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A discussion of Schumann's Settings of Goethe's "Mignon-Lieder"

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A Discussion of Schumann's Settings of Goethe's
Mignon-Lieder

A Thesis Equivalent Project

Presented to the

Department of Music

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Barbara E. Carlsen

July 1992

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THESIS EQUIVALENT PROJECT

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ABSTRACT

Robert Schumann and Johann Goethe made important contributions to the musical output of Western-European society. Robert Schumann, the composer, performer and critic, was a force in the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century. Johann Goethe's literary contributions, such as Faust and Wilhelm Meister, served as inspiration to eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century composers. This treatise will address the histories and philosophies of both these men as well as the progression of the art-song through the Romantic period. Specifically, this discussion will focus on Schumann's setting of three of Goethe's Mignon-Lieder taken from his novel Wilhelm Meister.

The paper is divided into four main areas. Chapter one will focus on the life of Robert Schumann. The second chapter will examine the history and development of Schumann's lieder. The next chapter will discuss the career of Johann Goethe, and will focus primarily on his philosophy of lieder and how a composer should approach this form of music.

The final chapter analyzes Schumann's setting of Goethe's Mignon-Lieder. The analysis includes an introspective on the text's poetic meaning and an analysis of selected musical elements from each song. Typically, the

Mignon-Lieder is performed as a group of four songs:

"Kennst du das Land," "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," "Heiss mich nicht reden" and "So lasst mich scheinen." This treatise considers only the last three songs of this group, since the first is discussed widely in the literature.

Ultimately the goals of this paper are to examine Schumann's settings of the Mignon-Lieder and their correspondence to the lieder ideals and philosophies of Goethe, and to provide musicians with a look into Schumann's compositional techniques and goals of each song discussed. The purpose is to provide performers with some suggestions on poetic interpretation that Schumann believed were important in his settings of these songs.

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CHAPTER ONE

Schumann's Life

Robert Alexander Schumann, the youngest of five children, was born in Zwickau, Saxony in 1810. His father, Friedrich August Schumann, a bookseller and author, encouraged the young Schumann in the study of music and literature. Schumann began his piano studies with J.G. Kuntzsch, an organist at a local church. Realizing his son was talented, August Schumann unsuccessfully attempted the arrangement of lessons for Robert with Carl Maria von Weber in Dresden. Along with his musical studies, Schumann showed promise with his literary abilities. Schumann spent time reading, working, and writing with his father at their bookstore and library. Because of his studies, Schumann was proficient in contributing articles to various publications by the age of 13 (Abraham 16:831).

The death of his father in 1826 was a turning point in Schumann's life. Without his father, encouragement in a musical career no longer existed. His mother insisted that Schumann attend law school and forget about music (Abraham 16:831). In 1828, Schumann went to study law at Leipzig University. While at Leipzig he met and befriended Gisbert Rosen. Rosen and Schumann became devotees of the Romantic poet Jean-Paul Richter. The two students travelled

together, and met the poet Heinrich Heine. Through their friendship and travels, Schumann was exposed to Romantic philosophies which created in Schumann a new desire to study music when he returned to Leipzig.

In August 1828, Schumann acquired Friedrich Wieck as a piano teacher. He also made the acquaintance of Wieck's young daughter Clara, who at age nine was a celebrated piano prodigy (Abraham 16:832). Schumann soon lost all interest in law and decided to concentrate on music. In his desire to make up for lost time, he tried improving his piano technique by using a mechanical device designed to improve the independence of the fourth finger. This device eventually crippled Schumann's hands, making him unable to pursue a career as a piano soloist (Lloyd 522). Some scholars also believe that the finger trouble was linked to mercury poison, resulting from treatment for syphilis (Abraham 16:834). Refusing to give up music, Schumann decided to concentrate on composition.

Frau Schumann finally permitted Robert to study music. Schumann lived at the Wieck home in Leipzig and worked on his musical skills. He began compositional studies with Heinrich Dorn, who let the young composer study and work without limitations and guidelines (Lloyd 522). This freedom helped Schumann create original sounds in his

compositions, but he retained especially in his songs a clarity of form (Felber 343). Along with musical studies, Schumann continued literary pursuits.

In April 1834, the first issue of a new bi-weekly music journal, Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, appeared. It was devoted to musical criticism and the ideals and aims of the Romantic school. Robert Schumann was the editor of this journal from 1835 to 1844 and contributed articles and stories. One of Schumann's literary themes included the imaginary town, Davidsbund. The townspeople were fighting a symbolic war against the musical Philistines. The theme dealt with the destruction of an older order, Classicism, by a new order Romanticism. The townspeople symbolized the emotional youth and the Romantic school. The Philistines were the pedantic and artificial older people representing the Classical era.

