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Toward an Understanding of the Eighteenth-Century Lied

If there is a single thread winding its way throughout western culture, it is surely the idea of "progress." Whether expressed as the Homeric hero struggling past the rocks of the sirens, the Christian on the arduous path of salvation, or the Romantic wanderer in search of an elusive "Heimat", the teleological worldview is dedicated to interpreting both life and history in terms of the goal toward which they are said to be advancing. Not surprisingly, music has not escaped the march of progress, a point amply in evidence in the following pronouncement from Raphael Georg Kiesewetter's 1834 *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unsrer heutigen Musik*: "If we now gaze backwards, it is gratifying to observe how this most beautiful of the arts has risen... stage by stage, slowly but surely, to the perfection which... we believe we have achieved."¹

While many today doubtless would reject Kiesewetter's position, attitudes like it nonetheless continue to shape our understanding of music. Nowhere is this more clearly to be seen than in the standing accorded the eighteenth-century lied. To be sure, for most critics nowadays the genre is little more than a succession of "tuneful trifles" eked out by "anemic... arpeggios."² Comparisons with Schubert only reinforce the impression; for Eric Sams, Schubert's more than 600 lieder "annihilate" all that they precede.³ Add to this the nineteenth century's paradigmatic shift in aesthetics with the composer-as-genius inspired not by convention but by the original stirrings of his or her soul, and the eighteenth-century lied seems positively pallid!

Yet as an open-minded appraisal will show, the lied before Schubert was widely regarded as the yardstick of Enlightenment musical life, a point affirmed by Reichardt in 1774 when he declared it to be "that upon which the steadfast artist relies when he begins to suspect his art is going astray" – the "musician's true north star."⁴ In short, the genre's current standing has concealed its origins, obfuscated its didactic standing within eighteenth-century musical thought, obscured Schubert's debt to his predecessors, and shrouded the fact that, like the nineteenth-century lied, that of the previous century was sparked by German poets striking out on new paths.

¹ Raphael Georg Kiesewetter: *Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unsrer heutigen Musik*, Leipzig, 1834, p. 98f.

² The first quotation is by Edward T. Cone: *Words and Music: The Composer's Approach to the Text*, in: *Music: A View from Delft*, Selected Essays, ed. Robert P. Morgan, Chicago and London, 1989, p. 115; the second is by Lawrence Kramer: *The Schubert Lied: Romantic Form and Romantic Consciousness*, in: *Schubert Critical and Analytical Studies*, ed. Walter Frisch, Lincoln and London, 1986, p. 200.

³ Eric Sams: Art. *Schubert*, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, 1980, vol. 16, 774.

⁴ Quoted in Max Friedlaender: *Das deutsche Lied im 18. Jahrhundert: Quellen und Studien*, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1902, vol. 1, part 1, p. 196.

If the lied from Johann André to Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg seems not to conform to present notions of „progress,” yet another reason for the indifference that typically greets it stems from the fact that music scholars tend to shy away from matters literary. Yet it is the when, where, what, and why of the purely verbal text developed by a new generation of writers, who, beginning in the 1730s, increasingly rejected what they saw as the extravagant excesses of their literary forebears, that provided eighteenth-century composers with the starting points for their tuneful creations. Johann Christoph Gottsched, professor at the University of Leipzig beginning in 1730 and self-appointed guardian of German classicism, quickly assumed the role of chief spokesperson. In his widely-read *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst* (1730), Gottsched declared his allegiance to two guiding precepts: the authority of the ancients and of nature. The affiliation is affirmed on the treatise's first page by means of an epigram from Horace's *Ars Poetica*: “In short, everything you write must be modest and simple.” Thus the poet must uphold an “exact observation of nature,” for nature is devoid of all artificiality. The same advice is appropriate for the musician yet with one proviso. As Gottsched insists, a song ought to aim at “nothing more than an agreeable and clear reading of a verse, which consequently must match the nature and content of the words.”⁵

