**Schubert’s *Winterreise.***

**Performance Considerations**

**Page 1: Which key?**

**Page 7: Schubert’s triplet figure – assimilation or not?**

**Page 10: Hairpins and wedges – reconsidering Schubert’s expression marks.**

**Page 14: The ‘Leiermann’ drone**

* **Which key?**

Five of the published songs in Schubert’s *Winterreise* are in different keys to those found in his autograph score. In all five songs the later transpositions are pitched lower, one whole tone. The one exception is ‘Einsamkeit’, where the transposition is down a minor third. What were the reasons for the transpositions and are there guidelines for performers in choosing the original or transposed versions? In examining a sample of available recordings by the foremost interpreters of the work, it is clear there is no definitive rule in reaching such a decision. It seems that each partnership must resolve the issue as best they can.

The table below sets out the results of a review of seven recordings that feature a tenor vocalist, the originally intended voice in Schubert’s autograph.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Wasserflut*** | ***Rast*** | ***Einsamkeit*** | ***Muth*** | ***Der Leiermann*** |
| **Schreier/Richter** | E minor | D minor | D minor | G minor | A minor |
| **Pears/Britten** | F# minor | D minor | D minor | A minor | B minor |
| **Padmore/Lewis** | F# minor | D minor | D minor | A minor | B minor |
| **Bostridge/Drake** | F# minor | D minor | B minor | A minor | B minor |
| **Pregardien/Staier** | E minor  | C minor | D minor | G minor | A minor |
| **Behle/Bjelland** | E minor | C minor | B minor | G minor | A minor |
| **Gura/Berner** | E minor | C minor | B minor | G minor | A minor |

As can be seen, there is little alignment in the choices made by these exceptional artists. Each partnership has arrived at their preferences based on criteria that they found compelling, as it must be for all interpreters preparing the work.

Generally, it could be said that Schubert favoured higher keys in his song settings and the reason for this is most likely a personal one. There is little doubt it is in Schubert’s Lieder that we glimpse the very essence of the composer and it is fair to say that, for the most part, he aligned his own tenor voice to the majority of his Lieder - it is his voice that sings them and in a key that would allow him to accompany himself at the pianoforte. It was argued by those who knew him that no one could sing them like Schubert himself[[1]](#footnote-1). However, as contemporary sources inform us, he had no objection to transposition and in his recitals with his favoured interpreter, Michael Vögl, he would gladly transpose at sight to accommodate his baritone voice.

This trend lends support to the case put forward by Susan Youens in her book *Retracing a Winter’s Journey*,[[2]](#footnote-2) that the revision of the five songs in *Winterreise* was primarily one encouraged, or perhaps demanded, by Schubert’s publisher Haslinger who, looking to optimise sales in the domestic market, thought that the tessitura and especially the high *a’’* in some of these songs would be beyond the capability of the amateur singer. In two of the five transposed songs, ‘Wasserflut’ and ‘Mut’, this seems the most likely reason. However, ‘Der Leiermann’, in its original higher key of Bm, does not sit overly high, the tessitura of the final phrase aside, perhaps. Similarly,‘Einsamkeit’, even in its original key of D minor, generally remains within the stave, making the choice of a transposition a minor third lower a curious one. The remaining song ‘Rast’ is a specific case, for it is the only one of the five transposed songs that has an instruction for transposition found in Schubert’s hand. (Ex. 1)



Ex 1.: Schubert’s handwritten (and underlined) instruction from his autograph for ‘Rast’ reads

 “NB: this is to be written in C minor”.

The other transpositions in Part I – ‘Wasserflut’ and ‘Einsamkeit’ bear no instructions on the autograph, whereas the transposition instructions in Part II (‘Mut’ and ‘Der Leiermann’) clearly indicated in red pencil, are in Haslinger’s hand. One presumes that this is due to the submission of the manuscripts to the publisher in separate batches. We do not know who performed the function of Schubert’s copyist and there are no surviving accounts of the communication between composer, copyist and publisher that might enlighten us as to the dialogue that ensued. All we can assume is that on instructions from Haslinger, the copyist – who was most likely in the employ of the publisher rather than the composer - produced the transpositions and Schubert, for whatever reason, did not object.

Of course, one is drawn to the case of key relationships in the cycle. Was there a tonal plan that Schubert envisaged and if so, how strong a role did it did this play in Schubert’s revision? A brief look at the compositional history of the cycle can assist with this.

