2016

Chorale for One: Personal Expression in Nineteenth-Century Chorale Topic

Eileen Watabe

Colorado Mesa University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr>

Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Watabe, Eileen (2016) "Chorale for One: Personal Expression in Nineteenth-Century Chorale Topic," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*: Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1036>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yale Journal of Music & Religion by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact elischolar@yale.edu.

Chorale for One:

Personal Expression in Nineteenth-Century Chorale Topic

Eileen Mah Watabe

Chorale as a genre originates in the application of the term to sixteenth-century German Lutheran worship music. By this definition, chorales are vernacular and congregational, identifying and expressing the sentiments of a group, and they comprise a huge variety of texts and melodies (and later, harmonizations) in a popular, accessible style. A singular significance of chorale in Protestant practice is that it elevated vernacular congregational song to liturgical status, and the repertory was widely disseminated via hymn books. Chorale is thus both high (sacred, liturgical) and low (popular), and regularly functions on both levels.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, chorale style infiltrated the music of Catholicism more prominently and extensively than in earlier Catholic hymnody, and also began to appear in secular concert music, particularly in nationalistically associated pieces. However, a chorale that appears in, for instance, a symphony or a depictive battle piece may represent not a genre but a musical *topic*, that is, a semiotic code for some idea or feeling associated with chorales. Preexisting chorales from actual worship practice (with or without their texts) as well as newly composed music in chorale style can both be used topically. From this point on, Chorale the topic (and names of other topics) will be capitalized to differentiate it from actual chorales or choralelike passages. Because of their texts, the associations for actual chorales will of course be more specific or more direct, but in all cases the most common associations for Chorale have been of purity, archaism, and spirituality. Additionally, a communal “we” is implicit in all chorales, but other meanings and “voices” emerge when Chorale is placed in the context of other topics and genres.¹ This study will examine examples of personal expression through Chorale in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Public and Private Expressions

Various pronouns (we, it, I, me, them, you) can be used to organize the different expressions of Chorale and the implied perspective, or voice, behind each one. “We” is a communal and public expression, something that is accessible and understandable to everyone in a community, and moreover expresses shared identity and sentiments. “It” is similar to “we” in that it concerns something larger than the individual, but it is more impersonal—it is *about* that thing or group rather than from its perspective. “I” is an individual, personal, and private expression. “Me” and

¹ For passages in instrumental and/or secular music to be classified as Chorale, the typical identifying elements are: 1) a melody of moderate range, stepwise motion, even phrases, and simple, metrical rhythm which quotes or evokes traditional church hymns or other solemn ceremonial music; 2) generally unelaborated/unornamented four-part homorhythmic harmonization in choir registration; 3) generally simple harmonic progressions and avoidance of dissonance; 4) slow to moderate tempo. The aspect of tempo is of particular significance, as it often is with topical identifications, since many chorale tunes can sound like marches or dances at faster tempi. The term *hymn* is often used synonymously with *chorale*, but *hymn* should here be understood as the broader term, and *chorale* as a subset.

“them” are similar to “I” and “we,” but again are objectifying—something *about* me rather than simply from my perspective, and *about* “them” in relation to “me”—an individual looking at a group from the outside rather than feeling part of it.

Given their congregational nature, when chorales are used topically, they often express a religious or nationalistic “we” in a popular sense, as in the case of *Ein’feste Burg ist unser Gott* in Mendelssohn’s Fifth Symphony or the chorale style used in oratorios composed for national festivals in early nineteenth-century Germany. The performance context of those oratorios, and of Mendelssohn’s Fifth as well—commissioned for a commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession—binds religion and national identity inextricably together, and the chorale becomes an apt symbol for both.² Chorale serves as an identifier of Lutheranism or Protestantism in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*,³ and elsewhere even connotes spirituality or the monumental in general (more of an “it” than a “we” expression), as when Schumann uses it in the sixth movement of *Bilder aus Osten* to project his idea of a long-ago and far-away Eastern spirituality in a “universally” understandable way—by translating it into monumental German church music.

Such examples tend to be highly public expressions. But eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers also extended the expressive range of Chorale to the private and personal, from the irony and despair of the “I” separated from the “we” to the comfort, guidance, or transcendence of the separated “I” seeking and finding its community or communion. Haydn was one of the first composers to occasionally use Chorale in slow movements of his symphonies and string quartets, and the affect is often proto-Romantically personal. The “public” or “private” status of the genres containing Chorale is hard to ignore, especially in an era when the distinctions were more significant than they are now. However, the expressive traits of “public” and “private” genres are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are the definitions of the two categories fixed—they change as patterns and possibilities of dissemination and consumption change. Furthermore, the criteria for determining what constitutes a private or personal versus a collective or public expression is similarly fluid and subjective.

One criterion is scoring. Individual topics may have a clear inherent voice—for instance, Chorale as a “we” voice and Aria as an “I” voice. But the voice does not necessarily correspond to the scoring of the music, especially when material is rescored within a piece (as in solo and tutti passages in orchestral music) or when all the material is played by the same solo instrument (as in keyboard music). Chorale the topic relies on multivoiced texture—not merely chorale melody, but chorale texture—and thus generally cannot be a solo. A solo rendition of a chorale melody would have to be of a well-known, actual chorale, like *Ein’feste Burg* in *Les Huguenots*, in order for the reference to be clear. The association in such a case is so specific that it also

² For more on this, see Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167.

³ The subject of *Les Huguenots* involves the French Calvinist branch of Protestantism, and Meyerbeer uses the quintessential Lutheran chorale *Ein’feste Burg ist unser Gott* as the signifier. As Taruskin points out, even though representing Calvinist Huguenots with this melody is “not historically ‘true’ . . . only *Ein’feste Burg* . . . would instantly and automatically register with uninitiated audiences as ‘Protestant’”—i.e., the chorale has a topical function in this work. Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, 229.

retains the “we.” This is why the implications of voice in the “host” genre are particularly important to interpreting Chorale; for Chorale to be anything other than a “we” or an “it,” the indication has to come from the context, which often involves questions of genre. In any given piece, a composer usually has an intended expression and audience in mind, and does not make random choices concerning genre and the maintaining or thwarting of generic conventions.

“I” Yearning for “We”

Polish Romantic Nationalism

Both Jeffrey Kallberg and Halina Goldberg suggest interpreting Chorale in Chopin’s works as an expression of Polish Romantic nationalism, in which Poland’s political struggles took on a particular brand of “Christianization,” especially among Polish exiles living in France. Kallberg describes this nationalism as a “philosophy of history that imbued the Polish cause with a special mission . . . the redemption of mankind . . . and the eventual domination of Christian morality in politics.” Even more specifically, “Messianism” in Polish nationalism refers to the belief that a “redeemer, individual or collective, will mediate between heaven and earth in the process of history.”⁴ Kallberg sees this idiosyncratic blend of nationalism and religion mirrored in the nationalistic mazurka and religious chorale of Chopin’s Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 15, No. 3 (1830–33) (Exx. 1a and 1b).

Example 1a: Chopin, Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 15, No. 3, “mazurka,” mm. 1–7

Lento

The musical score for Example 1a shows the first seven measures of Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 15, No. 3. The tempo is marked 'Lento'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The score is written for piano. The right hand has a melody with a 'p' dynamic and 'languido e rubato' markings. The left hand has a bass line with a 'p' dynamic. The piece ends with a 'p' dynamic and a 'dim.' marking.

Example 1b: Chopin, Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 15, No. 3, “chorale,” mm. 89–96

religioso

The musical score for Example 1b shows measures 89–96 of Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 15, No. 3. The tempo is marked 'religioso'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The score is written for piano. The right hand has a melody with a 'p' dynamic and 'sotto voce' and 'sempre legato' markings. The left hand has a bass line with a 'p' dynamic. The piece ends with a 'p' dynamic and a 'dim.' marking.

⁴ Jeffrey Kallberg, “The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin’s Nocturne in G Minor,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 11/3 (Spring 1988): 256.

Viewed in this light, Chopin's Chorale is an expression of "we," but from the perspective of an exile—an "I" separated from his "we." Moreover, the host genre in this case is a nocturne for solo piano; this implies something quiet, introspective, and private. Granted, Chopin was in a *community* of Polish exiles, so in that sense one could say he is speaking for all of them. The "I" speaking for a community of individuals separated from their homeland, however, is different from straightforward nationalistic "we" expressions.

