

THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

LIED AND LIEDER CYCLES

SCHUBERT – DER ERLKONIG

Schubert was born in 1791 in Himmelpfortgrund, Austria. He was the son of a schoolmaster and a homemaker. The family was not wealthy but Schubert attended his father's school and received a thorough musical education and went on to win a scholarship to boarding school. He demonstrated an early gift for music; as a child he could play the piano, violin and organ. He was also an excellent singer. The composer's work gained recognition and popularity however Schubert was never famous or wealthy. He died in 1828 (age 37) in Vienna, Austria.

Eventually, Schubert enrolled at the Stadtkonvikt, which trained young vocalists so they could one day sing at the chapel of the Imperial Court, and in 1808 he earned a scholarship that awarded him a spot in the court's chapel choir. His teachers at the Stadtkonvikt included Wenzel Ruzicka, the imperial court organist, and, later, the esteemed composer Antonio Salieri, who lauded Schubert as a musical genius. Schubert played the violin in the students' orchestra, was quickly promoted to leader, and conducted in Ruzicka's absence. He also attended choir practice and, with his fellow pupils, practiced chamber music and piano playing.

In 1812 (age 21), however, Schubert's voice broke, forcing him to leave the college, though he did continue his instruction with Antonio Salieri for three more years. In 1814, under pressure from his family, Schubert enrolled at a teacher's training college in Vienna and took a job as an assistant at his father's school.

Schubert worked as a schoolmaster for the next four years. But he also continued to compose music. In fact, between 1813 and 1815, Schubert proved to be a prolific songwriter. By 1814, the young composer had written a number of piano pieces, and had produced string quartets, a symphony, and a three-act opera.

Over the next year, his output included two additional symphonies and two of his first **Lieds**, "*Gretchen am Spinnrade*" and "*Erlkönig*." Schubert is, in fact, largely credited with creating the German Lied. Boosted by a wealth of late 18th-century lyric poetry and the development of the piano, Schubert tapped the poetry of giants like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, showing the world the possibility of representing their works in musical form.

In 1818, Schubert, who had not only found a welcome audience for his music but had grown tired of teaching, left education to pursue music full-time. His decision was sparked in part by the first public performance of one of his works, the "Italian Overture in C Major," on March 1, 1818, in Vienna.

The decision to leave school teaching seems to have ushered in a new wave of creativity in the young composer. That summer he completed a string of material, including piano duets "Variations on a French Song in E minor" and the "Sonata in B Flat Major," as well as several dances and songs. That same year, Schubert returned to Vienna and composed the operetta "Die Zwillingsbrüder (The Twin Brothers), which was performed in June 1820 and met with some success. Schubert's musical output also included the score for the play "Die Zauberharfe" (The Magic Harp), which debuted in August 1820.

The resulting performances, as well as Schubert's other pieces, greatly expanded his popularity and appeal. He also showed himself to be a visionary. His composition "Quartettsatz [Quartet-Movement] in C minor," helped spark a wave of string quartets that would dominate the music scene later in the decade.

But Schubert had his struggles as well. In 1820, he was hired by two opera houses, the Karthnerhof Theatre and Theatre-an-der-Wein, to compose a pair of operas, neither of which fared very well. Music publishers, meanwhile, were afraid to take a chance on a young composer like Schubert, whose music was not considered traditional.

His fortunes began to change in 1821, when, with the help of some friends, he began offering his songs on a subscription basis. Money started coming his way. In Vienna especially, Schubert's harmonious songs and dances were popular. Across the city, concert parties called Schubertiaden sprung up in the homes of wealthy residents. Schubert did not perform much besides these private parties.

However by late 1822, however, Schubert encountered another difficult period. His financial needs going unmet, and his friendships increasingly strained, Schubert's life was further darkened when he became severely sick—historians believe he almost certainly contracted syphilis.

And yet, Schubert continued to produce at a prolific rate. His output during this time included the renowned "Wanderer Fantasy" for piano, his masterful, two-movement "Eighth Symphony," the "Die Schöne Müllerin" song cycle, "Die Verschworenen" and the opera "Fierrabras." None of the finished pieces, however, brought him the fortune he deserved or so greatly needed. Battling health problems, Schubert again turned to music for escape. In 1824, he turned out three chamber works, the "String Quartet in A Minor," a second string quartet in D minor and "Octet in F Major."

For a time, Schubert, almost constantly penniless, returned to teaching. He also continued to write, producing piano duets such as "Piano Sonata in C Major" (Grand Duo), and the "Divertissement à la Hongroise."

In 1826, Schubert applied for the job of deputy musical director at the Stadtkonvikt. While certainly a top candidate, he failed to land the job. Still, his fortunes during this period began to improve. His impressive musical output continued, and his popularity in Vienna increased. He was even in negotiations with four different publishers.

His work during this time included the "String Quartet in G Major" and the "Piano Sonata in G Major." In 1827, no doubt influenced by the passing of Ludwig van Beethoven and his impressive musical legacy, Schubert channeled a bit of the late composer and created a string of pieces. This work included the first 12 songs of the "Winterreise," as well as the "Piano Sonata in C Minor" and two piano solos, "Impromptus" and "Moments Musicaux."

