

Death's Voice in Zemlinsky's Lieder: A Comparison of "Ich geh' des Nachts" Op. 6, no. 4 and "Vöglein Schwermut" Op. 10, No. 3

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"Alexander Zemlinsky" is not a name easily recognized by today's classical music enthusiasts and concertgoers. Thanks to the efforts of scholars such as Antony Beaumont, however, perhaps Zemlinsky will gradually become more widely known: after editing Alma Mahler-Werfel née Schindler's diaries of 1898-1902, Beaumont went on to publish the first full-length biography of Zemlinsky, Alma's composition teacher. David Allenby hails this biography as the kind of book "which redefines critical perspectives on a composer to such a degree that our understanding takes a quantum leap forward,"¹ and he feels that it is "Beaumont's supreme contribution to the composer's revival."² Fittingly, Beaumont was also the contributor of the entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Most significant for performers, however, is the fact that he spent years sorting through the Zemlinsky collection at the Library of Congress, transcribing, editing, and sometimes even partially reconstructing numerous unpublished works by Zemlinsky in preparation for publication.

¹ David Allenby, "Review: More Than a Footnote," *Musical Times* 141.1873 (2000): 59.

² Ibid.

I, too, wish to aid in the effort to shed light on the fascinating life and works of this half-forgotten composer. As the bulk of his compositions involve voice, the main purpose of this paper is to compare two of his lieder: “Ich geh’ des Nachts” op. 6, no. 4 (“I wander at night,” 1898) and “Vöglein Schwermut” op. 10, no. 3 (“The bird of melancholy,” ~1901). I have selected these two particular songs because of a specific similarity within their texts: they are the only poems set by Zemlinsky for voice and piano in which Death is not only personified, but is given a speaking role. As my close analyses reveal, the parallels between these two songs are not merely found in their textual content, but, more interestingly, manifest within the music itself. In giving Death distinct musical characteristics, Zemlinsky takes the opportunity to examine the nature of death and to explore its effect on our individual and collective lives.

Zemlinsky and his Lieder

Alexander Zemlinsky (b. Vienna 1871, d. New York 1942) lived at a time of great musical experimentation and achievement in Europe and was not only a composer, but a celebrated conductor, composition teacher, and accomplished pianist as well. He obtained a diploma in piano at the Vienna Conservatory in 1890 and went on to complete a two-year course in composition, studying under Johann Nepomuk Fuchs. Zemlinsky interacted with many other musicians and composers whose music proved inspiring: for instance, one of his earliest supporters was Johannes Brahms, whose influence can be seen in Zemlinsky’s

early works. He also formed a lifelong friendship with Arnold Schoenberg, to whom he gave lessons in counterpoint, Schoenberg's only formal musical training. In fact, Zemlinsky and Schoenberg shared and commented on each others' compositions over the years, and later became brothers-in-law when Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's younger sister Mathilde. Although good friends with Schoenberg, Zemlinsky never wrote atonal or twelve-tone music; he preferred to stay within the realm of tonality, sometimes utilizing a high degree of chromaticism and later the kind of extended harmonies used by Wagner.

With a wealth of musical inspiration to draw on, Zemlinsky focused the bulk of his compositional efforts on writing for voice, for which he seems to have had a special affinity. As Lorraine Gorrell notes, literature was a constant and significant source of creative inspiration: "As the son of a writer, Zemlinsky developed a respect for words early in his career, and he gained practical experience in text setting with the libretto for his first opera, *Sarema*, probably under the guidance of his father, Adolf von Zemlinszky [*sic*]."³ He is best known as an operatic composer; however, Zemlinsky's love of literature and his ability to create beautiful lyric melodies, combined with his superior pianistic skills, make lieder seem an ideal genre for him.

³ Lorraine Gorrell, *Discordant Melody: Alexander Zemlinsky, His Songs, and the Second Viennese School* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 118.

Well over half of his published and unpublished works are for voice, which includes operas, choral works, works for voice and orchestra, and lieder. Fifty-four of his songs were published during his lifetime, and it was not until 1977-1978 that twenty more were published in the form of op. 22, op. 27, and two additional songs. In 1995 thirty-nine previously unpublished songs, mostly from the Zemlinsky collection at the Library of Congress, were published, having been transcribed, edited, and in some cases partially reconstructed by Antony Beaumont. Over half of Zemlinsky's lieder were composed between 1888 and 1901, including the two pieces analysed in this paper.