As we know, Schubert did not originally conceive the cycle in its entirety but set the poetry as he encountered it, in distinct sections. In confirmation of this, Schubert writes *Fine* at the end of the twelfth song ‘Einsamkeit’!

The reason for this is that Müller’s texts were published in three stages. Twelve poems were published in *Urania:Taschenbuchauf das Jahr 1823*, which Schubert discovered late 1826 or early 1827 - Part I of his setting. While this publication was initially conceived as a stand-alone work, it soon became clear that Müller was dissatisfied with it, as ten more poems were published in March of 1823 in *Deutsche Blätter fur Poesie, Literatur, Kunst und Theatre*. Then, the complete cycle of poems, with the additions of ‘Die Post’ and ‘Täuschung’ were published in *Waldhornisten II* in 1824. We have no correspondence or contemporary commentary as to his reasons for adding to his original publication but it is fair to speculate that his dissatisfaction with Part I had much to do with a lack of resolution on the part of his wanderer, even if that resolve meant self-annihilation. For on its own, Part I ends much the same way as it had begun.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the poems of Part II, the reference to the initial betrayal contracts significantly. ‘Die Post’ holds on to the hope of being reunited, yet in songs 14 through to the end of the work only in ‘Täuschung’ and ‘Die Nebensonnen’ is there any reference to the beloved and even then, the reference has become less specific and more comprehensive in its human dimension. We know that Schubert came upon the *Urania* and *Deutsche Blatter* publications separately and that the discovery of the companion group of songs and the complete set in *Waldhornisten*, compelled him to complete the cycle.

The table below sets out the initial keys as notated in Schubert’s autograph with the later transpositions in brackets below.

**PART I**

 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Gute Nacht W/fahne g Tränen Erstarrung L/baum W/flut Auf d Flusse Rückblick Irrlicht Rast F/traum Einsamkeit

 Dm Am Fm Cm E F#m Em Gm Bm Dm A Dm

 (Em) (Cm) (Bm)

**PART II**

 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

 Post g Kopf Krähe L Hoffnung Im Dorfe s Morgen Täuschung W/weiser W/haus Mut N/sonnen L/mann

 Eb Cm Cm Eb D Dm A Gm F Am A Bm

 (Gm) (Am)

One notices immediately the dominance of minor keys, something not unexpected given the prevailing mood. Of those in major keys, ‘Der Lindenbaum’ and ‘Frühlingstraum’, summon up memories of happier times, with ‘Die Post’, ‘Letzte Hoffnung’ and ‘Täuschung’, an expression of hope. One might speculate regarding the close tonal link between ‘Frühlingstraum’and ‘Im Dorfe’. Perhaps it is the shared reference to ‘dreams’ in both songs; in ‘Im Dorfe’, of course, the hope of the former dream has all but evaporated. ‘Das Wirthshaus’, being in F major joins other Schubertian compositions in that key that speak of blessed repose and release from torments. Traditionally a pastoral key, we perceive an arcadian quality of peace and tranquillity in songs such as ‘Erlafsee’ (his first published song) and most notably in the masterly ‘Die junge Nonne’ which, while starting in F minor, magically moves to the major when the young nun sings:

“Nun .. im Herzen ist Friede, ist Ruh”

(“Now in my heart there is freedom and peace”)

The remaining song in a major key, *‘*Die Nebensonnen’, has the rhythm and feel of a weighty Sarabande and along with it, the elegance and nobility of that dance form. To an interpretation that, taking its cue from ‘Mut’, views our protagonist as enduring rather than succumbing, this movement has the effect of enhancing the ‘heroic’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The above survey, listing key choices by notable performing partnerships, indicates that there is no one persuasive argument in determining Schubert’s intentions. So, it seems, each partnership undertaking the cycle must make their choices as best they can. In doing so, today’s professional duo can disregard Haslinger’s objection to the high tessitura, a determination surely made on behalf of the contemporary amateur. Other considerations are more fluid and will, as the above survey shows, result in a variety of outcomes.

As an example of the various possibilities, I have traced below the thought processes that led to one particular set of choices.

