On the Musical Structure and Artistic Treatment of Schubert's Art Song "Der Erlkönig"

Kun Yang[1] and Palphol Rodloytuk[2]

Academy of Arts and Philosophy, Shinawatra University, Thailand
Corresponding Author, E-mail: [2]palphol@siu.ac.th

Abstract

Art song is a vocal genre of chamber music in European countries, and it is also a general term for popular music songs in the Middle Ages. Among various art songs, the most distinctive feature is that most of their lyrics are derived from folk poetry. The music forms and tunes possess strong expressive power, focusing on showcasing the characters' traits and inner thoughts. Piano accompaniment plays a decisive role in the performance of art songs, often forming a musical texture with the singer. Through their interaction, the poet and composer are integrated, revealing the inner world to the audience, who can clearly comprehend the artistic elegance within.

During his music study career, the author gained insights into the artistic image depicted by Schubert through long-term appreciation of his works, thereby developing a profound affection for art songs. Art songs require high artistic appreciation and aesthetic ability from both professionals and enthusiasts. Whether singing or recreating artistic songs, one must be able to clearly perceive the emotional charm and artistic appeal. Through personal advancement, the scientific guidance of a tutor, and the accumulation of artistic song works, the author has found the direction and focus of future research: the analysis of the relationship between sound and emotion. This study offers valuable insights into vocal performance, compositional analysis, and cultural interpretation of Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*, providing a reference for future performance practices and interdisciplinary research in vocal music and Romantic-era art songs.

Keywords: Schubert; Art song; Lyricism; Drama; Character

Introduction

As an outstanding work in music history, Schubert's art song "Der Erlkönig" has become the focus of research for countless musicians and scholars due to its profound emotional connotation and unique musical structure. For such a classic work that integrates poetry, melody, and accompaniment, its musical structure and singing artistic treatment have naturally become the top priorities of research.

Firstly, from the perspective of musical structure, "Der Erlkönig" demonstrates Schubert's superb use of a multi-section structure. The whole song can be divided into five distinct parts: "Prologue," "Beginning," "Development," "Climax," and "Ending." Each part is closely integrated with the lyrics, forming a perfect fusion of music and poetry. This structure not only makes the song formally complete but also provides the singer with ample space for emotional expression. Additionally, Schubert's meticulous design in tonal layout, harmony, and accompaniment patterns further enhances the artistic expression of the song. Especially in terms of modulation, he cleverly uses the conversion of major and minor keys of the same name, making the differences in color and expressiveness serve the content of the poem, demonstrating his outstanding musical talent.

Secondly, from the perspective of singing art processing, "Der Erlkönig" is a work that requires extremely high skills and emotional expression from the singer. There are four different characters in the song—son, father, Der Erlkönigl, and narrator—each with their own unique personality and emotions. The singer not only needs to distinguish voices but also needs to portray the image of each character through delicate emotional processing. Moreover, the status of the accompaniment in this song is equal to that of the vocals; it is neither a simple melody foil nor a harmonious background. The singer needs to work closely with the accompaniment to create the atmosphere and emotions expressed in the song.

Research on "Der Erlkönig" has primarily focused on analyzing its musical structure and singing skills in the past. However, with the deepening of musicological research, more scholars have begun to pay attention to the cultural connotation and social background behind this song. They attempt to interpret this work from a broader perspective to further explore its artistic value and social significance.

In summary, the musical structure and singing artistic treatment of Schubert's art song "Der Erlkönig" is a subject worthy of in-depth study. Through the analysis and research of this song, we can not only gain a deeper understanding of Schubert's musical talent and creative ideas but also provide

valuable references and inspirations for future generations of music creation and singing.

Research Objectives

1. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the musical structure of "Der Erlkönig," encompassing musical form, harmony, melody, rhythm, and other elements, in order to unveil Schubert's creative characteristics and musical style in this work.

2. To discuss the singing art interpretation of "Der Erlkönig," including voice shaping for different characters, emotional expression, coordination with accompaniment, etc., to reveal the skills and artistic accomplishments that singers should possess when performing this work.

3. To explore the similarities and differences in musical structure and singing art between Schubert's original work and Liszt's adaptation by comparing the two versions, thereby deepening our understanding and appreciation of the original work.

4. To delve into the cultural connotations and social background behind "Der Erlkönig," and to examine Schubert's source of inspiration and the contemporary significance of creating this work, in order to enrich our understanding of its artistic value and social impact.