Lorraine Gorrell aptly describes the transforming compositional style that is particularly evident in Zemlinsky's lieder, attributing the constant change to his growth as a composer and his continuous exposure to new musical styles:

Many of Zemlinsky's earliest and last compositions were lieder, and they often reflected changes in his ideas about composition, illustrating the continual metamorphosis of his style. His conservatory education connected him with the masters of the past, and at first, his songs were carefully grounded in a traditional tonal language and style. As he developed independence, his harmonic vocabulary became more colourful, flexible, and unique with his increasing use of chromaticism, non-functional harmonies, pedal point, vaguely implied tonal centers, polytonality, and whole tone scales.

Zemlinsky's songs represent a bridge between the romanticism of the nineteenth century and the aggressive modern world – a synthesis of such disparate styles as those of Wolf, Mahler,

Strauss, Berg, and early Stravinsky. . . . Zemlinsky's musical language was never rigid or static, and he continued to change throughout his professional life in response to his musical experiences.⁴

While Gorrell seems to construe Zemlinsky's "continual metamorphosis" in relatively positive terms, Theodor Adorno presents a more mixed view of Zemlinsky's reliance on the influential works of his predecessors and contemporaries. In his 1959 essay, Adorno makes this observation:

[Zemlinsky]. . . is criticized for having internalized every possible fashion, particularly stylistic fashions, and combined them without ever achieving a tone that is peculiarly his own. . . . Alexander Zemlinsky, who originates from the same spiritual ambience as Mahler, made more of the compromises characteristic of the eclectic than any other composer of rank of his generation. The sensitivity essential to artistic production was identical in his case with impressionability. He positively invited the criticism of eclecticism. The subjects and forms that he chose uninhibitedly echoed those of his most celebrated contemporaries. . . . But his eclecticism shows genius in its truly seismographic sensitivity to the stimuli by which he allowed himself to be overwhelmed.

Weakness which never pretends to be creative acquires the strength of a second nature. The unreserved sacrifice of the pathos of personality

⁴ Ibid., 136-137.

becomes a critique of personality and hence something intensely personal.⁵

Although Adorno calls Zemlinsky's impressionability and eclecticism "weakness which never pretends to be creative," he also recognizes that, at the same time, these qualities reveal Zemlinsky's genius, strength, and personality. Despite the influence of other composers, or perhaps because of it, Zemlinsky was able to set to music the poetry of Dehmel, Maeterlinck, Baudelaire, Hofmannsthal, and over fifty others, skillfully transforming texts into deeply expressive vocal melodies with sparkling piano accompaniment.

The Music and Texts of Opuses 6 and 10

Composed in 1898, *Walzergesänge* opus 6 consists of a series of six "waltzes," although they are clearly not simple dance tunes. Gorrell attributes the sophistication of the waltzes to "the shifting of rhythmic accents and reveling in unexpected harmonies,"⁶ observing that "Klagen ist der Mond gekommen" (no. 2) and "Ich geh' des Nachts" (no. 4) are particularly "distanced. . . from the traditional, lighthearted Viennese waltz, as [Zemlinsky] reveals elusive layers of meaning in the intriguing texts."⁷ Beaumont adds that these pieces, "written primarily to entertain, chal-

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Zemlinsky," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 111, 114, 115.

⁶ Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 166.

⁷ Ibid.

lenging but not dauntingly difficult to perform, follow in the tradition of Brahms's *Liebeslieder* waltzes. . . . Only in 'Ich geh' des Nachts'. . . does the mood darken."⁸ It is apparent that "Ich geh' des Nachts" owes its dark lyricism and deeply felt emotion to the composer's appreciation of and response to the song text, the music serving to intensify the poetry.

The texts for all six songs are anonymous Tuscan folk poems translated into German by the writer and cultural historian Ferdinand Gregorovius (1821-1891) in the collection for which he is most famous, *Wanderjahre in Italien* (The Wander Years in Italy, 1856-1877). "Ich geh' des Nachts" is originally a four-line poem:

Ich gehe des Nachts wie der Mond thut gehn
 Ich suche wo den Geliebten sie haben.
 Da hab' ich den Tod, den finstern gesehn,
 Er sprach: Such' nicht, ich hab' ihn begraben.

[I walk at night, following the moon;
 I search for where they have taken my sweetheart.
 But then I saw death, the Dark One.
 He said: "Search no longer – I have buried him."]⁹

Zemlinsky, however, takes a bit of liberty with the text by repeating the first two lines at the end, clearly

⁸ Antony Beaumont, *Zemlinsky* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 109-110.

⁹ Emily Ezust, trans., "I walk at night," translation of "Ich geh' des Nachts" by Ferdinand Gregorovius, The Lied and Art Song Texts Page, REC Music, accessed December 5, 2009, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=6860.

turning the poem into a neat ABA form. The music, too, adopts a three-part form.

