

MUSICAL SENSIBILITY OF THE BALLADIC IN THE LIEDS OF FRANZ SCHUBERT: *ERLKÖNIG*, OP. 1

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SUMMARY. In those almost 600 Lieds of Franz Schubert, a serious number of them are composed on the verses that belong to Goethe. The clearness of the thoughts that are expressed into Goethe's poems, the accuracy of the expressing, the deep feeling of which they are penetrated, all these things gave a deciding impulse to the creation that belongs to Schubert. The Lied *Erkönig* was composed in 1815. At that time, Franz Schubert was 18 years old. In his creation, this work is numbered with Opus 1, even if this Lied is not his first written creation. The first edition is from 1821. This study presents an analysis of this work.

Keywords: Franz Schubert, *Erkönig*, ballad, form, structure, harmony, analysis, Lied, musical sensibility

The genre **ballad** in the literature area represents an epic poem, a narrative one that is relied on the historical, heroically, legendary, fantastical themes, having a root that is deeply anchored into the folklore. Usually, there are anonymous and collective creations in the same time, their shape is a little reduced than those that belongs to the epical poems, they do not have the character belonging to a fresco that do characterize these creations. The origin of the ballad is somewhere in the Middle Ages, it initially meant a song that came together with a dance. The name came from the French language—*ballade* (dance) and from the Italian language, too - *ballata* (dance), - *ballare* (to dance).

The ballad *Erkönig* of Johann Wolfgang Goethe is a part of the poem in verse *Die Fischerin*, being composed in the year 1782. In his scenically notes, the author introduce his opera in the following terms: "On the banks of a river, under the tall alder trees, here and there, there are fishermen cottages; night time, silence. On a small fire, pots, around it, nets, tools for fishing. Dortchen (is working and she sings in the same time): «Wer reitet so spät...»"

As a scenically conception, the ballad *Erkönig*, can be compared with *Gretchen am Spinnrade* D. 118 (op. 2, 1814, Goethe). Both the women characters are occupied with a tedious, manual work, meanwhile, they sing with a genuine calmness in their attitude.

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The musical work *Erlkönig* by Franz Schubert is under the shape of a chain-structure, the musical content is closely to the poetic text. So, with its constructive aspect of some cubs, we can find the following constituents:

1) On the one hand, there is the rhythmical background of one continuous pulsation; this is materialized by an *ostinato* of triplets which are persistent from the first to the last but two measures, where it is dissolved into a **Recitative**. This rhythmical background has the role of creating the atmosphere of an inner tension of the Lied, but, meanwhile, it creates an onomatopoeic effect, suggesting the whistling of the wind, and the continuous movement of the two real characters, the tragically ones: the father and the children. The typical accompaniment is under the shape of some repeated chords.



This accompaniment is changed only in the stanzas where Erlkönig intervenes into the discourse:



In the 5th stanza, the alternating of the ascendant and descendent arpeggios from the piano part, it suggests, in a very plastically manner, the word *wiegen* (to swing), from the poetic text.

This rhythmical-harmonically pulsation assures the compositional **continuity**. The piano accompaniment is not made into stanzas. The two interventions from above that belong to Erlkönig can be considered as sections from the allure of the couplet from the rondo form, the literary stanza no. 8th became *Coda* (as the shape of the ballad is analyzed by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau). But, in our opinion, the folding of the shape on the rondo pattern is a little bit exaggerated. To this exaggeration is opposed, on the one hand,

the continuity that is suggested by the accompaniment even in those sections in which the profile of ostinato is changed, on the other hand, the stanzas **in a chain** that belongs to the vocal part. The music is subordinated to the literary text, following by its modalities and expressive resources, the formal and the tribal ones to make the poetic text as graphically as possible.

2) Above this rhythmical-harmonically background there are overridden three leitmotif elements:

a) **the ridding motif** (the name was taken from Dietrich Fischer Dieskau)



Ex. 4

As an important aspect to this motif, we can notice the fact that it always appears in the low register; his melodically profile, during the Lied, embodies the following shapes:

Ex. 5



Putting all these variants together, we can notice that the motif is under three variation procedures:

1. The transposition of the initial pattern, without any modify from the melodically profile. (See the variants **g** and **h**).
2. The varied transposition and the replacing of the cell **y** by a pedal sound (see the variants **b**, **e**, **f**) that follows the successive order of the **x** cell, without refolding it.
3. The transposition and the variation of the cell **y** by the interval broadening (see the variants **c** and **d**).