**No.6‘Wasserflut’**

With Haslinger’s objection to tessitura put aside, we can entertain the reinstatement of the original key of F#m. The later transposition of ‘Wasserflut’ to E minor certainly produces a smooth and untroubled transition from the E major of ‘Der Lindenbaum’ and also to the following ‘Auf dem Flusse’, also in E minor. One might argue that this lacklustre orbit around the E tonality does not bear the mark of Schubert’s acute sensitivity to poetic meaning, especially when one considers Müller’s text in the latter part of ‘Der Lindenbaum’ -

“Nun bin ich manche Stunde entfernt von jenem Ort”

(“… I am now many hours away from that place”)

The key of Em following the E major of ‘Der Lindenbaum’ is hardly a reflection of this state of mind or place and one could be forgiven for expecting a tonality that was more oblique However, with regard to songs 5 and 7, there is a poetical relationship between the E major of ‘Der Lindenbaum’, into whose bark were carved the lovers’ names,

“Ich schnitt in seiner Rinde, so manches liebe Wort”

(“.. I carved in its bark so many loving words”)

and the E minor of ‘Auf dem Flusse’, where the wanderer carves the details of the death of the relationship in the hard ice of the river.

“In deiner Decke grab ich, mit einem spitzen Stein, den Namen meine Liebsten….”

(“On its surface I scratch, with a sharp stone, my beloved’s name ….”)

This tonal relationship would seem typical of Schubert’s acute sensitivity to his subject matter, yet the choice of E minor as the preferred key for the intervening song significantly diminishes the potency of this poetic idea.

**Wasserflut: Preferred key F#m**.

**No.10 ‘Rast’**

One is naturally drawn to respect Schubert’s handwritten instructions that are clearly set out in his autograph, although four of the seven partnerships in the above survey opt for the higher key of the original.

Of course, the reason for Schubert’s instruction is unknown. It may have been the result of a recommendation (or demand[[5]](#footnote-5) ) from Haslinger, given either verbally or via correspondence now lost. Clearly, in line with Haslinger’s supposed objection, it does expose the voice to a challenging *a”.* However, for sake of argument, let us assume that the re-allocation of key was solely Schubert’s idea. What might be his reasons for the change?

If one considers Part I as a stand-alone work, as Schubert originally did, the choice of D minor tends to pre-empt the allocation of that key to ‘Einsamkeit’, a choice that seems appropriate in completing the tonal cycle with which the work began. Now, of course, one can say that that is not a problem if ‘Einsamkeit’ also follows the later downward transposition - a premise I will challenge below. If one maintains the original D minor allocation for ‘Einsamkeit’, then there is a strong argument for Schubert opting for the key of C minor for ‘Rast’. The sequence of keys of C minor to A major also creates some ‘distance’ between the disturbing thoughts of the “wurm” at end of ‘Rast’ and the happy memories evoked as he falls asleep in ‘Frühlingstraume’.

**(‘Rast’: Preferred key Cmin)**

**No. 12 ‘Einsamkeit’**

Since Part I was originally composed as if it were a self-contained unit, the choice of D minor would seem a fitting one, as this key nicely draws a pleasing tonal arch over the unit. If this original tonality is maintained, the Dm-Am sequence of the first two songs ‘Gute Nacht’ and ‘Die Wetterfahne’ are mirrored palindromically in ‘Frühlingstraume’ (Amaj/Amin) and ‘Einsamkeit’. Even if Schubert’s tonal structure was reconsidered when he added Part II, the choice of B minor for ‘Einsamkeit’ seems an odd key with which to bind the A of ‘Frühlingstraume’ and the Eb major of ‘Die Post’.

Additionally, I also feel that one can make a case for the cycle still having a binary feel and so entertain the idea of a ‘pause’ following Part I. It becomes clear that, in the second part of the cycle, Müller’s wanderer puts aside the ready reference to the beloved. Here, his musings become more focused as he seems to move towards a resolution, even if that resolution is a grim one.

However, for me, the most compelling argument for maintaining the original key of Dm lies in the dramatic potential of the higher key. Why Schubert would initiate such a significant transposition - a third lower - seems unfathomable, as the lower key, when sung by a tenor voice, renders the more dramatic aspects of the song impotent. In particular, key words like “Stürme” and “ehland”, when sung in the lower key, are but a pale shadow of their original voicing.

**(‘Einsamkeit’: Preferred key Dm)**

**No. 24: ‘Der Leiermann’**

As mentioned above, ‘Der Leiermann’ in its original key of B minor would not seem to present adverse technical challenges to the *Hausmusik* market, so Haslinger’s objection on the grounds of tessitura, appears less compelling here. Nevertheless, the vocal leap in the final phrase can be daunting and may have been enough for him to demand its transposition to A minor.

However, there may have been another consideration that triggered the alteration rather than a purely commercial reason; one based upon artistic judgement and the desire to create a seamless pairing of the final two songs.