Also different is that Chopin's piece is tinged—no, distinctly colored—with melancholy. Winfried Kirsch notes the broken qualities of the mazurka—the halting rhythm, the odd phrasings, the phrases that repeat and repeat without seeming to get anywhere, and the increasingly anxious sequence toward the end of the section (mm. 69–76) that dissolves into a "crisis" note (a repeated C-sharp ending a section that began in G minor). Kirsch then analyzes the following chorale as antithetical to this in every way and as a "solution" to the crisis.⁵ This view is plausible considering that the broken mazurka never returns, as might be expected in the typical ternary form of so many of the nocturnes.⁶ Instead, the mazurka and the chorale, as well as both of their keys, morph with each other in the final section, and the piece ends with rhythmic stability and a very peaceful and hopeful Picardy-type G major.

Kirsch also considers Chopin's marking *religioso* in Example 1b—as opposed to the mere tempo markings for the chorale sections in other works of his—not so much as a characterization of the mood but as an indication of an actual event.⁷ If so, it drops in "messianically," in the unrelated and unexpected key of F major, quiet and *sotto voce*—an otherworldly nationalism, as Kallberg described. Again, this is more like a personal vision, or the private prayer of exiles, rather than a public and victorious homeland celebration.

Goldberg extends this type of messianic analysis to Chopin's use of Chorale in general. She quotes contemporaneous reviews of Chopin's works that corroborate this interpretation, particularly in regard to the Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 49 (1841). Here, "the narrative of the Fantasy ushers the listener through a network of recognizable patriotic musical topics, alluding to national death and resurrection."⁸ Those topics include a funeral march in F minor, a heroic march in E-flat major, and a chorale in B major (reminiscent of the key scheme in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73, "Emperor")—all public-type topics embedded in the improvisatory fantasy—and once again, the key of the chorale lends it a miraculous otherworldliness (Ex. 2).

⁵ Winfried Kirsch, "Languido—Religioso: Zu Chopins Nocturnes in g-moll op. 15 Nr. 3 und op. 37 Nr. 1," *Chopin Studies* 5 (January 1995): 107.

⁶ Kallberg, "The Rhetoric of Genre," 249.

⁷ Kirsch, "Languido—Religioso," 110.

⁸ Halina Goldberg, *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 68, 75–79.

Example 2: Chopin, Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 49, mm. 199–222

Lento sostenuto

Goldberg calls the B-major section of the Fantasy “hymn-like” (p. 76) and later refers to it as a “chorale” (pp. 77 and 78)—the familiar terminological confusion. Jan Wękowski, in a study on religious references in Chopin’s music, makes the claim that “in Poland—unlike in other Catholic countries—songs collectively sung by everyone in the vernacular took up a large portion of and played an important role in services as well as the liturgy of the Mass (even in defiance of Church laws!)”⁹ Whether this is the case or not, the music of Chopin’s *Lento sostenuto* is inconsistent in its texture, rather lilting in its melody and rhythm, and rather

⁹Jan Wękowski, “Religious Folklore in Chopin’s Music,” *Polish Music Journal* 2/1–2 (1999), http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issue/2.1.99/wecowski.html (accessed Dec. 12, 2014).

chromatic in its harmony; its sound is not nearly as liturgical as the *religioso* chorale of the G-minor Nocturne.¹⁰ Chopin does, however, incorporate Chorale: the *Lento sostenuto* is structured in four neat four-measure phrases, with an eight-measure interlude of sorts in the middle (Ex. 2, mm. 199–202, 203–06, 207–14, 215–18, 219–22). Each of the four four-measure phrases ends with the same figure, which *does* employ strict homorhythm, simple and even rhythm, and simple harmony. Because of this, the salient characteristics of a communal, religious utterance are as clear as in the unmistakable IV–I “Amen” cadence that ends the whole piece. Also clear is that as in the G-Minor Nocturne, the host genre is of the personal, private type—a fantasy for solo piano.

Alienation and Despair: “Me” versus “Them”

The use of Chorale to express an “I” separated from its “we” can be hopeful or idealistic, as in the examples above. In other instances, though, the tone is ironic and expresses the despair or pessimism of the alienated individual, hence the more narcissistic “me” and “them” rather than “I” and “we.” Distorted or disjunctive use of Chorale invokes a sense of pathos, but the devotional and religious connotations of the topic are never in question or absent. In fact, they are poignantly present, helping to create irony in the Romantic, Schlegelian sense of paradox, antithesis, and self-conscious referencing.

Schumann’s Lied *Anfangs wollt’ ich fast verzagen* (At first I almost despaired), no. 8 from the Heine *Liederkreis*, Op. 24 (1840), contains only 11 measures of music: two measures of piano introduction, eight measures of sung chorale, and one measure of sung postlude (Ex. 3). The opening melody is the chorale tune *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten* (He who but suffers dear God to reign), used by J.S. Bach in several cantatas (Ex. 4).¹¹

¹⁰ Chopin includes an even more overtly prayerful chorale in another G-minor nocturne, Op. 37, No.1, which will be discussed later.

¹¹ The example of this chorale as used by Bach is given here to show it in a straightforwardly sacred context (and perhaps in the form through which Schumann encountered it), but not to suggest any particular connection between Schumann’s Lied and Bach’s cantatas.

Example 3: Schumann, *Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen* (complete)

The musical score for Schumann's song "Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen" is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody in treble clef and the piano accompaniment in bass clef, both in C major and common time. The vocal line begins with a *mf* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a complex, arpeggiated texture. The second system continues the piece, with the vocal line marked *p* and *rit.* (ritardando). The piano accompaniment also includes a *p* and *rit.* marking, with a crescendo hairpin leading into the final measures. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

mf

An-fangs wollt' ich fast ver-za-gen, und ich glaubt', ich trüg es nie,

mf

7 und ich hab' es doch ge-tra - gen, a - ber fragt mich nur nicht: wie? nicht: wie?

p rit.

p rit.

rit.

Example 4: J.S. Bach, Cantata No. 93, *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten*, chorale

The musical score for J.S. Bach's chorale "Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten" is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody in treble clef and the piano accompaniment in bass clef, both in C major and common time. The vocal line is a simple, homophonic melody. The piano accompaniment features a complex, arpeggiated texture. The second system continues the piece, with the vocal line and piano accompaniment both marked *p* and *rit.* (ritardando). The piano accompaniment includes a crescendo hairpin leading into the final measures. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

p rit.

p rit.

The literal copying of Bach's first phrase in the Lied (mm. 1–4) makes the reference crystal clear, and Schumann feels free to make changes for the remainder. His text of course is different, too; while the original chorale speaks of the security that will come from trusting in God, Heine's

poem insinuates something “more dubious than difficult” about the remedy to the despair:¹² “At first I almost despaired, and I thought I would never bear it, and I have borne it, but never ask me: ‘How?’” Schumann even repeats this last question, appropriately set to a dangling half cadence in measure 11. The chorale quotation and the four-part chorale texture of the piano part are ironic; with the minor key, the half cadence, the text, and the setting for solo voice, nothing about this chorale is reassuring, secure, or communal. The context of the Lied within the song cycle reveals what the speaker means by “it” (“I thought I would never bear it, and I have borne it”): sorrow over his unfulfilled love. The speaker does not exactly name a “them”—someone or something that he is at odds with—but the text and context make it clear that he is alone and doubts that he will ever truly be able to bear the sorrow. Both the object of his unreciprocated love and his sorrow over it are his “enemies” in his loneliness, and he is even alienated from faith in God and religious communion.