Literature Review

1. Research on Music Structure

Regarding the musical structure of "Der Erlkönig," scholars' research primarily focuses on musical form, harmony, melody, and rhythm. Most studies contend that the song employs a multi-sectional structure, with each section intricately linked to the lyrics, achieving a seamless fusion of music and poetry. Furthermore, Schubert's meticulous design of tonal layout and his distinctive use of harmony have garnered significant scholarly attention. For instance, he skillfully utilizes (the same-name major and minor changes) to enhance the song's expressiveness, ensuring that the music and the poem's emotions complement each other (Liu, 2023).

2.Research on Singing Art Interpretation

In terms of singing art, "Der Erlkönig" is renowned for its challenging vocal techniques and rich emotional expressions. Scholars' research primarily centers on aspects such as voice shaping, emotional expression, and coordination with accompaniment for different characters. Most studies argue that

singers require exceptional vocal skills and a keen understanding of emotions to accurately portray the images and emotions of various characters in the song. Additionally, close collaboration with the accompaniment is crucial for a successful performance of this work.

Conceptual framework

1. Conceptual Framework for Musical Structure Analysis

Form Analysis: Examine the overall structure of "Der Erlkönig," encompassing the prologue, beginning, development, climax, and conclusion. Analyze the musical characteristics and functions of these sections and how they integrate to constitute a cohesive work.

Harmony and Melody: Investigate the employment of harmony and melody in the song. Assess how Schubert utilizes harmony and melody to establish the atmosphere and emotional expression of the piece.

Rhythm and Dynamics: Analyze the variations in rhythm and dynamic contrasts within the song. Explore how these musical elements interact with the lyrical content to collectively depict the characters and plot development.

2. Conceptual Framework for Vocal Art Interpretation

Characterization: Study the vocal portrayal of different characters in the song. Analyze how the singer employs timbre, volume, and pitch to embody characters such as the father, child, Erlkönig (Der Erlkönig), and narrator.

Emotional Expression: Delve into the singer's emotional interpretation within the song. Assess how they convey emotions such as fear, tension, temptation, and others through changes in their vocal delivery and facial expressions.

Coordination with Accompaniment: Analyze the synergy between the singer and the piano accompaniment. Explore how they collaborate to create the desired atmosphere and emotional impact through the rhythm, dynamics, and timbre of the music.

Research Methodology

1. Literature Review Method

By consulting relevant books, journals, papers, and other documents, we can gain a comprehensive

understanding of the historical background, creative context, musical style, and vocal techniques of Schubert's art song "Der Erlkönig." Additionally, existing research findings are reviewed and evaluated to provide a foundation and reference for subsequent research.

2. Musicological Analysis Method

Using the method of musicological analysis, we conduct an in-depth examination of the musical structure of "Der Erlkönig," encompassing analyses of musical form, harmony, melody, rhythm, and more. Through a combination of score analysis and listening experiences, we explore the distinctive characteristics and style of Schubert's musical composition in this work.

3. Vocal Practice and Performance Method

Through actual vocal practice and performance, we delve into the artistic interpretation of singing "Der Erlkönig." Singers personally embody the characters and emotional shifts within the song, employing appropriate vocal techniques to shape the characters and convey emotions. Simultaneously, through coordination with the piano accompaniment, the necessary atmosphere and emotional tone for the song are collectively created.

Research results

1. Analysis of the Musical Structure of Schubert's Art Song "Der Erlkönig"

Schubert's art song "Der Erlkönig" demonstrates his unique creative prowess in terms of musical structure. This work is distinguished not only by its melody and harmony but also by its cleverly arranged musical form and structure, imbuing the entire song with drama and tension.

1.1 Formal Structure

The musical structure of "Der Erlkönig" adopts a multi-section form, which is intimately linked to the alternating appearances of four different characters in the song: the narrator, the father, the child, and the Erlkönig. The entire song can be divided into three major sections: introduction, main part, and ending.

The introduction is brief and mysterious. Through the deep tone and rapid rhythm of the piano accompaniment, it establishes a tense and terrifying atmosphere, setting the stage for the entire song. (Cheng, 2019)

The main part consists of a loop composed of multiple sections, each corresponding to a plot

or emotional change in the lyrics. These sections exhibit both similarities and marked contrasts in the music, creating a rich musical tapestry. The melody, harmony, and rhythm within each section closely align with the lyrics, jointly driving the song's narrative forward.