There is undoubtedly a strong bond between ‘Die Nebensonnen’ and ‘Der Leiermann’. The numinous vision that besets the wanderer in the penultimate song emanates from a world whose shadows could well conceal the figure of the old hurdy-gurdy man. It is an attractive notion that the wanderer’s glance takes in the beggar before hearing the first sound of his instrument; an idea that is made palpable when the tonal bond between the two songs is shared.

**(‘Der Leiermann’: Preferred key Am)**

**No. 22 ‘Mut’**

It is crucial to decide upon the preferred key for ‘Der Leiermann’, before an allocation for ‘Mut’. If A minor is chosen then the tonality of A could dominate the last three songs. As stated above, while this has potency as a shared key for the last two songs, that effect would surely be weakened if also allocated to ‘Mut’, as the text and musical character of ‘Mut’ presents such a unique and contrasting character to the tone of the final two songs. It’s overt display of defiance is a vital insight into the mind of the protagonist but is, in effect, parenthetical; a characteristic that is strengthened by the choice of an oblique key.

 **(‘Mut’: Preferred key Gm)**

* **Schubert’s triplet figure – assimilation or not?**

Allow me to preface this section with a quote from David Montgomery’s excellent book *Franz Schubert’s Music in Performance.[[6]](#footnote-6)*

”Over the course of some years, various musicians and editors have advanced suppositions to the effect that

1) Schubert’s notational capability was and remained inadequate for his true musical intentions;

2) that he was unsure how best to notate certain works; and

3) that his notation was often inexact and inconsistent.

These accusations have no basis in fact, for Schubert was far more painstaking about his notation than his reputation to date has allowed.”

While this statement refers to a range of instances, the notational anomaly that will be addressed here concerns the performance of mixed rhythmic figures that, if played as in score, present a combination that is impossible to execute and, as such, requires interpretation by the performer. Specifically let us address a prominent example in ‘Wasserflut’.

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Ex 2: Autograph score ‘Wasserflut’ b1-3

As notated by Schubert in his autograph and as represented in many printed scores, the RH triplet figure and the LH dotted figure present an impossible rhythm. With the coincidence of the third quaver of the triplet group and the semiquaver of the dotted figure, should the pianist (a) compromise the execution of the left hand by aligning it, as written, with the third triplet quaver, or (b) execute each rhythm exactly, so that the LH semi-quaver is delayed to follow the third note of the triplet. In short does one assimilate the two rhythm figures or not?

Esteemed artists have voiced strong opinions for both options and consequently, we find a variety of executions in the discography. Ultimately, it is incumbent upon artists to evaluate the available information so that a conclusion can be drawn that both aligns with the composer’s intentions and the performer’s musical intuition.

The history of this dilemma certainly precedes Schubert. There are tantalising passing remarks on the subject in some of the keyboard tutorials of the C18th and following. Quantz, on one hand, clearly stated that when such conflicting rhythms occurred, one should play them correctly as their individual rhythms demand. On the other hand, CPE Bach gave some leeway - at least for the aspiring player whose skills were in development - espousing an assimilation of the conflicting rhythms. Such opposing accounts were sure to cause confusion as time progressed.

In the Vienna of Schubert’s day, we still find instances of the conflict. There is some contention as to whether the annotations to Johann Baptiste Cramer’s *Etudes* are indeed by Beethoven or a forgery by Anton Schindler. They certainly are in the latter’s hand but could well have been dictated by or gleaned from the composer. Whatever the source, the annotation for the sixth study (Ex. 3) does indicate that there was at least one accepted practice of our current dilemma in the Vienna of the period:

*The rhythmic accent should fall on the first note of each triplet. Herewith, however, are the rhythmic configurations to be observed, which are sometimes longer, sometimes shorter: otherwise one would hear a false melodic progression. The movement is 4-voiced until the 15th measure.* Beethoven.[[7]](#footnote-7)



Ex 3: Johann Baptiste Cramer, Etude VI from Bk I.

The clarity in this instruction leaves little room for debate. It should be noted, however, that in the publishing practice of the time it was common for such notation to be aligned in score, so it should not be surprising that assimilation became the preferred option for those not in-the-know. However, for the professional musician, it seems clear that the performance practice, as stated in these annotations, demands a true independence of rhythm and therefore, in voicing. For confirmation that Beethoven would have indeed observed this practice, a custom that he would have imparted to his students, we have the following statement by no less a luminary than his pupil, Carl Czerny:

*When triplets are combined with dotted figures, the note following the dot should be played after the last note of the triplet.[[8]](#footnote-8)*

Much of the dissent for this procedure, particularly with Schubert’s intentions in *Winterreise*, stem from a section in song No 4, ‘Erstarrung’. (Ex. 4)

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Ex. 4: ‘Erstarrung’ bar 81

Here Schubert’s autograph shows a forced combination of the two figures with an implication that they should be assimilated. However, not only do we have the above sources supporting separation but also an overriding musical imperative that highlights the independent voice of the dotted figure as a contrast to the triplet figure, which is an accompanying motif throughout.