The Hamburg poet Johann Friedrich Hagedorn shared Gottsched's neoclassical outlook. In the preface of his 1742 *Oden und Lieder*, Hagedorn provides a prescient sketch of the lied as it would be cultivated for the next seventy-five years. Quoting from a 1713 essay from the British literary journal *The Guardian*, he begins by specifying the kind of poetry from which he is seeking to distance himself: that sort where “one Point of Wit flashes so fast upon another that the Reader's Attention is dazzled by the continual sparkling of their Imagination.” In such verse, he continues, “you find a new Design started almost in every Line, and you come to the end, without the Satisfaction of seeing any one of them executed.” Far better to imbue a poem with “great Regularity, an elegant and unaffected Turn of Wit” and where “one uniform and simple Design” is given over to but “a single Thought..., which is driven to a Point, without... Interruptions and Deviations.”⁶ Hagedorn's younger contemporary, the Ansbach poet Johann Peter Uz agreed. In the introduction to his 1749 *Lyrische Gedichte*, one discovers a poetics dedicated to “gentle feelings, the likeness of nature, the noble simplicity of unadorned expressions or the beautiful essence of long ago antiquity.” Just as does Gottsched, Uz bases his poetic program on nature. In his poem *Die Dichtkunst*, from the same publication, he implores his muse: „cultivate in-

⁵ Johann Christoph Gottsched: *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen*, 4th ed. Leipzig, 1751; facsimile ed. Darmstadt, 1962, respectively from p. 13, 144, and 466.

⁶ Hagedorn's familiarity with *The Guardian* stemmed from his time as private secretary to the Danish ambassador at the court of St. James. See Hagedorn: *Oden und Lieder in fünf Büchern*, Hamburg, 1747, p. xii. The issue of *The Guardian* is No. 16, March 30, 1713; see *The Guardian*, ed. John Calhoun Stephens, Lexington, 1982, p. 88f.

nocence and nature... Strive not for overweening ornament, sound here your gentle song that it may inspire the enraptured shepherd to take up unadorned song."⁷

True to the polemical spirit of the age, the new lied was not universally accepted. As early as 1722, Johann Mattheson, then forty-one and a member of the established guard, took stock of the winds of change with the following vituperative volley. While Hagedorn might laud poetry for its "uniform and simple Design," for Mattheson such attributes were "a malady of melody, a cruel iron collar for musical poets." Not only is the unchanging repetition of the same tune in a strophic song wearisome, it is also "not at all musical."⁸ Although Mattheson's reproach remained unanswered for more than a decade, the defense ultimately was led by Johann Adolph Scheibe, erstwhile pupil of Gottsched in Leipzig, now in Hamburg, the same city in which was Hagedorn. Remembered almost exclusively for his infamous assault on Johann Sebastian Bach, whose music he found "confused" and "turgid," a more complete awareness of Scheibe's aesthetic outlook and age when he took up Mattheson's gauntlet provides perhaps a more dispassionate explanation for his views on Bach rather than mere vendetta. Devoting an issue of his journal to the lied, Scheibe begins by acerbically reflecting that "there are some lordly souls who think the very word *lied* offensive" and "who cry out against simple *lieder* with haughty disdain." Dismissing such arrogance, and after duly citing the ancients, for whom "order and nature" counted above all, he advises the would-be songster to begin with a look at the poem's overall form. Given the invariably strophic nature of such poetry, care must be taken that the music suit every strophe. The composer must not effect a cadence, repeat a word nor extend a syllable in one strophe where such would be unsuitable in another. Likewise, the poem's verse and meter must be musically matched. This done, the last step is the creation of a relatively short melody, one that remains close to tonic and that adheres to "a moderate range," is "free, flowing, pure, and really natural" in order that it might "be sung at once and without particular effort by someone inexperienced in music."⁹

The question that remains is what did composer's make of the new type of verse and song advocated by Gottsched, Hagedorn, Uz, and finally Scheibe? In providing now a brief analysis of a setting of Hagedorn's *An die Freude*, perhaps the first thing to be said is that Scheibe's guidelines appear to have been followed to the letter. Starting where the composer presumably did, that is with the poem, it is discovered

⁷ Johann Peter Uz: *Lyrische Gedichte*, Berlin, 1749, 3. The reference to Uz's *Die Dichtkunst* is from the same publication, Book IV, lines 1; 9-14. As it happens, the introduction was written at Uz's request by Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim. See *Briefwechsel zwischen Gleim und Uz*, ed. Carl Schüddenkopf, Tübingen, 1899, vol. 218, *Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart*, p. 179. Gleim's reference to "the noble simplicity of unadorned expressions" anticipates by six years Johann Joachim Winckelmann's more famous formulation on the "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" of Greco-Roman sculpture made in his 1755 *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*.