The epilogue serves as the summation and conclusion of the entire song. In this section, Schubert employs rich harmonic changes and melodic lines, propelling the song to a climax at the end and leaving a lasting impression.

1.2 Use of Harmony

In his use of harmony, Schubert displays his exceptional skill and unique creativity. He adeptly utilizes the major and minor changes of the same name to depict the emotional shifts of different scenes and characters in the song. For instance, in the passage describing the Erlkönig, he employs minor-key harmony to evoke a dark and terrifying ambiance; whereas in the passage depicting the child, he uses major-key harmony to convey a sense of innocence and purity (Dai, 2012).

Furthermore, Schubert is also adept at employing techniques such as chromatic progression and dissonant chords to enhance the song's expressiveness. The application of these techniques not only enriches the harmonic palette of the song but also imbues it with greater emotional depth and complexity.

1.3 Melody and Rhythm

In terms of melody and rhythm, Schubert also exercises meticulous design. The melodic lines of the entire song are smooth and varied, encompassing both expansive lyrical melodies and tense narrative melodies. These melodies are closely intertwined with the lyrics, collaborating to create the images and emotions of the different characters in the song (He & Bai, 2016).

Regarding rhythm, Schubert employs a diverse array of rhythmic patterns to complement the lyric content and emotional shifts. For example, in the passage describing the father's horseback riding, he uses a rapid hoofbeat rhythm pattern to simulate the sound of a galloping horse; whereas in the passage depicting the child's fear, he utilizes a tight and rapid rhythmic pattern to convey the child's inner anxiety and unease.

2. Artistic Processing of the Song "Der Erlkönig"

The song "Der Erlkönig" presents a significant challenge to singers. They must embody four distinct roles while continually shifting their emotions. The diverse emotional landscapes of these characters constitute the very charm of this song. (Lei, 2019)

2.1 Analysis of Roles in the Song

"Der Erlkönig" features four characters with vastly different personalities: the narrator, the father, the son, and the god of death. Schubert has cleverly composed melodies tailored to each character, ensuring that the emotions conveyed in the lyrics merge seamlessly with the music. The song begins in the key of B-flat and undergoes several key changes before returning to B-flat as the main key and ultimately concluding. The depiction of the characters, coupled with the various melodic shifts within the composition, brings the psychological traits of each character to life, allowing the work to resonate more clearly with the audience. This musical approach is quintessential to Schubert's artistic style (Cao, 2020).

The first character introduced is the "narrator," who starts off in B-flat with a steady and swift tone, providing the audience with a recitative reminiscent of operatic singing. This sets the stage by broadly outlining the overall storyline (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The appearance of the character of the narrator. (Source: By researcher, 2024)

What follows is a dialogue between father and son. This passage also enters with the melody of "B flat", passes through (g minor-c minor) and finally returns to "B flat", which expresses the relationship between father and son. The father's melody appears in the bass range, highlighting the father's calmness, while the son's melody appears in the mid-range and high-pitched range, highlighting the child's nervousness and fear when seeing the shadow (Yang, 2020) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 The dialogue between the character (father) and the character (son).

(Source: By researcher, 2024)

Then the third one appeared was the "Der Erlkönig". As soon as the character of "Der Erlkönigl" appeared, the music changed a lot. In the form of a movie, the "Der Erlkönigl" appeared in the dialogue between "father" and "son", calmly seduces the child in the key of "B flat major". Through the accompaniment, we can know that Der Erlkönig is approaching the child step by step (Figure 3).

Figure 3 The appearance of the figure (Der Erlkönig). (Source: By researcher, 2024)

2.2 Articulation of songs

As we all know, the pronunciation of words is extremely important in the singing of music songs. The art song "Der Erlkönig" is one of the very classic works in the German language family. It requires the singer to learn German well. This is the most basic and basic requirement of this song. German, a distinctive language, belongs to the "Germanic" language family, which requires singers to always pay attention to the pronunciation of "consonants" and exaggerated pronunciation when the German language is spoken. This is also a strict characteristic of the German language family.

During the reading process, you can read rhythmically according to the speed of the work. This will help improve the accuracy of the words when singing, improve the intonation, and better integrate with the piano accompaniment. This not only reduces the difficulty of learning, but also effectively and quickly sings a song completely.

