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Becoming Time: Cyclicity in Schubert's Expanded Secondary Theme Area

ABSTRACT

Background

Schubert's late works convey a sense of time not only in terms of the chronological label, but also in their disjunctive and non-teleological tonal and formal procedures. Schubert's treatment of the secondary theme area in his late sonata-form compositions is particularly striking in how it musically shapes time and thus manipulates the listening experience. In this paper, I consider the role of thematic repetition in creating this musical structure, how the process extends to the larger-scale form, and how such recurrences shape the listener's perception of time in Schubert's music.

Compared to the succinctness of the primary theme area, Schubert's later secondary theme areas are vastly expanded, creating a sense of timelessness that recalls Schumann's famous description of the C major Symphony's 'heavenly length' (*himmlische Länge*, Schumann 1965). Multiple occurrences of the lyrical secondary theme contribute to this characteristic temporal perception: constantly returning after deviations within the thematic action space — sometimes deviating to the extent of the quasi-development section within the exposition (or recapitulation) —, the theme functions as a point of reference or signpost on the seemingly goalless path, as well as creating the layered structure within the thematic space (Hyland 2016).

These multiple occurrences of the secondary theme share common ground with the 'multimodular secondary theme' (MMS) discussed in Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory; in both, the strategy for achieving the 'essential expositional closure' (EEC) temporally expands the secondary theme area beyond the Classical norm. However, the intervening episodic sections distinguish Schubert's secondary theme area. Given that the secondary theme area 'makes a sonata a sonata' (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 117) by providing the structure's tonally defining moment, Schubert's practice of organizing the secondary theme area in such a way as to confound and undermine the sectional goal (EEC) produces a temporal effect very distinct from classic teleological sonata structures.

The subjective experience of time occupies center stage in the resulting musical experience, as the multiple occurrences of the secondary theme shape the listener's temporal awareness both in terms of immediate aural reception and retrospective structural perception. Margulis observes that repetition 'beguilingly makes it[self] knowable in the way of something outside of time' (Margulis 2013, 7); in the recursive structure of Schubert's secondary theme area, time indeed seems to be suspended, rather than moving forward. How does this sus-

pension form a dialogic relationship with the underlying teleology of sonata structure?

Aims and Repertoire Studied

I provide an analytical and hermeneutical interpretation of how the multiple occurrences of Schubert's secondary theme shape the listener's experience of time. Rather than limiting the role of the secondary theme to its juxtaposition with primary thematic material, I approach it as a dynamic process endowed, in its own right, with a phenomenological effect on temporal perception. Although the recursive structure of Schubert's secondary theme area may be considered a tautological aspect of Schubert's formal procedure, teleological motion toward EEC emerges from the cyclic occurrences of the secondary theme. The coordination of teleological drive arising from cyclic motion — 'stasis in motion' or 'motion in stasis', or, as Shamgar terms it, 'motionless motion' (Shamgar 2001, 167) — shapes the experience of time in an intriguing manner.

Through examining the formal design of the secondary theme area of the first movement of Schubert's penultimate A major sonata (D. 959), I will argue that the experience of Schubert's secondary theme area goes well beyond the binary opposition between motion and stasis, or between teleology and non-teleology. Further, I will examine the phenomenological nature of Schubert's cyclic process.

Methods

To explain time perception in Schubert's late sonata form, I draw on four theoretical perspectives. First, building on the terminology and main concepts of Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory, I approach Schubert's formal process as part of a dialogic relationship with the Classical sonata form, and explore how that dialogue engenders a sense of time (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006; Caplin, Hepokoski and Webster 2010). Second, the alternation of different types of subjective time, such as Monelle's lyric and progressive time (Monelle 2000), will provide an important reference in describing the temporal effect of the layered formal structure in Schubert's secondary thematic area (Hyland 2016). Third, I apply Schmalfeldt's retrospective reinterpretation in my hermeneutic approach to time in Schubert's sonata form, in order to explicate that time plays a significant role in the multiple occurrences of the secondary theme (Schmalfeldt 2011). Last but not least, to investigate the listener's experience of time, I apply Husserl's phenomenological notions of time-consciousness in reading — and revealing the dynamic nature of — the listener's experience of time in Schubert (Husserl 1991; Clarke 2011).

Implications

My analytical and hermeneutic approach to Schubert's sonata-form procedure demonstrates how his sense of time is embedded in the musical form, and how it manipulates the listener's time consciousness. By applying the phenomenological concepts to Schubert's cyclic process, I explore the notion of musical form as process, and further, how unsounded music can play in the listener's mind.

Keywords

Schubert, Sonata Form, Secondary Theme Area, Sonata Theory, Analysis of Time, Repetition, Phenomenology, Time Consciousness.

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