

Lieder and Miniatures: Field and Schubert

April 12, 2018

Salon

- ▶ “Big room.” English: “drawing room,” abbrev. “withdrawing room.”
- ▶ Open house on a designated day with live entertainment (hired or not).
- ▶ Cusp of private and public sphere
- ▶ Music frequently performed by women; unless it’s the composer performing
- ▶ Only in such an environment does the idea of a “public display of privacy” lose its paradoxical, even faintly ridiculous mien. (Taruskin)

Josef Danhauser, *Liszt at the Piano*, 1840



Liszt at the Piano members, L to R

- ▶ Alfred du Musset, french poet
- ▶ Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin, aka George Sand, extremely important author, literary critic, public free spirit.
- ▶ Victor Hugo (Hunchback of N Dame, Les Miserables)
- ▶ Berlioz and Rossini hugging. Liszt (at the Piano).
- ▶ Countess Marie d'Agoult (1805–76), aka Daniel Stern, author, mistress to Liszt, mother of Cosima

“A portrait of shared solitude.” (Taruskin)

Machismo in the bust of Beethoven – why?

Elitism

Taruskin:

The salon, in other words, was a new vehicle for the channeling of art patronage, based on a newly negotiated symbiosis between social and artistic elites. Music played at salons, much of it written to be played there, was marked by its milieu as socially elite. Reciprocally, its presence there, especially when played by its creators, marked the occasion and the assembled company as culturally elite. Each elite helped define and support the other. There were material benefits, too, for pianist-composers in social contacts that led to fashionable pupils, mainly the daughters of those in attendance. That was how Field (and later, Chopin) earned a living.

“Music trance”

- ▶ Franz Anton Mesmer (1734 – 1815), inventor of “mesmerism” i.e. hypnotism.
- ▶ Appears to prove the existence of a realm of reality that transcends sense perception; a truer realm? An aesthetic realm? An inner realm?
- ▶ Genre: the autobiography, diary, biography
- ▶ Industrial revolution: cheap editions of music, musical instruments for private ownership.
- ▶ Esp. music, which was known to induce such states. Herder: “in the mirror of tones the human heart learns to know itself.”
- ▶ **Submediant modulation**: precedent is Beethoven, Op. 130, Cavatina

John Field, 1782-1837

- ▶ Born Ireland, 1782
- ▶ Grows up in London, student of Clementi – composition, piano, and instrument making.
- ▶ Ends up in Moscow, composing primarily piano music, frequently taking up Russian themes.
- ▶ **18 Nocturnes** Stylistic features:
 - ▶ Wide ranging harmonic explorations, largely in LH, with pedal
 - ▶ Melismatic RH melodic writing
 - ▶ Surprising modulations
 - ▶ **See esp. no. 14: scena**

Liszt on Field

In writing as in playing, Field was intent only on expressing his inner feelings for his own gratification. It would be impossible to imagine a more unabashed indifference to the public than his. He enchanted his public without knowing it or wishing it. His nearly immobile posture, his expressionless face did not attract notice. His glance did not rove.... It was not hard to see that he was his own chief audience. His calm was all but sleepy, and could be neither disturbed nor affected by the thoughts of the impression his playing made on his hearers.... Art was for him in itself sufficient reward for any sacrifice.... Field sang for himself alone.

(Franz Liszt, "John Field and his Nocturnes," cited in Taruskin, Oxford History)

Taruskin on Field

The music a pianist like Field composed for salon performance (whether by himself or by one of his fashionable lady pupils) served the same social purpose, for both composer and audience, as the concerto had served for Mozart. A statistical survey of Field's output bears this out: he started his career as a public musician in London, with a concerto (in Eb , 1799), made his early name in Russia with more concertos, but after 1822 composed only for solo piano or for piano intimately accompanied by a string quartet ad libitum. He had shifted his field of operations from the concert hall to the salon, and his music responded to the change with an ever-increasing quotient of Innigkeit.

- ▶ “The Field tradition” to which Schubert and Chopin belong.

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

- ▶ Born Vienna, studies with Antonio Salieri. Musical talent earns him the chance to get a good education (not common for someone of his station).
- ▶ Music scholarship to Imperial and Royal City College
- ▶ Early compositions: fantasie in G for two pianos, Hagars Klage
- ▶ Appears to follow family profession (education) as a day job
- ▶ Productivity 1815-1816: 65 bars of new music a day.
- ▶ 1818: Hired by Esterhazy estate to teach at Zseliz (summer spot)
- ▶ 1823: health problems (**syphilis – 1 in 5!!!**). Suggestions of “sexual excess” in lifestyle. (Grove)
 - ▶ “ Inwardly a poet and outwardly a kind of hedonist”, “ his works proclaim a genius for divine creation, unimpaired by the passions of an eagerly burning sensuality”
- ▶ Supported by friends and family, devotes all his time to composing at age 16.