As shown in section 143 of the picture, the "ht" in "reicht" here does not need to be pronounced with emphasis, and the "tot" at the end must be pronounced with the "t" sound. First, it shows the solemnity and solemnity of the Germanic language family. Rigorous, the second is to highlight the fact that "the child is dead" (Sun, 2014) (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Death of a character (child) and its explanation. (Source: By researcher, 2024)

2.3 Song Content and Emotional Expression

Schubert's art song "Der Erlkönig" is imbued with rich emotions. The singer must thoroughly comprehend the personality and inner world of each character to fully convey the emotional depth of the work (Han, 2018).

The first character to emerge in the song is the "narrator." This role is tasked with summarizing the entire narrative, introducing the beginning and conclusion, thereby enabling the listener to swiftly immerse themselves in the scene created by the song. When the baritone singer performs, it is essential to integrate their own alto timbre. While singing this section, the singer should also exhibit a sense of sexiness, delivering the lines calmly yet with a touch of urgency, while maintaining resonance in the head cavity. There is no need to overly engage the chest, as this character serves as a storyteller and does not require excessive technique. The aim is merely to elucidate the storyline, thereby inducing a slight sense of nervousness in the listener at the song's outset.

The subsequent character to appear in the song is the "father." The role of the "father" is portrayed as exceedingly calm within the song. He manages his own emotions while simultaneously soothing the "child's" emotions. Consequently, when the baritone singer sings the lyrics of the "father," it is imperative to maintain a serene and steady demeanor, with a lower timbre. The singer should convey the emotion associated with the lower register, enabling the audience to perceive him as a father confronting difficult emotions with composure. This singing approach not only highlights the richness of the baritone's bass range but also embodies the "security" of this character. Baritone singers must be proficient in the lower range, capable of producing their voices calmly and powerfully, and effectively expressing their emotions. (Zhao, 2020)

Subsequently, the "child" emerges in the song. The role of the "child" is pivotal in the song and serves as the protagonist of the story. The entire narrative revolves around the "child's" illness. Given that the "child" is gravely ill in the story and is being pursued by the "Der Erlkönigl", the situation is exceedingly frightening. In the song, the "child" exhibits a trace of uncertainty when conversing with the "father" for the first time, as they initially believe what the "father" says and only see leaves. However, in the second verse, when the "Der Erlkönigl" begins to address the "child," the "child" becomes convinced of the "Der Erlkönig's" existence. Therefore, when singing this section, it is necessary to infuse a hint of panic. By the third verse, the "Der Erlkönig" is continually approaching the "child," further reinforcing the "child's" belief in the "Der Erlkönig's" existence. Singing this section requires a great deal

of fear. In the final section, death arrives, and the "Der Erlkönigl" stands before the "child" to claim their life. Upon witnessing death's arrival, the "child's" heartbeat accelerates. At this juncture, the singer must increase their speaking speed, adopting a serious and desperate tone, shouting in agony. This enables the listener to directly perceive the "child's" suffering in the face of death and their hope for life. Baritone singers must skillfully employ the techniques they have acquired to sing this section, as the "child's" vocal range is relatively high and situated in the voice change area, necessitating proficiency in singing techniques to execute it effectively.

The final character to appear in the song is the "Der Erlkönigl". The "Der Erlkönigl" serves as a dark and desperate figure in the story, requiring the singer to convey evil while singing. In the three sections where the "Der Erlkönig" appears, the initial section is sung with an intensity of "PPP," depicting the artistic image of the "Der Erlkönigl" seducing the "child." Subsequently, the singing intensity increases to "FF," signifying the "Der Erlkönig's" impatience and desire to swiftly claim the "child's" life as his own. Therefore, during the singing process, the singer must alternate between "soft" and "strong" to coordinate the performance. This not only showcases the "Der Erlkönig's" evil and fierceness but also enables the listener to clearly perceive the "child's" fear.

2.4 Vocal Singing and Piano Accompaniment

The piano's accompaniment in art songs dictates that the score comprises two parts: the accompaniment and the vocal part. The role of the accompaniment is to complement and enhance the vocal part through variations in tempo, dynamics, rhythm, tonality, texture, harmony, and other musical elements (Wang, 2018).