Although the exact dates are unknown, opus 10 was likely composed around 1901, only a few years after opus 6. Zemlinsky was passionately in love with Alma Schindler at this time, and chose themes of love, desire, marriage, and – in the case of no. 3 – melancholy for the six songs of opus 10. Unlike opus 6, each of the opus 10 texts were written by a different poet. “Vöglein Schwermut,” or “The bird of melancholy,” uses a text by Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914) which is once again relatively short in length:

Ein schwarzes Vöglein fliegt über die Welt,
das singt so todestraurig. . . .
Wer es hört, der hört nichts anderes mehr,
wer es hört, der thut sich ein Leides an,
der mag keine Sonne mehr schauen.

Allmitternacht, Allmitternacht
ruht es sich aus auf dem Finger des Tods.
Der streichelt's leis und spricht ihm zu:
Flieg, mein Vögelein! flieg, mein Vögelein!
Und wieder fliegt's flötend über die Welt.

[A little black bird flies over the world,
it sings so sorrowfully of death. . . .
Who hears it, he hears nothing else,
who hears it, he does himself a harm,
he no longer wishes to see the sun.

All midnight, all midnight
it rests on the finger of death.
He caresses it solemnly and urges it to:
Fly, my little bird! fly, my little bird!

And again it flies fluting over the world.]¹⁰

Like “Ich geh’ des Nachts,” this song is the darkest of its set, since many of the others are not only joyful but reaffirm life and love within the central theme of the joy of partnership. As Beaumont notes, “in many respects op. 10 thus covers the same ground as the Walzer-Gesänge [*sic*] op. 6. But after the stylistic breakthrough of op. 7 Zemlinsky writes with greater freedom, expressive power and stylistic variety. As in the earlier cycle, one song disrupts the general euphoria: ‘Vöglein Schwermut.’”¹¹ It, too, is in a three-part form, specifically ABA¹ in which A¹ is quite truncated, and tells the story of a black bird whose sorrowful song is so powerful that those who hear it must die. Every night at midnight, the bird comes to rest on the fingers of Death before taking off again to find new victims. Gorrell briefly compares the bird in Morgenstern’s poem to the legend of the Lorelei¹² whose singing, like that of the Greek sirens, is so potent that it lures men to their deaths.

As I go into more detailed analyses, it can be seen that the personification of Death as well as Death’s speech

¹⁰ My own translation, with the aid of Dr. Harald Krebs and with reference to John Campbell’s translation. John H. Campbell, trans., “Melancholy bird,” translation of “Vöglein Schwermut” by Christian Morgenstern, *The Lied and Art Song Texts Page*, REC Music, accessed December 5, 2009, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=11602.

¹¹ Beaumont, *Zemlinsky*, 116.

¹² Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 180.

occur in the B section of both lieder and are treated in a comparable manner. The subject matter of the texts invites questions and speculations about Zemlinsky's fascination with the melancholy in literature, perhaps allowing tenuous parallels to be drawn between his compositions and the disappointments he suffered in his personal and professional life. At the same time, the strong similarities between these two lieder suggest that Zemlinsky may have felt compelled to return to and develop the ideas of op. 6, no. 4 when he wrote op. 10, no. 3. Because of the uniqueness of the textual content, one wonders whether he deliberately sought out a poem that would allow him to rework the compositional ideas of his previous song.

Analysis of “Ich geh’ des Nachts”

The majority of Zemlinsky's lieder are relatively short and do not include extensive piano preludes or postludes; that is not to say, however, that the brief piano introductions of “Ich geh’ des Nachts” and “Vöglein Schermerz” do not play fundamental roles in setting the mood and even revealing the formal structure of the pieces. In the first two measures of “Ich geh’ des Nachts” the atmosphere is established by the pervasive “wandering motive” that will last through the entire piece, a motive suggestive of the speaker wandering through the night, searching for the beloved (see Example 1).

The great passion, movement, and expression desired by Zemlinsky are stated in the tempo and expression markings: “Leidenschaftlich bewegt” and “Agitato, con passion” are written at the beginning of the piece

and “mit grossem Ausdruck” and “con espressione” appear at the entry of the voice.¹³ Besides these markings, a number of factors presented in the opening measure contribute to the unsettled, restless mood of the piece. There are the constant triplets in the right hand of the piano set against a brief three-against-two rhythm in beat three, as well as what might be referred to as small-scale or low-level metrical dissonance: the triplet pattern consists of *pairs* of falling pitches rather than groups of three, making the continuous motion sound slightly off-kilter. In addition, the left hand rhythm lingers on beat two before propelling itself into the downbeat of the following measure while hairpin dynamics give a sense of undulation; both rhythm and dynamics here contribute to the constant movement. The many dissonant intervals buried within the right hand also contribute to the unsettled mood: a minor second (A-G#), an augmented second (G#-F), a tritone (D-G#), and an