Eric Sams correlates Schumann’s chorale with Chopin’s Prelude in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20 (1839), asserting that the “affinity . . . with the prelude . . . then just published in Leipzig, may not be unintentional.”¹³ The prelude is sometimes included on lists of Chopin’s use of Chorale (Goldberg’s, for instance),¹⁴ although it is perhaps more Funeral March than Chorale, the two topics can of course be combined (Ex. 5). Moreover, the plodding quarter notes and the voice motion of the bass do resemble the piano part in Schumann’s Lied, adding another layer of irony to the song. Sams summarizes: “His music is all humility and self-denial, a Bach chorale; yet coloured with frank regret and nostalgia, a Chopin prelude.”¹⁵

Example 5: Chopin, Prelude in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20, mm. 1–6

The musical score for Chopin's Prelude in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20, measures 1–6, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1–3) is marked 'Largo' and 'ff' (fortissimo). The second system (measures 4–6) is marked 'p' (piano). The score is in C minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) features a four-part chorale texture with chords and moving lines. The left hand (bass clef) plays a steady quarter-note bass line. The piece concludes with a half cadence in measure 6.

¹² Eric Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 45.

¹³ Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann*, 46.

¹⁴ Goldberg, *The Age of Chopin*, 68.

¹⁵ Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann*, 45.

Schubert uses ironic Chorale in one of his song cycles as well—*Winterreise* (1827). Part of the irony here comes from the context of the narrative and the juxtaposition with an extremely contrasting topic. Jonathan Bellman identified Schubert's use of *style hongrois* in nos. 20, 22, and 24 of *Winterreise*, where it represents different aspects of the Gypsy stereotype. These are not literal depictions of Gypsies, but suggestions of the mental or emotional state of the protagonist. There seem to be other examples of *style hongrois* in the cycle as well, but it is nevertheless significant that it is concentrated at the end of the cycle, as the protagonist is losing his sense of reality as well as his will to live, and becomes increasingly alienated.¹⁶ The intervening songs, nos. 21 and 23—almost certainly by design, since Schubert rearranged the order of the poems from Müller's original¹⁷—are voiced as chorales and as such answer the declarations and complaints of the songs they follow. The two topics—*hongrois* and Chorale—are suitably opposite to achieve this effect. Chorale represents the pure, right, proper, communal, and Christian, while the implications of the *hongrois* lean toward the low, marginal, antisocial, wild, criminal, and heathen.

Song no. 20, *Der Wegweiser* (The Sign Post), uses hints of *style hongrois* in the piano part to support the text that describes the protagonist as a wanderer, purposely avoiding other people and looking for a place of no return where he can rest alone. In the following song, the place he finds is a cemetery, which he speaks of as if it is an inn—"das Wirtshaus"—and the musical language here is not just a hint of Chorale in the piano part, but a full-blown homorhythmic chorale in which both the voice and the piano participate (Ex. 6).

¹⁶ Jonathan Bellman, *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 150–57.

¹⁷ Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's Winterreise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 22. *Der Wegweiser* and *Das Wirtshaus* were originally nos. 16 and 17, respectively; Schubert made them nos. 20 and 21. *Die Nebensonnen* was originally no. 20; Schubert inserted it as no. 23, between *Mut* and *Der Leiermann*.

Example 6: Schubert, *Das Wirtshaus* from *Winterreise*, D. 911, mm. 1–15

Sehr langsam

Auf ei - nen To-dten-a-cker hat

mich mein Weg ge-bracht; all - hier will ich ein-keh-ren, hab' ich bei mir ge-dacht. Ihr

grü - nen To - dten krän - ze, könnt wohl die Zei - chen sein, die mü - de Wand - drer la - den ins küh - le Wirtshaus ein

The key of F major—having appeared up to this point in the song cycle only in brief modulations—is significant, standing in peaceful, pastoral contrast to the minor keys of the songs on either side of it. Furthermore, Schubert opens his *Deutsche Messe* (for the Catholic Church) from 1827 (the same timeframe as *Winterreise*) with a very similar chorale, *Wohin soll ich mich wenden* (Whither shall I turn), also in F major (Ex. 7). Thrasybulos Georgiades believes this was a paraphrase of the F-centered Kyrie from the Gregorian Requiem Mass, which Schubert would have known from his time as a chorister in the Catholic Church.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cited in Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey*, 280–81.

Example 7: Schubert, *Wohin soll ich mich wenden* from *Deutsche Messe*, D. 872, choral score, mm. 1–8

Mäßig

p

SATB

Wo - hin soll ich mich wen - den, wenn Gram und Schmerz mich drück - ken? Wem

künd' ich mein Ent - zük - ken, wenn freu - dig pocht mein Herz?

With the green garlands in the cemetery (an image from the second stanza of *Das Wirtshaus*) as a symbol of welcome to the traveler, he is no longer alone and shunning company, but participating (or imagining his participation) in a communal funeral chorale—just not his own as he was wishing for, since this “inn” has no room and turns him away. Arnold Feil even sees a connection between the way Schubert scored the music and the way a wind band would have played such a chorale in a funeral procession, with the upper voices of the instrumental accompaniment higher than the melody in measures 12–15 (see Ex. 6).¹⁹ The irony of the Chorale in *Das Wirtshaus* is that the communal genre serves to intensify the poet’s isolation, and the Christian imagery underscores that he is totally alone; no one walks with him. In any case, the Lied evokes something religious. The *style hongrois* of the surrounding songs implicitly rejects faith and community, but in *Das Wirtshaus* the protagonist seems to be reverting to them, or at least wishing to. That language is subtly introduced in *Der Wegweiser* and is increasingly pronounced in song no. 22, *Mut* (Courage). There, the protagonist is not merely alone, but angrily, irreverently, and energetically defying traditional faith with a falsely cheerful tone in both the text and the music. “If there is no god on earth, then we ourselves are gods,” he proclaims. Feil sees song no. 23, *Die Nebensonnen* (The False Suns), as a stylized sarabande with obvious connections to *Das Wirtshaus*: “related in their simplicity . . . far from melancholy, yet deeply sorrowful . . . they both bring something to a close.”²⁰ Making a connection between Schubert and the obsolete sarabande is something of a stretch (and in any case the metrical emphasis here is not quite right for a sarabande). The music does feel like a heavy and slow processional, with the traveler stepping only on beats 1 and 2; the empty third beat shows his

¹⁹ Arnold Feil, *Franz Schubert: Die Schöne Müllerin, Winterreise* [1975], trans. Ann C. Sherwin (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1988), 121.

²⁰ Arnold Feil, *Franz Schubert: Die Schöne Müllerin, Winterreise*, 126.

exhaustion. Whether *Die Nebensonnen* is based on dance rhythms or not, a connection to *Das Wirtshaus* that Feil does not mention is that Schubert also voices and harmonizes it as a chorale, or perhaps a choralelike *Männerchor* piece. Connecting Schubert to either of these genres is unproblematic (Ex. 8).

Example 8: Schubert, *Die Nebensonnen* from *Winterreise*, D. 911, mm. 1–8

Nicht zu langsam

Drei

Son - nen sah ich am Him - mel steh'n, hab' lang und fest - sie an - ge-sehn.

The text of *Die Nebensonnen* reveals the traveler now nearing a state of madness and exhaustion as he speaks of three suns in the sky and reiterates his desire to die, or at least to be alone and absent (“Ging nur die dritt’ erst hinterdrein! Im Dunkel wird mir wohler sein”—If only the third [sun] would also set! I will feel better in the dark). Musically, the combination of Chorale, a slow processional in triple meter, and the key of A major illustrate this speech with poignant irony. The traveler sings what ought to be a communal chorale, but he is fully alone, despondent, and possibly insane. The Chorale aspect could be read ironically: everything that Chorale represents has become his enemy—the “them” of “me” versus “them”—even if the true enemy is merely the paranoid voices within his own head. Paradoxically, the Chorale could also be indicative of the traveler’s definitive and proper exit from the world. The alienated aspect of the *style hongrois* in the final song of *Winterreise*, *Der Leiermann* (The Hurdy-gurdy Man), finalizes this destiny—and no chorale follows to console or correct it.

The Dream of “We”: Unfulfilled Prayer

The Chorale in *Winterreise* and *Liederkreis*, Op. 24, exemplifies a particularly ironic use of the topic, because in the end, there is no consolation, no resolution, no belonging, no clarity, no faith. The Chorale in Chopin’s other G-Minor Nocturne, Op. 37, No. 1 (ca. 1839), might fit in this category, too, since unlike in Op. 15, No. 3, the chorale is framed on *both* sides by the painful lament of the arialike melody in the right hand and the processional feel of the music in the left hand (Ex. 9a). The chorale in the middle is square and pious, and it feels grounded and secure with its unwavering quarter notes, low tessitura, and key of E-flat major. The vision of this chorale, however, is a dream; fermatas in four successive measures (61–64) at the end of the section signal the dreamlike quality, while superficially they resemble the fermatas of a Bach chorale setting. Time stops, and then with the “wrong” cadence (mm. 64–65), everything abruptly dissolves back into the reality of the lament (Ex. 9b).

