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# LISZT'S *O LIEB' SO LANG DU LIEBEN KANNST*: THE SONG THAT INSPIRED *LIEBESTRÄUME* AND THE COMPOSER'S PROGRAMMATIC LITERATURE

by

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#### AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

DANIELLE ALDACH, for the Music Bibliography and Research Class in MUSIC, presented on 6 December, 2012, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: Liszt's *O lieb'* so lang du lieben kannst: The Song That Inspired *Liebesträume* and the Composer's Programmatic Literature

CLASS PROFESSOR: Dr. Douglas Worthen

Liszt's *Liebesträume* (1850) for solo piano is one of the most well-known piano pieces of the romantic period. However, the poetry behind the music is often overlooked. Before the piano piece was written, Liszt set Ferdinand Freiligrath's poem *O Lieb' so lang du lieben kannst* (1847) as a soprano/tenor Lied. It was not until three years later that the song was transcribed for piano solo. This paper will examine several differences that arise from the poem's two settings. These pieces were compositionally influential at the time Liszt was developing programmatic piano literature. The composer used romantic elements in the piano transcription to portray the meaning of the poem. One can also argue that some dramatic aspects of the text that are present in the vocal piece were lost in the transcription for the piano.

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O Lieb' so lang du lieben kannst Poem by Ferdinand Freiligrath

O lieb, solang du lieben kannst! O lieb, so lang du lieben magst! Die Stunde kommt, die Stunde kommt, Wo du an Gräbern stehst und klagst.

Und sorge, daß dein Herze glüht Und Liebe hegt und Liebe trägt, So lang ihm noch ein ander Herz In Liebe warm entgegenschlägt.

Und wer dir seine Brust erschließt, O tu ihm, was du kannst, zulieb! Und mach ihm jede Stunde froh, Und mach ihm keine Stunde trüb.

Und hüte deine Zunge wohl, Bald ist ein böses Wort gesagt! O Gott, es war nicht bös gemeint, -Der andre aber geht und klagt.

O lieb, solang du lieben kannst! O lieb, solang du lieben magst! Die Stunde kommt, die Stunde kommt, Wo du an Gräbern stehst und klagst!

Dann kniest du nieder an der Gruft Und birgst die Augen, trüb und naß, - Sie sehn den andern nimmermehr -Ins lange, feuchte Kirchhofsgras.

Und sprichst: O schau auf mich herab, Der hier an deinem Grabe weint! Vergib, daß ich gekränkt dich hab! O Gott, es war nicht bös gemeint!

Er aber sieht und hört dich nicht, Kommt nicht, daß du ihn froh umfängst; Der Mund, der oft dich küßte, spricht Nie wieder: Ich vergab dir längst! O love, love as long as you can!
O love, love as long as you will!
The time will come, the time will come,
When you will stand grieving at the grave.

And let it be that your heart glows And nurtures and carries love, As long as another heart is still Warmly be-struck by love for you!

And to one who spills his breast to you, O to him, do what you can, in Love! And make him happy for each moment, And never let him be sad for one!

And guard your tongue tightly, In case any slight escapes your mouth! O God, it was not meant that way, -But the other recoils, hurt and sighing.

O love, love as long as you can!
O love, love as long as you will!
The time will come, the time will come,
When you will stand grieving at the grave.

Then you will kneel down at the grave And your eyes will be cloudy and wet, - You will never see the other again, -In the church graveyard's long, damp grass.

You say: O look at me below, I who cry here at your grave! Forgive me that I insulted you! O God, it was not meant that way!

Yet he sees and hears you not, You cannot comfort him again; The lips which kissed you often speak Not again: I forgave you long ago!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Thomas Ang, "O lieb so lang du lieben kannst: An English Translation." *REC Music Foundation* (blog), 2007, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get\_text.html?TextId=2844

#### INTRODUCTION

The songs in their present form can stand on their own feet . . . and if some singers, neither coarse nor superficial, find the necessary courage to sing songs by the notorious non-composer Franz Liszt, then probably they too will find their public.

