

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

In his landmark article about Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony, Maynard Solomon writes, of the Andante con moto's climactic passages (Example 1, a more extended version of Solomon's Example 2): "... the Andante con moto ... erupts into moments of triumphant exaltation like those usually associated with the Beethovenian symphonic finale."¹ Solomon's dual account of the Symphony's internal closure and its manuscript's long journey to discovery and public performance remains among the most persuasive *historical* and among the most convincing *musical* explanations for the symphony's unfinished state. Unfinished, that is, to the extent that one was expecting it to comprise four movements.

Some of the most immediate or even obvious common-sense musical explanations given over the years—that the third movement, of which some 20 measures survive in an orchestral autograph state, was not qualitatively commensurate with the first two;² that Schubert simply could not find material compatible with the first two movements; that the first two movements and the

I thank Tilden Russell for his substantial help in various matters concerning minuet topics, as acknowledged further in the text, the footnotes, and the Examples.

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¹Solomon 1997, 132-133.

² Solomon refers to the Scherzo as a "miscarriage" (1997, 132).

projected third movement were all in triple meter, hence too much of a good thing³—are also quite convincing, and there is no reason why they cannot continue to live side by side with other purely musical theories. *Biographical* explanations offered in recent times—that the ailing Schubert's association of the Symphony's two complete movements with his terminal illness and impending death led him to put it aside and then give it away for safekeeping;⁴ that Schubert's regard for his pre-1824 works was ambivalent;⁵ and that Schubert, having grown increasingly concerned about having borrowed explicitly from Beethoven in his discarded third movement and having constructed an excessively evident network of Beethovenian relations between the movements, decided to abandon the Symphony⁶—can also live (more or less) comfortably, side by side, with older theories.⁷

In this article, I should like to explore new, internal reasons for regarding the "Unfinished" Symphony as essentially complete in its two-movement state—not

³ Charles Fisk puts these most eloquently:

"... the symphony's second movement answers to its first as part of a subtly and elaborately cyclic conception, a conception that Schubert obviously did not bring to the completion he initially envisaged for it. Possibly he could not, perhaps because he could not imagine a finale that would both engage the memory of the earlier movements and match them in expressive range. Or possibly he decided, at some point, that any continuation would do violence to the music he had already composed—would begin to 'untell' a story he had already told fully enough" (2001, 113).

⁴ Brown 1980, 761; Barry 2010. The "Unfinished" Symphony has traditionally been associated with the topic of Schubert's impending death, usually in wildly erroneous ways; see Lindmayr-Brandl 2016, with further references.

⁵ Gingerich 2007.

⁶ Chusid 1971, 110.

⁷ Some are summarized in Deutsch 1971, and Solomon 1997, 112. Solomon's 1997 interpretation, that Schubert sent the Symphony in its two-movement form to the Styrian Musikverein in Graz in fulfillment of an earlier promise and also in hope of performance in Graz, remains the most persuasive.

through linear analysis, as one might expect,⁸ but from the vantage point of borrowings, their sources, the topics of those sources, and the order in which Schubert presents them across the *Andante con moto*, and ultimately across both complete movements.

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Some of the themes in both movements of the Symphony have traditionally been associated with Ländler topics, especially the second theme of the *Allegro moderato*.⁹ In Example 2, I present the *Allegro*'s second theme with the Ländler rhythms it conjures up, in a setting by Arthur Maisel; in Example 3, I show that the first theme could be so rewritten as well, and in Examples 4a and 4b I show that even the *Andante con moto*'s opening theme could be so recast, if one so wanted.¹⁰ And recently, Richard Taruskin suggested that the early D \flat major version of the *Andante con moto*'s climactic measures (bars 84-95; the climactic measures follow in bars 96-111) might be regarded as a Ländler (Example 4).¹¹ The perception that

⁸ Beach 2016, with further references.

⁹ See Kurth 1999, 16. One writer who objected to the Ländler characterization was Tovey (Kurth 1999, 16, fn. 33). Richard Kurth makes a persuasive case for linking the second theme and its scansion in 6/8 time to the barcarolle (1999, 19, especially fn. 39).

¹⁰ I thank Arthur Maisel for realizing the Ländler implications in Examples 2-4, and for setting the musical examples with his customary mastery.

¹¹ Taruskin 2005, Vol. 3, 114: "... the clarinet and flute exchange that takes place during this excursion into D flat major (mm. 90-95) removes any doubt that we are dealing here with a *Ländler*, an adapted (and locally Viennese) ballroom dance." Earlier, citing the *Andante con moto* from Mozart's E flat Symphony, K. 543, as a model, Taruskin characterizes Schubert's as "a slow rondo (or, alternatively, a slow minuet or *Ländler* with two trios" (113).