Example 9a: Chopin, Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No.1, mm. 1–8

Andante sostenuto

The musical score for Example 9a is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 1–4) shows the right hand with a melody starting on a half note G4, followed by eighth notes, and the left hand with a bass line of quarter notes. The second system (mm. 5–8) continues the melody and bass line, with a fermata over the final measure (m. 8). The score includes dynamic markings (p, f, p) and articulation marks (accents, slurs).

Example 9b: Chopin, Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1, mm. 41–69

Andante sostenuto

The musical score for Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1, measures 41–69, is presented in five systems. The tempo is marked *Andante sostenuto*. The key signature is G minor (three flats). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, arpeggios, and ornaments.

- System 1 (Measures 41–46):** The left hand plays a series of chords in the bass register, marked *p* (piano). The right hand plays a series of chords in the treble register.
- System 2 (Measures 47–52):** The left hand continues with chords, and the right hand plays a series of chords in the treble register.
- System 3 (Measures 53–58):** The left hand plays a series of chords, marked *p* (piano). The right hand plays a series of chords in the treble register.
- System 4 (Measures 59–64):** The left hand plays a series of chords, marked *dim.* (diminuendo) and *rit.* (ritardando). The right hand plays a series of chords in the treble register.
- System 5 (Measures 65–69):** The left hand plays a series of chords, marked *pp* (pianissimo). The right hand plays a series of chords in the treble register.

As discussed earlier, the potential for political interpretation—with a nationalistic “we”—of Chopin’s works somehow makes this nocturne seem less self-absorbed than the Lieder discussed above, hence the separate classification—dream of “we” instead of “me” versus “them.” While these distinctions may be somewhat subjective, it remains true that *Anfangs*, *Wirtshaus*, *Nebensonnen*, and Chopin’s Nocturne, Op. 37, No. 1 are all characterized by unresolved alienation and despair. The chorale in Schumann’s *Anfangs* can almost be heard as a minor version of the chorale in Chopin’s Op. 37, No. 1 (compare Exx. 4 and 9b).

Another chorale with a dreamlike quality, this time from a solo piano work, is in Schumann’s *Vogel als Prophet* (Bird as Prophet), no. 7 of the *Waldszenen* (Forest Scenes), Op. 82 (1848–49). Christopher Alan Reynolds elucidates the meaning behind the altogether eerie and sinister mood here, interpreting the “Bird as Prophet” as the “familiar trope of a songbird as harbinger of death or a voice of lamentation.” Apparently, Schumann originally included (and later suppressed) a poetic motto for each movement of *Waldszenen*; for *Vogel als Prophet*, the quotation came from Eichendorff’s *Zwielicht* (Twilight): “Be on your guard, be awake and alert!” In the poem, a human voice warns the deer in the forest to beware of man; in Schumann’s piece, this seems to be reversed: an animal voice (the bird) warns mankind about death.²¹

Chorale appears in the middle of *Vogel als Prophet*, framed (as in Chopin’s nocturne) by iterations of the eerie warning/lament of the bird (Ex. 10a). Reynolds does not identify it as Chorale, but he does make several pertinent observations: it is completely disjunct musically from the “bird” music (Ex. 10b) and is even set off by one of Schumann’s trademark quotational devices—a complete pause (Ex. 10a, m. 18).

²¹ Christopher Alan Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 77.

Example 10a: Schumann, *Vogel als Prophet* from *Waldszenen*, Op.82, mm. 16–27

19

Etwas langsamer

22

(Verschiebung)

25

Im tempo

Example 10b: Schumann, *Vogel als Prophet* from *Waldszenen*, Op. 82, mm. 1–6

Langsam, sehr zart

Reynolds further reveals that the melody of the chorale section is a self-quotation from Part III of Schumann's own *Szenen aus Goethes Faust*, in which a boys' choir—portraying the spirits of innocent children who died at birth—sings of their happiness while Pater Seraphicus fills out the four-part texture in the bass, singing a different text about their blissful ignorance (Ex. 11).²²

Example 11: Schumann, *Szenen aus Goethes Faust*, Part III, *Chor seliger Knaben* (Chorus of Blessed Boys), mm. 13–19

boys' choir

p Glück-lich sind wir Al-len Al-len ist das Da-sein so ge-lind. Sag'uns, Va-ter, wo wir wal-len sag'-uns

Dass ein Lie-ben-der zu-ge-gen, fühlt ihr wohl, so nahe-uch nur, doch von schrof-fen Er-de-we-gen, Glückli-che!

Pater Seraphicus

In *Vogel als Prophet*, the chorale proceeds sweetly along, and then abruptly shifts up by a minor sixth to the key of E-flat major (Ex. 10a, mm. 23–24). The effect of this shift is unearthly, and the allusion to the spirits of departed children ascending to heaven only adds to the dreamlike quality. Furthermore, the switch back to the G-minor bird music (mm. 24–25) is equally abrupt; as with the deceptive cadence in Chopin's nocturne, we are jolted out of the vision, and the concluding bird music offers nothing but its unsettling spookiness—persistently accented chromatic notes, the gesture of the main motif, the final cadence with a barely recognizable tonic chord. The dream of “we” in this piece is the prayer for deliverance from this terror and for

²² Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion*, 78–79. John Daverio describes this chorus as “hymnic,” by which he perhaps means choralelike, since it is a simple, four-part homorhythmic setting. John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a “New Poetic Age”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 380.

heavenly communion. But there is no peace or comfort here, no erasing of tragedy—Gretchen’s drowning of the baby she conceived with Faust, or whatever danger the Bird Prophet foretells and laments.

“I” Finding “We”

On the other hand, the lost or struggling “I” does sometimes find peace or make its way home—in a spiritual rather than nationalistic sense. The Chorale in such pieces functions within a variety of narrative trajectories and offers a variety of affects, but always affirmatively and, unlike nationalistic or monumental Chorale, in a personal or private context. As always, the clues for the interpretive classification are both musical and contextual.

Consolation and Peace

Another work of Schumann’s provides a signature example of Chorale in the context of consolation and peace—*Der Dichter Spricht* (The Poet Speaks) from *Kinderszenen* (1838). This epilogue to *Kinderszenen* has been analyzed in a variety of ways, including mention of the opening and closing material as being choralelike, but it is hard to find a coherent explanation for identifying it as such and, more important, a coherent reading of its meaning. Kofi Agawu’s reading comes close in the way he dissects the music in terms of topic and what he calls “modes of enunciation,” but he stops short of fully interpreting Schumann’s topical and structural choices. As Agawu puts it, “the poet . . . enlists the participation of a community, perhaps a Protestant one,” and the piece opens with a chorale (song mode) “as if in medias res,” followed by an introspective, improvisatory recitative (“speech mode in its most authentic state”), and finally, “the poet joins the congregation in beginning the chorale again. . . . In song mode, we are led gradually but securely to a place of rest”²³ (Ex. 12).

Agawu never ventures a theory, however, as to what purpose or narrative these modes of enunciation serve, nor does he give any good reason to make a specifically Protestant connection. In his earlier study, Agawu does provide interpretive insight: “It is in the realization of the [private] poetic idea that Schumann makes the most explicit use of a public code. The piece begins as a chorale, which carries implications of archaicism, age, authority, and a certain purity.” Again, though, Agawu posits nothing specific about why Schumann chose the topics he did (and here he also includes one additional topic—“arabesque” in mm. 9–12), saying only that their sequence “has no syntax . . . the listener and performer are invited to construct a metaphorical scenario.”²⁴

²³ Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98–102.

²⁴ Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 140–41.

Example 12: Schumann, *Der Dichter spricht* from *Kinderszenen* (complete).

