

## THE FORMAL, TONAL AND HARMONIC LOGIC OF ROBERT SCHUMANN'S *FRAUENLIEBE UND LEBEN* (A WOMAN'S LOVE AND LIFE), OP. 42

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**SUMMARY.** This study, after the succinct description of the poetical content of the lyrics that underline the songs cycle A Woman's Love and Life, op. 42 by Robert Schumann, present in a synthetic table the form structures of the songs. Then there are presented the main tonal characteristics of the songs, the tonal ethos being associated and explained in relation to the dramatically content of the text. After the tonal synthesis, there are extracted and analyzed several interesting chordic solutions realized by Schumann in the songs cycle.

**Keywords:** Robert Schumann, Frauenliebe und Leben, A Woman's Love and Life, formal logic, tonal logic, harmonic solutions, poetical content, tonal ethos, text, dramatically content

Robert Schumann composed this song cycle in 1840, at the age of 30, in the year of his marriage to famous pianist Clara Wieck. The lyrics to the cycle were inspired by 8 poems by his friend (Adelbert von Chamisso).

These 8 poems are songs of love, in which lyrics and music are strongly interwoven reflecting the close relationship between Schumann and Clara. The composer presents eight different moments of life:

1. *Sehn ich ihn gesehen (Since I Saw Him)* presents the enchanting moment after which she does not notice anyone else, but him.
2. *Er der Herlichste von Allen (He, the Noblest of All)* reflects the enamored state of the young lady both in lyrics and music.
3. *Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben (I Cannot Grasp or Believe It)*. What the girl cannot grasp or believe is that her love chose her from among all the girls. She wishes she could die with this marvellous feeling in her heart while her lover holds her in his arms.

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4. *Du Ring an meinem Finger (You Ring Upon My Finger)* sings about the engagement ring as a dream come true. She wishes to serve nothing, but him during her entire life, to give herself to him completely, to be glorified in his shining glory.
5. *Helf mir, ihr Schwestern (Help Me, Sisters)* sings about the joy of dressing up to be a bride, a joy that she wishes to share with everybody. She closes the door on her childhood so that she can dedicate herself to her marriage with the beloved man.
6. *Süsser Freund, du blickest (Sweet Friend, You Gaze)*. The man cannot understand how the woman can cry in such a joyful moment. But she imagines a cradle next to her bed in which the dream will sometime wake up and from which the face of the beloved man will laugh at her.
7. *An meinem Herzen, an meinem Brust (At My Heart, At My Breast)*, are the words the mother utters when embracing her baby. This song reflects the increasing joy, a joy only a mother can feel while feeding her baby. She feels sorry for the man, since he cannot feel a mother's joy. He just watches her and smiles.
8. *Nun, hast du mir den Schmerz gethan (Now You Have Caused Me Pain for the First Time)* in the closing song of the cycle, after singing about so many joyful things a *sforzando* chord tears apart the beautiful dream with a painful cry. The beloved man died. Everything is meaningless. The woman, left behind, stares blankly, her veil falls and she only seems to be alive. She retreats to her own self, to her inner world and takes refuge in her memories.

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In this song cycle Schumann creates interesting formal, tonal and harmonic formations. Let us sum them up in the following table:

**Table no. 1**

No. 1	<i>Sehn ich ihn gesehen</i>	<b>Intro Addition in A Addition in A Codetta</b>	Bistrophic (In two parts)
No. 2	<i>Er der Herlichste von Allen</i>	<b>Intro Trans A Trans A B Av1 C Trans Cv1 Av2 Coda</b>	Extended classic rondo
No. 3	<i>Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben</i>	<b>A B Av1 Trans A Coda</b>	A BAR form with reprise in mirror with coda, but it can be also interpreted as an extended song with coda
No. 4	<i>Du Ring an meinem Finger</i>	<b>A B A C Av Coda</b>	Classic rondo