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

- ▶ By the age of nineteen,
 - ▶ six operas (mainly singspiels, short comic works in German with spoken dialogue)
 - ▶ five symphonies
 - ▶ sixteen string quartets (composed for family recreation)
 - ▶ dozens of dances for piano or small chamber ensemble
 - ▶ literally hundreds of songs set to verses by contemporary poets. Including
 - ▶ Gretchen am Spinnrade ("Little Margaret at the spinning wheel")
 - ▶ Depiction
 - ▶ Erlkonig ("the elf king")

Impromptu - “spur of the moment”

- ▶ 8 impromptus, 1827.
- ▶ Share with Field the ternary form (ABA).
- ▶ Shares with Field the preoccupation with the submediant – but intensifies it and combines it with more adventurous modal mixture.
- ▶ **Impromptu No. 2, Op. 90 in Eb**
 - ▶ “crossing the edge” – motion at the 3rd
 - ▶ The relationship can be traced logically, and is therefore intelligible, but its distance, not the logic of its description, is what registers. The logic, while demonstrable, is beside the point. To insist on demonstrating it works against the intended effect.
 - ▶ However, “cycle of thirds?”

Schubert, *Moments Musicaux*, Op. 94 no.6

- ▶ Recording
- ▶ Score
- ▶ 6 pieces in loose ternary form; not really conceived as a set
- ▶ *Augenblick*
- ▶ Time and harmonic prolongation
- ▶ Radical new regions for tonicization
- ▶ German 6th vs Dominant 7th
- ▶ Ending

Taruskin on this sort of modulation

The harmonic vocabulary of romantic introspection is one in which, as a matter of course, any augmented sixth chord can be resolved as a dominant seventh and vice versa, any triad in first inversion can be resolved as a Neapolitan and vice versa, and any constituent tone in a diminished seventh chord can resolve as a leading tone. The whole panoply of major and minor degree functions is freely available for use, and any one of them can function at pleasure as a pivot for modulation. In all of these techniques and more, Schubert was the chief pioneer, precisely because his art was nurtured in the intimacy of domestic genres.

Schubert, Piano Sonata No. 21 in B Flat, 1828

- ▶ Last sonata, written just a few months before his death
- ▶ Recording
- ▶ Compare with the logic of tonal harmony as we have known it so far.
- ▶ Gb/Fs “doppleganger”

Taruskin:

It relativizes the 150-year hegemony of the circle of fifths as sole arbiter of tonal coherence, positing two other cyclic models—thirds and semitones—as equally viable tonal administrators, the first accessible through mediant relationships, the other through Neapolitans. And finally, since the flat submediant is the “dominant of the Neapolitan,” this opposition among disparate harmonic routes—fifths, thirds, semitones—may be relativized in turn, and freely intermixed.

Schubert and Harmony and Sexuality and Identity

Taruskin:

Schubert's venereal disease, which may have hastened his death, had long since led to speculations concerning what one writer, as early as 1857, called passions mauvaises, "evil passions." The judgment implied by the word mauvais reflected the moral standards of 1857, well into the Victorian age, when sexual roles, as observed in the previous chapter, were hardening. The judgment also obviously partook of the mythology of the poète maudit, equally anachronistic for Schubert.

Schubert and Harmony and Sexuality and Identity

In Schubert's time imputation of homosexual tastes or activities carried less stigma than they did at midcentury (here, many would contend, our own time is in agreement with Schubert's), and were less bound up with issues of identity (but here our time differs profoundly from his). In any case, it is doubtful whether these matters would have excited as much controversy as they have, had some critics not begun to find corroborating "internal" evidence—that is, evidence in "the music itself."

Interpreters of Schubert

- ▶ Maynard Solomon, “Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* XII (1988–9): 193–206.
- ▶ Susan McClary, “Constructions of Identity in Schubert’s Music,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Lesbian and Gay Musicology*. (1994)
- ▶ Kofi Agawu, “Schubert’s Sexuality: A Prescription for Analysis?” in *19th Century Music*. (1994)

Susan McClary, “Constructions of Identity in Schubert’s Music”

- ▶ Schubert’s music evokes “a different sensibility.” (209)
- ▶ Biography, from Solomon: Schubert 1) probably had sex with men, and 2) “he suggests that this aspect of Schubert’s life was central to his understanding both of himself and of his principal affectional and social relationships.”
- ▶ Music doesn’t have to reflect sexual orientation...but it *can*.
- ▶ “Rather than protecting music as a sublimely meaningless activity that has managed to escape social signification, I insist on treating it as a medium that participates in social formation by influencing the ways we perceive our feelings, our bodies...”

Compare with *Eroica*

In the opening of this celebrated symphony, the subjective force of the principal theme hammers away, apparently making its own formal pathway as it goes. Any distraction from its agenda must be resisted or annexed for the sake of satisfactory self-development. When the subject finally appears in its definitive form in the coda, the listener can scarcely help cheering the strength and self-denial that made this hard-won, heroic identity feasible. When critics refer to the virility of Beethoven's music, they have in mind this kind of narrative and those types of gestures.

- ▶ Schubert is different...historically, cast as “feminine,” but McClary insists “Schubert was constructing models of male subjectivity.”

McClary, concluding

Standard accounts from Schumann to Dahlhaus warily label Schubert's music as sentimental, feminine or weak, even as they mean to praise him. In other words, Solomon and I did not introduce the issue of sexuality into Schubert interpretation...but Solomon's research invites us to read this dimension of Schubert's life and music in the affirmative terms made available by gay and feminist theory. For with recent scholarship, we can begin to see how culture has privileged certain models of masculinity and narrative structure, and it becomes easier to recognize and value alternatives. What has been perceived in Schubert's music as defective may at last be heard as purposeful, ingenious, and liberatory – and this is so whether or not he was actually involved in same-sex erotic activities.

(McClary, 228)

Schubert, Symphony no. 8, Mov 1

Recording