MTNA 2017 National Conference / March 18-22, 2017 Poster Presenter: Ah Young Kim / ahykimkim@gmail.com

Title: A Guide to Franz Liszt's Piano Transcriptions of Franz Schubert's Songs

Franz Liszt (1811–1886) made fifty-six transcriptions of Schubert's songs over a period of eight years (1838–46) to introduce the name of the composer, who was little known both in and outside Vienna during his lifetime. Because Liszt intentionally preserved all the details of the original songs, these transcriptions present challenges for a pianist, such as how to produce a vocal line on the piano, as well as interpretive issues such as ornamentation, style, and conveying the meaning of the lyrics on the piano. The purpose of this presentation is to introduce pianists to study practices employed by singers, with the goal of interpreting the vocal aspects of Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions.

Many prominent vocal pedagogues, including Cornelius L. Reid,<sup>3</sup> Appelman,<sup>4</sup> and Richard Miller,<sup>5</sup> consider that control of the breath is vitally important for supported singing.<sup>6</sup> Although breathing is essential for singing, it is easy for pianists to overlook the importance of breathing, because that is not a primary factor in physically producing sound on the piano. Nevertheless, it is critically important that pianists studying Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions for the first time acquire an understanding of breathing in order to interpret the vocal aspects of his transcriptions. Breathing helps pianists to understand the direction of a phrase, as well as to maintain its continuity in legato.

It is crucial that pianists study the notated ornaments of Schubert's songs in order to distinguish the original vocal ornamentation from Liszt's pianistic ornamentation. An understanding the vocal performance practices helps pianists to recreate vocal qualities on the piano.

Schubert's most remarkable accomplishment is to match the musical line to the text, and he used speaking style as a compositional method for dramatic effects. Liszt marked expression marks (e.g., *parlante*) and various notations (e.g., staccato with slur) to indicate speaking style, but this alone does not guide pianists in how to interpret speaking style on the piano.

Although Liszt encouraged publishers to print the song text above the staff, the text does not offer any guidelines on how to transfer the vocal interpretation to the piano. A study of the original song text from a vocal point of view helps pianists to reflect the style of the language and to deliver the meaning of the text on the piano.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Liszt's song transcriptions also widened his own repertoire. Alan Walker, "Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions," Introduction to *Franz Liszt: The Schubert Song Transcriptions for Solo Piano, Series III* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), ix.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Alan Walker, "Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions," *Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (winter 1991): 249–51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Cornelius L. Reid, *The Free Voice: A Guide to Natural Singing* (New York: Joseph Patelson Music House, 1972), 160–69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> D. Ralph Appelman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy: Theory and Application* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 10–11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "In the beginning there was Breath and Singing was with Breath and Singing was Breath. And all Singing was made by the Breath and without Breath was not any Singing made that was made." Robert C. White, "On the Teaching of Breathing for the Singing Voice," *Journal of Voice* 2, no. 1 (March 1988): 26.

The composer Robert Schumann once remarked that Liszt's transcriptions were perhaps the most difficult pieces written for the piano up to that time, and only an intelligent artist could satisfy Liszt's high level of virtuosity without destroying the identity of the original work. This could be considered a warning to pianists not to focus on the technical aspects only. The pedagogical guide presented in the study, based on singers' approaches to the actual songs, should help pianists to "see beyond the notes" and achieve a performance closer to the heart of the songs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 154–55.

# A GUIDE TO FRANZ LISZT'S PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS OF FRANZ SCHUBERT'S SONGS

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Schubert's songs over a period of eight years (1838-46). Franz Liszt (1811–1886) made fifty-six transcriptions of

### Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions are faithful to the vocal materials of the original songs

When Liszt published his song transcriptions, he showed his respect for the original works by printing the song text above

profested that this was useless and that the transcriptions must be printed with the words underlying the notes—exactly as Schubert himself had set them—a request that was eventually carried out. When Diabelli brought out the first batch of twelve transcriptions, in 1838, he printed the poems separately inside the front covers. Liszt at once

original work when transcribing the songs for piano. A critic wrote about Liszt's ability to help a singer to interpret songs iszt's experience with singers helped him to preserve the more effectively (Liszt, 52):

performed by Liszt and Adolphe Nourrit... But then, who but Liszt could follow the singer through all the nuances of his interpretation and instill To fully understand all that is moving, terrifying, and uncanny in Erlkönig, one has to hear that celebrated ballad by Goethe and Schubert his playing with an energy and power that doubled that terror the

Altogether in his song transcriptions, Liszt used many more I canto (the song), parlante (speaking), and voce (voice). expression marks, including especially

audience felt when hearing the cries of the doomed child?