The above motif points the *Introduction*, the accompaniment of the stanzas 1 and 2, the transition towards the 7th stanza, and the accompaniment of the last stanza, the 8th one.

In the moment of the positive golden section of the Lied, this leitmotif is taken in a varied form by the vocal party (**a unique case all over the Lied!**)

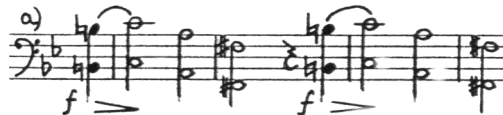
Ex. 6



b) from the intervals diminishing and from the rhythmical augmentation of the cell *y*, of the *Motif of the riding*, Schubert obtains other two leitmotifs:

- **one of the dramatic emphasis**

Ex. 7



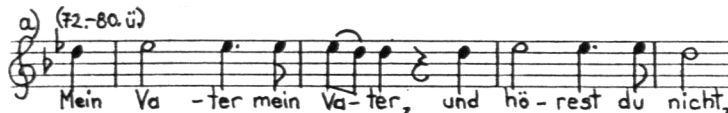
This motif is used only as a harmonically support. It appears only by three times, following a gradual evolution to a great, first by the transposition to an ascendant major second, then, by the transposition, to a minor, superior third. The gradation is serving, in this particular case to the dramatically end in order to intensify the tension. It can be met in the 4th, 6th, and 7th stanzas.

Ex. 8



- c) The **suffering motif** (or the motif of the blurred cry)

Ex. 9



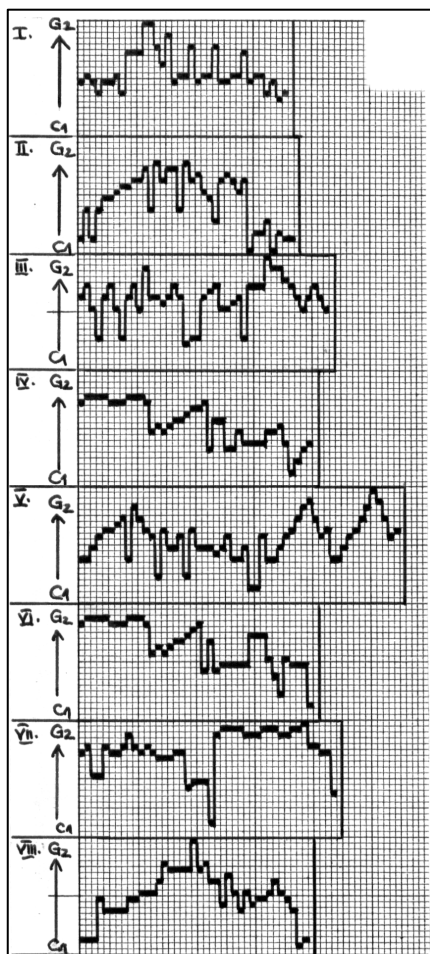
It appears every time in the overlapping of the previous motif, only in a vocal party. It suggests, in a very plastic manner, the sobbing cry of the child, who addressing his father:

Ex. 10

b) (97.-105.ü)
Mein Va - ter mein Va - ter, und siehst du nicht dort,
c) (123.-134.ü)
Mein Va - ter mein Va - ter, jetzt fasst er mich an!

We have to notice in here the fact that Schubert uses a symbolist of the intervals. So, from the examples from the above, it results that the characteristic interval of the child in this Lied is the **minor second!**

In order to visualize as suggestive as possible the melodically profile of the sung voice we can propose the projecting of the pitch levels on a millimetric paper:



Ex. 11

From this graphic, there can be clearly seen the similarity, as a general profile, of the **stanzas 4th and the 6th** - they both constitute a visible fall, a diagonal that comes down from the left, superior corner towards the right, inferior corner. We put, as a dramatic parallelism the text of these stanzas:

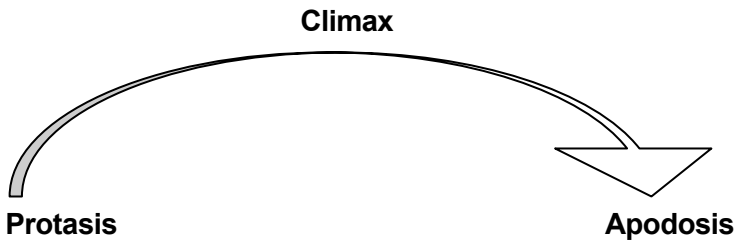
*„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörst du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?
Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.—*

*Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?
Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich sehe es genau;
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.—*

- **The 7th stanza**—it offers us the upside-down image of the 6th stanza (so, the verses 1. and 2./6th are corresponding to the lines 3 and 4/ 7th and the lines 3 and 4/6th corresponds to the lines 1 and 2/7th).

