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Musicianship 1

Final Analysis

Zärtliche liebe – Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven is acknowledged as one of the giants of classical music; occasionally he is referred to as one of the “three B’s” (along with Bach and Brahms) who epitomize that tradition. He was also a pivotal figure in the transition from the 18th century musical classicism to 19th century romanticism, and his influence on subsequent generations of composers was profound (Powers).

"Zärtliche Liebe" ("Tender Love") was first published in 1803 by Johann Traeg in Vienna along with "La partenza," WoO 124. Although Thayer puts the composition of "Zärtliche Liebe" in 1797-98, more recent research suggests it was written in 1795. The poem, by Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Herrosee, is occasionally referred to by its first line, "Ich liebe dich, so wie du mich" ("I love you as you love me") (Palmer).

While he completed only one opera, Beethoven wrote vocal music throughout his life, including two Mass settings, other works for chorus and orchestra, arias, duets, art songs, and true song cycles (Solomon).

The narrator describes the love he shares with another, a love that enables them to share all of their sorrows and provide each other with comfort and understanding. The year 1795 was an important turning point in Beethoven's career. He had lived in Vienna for over two years, studied with Haydn and others, and, most importantly, had insinuated himself into the homes and hearts of the
nobility. He had become something of a "hot commodity" among Viennese aristocrats, and his music was becoming popular, as evinced in the publication of his Trios, op. 1 in 1795 (Palmer).

Set in ABA’ form, "Zärtliche Liebe" contains subtle nuances that point toward the mature Beethoven. The voice and piano parts are independent, but the piano part is not completely subservient to the voice. Although there is no piano introduction, Beethoven gives the responsibility of introducing the new melodic material for the second strophe to the piano. Just as the voice opens the song, it begins the third verse, which returns, hesitantly, to the music of the first. A move to the dominant at the end of the final line initiates the coda, which consists of the repetition of the last two lines of text. The arching, stepwise lines and quiet interplay between the voice and piano demonstrate Beethoven's assimilation of the Classical style as embodied in the work of Haydn and Mozart (Palmer).

The reason I love this song is because the piece is so simply. For the first five measures, Beethoven plays around on arpeggios, switching from tonic and dominant in a few different inversions. He keeps the vocal line on chord tones, with a few quick passing tones. Half of measure four ends with an imperfect cadence. It plays very nicely with the phrasing of the lyrics because the musical phrase ends on a tonic chord when the sentence of the lyrics ends.

At measure six, Beethoven introduces us to a four chord in root position, but quickly changes the chord by sharping the C. I thought this chord was a secondary dominant because the C# is in the bass and over it is A, E and G, which gives us an
A7. A7 is the dominant of D, which is the dominant of our tonic, G. Beethoven now starts a cadential 8-6-4 cadence and finally resolves to the tonic on a perfect authentic cadence.

The piece changes keys at measure nine and enters the B phase. The vocal line takes a break for 2 quick measures and continues with a piano interlude. As we enter the key of D, the piano plays the new tonic for one full measure and then plays half a measure of a dominant chord in 4-3 inversion back to D. The melody is reintroduced in the voice. The reason why the key has changed is because the leading tone in D, which is C#, is constantly sung. Beethoven keeps playing with the tonic and dominant, when at measure 15, we enter the key of G again.

It was hard to decide whether or not to analyze the chord as a flat 6 chord in the key of D, or to change keys and call it a 4 in G. I decided on changing the key back to G because this phrase of the B section contains no C#’s. Also, Beethoven plays around the 4 and 5 chords in G major and it wouldn’t harmonically make sense in D major.

So at this point in measure 15, the piece keeps playing with different cadential patterns, going from 4 to 1 and 5 to 1. At one point, the tonic brings us to a minor second chord in 6-5 inversion. With the C in the bass, Beethoven repeats what he did in measure 6 and sharps the C, thus making the chord a secondary dominant again. We see another cadential 8-6-4 pattern, but this time he lands on a half cadence and suspends us on a dominant 7th chord. The voice sings the diminished part of seventh chord while the full chord is held as a whole note under it. I feel that
this part of voice is almost a suspension in midair because the diminished triad that is sung sounds like a musical question mark.

Beethoven amazes me. He finds a way back to the first A theme with the same melody and accompanying arpeggiated piano. At this point in the piece and A section, Beethoven landed us on a half cadence. But now we end on a deceptive cadence (my favorite). We land on the minor 6 chord of E minor. It is marked as a piano tempo. Beethoven wanted the singer to treat this cadence as a main spot in the song. Strangely enough, there was only one minor chord before this minor 6 chord in the entire piece. The fact that the minor 6 is held through an entire measure and contrasted from the rest of the piece dynamically shows that this measure is meant to stick out.

The sub-mediant chord leads us to a tonic chord with a 7th in 4-3 inversion. For two measures, the G7 chord and C (4 chord) switch off until we get to the A7 chord again, which is the secondary dominant of G. From here on out, we see typical Beethoven as he beats away at the 5 and 1 for the rest of the song, until he ends the piece with yet another cadential 6-4 progression.

This song has a soft spot in my heart because of its simplicity. I don’t get how something this simple can be so beautiful. This is the first German piece of music I ever learned how to sing, and now I’m going to Vienna in the summer to study the background of lieder. Ich liebe dich is truly gorgeous, and as I analyzed it, I discovered how simplicity could be so effective in music.
Works Cited

