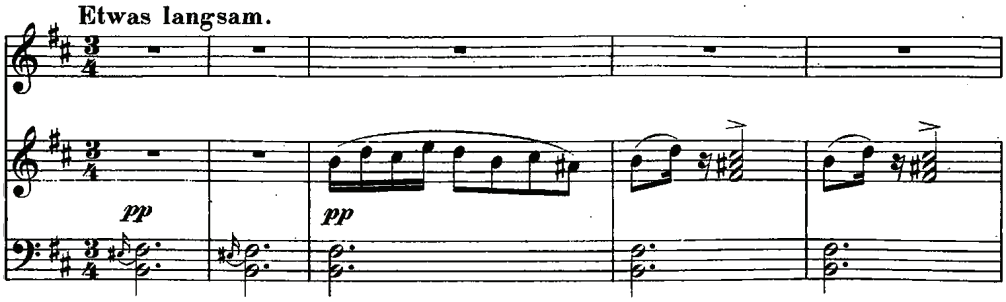
He, too, had three suns once, but having lost the two he cherished most (die besten zwei), referring to her eyes, he now has only one, i.e., his mind’s eye.

And he wishes that would go dark, too.



Der Leiermann (The Hurdy-Gurdy Man)

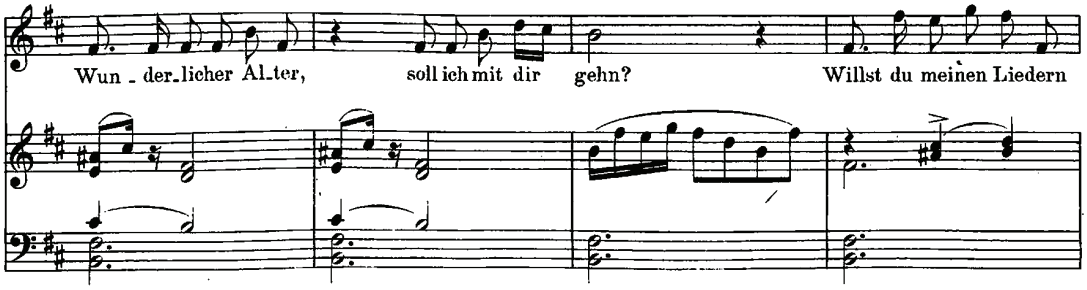
A drone announces the forlorn figure of an old organ-grinder playing with numb fingers, barefoot in the cold, the only human being the traveller meets on his winter journey. His begging plate lies empty as dogs growl at him.



Although perfectly tonal, the exotic sound of this reedy “piped” melody, wavering in 3rds and then ending inconclusively, in dissonance with the bass drone, sounds eerily remote to our ears.

A disturbing pair of questions now quietly overtakes our singer.

Shall he go with this strange man? Will the organ-grinder now play his songs?



The symbolic resonance of this final scene is quietly shattering.

* * *

In little more than a year after completing *Die Winterreise,* at the age of 31, Franz Peter Schubert, the founding creator of the German lied, would succumb to the illness he had struggled with for almost six years, the spectre of which must surely have hovered over his pen during the composition of this, his final song cycle.

Program notes by Donald G. Gíslason, 2026

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