An identical corresponding can be made between the 7th and the 4th stanzas. The difference relies on the fact that the 7th stanza is melodically constantly maintained in the superior part of the graphic, it has only two brusque fallings. However, in its own way, it is unique. It has similarities with other stanzas, meanwhile, it keep its individuality.

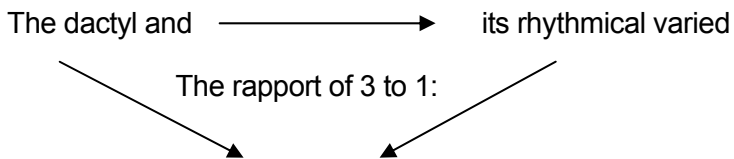
- **The 1st, the 2nd and the 7th stanzas**—all the three of them suggests the visual expression of a cliff, following the constructive law:



- **The 3rd and the 5th stanzas** bring visible similarities in their profile. In the 5th stanza, Schubert uses the repetition of the line “*und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein*”. In the original literary text, this repetition does not exist. By the repetition of the text, the only melodically variation is represented by the rising of the climax with a major second. This line represents, as we had already said, the taking over, in the vocal party, of **the riding motif**, so, the positive golden section of the Lied.

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The vocal part does not bring with it heavy intonations. Among the rhythmical formulas, the most frequent are:



The rhythmical structure follows the accents of the metrical prosody.

The only exceptional division from the vocal part comes in the 3rd stanza, the 2nd line, where Schubert overlaps the verb “*spielen*” (*to play with*) to a triplet whose melodically line can be added to the turn (“*Doppelschlag*”).



Ex. 12

In a comparative analyze of the range of the melodically line of the stanzas, we can notice that they have in a great part, intervals in ninth and tenth. However, in the second part of the Lied, **following the dramatic tension**, Schubert extends, step by step, this range, in the 7th stanza, it touches the eleventh, and, in the last stanza, it touches the twelfth.

Ex. 13



The order of the apparition of the tonalities and the number of the measures which they occupy are the following:

Ex. 14

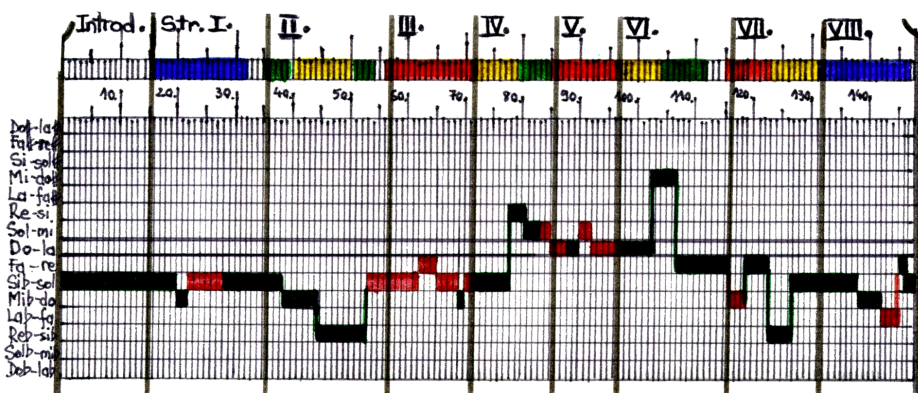
1.	<i>G minor</i>	48,75 measures
2.	<i>C minor</i>	13,50 "
3.	<i>B♭ major</i>	21 "
4.	<i>B♭ minor</i>	12 "
5.	<i>F major</i>	3 "
6.	<i>B minor</i>	2,75 "
7.	<i>E minor</i>	2,25 "
8.	<i>G major</i>	4 "
9.	<i>C major</i>	8 "
10.	<i>A minor</i>	7,50 "
11.	<i>C# minor</i>	4,50 "
12.	<i>D minor</i>	14 "
13.	<i>E♭ major</i>	3 "
14.	<i>A♭ major</i>	3,75 "
	As a TOTAL	148 measures

Quantifying the tonalities, there is a semantically proportionally. So, the *G minor* key is present in 48.75 measures and it has a grand correlation of great quantity (21 measures) with the related key - *B major*.

The following significant key is *D minor*, it has inside 14 measures. In the same frame, a quantitative importance has the key *C minor* (13.50 measures) and *B♭ minor* (12 measures). The other keys has a pointing role, their apparition is resumed to a small amount of the measures.