The debate continues to this day both in publications and in performers’ interpretations. For example, the *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe* chose to print the ‘Wasserflut’ figure in non-assimilatory notation (Ex.5), a decision that was meet with a critical response from no less an artist than Paul Badura-Skoda[[9]](#footnote-9), a long standing ‘assimilationist’.



Ex. 5: Editorial rendering of No.6 ‘Wasserflut’ in the *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe*

Badura-Skoda’s position is shared by such great musicians as Malcolm Bilson and others, while just as many are convinced ‘separatists’. Below are examples of the variances to be found in performances by some of the great Lieder duos over the past fifty years.

In his 1971 recording of *Winterreise* with baritone Hermann Prey, [Wolfgang Sawallisch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Sawallisch) had already adopted the practice as notated in the *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe,* an enterprise that commenced in 1965.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZSX4aybi7w>

However, Sviatoslav Richter, in his 1985 performance with tenor Peter Schreier, chose to assimilate. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j36N_BqEVOo>

Of the performers in the above survey only Bostridge/Drake and Gura/Berner choose to separate the rhythms, with Padmore/Lewis, Britten/Pears, Pregadien/Staier, Behle/Bjelland choosing to assimilate. Other notable performers favouring separation are Bär/Parsons, Bastin/Kniehs, Kaufmann/Deutsch, Fischer-Dieskau/Moore[[10]](#footnote-10).

* **Hairpins and wedges – reconsidering Schubert’s expression marks.**

The motivation to re-examine these expression marks arose on reading a section in the preface of Gerald Moore’s book *The Schubert Song Cycles[[11]](#footnote-11)* wherein he makes a case for interpreting Schubert’s wedge marking [˂] as a temporal rather than a dynamic symbol. While current practice would lead most performers to interpret such a symbol with a slight dynamic accent, Moore is suggesting that the effect should be rather that of an agogic delay, a mild rubato if you will. As perhaps the greatest collaborative pianist of the C20th, Gerald Moore had a unique intimacy with the songs of Franz Schubert and as a conduit for the composer, his musical intuition in rendering his scores cannot be underestimated.

His position on the subject was formed in part from observing the many incidences of coincidence of the wedge symbol with *fp* or *sf*. Believing that it was unlikely that Schubert’s inscription was a redundancy, he formed the opinion that each symbol had a distinct meaning. Other than that observation however, he cites no literature, correspondence or other tool of scholarship in support of this deduction. However, such is his experience of and advocacy for the composer’s oeuvre, that to dismiss his instincts without further investigation would be churlish. So, one is led to the interesting task of investigating what surviving evidence there might be to support his interpretation. My discussion will make a case for an interpretative relationship between the ‘wedge’ and the ‘hairpin’, particularly as used by Schubert in *Winterreise*.

Those familiar with Schubert’s work, will be aware that his inscribing of performance instructions in the voice part of his songs is virtually non-existent. With very few exceptions, all instructions are notated in the piano part. There have been various reasons given for this, the most popular being that it would have been clear to the performers in his day that the directive in one part was meant for both. Others (Schroeder[[12]](#footnote-12)) have made the case that a singer would naturally know what to do, whereas an instrumentalist would need to be guided – a suggestion that seems at odds with a certain prevailing relationship of ‘singer’ to ‘musician’ in our own time! 

That the former reason is the more likely, is borne out by those instances where Schubert, requiring each party to perform different expressive functions, will clearly indicate such in the score. An instance, as shown opposite, from No. 5 ‘Wasserflut’, is a good illustration of this dichotomy.

So, as a general principle, let’s assume that unless stipulated, both performers can take their expressive instructions from the markings in the piano part.