In 1828, the last year of his life, Schubert, though obviously ill, stayed committed to his craft. It was during this time that he produced what is quite possibly his greatest piano duet, "Fantasy in F Minor." His other work from this time included the "Great Symphony," the cantata "Mirjam's Siegesgesang," and his last three piano sonatas, in C Minor, A Major, and B-flat Major. In addition, Schubert finished "String Quintet in C Major," considered by musical historians to be the classical era's final piece.

Oddly enough, Schubert's first and final public concert took place on March 26, 1828, and it proved successful enough that it allowed the great composer to finally buy himself a piano. Exhausted, and with his health continuing to deteriorate, Schubert moved in with his brother, Ferdinand. He died on November 19, 1828, in Vienna, Austria.

Impact

It was only after Schubert's passing that his musical genius received the kind of recognition it deserved. His talent lay in his ability to adapt to almost any kind of musical form. His vocal contributions, more than 500 in all, were written for male and female voices, as well as mixed voices.

Like the poets whose work he wrote his music around, Schubert was an unrivaled master of lyrical beauty. It is no secret that Schubert adored Beethoven—he was awed by him, to the point that he was too timid to even introduce himself to the musical giant when the two passed one another on the streets of Vienna. But it is far from a stretch to mention these two musical giants in the same sentence. Schubert produced masterful works with rich harmonies and legendary melodies for a variety of genres, and his influence proved considerable with later composers like Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf. And for some musical historians, his much-praised "Ninth Symphony" opened the way for other greats like Anton Bruckner and Gustav Mahler.

In 1872, a memorial to Schubert was constructed in the Stadtpark in Vienna. In 1888, his grave, along with Beethoven's, was relocated to Zentralfriedhof, the Viennese cemetery that is among the largest in the world. There, Schubert was placed alongside fellow musical giants Johann Strauss II and Johannes Brahms.

DER ERLKONING – A LIED

Der Erlkoning was originally a poem from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It depicts the death of a child assaulted by a supernatural being, the Erlking or "Erlkönig". The poem has been used as the text for Lieder (art songs for voice and piano) by many classical composers.

Analysis of poem

An anxious young boy is being carried home at night by his father on horseback. To what sort of home is not spelled out; German *Hof* has a rather broad meaning of “yard,” “courtyard,” “farm,” or (royal) “court.” The lack of specificity of the father’s social position allows the reader to imagine the details.

As the poem unfolds, the son seems to see and hear beings his father does not; the father states natural explanations for what the child sees – a wisp of fog, rustling leaves, shimmering willows. Finally, the child shrieks that he has been attacked. The father makes faster for the *Hof*. There he recognizes that the boy is dead.

Text

| | Literal translation | Adaptation ^[1] |
|---|--|---|
| Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind? Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind; Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm, Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm. | Who rides, so late, through night and wind? It is the father with his child. He has the boy well in his arm He holds him safely, he keeps him warm. | Who rides there so late through the night dark and drear? The father it is, with his infant so dear; He holdeth the boy tightly clasp'd in his arm, He holdeth him safely, he keepeth him warm. |
| "Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?" – "Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht? Den Erlenkönig mit Kron und Schweif?" – "Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif." | "My son, why do you hide your face in fear?" "Father, do you not see the Elfking? The Elfking with crown and cape?" "My son, it's a streak of fog." | "My son, wherefore seek'st thou thy face thus to hide?" "Look, father, the Erl-King is close by our side! Dost see not the Erl-King, with crown and with train?" "My son, 'tis the mist rising over the plain." |
| "Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir! Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir; Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand, Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand." – | "You dear child, come, go with me! (Very) beautiful games I play with you; many a colourful flower is on the beach, My mother has many a golden robe." | "Oh, come, thou dear infant! oh come thou with me! For many a game I will play there with thee; On my strand, lovely flowers their blossoms unfold, My mother shall grace thee with garments of gold." |
| "Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht, Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?" – "Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind; In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind." – | "My father, my father, and hearest you not, What the Elfking quietly promises me?" "Be calm, stay calm, my child; Through scrawny leaves the wind is sighing." | "My father, my father, and dost thou not hear The words that the Erl-King now breathes in mine ear?" "Be calm, dearest child, 'tis thy fancy deceives; 'Tis the sad wind that sighs through the withering leaves." |
| "Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn? Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön; Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn, Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein." – | "Do you, fine boy, want to go with me? My daughters shall wait on you finely; My daughters lead the nightly dance, And rock and dance and sing to bring you in." | "Wilt go, then, dear infant, wilt go with me there? My daughters shall tend thee with sisterly care; My daughters by night their glad festival keep, They'll dance thee, and rock thee, and sing thee to sleep." |
| "Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?" – "Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau: Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau. –" | "My father, my father, and don't you see there The Elfking's daughters in the gloomy place?" "My son, my son, I see it clearly: There shimmer the old willows so grey." | "My father, my father, and dost thou not see, How the Erl-King his daughters has brought here for me?" "My darling, my darling, I see it aright, 'Tis the aged grey willows deceiving thy sight." |
| "Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt." – "Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich an! Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!" – | "I love you, your beautiful form entices me; And if you're not willing, then I will use force." "My father, my father, he's touching me now! The Elfking has done me harm!" | "I love thee, I'm charm'd by thy beauty, dear boy! And if thou'rt unwilling, then force I'll employ." "My father, my father, he seizes me fast, For sorely the Erl-King has hurt me at last." |
| Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind, Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind, Erreicht den Hof mit Müh' und Not; In seinen Armen das Kind war tot. | It horrifies the father; he swiftly rides on, He holds the moaning child in his arms, Reaches the farm with great difficulty; In his arms, the child was dead. | The father now gallops, with terror half wild, He grasps in his arms the poor shuddering child; He reaches his courtyard with toil and with dread, – The child in his arms finds he motionless, dead. |