From the evolution of the keys on the circle of the fifths (see the example 15) we can notice the apogee of the modulator ascension is represented by the key *C # minor* (6th stanza), while the abyssal of the tune directing corresponds to the tune *B b minor* (the 2nd stanza). In both cases, the protagonist of the speech is the child.

Ex. 15



There is a special equilibrium in the distribution of the sonorous space for each of the characters. The narrator dominates the first and the last stanza belongs to Erlikönig - the 3rd and the 5th stanza; and the dialogues between the father and the son took place in the 2nd, in the 3th and the 6th stanzas. The 7th stanza brings the legendary face of the old king and of the young child that is kidnapped from this life.

Legend:

- = The Narrator
- = The Father
- = The Child
- = Erlikönig
- = minor keys
- = major keys

The keys that are represented on the characters:

<p>The Narrator:</p> <p>The 1st stanza: <i>g-c-Bb-g</i></p> <p>The 8th stanza: <i>g-c-Ab-d-g</i></p>	<p>The Child:</p> <p>The 2nd stanza: <i>c-bb</i></p> <p>The 4th stanza: <i>g-b</i></p> <p>The 6th stanza: <i>a-c#</i></p> <p>The 7th stanza: <i>bb-g</i></p>
<p>The Father:</p> <p>The 2nd stanza: <i>g-c</i> <i>bb-Bb</i></p> <p>The 4th stanza: <i>b-e-G</i></p> <p>The 6th stanza: <i>c#-d</i></p>	<p>The King:</p> <p>The 3rd stanza: <i>Bb-F-Bb-c-Bb</i></p> <p>The 5th stanza: <i>C-a-G-C</i></p> <p>The 7th stanza: <i>Eb-d</i></p>

From the table above, there is that in the king's discourse there are dominating the major keys (light-colored). This fact is very significant, since, in the Lied, the largest space of the measures is occupied by the minor key with flats. (See ex. no. 15)

Looking at the relations semantically-esthetical that are between the text and the music at the level of the stanzas, and that of the background for the tragic, the symbols of the keys proposes a *G minor*.

- *G minor*, taking into consideration the ethos of the keys, it represents the lonely pain, the desperation, the lack of any hope. For Mozart, *G minor* is one of the tunes which express in a musical way, the dramatic and the tragic.

“...the scale ***G minor*** is the most pathetically except for ***F minor***—as Grétry² said.

“*G minor*, the **discontent** and the **indisposition**, the **unfortunate** for **an unaccomplished plan**, the **gnashing of the teeth** of the **discouraging**, in one word: **anger**, and **sickness**”³.

The main tonality of the Lied *Erlkönig* is *G minor*. Due to the Classical tradition, *G minor* is the beginning and the end tonality of the work. From the amount of 148 measures, 48.75 are written in *G minor* key.

So, the 1st and the 8th stanzas, the narrator starts and ends his speech in this key. We can come across with *G minor* at the beginning of the 2nd stanza, when the words of the father are coming:

“*Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?*”

In *G minor*, also, can be heard the cry of the child in the 4th stanza:

“*Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht?
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?*”

The last words of the child, before he died, are in *G minor*, too:

“*Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids gethan*”.

*

The following key with the greatest frequency regarding the number of the dominating measures is in *B ♭ major*.

“***B ♭ major***, **serene love**, **clean thought**, **hope and the wish of a better world**”—as Schubart⁴ says.

² Rolland, Romain, *Grétry*, in: *Călătorie în țara muzicii (A Travel in the Land of Music)*, Ed. Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, 1964, p. 216-141

³ Schubart, Ch. Fr. D., *Characterul expresiv al tonalităților (The expressive character of the keys)*, In: *O istorie a muzicii universale (A History of the Universal Music)*, Ed. Muzicală, București, 1983, p. 323-328.

⁴ Idem.

“the scale **B flat** is a noble one, but less noble than **C major** and more pathetic than **F major**”.

In *Erlkönig*, the following line from the 1st stanza is in *B \flat* :

The narrator: “*Er hat den Knabel wohl in den Arm*”

It symbolizes the hug, a gesture of love.

B \flat major dominates almost the entire 3rd stanza, sustaining the words of the king, in a tonal way:

“*Du **liebes Kind**, komm geh mit mir!*

(...)

*manch **bunte Blumen** sind an dem Strand.*”

(The underline that appears in the text belongs to us, wishing to highlight the concordance between the tonal ethos and the expressive sense of the literary verse).