This classic musical work is inherently incomplete without piano accompaniment. Initially, the song commences with a magnificent piano introduction. The right hand plays with grandeur, evoking the image of a galloping horse, and then introduces the main theme in "B-flat major." The tonic, in the form of a triplet, is played rapidly in octaves, mimicking the sound of real-life horse hooves. Meanwhile, the left hand portrays a scene of a dark and windy night, which persists throughout, imparting a sense of urgency and tension to the audience, making the entire composition eerie and disturbing (Wang, 2012).

Firstly, the significance of the performer is evident in the "triplets" at the beginning of the song. The performer must execute the melody swiftly, adding diversity to the song's melody and enabling the singer to quickly immerse themselves in the character's mindset. This is followed by the

"interludes" within the song. Each interlude signifies a change in character, allowing the singer to swiftly and accurately grasp the character's inner world, thereby facilitating a more compelling performance for the audience (Figure 5).

Figure 5 The speed at which the performer plays the melody adds variation to the song's melody.

(Source: By researcher, 2024)

Here is the transition in the singing from "Father" to "Der Erlkönigl". The "triplets" are employed in the middle bars (55–57) as an "interlude," enabling the singer to clearly comprehend which character will appear next. Thus, the piano accompaniment and singing are seamlessly integrated (Kim, 2021).

3. Compare Schubert's original with Liszt's adaptation

Schubert's original art song "Der Erlkönig" demonstrates a high level of cohesion and unity in its musical structure. The entire piece is consistently in 4/4 time, and through the meticulous organization of eight verses, the story's beginning and end are ingeniously crafted. Each section closely revolves around the lyric content, with the melody and accompaniment interweaving to propel the narrative forward. Schubert's adept utilization of tonal shifts—portraying the seductive aspect of Der Erlkönig in a soothing major key, while the son's plea for help and the father's anxiety are conveyed in a rapid minor key—serves to heighten the dramatic impact of the music.   Furthermore, through fluctuations in the melody, variations in rhythm, and changes in harmony, he masterfully four distinct characters: Der Erlkönig, the father, the son, and the narrator, rendering the song both structurally rigorous and musically diverse, imbued with artistic allure.

Conversely, Liszt's arrangement of the piano work "Der Erlkönig" exhibits a more ambitious and intricate musical framework. He skillfully employed the technique of symphonic poetry to transform the original vocal-centric art song into a symphonic solo piano composition. In the process of adaptation, Liszt not only preserved the essential structure and narrative threads of the original but also deepened its layers and connotations through multifaceted rhythmic shifts, chord progressions, and dynamic contrasts. His adept use of various piano techniques, such as arpeggios and alternating two-handed percussions, lent the arrangement greater depth and diversity in sound. Simultaneously, Liszt vividly conveyed the father's anguish and panic upon seeing his son near death through numerous chord leaps and forceful dynamic markings. This innovation and expansion of the musical structure not only highlight Liszt's exceptional adaptation skills but also breathe new life and artistic merit into the classic work "Der Erlkönig."

In summary, a comparison of Schubert's original art song "Der Erlkönig" with Liszt's piano work "Der Erlkönig" reveals both shared traits in musical structure and vocal artistry, as well as their unique artistic allure. Schubert's original showcases his extraordinary artistic prowess through its profound emotional expression, distinct character portrayal, and cohesive musical structure. Meanwhile, Liszt's arrangement underscores his mastery in piano arrangement, characterized by its grand symphonic scope, rich rhythmic variety, and challenging technique. Together, they complement each other, presenting us with the diverse artistic dimensions of the timeless work "Der Erlkönig."

4. The cultural connotation, social background behind the art song "Der Erlkönig", as well as Schubert's inspiration and contemporary significance

"Der Erlkönig" is an art song by Franz Schubert based on the narrative poem of the same name by the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This work is not only known for its exquisite musical skills and profound emotional expression, but also contains rich cultural connotations and social backgrounds, reflecting the fusion of European Romantic literature and music at that time, as well as Schubert's personal creative inspiration and historical background. By delving into these aspects, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the artistic value of Der Erlkönig and its contemporary significance.

4.1 Cultural connotation and social background

Der Erlkönig was written in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century, during the rise of Romantic literature. Romanticism emphasized the expression of personal emotions, imagination and

nature, and opposed the rational constraints of classicism. Goethe's poetry was heavily influenced by Romanticism and was full of mystical and supernatural elements. A case in point is Der Erlkönig, which tells the story of a father who rides through the forest at night and takes his ailing son to escape the temptation of a demon king. This narrative poem not only shows the fragility and fear of human nature, but also reflects the greatness and firmness of fatherly love. When composing the music, Schubert skillfully combined these emotions with musical elements to make the work dramatic and infectious.