No. 5	<i>Helf mir, ihr Schwestern</i>	<b>Intro A B A Trans C Av Coda</b>	Classic rondo with introduction and coda
No. 6	<i>Süsser Freund, du blickest</i>	<b>Intro A Addition in A Trans B (internal addition) Trans A1 Codetta</b>	A BAR form with reprise with introduction and coda
No. 7	<i>An meinem Herzen, an meinem Brust</i>	<b>Intro A Av1 Av2 Av3 Coda</b>	Theme with variations, introduction and coda
No. 8	<i>Nun, hast du mir den Schmerz gethan</i>	<b>A B (= Av from the 1st song of the cycle)</b>	Bistrophic (In two parts)

Since this is a cycle of songs, one would believe strophic forms have priority, but the composer in some cases is very much inclined to use thematic forms. Thus the 2nd song turns into a rondo extended with stanza repetitions, while the 4th and the 5th songs turn into classic rondos (with or without an introduction and with a coda). Also the theme with variations, introduction and coda appears in the 7th song. Two songs have the BAR form and another two are bistrophic (they have two parts). Formally the most complex is the 2nd song (*Er der Herlichste von Allen*) – the classic rondo extended with stanza repetitions.

Tonally, songs 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8 use exclusively keys in flat. The 2nd song visits for a short time the sharp part of the circle of fifths creating thus an interesting formation as a descending, gradual modulation. The song descends from A major to D major and G major, then C major, F major, B major and E flat major. The central C major is surrounded symmetrically by 3+ and 3- major keys. The following lyrics are illustrated with a tonal reflection, this descending modulation formation taking us through 7 keys: *Should my heart break, Break away, heart that is no extraordinary thing!* Or translated slightly differently: *Even if my heart breaks. What are you waiting for, my heart?* Songs 6 and 7 are songs of complete and undisturbed happiness. In these songs the composer uses in the greatest part tonality from the sharp part of the circle of fifths, i.e. these are mostly major keys. In these two songs Schumann uses few keys, therefore they have a unitary tone, yet these few tonalities interchange rapidly.

While the feeling of complete happiness is expressed in the 7th song of this composition in D major, a key called even by André Grétry (1741-1813), the great Belgian composer of the 18th century, one of the great masters of the French comedy opera as a “shiny key”. Schumann illustrates the first part of the 8th song, where the beloved man dies with a melancholic D minor. One needs to think only of Mozart's Requiem in order to realize that Schumann also was familiar with the ethos of the keys and therefore it is not by chance that he used D minor and not another key. Formally the **B** part of the 8th song winds up the entire cycle returning to part **A** of the first song as

a variation. The keys are also similar: B major (a noble and pathetic key) and the also pathetic C minor (see the op. 13 *Pathétique* piano sonata by Beethoven). The noble and pathetic B major is also the basic key of the 5th song, where the girl in love dresses her wedding gown helped by her sisters. Out of the 52 measures of this song only 4 are in minor. All the other are measures in the noble, shiny major key.

The E flat major key, which is the basic key of the 4th song (*You Ring Upon My Finger*) is also a noble and pathetic key. The continuous tonal cycle is a musical symbol of the ring.

Schumann creates a typically Romanticist mistune with a link to a major third and a wonderful effect in measures 40-41 of the 5th song, where he modulates from B major to G flat major. This is the moment when the bride leaves her sisters after dressing up:

**E.g. 1**

Streu et ihm, Schwestern, streu et ihm Blu - men, briu - get ihm knospende Ro - sendar.

