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*”Where words leave off,
music begins”*

A comparison of how Henry Purcell and Franz Schubert convey text through their music in the compositions *Music for a while* and *Erlkönig*

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Summary

"The singer is always working through a text that in some way or another inspired the vocal line and its texture," wrote American pianist, pedagogue, and author Thomas Grubb. But exactly how does a text inspire a composer to create this synergy between words and music?

During the course of my studies at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, I gradually began to deepen my knowledge and awareness of Henry Purcell and Franz Schubert. I was at once astounded by their ability to seamlessly amalgamate the chosen texts to their music, and decided that this connection required greater research.

The purpose of this study was thus to gain a deeper understanding of how Purcell and Schubert approached the relationship between text and music by studying the two pieces *Music for a while* and *Erlkönig*. I also wished to discover any similarities and differences between the composers' approaches to word painting, in addition to discerning the role of the accompaniment to further illustrate the narrative.

I began by reading literature about the two composers as well as John Dryden and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the poets whose texts were set to music. Once a greater understanding of them had been attained, I proceeded to analyze the texts and music for a greater comprehension of Purcell's and Schubert's methods. For early inspiration, I listened to numerous versions of the pieces by different musicians on YouTube.

Both Purcell and Schubert used various tools in their compositional arsenals to accomplish their effortless combination of text and music. Amongst others, Purcell employed tonal ambiguity, unexpected harmonies, and repetition, while Schubert made use of vivid imagery, inventive treatment of chromaticism, and unmistakable rhythmic motifs.

The analysis demonstrated that, while both composers painted lively and dramatic pictures in their compositions, their methods were strikingly different. The role of the accompaniment in *Music for a while* leaves much to the individual taste and ability of the instrumentalist(s) performing to assist the singer in setting the scene. In contrast, Schubert instructs the pianist in *Erlkönig* explicitly how they are to play, while additionally the piano personifies the fifth character in the story, the horse. Indeed, the role of the singer in the two pieces is equally at variance with the other. With Purcell, the singer portrays a priest, while the singer in *Erlkönig* personifies four different voices, each with their own melody, character, and tessitura.

I hope this study will inspire others to delve deeper into the material with which they work to offer a more profound understanding to themselves and, ultimately, the listener.

Keywords: Word painting, poetry, Lied, art song, Purcell, Schubert, Dryden, Goethe, Music for a while, Erlkönig.

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1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction and background on composers and poets

Throughout my nearly seven years of study at the Royal College of Music (both a Master's degree in music education and a Bachelor's degree in vocal performance), I have been introduced to the wonderful and engrossing *lied* music of Franz Schubert while also learning more about the master that is Henry Purcell. Through my previous choral singing I had performed one movement of the former's *Deutsche Messe* in addition to several pieces by the latter. Upon beginning to learn more about them, I immediately noticed how drawn I was to their unparalleled ability to convey the meaning of different texts through their music. However, having the sense that I had only barely scratched the surface of their respective musical output, I realized that a significantly deeper study was necessary. Since an examination of both composers' complete musical outputs would be too all-encompassing for the purpose of this study, I have elected to choose one of each musician's best known and most iconic works.

Purcell's most famous work is his 1689 opera *Dido and Aeneas* (Keates, 1995, p.50), but one of his most famous airs is *Music for a while* (Keates, 1995, p.236). During my studies I had performed this piece and instantly fell in love with its deceptively simple architecture and skillful use of word painting and imagery. Additionally, I had performed the piece both as a countertenor and a tenor, giving it two different appeals. It therefore seemed a logical choice for the purpose of this study.

Like Purcell, Schubert managed to compose a prolific amount in his short lifetime. While his symphonies, chamber music, and song cycles are greatly appreciated, it is with his body of over 600 *lieder* for which he is best known, resounding as the "common denominator of his fame" (Gibbs, 2006, p.8). Schubert wrote *Erlkönig* in 1815, and it is "one of the commanding compositions of the century" (ibid). I first came across the piece while listening to a CD of Schubert *lieder* and was utterly amazed by the harmonic modulations, interchanging lines between different characters, and the piece's stunning dramaticism. Its selection for this study was equally axiomatic.

1.1.1 Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Henry Purcell was born at some point in the latter half of 1659 in London (Keates, 1995, p.13). His father was a singer in the choirs of Westminster Abbey and at the Chapel Royal, where Purcell started his career as a boy chorister at the age of seven or eight (Keates, 1995, p.25). His main teachers at the time were John Blow, Henry Cooke, and Christopher Gibbons. (Temperley, 2004)

On September 10, 1677, Purcell took the post of composer for the Twenty-four Violins, King Charles II's special court ensemble (Holman, 1994, p.13). He succeeded Blow as organist in Westminster Abbey in 1679 and as one of three organists of the Chapel Royal on July 14, 1682 (Westrup, 2017). He composed many "symphony anthems" for use in the chapel, but his activities there came to an abrupt end in 1685 when Charles II was succeeded by his Roman Catholic brother, James II. When William and Mary took the throne in 1689, he continued writing for royal events but with less frequency composing for the church (Temperley, 2004).

Inspired by Blow's 1683 opera *Venus and Adonis* (credited as the first ever English opera), Purcell soon turned to composing for the stage. In 1689, he wrote the immensely successful opera *Dido and Aeneas* in 1689. He was heavily involved in the music for London's theatres and composed four full-scale semi-operas. Among these were *King Arthur* (1691) to a libretto by John Dryden and *The Fairy Queen* (1692), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Westrup, 2017).

