
Macro Analysis of Robert Schumann's "Abschied," from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82

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2003 Robert Fountain Memorial Award Recipient

All artists are, to one degree or another, affected by the predecessors in their field. Whether they react adversely or in accordance with that influence, their products will show. Robert Schumann (1810–1856) is one whose art contains clear evidence of influence from previous styles, which are embodied by particular composers. In Schumann's music, one discovers a descent from J.S. Bach (1685–1750), W. A. Mozart (1756–1791), and Ludwig von Beethoven (1770–1827). Schumann has a distinctly Bach-ian way of pitting melody against melody for marvelous harmonic effect. Mozart's fingerprints are clear in Schumann's use of circle progressions and leading-tone chords to drive his piece forward. And Schumann is wearing a hat fashioned after Beethoven's in his manner of diverging from the audience's expectation at the most interesting points. Despite all of this inspired material, Schumann holds his own style and ideas effectively, as can be observed in "Abschied," from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82.

This short work (in English: "Farewell") is the ninth in a set of character pieces depicting scenes from a forest. The spirit of Bach is clearly present in the melodic lines that can be found in all voices throughout the composition, though not in such a condensed manner as the Baroque master would have written. Often these melodic lines are simply stepwise motion in the tenor or bass ranges that have an expressive quality as they lean forward into resolution. Schumann was trendy in this aspect of his work, as the stepwise bass line was a popular Romantic-era idea. The composer no doubt expected his interpreters to treat it with emphasis. Notice the way a singing bass line carries a long soprano note forward in the following excerpt from "Abschied."

5

Ped. * *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

c^7 E_b B_b F^7 B_b b_b F^7

Figure 1. Schumann, "Abschied," from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82, mm. 5–6.

Schumann also has a gift for more direct counterpoint. We find ourselves with two independent melodies, quite diverse, juxtaposed against one another here:

13

Ped. * *Ped.* *

C^7 C^9 F d F

15

Ped. *

B_b B_b^7 E_b B_b E_b d°

Figure 2. Schumann, "Abschied," from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82, mm. 13–16.

The alto voice is a majestic echo of earlier material, colored a sad hue by melodic-minor sevenths and a descending shape. In contrast, the soprano holds a lighter and more fleeting ambiance, moving more quickly

through nonchord-tone pitches. The two melodies move against each other into dissonance only to find resolution at the end of each phrase.

“Abschied” maintains a center in B-flat major with a significant amount of emphasis on the dominant, F. Schumann employs a wide array of chromatic chords, but he holds steady ground in traditional harmony. Tonics, subdominants, and dominants abound in the keys of B-flat and F. In fact, diatonic chords fill about eighty percent of the piece. He uses the momentum of the circle of fifths to propel his pieces in a natural way. It is this adherence to common practice, the “meat and potatoes” of nineteenth-century music, that calls to mind the influence of W. A. Mozart.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Schumann’s association with the practices of the composers of the past lies in his manner of surprising us in a way that seems of have been inspired by Beethoven. As the table above shows, Schumann frequently used common, ear-pleasing harmonic progressions, but at times he inserted a bold, chromatic surprise, as in the following example. Shortly after no fewer than four circle progressions in a row, he has chosen two chords that are a tritone apart. He even uses stepwise motion in the bass to cause his listeners to assume he is headed straight for a first-inversion A-flat major chord. Instead, he evades our expectations with an A major chord, causing a melodic tritone in the bass. Herein lies the special beauty that endears Schumann’s listeners to him as a favorite Romantic composer.

Figure 3. Schumann, “Abschied,” from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82, mm. 26–31.

Figure 3. Schumann, “Abschied,” from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82, mm. 26–31.

30

E_b (c) E_b E_b^7 A^7

Tritone Relationship (E_b to A)

Figure 3, continued.