In 1836, Clara Wieck, now a girl of seventeen and an extraordinary pianist, became seriously involved in Robert's life. For four years, Clara and Robert struggled with the disapproval of Clara's father who could not see his talented and famous daughter married to an unstable, unrecognized composer. Friedrich Wieck refused to give the couple his permission to marry, thus forcing Schumann to obtain a court order permitting them to marry (Abraham 16:837-39). The

conflict between the couple and Clara's father was resolved in 1840, a monumental year in Schumann's life.

In 1840, Schumann received an Honorary Doctoral degree of philosophy from the University of Jena, and began a year of composition devoted to song and song cycles. During this year, Schumann composed a total of 138 songs. His literary expertise exposed Schumann to a wide range of poetic texts. His favorites were those of Heine. His song cycles, "Myrthen" Op. 25, "Dichterliebe" Op. 48, and "Liederkreis" Op. 24, are all on poems of Heine. The year 1840, however happy and fruitful, was scarred by Schumann's mental condition.

Schumann suffered recurring mental health problems. He started a diary in 1827 writing of his struggle with insanity. In 1828, he writes of bouts with melancholy, depression, and insanity. By 1833, these conditions caused Schumann to become suicidal. His excessive drinking and smoking only worsened his mental condition (Abraham 16:831-35).

His health situation did not prohibit him from working. Schumann held various teaching and conducting positions. In 1843, Schumann was appointed a professor of composition and piano at Leipzig Conservatory. However, because of mental health complications, Schumann moved a year later to Dresden

and took a conducting position with a new Philharmonic Society. During this time, Schumann experienced a mental breakdown which significantly slowed his musical creativity. He spent six quiet years in Dresden until he felt competent to try a new musical position. In 1850, he became the director of the orchestra and choral society in Dusseldorf. This new beginning was to be a bittersweet experience because Schumann's conducting abilities were under constant criticism. Complaints from singers, orchestra members, and the assistant director resulted in his termination. He was salaried until 1853 (Abraham 16:849).

After the termination, the Schumanns left Dusseldorf in November of 1853 for a musical tour in Holland, returning to Dusseldorf in February of 1854. On February 10, 1854, Schumann began to have aural distortions that caused extreme pain in his ears. These symptoms support the theory that Schumann suffered from syphilis. His condition worsened, and he was taken to an asylum where he attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine River. He was forced to remain in the asylum for the next two-and one-half years. Out of concern for Clara's safety, she was not allowed to see her husband during this long internment. Clara was finally given permission to see Robert two days before his death on July 29, 1856 (Abraham 26:849-50).

CHAPTER TWO

Schumann's Lieder

In view of Schumann's interest in literature and poetry, it is curious that he did not begin to concentrate on song writing until 1840. In 1839, Schumann wrote to a friend and stated, "All my life I have thought vocal music inferior to instrumental and have never considered it to be a great art" (Martin 98). This statement was made by a composer who spent little time writing Lieder. That situation was soon to change, for in 1840 Schumann began a year of composition almost entirely devoted to Lieder.

Composers who made the biggest contribution to Schumann's style were Schubert, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Schumann found verbal expressiveness and formal guidelines in the music of Schubert. Beethoven influenced Schumann's use of the piano in its relationship to the melodic line. Mendelssohn's piano compositions "Lieder ohne Worte" (Songs Without Word) showed Schumann the power of prophetic descriptions. One can speculate that Schumann believed if an instrumental piece could represent words or poems without any vocal line, a composition with both entities could be twice as effective.

In the compositional life of Schumann the year 1840 is considered the year of the lied (Liederjahr). Schumann

had three stylistic periods of song writing in his life: 1840-47, 1849-50 and 1851-52 (Felber 343-44). Most critics viewed the numerous songs of the year 1840 to be his greatest contributions to the collection of German Romantic lieder. Chissell states in her book Schumann that "A true romanticist's life and work are so interrelated that you must understand one to understand the other" (87). That is definitely the case with Schumann, for in 1840 Schumann's marriage to Clara Wieck brought about the composition of love songs.

During the first period of Schumann's lied composition, he chose the poetry of contemporary Romantic writers such as Heine, Eichendorff, Ruckert, Morike, Lenau, and Chamisso. The early songs focused on romantic love (Chissell 132).

The first period of song writing can be called the melodic period. Schumann's lieder had a rich melodic line that was connected to the clarity of strophic form (Felber 343). Schumann's lieder are simpler than his earlier piano compositions, in that the melodies tend to be stepwise and have a modest range. Schumann used various recitative elements if the poetic text dictated a need for this technique in the vocal line. These simple diatonic melodies are the predominate factors in this period.