⁸ Johann Mattheson: *Critica musica*, 2 vols. Hamburg, 1722; 1725, vol. 2, p. 311 and 309, respectively.

⁹ Scheibe: *Critischer Musikus*, Hamburg, 1738, 64. Stücke, Tuesday, 17 November, 1739, variously from p. 295, 299, 302.

that the song satisfies in every way Hagedorn's dictum that a poem possess an "*easie and flowing*" style while probing but a „*single Thought*." In keeping with the mandate of "*one uniform and simple Design*," to the extent that there is any real progression it is largely cumulative rather than syntactical. Published in 1742, Hagedorn's *An die Freude* was first set to music in 1744 by Johann Valentin Görner, one of Hamburg's leading composers.¹⁰ Brief although the setting is, brevity likely is not its most striking feature but rather the austere texture.

Etwas munter

Freu - de Göt - tin ed - ler Her - zen Hö - re mich. Freu - de

Göt - tin ed - ler Her - zen Hö - re mich. Laß die Lie - der, die hier schal - len, Dich ver -

grös - sern, dir ge - fal - len: Was hier tö - - - net, tönt durch dich.

Vom Anfang

Example: Johann Valentin Görner: *An die Freude*.

Less readily apparent, at least when considered in relation to the lieder of Schubert, is what the song lacks: a mood-setting introduction and postlude for solo keyboard. The accompaniment, far from elaborating on the poem, provides the barest of supports. Thus Görner's setting seems to have but the single purpose of unobtrusively conveying the poet's words. Certain aspects, however, cause one to question whether or not the presiding personality or "persona", to borrow Edward T. Cone's suggestive phrase, is always the poet.¹¹ This especially is to be seen in Görner's disregard for the strophic design, given that he ignores the poet as to where each strophe should end by repeating the first line of each strophe, indicated by the *da capo* indication at the end of measure 15. Assuming Görner's performers were diligent enough to render all five of Hagedorn's strophes, the listener would hear the first eight measures a total of ten

¹⁰ First published in 1742, I quote the version from Hagedorn's *Oden und Lieder in fünf Büchern*, Hamburg, 1747), vol. 2, pp. 41-42. Görner's setting was published in the *Sammlung Neuer Oden und Lieder*, Hamburg, 1744 and was given pride of place as the first number of the second volume (volume 1 had appeared in 1742).

¹¹ Edward T. Cone: *The Composer's Voice*, Berkeley, 1974, p., 20ff.

times — something Mattheson no doubt happily would have pronounced “*not at all musical*.”

Measured against Scheibe's criteria, Görner's setting emerges as potentially problematic. Even allowing for the song's early date and the fact that lied composers in the 1740s were venturing into uncharted waters, it could be argued that Görner evinces only marginal awareness of the poem's form and content. Yet in other ways he seems to satisfy all of Scheibe's other requirements: unaccented syllables coincide with weak beats in the music and the melody holds to “*a moderate range*” and is “*free flowing*.” The repeat of the poem's opening line in the music's second phrase, in measures 5–7, while ostensibly pointless from the poetic perspective, is effective in balancing antecedent and consequent phrase design of the first half of the setting and, even more crucial, following the antecedent phrase's half cadence in m. 4, in preparing for the tonic cadence in m. 8. The repeat of the first text line also makes good melodic sense: whereas the melody in the antecedent phrase rises a fifth from *a* to *e*, the consequent phrase reverses that motion. Intriguingly, it is only when one turns to the requirements of coordinating harmony and phrase structure that Görner's song shows itself to be more than the work of a hack. For in crafting a poem with varying line lengths and a rhyme pattern consisting of a b b a, Hagedorn may be said to have presented the composer with an insoluble problem. If the composer is to honor the poet's plan at all, the question emerges where to place the major musical caesuras and at the same time fashion a song with coherent phrase structure. Should one stretch the two middle lines over eight measures of music? If so, what about the last line of text — ought it to stretch over eight bars of music? And what of the eleven syllables of line 1? In sum, inauspicious although it may at first seem, Görner's *da capo*-like design is not so inept after all. Moreover, the repeat of the first line may be said to be motivated by the poem itself, for it echoes the first strophe's imagery of resounding songs; in the second the Joy that transcends ordinary happiness; in the third the Joy greater than earthly riches; in the fourth the Joy that brightens reason.