¹³ It seems more likely that the decision to reiterate directives in both German and Italian was made by an editor rather than Zemlinsky. The Texas-based Recital Publications' 1992 reprint editions of opuses 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 13 use source material provided by the Gorno Memorial Music Library of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and do not reiterate markings. Opus 6, however, was published a year later by Recital Publications with source material from the Spaulding Library of the New England Conservatory. The edition does not specify that it is a *reprint* edition as the others do, which would suggest little to no editorial changes, and the reiteration of directives in German and Italian seems to be relatively consistent throughout the opus 6 pieces. This opus was originally published by Simrock in 1899 and opus 10 by Doblinger around 1901. I currently do not have access to these initial publications for comparison.

augmented sixth (G#-Bb). It is the repetition of this single-measure “wandering motive” that suggests cyclical motion, as well as the fact the motive begins on the tonic, departs from it, then returns to it. This cyclicity is reflected on a larger scale with the return of the opening lines of text and the tonic tonality at the end of the piece.

Leidenschaftlich bewegt.
Agitato, con passione

mit grossem Ausdruck.
con espressione

Ich geh' des Nachts'
I go down - dered by

Example 1. “Ich geh’ des Nachts” mm.1-3, section A. “Wandering motive” in m.1; dissonant appoggiatura in m.3 voice.

When the haunting vocal line begins, it very quickly uses leaps to expand over one and a half octaves, reflecting the speaker’s inner turmoil. Word-painting occurs at “Mond” (“moon”), which is set as the highest pitch in the phrase (see Example 4 for the repeat in section A¹). This vocal line heavily relies on appoggiaturas to contribute to the troubled feeling of the piece, and the dissonant crunch of several downbeats is further emphasized by duration: the C# over a D minor chord in m.3 lasts for a beat and a half (see Example 1), and the G# over a D minor chord in m.4 lasts for two beats before finally resolving on a weak beat.

Gorrell notes that the D minor chord with an added G# occurs prominently in Zemlinsky’s other music and was used by Schoenberg in *Pelleas und Melisande* (1907), a symphonic poem about forbidden and

doomed love, to represent fate.¹⁴ Although this chord appears in Zemlinsky's music prior to the completion of Schoenberg's orchestral work, it seems that the connection to fate has encouraged Zemlinsky scholars to refer to this as the "fate chord." As Beaumont notes, the D minor chord with an added G# became "Zemlinsky's identifying harmonic fingerprint."¹⁵ Perhaps this particular harmony in "Ich geh' des Nachts" is used to foreshadow Death's statement concerning the fate of the beloved, or to suggest that the speaker is fated to forever search in vain. It seems fitting that the G# of the "fate chord" occurs in the voice with the words "Nachts" ("at night") and "Tod" ("death"), since these often connote dark, ominous forces. This harmony is also found within the "wandering motive" stated in the opening. In addition, the key of D minor was a favourite of Zemlinsky as well as Schoenberg while he wrote tonal music, and was apparently the key Zemlinsky associated with tragedy.¹⁶

The middle section begins at the pickup to m.13 and sets the third and fourth lines of text. Although I refer to it as the B section, it opens with A material that lasts until the metrical dissonance in the right hand of the piano at mm.15-16, which immediately precedes new material in which Death speaks. In direct contrast to the disjunct but lyrical expansiveness of the

¹⁴ Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 167.

¹⁵ Beaumont, *Zemlinsky*, 22.

¹⁶ Ibid.

previous vocal material, Death's spoken words are approached by a leap of a major sixth down to a low Db and he "speaks" without inflection, repeating the same pitch primarily with quarter notes (see Example 2). Not only does he "speak" in a monotone, but with a mono-rhythm as well. This gives Death a very different feel from the speaker's emotions: Death seems cold and indifferent, matter-of-fact, and even ominous; there is also a sense of finality in the strong pulse of the quarter notes. It makes sense that Death would speak on a low pitch, but it is interesting that Zemlinsky chose not only a flat pitch, but the flat of the tonic pitch – this perhaps lends an additional sense of darkness, at least visually. It is also interesting to note that the Db, now a prominent pitch and an integral part of the Gb harmony in this section, is an enharmonic re-spelling of C#, a pitch that has occurred only twice in the vocal line thus far (mm.3, 13) as a dissonant non-chord note. In fact, when C# does appear as a leading-tone within a dominant chord, it usually evades the expected tonic resolution by stepping down to C as part of the descending line C-B-A over a tonic chord. This use of scale degree b7 not only hints at the Dorian mode mentioned by both Beaumont and Gorell,¹⁷ but also allows Zemlinsky to avoid the true sense of closure or resolution afforded by a clear leading-tone to tonic motion.