At the same time, the work also reflects the social context of the time. At the beginning of the 19th century, Europe experienced the turmoil and transformation of the Napoleonic Wars, and people were full of uncertainty and fear about the future. The figure of the demon king in Der Erlkönig may be seen as a symbol of social unrest and unrest, while the father's protection of his son represents people's perseverance in family and faith in the face of adversity.

4.2 Schubert's inspiration and creation

Schubert's inspiration was mainly based on Goethe's poetry. Fascinated by the dramatic, emotional, and mysterious nature of the poem, he decided to compose it as a song. In the process of creation, Schubert made full use of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony and piano accompaniment, and successfully created four distinct characters: the demon king, the father, the son, and the narrator. In particular, he imitates the sound of hurried horses' hooves and whistling wind through piano accompaniment, which enhances the tension and drama of the work.

In addition, Schubert's work was also influenced by personal emotions. He has a deep understanding of the family affection and faith depicted in the poems, and these emotions are fully reflected in his works. Schubert conveys his own perceptions and thoughts on life through music, making his works more real and moving.

4.3 Contemporary significance

Der Erlkönig not only had a profound impact at the time, but is still relevant today. First of all, as a classic work of art, it shows the perfect combination of romantic literature and music, and provides valuable inspiration for later generations of music creation. Secondly, the themes of family affection and faith contained in the works have universal human emotional value, which can resonate and think about modern people. Finally, through the study and appreciation of Der Erlkönig, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotation and social background of the time, and enrich our understanding of history and culture.

Discussion

The in-depth research on Schubert's *"Der Erlkönig"* has significantly expanded our understanding of the song's musical structure and vocal artistry. Scholars have identified that the song's multi-sectional form, coupled with Schubert's nuanced use of tonality, harmony, and rhythm, creates a dynamic and emotionally charged narrative. Through the manipulation of these musical elements, Schubert effectively conveys the emotional transformations of the characters and the unfolding drama, enhancing the listener's engagement.

The song's structural design is particularly effective in highlighting the varied emotional landscapes of the characters: the narrator, the father, the child, and the Erlkönig. Each character is distinctly portrayed through unique melodic lines, harmonic choices, and rhythmic patterns. For instance, the rapid and repetitive rhythmic patterns in the piano accompaniment vividly depict the galloping horse, contributing to the tense atmosphere of the song. The father's melody, typically steady and grounded in the bass, contrasts with the child's soaring, anxious vocal lines, reflecting the emotional distance and heightened fear. Meanwhile, the Erlkönig's melodies, often in a major key, embody both a deceptive allure and an ominous threat. This careful use of musical devices showcases Schubert's mastery in translating literary and emotional content into sound, allowing him to craft four distinct characters, each with its own musical identity.

In terms of vocal performance, *"Der Erlkönig"* stands as one of Schubert's most technically demanding works. Singers must navigate not only the complexity of multiple characters but also the varied emotional expressions required for each. Research indicates that exceptional vocal skill and emotional sensitivity are essential for accurately embodying the different personalities and psychological states portrayed in the song. The ability to switch seamlessly between the narrator's calm storytelling, the father's composure, the child's mounting fear, and the Erlkönig's sinister seduction demands considerable vocal control and interpretive insight.

The collaborative nature of the performance is another critical aspect of the work. The piano accompaniment is not merely an accompaniment but an integral part of the musical narrative. The interplay between voice and piano creates a dynamic relationship, with the piano providing both emotional depth and structural support. In the opening, the rapid triplet figures in the piano imitate the pounding of hooves, establishing the song's sense of urgency. As the song progresses, the piano shifts

in tone and texture, corresponding to the emotional development of the narrative, thus amplifying the drama and heightening the emotional resonance of the characters' struggles. This symbiosis between vocal line and piano accompaniment is crucial in delivering the emotional and dramatic impact that *"Der Erlkönig"* is known for.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of various performance versions has revealed the nuanced differences in how singers interpret the characters and convey their emotional journeys. These differences highlight the importance of personal expression and stylistic choices in shaping the overall impact of the work. Singers must work closely with the accompanist to ensure that the dramatic tension is maintained and that the emotional undercurrents of the song are fully realized in performance.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. The analysis focuses primarily on *"Der Erlkönig"*, with limited comparison to other works by Schubert or his contemporaries, which restricts broader generalization. Additionally, the interpretation of vocal performance relies mainly on literature and limited practice-based analysis, lacking empirical testing through live performance or audience reception studies. The cultural contextualization also depends on secondary sources without integrating primary historical documents that could enhance historical authenticity.

