

A Study of "Poetic" in Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Op. 42

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Abstract: Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Op. 42 is a representative art song work of early Romanticism. The "poetic" expression of this work is the result of the interaction between German early Romanticism poetry and music. Therefore, by exploring the logical significance of the two aspects of unity of opposites of poetry and music in this work, the key to the fusion of acoustic material and poetry, the "meaningful formal content" of the work is understood and used as a perceptual guide for the practice of singing in order to externalize the 'poetic' of the work.

Keywords: Schumann; Early Romanticism; Poetic

1. Introduction

Art is poetically confronted with the world it faces, and the carrier of this "poetic" is the symbols and forms of art, and the activity of creating the symbols and forms of art can be called "poetic activity". [1] Here, "poetic activity" can be understood as the creation process of artworks, but "poetic activity" is not simply equal to studying the creation process of artworks facing the world (for example, the firing process of porcelain; the process of building the framework of literary and musical writing; the painting process of oil painting), but in addition to the symbol of creating art, there is a more profound instruction - to create "meaningful formal content". [2] This "meaningful formal content" in the context of musical art can be seen as an emphasis on "Heteronomie Aesthetics", where the "content" should be interpreted in addition to the apparent musical structure, that is, music and its structure should be treated as a living entity in accordance with nature. [3]

2. Tracing the Background of the Suite

The vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben, Op. 42" was composed by German composer Robert Schumann with lyrics and music from the group poem "Frauenliebe und Leben" by German poet and novelist Adelbert von Chamisso, and the work can be considered as a product of the fusion of acoustic and verbal materials. Since the acoustic material of music is abstract and non-semantic, [4] it cannot provide logical understanding directly to the listener; poetry, as linguistic material, can present its direct meaning directly to the appreciator, but its meaning needs to be explored by the reader in the context of history and humanities. Therefore, to interpret the work and study its inner "poetic meaning", it is necessary to first understand the background of its creation, and under the support of the general background, to use the dialectical development of the thinking to meaning the creator's emotional spirit of the work, and then to understand the intention of the artistic symbols created.

The two major components of the work (poetry and music) were both composed in the 1830s and 1840s, and are the artistic product of the German Romantic movement. The "Storm and Stress Movement" of the eighteenth century brought about a transition from Classicism to Romanticism, and during the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, German philosophical and aesthetic studies were highly influential in the field of literature and art. The aesthetic concepts of philosophers such as Hegel, Kant and Schopenhauer gave theoretical support to the artistic creations of that era to express individual emotions, and composer Schumann emphasized this connection between music and emotions in his works and music criticism, arguing that music is not just a language of forms, but should be full of rich emotional content and life experiences; [5] the poet Chamisso also poured into his works what he saw and knew during his adolescent dislocation and what he felt about ecology and nature. But in a period when the individual subjective emotions were infused with objective forms of artistic symbols, Schumann's and Chamisso's "Frauenliebe und Leben" can be different emotional expressions.

The poet Chamisso understood nature and life through his experience of exile since childhood, and his ecological consciousness and spirit were reflected in the form of literature, while he experienced hardships in a difficult environment since childhood, and experienced life at the bottom of society at that time, and his works expressed his ideal of life and criticism of the capitalist system. The heroine in his poem "Frauenliebe und Leben" pursues love and freedom, and spends her life with her beloved in marriage and children. In this life, there are the stirrings of the first meeting, the joy of marriage, the happiness of nursing, and the sorrow of parting. What seems to be an ordinary life in modern society was a life that women looked forward to in Germany at that time. In German Romantic women's literature, women were entrusted with the ideals of the Romantics in their search for art and life,[6] while in the real world at the time, women were still able to live such a life in accordance with their hearts. Chamisso's group poem "Frauenliebe und Leben" actively expresses the right of women to choose their natural life by literary means and opposes the confinement of women's thoughts by the monasteries. Women in the romantic poetics as the embodiment of the ideal of life, the poet put his thoughts on women, so as to achieve the unity of art and life. The romantic poets pursue "poetic life", hoping that the limited life in the poetic fantasy to eliminate the bondage and opposition, to achieve absolute freedom.[6]

However, when the composer Schumann composed the group poem, he and his wife Clara were married, and his life was full of joy and happiness, and for Schumann, who believed in the integration of emotions into music, the heavy allegory contained in the group poem was not the whole of his musical expression. Schumann's marriage to his wife Clara was the fruit of their triumphant pursuit of love, and for Clara she won the right to choose her own life and marry love, so her experience is the spokesperson for the Chamisso's group poem, which is fortunate for the couple.

Therefore, there are different expressions in the content and form of the poetry and music of this work, which is its opposition, and the composer Schumann, who gave different expressions, gave the work a unity with acoustic materials.