The harmonies of the first period are also diatonic and

move to either the supertonic or mediant key areas to emphasize poetic contrasts. For the most part, the time signatures stay in simple duple or quadruple time. Schumann avoids repeated rhythmic patterns, choosing to use them to emphasize an important poetic line. Finally, the piano technique during this period is not demanding (Sams, Robert Schumann 126). All of these compositional characteristics create a style of lied that is recognized for its clarity, simplicity, and melodic beauty.

Schumann was interested in portraying the psychological impact of the poem by musical means. Because of the simplicity of the songs, any musical complexities created an emotional effect. Schumann commonly moved to remote key areas to help symbolize complex emotions in songs. Extended displaced tonicism is significant in Schumann's lieder as it represents an emotional change in the psychological state of the character. For example, songs with a poetic text representing a wide emotional range could have melodies encompassing wide ranges and leaps. Additionally, chromatically altered notes were used to communicate a sense of emotional confusion (Sams, Robert Schumann 126).

The second period of concentrated lieder began in 1849, marking the high point of Schumann's compositional output. The music of this period stylistically foreshadows future

advancements in music (Felber 344). These advancements ironically might have not occurred because of Schumann's deteriorating state of mind. An older Schumann brings to this period a very troubled soul. Schumann's personality was characterized by violent mood swings. His personality was on a constant roller coaster ride between extreme elation and depression. Today Schumann would be diagnosed as a manic/depressive. Further destroying his mind and hindering his creativity during this second period was syphilis (Sams, Robert Schumann 132). All of his mental problems had their effects on his lieder composition.

In this second period, Schumann's music is more abstract and less personal. The songs of this period can be characterized by bold declamations in the voice, free-ranging melodies, syncopated rhythms in the accompaniment, greater use of the through-composed form, chromatic harmonies, and independent piano lines (Sams, Robert Schumann 150).

One of the important qualities of the second period was the new declamatory style. This technique perhaps reflects Schumann's problems with manic/depressive tendencies. Schumann's declamatory melodies have leaps in range and abrupt changes in dynamics and rhythm that represent the strong feelings and emotions of himself and the poetic

impulses he wishes to portray using only musical images.

One author believes that the true importance of Schumann's lieder lie in his melodies. Felber describes the importance of Schumann's melody, "in its intensity of feeling and its directness and richness of expression" (345). Schumann's melodies embodied the Romantic concept which was "feeling above thought and content above form" (Felber 350). His melodies can be characterized as emotionally intense and subjective. As mentioned above, in the second period the melodies became more chromatic. They moved by larger intervals, changed abruptly to new registers, and incorporated lavish rhythmic elements (Felber 345). By the third period, this emotional intensity permeated both the voice and the piano accompaniment.

In September of 1850, Schumann moved to Dusseldorf where there was some improvement in his health and mental state. The years 1851 and 1852 encompass Schumann's third period of writing. This third period is characterized by a combination of techniques used in the first and second periods of writing. The chromaticism of the second period was mixed with the more traditional forms found in the first period. Eric Sams in his book, The Songs of Robert Schumann, writes that for a time Schumann was able to overcome the compositional difficulties of his second

period. Yet Sams states that neither the subject matter nor the songs of this period really come to life (259).

The piano accompaniment of the third period is marked by increased chromaticism and a faster harmonic rhythm. As in all his other compositional techniques, these developments were again used to highlight poetic meaning. In so doing, the accompaniment took on an independence. The accompaniment became an additional voice commenting on and complementing the vocal line.

The elements that define Schumann's song-writing style are not without criticism. The declamatory style, chromatic harmonies, and abrupt register and dynamic changes that Schumann used in pursuit of expressing the soul and meaning of the poem created a lack of unity and direction. Critics of Schumann's music will often attribute this lack of unity to the problems with his mental condition; his mind was not focused, leading to music which was not directional (Schlotel 132; Felber 353).

Schumann's approach to lieder set an example for others to follow. Schumann's aim was to create "the highest possible development of the instrumental part as well as of the vocal line, so as to penetrate to the very core of the poem, and to recreate it as a whole and in all its details in the language of tone" (Felber 353). One author maintains

that the goal of creating an art form that fully connected music and poetry was not truly achieved until the lieder of Hugo Wolf (Felber 353), yet we would be negligent to omit Schumann's influence. Schumann's romanticism and his artistic abilities contributed to the advancements in the late German Romantic Lied.

CHAPTER THREE

Goethe

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), an important force in German literature, was a man of knowledge, whose interests included various fields of science, art, and music (Reinhard 41). Goethe's poetry and dramas became sources of inspiration for almost all of the important composers of the Classical and Romantic periods of music including: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Wolf.