-Franz Liszt<sup>2</sup>

Liszt composed a total of eighty-two songs. Of these, fifty-two were German settings, fourteen French, five Italian, three Hungarian, one Russian, and twelve English. This paper will examine one of these examples of Liszt's transcriptions. *O lieb so lang du lieben kannst* was originally composed in 1845 for high voice and published by Kistner in 1847. Three years later, the piece was transcribed for piano to make the third of three nocturnes published under the title *Liebesträume*. It is a great shame that Liszt's songs are overshadowed by his orchestral and keyboard works. Though his keyboard works surpass his song literature in number, there are many important and unique aspects of his vocal compositions that display special qualities that are not found in his orchestral and keyboard works.

In his article from the *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, Guy Wuellner applauded the shortened version for the piano. He also argued that the transcription is, overall, a better composition.<sup>4</sup> However, this research paper is not intended to compare the vocal setting to the piano transcription to prove that one is in any way superior to the other. It is true that *Liebesträume* is far more pianistic and virtuosic. If the piano accompaniment was written in virtuosic style in the original lied, no one would hear the singer! An elaborate accompaniment and showy cadenzas could diminish the effect of the poetry.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 45

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Carol Kimball, Quoted in *Song: A guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005), 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Guy Wuellner. "Franz Liszt's "Liebesträume" No. 3: A Study of "O lieb" and its Piano Transcription," Journal of the American Liszt Society 22 (1988): 45.

For the purposes of this paper, two excellent recordings by Diana Damrau: *Liszt Lieder*"O lieb so lang du lieben kannst" and John Ogdon II: *Great Pianists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*"Liebesträume" are recommended.<sup>6</sup>

# THE POEM BEHIND THE MUSIC

In his liner notes to *Liebesträume*, Maurice Hinson explains how the Freiligrath poem has been interpreted.

"The poem on which this nocturne is based throws an interesting light on the real nature of the music and its interpretation. It is not essentially or even primarily erotic, as is commonly supposed. The poem invokes man to love, not in the narrow, but in the broadest sense of the word- a love which is all-embracing, which reveals itself in ties of blood, in charity, and a warm, deep feeling for all mankind...Both words and music are intended to suggest the universal. Nor is it without significance that an innate, warmheartedness, generosity and a capacity for brother-love were among Liszt's foremost characteristics."

The words to *O lieb*' are taken from a poem of Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810-1873). The poet began his freelance career as a writer in 1839. In 1845, Freiligrath and Liszt met in Switzerland. The meeting inspired Liszt to set Freiligrath's poetry to music. Most of Liszt songs were not published until the 1870s. He and Freiligrath must have kept in contact over the years, as Liszt published three more settings of the poet's works in 1871. *Die Trompete von Vionville*, *Sie haben Tod und Verderben gespien*, and *Und nun kam die Nacht* are dated '16. August 1870' by the poet and published by Liszt circa 1871. Arguably, none of these settings are as celebrated as *O lieb so lang du lieben kannst*. This text was the only Freiligrath poem that inspired Liszt to compose a programmatic setting for the piano.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Diana Damrau, *Liszt Lieder*, Virgin Classics, 2011, CD.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John Ogden II, *Great Pianists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Phillips Classics, 1961-1985, CD.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Maurice Hinson, Liner notes to *Liebesträume*, Alfred Publishing Company Inc., 2004.

# STRUCTURAL COMPARISON

# I. Structure

Looking at the structure of the two pieces, it can be seen that there are many subtle differences. Further investigation will illuminate the depth of these changes as they relate to the original poetry. The following is a comparative chart examining measure and form of the song and its transcription.