As this movement appears after about twenty minutes of contrasting movements of excitement and beauty, “Abschied” is indeed a lovely and illustrative “farewell.” The atmosphere is made melancholy by an abundance of major and minor sevenths both harmonically and melodically. Schumann also uses further extended harmony and the movement of several chords over a prolonged note in the bass, usually tonic, B-flat. A beautiful incident of “tonic prolongation” is found in the codetta of this three-minute work. Having rested on tonic for only one beat, Schumann would have use believe that he has modulated to the relative G minor, by using E-naturals and C-sharps, which sound like the dominant of G, followed by an arpeggio outlining g^7 . However, this minor tonality is offset by the open fifth of B-flat in the bass, which can be analyzed as a part of the minor chords, but which actually sounds like a tonic prolongation. Like any bittersweet goodbye, Schumann delays the parting, but smiles back at us with the final two chords, a peaceful return to B-flat major.

49

B_b B_b^{13}

Figure 4. Schumann, “Abschied,” from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82, mm. 49–53.

51

Tea
(g⁷)

*

Tea
B^b

*

Figure 4, continued.

A product of the genius of his predecessors and his own innate creativity, Robert Schumann's ancestry is outlined in this example of a nineteenth-century character piece. He is perhaps looking back on the great composers before him, resting on their foundation, but moving forward into progressive Romantic music. A century and a half later, the observer wonders whether Schumann realized at the time that his ideas would one day become inspiration for composers to follow, in the same way that his musical fathers were to him.

Abschied

1 Nicht schnell M.M. ♩ = 80

1 *p* 3

Bb^7 F^7/Bb Bb a^7/Bb Bb

3 *mf*

Eb F^7/Bb Bb

5 *leg.* *

c^7 Eb Bb F^7 Bb bb F^7

7 *leg.* *

Bb C^7 F G^9

Figure 5. Schumann, "Abschied," from *Waldscenen*, Op. 82

9

p

11

13

15

G⁷ C⁹ F

F⁷ B^b F⁷ f^{#7} g

C⁷ C⁹ F d F

B^b B^{b7} E^b B^b E^b d[°]

Figure 5, continued.

17

19

21

23

Reo * Reo * Reo *
 E^b c F^7 B^b g

Reo *
 C^9 C^7 F^{13} E^b/F a^{o7}/F F^9

B^b E^b F^7/B^b B^b

Reo *
 c^7 E^b B^b F^7 B^b b^b F^7

Detailed description: This figure shows four systems of piano music, measures 17 through 23. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is in a key signature of two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). Measure numbers 17, 19, 21, and 23 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. Annotations include 'Reo' (likely a typo for 'Reo' or 'Reo') and asterisks (*) above the bass line, and various chord symbols below the bass line. Brackets and dotted lines group these annotations under specific measures or groups of measures. The chord symbols include E^b , c , F^7 , B^b , g , C^9 , C^7 , F^{13} , E^b/F , a^{o7}/F , F^9 , B^b , E^b , F^7/B^b , B^b , c^7 , E^b , B^b , F^7 , B^b , b^b , and F^7 .

Figure 5, continued.

25

27

29

31

B^b C^7 F G^9

G^7 C^9 F^9 F

B^b7 E^b c E^b E^b7

A^7 d g F B^b b°

Detailed description: The image shows a piano score with four systems of music, numbered 25, 27, 29, and 31. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Below the bass line, there are harmonic analysis labels. Brackets and asterisks indicate groupings and specific annotations. In system 25, the labels are B^b, C⁷, F, and G⁹. In system 27, the labels are G⁷, C⁹, F⁹, and F. In system 29, the labels are B^b7, E^b, c, E^b, and E^b7. In system 31, the labels are A⁷, d, g, F, B^b, and b[°]. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks.

Figure 5, continued.

33

Rea * *Rea* *

C⁷ F⁷ B^b B^bM⁷ E^b B^b

35

E^b G⁷ c g a b b^o

37

Rea *

c C⁷ C⁹ B^b C⁷

39

B^b¹³ F⁷ B^b b f B^b⁹

Figure 5, continued.

41

C^9 D^7 g^9 $c^{\#o7}$ B^b e^{o7} c^{11} a°

43

B^b b^b F B^b9 F^9 c $f^{\#o7}$ g

45 **Immer schwächer**

C^9 B^b F^7 B^b b^b C^7

47

B^b b^b c^{o7} B^b e^{o7} F^9 F^7

Figure 5, continued.

49

51

B^b B^{b13}

F^m * F^m *

F^m (g^7) * B^b *

Figure 5, continued.