3. Analysis of the Suite

The traditional literary and artistic themes of the early romantic poetic structure are emancipatory in liberating various emotions and imaginations. As the German poet Novalis said: "If the philosopher only regulates everything and establishes everything, then the poet must release all restraints." [7] In "über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber", the German social thinker Hippel critically inherited and developed Rousseau's "view on women's education". He exposed women's traditional education as "hypocritical" and opposed the suppression of their spiritual thoughts by the compulsory education of the monastery. Because this kind of education forbids them to "see, hear and think" independently, it does not "educate them as adults". [8] Early romanticism believed that women were born with the ability to love, and love was the nature of women. It opposed the restrictions of traditional moral customs on love and marriage, criticized the unreasonable marriage system, advocated the freedom of love, advocated the loftiness and infinity of love, opposed the oppressed family status of women in the civil marriage life, and opposed the praise of women at the expense of freedom through endless dedication.

It was under this social influence that the poet Chamisso composed the group poem "Frauenliebe und Leben". When the composer Schumann, together with his wife, overcame the obstacles of marriage, he was impressed by the inner call of this work to release women from the bondage of pursuing love and composed the vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben". So both from the lyricist's and composer's point of view, this work has a "poetic" layer of divine yearning, which is well reflected in the overall tone that Schumann set in the first place when composing the eight suites.

1. Componiert 1840.

Seit ich ihn ge - se - hen, glaub'ich blind zu sein; wo ich hin nur

Figure 1: Seit Ich Ihn Gesehen, bars 1-5



Figure 2: *Seit Ich Ihn Gesehen*, bars 29-36

Figures 1 and 2 show the first and last parts of the score for the first song of the vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben", *Seit ich ihn gesehen*, in which the part in red is the motive fragment of the piece and the 'force' that makes the eight songs describing the different scenes form a fully structured suite. This 'force' is the structural force of the music, which links the work logically into a whole and serves to foreshadow the development and set the tone in the opening movement. The 3/4 time rhythm of "Larghetto" is flat and slow throughout, and the use of a whole bar of connecting lines makes it different from the usual 3-time waltz style, and the pace of this piece is more "heavy". And this first piece of music is the description of the heroine's psychological activities when she falls in love with the hero at first sight, and the heroine's heart is pounding with desire to pursue love. Judging from the plot of the poems, the heroine's heart should be throbbing, and the atmosphere rendered by the music is relatively serious. Faced with this contradiction, many analysts understand that it is based on the foreshadowing of "tragic color", but this statement is obviously contrary to the original intention of the songwriter in the context of the situation.

In my opinion, facing the German romantic poets who take poetry as a portrayal of the ideal life pursued, the composer Schumann still retains the freehand brushwork of the lyricist in a state of joy in his heart, so he uses such a solemn tune to reflect the holiness of love, to convey the poetic meaning of the sacred ideal of female liberation expressed by the poems, and then the music and the mood described in the poems synchronise with the description of the heroine's life after falling in love, which is also the unity of music and poems.

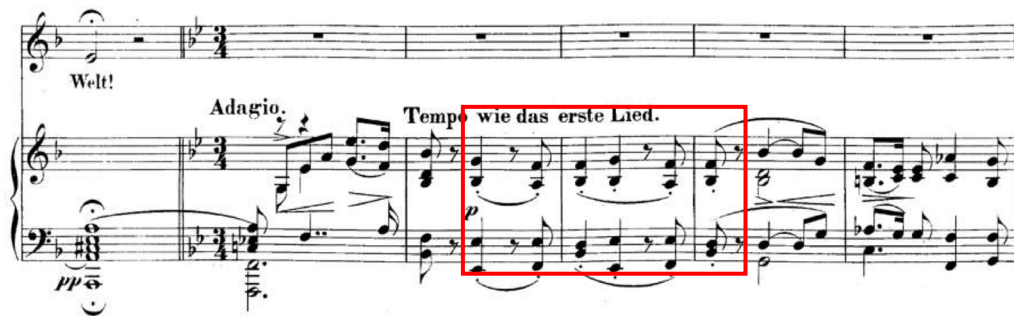


Figure 3: *Nun Hast du Mir den Ersten Schmerz Gethan*, bars 23-28



Figure 4: *Nun Hast du Mir den Ersten Schmerz Gethan*, bars 37-44

Figures 3 and 4 show the score of the end part of the eighth song "Nun hast du mir den ersten

Schmerz gethan" from the vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben", where the motive fragment appears at the end and reproduces the music of the first song, echoing the first and the last. The music corresponding to the eighth lyric describes the heroine's grief over the death of the hero, and the music is heavy with large lines of chords as the main texture. The ending treatment at this time is the "hope" part of the song. It can be seen that Schumann did not want to end the whole song with great sadness, so he reproduced the first piece of music and made it a closed loop, so the ending seems sacred and tender. It is the heroine's memory of the time when she met love in this life. Although it is painful at the moment, this life is beautiful. This is also the result of Schumann's self-emotion, and the romance of his music.

