

Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony:
Dance Topics, Borrowings, and the Sense
of an Ending

Abstract

Many of the themes of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony have long been thought to evoke dance genres, most notably the Ländler. I show (with help from Tilden Russell) that the opening theme of the Andante con moto is closely tied to a Mozart minuet, and that, by extension, it relates to a specific minuet form cultivated by Handel, Gottlieb Muffat, and a few other Baroque composers. Not only is the borrowed minuet inextricably related to the Andante con moto's subordinate theme: the counterpoint of the subordinate theme derives from a fugal gigue by J.S. Bach. The similarity in location and the association between Bach's and Schubert's treatment of the gigue subject tells us a good deal about the state – complete or incomplete – of Schubert's Symphony.