Table 3-1: Structural Comparison of O Lieb' and Liebesträume

O Lieb (Original Lied)			Liebesträume No. 3 (Transcription)		
Key	Measure #	Section	Key	Measure #	Section
Ab Major	1-27	Section A	Ab Major	1-24	Section A
Modulatory	28	First Interlude	Modulatory	25	First Cadenza
B Major	29-58	Section B	B, C, Ab	26-57	Section B
Modulatory	58-74	Section C (Recit.)			
Modulatory	74-77	Second Interlude	Modulatory	58-60	Second Cadenza
Ab Major	78-93	Section A'	Ab Major	61-76	Section A'
Ab Major	94-102	Piano Outro	Ab Major	77-85	Piano Outro

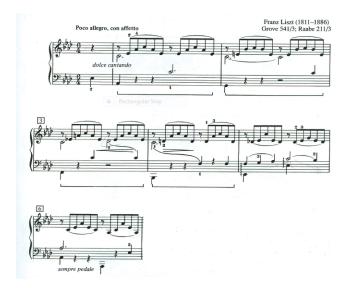
# II. Section A

While the piano transcription begins with the melody, the lied starts with a two-measure introduction. This is typical of many lieder as it sets the mood and tempo and gives the singer the starting pitch.

Example 1: *O lieb* 'mm. 1-8:



Example 2: Liebesträume No. 3, mm. 1-6:



While the contour of the accompaniment line differs slightly between the two pieces, the harmonic structure remains the same. *Liebesträume* was composed in a more rounded way, with the arpeggio arching up and then back down, returning to the initial note. There are no sustained

half-notes in the bass for the transcription. The reason why this melody was altered is because the phrase is quite legato, easily replacing the heavy bass line.

The placement of the melody is somewhat unusual. As shown in the above example, the 'singing' line is in a tenor range and has to be traded between right and left hand to be played smoothly. This choice of placement possibly originates from the presence of the accompaniment which requires the right hand, and respectively less activity in the bass line. It can also be seen as a compositional technique that builds to the dramatic octaves that are heard in the return of this melody. Looking back at the poem, it can be seen that the line "O love, love as long as you can! O love, love as long as you will!" is later repeated. The octaves create a poetic gesture in reference to the words, especially since the melodic line was kept the same note-for-note.

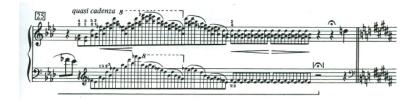
# III. First Interlude/Cadenza

The two interludes from the song are also present in the transcription, but are expanded upon harmonically. The first interlude is used as a transition into Section B. In the piano solo, it is transformed into a full cadenza. The starting notes remain the same, but the latter section is expanded upon and uses major chords as the interval structure. Perhaps since there is no singer, this cadenza does not need to modulate to give an approach to the new key. Instead, there is a held rest for dramatic effect and a pick-up note on D natural to the new key.

Example 3: Interlude from *O lieb*', mm. 24-25:



Example 4: Quasi cadenza from Liebesträume No. 3, mm. 25:



# IV. Section B

Wuellner's article mentions that the B section is easily subdivided into two parts: "a" and "b." Part "a" of the piano solo is, for the most part, more consistent with the song setting than is part "b." The piano line of part "a" is similar to the accompaniment of the song, whereas it is interesting to note that, in part "b," Liszt breaks away from this tradition. Up until this point in the transcription, the 'vocal line' has been faithful to the original version in the song. At measure 58 of the transcription, a climax connects directly into the second cadenza, causing part of a line from the poem to be cut: 'Und mach ihm keine Stunde trüb' which translates to 'And never let him be sad for one!'

Example 5: *Liebesträume* No. 3, mm. 49-60:



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Guy Wuellner. "Franz Liszt's "Liebesträume" No. 3: A Study of "O lieb" and its Piano Transcription," Journal of the American Liszt Society 22 (1988): 54.

At this point, Liszt turns the piano transcription into more of a variation on *O lieb'*. According to Wuellner, "Another way Liszt creates excitement in the push to the transcription's apex in measure 58 is to transform the accompaniment patterns from the rather ordinary ones found in the song into sweeping figures: plunging patterns and rising-and-falling patterns."

In both pieces, the piano line heightens throughout the entire B section. The melody now occurs an octave above where it is in the A section, thus augmenting the arch of the piece's range. Chords at measure 38 in the transcription encompass the melody from the song as the line heightens. Several measures before the second cadenza is reached, the composer writes in 8va.