He had married in 1680 and had at least six children, three of whom died in infancy; his son Edward was also a musician. His early death on November 21, 1695 brought an end to what could have been an exciting development in English theatrical music, leaving no successors of comparable stature (Temperley, 2004). His untimely passing prevented him from finishing his work on *The Indian Queen*, another collaboration with Dryden. The piece was instead finished by his brother, Daniel (Westrup, 2017).

Purcell was a master of the English song, and was in high demand as a teacher and composer of chamber music. He is noted for strong, distinctive harmonies and for his immaculate sensitivity to the rhythms and stresses of the English language. Henry Hall, a fellow chorister in the Chapel Royal and organist at Hereford Cathedral, wrote in 1698 that Purcell "Each Syllable first weigh'd, or short, or long, That it might too be Sense, as well as Song" (Holman, 1994, p.23). He rivals William Byrd, Edward Elgar, and Benjamin Britten for the claim of being considered the greatest ever English composer (Temperley, 2004).

1.1.2 John Dryden (1631-1700)

Born on August 19, 1631 to a country gentleman, John Dryden was a poet, dramatist, satirist, and literary critic who so dominated the literary scene of his day that it came to be known as the Age of Dryden (Sutherland, 2017). He tried his hand successfully at most of the prominent dramatic genres of the Restoration period and completed 28 plays. Some of these were written by himself, some in collaboration with other authors, while others were adaptations (International Dictionary of Theatre, 1993; IDT).

He was a staunch supporter of the monarchy, and when Charles II retook the throne in 1660 he wrote *Astraea Redux* in his honor, a poem with more than 300 lines in rhymed couplets. For his coronation in 1661, he wrote *To his sacred majesty*, and the two poems were meant to dignify and strengthen the monarchy. In 1668 he was appointed Poet Laureate, and two years later he became the royal historiographer (Sutherland, 2017).

Dryden's first resounding success was *The Indian Emperour* (1665), a sequel to *The Indian Queen* (1664), on which he had collaborated with his brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard. Incidentally, Henry Purcell wrote the music to a revised version of the play in 1695, though

due to Purcell's early death, the semi-opera was incomplete (Holman, 1994 p.219). Dryden's reworking of Sophocles's *Oedipus* (a collaboration with Nathaniel Lee) in 1679 was one of the staples of Restoration drama. It won great favor with the public (Horton, 2009) and was deserving of the "admiration it received from contemporary spectators and readers" (Keates, 1995, p.236).

Dryden started working with Henry Purcell on *Amphitryon* (1690) a comedy to which the latter wrote incidental music. Their partnership continued with the successful *King Arthur* (1691), a dramatic opera glorifying England and the monarchy which also gave the audience magic, romance and dance. In 1692, Purcell wrote incidental music to *Oedipus*, from where *Music for a while* originates (IDT, 1993).

1.1.3 Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Born on January 31, 1797 in Vienna, Schubert was the son of a schoolmaster who began teaching him the fundamentals of music before he started his formal musical training (Braun, 2017).

He came to the attention of Antonio Salieri, Vienna's leading musical authority, in 1804, and in 1808 he gained a scholarship to the elite private school Stadtkonvikt. The poetry of Goethe inspired his initial masterpieces *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (composed at 17 years of age) and *Erlkönig* (18), although the public premiere of the latter was not until 1821 (Gibbs, 2006).

In 1814 he entered a teacher's training college while also teaching the youngest pupils at his father's school. He also continued studying with Salieri for a few more years (Braun, 2017). In 1816 he was invited by his poet friend Franz von Schober's family to live with them to give him time and space to focus on his composing instead of teaching. Von Schober introduced him to the renowned baritone Johann Michael Vogl, for whom he wrote many songs. These acquaintances helped make his *lieder* immensely popular in Vienna's music circles (International Dictionary of Opera, 1993).

In the 1820s, Schubert was part of a close-knit circle of artists and students who had social gatherings that became known as *Schubertiaden*. His compositions during this time had matured in style, and he began to assume a more prominent position and a capacity to address a wider public (Gibbs, 2006).

In 1822, he made the acquaintance of Carl Maria von Weber and Ludwig van Beethoven, but little came of it. On his deathbed, Beethoven is said to have looked at some of the younger Schubert's works and exclaimed, "Truly, the spark of divine genius resides in this Schubert!" (Thayer, 1921).

He wrote many of his masterpieces during his final years, including several of his large-scale song cycles, his Symphony in C, and Piano Sonata in A minor. Concurrently, his health began to deteriorate after having contracted syphilis in 1822, and he died in Vienna on November 19, 1828 (Braun, 2017).

1.1.4 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born on August 28, 1749 in Frankfurt, Germany to an upper class, bourgeois family. His early education came from his father, a lawyer and Imperial Councillor to Charles VII, Holy Roman Emperor, and various tutors. He went to study law in Leipzig in 1765, and began making a name for himself in theatrical circles while attending courses taught by famed German poet Christian Fürchtegott Gellert. After a spell of tuberculosis and two years of convalescence, he moved to Strasbourg in 1770 to complete his studies. There he met and became close friends with Johann Gottfried Herder, a poet and philosopher, who ignited his interest in the works of Shakespeare and Ossian (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017). Herder also made him look at language and literature in a new, almost anthropological way, as the expression of a national culture. He began collecting folk songs, and even tried to write some himself (Boyle, 2017).