¹⁷ Beaumont, *Zemlinsky*, 110. Gorell, *Discordant Melody*, 167.

sehn, er sprach: Such' nicht, ich hab' ihn be-
met. He spoke, "Seek not, thy Love I have

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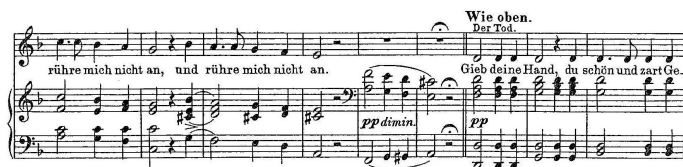
Example 2. "Ich geh' des Nachts" mm.16-19, section B.

Death's speech approached by leap down to low Db; harmonic rhythm comes to a standstill. Example also contains second half of mm.15-16 hemiola in piano.

Even though the wandering motion in the right hand of the piano remains a constant, time seems to slow at the moment Death speaks (m.17); this seems fitting, since Death exists outside the constraints of time. As if to herald the arrival of Death, the two measures that precede his speech are the most metrically dissonant of the piece: the previous small-scale metrical dissonance consisting of pairs of falling triplet eighth notes remains, while a two-beat falling pattern is repeated for a total of three iterations over the two measures, effectively creating a hemiola. The hemiola is further identified with slurs. When Death begins to speak, however, the "wandering motion" is no longer metrically dissonant: the hemiola disappears and, rather than being grouped in pairs of notes, the triplets are grouped into threes. For the first time, solid chords are used in the left hand and the lower register is highlighted by the use of doubling to produce octaves. The notion that time slows or stops is primarily suggested by the harmony, however: the *only* change in pitch that occurs is an oscillation between a half note Gb and a quarter note F in the piano, prolonging a single harmony over several measures via its neighbour. Despite the consistency of the continuous sur-

face rhythm, it is as if Zemlinsky briefly freezes the moment of Death's speech.

Gorrell points out that Zemlinsky's setting of Death's speech follows in the tradition of Franz Schubert's lied "Der Tod und das Mädchen" ("Death and the Maiden"),¹⁸ which later became the basis for the second movement theme and variations of Schubert's 1824 string quartet of the same name. Composed in February of 1817, this one-page song sets two quatrains by German poet Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) consisting entirely of a dialogue between the characters "Das Mädchen" and "Der Tod." Like the A section of "Ich geh' des Nachts," the maiden's speech is more lyrical than Death's, and the accompaniment features more motion. When Death speaks (see Example 3), he sings on an unvarying D, while the accompaniment is also significantly more static.



Example 3. Schubert's "Der Tod und das Mädchen" mm.16-24. The end of the Maiden's dialogue and the beginning of Death's dialogue.

The similarities between these two songs are unmistakable, including their shared D minor tonality. In fact, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that

¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

Zemlinsky himself may have performed this particular Schubert lied at some point during his career as an accomplished accompanist. It is well known that he had a great knowledge of the traditional lieder repertoire, and he accompanied and toured with singers such as the Hungarian-born baritone Max Klein, performing some works by Schubert including *Schwanengesang* on 8 April 1920 and *Die Winterreise* on 20 November 1921 in Prague. He sometimes performed his own works as well: opus 6 was premiered by Zemlinsky and the soprano Melanie Guttman on 28 December 1899 in Vienna.

What especially interests me about “Ich geh’ des Nachts” is that Zemlinsky chose to return to the first two lines of text, revealing that there is no verbal acknowledgment of Death’s words; the speaker disregards Death’s advice. This suggests that the speaker will continue to search for the beloved, perhaps even to the point of obsession. The ending remains restless and reflects the unfinished or open-ended nature of the narrative through several means: the repetition of melodic and rhythmic figures, the constant motion, the lack of cadence in favour of prolongation of tonic harmony, and the voice closing on scale degree 5 instead of 1. The cyclical or continuous nature of the textual content, hinted at musically in the insistent “wandering motive” introduced at the start of the piece, is further emphasized through the repetition of a falling C-B-A melodic fragment in both the voice and piano during the final system.

Although there is no verbal acknowledgment, perhaps the response to Death is found in the piano part. As

the return of the A section approaches, there is an outpouring of emotion beginning in the piano with a large crescendo (m.22) to a forte (m.24), the first indication of a dynamic above the song's overall pianissimo/piano level. The drama of the voice's re-entry is reinforced by an almost violent rising septuplet arpeggiation on the pick-up to m.25 followed by a falling counter melody in octaves in the right hand of the piano (see Example 4). The combination of arpeggiation and counter melody mimics the melodic contour of the voice, although it truncates the duration of the rise and elongates the fall of the vocal line. This counter melody relies on groupings of three step-wise descending pitches, an element that can actually be traced throughout piece.

