

After his 27th birthday at the beginning of 1824, Schubert's syphilis began to move into its secondary phase. His friend Schwind reported that Schubert would not leave his room. The classic and shameful symptoms had manifested themselves: he had "lesions of the mouth and throat", aching bones, rashes, and pains. He was unable to play the piano, so great was his agony. He wrote to a friend: "I find myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair continually makes things worse and worse instead of better; imagine a man, I say, whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the felicity of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain at best ..." The social stigma of venereal disease was such that Schubert's friends destroyed much evidence pertaining to the disease after his death. It is hard to imagine the crushing despair and shame that Schubert was subjected to. He himself privately noted in his diary the connection between his suffering and his art: "What I produce is due to my understanding of music and to my sorrows."

As is usual with sufferers of syphilis, the secondary symptoms receded temporarily, and Schubert may have indeed thought he had been cured. The summer of 1825, for instance, was a period of respite and a time of great happiness and productivity. But more symptoms (probably tertiary syphilis) appeared in 1827: he was acutely sensitive to light, and his "usual headaches" were "already assailing me again." In this context, in February of 1827, Schubert began to work on setting a melancholy cycle of poems by Wilhelm Müller called *Die Winterreise*. Ostensibly about a young man who has been spurned by his beloved who then wanders through a frozen landscape in ever-increasing states of existential angst, terror, and paranoia, Schubert completed the full 24-poem cycle in two halves before the end of 1827. He gathered his friends for an impromptu performance:

He then, with a voice full of feeling, sang the entire *Winterreise* for us. We were altogether dumbfounded by the sombre mood of these songs, and Schober said that one song only, "Der Lindenbaum," had pleased him. Thereupon Schubert leaped up and replied: "These songs please me more than all the rest, and in time they will please you as well."

His friend Spaun added later that the songs of *Winterreise* "were his real swansong. From then on he was a sick man, although his outward condition gave no immediate cause for alarm." In late 1828, symptoms worsened, and he corrected the proofs for the second half of *Winterreise* on his death-bed. He died in November at the age of thirty-one.

It is very hard to disentangle the profoundly dark subject matter of *Winterreise* from that of Schubert's own demise. After Schubert's death his circle, as the account from Spaun attests, made explicit links between the composer's downfall and the similar descent into depression of the protagonist of *Winterreise*. Certainly, the composer responded to Müller's text in ways that contrast dramatically with *Die schöne Müllerin*, his other setting of work by the same poet. In that cycle the story of the young journeyman miller ultimately unlucky in love is characterised by gorgeous lyrical arches and yearning melodies; in *Winterreise* we have only bleakness and despair, with brief, declamatory phrases predominating. Schubert himself called them his "schauerliche Lieder" (horrifying songs). However, 1828 was also filled with moments of optimism and bursts of creativity, as his symptoms waxed and waned. As Spaun notes, to all outward observers Schubert was quite healthy. It is important to note that *Winterreise* was only corrected and not composed on his deathbed.

Similarly, although many interpreters of Schubert have emphasised the existential crises of the persona in *Winterreise* —Elena Gerhardt famously said that "You have to be haunted by this cycle to be able to sing it"—it is entirely plausible that Müller (and perhaps Schubert) conceived *Winterreise* primarily in political terms: as a veiled, poetic attack on what the poet saw as the deep and abiding corruptions of contemporary society. Vienna of the 1820s was almost a police state, with much censorship and official repression. Müller's highly political *Lieder der Griechen* (which Schubert admired) share many poetic similarities with *Winterreise*. In the *Griechenlieder* the poet speaks of the "Freiheit" (freedom) of the rebellious Greeks whose homeland and identity were in danger of being extinguished. In *Winterreise* it is the "Herz" (heart) of the protagonist that is in danger of being broken beyond repair. *Lieder der Griechen* is

about a faraway country in peril and so is explicitly political; *Winterreise* can be read as a lament about the corruption of the homeland but is veiled in symbolism, to get past the censors. The most explicit song are the harshly critical tones of “Im Dorfe”, in which the protagonist mocks the materialist pretensions of the sleeping bourgeoisie. This perspective is certainly in keeping with Schubert’s liberal political leanings. The fact that *Winterreise* can be read as both a terrifying descent into the realities of an inescapable fate as well as a symbolic series of “protest songs” only bespeaks to the richness of the masterwork itself.