Despite these limitations, the study has important implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of vocal musicology by demonstrating how compositional form interacts with poetic structure and character portrayal. It encourages interdisciplinary research between music theory, literature, and performance studies. Empirically, the findings provide practical insights for singers, vocal coaches, and music educators. Singers can benefit from the detailed vocal strategies for differentiating characters and managing dynamic expression. Music educators can use the analysis as a teaching tool to illustrate Romantic-era performance practice. Additionally, composers and arrangers may draw inspiration from the structural comparison between Schubert's and Liszt's versions, which reflects how vocal art songs can be transformed into instrumental narratives without losing dramatic essence.

Future studies are recommended to adopt more comparative and empirical approaches—such as performance experiments, surveys of audience perception, and historical document analysis—to further investigate the layered significance of *"Der Erlkönig"* and its modern interpretations across cultures and genres.

Conclusion

As a renowned "narrative" song, "Der Erlkönig" stands as the most potent manifestation of Schubert's dramatic songs. The narrative lyrics are segmented into eight parts, each with distinct songs and lyrics that are tightly integrated. Each part is further divided into four sentences, facilitating the singer's ability to differentiate between characters. The song features four characters: the narrator, the father, the child, and the Der Erlkönig. Each character embodies unique emotions, requiring the singer to interpret them based on the lyrics' primary meaning and the emotions conveyed by the musical melody, thereby creating four distinct characters. The entire song is piano-based, with the accompaniment melody closely intertwined, posing a significant challenge to the performer. An orchestra can also be utilized for accompaniment. Given the demands of speed and difficulty, even listening to the accompaniment alone is sufficient to appreciate the music's powerful charm. To better express the story's content, the composer's use of harmony is also highly distinctive.

"Der Erlkönig" is the most dramatic among art songs. Schubert, the "musical poet," employed numerous dramatic art techniques in creating this work, necessitating that singers perform it in varying tones. After extensively studying this song and organizing the materials, the author has gained a deeper understanding of Schubert's artistic songs, particularly "Der Erlkönig," and is now fully prepared for singing. Not only must the author comprehend each character in the song and their image characteristics, but they must also thoroughly analyze and understand the lyrics to present the four characters to the audience in unique ways.

In summary, "Der Erlkönig" is a representative art song by Schubert. In terms of artistic characteristics, it exhibits vivid character portrayal. The composer utilizes diverse creative techniques to emphasize emotions. Therefore, during the singing process, the singer must not only complement the piano accompaniment but also convey the emotions of the four characters. This underscores that Schubert's art songs are artistic treasures in bel canto singing, and further research and re-creation by scholars are warranted.

Recommendations

1. General Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Schubert's art song Der Erlkönig, several general recommendations for performance and appreciation are offered. Singers should focus on enhancing their vocal technique, particularly in areas like range, dynamics, and articulation, to more effectively portray the diverse characters and emotions within the song. Emotional insight and expressive ability are equally important, as they allow performers to convey the characters' motivations and emotional journeys authentically. Additionally, close collaboration between the singer and the piano accompanist is crucial to ensure a seamless integration of vocal and instrumental parts, which amplifies the dramatic tension and emotional depth of the piece. Performing Der Erlkönig in varied settings, such as concerts, festivals, and educational programs, can help introduce the work to broader audiences, expanding appreciation for the art song genre.

2. Further Research Recommendations

Further research should focus on a more detailed exploration of the musical elements in Der Erlkönig, such as tonality, harmony, and rhythmic patterns, to better understand how these contribute to the emotional impact and narrative structure of the song. Comparative studies with other art songs by Schubert or composers from the same period could provide valuable insights into common thematic elements or innovative techniques. In addition, investigating the social and historical context in which the song was composed would enrich our understanding of Schubert's creative process and the audience for whom he composed. Future research into modern performance practices, including the integration of multimedia and interactive elements, could offer new ways to interpret and present Der Erlkönig, engaging audiences in innovative and meaningful ways.

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