Today, the prevailing interpretation of and is a dynamic one, indicating a *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. However, there is some evidence to suggest that throughout history, such may not have always been the case. We rarely see the words *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in score before the C17th but, just as with the introduction of words as guides to character and tempo (*Allegro, Andante,* *Largo* etc), their use proliferates during the C18th. The hairpin symbol was used as early as 1712 (Giovanni Antonio Pianini Op 1, Paris) but never became a complete substitution for these words or their abbreviations *cresc* and *decresc/dim*; there are many scores wherein both forms are shared. Perhaps it was this concurrency that freed up the hairpin to evolve into something that had a broader meaning than simply the rise and fall of volume. By the time we get to the late Classical/early Romantic period, there is a proliferation of performance instructions from composers who were now less willing to rely solely upon a performer’s intuition. With this abundance there arose some seemingly conflicting combinations of symbols that can give today’s performer ‘interpretative’ pause.

I could find no correspondence or specific literature that gives us a direct reference as to how Schubert intended the expressive instructions in his songs to be performed. However, there is significant literature and first-hand accounts that give us insights as to how the musicians of his period would have viewed such shorthand. While such evidence may be judged circumstantial in its application to Schubert, it carries significant weight by establishing the linguistic milieu in which he worked, enough, I am convinced, to make reliable interpretive judgements in performing his music.

I have drawn upon three scholarly sources in my endeavour to validate Gerald Moore’s instincts in interpreting the Schubert hairpin and wedge. These are Eric Heidsieck[[13]](#footnote-13), Roberto Poli[[14]](#footnote-14) and David Hyun-Su Kim[[15]](#footnote-15).

Kim is clear and forthright in his arguments that lead him to state:

*‘Hairpins...are today universally accepted as equivalent to the markings crescendo and decrescendo, calling for an increase or decrease in volume. But this view is irreconcilable with the evidence of many scores of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, hairpins are not dynamic markings, but rather connotative expressive indications that are frequently associated with rhythmic inflection.’*

Complementing their work are some valuable and insightful writings by prominent artists of the period that coincides with the period in which Schubert worked, as well as the years following, indicating that there was a broad and sustained tradition of such an interpretation.

For example, an explanatory note to her Exercise, *Allegro ma non troppo* in F minor, Fanny Hensel[[16]](#footnote-16), older sister of Felix Mendelssohn, reads:

*“Dies Stück muss mit vieler Abwechslung des Tempo, aber immer sanft, u. ohne Rückung vorgetragen werden. Für accelerando u. ritardando stehn die Zeichnen*

*This piece must be played with great variety of tempo, but always gentle and without abrupt modulation. The signs and stand for accelerando and ritardando.*

This unqualified statement seems at odds with our modern reading of these symbols. Written in 1826, while Schubert was still active as a composer, it could be argued that this was purely a one-off, a personal code only used by Hensel. However, that would seem unlikely, especially when one finds other accounts that support it. In his book, Roberto Poli devotes a sizable chapter to the topic and is convinced that hairpins were to be interpreted as a form of rubato in this period. His discussion chiefly revolves around the music of Frederic Chopin, a composer we do not readily link with Schubert, certainly in style. However, realising that Chopin gave his first recital in Vienna in the year of Schubert’s death, places him within a time frame that would see a shared acceptance of current musical codes.

We find that the practice of interpreting the hairpin in this way does not lose traction in the years that follow, indeed one might even argue that it is strengthened. There is a particularly illuminating insight by the English pianist Fanny Davies (1861-1934). Davies studied with Clara Schumann and performed with many members of the Brahms circle. In 1887 she sat in on a reading of the C minor Trio, op. 101, played by Joachim, Hausmann, and Brahms, an experience that was recorded by her in generous notes. The account not only detailed the trio reading but also the playing style of Brahms himself.

*Like Beethoven, he* [Brahms] *was most particular that his marks of expression (always as few as possible) should be the means of conveying the inner musical meaning. The sign*

*as used by Brahms, often occurs when he wishes to express great sincerity and warmth, allied not only to the tone but to rhythm also. He would linger not on one note alone, but on a whole idea, as if unable to tear himself away from its beauty. He would prefer to lengthen a measure or phrase rather than spoil it by making up the time into a metronomic bar.[[17]](#footnote-17)*

Of course, this account occurs many decades after Schubert’s death yet, linked with the earlier accounts, it does present an arching consistency in German romantic music that hairpins did not prescribe only sounds but meaning. In fact, Eric Heidsieck points to Brahms’s hairpin notation and posits what he claims is a lost tradition of reading hairpins agogically rather than dynamically. So, perhaps we may gain a fuller understanding of works from this period if instead of thinking of hairpins solely as “growing louder/quieter,” they would be better understood as “becoming more/less” and, of course the realisation of “more/less” in nineteenth century music was achieved by techniques other
than just dynamics. While Poli advances this notion with persuasive examples found in Chopin’s music, he stresses that the tradition had been emerging in the previous generation of composers:

*‘In his late years, Beethoven’s...hairpins were meant to suggest interpretative nuances in more melodic contexts, not dynamic variations within a passage or phrase.’[[18]](#footnote-18)*

And, as with Gerald Moore, perhaps this is something that attuned musicians do naturally. For instance, there is an interesting modern account of wrestling with Beethoven’s expressive instructions that comes to a similar conclusion through intuition. It is to be found in a blog kept by a member of the Elias Quartet who kept the diary while undertaking a major project of performing the Beethoven String Quartets.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**The entry of 19/10/2011 reads:**

*Today there was a small breakthrough for me with the 4th movement- “Alla Danza tedesca” (As a german dance) Beethoven’s incredibly specific hairpins and rhythmic notation are very complicated and can feel restrictive. If you really try to do what he asks, it can easily sound overly complicated and unnatural. We tried thinking of the hairpins more emotionally, and Marie mentioned that the first gesture could be really tender. Somehow, this made everything fall into place! And for the first time I felt that I understood what that movement is about.*

In returning to Schubert’s *Winterreise*, we find many instances where re-evaluating these symbols in the light of these thoughts can illuminate seemingly conflicting instructions. ‘Eimsamkeit’ provides a good example (Ex.6). In b24-30, Schubert writes a series of expressive symbols that would seem to conflict with each other if the hairpin was merely a dynamic figure. We can also now include the wedge [˂] in our investigation for, as used here, it surely evokes a similar reading as the hairpin; a slight delay yet applied only to a single note. So, in bar 28 where Schubert writes the abbreviation *cresc* next to the hairpin, we should understand that the piano has a dynamic swell concurrent with a forward momentum then relaxation. Similarly, in bars 24, 26 & 29, the conflict of the *f* symbol placed at the start of hairpin makes complete sense when one views the hairpin as agogic. Likewise, in bars 25 & 27, where the *fp* and [˂] would be redundant if they meant the same thing; here the wedge symbol requires the performer to allow the slightest temporal indulgence - exactly the interpretation that Gerald Moore so astutely predicted in 1975.

 

Ex 6: *Winterreise* No. 12 ‘Einsamkeit’ (b24-30) as found in *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe*

* **The ‘Leiermann’ drone**

An unusual interpretation of the LH drone figure that accompanies song No.24, ‘Der Leiermann’, has been a feature of more than one recent recording. It is so bold and curious and has gathered such traction as a performance option, that it demands examination to qualify as a legitimate reading of Schubert’s intentions.

In recordings by Roman Trekel (Baritone) with Ulrich Eisenlohr, Christian Gerhaher (Baritone) with Gerold Huber (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQGj_WYYQd8> ) and Mark Padmore (Tenor) with Paul Lewis (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soDkFNsQMFA> @ 1:10:13), the piano’s grace note and open fifth drone are either struck concurrently or, if one does precede the other, the grace note is not released, resulting is an abrasive dissonance. In at least one of these interpretative gestures the grace note is released/cleared halfway through the bar before engaging the dissonance once more on its restriking in the second bar. In the Trekel/Eisenlohr recording, the pianist goes even further and sustains the effect throughout the song, even though Schubert’s autograph abandons the grace note after the second bar. Having been challenged by more than one commentator, Eisenlohr offered the following defence:

*As you might perhaps know, the "Leier" is always played with bordun-chords. If some of these bordun-strings are not well tuned, which is quite likely in winter-time and outdoors,- they will sound a little bit "dirty" ; that is why I play the appoggiatura on the beat. There is nothing less meant by Schubert than a correct appoggiatura, done by a well-educated musician. Can we presume that the Leiermann will stop his playing after two bars to tune his bordun-strings again? Probably not: he will continue as he has begun: "dreht, und seine Leier steht ihm nimmer still." So, why change the playing of the left hand in the third bar? It is just meant like "simile" or "segue", which is a familiar instruction in classical and romantic music, often not even written by the composers, because they trusted in intelligent interpreters who would know how to read and understand the music. Although I don't think that my kind of playing distracts the listener from the voice - even if it did: would it not be the pendant to the fact, that the singer is distracted from himself, his sorrows and pains, by the playing of the Leiermann?*

Such a defence seems based upon, at best, a musical hunch and may have been more compelling if it could be supported by some literature or some other examples where such liberties might be applicable. The fact that he and his vocalist are not alone in choosing this interpretation means that it has to be taken seriously by other potential interpreters so, we must look for any evidence that will help us either confirm or confound such a position.