The musical score for Example 4 is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the word "Ich" and continues with "ge - he des Nachts, wie der Mond — thut". The piano accompaniment features a rising septuplet arpeggiation on the pick-up to m.25, followed by a falling counter melody in octaves in the right hand. The left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The word "expr." is written below the piano part.

Example 4. "Ich geh' des Nachts" mm. 24-27, section A¹. Dramatic return to opening material; counter melody in descending piano octaves. Example also contains word-painting on "Mond" previously found in section A.

The first occurrence of a set of three descending pitches can be found in the upper notes of the m.1 "wandering motive" (A-G#-F, see Example 1); this is actually an inversion of the voice's C#-D-F in m.3 and also a retrograde fragment of the vocal line in

mm.3-4. This compositional element is further highlighted in mm.9-10 in an inner voice of the piano, clearly marked with stems and slurs so that it is brought out of the texture by the performer. Like the concept of the developing variation, the three-note patterns often develop out of previously stated material: for instance, the gap of a falling minor third (first seen in the left hand of the piano at m.1) is filled in to create another three-note falling pattern beginning in m.13, and yet another three-note pattern grows out of the Gb-F oscillation to completely take over the left hand in octaves beginning at m.20. As previously mentioned, the countermelody at m.25 is based on three falling pitches, while the final system features the repetition of C-B-A in both the voice and the piano. This repetition of C-B-A within the prolonged tonic harmony contrasts the end of the initial A section, where the voice sings C-B-A followed by C-Bb-G in order to cadence in G minor instead of the tonic. The repetition of the same three falling pitches at the close of the piece suggests a kind of circularity, implying that the speaker will continue to search for the beloved despite Death's command. Perhaps the new material in the piano in A¹ is not the only response to Death's words that is given. Even though the speaker cannot or will not admit the truth of Death's statement aloud, the potency of his speech takes on greater meaning through the repetition of C-B-A in the final system as the speaker becomes fixated on the three-note fragment and on continuing the search.

Analysis of “Vöglein Schwermut”

Besides the personification of Death and the setting of Death’s speech, “Ich geh’ des Nachts” and “Vöglein Schwermut” have several other elements in common, including the extensive use of an initial motive, the 3/4 meter, and the ternary form in which Death speaks in the B section. Although “Vöglein Schwermut” was published in the key of Eb minor, it was originally conceived in the same key as “Ich geh’ des Nachts”: Gorrell mentions that, among the collection of Zemlinsky’s papers and manuscripts at the Library of Congress, there is a holograph of the vocal part of op. 10, no. 3 written in the bass clef in D minor.¹⁹

The first measure of “Vöglein Schwermut” plays an important role in setting the mood, suggesting the narrative, and predicting the form of the piece to an even greater extent than the opening of “Ich geh’ des Nachts.” It consists of what seems to be an arpeggiated German sixth chord followed by a diminished seventh chord over the Eb tonic in the bass, although Beaumont recognizes the sonority’s resemblance to the “fate chord” and compares the piano’s ‘nervous fluttering’ to Schumann’s *Vogel als Prophet*.²⁰ What is most interesting, however, is that each beat of this measure can be likened to a microcosmic formal section of the piece’s ternary structure. The A section can be represented by beat 1, in which the fast thirty-

¹⁹ Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 181.

²⁰ Beaumont, *Zemlinsky*, 116.

second notes are indicative of the black bird in the text. The bird flies down and lands on the fingers of Death in the B section, which is reflected by the falling motion toward the single Bb quarter note of beat 2 where, as in the previous song, time seems to slow or stop. Beat 3, with its upward swell of sixty-fourth notes, mirrors the return of the A section and the bird taking off in flight once again. Within a single measure, therefore, the motion of a bird alighting and flying away is present (see Example 5).



Example 5: “Vöglein Schwermut” m.1, section A. Opening measure both programmatic and a microcosm of song’s ternary structure.

The piano part in this piece is more obviously programmatic than that of “Ich geh’ des Nachts.” Besides the constant fluttering of thirty-second and sixty-fourth notes, the bird is also represented musically by the right hand trills in mm.8-9. When the voice enters, it oscillates between A and Bb and, although the vocal line is much slower and seems to float above the piano, it, too, has birdlike qualities: combined with the rhythm of dotted quarter, eighth, and quarter note, the decoration of the established oscillation at the word “Vögelein” (“bird,” m.4) that leaps up a perfect fourth and back down a tritone is reminiscent of a birdcall. A more subtle occurrence of word-painting

can be found in m.6 where, similar to the setting of “Mond” in the previous piece, the word “Welt” (“world”) is set as the lowest note of the opening phrase.