Goethe was born in Frankfurt to a patrician family. He received his education at home. In 1765, Goethe began his studies in law at Leipzig University where he was exposed to many refinements of life: elegant manners, art lessons, and poetry. Because of a serious lung ailment, Goethe went back to Frankfurt to recover for two years (Reinhard 41).

After the battle with his illness, Goethe resumed his law studies in Strassburg. While in Strassburg, he met J.G. von Herder. Herder introduced Goethe to Shakespeare, Gothic traditions, and the relationship between folk-song and poetry. Goethe's time at Strassburg was a time of great emotional and intellectual growth. After completing his law degree, Goethe returned to pursue a law career in Frankfurt (Reinhard 42).

During his time in Frankfurt, Goethe began work on the novel The Sorrows of Young Werther. This novel, as it displayed a new freedom with respect to the poetic rules of verse and rhythm, was influenced by the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) movement of the Berlin School. Other work during this period include Egmont, Heidenröslein, Prometheus, and the first drafts of Faust (Reinhard 42).

In 1775, Goethe was persuaded by Duke Carl August to leave Frankfurt and take a position with his cabinet in Weimar, where he stayed for ten years. During his time in Weimar, Goethe met and fell in love with Charlotte von Stein. Their relationship inspired the sense of humanity, serenity, love, and balance found in Goethe's poetic writings. Goethe's writing style began to emphasize the philosophies of balance and order important to the Classical ideals. Goethe placed less importance on the Sturm und Drang philosophy of his earlier works (Reinhard 43).

While in Weimar, Goethe also held the position of director of the Weimar Hoftheatre providing Goethe with an arena for experimenting with many of his works. The theater became a source of inspiration for his writing. Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister is based on his experiences with the theater (Reinhard 43).

Goethe's approach to writing is subjective, and formal guidelines were strictly followed. This dual approach to writing can be explained by looking at two important influences in Goethe's career: the Enlightenment and the Berlin School (Grout 449;479).

The Enlightenment encouraged and witnessed a spirit of revolt. Goethe, like Beethoven, was a child of this spirit. The Enlightenment encouraged social and artistic changes. It was a time that proselytized the values of common sense, nature, individual freedom, and equal rights for all. These new ideals took form in the fine arts of Sturm und Drang school (Grout 449).

The first Berlin School had strong convictions and beliefs in personal and artistic freedoms. The Sturm und Drang philosophy practiced by the Berlin School is characterized by great emotional intensity and passionate violet outbursts. Goethe's drama Gotz vom Berlichingen and prose The Sorrows of Young Werther are examples of literature in the Sturm und Drang style (Pauly, 30).

The first Berlin School gave Goethe some of his emotional guidelines, but the second Berlin School gave Goethe structural guidelines. The ideals of the Berlin School included the strophic form for lieder. The melodies should have a natural expressiveness like that found in

folk-songs. Embellishment of words or notes were inappropriate. Thus, each note of the melody should line up with each syllable of the poetic text. The accompaniments were to be simple and play a secondary role to the vocal line and the words (Grout 479).

There was a problem with all of these guidelines. The rules were so restrictive that they produced a repetition which was often monotonous. To eliminate monotony, Goethe encouraged the singer to interpret the emotion of the poetic text vocally through rubato and tempo and dynamic changes (Grout 479; Paul 180).

Goethe's belief in the philosophies and restrictions of the Berlin School might lead one to incorrectly conclude that he considered music to be unimportant next to the poetic text. Goethe believed that music and poetry were interrelated. He once said, "Never read, always sing!" Goethe also recommended to a friend that, in order to read his poetry, one should sit at the piano and play music while reading the poetic text (Rolland 159).

Goethe had strong opinions about how lieder should be composed. Rolland states in his article, "Goethe's Interest in Music":

What Goethe demanded both of sacred and of secular music was that it should set free the joy of living,

moral confidence, whole-hearted energy, the sense of the eternal, contempt for pettiness, for nothingness, and above all, the powers of reason: order, clarity of mind (168).

Goethe believed that by singing a song, the audience will learn something about and acquaint with the character or the meaning of the poetry. Goethe felt that music was capable of communicating at a higher level than even that of his own poetic language. Goethe said that "Music is the only, the immaterial means of entry into a higher world of knowledge which envelops man but which he cannot grasp" (Rolland 176). Because of music's power to transport an audience to such emotional heights, Goethe believed it was necessary to place limits on music. As stated, his ideals of the lieder had its foundation in folk-melodies. He believed that music expressed the meaning best when set with clarity and simplicity. Goethe disliked loud declamations and abrupt changes, although he was willing to let composers experiment with the strophic form, if the change would benefit the meaning of the text (Istel 248).

