

MUSIC

# Two Early Song Settings of Schiller's 'The Maiden's Lament'

The most famous of Franz Schubert's settings of the German poet Friedrich Schiller is his second version of "Des Mädchens Klage," ("The Maiden's Lament"). This four stanza poem was first published in 1798. The first two stanzas, slightly altered, are sung by the "beautiful soul" Thekla in the play *The Piccolomini*, first performed in 1799.

Schubert's song in C-minor, accompanied by chordal triplets over a

magnificently constructed bass-line, was composed in 1815, when he was only seventeen. It is in print in Band I of the Peters *Schubert Album*, and in the Dover *59 Favorite Songs* by Schubert.

Of all Schiller's poems, this was most often made into a song. There are two other settings by Schubert, one by Mendelssohn, and two by the Russian composer Glinka.

Mendelssohn's posthumous ver-

sion is a through-composed setting of only the first two stanzas, with a virtuoso piano accompaniment. Schubert's first try, around 1811-12, is also through-composed and highly declamatory with a high-C at the end! His third setting, strophic and in C-minor like the second, composed in 1816, seems to call for a dramatic soprano.

The two settings here were composed within a decade of the poem,

## Des Mädchens Klage

Der Eichwald brauset, die Wolken ziehn,  
Das Mädlein sitzt an Ufers Grün,  
Es bricht sich die Welle mit Macht, mit Macht,  
Und sie seufzt hinaus in die finstre Nacht,  
Das Auge von Weinen getrübet.

"Das Herz ist gestorben, die Welt ist leer,  
Und weiter gibt sie dem Wunsche nichts mehr.  
Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück,  
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,  
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!"

Es rinnet der Tränen vergeblicher Lauf,  
Die Klage, sie wecket die Toten nicht auf;  
Doch nenne, was tröstet und heilet die Brust  
Nach der süßen Liebe verschwundener Lust,  
Ich, die Himmlische, will's nicht versagen.

"Laß rinnen der Tränen vergeblichen Lauf,  
Es wecke die Klage den Toten nicht auf!  
Das süßeste Glück für die trauernde Brust,  
Nach der schönen Liebe verschwundener Lust,  
Sind der Liebe Schmerzen und Klagen."

## The Maiden's Lament

The clouds are flitting, the oakwood roars,  
The maid is sitting upon green shores,  
The waves they are breaking with might, with might,  
And she sighs out into the sombre night,  
Her eyes are from crying grown turbid.

"The heart is now deadened, devoid's the world,  
And ne'er again be my wishes fulfilled.  
Thou holy one, summon thy child back home,  
For I have the fortune terrestrial known,  
For I have full lived and have loved!"

The tears running down do in vain their course take,  
Lamenting, 'twill never the dead one awake;  
Yet name it, what comforts and healeth the breast,  
After sweetest love all its pleasure has lost,  
I, the heavenly, won't be denying.

"Let run down the teardrops in vain do they break,  
The dead one lamenting 'twill never awake!  
The sweetest of balms for the sorrowful breast,  
After beautiful love all its pleasure has lost,  
Are but love's lamenting and sighing."

—translation by Marianna Wertz

both in E $\flat$ -major. They have not been available in popular editions since the early 1800's. Among other things, the angular "north German" style of the first contrasts to the more Italianate "south German" approach of the second.

This poem is one of Schiller's most succinct lyric expressions of his idea of the sublime: the simultaneous experience of intense happiness and

intense sadness, which points negatively to the fact that there is a higher, supersensuous principle in man, his capacity for freedom. Schiller identifies this with man's capacity for love, even if acting out of love conflicts with the natural instinct toward self-preservation.

Schiller paints a picture of a girl sitting in a stormy landscape, grieving for her dead lover. Her anguish

is answered by a heavenly woman (probably the Virgin Mary), who tells her that after love's pleasures, the greatest balm is love's lamenting and pain. The two contrasting emotions are mirrored by nature, as the roaring oakwood, and the mighty breaking waves, are set off against the maiden's sighs.

Berlin's J.F. Reichardt, Goethe's favorite composer, set many Schiller

## Des Mädchens Klage

*Etwas langsam, doch lebhaft deklamiert. Die zweite und letzte Strophe leiser als die anderen.*

Johann Friedrich Reichardt

Der Eich - wald brau-set, die Wol - ken ziehn, das Mägd - lein sit - zet an

U - fers Grün, es bricht sich die Wel - le mit Macht, mit Macht, und sie seuf - zet hin -

aus in die fin - stre Nacht, das Au - ge von Wei - nen ge - trü - bet.

poems, both as *lieder* and in anthem-like choral versions. His “*Des Mädchens Klage*,” published in 1811, exemplifies what Lyndon LaRouche refers to as Reichardt’s “simplistic, but rigorous scheme” [SEE page 42]. Choosing the four-stanza version, he sets it strophically, i.e., each verse has the same notes for the voice and the same accompaniment. But he specifies in his instructions: “Rather slow, but vividly declaimed. The second and last verses softer than the others.”