# V. Section C

The entire C Section from the song is omitted in the transcription. It must be noted that, by removing the poetry entirely, some meaning has been lost between the music and the poetic message. This is acceptable in a piano transcription. However, in removing the C Section, Liszt removes an important section of poetry that could have had significant effect in the music. It is likely that he realized that this recitative section could not be transcribed successfully. At this time in the romantic period, a way for the piano to 'speak' like the human voice had not yet been discovered. The C Section of poetry reads as follows:

And guard your tongue tightly, In case any slight escapes your mouth! O God, it was not meant that way, -But the other recoils, hurt and sighing.

Written as recitative, the mood creates a more hushed setting. The speaker does not like the subject, but it must be mentioned. This section is the darker aspect of the poetry. It speaks of the struggle and turmoil that comes with every loving relationship.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Guy Wuellner. "Franz Liszt's "*Liebesträume*" No. 3: A Study of "O lieb" and its Piano Transcription," *Journal of the American Liszt Society 22* (1988): 56.

Example 6: *O lieb* ' mm. 58-74:



Excluding this section from the transcription leaves the piece with no low point. Upon listening to *Liebesträum*, the listener finds no gentle section in the music until the very last measures of the piece. Since both sections A and B are in major keys, there is significantly less modulation in the piano transcription than there is in the lied. In fact, some analysts advocate that the B section is really an A' with modulation from B Major to Ab Major. The melody remains the same, but uses dramatic octaves in the right hand.

### VI. Second Interlude/Cadenza

Again, at this cadenza in the transcription, Liszt expands upon the interlude from the song. The beginning and ending use almost the exact same notes from the song, but the middle is marked "quasi cadenza" as in the first passage. The cadenza consists of a chromatic descent from four octaves above middle C. This chromatic effect is a signature compositional style of Liszt in the height of the Romantic Period.

# VII. Section A'

At the return of the A section, the piano transcription returns to the same form as the song. The music is identical, simply adding the vocal line to the right hand. This technique returns the programmatic idea of transcribing a song as close to the original as possible to convey the same meaning through the use of a different instrument.

Example 7: *O lieb* ', mm. 78-80:



Example 8: *Liebesträume* No. 3, mm. 61-63:



Finally, the last five measures of the song have been removed and replaced with a completely different ending for the transcription. Both passages begin with the same chord progressions. I agree with Wuellner that this removal is the most substantial change in the

music.<sup>10</sup> Both endings are of good compositional structure, but the vocal piece seems to be unusually long. This may be due to the fact that *O lieb* 'was one of Liszt's earlier pieces for the voice.

#### PROGRAMMATIC INFLUENCE

From the age of ten, Liszt found himself in an artistic environment, surrounded by the finest instructors. Patrons offered him a sum of money, enabling him to study and perform throughout Europe, first in Vienna, then soon after in Paris. He met with a number of artists, poets, and musicians. It is no wonder that he was so greatly influenced by the romantic movement in art from such a young age.

In his book *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries*, Frederick Niecks describes Liszt's view on program music versus absolute music. "Liszt differentiates clearly the composer of absolute music from the composer of program music, whom he calls respectively the specific and the poetizing symphonist." Liszt once described a program as 'any foreword in intelligible language added to a piece of pure instrumental music, by which the composer intends to guard the hearer against an arbitrary poetical interpretation, and to direct his attention in advance to the poetical idea of the whole, to a particular point of it.'12

The way Liszt approaches the setting of a poem is structured within the style of a romantic piece. His songs are often strophic, but lush in melodic extravagance. The accompaniment is advanced, but does not impose on the vocal line. All of these qualities are present in *O lieb so lang du lieben kannst*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Guy Wuellner. "Franz Liszt's "Liebesträume" No. 3: A Study of "O lieb" and its Piano Transcription," Journal of the American Liszt Society 22 (2988): 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Frederick Niecks. *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), 278.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid. 279.

Liszt routinely transcribed his vocal pieces for piano solo. Michael David Baron comments on this in his dissertation on The Songs of Franz Liszt. "Clearly indicating Liszt's close association at this time of a song with its piano transcription is the simultaneously published piano version. ." In this case, the transcription became a better known piece than the vocal work.