CHAPTER FOUR

Mignon-Lieder

The poetry of the Mignon-Lieder have been set by many composers of Lied. The best-known settings come from Schubert, Wolf, and Schumann. Schumann composed the Mignon-Lieder in 1849, near the end of his life, at a time when he was suffering from various bouts of depression; ironically, 1849 marked the largest output of works by Schumann. The Mignon-Lieder represents not only a portrayal of Mignon, but also of Schumann's own inner struggles.

The poems come from Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister. The story is about the girl, Mignon, who was abandoned by her mother and sold to a circus. Mignon's life was filled with neglect and abuse. This persecution distorts her sense of love and reality. Mignon falls in love with her abusive boss, who is her father. The story is a tragedy that explores the inner pain of this young girl.

The texts for the lieder are derived from songs that the character Mignon sings. This chapter will focus on "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," "Heiss mich nicht reden" and "So lasst mich scheinen."

"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt"

The first poem, "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" (Only one who know longing), describes a pain so deep that it is

unimaginable to those who have not experienced such great loneliness. The words emphasize this isolation:

"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt"

Only one who knows longing can understand what

I suffer!

alone and bereft of all joy,

I look to the sky yonder

Ah, he who loves and understand me is far away.

I faint. Fire burns within me.

Only one who knows longing can understand what

I suffer!

The song begins with the piano introducing its accompaniment pattern followed by the vocal line. The voice enters on the unaccented second count of the measure, creating a sense of uncertainty, perhaps an unhappy reluctance, or as though the singer finishes a sigh or moan before being able to enter. This is a portrayal of the first line of the text, especially an expression of the words "sehnsucht" (longing) and "leide" (suffer).

The melodic line reinforces the dark quality established by the first measure. It slowly moves stepwise down a minor third on "Nur wer die" and then takes an upward leap of a minor sixth to "sehnsucht."

Langsam, sehr gehalten. (♩ = 63.)

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,

Mit Pedal

Fig. 1 "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" (mm. 1-2)

This melodic line is a characteristic motive in this song, symbolizing the anguished cry of "sehnsucht" (longing).

Other examples of descending stepwise motion followed by large leaps up the register to a higher tessitura are used in measures 16 for the word "brennt" (burns), 18 for "Sehnsucht" (Longing), and 20 for "leide" (suffer).

Schumann used the instability created by the dissonant leap to underscore the urgency and pain suggested by these words.

In contrast to the descending stepwise motion, Schumann used an ascending stepwise line, followed by a skip up when the poetic text speaks of "freude" (joy, mm. 25-26) and "ans firmament nach" (Looking to the sky, m. 28). Schumann often used ascending motives when representing positive emotions such as freedom, and a desire to escape (Sams, Songs of Robert Schumann 14-15). The anticipated feeling of freedom

created by this technique is an appropriate contrast to the previous compositional device.

In measures 4-7 of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," Mignon's inner turmoil is represented by harmonic and rhythmic compositional techniques. The initial device used is a descending chromatic bass line. The result of this line, which is a temporary suspension of strong tonicization, is parallel to Mignon's lack of certainty about her station in life. Further, the sonorities supported by this bass line are non-functional. The bass note d in measure 5 supports a triad of dominant function in g minor. However, subsequent harmonies consist of unresolved and enharmonically spelled diminished-seventh chords. The harmonic goal of the phrase, an a-flat diminished-seventh chord in measure 8, is non-functional at the level of g minor. This unstable harmonic structure further elucidates Mignon's mental state. The melody consists of an ascending stepwise progression from a in measure 5 to c in measure 8. This arpeggiated movement in the voice supported by the diminished-seventh chords was a compositional setting Schumann sometimes used to create a sense of puzzlement and bewilderment (Sams, Songs of Robert Schumann 19).

Rhythmic techniques are as important as melodic and

harmonic devices in emotional expression in this song. Mignon's sense of turmoil is produced primarily through two devices, the hemiola in the bass line, and the increasing surface rhythm between measures 7 and 8. Further, the harmonic rhythm speeds up at the same rate as the rhythm of the bass line. Schumann utilized all these techniques in this phrase to present a musical portrait of Mignon at this point in her life.



Fig. 2 "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" (mm. 4-7)

Schumann's avoidance of strong cadences represents a significant compositional process which seldom allows the music to come to a strong point of articulation. For example, in measure 11, a deceptive cadence on the word "seite" (side) represents Mignon's hopelessness by denying a sense of harmonic closure. Schumann avoids the resolution of the tonic chord until the last word of the poetic text, "leide" (suffer). This symbolizes Mignon's reluctant yet final acceptance of her fate. After the voice line is finished, Schumann once again moves away from tonic with two

more diminished-seventh chords. The piano completes another cadence on g minor and maintains this tonality throughout the last two measures. This manner of closure characterizes continued inner turmoil and suggests the concept that the words end before the pain ends.