Just as it is hard to disentangle Schubert’s own terminal illness from the story of *Winterreise* so too is it difficult to disentangle any performance of *Winterreise* from the rich tradition of recordings that have become seminal for such an important work. It is almost impossible to listen to the work in 2018 without inevitably conjuring up the familiar sounds of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore, who recorded the work seven times, or other such luminaries, like Herman Prey or Peter Schreier, all from the so-called “golden era” of recording.

So revered are their interpretations that many listeners hardly think about how these songs might have sounded in the nineteenth century, with different vocal traditions and different pianos. Besides the written evidence documenting vocal techniques of Schubert’s time, we can glean vestiges of earlier practices in the earliest recordings of artists like Sir Charles Stanley, Adelina Patti, and Emma Albani (to pick just a few). Luckily for us, perhaps the oldest singer to have left a legacy of gramophone recordings is famed Schubert interpreter, tenor Gustav Walter. He was born in 1834, only six years after Schubert’s death. The styles of these singers radically contrast with the beautiful and familiar sounds of Fischer-Dieskau and others. On first listening, these recordings are challenging to modern ears, ugly even. We notice singers “indulging” in all kinds of “extravagant” expressive practices: sliding between notes (*portamento*), modifying the pulse of the music itself as well as using *rubato* (where the accompaniment is strict, but the melody is expressively dislocated), altering the written text and rhythms, and ornamenting more freely than we are accustomed to. But what if these were not extravagant, unthinking, or indulgent practices, but rather evidence of a highly conditioned and un-notated nineteenth-century style of singing that many composers (Schubert among them) expected—even desired—of their singers?

For our first recording of *Winterreise*, we were inspired both by our mutual affection for many of these early recordings and our interest in the latest research in historical performance practice, and so naturally we found ourselves influenced in our rendition by these older practices of *portamento* and tempo modification. Johann Michael Vogl, for example, was one of Schubert’s favourite singers, and his training in the theatrical style of Italian opera would have led him to be an expert in these expressive and improvisatory elements that were deliberately left to the performer’s discretion. The composer and singer fostered a unique and fruitful working relationship, with Schubert remarking in 1823:

The style and the manner in which Vogl sings and I accompany, so that at such a moment we seem to be one, is for these people something utterly new and unheard-of.

Vogl was known to embellish Schubert’s lieder, and indeed some of his ornaments survive. David has been inspired by Vogl in our own recording of *Winterreise*, embellishing, as Vogl did, repetitions of similar melodic material and using ornaments to sweeten lyrical phrases (which in *Winterreise* are very few; consequently, the practice of ornamentation here makes these brief respites even more bittersweet). Most importantly, however, Vogl was championed for his uniquely expressive marriage of text and musical declamation.

Vogl was famous for his use of *rubato*. This expressive device, in which the accompaniment remains steady but the melody is allowed more rhythmic freedom, is famously tricky to notate; in fact, writers before recorded sound remarked that it was “more easily demonstrated than described” (Leopold Mozart). As early as 1723, the famous castrato and voice teacher Tosi set the tone for its use in the Italian operatic tradition of which Vogl was heir to:

He who does not know how to use rubato in singing [...] remains deprived of the best taste and the greatest intelligence. Stealing the time in the pathetic [style of singing] is a glorious theft in

one who sings better than others, provided that his comprehension and ingenuity make a good restitution.

The device was still in fashion almost a hundred years later (and has been as steadily popular in jazz and popular music in our own time). Famous late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century teachers such as Manuel García and Domenico Corri continued to advocate its use saying that *rubato* “[...] breaks the monotony of regular movements, and gives greater vehemence to bursts of passion” (García). Corri notes how the device is used by the expressive singer to “give emphasis, energy, or pathos, to particular words” and that “alterations introduced by a singer will [therefore] stand out in relief and change the character of a certain phrase” (García). David uses *rubato* in this recording as an ornamental device to throw relief upon Müller’s text and accordingly give it greater “emphasis, energy, or pathos.”