*Ex 7: No. 24 ‘Der Leiermann’ (Neue Schubert-Ausgabe)*

In the score (Ex 7), Schubert writes the grace note with a slur. Perhaps Eisenlohr and others read this as shorthand, a suggestion by the composer to carry the grace note across and sound with the drone figure? If so, it would surely be an isolated instance as other examples of similar notation found in the song cycle are clearly meant to be performed differently. See the example opposite, where the piano grace note is doubled in the voice part but there, fully written out by the composer, clearly indicating the mode Ex 8: No. 23 ‘Der stürmische Morgen’ b11. *Neue Schubert-Ausgabe* of execution.

So, by seeking any other intention in ‘Der Leiermann’, Schubert would only be causing confusion with his readers. It is also clear from other instances in *Winterreise* that when his intention is to carry a note across he clearly notates it so (Eg ‘Frühlingstraum’ Ex 9 )



Ex 9: ‘Frülingstraum’ b76-79 *Neue Schubert Ausgabe*

However, perhaps the most compelling reason to reject this mode of delivery lies in the fact that, if this indeed was the tonal effect that Schubert desired, there was a specific notation already available to him. It was called the ‘Zusammenschlag’ and would have been known to Schubert and his contemporaries as it is illustrated in a table in Friedrich Starke’s, *Wiener Piano-Forte Schule* (Vienna, 1819-21) wherein the notation, and the execution of its effect, is clearly outlined (Ex.10). That it was listed in a compendium published within a few years of the composition of *Winterreise*, means that it was a common enough device and would have been known to practitioners of the period. Surely if this was the effect that Schubert wanted, he would have notated it so and not, as he did, with a slur.



Ex 10: Der Zusammenschlag (‘struck together’) and its execution. Found in Friedrich Starke’s, *Wiener Piano-Forte Schule* (Vienna, 1819-21)

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1. See, for example, Maria Wagner's comment in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by his Friend*s, trans. Rosamond Ley & John Novell, London, 1958, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Franz Schubert's "Winterreise*" Cornell University Press. 1991 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Youens, pp22-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is perhaps the subject matter for another investigation but it has always struck me that, unlike the young miller in Schubert’s other great song cycle, his wanderer in *Winterreise* is an older, more experienced person. The failed love affair alluded to in the poems, is but a catalyst or symbol for the many struggles that he has experienced and worked through. Rather than submitting to his wish for death, he faces his demons. We see it in his determined exclamations in ‘Mut’ but also in ‘Das Wirthshaus’, where having contemplated release in death, he pulls himself together and trudges on. (“… nun weiter den, nur weiter mein treuer Wanderstab”). Similarly in ‘Der Leiermann’ his final wish is not for oblivion but to keep singing his songs. (“Wunderlicher Alte, soll ich mit dir gehn? Willst zu meinen Liedern deiner Leier drehn?”) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Schubert’s relationship with Haslinger was never that of the more famous Beethoven, whose letters to the publisher, filled with endearing terms and jovial informality, showed who had the final word in editorial decisions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Montgomery David [*Franz Schubert's Music in Performance*](http://www.pendragonpress.com/book.php?id=658) (2003, Hillsdale: Pendragon Press) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As quoted and translated in Montgomery, 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Carl Czerny, *Richault Edition*, quoted and translated in Montgomery, 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Paul Badura-Skoda, “Schubert as Written as Performed,” The Musical Times 104 (1963): 873–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gerald Moore’s decision seems to emanate from an interpretative insight rather than one based upon available literature, likening the delayed LH semi-quaver to the wanderer’s weary gait. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gerald Moore, *The Schubert Song Cycles* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. x. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Schroeder, DP. “Schubert the Singer” *The Music Review.* 1988. Vol 48 Issue 4. p254-266 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Eric Heidsieck, “Dynamics or Motion? An Interpretation of Some Musical Signs in Romantic Piano Music,” *Piano Quarterly* 35, no. 140 (1987) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Roberto Poli, *The Secret Life of Musical Notation* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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16. Mendelssohn Archiv, Deutsche Stadtsbibliothek, Ms. 35, 1826, 42–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Fanny Davies, “Some Personal Recollections of Brahms as Pianist and Interpreter,” in “Brahms,” in *Cobbett’s Cy-clopedic Survey of Chamber Music,* ed. W. W. Cobbett (London: Oxford University Press, 1929; 2nd edn. 1963), p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Roberto Poli [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <http://thebeethovenproject.com/making-friends-with-op-130-a-diary/> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)