The tempo indications of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" play an important role in interpreting the text. Schumann starts the song with the tempo marking Langsam, sehr gehalten, quarter note equals 63. This tempo marking, slow, with hesitation, is used for describing Mignon's longing and suffering, as well as her unwillingness to go on. Each time the vocalist begins to sing about the burning love for one who is far away, Schumann indicates the tempo to become "Schneller" (faster, hurried). This increase in tempo corresponds with the desperation that Mignon experiences by being cut off from her loved ones. The original tempo returns at the end of the song, and is used for the reiteration of the opening statement, "Only one who knows longing can understand what I suffer!" The slower tempo marking at the end once more reinforces Mignon's sense of resignation.

Schumann offers a psychological portrayal of Mignon's character in this song. He creates a sense of ambiguity in the song through several means including, harmonic

instability, melodic contour, cadence structure, rhythm, and tempo. It can be concluded that Schumann in his setting of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" not only expressed the meaning of the poetic texts, but delved deeper into Mignon's psyche, representing in music an unstable persona.

"Heiss mich nicht reden"

The second poem, "Heiss mich nicht reden" (Do not ask me to speak), speaks of Mignon's unfulfilled desire to reveal her secrets. This cannot be done because of her promise not to divulge them to anyone. Mignon is once again faced with sorrow and loneliness because she is unable to share her secrets with a friend.

"Heiss mich nicht reden"

Do not ask me to speak, tell me to be silent,
 for my secret is my duty;
 I would reveal to you my inmost being,
 but fate will not have it so.

At the appointed time the sun's course drives away
 the gloomy night, and it cannot choose but brighten.
 The hard rock opens its bosom;
 It does not begrudge the earth its deep-hidden springs.
 Each seeks peace in the embrace of a friend,
 there the breast can pour out its sorrow;
 Only a promise closes my lips,

and only a God may open them.

Mignon's conflicting emotions are represented by several compositional techniques found in measures 1 through 7. The first device is the dramatic vocal entrance in measure 2. The effect is one of a vocal line wrenched from the accompaniment, especially after the extreme textural change in measure 4. Simultaneously, the piano has an octave transfer in its two outer voices in measures 1 and 2. Thus when the vocal line enters in measure 2 an octave higher, the focus changes to another register. These dramatic shifts in texture and register symbolize the unstable and hysterical state of Mignon.

Schumann continues to contrast the opening exclamatory remark with changes in dynamics, tempo and harmonic movement. The dynamic is suddenly soft in measure 4, and the tempo quickly changes from Mit freiem leidenschaftlichen Vortrag (perform freely and passionately) to Langsamer within two beats. The texture in the accompaniment changes from chordal to an arpeggiated texture and abruptly drops out under the vocal entrance. Immediately beginning with chromatic movement in the piano, the vocal line ascends chromatically back up to the original octave. Whereas the first three measures were harmonically stable, staying with c minor prolonging the interval of c to e-flat, the

In measures 7 through 9, the piano accompaniment has a repetition of continuous eighth-notes accentuated by sforzando chromatic motives which emphasize the important words "ich" (I) and "zeigen" (reveal) in the phrase, "I would reveal to you my innermost being. The urgency of Mignon's desire is represented by this steady eighth-note surface rhythm as well as the increased tempo. The texture is still homophonic (melody and accompaniment), however, the rhythmic activator and the use of imitation in measure 10, where the bass line repeats the vocal line from measure 8, creates a texture that indicates another example of the complex and conflicting emotional state of Mignon.

In measure 15, the character of the melodic line changes. The tempo and surface rhythm slow and the modality changes from minor to major. Schumann's contrasts of major and minor represent day and night, smiles and sadness, and sunshine and showers (Sams, Songs of Robert Schumann 16). He changes modality when the poetic text speaks of sharing secrets with a friend (measures 16 through 36). The poem uses analogies of the rising sun and the opening rock to symbolize the possible liberation Mignon would experience if only she could share her secrets. The melody parallels the words of the poem, as the sun rises in the text, the melodic line ascends. The action of the rock "opening its bosom" is

represented by a descending melody doubled in the piano. The techniques utilized in this section represent a more stable life-style than Mignon's.

Figure 4a shows a musical score for the song "Heiss mich nicht reden". It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "reibt der Son - ne Lauf die fin - stre Nacht, und sie". The piano accompaniment features a descending melody in the right hand and a more active bass line.