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Der Dichter spricht" from Schumann's "Kinderszenen". The score is written for piano in G major and common time (C). It consists of five systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff joined by a brace. The first system (measures 1-6) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 7-11) includes a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The third system (measures 12-13) features a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The fourth system (measures 14-20) includes a piano (*p*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The fifth system (measures 21-24) begins with a ritardando (*rit.*) marking and concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Kinderszenen is a cycle of 13 short, titled, and motivically interrelated character pieces for piano. The first 12 pieces are, as the title indicates, scenes from childhood, be they depictive (from an adult's perspective) or perceived (actually entering the mind of the child). The cycle begins with innocence—children's stories, games, desires (and fulfillment)—departing from its opening in G major, but only to closely related sharp keys, realized in a stable and uncomplicated way. The sixth piece, however, *Wichtige Begebenheit* (Important Event), is a midpoint and turning point, after which the cycle takes on a larger-scale narrative aspect—not just individual scenes from childhood, but a narrative of the changes in the child's psyche through his experiences, that is, the process of growing up and losing innocence.

The keys reflect this change, first shifting to the flat side: F major for dreaming and the safety of the home, C major for pure imagination. From this point, simplicity and innocence begin to slip away, both harmonically and rhythmically: syncopated G-sharp minor for unchildlike pensive melancholy; an extremely complicated return of G major for a piece called *Fürchtenmachen* (Frightening) with many chromatic inflections, shifts to minor, and tempo fluctuations; then E minor for the penultimate piece—a lullaby (ending on subdominant harmony) for an apparently troubled child falling into an uneasy sleep.

Following this lullaby, the epilogue *Der Dichter spricht* represents a shift in perspective: no longer a scene from childhood, but a commentary from the poet-narrator, perhaps the child as an adult. This is the point when he must reconcile his adult self with these scenes of childhood and the ache he feels at the observation of innocence and its subsequent loss. Given Schumann's poetic propensities as well as his own writings about *Kinderszenen*,²⁵ it is no stretch to interpret the work poetically or narratively, with a fundamental conflict between childhood innocence and its loss, or the fact that innocence is only recognized upon its loss. That Schumann would choose four-part homorhythmic texture to begin this moment of personal utterance concerning a moment of personal crisis demands interpretation.

The half-note rhythm, homorhythmic texture, stepwise melodic contour, midrange four-part voicing, and four-measure phrase structure all support calling the opening four measures of *Der Dichter spricht* Chorale. Agawu is correct that it seems to begin in the middle of something, an episode already underway—note in Example 12 that the key has returned to G major, but begins on a third-inversion dominant chord. In a “normal” chorale, the second four-measure phrase might then end on a tonic chord, with the melody in the top voice proceeding in half notes from B to A to G in measures 7–8. Of course, this is *not* what happens, and there are other signs of dissolution as well. The melodic ornament in measure 3 is in a rhythmically normal place, but the second one in measure 6 is transferred to the tenor, in a rhythmically odd place, and its final note (G-sharp, which now sounds like a leading tone) is unresolved. Instead, a rest follows, and the four-measure consequent phrase is broken up rhythmically and harmonically, veering to A minor instead of G major. From here, the chorale motif morphs into plaintive recitative in E minor that culminates with the fully

²⁵ For more on this, see Timothy Taylor, “Aesthetic and Cultural Issues in Schumann's *Kinderszenen*,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 21/2 (December 1990): 161–78.

diminished seventh chord of measure 16, seeming to ask, “Why? Why does it have to be this way? What happened? What went wrong? Why can’t I get back?”

The chorale motif (mm. 1–2) resembles the motif from no. 5, *Glückes genug* (Quite Content), and the accompaniment for the motif when Schumann fragments and sequences it (mm. 9–12, the part Agawu calls “arabesque”) resembles the accompaniment from no. 4, *Bittendes Kind* (Pleading Child). These similarities underscore the chorale as a symbol of purity and wholeness from the past as well as its loss, only now the order is reversed: happiness followed by a plea to return to it, rather than a plea for something followed by happiness at getting it.

Additionally, Schumann’s choice of Chorale here serves to universalize the individual pain of this poet, and shows him seeking help and reassurance. The suffering “I” seeks comfort and answers in faith and age, and the power of their communal expression. Chorale in this way is a symbol of reconciliation, peace, and understanding, and of returning whence you came. Exactly opposite from *Vogel als Prophet*, the Chorale here is the frame rather than the middle section, and it is in the “right” key. When it returns after the recitative, Schumann does let it finally cadence securely and very peacefully in G major. This is not chorale as applied from above or outside, a pure and whole chorale, or a Protestant choir singing to the poet, but rather, chorale as filtered through Robert Schumann in a most personal of manners. In contrast to Schumann’s setting and then embellishment of an actual chorale (*Freue dich, o meine Seele*) in *Album für die Jugend*, the chorale in *Kinderszenen* is fragmented and clearly topical.

A moment strikingly similar to the chorale and recitative in *Der Dichter spricht* can be found in the third movement of Mendelssohn’s Cello Sonata No. 2 in D Major (1843). Here the piano plays a Bach-style chorale (coincidentally or not, also in G major) in huge arpeggiated chords, in alternation with the cello’s plaintive and mournful recitative (Ex. 13). By the end, after the piano takes a turn with plaintive recitative, the movement ends peacefully on arpeggiated G-major chords (from the chorale).

Example 13: Mendelssohn, Cello Sonata No. 2 in D Major, III, mm. 1–16

Adagio

mf
sempre arpeggiando col Pedale

7
mf appassionato ed animato
col Violoncello

dim.
p
dim.

13
f

cresc.
cresc.

Armin Koch marks the key of this movement—the subdominant of the overall D major of the sonata—as an indicator of introspection, and outlines speculative autobiographical connections to the death of Mendelssohn’s mother in 1842.²⁶ Autobiographical or not, interpreting the Chorale in this movement as a personal expression stems also from the context of its host genre. As for the idea that the chorale here expresses consolation and peace, the topical juxtaposition and interaction (again, as in *Der Dichter spricht*) are of the extremely contrasting topics of Chorale and Recitative. This bears comparison to J. Michael Cooper’s observation that in Mendelssohn’s oratorio *St. Paul* the “implicitly communal chorales are granted a new semiotic power, functioning as the dramatic result, culmination, or resolution of the strife-ridden complexity of fugal textures.”²⁷ The combination of extremely contrasting fugue and chorale is also found in one of Mendelssohn’s works of “unabashedly religious character,” the Klavierfuge

²⁶ Armin Koch, *Choräle und Choralhaftes im Werk von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 191–92.

²⁷ J. Michael Cooper, “The Unknown *St. Paul*: Bachian Impulses and Dramatic Spirit in Mendelssohn’s First Oratorio,” *Brown Working Papers in the Arts and Sciences*, vol. 7 (Georgetown, Tex.: Southwestern University, 2007), 21.

in E Minor, Op. 35, No. 1, which R. Larry Todd connects to the death of one of the composer's friends.²⁸

Mendelssohn famously had a keen interest in archaic music, and his many works involving chorales encompass all types of chorale-based compositions, from extensive usage of actual chorales to imitation of archaic chorale settings to topical use of chorale. The pervasive role that chorale plays in Mendelssohn's output has been the subject of various studies, including Armin Koch's comprehensive monograph. Much Mendelssohn scholarship focuses on his use of actual chorales in large, monumental works such as symphonies and oratorios. Koch posits that Mendelssohn's motivation in general for using chorales was to invite the mental participation, or "listening along" (*mithören*), of the listeners.²⁹ As Koch is apparently also inclined to believe, however, the expression of the Chorale in the cello sonata seems more personal; again, the host genre is the "private" realm of the cello sonata, and the chorale's location is in a slow, reflective inner movement.