The other kind of tempo modification, in which the pulse itself is subjected to freedom and fluidity, is very much apparent in the earliest recordings of great vocalists. Lauded and condemned alike by commentators and performers in the early nineteenth century, extreme tempo modification was without a doubt a major characteristic of performance styles in the late 1820s and 1830s. In 1833 one writer observed that “*ritardando* and *accelerando* alternate all the time. This manner has already become so fixed in the minds of the musical public that they firmly believe a diminuendo must be slowed down and a crescendo speeded up; a tender phrase (e.g. in an allegro) will be performed more slowly, a powerful one faster.” In our recording of *Winterreise* we have tried to reproduce the nuanced advice relating to tempo modification given by Crelle (1823), Czerny (1839–1846), and other sources. Once again, we find that this evidence accords with that of the earliest recordings—we also seem to hear a connection between this kind of practice and that of *portamento*, in which the voice audibly slides between pitches. *Portamento* helps guide the accompaniment, in that the speed of the slide holds us in suspense and can thereby modify the overall pulse. Like *rubato*, *portamento* was a device that highlighted important words.

Corri was one of the first writers to describe the various types of *portamento*. Like tempo modification it also had a long existence in vocal practice, and we hear it frequently in early twentieth-century recordings. Corri and García describe *portamento* as being “the highest degree of refinement” and considered it necessary in every style of singing. Both *portamento* and *rubato* disappeared from mainstream classical performance a little after World War II, in fact, almost precisely at the time of those first seminal recordings of *Winterreise*. This shift to a more literalist and score-oriented style succeeded in differentiating “art music” from “popular music.” The earliest fragment of *Winterreise* on record is a 1902 recording of “Die Nebensonnen” by tenor Franz Navel (a recommended worthy YouTube expedition) Albeit past his prime, *portamento* is used by Navel to imbue the text with a deep and expressive melancholy. David uses *portamento* in this recording in ways that are described by Corri and García and influenced also by singers such as the recorded practices of singers like Navel; sometimes sliding to create an expressive *ritardando*, to impart a binding sense of legato, or to paint words with the extraordinary variety of emotions that *portamento* can relay.

We chose to record this work on a splendid copy of the earliest Anton Graf piano in existence, from 1817. Built in 2016 by renowned Belgian maker Chris Maene, this instrument freshly recreates the kind of piano Schubert was familiar with. Characteristic of these Viennese pianos is their predilection for special effects, and these “stops” were especially beloved of Viennese makers and performers in the 1810s and 20s. These were operated by pedals and this 1817 Graf has six. On this instrument there is the familiar *una corda*, in which the hammers strike fewer strings, and of course the damper-raising pedal (both are still in use on modern pianos today). Besides these there are also two pedals that interpose between hammers and strings different thicknesses of felt (one for *pp* and another for *ppp*), as well as one for a so-called “bassoon stop” (which places parchment on the strings to create a buzzing sound that imitates the bassoon), and finally the so-called “Janissary stop”, which operates two kinds of drums and a bell. You can hear these effects used sparingly through *Winterreise* and Erin has also been inspired by his research into Viennese damper-raising practices to use the damper-raising pedal only as a special effect, and so only as much as one might utilise the other pedals. In other words, all six pedals are used equally. All are special colours to be used only

occasionally, much like *rubato*, *vibrato*, or *portamento*. Accordingly, this version of *Winterreise* does not use as much “pedal” as one might expect in a mainstream performance. In this we follow the precepts of Hummel (1828), Czerny, and the surviving pedal markings themselves made by Schubert and his Viennese contemporaries.

Benjamin Britten once observed just how much *Winterreise* relies on the vocalist and pianist to bring it to life:

One of the most alarming things I always find, when performing this work, is that there is actually so little on the page. [Schubert] gets the most extraordinary moods and atmospheres with so few notes. [...] He leaves it all very much up to the performers.

Britten’s astute observation bears much resonance with our own work into historical performance practice of the time, in which vocalist and pianist bring to the score a wealth of un-notated practices. We both share a fascination for the forgotten sound world of nineteenth-century vocal performance, and we are both mesmerized by the small glimpses of this almost alien art in the wonderful recordings of artists who lived in the nineteenth century. We both feel that these devices—far from being meaningless and inexpressive—make the music and text feel far fresher and more alive than the literalist approach that one often hears. It is no mistake that both *rubato* and *portamento* are used today much more by popular singers with much larger audiences than of trained classical musicians. Clearly, their expressive worth remains.

David Greco and Erin Helyard
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