Goethe returned to Frankfurt in 1771 to work as a lawyer but was torn by his growing desire to write. Over the ensuing years, he spent more and more time penning his works and gradually made a name for himself as a writer (Boyle, 2017).

In 1776, he was invited by the Duke of Weimar to reside and work at his court. Ultimately, Goethe spent ten years working there, and although many of his finest works were written during this period, he turned away from publishing them (amongst others, *Erlkönig* was written during this period) (Boyle, 2017).

Goethe finally set off on a long-anticipated yet previously postponed trip to Italy in 1786, which he viewed as the climax of his life due to his immense new inspiration. After returning to Weimar in 1788, he was relieved of all administrative duties and free to concentrate on his writing (Boyle, 2017).

He took on Christiane Vulpius as a mistress, and in 1789 she bore his child; eventually the two married in 1806. In 1794 he began an intellectual friendship with poet and dramatist Friedrich Schiller, who encouraged him to continue working on the tragic play *Faust*, which would later become his most acclaimed masterpiece. Introduced in two parts, the first was published in 1808 and the second in 1832 (International Dictionary of Theatre, 1993).

Goethe is considered the greatest German figure of the modern era. He is viewed as a central and unsurpassed representative of the Romantic Movement, just as Shakespeare was for the Renaissance and Dante for the High Middle Ages (Boyle, 2017).

1.2 Purpose and research questions

I want to compare and contrast how Purcell and Schubert treat the relationship between text and music in the compositions *Music for a while* and *Erlkönig*.

These are the two research questions I will address:

- What are the similarities and differences between the composers' approaches to the melding of text and music in the pieces?
- What role does the accompaniment play in the divulgence of the story?

When I have fulfilled the purpose and answered the research questions, I hope that the results of this study will help to improve my interpretation skills and assist in my development as a singer.

2 Method

The text for *Music for a while* comes directly from the score and thus needs no further adaptation. The text for *Erlkönig* comes from the original German in the score. While I have a rudimentary knowledge of German from university studies, I have worked with two different translations to gain a deeper understanding of Goethe's work. The first was a literal translation by music historian Betsy Schwarm (EB, 2017), which offered rich imagery concerning the powerful narrative. The second was a poetic adaptation by music author and lecturer Dr. Robert Philip (Donnachie & Lavin, 2004), providing a more nuanced perspective closer to the original Romantic version.

The score for *Music for a while* was taken from the collection *Purcell: 40 songs for voice and piano (high)*, edited by Sergius Kagen and published by International Music Company (1958).

The score for *Erlkönig* was taken from the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP)/Petrucci Music Library (www.imslp.org). It is from Franz Schubert's Werke, Serie XX: Sämtliche Lieder und Gesänge, No. 178 (p.219-224), edited by Eusebius Mandyczewski (1894-1895).

The research I drew most heavily from originated in: *Oxford Studies of Composers: Henry Purcell* (1994) by Peter Holman; *Purcell: A Biography* (1995) by Jonathan Keates; and *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert* (1997), edited by Christopher H. Gibbs. Due to prices and availability, these three books, in addition to *Franz Schubert: A Biography* (1996) by Elizabeth Norman McKay, were purchased on Amazon.com and shipped from America.

For an introduction and early inspiration, I watched several videos on YouTube, most notably recordings of *Music for a while* featuring Thomas Cooley (tenor) and Andreas Scholl (countertenor), and *Erlkönig* featuring Ian Bostridge (tenor) and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone).

In the following analysis, the music examples I chose from the scores were selected due to their overall importance to the pieces. This includes harmonic development, significant rhythmic motifs, and for their use of word painting. I used the music notation program Sibelius to write the examples.

3 Results and analysis

Once I had gained a better general understanding of Purcell and Schubert, I immersed myself in the texts of the two compositions and analyzed them for what they were: poetry. As a singer, we are not only singing words - we are re-creating a poem in a musical texture of sound and expression. Singers must grasp how the composer's musical conception transmits the poetry, and strive to communicate that to the listener (Kimball, 2013, p.52). As the German poet Heinrich Heine said, "where words leave off, music begins."

3.1 Text analysis, *Music for a while*

The text of *Music for a while* comes from the 1679 play *Oedipus: A Tragedy* by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee, an adaptation of Sophocles' classic Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. In Act III, Scene 1 of *Oedipus: A Tragedy*, a seer and two priests call upon the ghost of King Laius to reveal who murdered him. It is at the first priest's entrance at the start of the scene that the ground bass commences and the piece begins. The rising pitch in the ground bass during the opening three bars signifies the priest attempting to raise King Laius from the dead. The text goes on to implore Alecto, the Greek Fury of vengeance, to "free the dead from their bands." Alecto has snakes for hair and a whip that she uses to taunt and torment Oedipus for having killed his father. The priest attempts to persuade Alecto to drop the snakes from her head and the whip from her hand. Purcell opted for a shortened reprise of the first two lines of the text to form both a conclusion to and summary of the whole piece.