Like “Ich geh’ des Nachts,” the dynamic level of “Vöglein Schwermut” is primarily very soft, marked *pianissimo* in m.1 and triple piano at m.24 to the end of the piece. Only at one point do the dynamics make a sudden dramatic shift. While the climax of op. 6, no. 4 occurs with the return of A¹, the climax of op. 10, no. 3 occurs at the end of the first A section, quickly crescendoing in m.14 to a *forte* before climbing to a *fortissimo* at m.18. This increase in dynamics occurs with the text “der thut sich ein Leides an, / der mag keine Sonne mehr schauen” (“he does himself a harm, / he no longer wishes to see the sun”), the *fortissimo* arriving immediately after the sun is mentioned, as if light is breaking out from behind clouds. This swell in dynamics simultaneously occurs with a shift from the minor tonality to a Gb major sonority, strengthening the suggestion of word-painting at the mention of the sun. The climax may well allude to the sunlight in the text, but the light is then rejected as the brief glimpse of major harmony darkens and dissolves in mm.17-19, the fluttering notes of the piano descending as the bird comes down to rest on Death’s fingers for the B section (see Example 6). The juxtaposition of major and minor sonorities seems to highlight the contrast between the sun, which is associated with light and life, and Death, whose association with darkness is confirmed with text “Allmitternacht” (“all midnight,” mm.24-25). The setting of “Allmitternacht” as a rising perfect fifth and the word’s repeti-

tion is perhaps reminiscent of a clock beginning to chime the hour of the night.

To an even greater extent than the previous piece, time seems to stop at the advent of the B section at m.20: not only do the fast, birdlike surface rhythms completely cease, but durations get longer and the first measure of this new section is marked by a fermata (see Example 6). The extreme low register of the left hand octaves not only directly contrasts the previous more middle-range material, but also seems to suggest an ominous darkness, heralding the arrival of Death in the text. Maintaining the left hand rhythm of a half note followed by a quarter note, the B section also features the brief oscillation of pitches in the piano, similar to the B section in the first song. The oscillation occurs at first in the left hand of the piano and changes at significant points in the text: it changes to a quarter-note/half-note rhythm when it moves to an inner voice at the introduction of "Tod" ("Death," m.29), and returns to the original half-note/quarter-note rhythm in full chords when Death speaks (mm.33-34). The latter was also the oscillation rhythm used in "Ich geh' des Nachts."

Son - ne mehr schau - en.
light of the sun - shine.

ff

sehr leise

Allmit - ternacht, Allmit - ternacht ruht es sich
At mid-night hour, at mid-night hour, it rests a -

ppp

Example 6: “Vöglein Schwermut” mm.17-26, end of section A and beginning of section B. Climactic point where the “Sonne” is rejected (Gb major harmony occurs in m.16 immediately preceding this example); word-painting of bird alighting; contrast between formal sections.

As in the previous song, the vocal line can be quite disjunct and expansive, such as the anguished setting of the line “das singt so todestraurig” (“singing so sorrowfully of death,” mm.7-10). Zemlinsky treats Death’s spoken lines in a similar manner as well, making them much less lyrical and more speech-like. As in “Ich geh’ des Nachts,” there is a leap down into the lower register from Eb to Eb (mm.33) and Death speaks on a single pitch using repeated note durations; once again, Death uses a monotone and a mono-rhythm. The process is repeated in the next measure when Death reiterates his directive for the bird to fly away (see Example 7).

The A^I section begins at m.36 with the flight of the bird, thus the piano’s return to the fast, fluttering thir-

ty-second and sixty-fourth notes (see Example 7). The image of the bird commencing flight is strengthened by the continuously rising arpeggiated chords in m.41 followed by the final rising sixty-fourth notes in the penultimate measure. This overall rising motion at the end of A^I is in direct contrast to the falling motion at the close of A, in which the bird descends from the sky and comes to rest on the fingers of Death.

Example 7 is a musical score for the song "Vöglein Schwermut" (The Little Bird is Heavy-hearted), measures 33-36. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The lyrics are in German and English. The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords and a final rising sixteenth-note figure.

Example 7: "Vöglein Schwermut" mm.33-36, end of section B and beginning of section A^I. Death's speech again includes a leap down to a low repeated pitch; slow surface rhythm in piano contrasts re-entry of A material, which mimics the bird taking flight.

As in op. 6, no. 4, there is a sense of the cyclical built into the piece. Just as the speaker in the previous song will presumably continue to search for the beloved despite Death's advice, the black bird, a manifestation or at least a symbol of death, will continue to fly singing over the earth and come to rest on Death's fingers each night. This cyclical nature is found in the ternary form of the piece as well as the textual content, and is foreshadowed from the very start with the repetition of the falling and rising "bird motive," much like the "wandering motive" of "Ich geh' des Nachts." Perhaps this points to the cyclical nature of life and death, or to the timelessness of death.

