

Erkönig
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Eugene Birman / Scott Diel: for tenor voice and piano

August-September 2014

Erlkönig / notes

25 August 2014 / Oakland, CA, USA

A poem about a father and his dying son, the mythic story within it, the inevitable and yet – deeply disturbing conclusion. From this, of course, cannot be separated the pens and personalities of Goethe and Schubert, nor can their time and mindset, the unique period of German history and culture that they shared. To create an *Erlkönig* when an *Erlkönig* exists already, when art and place are inseparable, is an endeavor justified only by the fact that the message is universal, and the time has long since passed. This piece, then, is no homage; it is the grief, the magic, the timelessness of the Goethe poem, of its Schubert setting, humbly recomposed.

Commission: Oxford Lieder Festival, "The Schubert Project"
Instrumentation: tenor, piano
Duration: 7 minutes

General notes about the score

This piece is written in a combination of "free time" and "timed" sections. The vocal part is in free time throughout, while the piano part, in the beginning, is quite precisely timed with the given tempo. Tempos are given throughout (or suggested), but even the given tempi are approximate, intended only to act as a guide for a specific section. The piece should feel about as fast and frenzied as the Schubert setting: one of the score's few compromises to the past.

Groupings and "measures" are also suggested. Horizontal space is the ultimate arbiter, but the performers should feel free to treat the piece as written-out improvisation, or as is stated in the score, a kind of *cadenza*.

The pianist's whispering and yelling should be treated as practically on the same level of soloistic writing as the tenor's. Without each other, they are not whole, and the idea of the poem and its translation, of German and English, both familiar and unsettling, heard at once – is integral to the piece.

1 -

All notes without noteheads are whispered.

On whispered notes scattered between syllables, only the vowel of the last essential syllable should be pronounced, eg. rei=ei, te=e, Na=a. Otherwise, the syllable should just be repeated, like the consonant "t" on page 6, 1st system.

All notes with "X"s for noteheads should, in the piano part, be played with the strings inside the piano completely dampened by the hand, with the effect of seeming pitchless. The pedal should always be held down for this effect.

All X-shaped noteheads with a circle around the X are simply of half-note duration.

Trills should be trilled to the next-highest $\frac{1}{2}$ -tone.

In general, there is no need to cue the tempo of the Tenor part to that of the piano, as long as things happen more or less as written on the score, temporally-speaking.

cont., next page

cont., from previous page

- 2 - **Indications** for the damper pedal with an "accent" notehead should be performed with a forceful strike by the pianist's shoe, striking the floor as well. The sound should be present and jarring. The pedal should be held down until the "up" arrow implies it to be lifted, and immediately struck again.
- 3 - **An X** in the vocal part on Page 11, 2nd system asks for the "note" to be shouted.
- 4 - **As** written, the running text in this section and in the following one, should be practically yelled and the pitch of the voice should follow the contour of the *cresc.* and *decresc.* lines.
- 5 - **The** Tenor and piano parts do not need to link up specifically. It is preferable for them to be played freely from each other.
- 6 - **The** tremolo note that comes after each "chorale" section in the piano must, as marked, become $\frac{1}{2}$ -pitched; in which case, the pianist will gradually move the finger away from the hammer, along the string, to a spot that allows more pitch to come through.
- 7 - **The** pianist must follow the Tenor to cue each measure with the pedal strike. The parts otherwise do not need to absolutely "connect."
- 8 - **It** is very important that the boxed notes, marked "perform random rhythms, ad libitum" (page 16, 2nd system) be played until the very end of the piece without interruption. The rhythms can be made up and should imitate the sound of rain falling on a metal roof.
- 9 - **The** Tenor part should gradually transition from the Bb to an pitched whisper. The Tenor can finish when the note is exhausted and he has clearly gotten to "0" in volume. Likewise for the piano part, in terms of length. There is no need to end at the same time.
- 10 - **At** the very least, the final section, with the repeated unpitched notes, should last 20 seconds, and possibly longer.

"Erlkönig" translation/adaptation by Scott Diel

Who rides so late in night and wind?
It is the father with his kind;
Boy clasped tightly in his arm,
Holds him safely, keeps him warm.

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 in warm.

"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." –

Father, father, can't you see?
What the Elfking offers me?
Father, father, can't you hear?
The Elfking whispers in my ear.

"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."

Father, father, his daughters beguile,
They dance and sway, but the plan is vile;
Father, father, this is my last plea,
Father, father, he is taking me!

Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das äschzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Müh' und Not;
In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

Terrified father rides swiftly on,
The moaning child, his only son;
Reaching home not short for dread
Limp and cold, his child is dead.

For Maximilian, le Grand Monsieur. 2002-2014.

"Erlkönig" original text by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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.


Erlkönig | tenor and piano

E. A. Birman (b. 1987)

Fatalistic, quasi moto perpetuo: ♩ ~ 192-200
 whispered, rhythmically and precisely:


a tempo, rhythmic:

Tenor



mp *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

Piano



mp *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

//

[illegible]

in free time:
nonvib. —

p

like a wide vibrato, getting faster and narrower:

Tenor

Who rides so late

(a tempo) *sim.*

Pno.