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D minor keeps an important dramatic role in the context. It appears in the 6th stanza. In *D minor* there are the words of the father:

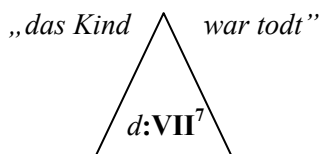
“*es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau*”

And the words that are uttered by Erlkönig:

“*und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt*”.

Both of them address to the child in this part. It is the demonic itself the climax of the confrontation between the real and the fantastic.

In the tonality *D minor*, there is a sonorous “depth” the chord a *fermata* from the final *Recitative* (the last but one measure of the Lied). The chord is interwoven between the words that belong to the narrator:



It is sufficient to think at the *Requiem* of Mozart in order to realize the character of the keys in *D minor*.

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As a continuation we can see the unique presence of 3 keys of a light color: (*F major*, *C major*, *E \flat major*). It is not by the chance that all the three keys agree with the words of the king.

F major: (see the VIth *Symphony “Pastoral”*, op. 68 by Beethoven). Schubart characterizes the key *F major* by “*amiability and calmness*”⁵.

⁵ Schubart, Ch., Fr., D., *op. cit.*, p. 323-328.

In these lines, the king speaks to the child in the following lines:

“gar schöne Spiele spiel ich mit dir”

C major: in the 5th stanza, it appears as a scordatura to the major superior second versus the *B ♭ major* of the 3rd stanza.

*“The scale C major is noble and opened”*⁶

Erlkönig in this *C major* tells the following words:

*“Willst, feiner Knabe du mit mir gehn? (...)
und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein”.*

*

E ♭ major: *“it is the tonality of the love, the pious recollection, the intimate conversation with God, the three flats suggests the Holy Trinity.”*⁷

“E ♭ major is noble and pathetic”.⁸

In this Lied, this key comes with the following words that belong to Erlkönig:

“Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schone Gestalt”.

*

The total number of the modulations from this work is 29. From these, **3** are **diatonic**, **21** are **chromatic**, **0** - **enharmonic** and **5** are made by a **tonal leap**.

All over the Lied we can come across with moments of a crushing dissonance, if we compare the frame of the incipient romanticism where the work is cataloged in. The following example is a proof for this:

Ex. 16

(97.-99.ü.)

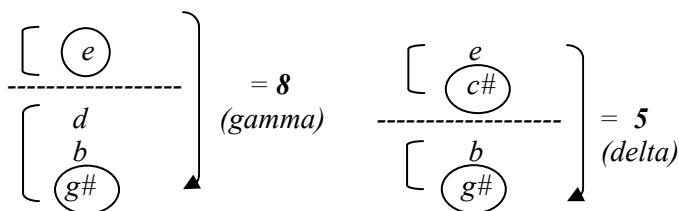
Mein Va - ter mein Va - ter

In the same measure there are overlapping three close sounds *D-E-F!* Putting together the notes of this motif, taking into consideration the conception of the modern harmony, there appear two geometrical chords (non-gravitational ones):

⁶ Rolland, Romain, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁷ Schubart, Ch., Fr., D., *idem*

⁸ Rolland, Romain, *idem*



From the rapport 8 and 5 (so, minor sixth and a perfect fourth) that are formed between the sounds of the two levels—the inferior and the superior one - there comes **two chords: gamma and delta**. The descendant arrow indicates the fact that these two chords (geometrical ones) can be analyzed starting from up to down, opposing the gravitational ones which are analyzed in reverse, from down to up. The rapport that exists between the main sounds of the two layers (in the case of the gravitational ones - 4, 7, 10, 13, - and in the case of the geometrical ones - 2, 5, 8, 11 - they correspond to the chords that are called - *epsilon, delta, gamma, beta*).

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The Lied's expressively is penetrated by **the tragic**, with some **demonical** implications; they all are presented in a **gracious manner**.

The concentration of the drama in the works with small dimensions and outnumbered (let's think of the almost 600 Lieds), in other words, the adoption of the **miniature** style by the author, it reflects that side of the life which is powdered into small things, (in seminars at the primary schools, and in so many other...).

The dramatic existence that is specific to the vocal creations, of large dimensions, - the opera, and the musical drama - which was thought of by Schubert himself, there are seeds of the work Op.1 - *Erlkönig*.

But the big things did not bring him any success. Only the hearing of the name is enough to make an immediate connection with no doubts:

SCHUBERT = THE LIED

This is HE, the man whose tragic being is, in the same time, a lyrical, epical, dramatically, tragically, demonical, miniature and gracious, sublime human being.

(Translated from Romanian by Maria Cozma)

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