In lingering over Görner's unassuming song, I have done so not to suggest it is a lost masterpiece but to provide a departure point for questioning the entrenched view of the lied before Schubert. Such a view places the genre's inception in Berlin, centered around the court of Frederick the Great. In arguing instead for Hamburg it should be said that such a statement in no way lessens Berlin's subsequent role in the genre's history. That said, it is surely time to eschew the march-of-progress approach so familiar from nineteenth-century music historiography with its donnish “periods” and “schools.” Hence, the lied's origins as part of a larger aesthetic program set in motion by a new generation of poets and musicians reacting against what today would be called the Baroque, calls into question the continued usefulness of such designations as “First Berlin” or “Second Berlin School of lied composition.” It is more exact to speak of the “North German lied” given the array of composers at work in a wide variety of north German locales and publication patterns both before 1770 — the traditionally agreed upon date for the start of the “Second Berlin School” — and thereafter. Yet over and above establishing where and when the genre began, there is an even more important issue. In our haste to get to Schubert, our understanding of his

lieder has lacked contextual footing. Telemann, another composer at work in Hamburg, in the preface to his 1741 *Vier und Zwanzig Oden*, spoke of his desire to inaugurate a "renewed golden age of notes" worthy of the ancients. Without question it was not Telemann, Görner, nor even Mozart or Beethoven who made good on that promise, but Schubert. Still, the view from the summit is even more inspiring when one has made the journey up from the valley, taking in along the way the frequently rewarding efforts of composers whose music made possible Schubert's "golden age of notes." In thus neglecting the valley, the lied's role within the ongoing aesthetic discussions of the second half of the eighteenth century concerning Kenner and Liebhaber has been poorly served because it has proceeded without a complete understanding of what the age meant by the concepts of popularity and artistic accessibility.

It also could be said that the lied provided composers from German-speaking lands with a kind of shared musical identity. Beginning with Leibniz in the 1680s writers increasingly objected to the "enforced blindness" that characterized the German "mode of life, speech, writing, indeed even of thinking" and the "Sklaverei" to things French. Thus Telemann in his 1741 collection spoke not only of his desire for a "renewed golden age of notes," but also to "show foreigners how more maturely we are able to think than do you!"¹² In light of this, the dedication of a 1753 song collection is revealing, for it is given over not "to weighty erudition but to the science of joy and pleasure" as a suitable curative for the excesses of Italian opera, an art form seen as the province of the upper classes.¹³ In contrast, the simplicity of the lied, the dedication continues, promotes "the pleasure and happiness of all society," a view upheld a half century later when Koch defined the lied as "the one product of music and poetry whose content today appeals to every class of people and every individual."¹⁴

¹² "Zuschrift", from *Vier und zwanzig, theils ernsthafte, theils scherzende, Oden, mit leichten und fast für alle Hälse bequemen Melodien versehen*, Hamburg, 1741.

¹³ "Dedication" (part one) from *Oden mit Melodien*, ed. Christian Gottfried Krause and Karl Wilhelm Ramler, Berlin, 1753.

¹⁴ Heinrich Christoph Koch, "Lied", *Musikalisches Lexikon*, Frankfurt a. M., 1802; facsimile ed. Hildesheim, 1964, col. 901.