Perhaps not taking into account the nature of the host genre, Todd is more hesitant to ascribe a personal significance to Mendelssohn's use of "free" chorale in the cello sonata, as he did for the Klavierfuge. For lack of concrete autobiographical evidence, he says only that in the Adagio of the sonata, Mendelssohn at least meant to "inject spiritual elements . . . so that works intended for the concert hall began to encroach upon the domain of sacred music for the church."³⁰ Whatever the case, just as the chorale in *Der Dichter spricht* was chorale as filtered through Schumann, chorale and the archaic for Mendelssohn were not merely artifacts to be preserved or displayed (although he did this, too), but also elements to be integrated into his own music, as in the way he thickly voices and arpeggiates the chords in the cello sonata chorale—pianistic rather than choral in style. Chorale is simply a part of Mendelssohn's vocabulary. Unlike Chopin (as we have seen) and Beethoven (see below), however, Mendelssohn does not tend to wax otherworldly with his Chorale; whether a rousing apotheosis in a triumphant symphonic finale or a grounding and consoling framework in a cello sonata, Mendelssohn's use of Chorale is strongly linked to a spiritual life—on earth. The rousing type has examples in his chamber music as well: the sixteenth-century chorale *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (commonly known as *Old Hundredth* in English) makes a surprise appearance (beginning in m. 128) in the finale of his Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor (1845) and ends up being a culminating melody. One additional example of a "private" Chorale (of a subtly different type) in Mendelssohn's music will be described below.

Beethovenian Transcendence

Eric McKee has identified the harmonic gesture of the I–V7–vi chord progression as a consistent feature in depictions of transcendent spirituality or exalted states of consciousness in eighteenth-century opera; he explains the expressive opposition of the "weightless" I–V7–vi versus the

²⁸ R. Larry Todd, "On Mendelssohn's Sacred Music, Real and Imaginary," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 180.

²⁹ Koch, *Choräle und Choralhaftes im Werk von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*, 70–72.

³⁰ Todd, "On Mendelssohn's Sacred Music," 180.

gravity-bound I–V7–I.³¹ McKee extends this association to the music of Beethoven, and further argues that Beethoven had a preference for the bright key of E major in “spiritual” pieces or passages, including the second theme of the Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 (*Waldstein*, 1803–04).³²

McKee seems more concerned with the I–V7–vi chord progression than with choralelike melodic and rhythmic disposition in his overall selection of examples, but he does note that Beethoven “was one of the earliest composers to make consistent use of this topic,”³³ and Op. 53 is indeed a fitting example. Here, unlike in the previous examples, the formal expectations pertain to sonata rather than to nocturne, prelude, art song, character piece, or fantasy—all of which have arguably looser formal expectations. Beethoven’s first theme famously features a pounding left-hand figure, extremely disparate registers, uneven rhythm and phrasing, frenetic energy, and a destabilized C-major tonality (Ex. 14a). Following an equally energetic and long transition to the chromatic mediant E major, the closely voiced Chorale of the second theme is even and serene, sweet and connected. The topic is also rather unexpected, even though the key is prepared; this location for Chorale is quite possibly innovative on Beethoven’s part (Ex. 14b).

Example 14a: Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 (*Waldstein*), I, mm. 1–15

Allegro con brio

³¹ Eric McKee, “The Topic of the Sacred Hymn in Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” *College Music Symposium* 47 (2007): 26–35. McKee uses the terms *hymn* and *chorale* rather loosely in this article to describe an affect; most of the examples he gives for “hymn topic” seem to fall under the category of “prayerful,” “meditative,” or “spiritual,” and many of them do indeed feature I–V–vi progressions. However, the texture and melody types of his examples are quite diverse.

³² McKee, “The Topic of the Sacred Hymn,” 41–43, 50.

³³ McKee, “The Topic of the Sacred Hymn,” 35.

Example 14b: Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 (*Waldstein*), I, mm. 35–43

Many commentators have pointed out the extreme contrast between the first and second themes in Op. 53, but once again, few have ventured an explanation or interpretation. Eero Tarasti, for example, simultaneously calls the second theme “disengaged” (for its key) and “particularly engaged” (for its voicing), and applies multiple other semiological terms to it, but never quite addresses the topical aspect. A second theme in a sonata of this era is expected to be contrasting, often described as more “lyrical” or “introspective.”³⁴ McKee’s explanation for why Beethoven specifically chooses Chorale for his second theme—to represent a transcendent state—is logical, and also opens the door to considering how poignantly common this affect is in Beethoven’s music, or perhaps to considering the various ways Beethoven signifies transcendence.

Chorale is one of those ways, and McKee makes a convincing case for the I–V7–vi progression³⁵ and the bright key of E major—to which should be added bright keys in general (including the B major of the Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 73, and possibly the modal F Lydian of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* [see below]), especially when they are in high contrast to surrounding keys. These elements are not necessarily all present in every case, of course, but

³⁴ This concept of contrast in sonata form exposition belongs more to the nineteenth than to the eighteenth century; as James Webster explains, “the Romantics believed that a sonata-form exposition was governed more by the contrast between the ‘first theme’ and the ‘second theme’ than by the tonal polarity between the keys of the first and second groups.” James Webster, “Schubert’s Sonata Form and Brahms’s First Maturity,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 2 (1978): 18.

³⁵ The question of whether McKee’s theory concerning I–V7–vi chord progressions is universally or generally applicable will not be taken up in this study. It is interesting to observe, however, instances of Chorale from Beethoven’s era (or shortly before or after) that also contain a prominent use of the progression: Chopin, G-Minor Nocturnes, Op. 15, No. 3, and Op. 37, No. 1; Schubert, *Wohin soll Ich mich wenden*; Loewe, Symphony in D Major, IV; Friedrich Schneider, *Das Weltgericht, Chor der Gläubigen*; Donizetti, *Les Martyrs*, overture and finale; Haydn, Symphony No. 75 and String Quartets Op. 76, Nos. 1 and 6 (all second movements). The similar disposition of Haydn’s slow, choralelike movements to Beethoven’s use of transcendent Chorale suggests the debt of the latter to the former.

the special quality of these moments in Beethoven's music stems at least partially from them. In addition, of particular relevance to this study are the specific characteristics of Beethoven's use of Chorale, which often does not sound explicitly ecclesiastical, but even when it does, also feels intensely personal.

In the Op. 53 Piano Sonata, E major stands in bright contrast to the main key of the piece, C major, but because it is so strongly prepared, "the listener can relax into the euphoria of that tonality."³⁶ That is, in this case the chorale does *not* seem miraculous or unreal or dreamlike, as in the earlier examples we have considered, even though its key is more remote than in some of those cases. Perhaps this is Classicism at work—thoroughly preparing the new key—but also, for Beethoven, this "far-out" key is not that far-out. The sharp-side third relation of E major to C major is normal for Beethoven, while still providing the vivid contrast in key color and affect. Significantly, even though the second theme is in the remote key, it feels vastly more stable than the first theme—Tarasti is exactly correct that it is both disengaged and very engaged. Moreover, when the second theme returns in the recapitulation, its key is A major—also bright, but one degree less, and serving as a pathway to A minor, and finally to C major. Again, this may be Classicism and the expectations of sonata form at work, but it still stands that in the end all is unified and brought into "true being" or "perfectiveness"³⁷—the earthly and the transcendent, the personal and the absolute, the subjective and the objective, or whatever polarities one wishes to see. The genius of the chorale in Op. 53 is that it is not necessarily clear which is which—and in the end it does not matter; the "we" and the "I" are one and the same.

In the case of Op. 53, the opening chord progression (m. 35) is unequivocally I–V7–vi, and the melody is actually rather churchy—if "churchy" is taken to imply utterly simple, square, and stepwise. In the variation that follows the first iteration, Beethoven embellishes the unaltered melody with running triplets (in contemporaneous church practice, chorale melodies tended to be unchanged, no matter how one might decorate them,³⁸ which seems to echo here). This treatment could fall under one of Robert Hatten's categories of "textural topic" in which "progressive rhythmic diminution often leads to a state of transcendent bliss." Hatten notes that this is a typical strategy in Beethoven's late variation movements, for which he gives as examples the slow movement of the *Archduke* Trio, Op. 97, the finale of the Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111, and the Adagio of the Ninth Symphony.³⁹ This sort of variation by rhythmic diminution personalizes the Chorale, both musically, in the improvisational-type embellishment to the melody, and in the affect of bliss or ecstasy (not mere transcendence!).

In the Piano Sonata in E Major, Op. 109 (1820), not just one section, but the entire three-movement piece is in the tonality of E major: two outer movements in E major frame a stormy

³⁶ Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 128.

³⁷ Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, 136–37.

³⁸ Sieghard Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-minor Quartet Op. 132," in *Beethoven Studies 3*, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 175.