A - bereuch, Schwestern, grüss' ich mit Weh - muth, freu - dig scheidend aus eu - rer Schaar, freu - dig scheidend aus

ritard. - a tempo

ritard. - a tempo

A table of the keys used in each song:

**Table no. 2**

No. 1	<i>Sehn ich ihn gesehen</i>	B major
No. 2	<i>Er der Herlichste von Allen</i>	E flat major
No. 3	<i>Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben</i>	C minor
No. 4	<i>Du Ring an meinem Finger</i>	E flat major
No. 5	<i>Helf mir, ihr Schwestern</i>	B major
No. 6	<i>Süsser Freund, du blickest</i>	G major
No. 7	<i>An meinem Herzen, an meinem Brust</i>	D major
No. 8	<i>Nun, hast du mir den Schmerz gethan</i>	D minor / B major

So, only two songs out of the full 8 have minor keys. The 3rd song (C minor) where the girl cannot grasp the fact that her lover chose her from among all the girls and the first part of the last song where death takes her beloved one.

Every song of the cycle contains some interesting chord. Only a few will be enumerated in the following:

- in measure 18 of the 3rd song an interesting geometrical chord is created in the basic key. This is a chord created based on a 4-2-4 minor second by which the composer modulates from C minor to B major:

**E.g. 2**

The image shows a musical score for the 3rd song of Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. The tempo marking is "Etwas langsamer." and the dynamics are marked with a piano (*p*) symbol. The score is in C minor, indicated by three flats in the key signature. The lyrics are "Mir war's, er ha-be ge-spro-chen". The score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. A bracket on the right side of the piano part indicates a specific chord structure in measure 18, which is a 4-2-4 minor second chord, used for modulation from C minor to B major.

- already in the 2nd measure of the 6th song (*Süsser Freund, du blickest*) Schumann creates a special musical effect by superimposing two different functions in G major. In the bass register of the piano this is a tonal 1st degree and the composer superimposes on this a chord of second of dominant function in the 5th degree:

**E.g. 3**

The image shows a musical score for the 6th song of Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. The tempo marking is "Langsam, mit innigem Ausdruck." and the dynamics are marked with a piano (*p*) symbol. The score is in G major, indicated by one sharp in the key signature. The lyrics are "Sü - sser Freund,". The score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. A bracket on the right side of the piano part indicates a specific chord structure in the bass register, which is a superimposition of two different functions in G major: a tonal 1st degree and a chord of second of dominant function in the 5th degree.

The initial D minor triad of the 8th song goes right through the heart of the listener with a *sforzato*, emphasizing the fifth in the sung voice immediately after the closing D major triad of the previous song.

## E.g. 4

## End of the 7th song

Musical score for the end of the 7th song. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a *ritard.* marking and two asterisks below the staff.

## Beginning of the 8th song

Musical score for the beginning of the 8th song. The score is in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Adagio.* and the lyrics are "Nun hast du mir den".

Until the symmetric axis the 8th song unfolds as a recitativo secco, the tune takes up the rhythm of the spoken word. It is full of minor seconds, while in the accompanying harmonies the tune is dominated gradually by the seventh chord and its reversals. Bitonality is present here as well, already in the 7th measure:

## E.g. 5

Musical score for E.g. 5. The score is in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "den To - des - schlaf.".

On the basic note and octave of the D minor chord of 1st degree in the bass Schumann superimposes a four-three chord of 7th degree in G minor.

In the 22nd measure (which is the symmetry axis of the song) Schumann makes a meaningful musical gesture leaving open the recitativo full of seconds on the D minor dominant chord of the 5th degree (!) by using a hold and after a double bar line, accidentals and a change in meter (from 4/4 to 3/4) he continues from the dominant seventh chord of the B major key repeating the introductory segment of the 1st song as a variation symbolizing the fact that the young woman continues to live on gaining strength from her memories and winding up thus compositionally the cycle of 8 songs.

"Everything that happens in the world has an effect on me... Then I feel an urge to put my feelings into music" – says Robert Schumann<sup>2</sup>. In this cycle of songs Schumann transposes to music his feelings related to an important moment of his own life thinking about what would happen should faith part him with his beloved wife of whom he would like to think as being eternally faithful to him.

*Translated from Hungarian by Danel Zsuzsa*

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