This text can be viewed as a statement about the power of music. Dryden was a devotee of the Pythagorean theory of music, where music can be perceived as a type of secret mathematical script that governs the universe. A parallel can also be drawn to Aristotle, who wrote about the emotive qualities of music and how it could induce calm, clarity, and reason. This can be seen as the subtext in Dryden's writing – how music can restore reason (Horton, 2009).

Dryden portrayed Oedipus as a wise ruler mired in horrible misfortunes, submissive to reason, and with restraint from emotion and prejudice. This image is juxtaposed by Alecto, possessing a mind torn asunder by myriad different voices (personified by the snakes), filled with anger, and with a lack of rational thought. Thus Alecto represents a human bound by irrational rage and violence, and when the snakes "drop from her head," reason has been restored (Horton, 2009).

Text:

Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile.
Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd
And disdain'g to be pleas'd
Till Alecto free the dead
From their eternal bands,
Till the snakes drop from her head,
And the whip from out her hands.

The text is not written in a specific meter, but in the rhyme scheme *AABBCCDD*.

3.2 Music analysis, *Music for a while*

Purcell chose to base this piece on a repeating ground bass (*basso ostinato*) that plays a very simple repeated theme with some elaboration. This was a technique he had truly mastered, utilizing it in 87 of his compositions (Horton, 2009). It adapts well to Dryden's intellectual approach to music, as this is also a reasonably mathematical way of composing music and the triumph of reason over Alecto's madness.

The original music for *Music for a while* comes from book two of *Orpheus Britannicus*, a collection of songs by Henry Purcell published posthumously in 1702. The piece was originally written in C-minor which, according to German poet and composer Christian Schubart, expresses a languishing and longing soul's lament (Steblin, 1983). The version I have chosen is down a minor third in A-minor, a typical key for a tenor. In A-minor, the chromatic notes F# and C# give the piece a sense of tonal ambiguity.



The ground bass pattern consisting of eighth notes in a slow tempo, which opens the piece, is three bars long. Usually, a ground bass pattern is two, four, or eight bars long, giving the one in *Music for a while* an unusual composition. As the vocal phrases generally span over an even number of bars, this creates an overlapping sensation that can be meant to sooth and seduce the Fury like a magic flute; the music never stops. Each set of four eighth notes rises

in pitch with the exception of the final group, perhaps symbolic of King Laius rising from the dead.

The piece has a twenty-one bar *A* section, seven bar *B* section, and finally a ten bar *A* section. The form of the piece can be viewed as ternary (*ABA*) or rounded binary (also notated as *ABA*, yet the return to the *A* section typically only contains half of the full *A* period), and thus I view it as rounded binary form. This is also closer to the *da capo* arias of Purcell's time.

The singer opens with the word at the crux of the piece, "music," on the tonic of A. It is then repeated up a fifth on the dominant of E for a longer duration, stressing the word's importance, before continuing with the rest of the first two lines of the *A* section. Purcell then languishes in the words "shall all," repeating them numerous times to create an entrancing sensation for both the listener and the Fury Alecto. The word "all" is thrice stressed by a quarter note (with the "shall" upbeats as eighth notes), adding emphasis to the text's message. To underline this text for a final time, Purcell finally repeats the entire phrase "shall all your cares beguile."

Up until this point the music is mostly composed syllabically, that is to say with one note per word syllable. Now Purcell begins to introduce a somewhat more melismatic style with the word "wond'ring," painting it twice in graceful, descending lines towards the typical suspension and resolution each of the three times the "pains" are "eas'd." He also uses dissonance between the D and F in the *basso continuo* against the E in the voice on the word "pains," giving the word an even greater sense of agony. Additional use of a dissonance is on the second "eas'd," where the singer holds a C against a B (minor second) and an F# (tritone), only to resolve to a B in a G-major chord, as well as the B in the voice against the C in the bass in the next measure. This part of the text concludes in the dominant of E-minor on "disdaining to be pleas'd."

Purcell revisits the beginning of the singer's lines with the continuation of the text "Till Alecto free the dead," albeit with a more developed melody. "Alecto" is first sung shorter (like the first use of the word "music") before being held out longer the second time. The harmony during this part modulates chromatically between E-minor, F#-minor, G-major, A-minor, B-minor, C-major, and D-minor to finally end up at G-major. This creates a harmonic juxtaposition between the uncertainty of the upward chromaticism and the assuredness of G-major, the relative major of the tonic's dominant E-minor.

The most pronounced use of a melisma comes on the word "eternal," one of the clearest uses of word painting in the piece. The two long phrases on this word are essentially ornamentations written out by Purcell, with the first occurrence centered around the pitch G and the second as a passage from the pitch E to D to C.

From their e-ter nal, e-ter nal band

Here the singer's melody is rife with dissonance against the bass, symbolizing the never-ending "bands" of the dead. The second melisma on "eternal" ends on the C-major, the relative major of the tonic of A-minor, and signifies the start of the *B* section.

The *B* section begins with a short instrumental interlude to aid in separating the first two sections of the piece. Just after the singer comes in with the words "Till the snakes," the accompaniment begins the original *ostinato* form, perpetuating the overlapping sensation between the singer and the accompaniment. On the word "snakes," Purcell writes a Picardy third (C#), drawing the listener in with the sudden appearance of A-major in the otherwise A-minor piece. The onomatopoeic dropping of the snakes is illustrated by a sequential pattern of three notes on the offbeat, further accentuating the lack of alignment between the singer and accompaniment.