The Legend of the Erlkoning

The story of the Erlkönig derives from the traditional Danish ballad *Elveskud*: Goethe’s poem was inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder’s translation of a variant of the ballad “Erlkönigs Tochter” (“The Erl-king’s Daughter”) in his collection of folk songs, *Stimmen der Völker in*

Liedern (published 1778). Goethe's poem then took on a life of its own, inspiring the Romantic concept of the Erlking.

The Erlkönig's nature has been the subject of some debate. The name translates literally from the German as "Alder King" rather than its common English translation, "Elf King" (which would be rendered as *Elfenkönig* in German). It has often been suggested that *Erlkönig* is a mistranslation from the original Danish *elverkonge*, which does mean "king of the elves."

Settings to music

The poem has often been set to music with Franz Schubert's rendition, his Opus 1 (D. 328), being the best known. Other notable settings are by members of Goethe's circle, including the actress Corona Schröter (1782), Andreas Romberg (1793), Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1794) and Carl Friedrich Zelter (1797). Beethoven attempted to set it to music but abandoned the effort; his sketch however was complete enough to be published in a completion by Reinhold Becker (1897). A few other nineteenth-century versions are those by Václav Tomášek (1815), Carl Loewe (1818) and Ludwig Spohr (1856, with obligato violin) and Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (Polyphonic Studies for Solo Violin). A 21st century example is pianist Marc-André Hamelin's "Etude No. 8 (after Goethe)" for solo piano, based on "Erlkönig".

The Franz Schubert Composition



Schubert's autograph of a simplified accompaniment to his "Erlkönig", one of several revisions

Franz Schubert composed his **Lied**, "Erlkönig", for solo voice and piano in 1815 (age 14), setting text from the Goethe poem. Schubert revised the song three times before publishing his fourth version in 1821 as his Opus 1; it was cataloged by Otto Erich Deutsch as D. 328 in his 1951 catalog of Schubert's works. The song was first performed in concert on December 1, 1820, at a private gathering in Vienna, and received its public premiere on March 7, 1821, at Vienna's Theater am Kärntnertor.

The four characters in the song – narrator, father, son, and the Erlking – are usually all sung by a single vocalist; occasionally, however, the work is performed by four individual vocalists (or three, with one taking the parts of both the narrator and the Erlking). Schubert placed each character largely in a different vocal range, and each has his own rhythmic nuances; in addition, most singers endeavour to use a different vocal coloration for each part.

1. The Narrator lies in the middle range and is in minor.
2. The Father lies in the low range and sings both in minor mode and major.
3. The Son lies in a high range, also in minor.
4. The Erlking's vocal line, in major, rolls up and down to arpeggio accompaniment: providing the only break from the ostinato bass triplets in the accompaniment until the boy's death. The Erlking lines are typically sung in a softer dynamic.

A fifth character, the horse, is implied in rapid triplet figures played by the pianist throughout the work, mimicking hoof beats.

“Erlkönig” starts with the piano rapidly playing triplets to create a sense of urgency and simulate the horse's galloping. Meanwhile the bass adds a horror theme to the piece. These motifs continue throughout. Each of the son's pleas become louder and higher-pitched than the previous ones. Near the very end of the piece the music quickens, as the father desperately tries to spur his horse to go faster, and then slows down, as he arrives. The piano stops before the final line, “In seinen Armen das Kind war tot” before ending with a **perfect cadence**.

The piece is regarded as extremely challenging to perform due to the vocal characterization required of the vocalist as well as its difficult accompaniment, involving the playing of rapidly repeated chords and octaves to create the drama and urgency in the poetry.

The song was transcribed for solo piano by Franz Liszt, and the piano accompaniment was orchestrated by Hector Berlioz. Hans Werner Henze created an *Orchesterfantasie über Goethes Gedicht und Schuberts Opus 1 aus dem Ballett “Le fils de l'air”*. There is also a transcription for solo violin by the violin virtuoso Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst, considered one of the most technically difficult pieces to play for the instrument.

1. Lieder usually have strophic, through-composed and Bar forms. Which form would you say *Der Erlkoning* has?
2. What is the last cadence in *Der Erlkoning*? Why do you think Schubert choose that cadence?
3. What motif represents the horse galloping?
4. What do **you** think Schubert is the most famous for? E.g. his impressive piano playing, his way with women etc?
5. How many public performances did Schubert have?