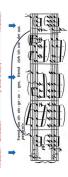
1. How to produce a vocal line on the piano

How to convey the meaning of the lyrics on the piano How to interpret ornaments and speaking style

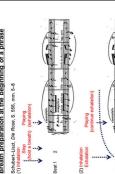
### **Methods and Application**

Breathing for phrasing 1. BREATHING

Schubert-Liszt, Gute Nacht, S. 561, No. 1, mm. 7-11



## Sreath preparation at the beginning of a phrase



Schubert-Liszt, Ave Maria, S. 558, No. 12, m. 3

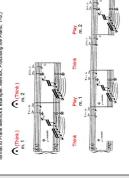
Humming for legato singing



# Mental concentration for breath-planning with inner

Correct: ah

Schubert-Liszt, Meeresstille, S. 558, No. 5, mm. 1-2 (It follows a similar format to Frank Merrick's example. Merrick, Practising the Piano, 1-5.)



### 2. ORNAMENTATION

performed on the beat. An appoggiatura takes the entire A small ornamental note should often be stressed and value of the note it decorates, the following note being unaccented (Neue Ausgabe). Appoggiatura

Schubert, Frühlingsglaube, D. 686, No. 7, m. 18 Schubert-Liszt, Frühlingsglaube, S. 558, No. 7, m. 18



generally begin on the beat (Howard Ferguson, 119-24). Nineteenth-century trills start on the main note and

Frill (shake)

Schubert, Das Fischermädchen, D. 957, No. 10, mm. 22–23 Schubert-Liszt, Das Fischermädchen, S. 560, No. 2, mm. 22–23





frill options, Schubert-Liszt, Das Fischermädchen, S. 560, No. 2, m. 22

### Application of parlando style

Schubert, Der Leiermann, D. 911, No. 24, mm. 9–10 Schubert–Liszt, Der Leyermann, S. 561, No. 8, mm. 9–10



PA, Schubert, Der Leiermann, D. 911, No. 24, mm. 9-10 (Glass, 965) Drüben hinterm Dorfe steht ein Leiermann Yonder behind the village stands an organ-grinder, (Over there behind the village an organ-grinder is standing,)

hrnt'em

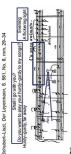
The mark means a stressed syllable

### Application of recitative

Change from monologue (narration) to dialogic (conversation) style Schubert-Liszt, Die Nebensonnen, S. 561, No. 2, mm. 15–20 Schubert-Liszt, Der Wanderer, S. 558, No. 11, mm. 5-9 Schubert-Liszt, Am Meer, S. 560, No. 4, mm. 12-17

### 4. TEXT COMPREHENSION

Use of pause and fermata for change of mood



Schubert-Liszt, Ihr Bild, S. 560, No. 8, mm. 20–24
Schubert-Liszt, Die Nebensonnen, S. 561, No. 2, mm. 14–17
Theatrical moments Schubert-Liszt, Der Wanderer, S. 558, No. 11, mm. 21–26 Schubert-Liszt, Der Leyermann, S. 561, No. 8, mm. 21-28

A pedagogical guide based on singers' approaches to the original songs helps to see Liszt's Schubert song transcriptions from a singer's viewpoint.

- understand the direction of a phrase, as well as to maintain its An understanding of breathing helps pianists to continuity in legato.
- of Schubert's songs in order to distinguish the original vocal It is crucial that pianists study the notated ornaments ornamentation from Liszt's pianistic ornamentation.
  - A study of speaking style is necessary for pianists to
- An understanding of the song text helps pianists to deliver the meaning of the text on the piano. match the musical line to the text.

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### **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to the members of my committee; Pamela Mia Paul, Stephen Dubberly, and Carol Wilson, as well as Dr. Ewia Puccinelli and Dr. David Lasocki.