Richard Kurth, in his important article (1999), has described the metrics of the *Allegro moderato* as a play of antinomy and colloquy between 3/4 and 6/8 times.

there is a dance-like lilt to many of the Symphony's themes is helped substantially by the influence of performance on period instruments: the heavy hand of yesteryear is nowadays replaced by a much lighter and more flexible touch.

For many years, the opening of the *Andante con moto* struck me as a kind of minuet, and specifically one that resembles the two peculiar minuets from Handel's *Concerti Grossi*, Op. 6, Nos. 5 and 12 (Example 5, a and b; both Handel minuets are apparently borrowed, in turn, from one minuet by Gottlieb Muffat, quoted in Example 6;¹² another Handel minuet that forms part of the same family but is more loosely related to those under discussion is the fifth movement of the *Organ Concerto in G minor*, Op. 7, No. 5, Example 5c). As it happens, the principal themes of these Handel minuets are indeed by no means common, generically: Tilden Russell reports that he has found only one similar minuet, in two versions, in his database of minuets (Example 7a),¹³ and two further versions of this minuet are cited in an article by David Charlton (Examples 8a and 8b).¹⁴ Two rather similar themes appear in symphonies by Johann Christian Bach (Examples 9a and 9b), and Beethoven employs similar isorhythms in both the *Scherzo* and the *Trio* of his *Second Symphony*, which Schubert is known to have deeply admired (Examples 9c and 9d).¹⁵ The incipits of all these pieces seem to share more with fugal themes in duple meter than with formal minuets in triple meter (Example 10; the fugal connection

¹² Gellrich 1960.

¹³ Tilden Russell, private communication.

¹⁴ Charlton 2000, VI, 280-281.

¹⁵ Chusid (1971, 107) cites the *Trio*. By isorhythm I mean an extended collection of smaller rhythms that is repeated, with its characteristic note values unchanged, several times. (The tonal content of these steady note values, by contrast, may of course change.)

may be purely coincidental, but Schubert puts it to good use later, as we shall see). Whatever their sources, the openings of these pieces stand out because they are not often found in nonfugal settings or in triple meter.

More likely, though, than either a Handelian or a Beethovenian source for Schubert's opening *Andante con moto* theme, is a Mozartean one—from the closing *Tempo di Menuetto* of Mozart's Keyboard Concerto in F, K. 413, as Tilden Russell has suggested in a private communication (Example 11a). The similarity between Mozart's falling bass and Schubert's (in bars 1-2; see again Example 4a) attests to the close relationship between the two works. (Another similarity is shown in Examples 11b and 11c.)¹⁶

Common to the Mozart Concerto finale and Schubert's *Andante con moto* theme is the isorhythmic rising step in dotted half notes (Mozart) and dotted quarter notes (Schubert) in the first two measures, and the even three-note isorhythm in the third measure (see again Example 11a). Since the measures in question occupy three-quarters of a frequently repeated phrase in each composition, the resulting similarity is very substantial. Schubert retains much of

¹⁶ In any case, it's all in the family: Mozart had access to the Handel minuets, at least to the early version of the D major Minuet from Op. 6, No. 5, which was part of the Overture to the Ode for St. Caecilia's Day (Example 11d). Mozart orchestrated the Ode in 1789, and his F major Concerto dates from 1784, but one might assume that Mozart knew at least one of his two Handel sources as early as 1784. Schubert's admiration for and indebtedness to Mozart are well documented: see, for instance, Wollenberg 2011, Chapter 5, with further references. On Schubert's growing reverence for Beethoven see Gingerich 2014, with further references. See also Shamgar 1989.

his three-bar isorhythm throughout the opening thematic section of the Andante con moto (bars 1-60), which is in aab' rounded binary form.¹⁷

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Regardless of internal formal terminology, one might say that the Andante con moto, which is in E major, comprises two thematic sections that are repeated in the manner of a sonata form without development (Examples 12 and 13). The second section begins in C-sharp minor at bar 64, following an introductory four-measure transition that parallels, at least conceptually, the two-measure introduction at the opening of the movement. The form of this second thematic section resembles, in broad outline, what William Caplin calls the *small binary*—two periods subdivided into four distinct phrases that are different in some ways and similar in others (these group into the larger 2+2 as follows: bars 64-83 and 84-96; 96-103 and 103-111). See the letters A, B, C, and D in Example 13.¹⁸ They are followed by a long transition to the recapitulation of both sections (bars 111-141).

During the first two phrases of the second section, A and B, we have no inkling that a syncopated fugal subject might come into play. More immediately significant is the enlargement of the opening theme's measure-long dotted-quarter-note steps into steps that span two measures each (Example 14a); these enlarged steps prevail throughout the second section's A, B, C, and D. The enlargement, among other things, binds the two thematic sections of the Andante con moto

¹⁷ My parsing of the Andante con moto's sections is similar to David Beach's (2016, 113) in many, if not all, respects.