In his concerts, Liszt frequently would distribute flyers or pamphlets for the audience to read before or during the performance.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that he provided copies of the poem when he performed *Liebesträume*. A strong advocate of program music, Liszt wanted to make certain that his music was not compared to absolute music.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Of the 87 songs Liszt composed and transcribed for piano solo, *Liebesträume* was one of the most successful. It is a part of the list of advance repertoire for any concert pianist. The compositional techniques in the piano solo well reflect the programmatic influence Liszt experienced at the height of the romantic period.

The transformation of *O lieb'* to *Liebesträume* is one of great magnitude. Though the changes seem subtle at first glance, every addition to the transcription has a purpose. Each measure is written to portray the turbulence and passion of emotion. The composer has a thorough understanding of the poetry. The only questionable change in the transcription is the exclusion of the C Section. If Liszt had decided to compose new or similar music for this part of the piece, the piano solo would have had an entirely different effect on the listener.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Michael David Baron, "The Songs of Franz Liszt" (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1993), 65, http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc\_num=osu1234717504.

Matt Wheeler, "Liszt and the Symphonic Poem" (Research Paper, University of Minnesota Duluth, 2011), 10. www.d.umn.edu/~rperraul/MUS204-EnsembleLit/MWheeler.pdf

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O lieb

Gedicht von Ferdinand Freiligrath.



F. L.VII 28.



F. L. VII 28.



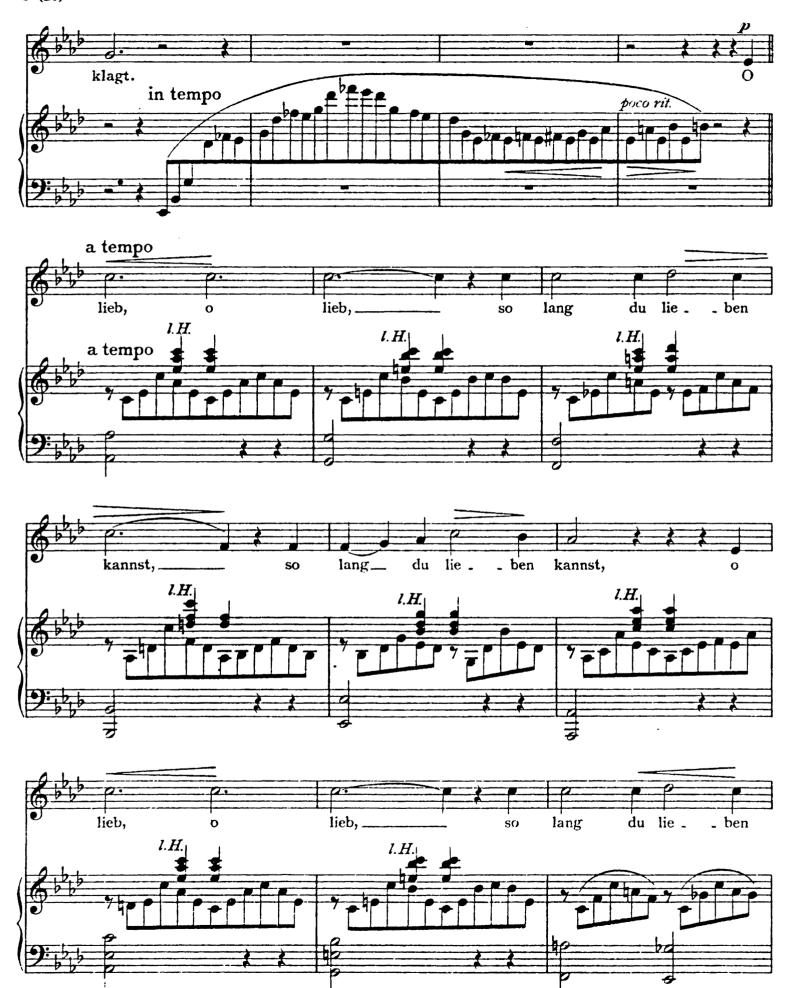
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# LIEBESTRÄUME

(NOCTURNE No. 3)