Fig. 4a "Heiss mich nicht reden" (mm. 18-20)

Figure 4b shows a musical score for the song "Heiss mich nicht reden". It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "schließt sei-nen Bu - sen auf, miß-gönnt der". The piano accompaniment features a descending melody in the right hand and a more active bass line. Dynamic markings "sp" and "Nach" are present.

Fig. 4b "Heiss mich nicht reden" (mm. 26-27)

New rhythmic and dynamic movement are found in measure 31 by a change in the accompanimental pattern as well as a sudden piano dynamic in both the voice and piano. A slow crescendo rises to the highest note on one of the most important words of this poem, "schwur" (seal, referring to the sealing of Mignon's lips). At this point, Schumann returns to the opening texture. The change in rhythmic and

dynamic movement and texture further emphasizes Mignon's original hysterical emotion.

The melody at "nur ein Gott!" (only one God) moves to a lower tessitura before it descends chromatically, thus implying a sense of slowing down, quitting, or of resignation. Schumann gives special attention to the penultimate statement of "nur ein Gott!" by elongating the rhythm and placing the notes in the lowest register of this song. Eric Sams found that in many of Schumann's songs, the bass notes symbolized bed-rock firmness and their depths created a dark meaning. The extreme register change at "nur ein Gott!" could possibly represent a descent to Hell.



Fig. 5 "Heiss mich nicht reden" (mm. 47-48)

Schumann adds a coda that reinforces the weight of the secret that only God may know. This is the only time "Heiss mich nicht reden" appears in a low register and a soft dynamic. In the melodic line, chromatic half-steps at the end of the first two phrases represent signs of exhaustion

and resignation. Schumann again emphasizes the word "schwur" with a sudden upward leap of an octave. The final statement of "nur ein Gott!" suggests the major mode as the piano reiterates a c major chord. The major tonality symbolizes Mignon's acceptance of her isolation.

Schumann produced ambiguity throughout the entire composition by avoiding the tonic, using deceptive progressions, and incorporating chromatic half-steps. Another way Schumann expressed ambiguity was by varying the speed of the music. These changes of speed place the song on an emotional roller coaster. The techniques described here characterize how Schumann is able to portray the instability that Mignon feels. The song also communicates the inner struggle that she experiences because she really does want to share her feelings with someone, even though she is unable to do so.

"So lasst mich scheinen"

Of the three poems discussed "So lasst mich scheinen" (So let me be) is the most hopeful. In the novel, Wilhelm Meister, Mignon sings this song after being in a play, where she has portrayed an angel. She sings of her desire to stay in the white robe of the angel and continue living her life in a fantasy world. In this world there is no distinction between people, and there is no suffering. Mignon wants to

leave her old life behind and become young and naive again.

"So lasst mich scheinen"

So let me seem, until I become so;
do not divest me of my white garment!
I am hastening from the beautiful earth
down to that impregnable house.
There I shall rest a little while in tranquility
then a fresh vision will open up;
I shall leave behind then the pure raiment,
the girdle and the wreath.
And those heavenly beings
do not concern themselves with the man and women,
and no garments, no robes,
cover the transfigured body.
It is true that my life is without care and trouble,
however I feel enough deep sorrow;
the sorrow has caused me to grow old too soon,
make me again forever young.

Schumann approaches the melodic concept of this song in the following ways: heaven and heavenly beings are represented by an ascending melodic line (mm. 6-10; 26-30; 42-47), and earthly sorrow is represented by descending melodic lines, lower tessituras, and increased chromaticism (mm. 15-25). There are three dramatic phrases in the

melody. The first uses the text, "dann offnet sich der frische blick" (then a fresh vision will open up). At this point, the melody unleashes this new vision with a declamatory descending melodic line which starts in a vocally high tessitura. Immediately after this phrase, the vocal line repeats the jump upward on the words "lasse dann die reine Hulle" (I shall leave behind then the pure raiment). The leaps in the melodic line might represent Mignon's freedom from her earthly life. Yet each time the vocal line leaps upward, it is immediately pulled back by a descending melodic line. Simultaneously, a harmonic battle occurs between the e-flat major and g dominant-seventh sonorities. The g dominant-seventh implies a resolution to c, however, the next sonority stands in a chromatic third relationship and strongly tonicizes e-flat. The contour of the melodic line and the battle for tonal superiority symbolizes Mignon's captive state.