¹⁸ Caplin 1998, 87-93, especially 91. I adapt the notion of small binary rather loosely, focusing more on its internal division into two periods and four large phrases.

inextricably together, allowing the minuet topic of the opening to intersect the later topics of the climactic measures.

Within the enlargement's hypermetrical steps, a stately ascent in dotted-quarter-note thirds emphasizes the downbeat of each measure as well as the rising thirds that the downbeats portray. These remind us (even if they do not necessarily borrow from) similar ascents, articulated by falling half-note thirds, in the Rondo from Mozart's Sonata in D for two keyboards, K. 448 (Example 14b), and—articulated less evenly by (essentially) half notes and quarter notes—at the very opening of Beethoven Piano Sonata in A \flat , Op. 110 (Example 14c; Beethoven's Sonata was composed less than a year before Schubert's Symphony).

Across the third phrase, though, at C, Schubert adds by way of counterpoint the aforementioned syncopated fugal subject (Example 15a). The subject explicitly dovetails the fugal subject of the Gigue from Bach's E minor Partita for Clavier (Example 15b). And during the last, apocalyptic phrase, at D, Schubert superimposes a furiously running counterpoint in thirty-second notes that is based, in part, on the equally furious thirty-second notes in the Corrente from the same Bach Partita (Examples 16a and 16b) and —perhaps more explicitly—on two brief motives from the Larghetto of Beethoven's Second Symphony (Example 16c), as Martin Chusid has shown.¹⁹

¹⁹ Chusid (1971, 103-04, Example 3). Schubert's admiration for Beethoven's Second Symphony is well known. It may well be that both the Bach and Beethoven pieces were in the back of Schubert's mind when he composed the climax of the Andante con moto: one might say that the motive expressed by the 32nds derives from Beethoven, but the developmental way in which the motive is worked out derives from Bach. This is a good example of a hybrid borrowing.

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And so, notwithstanding the large formal and temporal parallelisms between the two sections of Schubert's *Andante con moto*—the orderly division into discrete similar phrases, the enlargement of the first section's isorhythms in the second—a clearly marked succession of topics from minuet to fugal gigue emerges, somewhat in the manner of a Baroque suite. More important, the fugal subject that Schubert borrows from Bach originally brought Bach's heroic Partita to a soaring, triumphant climax, replete with a codetta and a *tierce de picardie* (see the asterisks in Example 15c).²⁰ Schubert recruits it to perform much the same task in the "Unfinished" Symphony. In adopting the spirit of the Baroque suite in general (the dance topics throughout, and the heavily sectional nature of the *Andante con moto*) and the fiery conclusion of a well-known, published Partita in particular,²¹ Schubert is suggesting—overtly as well as covertly—that he has brought his Symphony to a close.

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It would take us too far afield to probe some of the borrowings, mostly from Haydn's "Drumroll" Symphony, that dot Schubert's opening *Allegro moderato*, and have not yet been unearthed. Here we can only point to their relation to the ominous *Dies Irae* (Example 17a; see the brackets in Examples 17b-d) and to the chordal outbursts that populate both composers' opening movements (Examples

²⁰ I am intentionally using the same adjective, "triumphant," that Solomon uses to describe the climax of Schubert's *Andante con moto*.

²¹ Not to mention the conclusion to the entire published set of Six Partitas for Clavier.

18a and 18b).²² Suffice it to say that the two symphonies' allusions to the Dies Irae and their subsequent alternation of chordal outbursts and responding melodies (see the brackets, arrows and annotations in Examples 18a and 18b) open a dramatic discourse that invites further elaboration and resolution in both composers' subsequent movements. Schubert's overarching plot emerges clearly: even without a detailed overview of the *Allegro moderato*'s expansive conflicts in the development section, we can hear how Schubert's narrative leads from heroic struggle on to sublime respite (the heavenly realization of the minuet topic), and then to a triumph over adversity (the exalted *gigue* adaptation). Aware of his Bach source or not, Schubert did not need to continue his narrative, for he must have sensed that, at some level, the narrative has already come to a close.²³

²² Beth Shamgar (1987, 92-98, Examples 2 and 3) relates the drama of Schubert's outburst (reproduced in Example 18b), the silence that precedes it, and the repose that follows to a similar succession of events that take place at the parallel location in the opening *Allegro vivace* of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony.

²³ Referring to the sense of an ending at the coda of the *Andante con moto*, Maynard Solomon writes: ". . . it has achieved a state of repose that calls for nothing beyond silence and inner reflection. It is distinctly an ending, if by that we mean that it propounds a statement that does not necessarily require further discourse" (1997, 129).

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