

Listening Guide

Schubert: *Erlking* (*Erlkönig*)

DATE OF WORK: 1815

FORM: Through-composed Lied

TEXT: Narrative poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

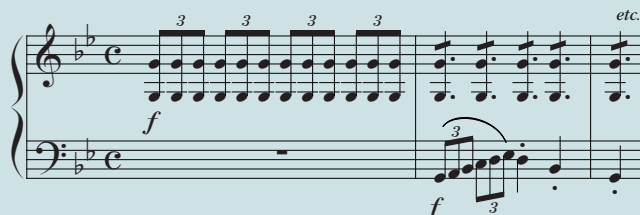
MEDIUM: Solo voice and piano

TEMPO: Schnell (fast)

CHARACTERS (performed by one vocalist):
Narrator: middle register, minor mode
Father: low register, minor mode; reassuring
Son: high register, minor mode; frightened
Erlking: medium range, major mode; coaxing, then insistent

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Piano accompaniment establishes mood of urgency and drama for the Lied; piano's triplet rhythm continues until very last text line.
Narrative text with 4 characters (narrator, father, son, Erlking), each expressed through differing vocal registers.
Shifts from minor to major mode (for Erlking) and dissonance to project the boy's terror (each cry is a step higher).

Piano introduction—
minor key and rapid
repeated octaves in triplets
set mood, simulating
horse's hooves:



Melody of son's dissonant
outcry on "My father, my
father":



TEXT

TRANSLATION

NARRATOR (*minor mode, middle range*)

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;
er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

Who rides so late through night and wind?
It is a father with his child;
he has the boy close in his arm,
he holds him tight, he keeps him warm.

FATHER (*low range*)

"Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang
dein Gesicht?"

"My son, why do you hide your face
in fear?"

SON (*high range*)

"Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht? Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?"	"Father, don't you see the Erlking? The Erlking with his crown and train?"
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FATHER (*low range*)

"Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif."	"My son, it is a streak of mist."
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ERLKING (*major mode, melodic*)

"Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir! Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir; manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand; meine Mutter hat manch' gülden Gewand."	"You dear child, come with me! I'll play very lovely games with you. There are lots of colorful flowers by the shore; my mother has some golden robes."
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SON (*high range, frightened*)

"Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht, was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?"	"My father, my father, don't you hear the Erlking whispering promises to me?"
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FATHER (*low range, calming*)

"Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind; in dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind."	"Be still, stay calm, my child; it's the wind rustling in the dry leaves."
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ERLKING (*major mode, cajoling*)

"Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir geh'n? Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön; meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reih'n und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein."	"My fine lad, do you want to come with me? My daughters will take care of you; my daughters lead the nightly dance, and they'll rock and dance and sing you to sleep."
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SON (*high range, dissonant outcry*)

"Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort, Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?"	"My father, my father, don't you see the Erlking's daughters over there in the shadows?"
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FATHER (*low range, reassuring*)

"Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau, es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau."	"My son, my son, I see it clearly, it's the gray sheen of the old willows."
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ERLKING (*loving, then insistent*)

"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt, und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt."	"I love you, your beautiful form delights me! And if you're not willing, then I'll use force."
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SON (*high range, terrified*)

"Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an! Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids gethan!"	"My father, my father, now he's grasping me! The Erlking has hurt me!"
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NARRATOR (*middle register, speechlike*)

Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind, er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind, erreicht den Hof mit Müh und Noth: in seinen Armen das Kind war todt.	The father shudders, he rides swiftly, he holds the moaning child in his arms; with effort and urgency he reaches the courtyard: in his arms the child was dead.
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