Conclusion

As Gorrell has stated, Zemlinsky's lieder bridge "the romanticism of the nineteenth century and the aggressive modern world,"²¹ and the two songs analyzed in this paper particularly seem to point toward the expressionism that originated in early twentieth-century Germany. In the chapter "How the Humanities Speak about Death" from her book *Death and the Humanities*, Sharon Scholl states that the "primary inflection cues" in expressionistic music and painting are "erratic lines, a dissonance of color, and unpredictable patterns across the surface."²² Although one might argue that Zemlinsky makes use of such 'cues' throughout "Ich geh' des Nachts" and "Vöglein Schwermut" in order that "the emotional element emerges as dominant over the subject matter,"²³ at the same time the subject matter – death – is granted a very real and pervasive presence. These two lieder not only explore "the meaning of death in human existence and the effect exerted upon our personal and collective lives by consciousness of death,"²⁴ as Scholl might suggest, but they also assign death a personified, speaking role. While the darkness, sorrow, and solemnity mentioned in the poems are also exemplified in the music, what is particularly conveyed through Zemlinsky's settings

²¹ Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 137.

²² Sharon Scholl, *Death and the Humanities* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984), 25.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

of Death's speeches is the inevitability and eternality of death: this notion is supported by the repetition inherent in the monotone and mono-rhythm of the speeches, the extensive use of repeated motives, and the utilization of both cyclicity and the so-called "fate chord."

Perhaps inspired by Schubert's treatment of the characters in "Der Tod und das Mädchen," Zemlinsky used the medium of music to express the nature of Death in two of his earlier lieder. Despite his relative anonymity according to today's musicians and audiences, Zemlinsky had an immense talent for text setting. As the son of a writer and as a lover of literature, he was continuously inspired by the written word, as his numerous compositions for the voice attest. Gorrell also makes note of Zemlinsky's particular affinity for poetry:

Zemlinsky found in poetry a source of personal expression around which he could shape his musical vision, magically linking musical inspiration and technique in the interpretation of the poem. His willingness to allow words to influence the shape of his musical ideas places him squarely within the German lied tradition. The listener can sense Zemlinsky's affinity with the poet when words stimulated his musical imagination and reveal glimpses of his own intimate thoughts and sensibilities.²⁵

Judging by the depth and richness of possible analysis, "Ich geh' des Nachts" and "Vöglein Schwermut"

²⁵ Gorrell, *Discordant Melody*, 134.

were poems that filled Zemlinsky with creative possibility and pushed him toward his ‘magical’ musical visions. I agree with performer and lecturer Jane Manning, that “Zemlinsky and his contemporaries would find a regular place in recital programmes if they were more widely known and, especially, promoted more effectively.”²⁶ I for one am grateful to have had the opportunity to study two of Zemlinsky’s works in depth, since they have proved to be not only wonderfully expressive but also analytically intriguing.

* * * *

*To discover a bountiful supply of relatively unfamiliar lieder is a special delight. It oxygenates some of the more faded corners of the genre, affording a prime opportunity for a fresh approach from a modern perspective, unhindered by the weight of tradition and habit. Those who guide young singers must always be willing to encourage them to seek out new pieces. It is all too easy to revolve on the spot, coaching only those works one knows intimately already, without troubling to entertain any new thoughts on them. . . . All singers and teachers should welcome the works of Zemlinsky and his contemporaries.*²⁷

²⁶ Jane Manning, “Appendix: Lecture-Recital: Zemlinsky and the Forgotten Late Romantic Composers of Lieder,” in *Zemlinsky Studies*, ed. Michael Frith (London: Middlesex University Press, 2007), 123.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

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Abstract

Alexander Zemlinsky, a fin-de-siècle Viennese composer associated with Brahms, Mahler, and Schoenberg, has been historically overshadowed by such celebrated composers. The near lack of popular and critical attention is unwarranted, however, particularly in light of his immense talent for text setting as evidenced in his lieder and operas. This paper seeks to address this musicological gap and continue the work of Zemlinsky scholars like Antony Beaumont and Lorraine Gorrell by offering a close comparative analysis of two of Zemlinsky's early songs, "Ich geh' des Nachts" op. 6, no. 4 and "Vöglein Schwermut" op. 10, no. 3. These two lieder have been selected because of a specific textual similarity which has resulted in corresponding parallels within their musical settings: interestingly, these songs contain the only poems in Zemlinsky's oeuvre in which Death is personified and given a speaking role. Ultimately, this paper argues that, through the unique musical characteristics given to Death in response to the poetry, Zemlinsky not only demonstrates a remarkable ability to express text through the medium of music, but he also comments on the inevitability and eternity of death and its effect on humanity.