Note that he writes out the arpeggiated accompaniment in the first measure only, and after that only puts the chords, with the instruction “*segue*,” which tells the pianist to continue breaking the chords in the same fashion. This is just a step away from the old thorough-bass tradition, in which the keyboard player was only given a bass-line and, usually, a number indicating the harmonies to be filled in (“figured bass”) in a pattern appropriate to the taste of the piece and the voice being accompanied.

Reichardt builds up the drama by a series of descending lines, starting with the phrase that drops from the soprano’s second register on G to her low register. By the end of the first couplet, the foreboding quality has been enhanced by a shift into C-minor, the relative key, on the word *grün*. As Schubert did later, Reichardt raises the song to its strongest dynamic as the waves break “*mit Macht, mit Macht*” on the shore, and then, also as Schubert would do, he

puts the maiden’s “sigh into the night” on the highest but quietest notes of the piece, at the top of the soprano’s second register. Reichardt, whose songs for sopranos otherwise tend to be very high, may have chosen the first and second registers here to convey the tragic mood.

Johann Rudolph Zumsteeg is one of the most engaging minor figures in classical German music. A schoolmate of Schiller in the Karlschule in Stuttgart, he remained very loyal to his friend, composing many musical settings of songs in Schiller’s plays. Zumsteeg was the first to insist on staging Mozart’s operas in Stuttgart, and he wrote his own opera based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. He died penniless in 1802, three years before Schiller. His Schiller lyrics and ballads, published at his own expense, strongly influenced the young Schubert, who often used Zumsteeg as the starting point for his interpretations.

As an opera composer, Zumsteeg used the two-stanza version of the “Lament” from the play, and attempted a through-composed (*durchcomponiert*) version which would change as the narrative unfolded.

Thekla is the daughter of the superstitious General Wallenstein, the central character in the *Wallenstein Trilogy*, which Schiller wrote about the Thirty Years War (1618-48), at a time when Europe was in the throes of the Napoleonic Wars. She sings at a turning point in the tragedy, foreshadowing the terrible death of her beloved Max Piccolomini, the other “beautiful soul” of the play. Max and Thekla were fictional characters invented by Schiller to complement the flawed historical personages. Through their love they triumph over death, and thus establish for the audience, a negentropic alternative in an other-

wise entropic world.

Zumsteeg provides a piano introduction like a miniature overture before the miniature tragedy begins: the melody, in the bass line, descends in a three-note phrase. After this is elaborated, the curtain rises—in G-major! The voice of Thekla enters, the tempo quickens to “moderately slow,” and she sings entirely in her second register, a line that rises from G to E $\flat$  and then falls back to G in the first couplet. The second couplet reaches up into a third-register high-G as the waves break. Then the maiden “sings” (“*singt*”—Schiller altered the verb, which had been “sighs” in the poem) very softly, in her second register into the dark night.

For the second strophe, the song slows down, the triplet arpeggios in the piano turn into simple chords for the declaimed line: “The heart is now deadened, devoid’s the world.” After this, Zumsteeg makes his way back to a variant on the first verse, setting each line separately for theatrical effect. Thekla pleads, “Thou Holy One, summon thy child back home.” The last line, “I have fortune terrestrial known, for I have full lived and have loved,” Zumsteeg set in an almost cheery, operatically ornamented way that brings the curtain down with an echoing conclusion from the keyboard. In the trilogy, after Max’s death, Thekla “disappears,” we never know whether into physical death or into a cloister.

It is striking that Schubert, who may have known both Reichardt’s and Zumsteeg’s versions, chose the relative minor of their E $\flat$ -major, C-minor. While his song has some things in common with both earlier attempts, it is above all the echo of Beethoven’s musical interpretation of the Sublime that lifts Schubert’s to the level of genius.

—Nora Hamerman

The study of classical settings of poetry is perhaps the most efficient way to learn the principles of poetic composition. Selections offered here are either previously unpublished, or no longer available in print.

# Thekla

Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg

Langsam.

The first system of the musical score for 'Thekla' is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, followed by a crescendo (*cresc.*) and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section. The vocal line is mostly rests in this system.

The second system continues the musical score. The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings of *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The vocal line includes triplet markings (3) and fermatas.

Mässig langsam.

The third system is marked 'Mässig langsam.' and features the vocal line with lyrics: 'Der Eich-wald brau-set, die Wol-ken ziehn, das'. The piano accompaniment includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section with triplet markings (3).

The fourth system continues the vocal line with lyrics: 'Mägd-lein wan-delt an U--fers Grün, es bricht sich die Wel-le mit Macht, mit'. The piano accompaniment features a forte (*f*) dynamic.

Macht, und sie singt hin - aus in die fin - stre Nacht, das Au - ge von

We - nen ge - trü - - bet. Das Herz ist ge - stor - ben, die Welt ist leer, und

**Langsamer.** *all-*

wei - ter gibt sie dem Wun - sche nichts mehr. Du Hei - - li - ge, ru - fe dein

*mählich wieder in das erste Tempo zurückgehen!* *f* *p*

Kind zu - rück, ich ha - be ge - nos - sen das ir - di - sche Glück, ich ha - be ge -

*mählich wieder in das erste Tempo zurückgehen!* *mf* *p*

lebt und ge - lie - - bet.

*sf* *p*