The surface rhythm of the piano part in measures 13 and 14 establishes an unsteady feeling due to the syncopation of the triplet figures. This rhythmic movement stops as "dann offnet" and "lasse dann" with half notes. The dynamic markings call for a forte in both the voice and piano. Schumann again reinforces her longing to be transformed into a heavenly being through the transformation in the music.

dann öff-net sich der fri-sche Blick, ich las-se dann die rei - ne Hül - le, den

Fig. 6 "So lasst mich scheinen" (mm. 15-19)

The third dramatic phrase occurs at the end of the poem where Mignon declares, "auf ewig wieder jung" (make me forever young). The melodic line here creates a sense of pleading for the youth and innocence Mignon so desires.

jung, — auf — e - wig wie - - der jung.

Fig. 7 "So lasst mich scheinen" (mm. 45-47)

Schumann paints a harmonic picture of Mignon's feelings in this song. This portrayal is found in the phrase, "Zwar lebt' ich ohne Sorg und Mühe" (It is true that my life is without sorrow and trouble). At this point, the song's harmonic structure has a strong foundation in major and is centered around the tonic triad. This major sonority symbolizes a sense of security and happiness, but the poetic text then indicates that Mignon still feels great sorrow

"doch fuhlt' ich tiefen Schmerz genug; vor Kummer altert ich zu frühe" (However I feel enough deep sorrow; the sorrow has caused me to grow old too soon). Schumann opens this phrase with a diminished-seventh chord, which presents a very different mood from the previous measures.

The image displays a musical score for the song "So lasst mich scheinen" from Schumann's "Liederkreis, Op. 24". It shows two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in German and reads: "doch fuhlt' ich tie-fen Schmerz genug; vor Kummer al-tert' ich zu frü - he,". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand features a driving eighth-note triplet pattern, marked with a "cresc." (crescendo) in the fourth measure. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

Fig. 8 "So lasst mich scheinen" (mm. 37-41)

There are two primary features of this song that communicate the emotion and reflection in Mignon's soul. The declamatory vocal line with its dramatic leaps establishes a sense of urgency in the music. It is Mignon's urgent desire to remain in the heavenly fantasy world. The other device is found in the driving eighth-note triplets in the inner voices of the piano, which represent the inner turmoil of Mignon's psyche. This rhythmic movement is continuous throughout the song with the exception of three measures: measures 15, 17 and 53. The breaks in rhythmic movement correspond to points of emotional intensity in the

poetic line. The voice ends with the pleading statement "auf ewig wieder jung" (Make me forever young). After this melodic line, the piano is given a new tempo marking, "schneller" (faster), which brings the music to the final two chords. This new tempo, combined with the triplet rhythms of the piano, symbolizes Mignon's impatience to be transformed.

Conclusions

After the analysis of the three Mignon-Lieder, the following conclusions can be reached about Schumann's adherence to Goethe's ideals on lieder composition. First, only one, "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt," retains the strophic quality of the poem in the musical form. However, it is modified and therefore one can say that Schumann did not adhere slavishly to this ideal. Second, because the melodies of all the lieder are progressive, Schumann did not adhere to the principle of a folk-song characteristic in his melodic writing. Third, although the text setting is syllabic, the words do not control melodic contour or style. Last, under no circumstances does Schumann adhere to the ideal of a simple supportive accompaniment.

In regard to Schumann's goals, one can conclude that Schumann felt no obligation to adhere to Goethe's ideals because he was more interested in the musical portrayal of Mignon's psyche. To this end, he utilized several compositional techniques. First, the melodic contours are dramatic and intense. They encompass a wide range for the soprano voice, utilize large skips, and demand a more operatic vocal technique. The melodies are thus perfectly matched to a highly dramatic reading of Mignon's character.

Second, the avoidance of tonal centers paints Mignon's inner turmoil and suffering. Third, variations in texture are used to create stark contrasts between voice and piano, achieving a sense of an inner dialogue in the protagonist. Fourth, rhythmically intense figures such as syncopation, hemiola, juxtaposition of duple and triple meter, and constant tempo changes are all connected to Mignon's intensity of personality, which strives for release from her suffering. Last, the piano is an equal partner to the voice. It provides not only color and support, but is also an extension of Mignon's personality. It comments upon, reinforces, and guides the emotions of Mignon by using all of the above techniques. Therefore, the piano is no longer only an accompaniment. It aids in creating a totally integrated composition. Thus, one of Schumann's goals appears to be the creating of a lied style in which voice and piano are ultimately co-dependent.

For an historically accurate performance, one must combine knowledge of Schumann's life with his compositional techniques and goals. The Mignon-Lieder are a subjective interpretation of the character Mignon. Written during Schumann's second period, when his mental state was perhaps at its worst, one can easily speculate that Schumann saw part of himself in Mignon. Since Schumann has imposed upon

Mignon's personality a high degree of conflict, confusion, and chaos through musical text painting, the performer should not be afraid to become more adventurous in interpretation.

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