Therefore, the vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben" is shrouded in the joy, excitement, sadness and other emotions in the scene by the "poetic" of the sacred ideal. It is a prophetic work in which women break free from the shackles of society, can watch, listen, and think independently, successfully pursue love, and spend their ideal life in love.

4. Externalization of the "Poetic Meaning" of the Suite

The German philosopher Alexander Gottfried Baumgarten (1714-1762) called the primary objective truth of existing things and people's subjective reflections on it as "truth". He called the fiction of aesthetic necessity "positive poetic plausibility", which has both a concrete basis for life and an objective necessity in real life, as well as the unrepeatability created by the theme, which can be universally accepted, understood and loved. [9] If this is brought into the performance of the second creation, it can be summarized as a creative performance that comes from life, has artistic aesthetics, but is not too exaggerated, and expresses the artistic theme. The interpretation of the meaning of a vocal work begins with the interpreter's reading of the text provided by the work. Text is the carrier of meaning in music score and the primary reference for performers to interpret works concretized. However, the correspondence between the work itself and the meaning is not one-to-one, but one-to-many, because there is no unique interpretation, and the meaning setting itself is subjective. Therefore, for historical music works, it is impossible for us to reach a completely consistent interpretation with the author, but we can try to get close to the author's will according to the analysis of historical background.

To externalize the "poetic" of the suite with such a standard, the focus is on the understanding and expression of the first and last two pieces of the suite. For performers with a certain musical literacy and a good sense of music, it is not difficult to accurately grasp the emotional psychology to be expressed in the music, but the deep meaning of the music at the beginning and the end of the work is often overlooked or one-sided understanding. For example, if the performer places the work in the framework of "sadness", the first and last part of her performance will be the expression of sadness, and the overall performance will be covered with dull and sad emotions. But this is not the case based on my analysis of the general background. If the performance of this work is less solemn and sacred feeling, the expression of "poetic" is not "true", so out of the timbre is certainly not in line with the characteristics of romanticism.

As the overall tone of this vocal cycle is not bright and light, many mezzo-sopranos also sing it. Among them, mezzo-soprano Stella Doufexis' version of singing perfectly restores the "poetic" analyzed in this paper. The singer Stella Doufexis gives the audience a solemn and sacred feeling brought by the deep timbre of the mezzo-soprano. Of course, some of them are natural timbre, which is an important feature of mezzo-soprano timbre. However, the control of timbre also needs to be adjusted in time according to the characteristics of the work in singing technology. The timbre here includes the width, thickness and brightness of the sound. For example, the singer Bartoli's voice color control is extremely brilliant. As a mezzo-soprano, she can also grasp the bright and light characteristics of the coloratura soprano. For example, when she sang Vivaldi's *Agata in due venti*, she adjusted the cavity to reduce the width and thickness of the voice, making the coloratura part extremely flexible and vivid; However, when she sings the aria *die Königin Der Nacht*, she can adjust the cavity to make the sound broad and tense while keeping the tone bright, which well presents the works of the dramatic coloratura female Gao to the stage. However, even if Bartoli changes her voice color through technology, the softness and steadiness of her voice color in women's middle school is still reflected in her works, which also makes her singing highly recognizable, which is due to her talent.

This is also true for mezzo-soprano Stella Doufexis, but even under the influence of her talent as a mezzo-soprano, she does not over-convey sadness in the music, but gives the audience a feeling of

talking about memories in the sad music segments. which was very gentle, smooth and calm. Moreover, she controlled the voice color so that it did not appear so dim, just like the holy moonlight reflected on the calm lake in the night. The combination of her soft and colorless voice and the smooth rhythm of the piano accompaniment seems to have entered the memory scene from the first song of the music, she tells the audience about her love and life. Until the end of the song, she reappears this life. This life is beautiful and lucky for her, and this interpretation is the embodiment of "positive poetic plausibility".

5. Conclusion

After analyzing the "poetic activity" of Schumann's vocal suite "Frauenliebe und Leben" from the perspective of historical background and musical characteristics, the "poetic meaning" of the piece in terms of the pursuit of women's liberation and ideals is summarized. It also denies the "sadness" of the suite and reveals its sacred positive side. For performers, it is extremely important to explore the author's "meaningful form and content" by looking for his musical poetic activities in the work and use it as a perceptual guide for singing practice. In addition to paying attention to the musical structure of the appearance, it is also necessary to interpret the "content" and study its "poetic meaning".

As a special way of artistic activities, music art and its activities are of artistic and academic nature. The non semantic nature of audio materials determines that music is a non descriptive art. Therefore, music is abstract, and the abstract form will lead to endless interpretation and cognition, and this interpretation process must be accompanied by the support of other disciplines, such as physics, biology, philosophy, history and so on. This requires the performer's own comprehensive quality and cultural accomplishment to constantly improve, not a one-sided interpretation of the work with empirical theory, but also from the perspective of academic research, objective and dialectical analysis of the work, and then use the skills and reasonable innovation, to create a second time.

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