Na-
ppp

fp

f

//

(in free time)
nonvib. *come prima:*

mf < *fp*

Tenor

Who rides so late

f

ppp

f

Pno.

nd; der Vater mi - - - - - nem Kind;

f

f

f

Tenor

sf *subito p* *sf* *subito p* *f*

in night and wind?

f *sost.*

Pno.

f *sost.*

abruptly stopped: 9

Er hat den Kna - ben wohl in der A - - - - - rm, E - - - - - r hat den Kna - ben wo-

//

Tenor

pp *sfz* *molto* *mp* *ff* *ff*

night and wind? whispered (sung) nonvib.

(a tempo)

It is the fa - - - - - ther and his Kind; Boy

ppp *pp* *f* *sost.* *sfz* *sfz*

Pno.

pp *f* *sost.* *sfz*

hl in dem A - - - - - rm, Er fa - - - - - ßt - - - - - *sim.*

ff *subito p* *f* *accel.* *↑*
 gradually move to
 trem. *8*
 Tenor
 whispered (sung)
 tight - - - - - ly in his arm (a tempo)
 5:4 5:4 5:4 5:4 5:4
 Pno.
 (i)- hn si-cher, e - - - - - r hä - - - - - lt, er hä - - - - -
ff
ff

//

② Surreal, saturated in color and tone:
quasi sprechstimme:
fff sost.

Tenor

"Du lie - - - -bes Kind,
(a tempo primo)

Komm,
geh mit mir?

fff

whispered,
perilously:
p < *fff* *p*

Pno.

repeat ad lib.

repeat ad lib.

repeat ad lib.

↑ ↓ *fff* sost.

↑ ↓ *fff* sost.

↑ ↓ *fff* sost.

[illegible]

System 1:

Tenor: *ff* , , *f < ff* dem Strand *ff*

Pno.: repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib.

System 2:

Tenor: *fff* *mp* *mf* *sf* *mp* *subito mp* *sost.* *fff* shouted, pleadingly: 3 "O"

Pno.: repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib.

System 3:

Tenor: 8 Mei - ne Mutt - - - er hat Man - - - - chen gül - den Gewand. "

Pno.: repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib.

System 4:

Tenor: 8 Mei - ne Mutt - - - er hat Man - - - - chen gül - den Gewand. "

Pno.: repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib. repeat ad lib.

3

Boundless, slightly slower: ♩ \sim 144

(shouted), pitch corresponding to dynamics (cresc = rising, decresc. = falling)

Tenor

Piano

libero, molto agitato, con rubato:

come prima pitch corresponding to dynamics.

come prima, pitch corresponding to dynamics:

[illegible]

za, disrupted:
sung, come prima (quasi
sprechstimme):

$$(\mathcal{H})_{sost.}$$

The musical score is written for Tenor and Piano. The Tenor part begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a series of triplets of eighth notes, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and accelerating (*accel.*). The lyrics "Meine Töchter, Meine Töchter führen den nächtlich-
fa - ther, O fa - ther, O my fa - ther, O fa - ther, O fa - ther, fa - ther, fa - ther" are sung under the triplets. The piano accompaniment consists of continuous triplet eighth notes in both hands, marked with a very strong fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic. The piece concludes with a deceleration (*Dec.*) and a sostenuto (*sost.*) marking.

sung: *ff* **Inconsolable, wild, poco meno mosso:**
pp
 Tenor: Und wie - gen und tan - zen und sin - gen dich ein!
 Pno.: 3
 Dem va - ter grau - me!
 as fast as possible: *pp*
 as fast as possible: *pp*
pp *ff*

[illegible]

subito p *f* *expansive: ff sost.*
 his on - - - ly son;
 whispered, resignedly:
 das äschzende *p* *mp*
 (repeated unpitched notes) *f* *ff*
 Er- *p*
pp

mp *f* *ff* *mp* *p* *pp*

//

mp *f* *ff* *mf*
 like a wide vibrato, getting faster and narrower:
 not short
 for dread, dread
 Hof mit Mühl' und *ff*
 -reicht den Hof mit Mühl' *mf*
 (repeated unpitched notes) *mp* *f* *ff* *mf* *f*

mp *f* *mp* *p* *f sost.*
 (like a wide vibrato, getting faster and narrower)

dread; Limp
 and cold, *come prima:*
 3
 whispered freely, as fast as possible:
 In seinen Armen das Kind war
 In seinen Armen
 his child
 das Kind
 (repeated unpitched notes)
 ↑ ↓ *Red.*

Tenor

Pno.

//

f sost.
 6 Tempo I, losing sense of time: 5-10 sec.
 is
 dea - - - - -
come prima: (whispered rhythmically, precisely)
 to - - - - -
pp
 (repeated unpitched notes)
 ↑ ↓ *Red.*

Tenor

Pno.

whispered/barely audible pitch
 continue as long as necessary: 0

(e)- - - - -d continue as long as necessary:

(o)- - - - -t 0

(like light rain hitting a metal roof)
ff *sost.*

 \equiv

20-35 seconds

gradually, fewer and fewer notes, more distinct, less "musical":
ff

Pno.

10 September 2014
Oakland, CA, USA
oltre la forza, la potenza