³⁹ Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 249.

inner movement in E minor. In this opus, sonata norms are defied (or are simply irrelevant) in too many ways to discuss here, but one of them is that the concluding movement is slow and lyrical, marked *Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung* (Songful, with most intimate/heartfelt feeling). The movement is a set of variations on a theme that illustrates well a hallmark trait of Beethovenian Chorale, a trait that makes it sound more personal: the fusion of Chorale with operatic or Lied style. As in earlier instances of this fusion (the Chorale found in the Op. 76 Quartets, Nos. 4 and 6, of Haydn, for example), the theme in the third movement of Beethoven's Op. 109 contains too many large intervals and register shifts to be congregational, but the tempo, phrasing, setting, and affect can rightly be interpreted as choralelike (Ex. 15). The I–V7–vi effect is not as immediate or obvious as it was in Op. 53, but is beautifully present in measures 5–7 (see chord analysis in Ex. 15). Finally, here again the “transcendent” chorale is neither far-out nor unreal, but rather the frame and core of the piece.

Example 15: Beethoven, Piano Sonata in E Major, Op. 109, III, mm. 1–16

Gesangvoll mit innigster Empfindung
mezza voce

I₆ IV V₇ I vi

The second movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 (*Emperor*, 1809–10) is a similarly operatic, transcendent chorale in its melodic contour and stretched-out 13-measure phrase structure. The I–V7–vi progression is clear in measure 10 and arguably present in measure 7, and in both places it is brought strongly to attention by the rest after the vi chord (Ex. 16). The key of B major here is very striking in relation to the overall E-flat tonality of the concerto, but once again, the way Beethoven slides back to E-flat for the finale, without pause between movements, integrates the heavenly transcendence of the second movement with the earthly dance of the third. This sense of integration is also underscored by the interaction of the “I”-soloist (sometimes ecstatically embellishing the melody) and the “we”-tutti (sometimes helping the soloist finish his phrases). The modulation to D major in the middle of the movement also lends a feeling of stability and legitimacy to the key of B major. B major is not just a strange and remote episode; no alienation here.

Example 16: Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 (*Emperor*), II, mm. 1–13

Str.
con sordino *p*
pizz.
arco

7
cresc.
f
dim.
p
f
p

I vi I⁴ V₇ vi

Conductor Benjamin Zander's article on interpreting Beethoven's metronome markings illuminates once again the crucial importance of tempo in defining the character of a piece or passage. In his discussion of the Adagio—or rather Adagio molto—from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, he likens it to the identically marked movement from Beethoven's String Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2, and labels them both as “chorale types in minim motion.”⁴⁰ To this list might also be added the Adagio cantabile from Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13 (*Pathétique*), even though it is notated in 2/4 rather than 4/4. These examples do move in half-measure impulses and possess a mood somewhere between prayerful stillness and ecstatic transcendence (depending on the tempo), but they also veer from chorale characteristics in both texture and in the operatic or Lied-like melodic contours with bigger intervals and bigger range than chorale-type melodies. Although it might be a stretch to call them chorales, the mutual influence of Chorale and Opera/Lied, or of the reverential and the keenly melodic, is relevant to the examples I have cited from Beethoven and Chopin, especially given the influence of operatic melodic writing in the latter's piano works. Operatic Chorale is another variation on the use of a public code (chorale) in service of personal expression.

Refuge or Retreat

As the examples above show, the transcendent Chorale is sometimes simultaneously grounding—and the two affects might just be different ways of wording the same phenomenon, or two sides of the same coin (transcendence and immanence), which in any case is affirmative and has an undistorted sense of well-being and belonging. While the line between “objective” and “subjective” and other polarities is not always clear, the next two examples are given their own

⁴⁰ Benjamin Zander, “Beethoven 9,” <http://www.benjaminzander.com/recordings/boston-philharmonic/beet9/review/130> (accessed July 11, 2014).

category as “retreating” rather than “transcendent” because of their context, even though one could argue a certain amount of transcendence as a result of the retreat. Both appear in surprising locations within fast movements, and even with a slight relaxation of tempo (indicated in the score in one case, and implicitly felt by lengthening of note value in the other), the tempos are too fast to afford the same transcendent feeling as in the examples from slow movements discussed in the previous section. The chorale in Beethoven’s Op. 53 is of course in a fast first movement, but the difference is in how the chorale plays out over the course of the movement.

The examples in this section do not exert the same kind of influence as the chorale in Beethoven’s Op. 53; instead, their presence is more like a temporary oasis of calm in the midst of storm, or a foil to the surrounding material, rather than a transcendence that spreads its glow over the surrounding material. The genres of these pieces are also slightly but meaningfully different—the duo sonata and the piano trio, in which one could argue the presence of multiple protagonists, multiple “I”s in conversation more than in homophony. As such, when the voices briefly join together in the chorale sections, the effect is poignant and peaceful, but again, temporary, and while it adds to the total picture of their relationship, it does not exactly transcend the fundamental nature of their interaction.

Mendelssohn’s early Viola Sonata in C Minor (1824) features Chorale in a highly unexpected location: the trio of the second movement’s minuet—again, as in Beethoven’s Op. 53, a moment when contrast would be expected, but probably not in the form of a chorale. The change in meter and texture as well as the simplicity of the melody and rhythm stand out. This trio also provides an extended section in C major in an otherwise mostly C-minor piece—all the movements are in C minor; the only other extended C major comes in the eighth variation of the last movement, but it, too, is temporary, as the piece ultimately reverts to C minor.

In the trio, the piano states the first phrase alone and is joined by the viola for the second (Ex. 17a), with “interludes” in between (such interludes will be further discussed below in the section on Beethoven’s *Heiliger Dankgesang*). Whether this piece is viewed as a duo sonata or a solo sonata with piano accompaniment, the utterance of an inherently communal voice—particularly an archaic church chorale, as this one seems to be—in a work featuring a single-line solo instrument is as striking as it was in the art songs discussed above. Moreover, Mendelssohn’s Chorale is also incongruent with the generic expectations of a movement labeled Minuet. The logic in this, however, would seem to be that the fast and stormy Minuet is actually more a scherzo than a minuet (Ex. 17b), from which the calm of an archaic chorale in half notes offers welcome relief or contrast.

Example 17a: Mendelssohn, Viola Sonata in C Minor, II, mm. 123–68

123

Trio

Più lento

p

135

p

147

p *pp*

159

p

1. 2.

p

1. 2.

p

Example 17b: Mendelssohn, Viola Sonata in C Minor, II, mm. 1–10

Another duo sonata, Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 (*Kreutzer*, 1803), was composed shortly before Op. 53 and shares with that sonata a very similar transition in the first movement to the “chorale” section—which (coincidentally or not) is in E major, as in Op. 53. The overall key of Op. 47 is A minor, although Beethoven chooses to open the movement with the solo violin sounding a chordal passage in A major (Ex. 18a) as a preface to the main key of A minor; the same modal interchange occurs when the placid E-major section (Ex. 18b) turns out not to be the second theme, but the first of a two-part preface to the energetic “real” second theme in E minor at measure 144 (Ex. 18c), with possible inflections of *style hongrois*.

Example 18a: Beethoven, Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 (*Kreutzer*), I, mm. 1–8

Example 18b: Beethoven, Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 (*Kreutzer*), I, mm. 91–105

Example 18c: Beethoven, Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 (*Kreutzer*), I, mm. 138–54

Presto

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 138 to 144. The violin part begins with a series of rapid sixteenth-note runs, marked with *sf* (sforzando). The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The second system covers measures 145 to 154. The violin part continues with rapid sixteenth-note runs, marked with *sf*. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked **Presto**. The score includes dynamic markings such as *sf* and *pizz.* (pizzicato).

Janet Schmalfeldt analyzes this movement in a similar way and labels the use of the major dominant in a minor piece “proto-Schubertian,”⁴¹ referring to the (once again E-major) second theme in Schubert’s overwhelmingly tragic A-Minor Piano Sonata, D. 784 (Ex. 19). Because of this comparison, the issue of Hatten’s designation of Schubert’s second theme in that piece as a combination of pastoral and hymn⁴² can be addressed here. Hatten defines hymn as “four-voice chordal texture,” that is, Chorale, but the theme in the sonata is not choralelike in its melody, harmony, or voice leading. (“Lullaby” could also be a more fitting identification than “Pastoral,” but that is a different discussion.) In any case, if any aspect of Chorale or E-major transcendence is present here, it is definitely in the category of the unreal or the ironic, since it seems meant to comfort or transport, but is utterly unable to do either and dissolves quickly, both topically and harmonically.