Till the snakes drop, drop, drop, drop, drop, drop, drop, drop from her head

The ground bass pattern ends on the word "head," at which point there are only two and a half bars remaining of the *B* section to conclude with the words "and the whip from out her hands." At this point the music modulates to the E-minor dominant and ends with a perfect cadence back to the tonic of A-minor for the return of the shortened *A* section.

The reprise of the *A* section serves as a summary and a closure to the piece, encompassing the opening three bar ground bass *ostinato* three times and ending with a final A-minor chord. During this time, the singer repeats the opening six bars and concludes with a four bar reprise of "shall all your cares beguile."

3.3 Summary, *Music for a while*

In 38 short bars, Henry Purcell masterfully wrote a piece lauding the inherent power of music to calm, soothe, and restore order. He made extensive use of the myriad tools in his compositional arsenal, including tonal ambiguity, unexpected harmonies, repetition, melismas, dissonances, and changing rhythms.

He also used a very literal form of word painting to portray some of the key words in Dryden's poem. The word "eas'd," which he illustrates through a suspension that resolves each time it appears, is repeated three times. The repetition of a word three times in music is typical when referring to the Holy Trinity and the resurrection on the third day, which seems rather appropriate in relation to the general theme of the piece.

Even though *Music for a while* has many similarities to a lament, or a song illustrating deeply sorrowful emotions (falling phrases, a minor key, and a slow tempo), I do not consider it as such. I believe the piece portrays too much hope in the power of music to be viewed as a lament. Even if it can be difficult to make sense of what is going on in the world (or what occurred during Purcell and Dryden's day), I believe that they were trying to portray a sensation that, underneath everything, calm and reason will reign if mankind will allow them their proper attention.

3.4 Text analysis, *Erlkönig*

The story of *Erlkönig* is based on the traditional Danish medieval ballad *Elveskud*, and Goethe's poem was inspired by a translation of this ballad by Johann Gottfried Herder (1778). *Erlkönig's* theme, setting, and tone are typical of the Romantic period of the late eighteenth century, namely featuring a fondness of nature, a fascination with the supernatural, and the persisting theme of love and death. The poem begins with the narrator describing a father riding quickly on horseback through the night, holding his feverish son in his arms. In his fearful and tiring state, the boy hallucinates and tells his father that he sees the Elf-king. The Elf-king's mystical personality is a clear metaphor for death. The father tries to rationally explain what his son perceives through natural phenomena such as fog, wind, and trees. The Elf-king tries twice to entice the boy to go away with him, promising toys, games, and playmates, and both times the boy cries out to his father for help. At the third attempt, the Elf-king says that he will take the boy by force if he doesn't come willingly. Following the son's third and final cry, the father becomes truly fearful for the first time and speeds up to get home. When he finally arrives and looks down in his arms, the boy was dead.

Original German text:

*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.*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"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!"*

*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.*

The text is not written in a specific meter, but in the rhyme scheme *AABB*.

Literal translation:

*Who's riding so late, in the night and wind?
It is the father with his child.
He grasps the boy in his arm.
He holds him securely; he keeps him warm.*

*"My son, why do you hide your face so fearfully?"
"Father, don't you see the Erl-King there?
The Erl-King with his crown and train?"
"My son, it's a streak of mist."*

*"You delightful child, come with me!
I'll play wonderful games with you.
Colourful flowers grow on the shore.
My mother has many fine things."*

*"My father, my father, don't you hear
What the Erl-King said to me?"
"Be calm, stay calm, my son;
The wind is stirring the dry leaves."*

*"Fine boy, will you come with me?
My daughters will wait on you nicely.
My daughters will lead the evening dancing
And rock and dance and sing to you."*

*"My father, my father, don't you see
The Erl-King's daughters in that gloomy place?"
"My son, my son, I see it indeed;
The old willow gleaming so gray."*

*"I love you, I delight in your beautiful shape;
And if you are not willing, I shall use force."
"My father, my father, he has seized me!
Erl-King is injuring me!"*

*The father blanched; he rode swiftly.
He held the moaning child in his arms.
With great trouble, he reached the courtyard.
In his arms, the child was dead.*

Poetic adaptation:

*Who rides at a gallop through night so wild?
It is the father with his dear child.
He grips the boy firmly in his arms,
He holds him safe, he keeps him warm.*

*'Son, why do you cower so fearfully?'
'Father, the Erl-king! Can you not see?
The dreadful Erl-king with crown and tail?'
'My son, it is mist blown by the gale.'*

*'You lovely child, come away with me,
We'll play together down by the sea;
Such pretty flowers grow on the shore,
My mother has golden robes in store.'*

*'My father, my father, oh do you not hear
What the Erl-king whispers into my ear?'
'Be calm, stay calm, it's nothing my child
But dry leaves blown by the wind so wild.'*

*'My fine young lad, won't you come away?
My daughters are waiting for you to play;
My daughters will lead the dance through the night,
And sing and rock you until you sleep tight.'*

*'My father, my father, can you still not see
The Erl-king's daughters waiting for me?'
'My son, my son, I can see quite clear
The moon on the willows, there's nothing else there.'*

*'I love you my boy, you are such a delight;
And I'll take you by force if you put up a fight.'
'My father, my father, he's gripping me fast!
The Erl-king is hurting! Help me, I'm lost!'*

*The father shudders, and speeds through the night,
In his arms he holds the moaning boy tight;
At last he arrives, to home and bed:
In the father's arms the child was dead.*

In Schubert's composition *Erlkönig*, there are four vocalized characters – the narrator, the father, the son, and the Elf-king – in addition to an unvoiced role, that of the galloping horse. The narrator sings mostly in mid-range and in minor. The father sings in a lower range and changes between major and minor. The son sings in a higher range and almost entirely in minor. The Elf-king sings seductively in major until his very last line – when he "takes the

boy – when he switches to minor. The right hand of the piano accompaniment throughout most of the song is a relentless eighth note triplet motif, which symbolizes the frantic pace of the horse, the piece's fifth character.

3.5 Music analysis, *Erlkönig*

The piece is written in G-minor, which Schubart says conveys uneasiness, resentment, and dislike. Incidentally, Schubart wrote the poem *Die Forelle*, which Schubert later set to music in 1817. *Erlkönig* begins without introduction with the horse's eighth note triplet motif coupled with the left hand's rising triplet and falling quarter note motif.



The narrator sets the scene by describing the father and son riding quickly through the forest. At the end of the narrator's first line the tonality changes to the D-minor dominant, and at the end of his second phrase the music is in the relative major of the tonic, Bb-major. These smooth transitions from the sensation of relative insecurity created by the minor tonic to the related and seemingly more secure major keys perhaps make the listener feel more at ease, yet Schubert immediately changes to A^o7/Bb to imply that the situation is anything but safe. The tonality when the narrator describes the father holding his son safe and warm modulates its way back to G-minor, reestablishing the uncertainty created at the beginning of the piece.

In a minor key to illustrate his concern, the father asks his son why he is hiding his face. During the phrase the accompaniment goes chromatically upwards to the subdominant C-minor, heightening the tension before the son's reply. With one exception, every one of the father's entrances is with a perfect fourth, a very solid and calming interval. The son replies – while changing back and forth between B^o7/C and C-minor – by asking if his father can't see the Elf-king, before describing him and ending in F-major. The father reassures his son by explaining his vision as a wisp of fog, changing from F-major to Bb-major, the relative major of the tonic.

At this point the Elf-king poses his first song of enticement to the son, still in Bb-major, while the accompaniment's horse motif has immediately been replaced with a more playful, dance-like eighth note triplet pattern broken up between the left hand (one eighth note) and the right hand (two eighth notes).

Du lie - bes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!

That the previously continuous horse motif has suddenly been replaced signifies that the son has been captivated by the Elf-king's allurements as if he has escaped in a dream. During the Elf-king's first appearance, the melody is very inviting and soothing. As soon as the Elf-king has finished, the galloping horse motif returns, symbolizing that the son has hastily returned to reality. He cries out to his father on an E_b in a $D7b9$ chord, asking if he cannot hear what the Elf-king is saying, at the same time as the tonality goes from G-minor chromatically upwards to the distant tonality of B-minor. In contrast to the father's first reassurances to his son (in F- and Bb -major), the father appears to begin to lose his assuredness by singing both in major and minor keys.

At this point the piece switches to C-major for the Elf-king's second enticing song. While the accompaniment for his first was a more dance-like one, the second features an arpeggiated right hand while the left hand plays eighth notes on the beat, adding a chasing sensation to the Elf-king's song.

Willst, fei - ner Kna - be, du mit mir gehn? mei-ne

His lines are not as melodic as before and feature greater chromaticism, constantly increasing the tension for the listener. Chromaticism can be associated with falsehood and deception, and this change in the Elf-king begins to reveal his true nature while also acting as a harbinger of

things to come. When the Elf-king says that his daughters will "rock and dance and sing" the son to sleep – a clear metaphor for death – the left hand accompaniment changes to eighth notes on beats one and three with eight note upbeats. This creates an even greater sense of pursuit while simultaneously implying that the Elf-king is beginning to lose patience with the son.

Once again, as soon as the Elf-king has finished, the horse accompaniment returns; the son has come to from his daydream. He cries out to his father with the same dissonance (*b9*) as before, yet now a whole step higher on F against an *E7b9* chord. When the father strives to once again reassure his son he does it almost entirely in minor keys, showing his increasing fear at the events unfolding before him.

There are striking contrasts between the Elf-king's third song and the two prior. From the father's last phrase in D-minor, Schubert writes the first three bars of the Elf-king's final enticement in the Neapolitan *Eb*-major, a sort of aural jolt to the listener showing that something is afoot. Additionally, and for the first time, the horse's ostinato accompaniment is present during the Elf-king's lines, demonstrating that he is no longer only a figment of the son's imagination, but actually present and beside him on the horse ride through the woods. When the Elf-king finally takes the son he is singing clearly in a minor key for the first time.

The son cries out for the third and final time in his highest range thus far, with the pitch having climbed to *Gb* in an *F7b9* chord. He calls to his father that the Elf-king has hurt him, finishing in the piece's tonic of G-minor. For the first time, his father does not answer him with some explanation of natural phenomena for his hallucinations. Instead, the father urges his steed on, showing his own fear for his son by replying through this more pronounced galloping of the horse. This is illustrated by the horse's triplet motif for the first time in both the right and left hands. With the return of the horse motif also comes the reappearance of the left hand's rising triplet and falling quarter note motif every other measure.