⁴¹ Janet Schmalfeldt, *In the Process of Becoming: Analytical and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 99–101.

⁴² Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 190–92.

Example 19: Schubert, Piano Sonata in A Minor, D. 784, I, mm. 59–77

Allegro giusto

Similarly, Schmalfeldt and Lawrence Kramer (whom she cites) call the E-major section in the *Kreutzer* Sonata choralelike on the basis of its texture and register, but as in Schubert's sonata, it is not very choralelike in its melody, harmony, and the same constantly droning E. Still, both examples present a moment of calm, togetherness, and refuge from turmoil, and they do so through their four-voice chorale texture.

Thanksgiving and Contemplation

Chorale for a prayer of thanksgiving after a struggle or battle and Chorale for a contemplative slow movement both have ample precedents by the time of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132 (1825), in which the third movement's *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart* (Holy song of thanks of a convalescent to the Godhead, in the Lydian mode) elevates both types of Chorale usage to a higher and more personal level. The wide leaps, Lydian modality, and points of imitation in measures 1–2 (and similar measures elsewhere) suggest a style even more archaic than chorale, but these passages alternate with purely homorhythmic passages in half notes and stepwise motion. Ratner analyzes this as “*alla breve* in its simplest form, *i.e.* the *chorale*,” and identifies five phrases of chorale melody, each four measures long and each preceded by two measures of free imitation.⁴³ Similarly, Sieghard Brandenburg describes the passage as individual lines of chorale with interludes (Ex. 20).⁴⁴

⁴³ Leonard Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets: Compositional Strategies and Rhetoric* (Stanford: Stanford Bookstore, 1995), 272.

⁴⁴ Brandenburg, “The Historical Background to the ‘Heiliger Dankgesang’ in Beethoven’s A-minor Quartet Op. 132,” 188.

Example 20: Beethoven, String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132, III, mm. 1–34

Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart.

Molto adagio

The musical score is presented in four systems, each containing four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature is A minor (no sharps or flats), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is 'Molto adagio'. The title is 'Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart.'.

- System 1 (mm. 1-8):** The first staff has a 'sotto voce' marking. A crescendo (cresc.) leads to a piano (p) dynamic at the end of the system.
- System 2 (mm. 9-17):** The piano (p) dynamic continues. A crescendo (cresc.) is marked at the end of the system.
- System 3 (mm. 18-26):** A forte (f) dynamic is marked at the beginning, followed by a piano (p) dynamic. A crescendo (cresc.) leads to a piano (p) dynamic at the end of the system.
- System 4 (mm. 27-34):** The tempo changes to 'Andante' and the mood is 'Neue Kraft fühlend'. The score shows a transition from piano (p) to forte (f) and back to piano (p) dynamics, with various crescendo (cresc.) markings.

Brandenburg also fully demonstrates how Beethoven's archaic "Lydian" idea came later; the sketches for this movement show that Beethoven was not working from Renaissance models or theory, in terms of either mode or counterpoint. Rather, he was adhering "to the current type of 'modern' church hymn that was in use in the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth in both Protestant and Catholic churches, predominantly in extra-liturgical contexts,"⁴⁵ in which the organist was expected to provide interludes between hymn phrases.⁴⁶ Brandenburg also observes that Beethoven's indication *Molto adagio* conforms to contemporaneous ideas of piety embodied by slow tempo. The title to the third movement (for once actually written by Beethoven himself and not by an editor or publisher) provides the obvious clue to interpreting the movement, but based on the sketches, Brandenburg nevertheless refutes the claim of Joseph Kerman (and others) about a programmatic intent for the quartet as a whole.⁴⁷

All this notwithstanding, the fact remains that Beethoven *did* title the movement, and he *did* add the archaizing elements, and not just in the (pseudo-)Lydian mode of the chorale, but throughout the entire quartet: the feeling of a Renaissance dance in the Andante sections of the *Heiliger* movement (beginning in mm. 31–34 of Ex. 20), the minuet (rather than scherzo), the Vivaldiesque final measures of the first movement. Thus in the third movement the Chorale and the dance contrast with each other, but in this case, the opposition is what Hatten would call supportive opposition, since although the styles are different, they both represent "a view of the archaic."⁴⁸

With the archaic Lydian mode and the absolute simplicity of style, Beethoven intensifies the expression of gratitude and joy; the "old" and the "simple" have often been equated with purity and reverence. Ratner points out how unusual it is for Beethoven to include "no sprung scansion, no harmonic tangents, no extensions of periods, no grand cadences, no problematic situations . . . [but instead] a very slow, steadily measured flow of radiant sound . . . that only a perfectly balanced string quartet can produce."⁴⁹ Then, in the sections that alternate with the dance sections, Beethoven presents variations on the chorale section, keeping the melody always intact, even when he subjects it to fugal process. The "interlude" part ceases to be interlude, but maintains its canonic and contrapuntal comportment. At the same time, though, this learned style becomes increasingly personal—the chorale tune loses its chorale texture and is furthermore gradually subsumed into the contrapuntal texture as the rhythms become increasingly complex, again fulfilling Hatten's idea of ecstatic transcendence through increasing rhythmic diminution. Ratner describes it this way:

⁴⁵ Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-minor Quartet Op. 132," 164.

⁴⁶ Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-minor Quartet Op. 132," 185.

⁴⁷ Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-minor Quartet Op. 132," 164.

⁴⁸ Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets*, 271–72

⁴⁹ Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets*, 271–72

To be sure, the fugue itself is minimal, seven entries in all, and four of these in the opening exposition. . . . Yet the contrast in rhetorical action between the final section and all that preceded it is striking. A very powerful sense of peroration is projected. Paradoxically, Beethoven specifies the most delicate nuances in this fugue, asking the players to perform *Mit innigster Empfindung* (with the most heartfelt feeling). This stance contradicts the traditional attitude toward fugue performance, where the thrust of the discourse would be disturbed by obtrusive local shadings. The most sensitive and moving part of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* is the one where Beethoven has deployed his most subtle skills of the learned style.⁵⁰

The Chorale of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* thus exemplifies various categories of “I” Chorale—thanksgiving, contemplation, transcendence. Additionally, the way Beethoven so clearly refers to the archaic by presenting the chorale tune in plain, slow half notes and maintaining them throughout the variations lends a sense of the monumental—a collectively shared past that Beethoven all the while simultaneously reimagines and blends with the immediately personal. Similarly, the archaism of the Lydian mode is a novel idea for a remote key to express something current and personal.

Beethoven’s music provides examples of many kinds of Chorale, and in many genres, from the most public of symphonies to the most private of chamber works. His ability to blend or synthesize different voices, affects, aspects, and functions of Chorale in one piece is a thread for a continuation of this study; as already seen in the examples from Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, and Mendelssohn, the number of examples of Chorale only multiplies after Beethoven. Even if the exact interpretation (or intention) of any given passage may vary, wherever Chorale or chorales are found, their presence is not arbitrary. They are patently distinct in melody, rhythm, and texture, and this makes them stand in marked contrast to their surrounding material. The variety of the melodies, though, as well as the wide spectrum of their locations, meanings, and treatments, seem to require differentiation and invite comparative analysis. This is what past scholarship investigating various facets of chorale and Chorale has not done in a comprehensive way. Recognizing the musical characteristics of Chorale is obviously significant for performance decisions such as tempo and articulation; just as important, though, is the awareness that a default interpretation of Chorale as a straightforwardly religious or nationalistic “we” is not always appropriate. With a groundwork laid for identifying and interpreting “I” Chorales and the many possibilities for the exact content of their meanings, the various expressive voices of Chorale may be more easily differentiated, and syntheses of the “we” and the “I” (and other perspectives as well) may be applied to the meaning of Chorale in works of the nineteenth century and beyond.

⁵⁰ Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets*, 274.