At this point the narrator returns and describes the horrified father riding faster towards his destination, while at the same time an *accelerando* increases the already-high tension. After the narrator explains that the father is holding his weary boy but before he arrives home, the left hand piano accompaniment rises chromatically up from C-minor to the tonic's Neapolitan *Ab*-major, further symbolizing the increasing speed of the horse to its destination and reminding the listener that the suspense is not over. When the narrator tells the listener that the father and son finally arrive home, it is through the chords *Ab*-major, *G°7/Ab*, and *Ab*-major, creating the sense that the story is about to reach its foreseeable conclusion. Schubert remains in the relatively distant key from the tonic of *Ab*-major, dragging out the conclusion as much as possible and thereby the suspense, as well.

When the accompaniment suddenly stops, the narrator says in a recitative style, "in his arms the child...", and the piano accompaniment replies with a *C#°7* chord. Since this chord can lead anywhere harmonically, this is Schubert's final opportunity to hang a great question mark in front of the listener, creating the last ultimate suspense and tension. The narrator finishes, saying simply, "...was dead," the first time the past tense is employed in the piece. The matter of fact manner about the narrator's (and the piece's) last dialogue, coupled with the perfect authentic cadence in the piano (*D7*-major to G-minor), finishes *Erlkönig* with a total harmonic and melodic conclusion.

3.6 Summary, *Erlkönig*

At the tender age of eighteen, Franz Schubert penned a piece which many older composers must surely only dream of being capable of writing. With its vivid imagery, inventive use of chromaticism, shifting harmonies, and unmistakable rhythmic elements, the masterpiece is the epitome of the *durchkomponiert*, or through-composed, *lied*.

In keeping with the fascination of the supernatural during the Romantic period, Schubert artfully constructs the piano's accompaniment to represent the galloping horse carrying the father and son home, effectively creating a fifth character to assist in recounting the tale. Breaking from the horse's familiar triplet motif for the first two songs of enticement by the Elf-king brings the son – and the listener – instantly away from the heart in mouth drama into a state of reverie, blissfully lured in by the false antagonist. By unexpectedly preserving the triplet motif during the Elf-king's third and final song, Schubert illustrates that the danger to the son is no figment of his imagination, rather duly present in reality. This foreshadowing of what will undoubtedly soon transpire appears all the more chilling when coupled with the chromaticism of the Elf-king and the shifting harmonies of the accompaniment.

Goethe wrote the poem in the present tense, as if the reader – or listener – is experiencing the story firsthand. Schubert plays on this notion by delaying the resolution of the inevitable outcome as long as possible, saving the two final (and past tense) words until the definitive ending cadence. One can almost picture the narrator reading the tale from a book: "in his arms the child...;" he looks up at the audience; "was dead;" he slams the book shut.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Comparison

The role of the accompaniment in the two pieces is very interesting. *Music for a while* was originally composed for voice and *basso continuo*, with the latter providing the harmonic structure of the piece. Holman (p.216) notes that the incidental music in *Oedipus* was "modestly scored" for alto, tenor, and bass soloists, two violins, and *continuo*, though it is unclear if all the instruments played in the initial performance of *Music for a while* due to a lack of notated parts. Often there are several instruments making up a *continuo* group, which must include at least one instrument capable of playing chords. Typically a harpsichord, organ, or theorbo would be joined by one or more low melody instruments such as a cello, bass, viola da gamba, or bassoon, depending on the other instruments involved in the piece. For example, a bassoon would most likely be included only if there were other wind instruments, such as an oboe, present in the ensemble. The original song only comprised a non-figured bass line – that is to say a bass line without notated numbers or accidentals beneath the staff to indicate which intervals or chords should be played – and the vocal melody, which would leave much freedom for musical expression to the instrumentalist or instrumentalists. What they played would either be rehearsed beforehand or improvised during the performance.

This is in stark contrast to *Erlkönig*, where the sole instrument's musical role is explicitly realized by Schubert with considerably less freedom for expression than with Purcell. Additionally, apart from harmonic structure, tonality, and dynamics, the piano is responsible for setting the character of the piece in a different way than the instrument or instruments in *Music for a while*, as the piano also plays one of the roles in the unfolding story. To be sure, the rising *ostinato* in Purcell's work symbolizes the raising of King Laius' spirit, yet the near ever-present triplets of the galloping horse offer a decidedly more tangible personification.

The role of the singer in the two pieces is equally contrasting. With Purcell, the singer playing the role of a priest is extolling the virtues of music and pleading with Alecto to liberate the dead. To that end, all the lines are thus sung by one personage fulfilling a singular role. This is juxtaposed in *Erlkönig* by the singer performing the role of four different characters, each with their own distinct personality and melody. The narrator appears as a neutral commentator at the beginning and end of the piece, merely painting a picture for the listener while framing the dialogue in between. The father's role is to be his son's champion, calmly reassuring him when he perceives wisps of fog and ominous shadows as nefarious entities. The son acts as a frightened conduit for the supernatural, torn between hallucination and reality. Lastly, the Elf-king personifies the supernatural and is deceptively pleasant at first, only to imminently reveal his true nature.

Hence the four roles of *Erlkönig* pose a different type of challenge to the singer than in *Music for a while*. It is undoubtedly every singer's mission and duty to convincingly communicate the message in the text they are performing, be it sacred or secular. In Purcell's composition, the singer must sincerely persuade the listener of music's intrinsic power to soothe and calm. Purcell dutifully facilitates this aim by writing graceful, flowing phrases over a constant and

steady foundation in the *continuo*. The rhythmical emphasis on so many of the words assists the singer in painting a lyrical tableau.

Given *Music for a while*'s slower tempo and Baroque provenance, there is an affluence of opportunity for the singer to make dynamic and rhythmic embellishments in their lines. Furthermore, the ability afforded to the singer to make use of ornamentation, as was customary in *da capo* arias of the epoch, allows for even greater freedom of expression. While permitting the singer to take certain obvious liberties with regard to dynamics, phrasing, and time for breathing, Romantic period music does not offer the same degree of vocal freedom as seen in the Baroque era. In particular, the piano accompaniment in *Erlkönig* spares no one in its relentless furor to reach the father and son's destination.

4.2 Reflection

When I prepare a new piece, I will typically listen to a few different recordings of it – especially if I do not know the piece – as well as read a little about the composer, find a translation if the text is in a foreign language, and gain a cursory understanding about the piece's provenance. Once I have done this, I will practice it while seated at a piano until I know how the part goes. Finally, I will continue to practice until I know the piece well. Due to the time demands of being both a student and a professional musician, I unfortunately do not often have the opportunity to delve deeper into any piece on which I am working.

Naturally the purpose of this study necessitated a significantly deeper understanding of the pieces, not only about the composers but also regarding the authors of the texts, the texts themselves, the time period and circumstances in which the pieces were written, as well as a considerably more profound comprehension of the music theory underlying the pieces. Thus thoroughly examining every aspect of the two pieces afforded me a level of understanding I had almost never previously acquired and which I greatly enjoyed.

When I next perform either piece, I will undoubtedly take this knowledge to heart. Analyzing the texts has given me a greater appreciation for the feeling and character I wish to convey as a singer. I believe it will help my decision-making in regard to ornamentation in *Music for a while* in a more "beguiling" manner in the reprise at the end, as well as the mood of the different parts of the text (enchanted, pleading, and full of hope). The skillful manner in which Purcell composed his melismatic phrases, coupled with a greater understanding of the harmonic function of the *basso continuo*, will hopefully allow my interpretation of his word painting to give a more nuanced and thoughtful performance than I would have prior to this study.

Likewise with regard to *Erlkönig*, a richer insight into the text and Schubert's masterful piano accompaniment provide the foundation for seemingly limitless experimentation with timbre and tone color when portraying the different characters in the piece. For example, the narrator should at first have a sound devoid of sensation, as they are simply presenting the narrative to the listener. When the narrator returns at the end, however, I believe they have become caught up in the story and should exhibit greater emotion when paired with the rising notes in their lines as well as the escalating chromaticism in the piano. The father requires a more reassuring and darker resonance to his lines while the son displays an increasingly shrill sound as the tessitura climbs. To successfully use sound vocal technique for the changing

characters has been a very interesting challenge to face. I have also explored how the use and application of consonants and tone color can further strengthen the interpretation of the four vocal roles. For instance, drawing out the "I" and subsequent vowel in "Du **l**iebes Kind" and "Ich **l**iebe dich" helps underscore the Elf-king's appealing nature. Singing his second song of enticement – in tandem with the accompaniment's more dance-like sound – in a more playful manner can additionally add to his mystique and allure.

I believe this study will positively affect my future preparations when learning new pieces. While I will most likely not go into the same level of detail required here, I will nonetheless strive to delve deeper than I did previously with the knowledge of the resultant benefits. I also modestly hope that this study can serve as an inspiration to other singers seeking to gain a deeper comprehension about the pieces with which they work.

4.3 Addressing the research questions

The first question was: What are the similarities and differences between the composers' approaches to the melding of text and music in the pieces? Purcell's use of word painting in the way he composed the voice line in *Music for a while* was more literal, for example in the words *music, beguile, wond'ring, eas'd, eternal, snakes, drop, and whip*. He made great use of melismas, tonal ambiguity, and unexpected harmonies to conjure the imagery intrinsic to the text. Utilizing compositional ornamentation, contrasts, and rhetoric was very typical of the Baroque period. This is in rather stark contrast to Schubert's use of word painting in *Erlkönig*. He set the text almost exclusively in a syllabic manner, allowing the harmonic development and permeating chromaticism to paint the poem's dramatic scenery. In addition to the underling presence of nature, the supernatural, and the theme of love and death typical of the Romantic era, Schubert draws more on the emotion and passion of the text to heighten the tension rather than stylistically word paint in the manner of Purcell.

The second question was: What role does the accompaniment play in the divulgence of the story? In *Music for a while*, the sparsely composed original score afforded however many instrumentalists that comprised the *continuo* group a great degree of artistic freedom, and this creative license would unequivocally manifest itself in assisting the singer to portray the text. An even moderately talented harpsichordist or lutenist, for example, would work in tandem with the singer to ornament and embellish suspensions and dissonances to illustrate the text. In *Erlkönig*, Schubert explicitly instructs the pianist how they should accompany the singer, seemingly hindering such artistic independence. However, Schubert managed to create a tremendous amount of storytelling capacity with an ostensibly limited piano accompaniment. Not only does the piano encompass harmonic development, tonality, and dynamics, it also plays an active, equestrian role in the drama as the poem's fifth character.

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