



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Combining the Arts: Multimedia Performances in the Early 19th-Century Habsburg Empire

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Last October saw the third annual conference of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften's Schubert Research Center, organized with aplomb by Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl (Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg), Livio Marcaletti (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien) and Thomas Seedorf (Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe). The three days of the gathering provided a rich variety of presentations on the interaction of sonic, visual and dramatic arts in Vienna and the Habsburg domains during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition to papers, the organizers incorporated performances and other activities that encouraged a warm camaraderie between conference attendees.

The conference opened with an introduction by Christopher H. Gibbs (Bard College) that surveyed the array of documented multimedia experiences in Schubert's life, including the 1821 Ash Wednesday concert at which his setting of Goethe's 'Erlkönig' was premiered. This concert became one of the touchstones of the conference; its recurrence across several papers helped remind us of the personal and cultural networks that permeated Schubert's Vienna. The opening paper session was on the theme of ballrooms, salons and theatres, and Erica Buurman (San José State University) gave the first, fascinating paper. She used detailed sources concerning the visual aspects of ballroom culture to help reconstruct the otherwise poorly documented musical elements, preserved primarily in keyboard reductions of dance music. She showed how composers such as Johann Nepomuk Hummel used music to enliven ball-goers' experiences and attract their attention amid the sensory overload of ballrooms such as the Apollosaal. Nancy November (University of Auckland) and Imogen Morris (University of Auckland) presented next on the popularity and variety of home entertainments during Schubert's era, including theatrical soirées that mixed amateurs and professionals performing in all sorts of genres and styles. The final presentation of the day came from Mary Riggs (independent scholar, Oxford, Mississippi) and Robert Riggs (emeritus, University of Mississippi), who expounded on the combination of arts encountered at the Kärntnertheater, particularly in association with the *pantomimische Ballette* of the early 1820s. They emphasized the importance of expressive gesture, a topic that returned with several of the next day's speakers.

In the afternoon, several attendees made their way to the historic Theater in der Josefstadt for a private tour. That evening, students from the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien gave us a practical demonstration of the conference theme with a 'musikalisch-deklamatorisch-tanzalische Abendunterhaltung' (musical-declamatory-dance entertainment for the evening) entitled 'Lebenstänze – Lebensstürme' (Dances of Life – Storms of Life). As two pianists and two singers performed a programme of Schubert songs and dances, a large group of dancers presented striking choreography, joined at times by a projected video built from fragments of their rehearsals. The students all performed wonderfully, bringing the day to an enjoyable close.

Friday opened with a session entitled ‘Visualized Body Gestures and Literary Soundscapes’. Because speaker Bettina Brandl-Risi (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität) had fallen ill just before the conference, her paper on *tableaux vivants* had to be replaced. Swift work on the part of the organizers and the help of speaker Margit Legler (Musik und Kunst Privatuniversität der Stadt Wien) meant that the session began instead with two workshop activities on early nineteenth-century dramatic art. Using props such as a stuffed dog and a toy sword, conference participants staged a *tableau vivant* based on Leopold Kupelwieser’s 1821 painting *Gesellschaftsspiel der Schubertianer in Atzenbrugg*, in which Schubert’s friends portray the Fall of Man from Genesis in a game of charades. I (Kirby E. Haugland, Indiana University) had the honour of playing the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, with Louis De Nil (Royal College of Music) draped over my shoulder as the serpent. In the morning’s second workshop, Margit Legler taught us some of the expressive gestures used by actors, speakers and singers in Schubert’s time. Presentations resumed with Emily Eubanks (Florida State University), who reconstructed the soundscape of Karoline Pichler’s play *Ferdinand II* as read in her salon on 23 December 1814 after it was blocked from performance during the Congress of Vienna. Drawing on a close reading of sonic markers in the text, Pichler’s correspondence and other evidence, Eubanks showed how Pichler’s play articulated an Austrian nationalism that ran counter to the Habsburg empire and the Congress’s official stances of international and inter-ethnic cooperation. The session closed with Margit Legler’s own performance lecture on ‘The Physical Eloquence of Schubert’s Time’. Legler provided a carefully researched explanation of the semantics of gesture in the long eighteenth century, culminating in manuals such as Gilbert Austin’s 1806 *Chironomia; or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies), a text considered the day before by Mary Riggs and Robert Riggs. Legler showed how contemporary gestures could be used to take a non-dramatic song such as Schubert’s *Nachtstück* (D672) and dramatize it, which she demonstrated in a striking performance.

Before continuing with the afternoon session, we were treated to a surprise visit by tenor Julian Prégardien, who was preparing for an unusual concert tour that took Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* to non-traditional performing venues around Vienna. Casually seated at the front of the room, Prégardien and guitarist Johannes Öllinger gave an intimate performance of three songs from *Müllerin*, much to everyone’s delight. The performance led smoothly into the afternoon’s topic of ‘Lied and Melodrama’. Cheston Humphries (Universität Wien) opened the session by considering the relationship between the developing German lied and the widely popular practice of declamation. Drawing on writings by Gustav Anton von Seckendorff, Humphries explained aspects of declamatory performance, showing how different settings of Goethe’s poem ‘Erk König’ engaged to different degrees with this expressive practice. The subsequent paper by Louis De Nil remained on the subject of ‘Erk König’. De Nil’s focus was the importance of gesture and physicality in early performances of Schubert’s setting. He supplemented his historical investigation with data from his recent experiments on audience perception at the Royal College of Music’s Centre for Performance Science. The session concluded with a three-paper panel on the Viennese court’s 1815 production *Ambigu*, in which members of the high nobility performed semi-improvised scenes from famous plays alternating with musical intermezzos. Werner Telesko (Universität Wien) provided an exhaustive account of those involved and the possible reception of *Ambigu* by the wider public. Alfred Noe (Universität Wien) broke down the dramatic elements of the production, noting the sources of these elements and the recurring themes of ambiguity and contradictory feelings. Livio Marcaletti concluded the panel with a discussion of *Ambigu*’s musical elements, which included comic trios, melodrama and national dances.

The conference’s final session took place on Saturday morning and covered the spectrum of ballet, opera and orchestral performance. Joan Grimalt (Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya) offered a performative analysis of Beethoven’s ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, Op. 43, drawing on tools from semiotics and two twentieth-century reconstructions of the ballet’s lost programme. I then spoke on the challenges of staging Luigi Cherubini’s opera *Lodoïska*. Drawing on pyrotechnic

manuals, production receipts and reviews from performances across central Europe, I explained how opera producers variously succeeded and failed when trying to create the castle inferno of the opera's finale. The session concluded with Christine Fischer (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), who made an argument for a lasting connection between experiences of sight and sound, thereby applying the concept of *tableau vivant* to a hermeneutics of symphonic music.

With its mixture of live performance, immersive activities and interdisciplinary scholarship, the conference took its subject of combining the arts to heart. While the presenters focused more on Vienna than the wider Habsburg empire, we witnessed a wide array of approaches and thought-provoking questions. The convivial atmosphere and intellectual stimulation encouraged everyone to return to the Center's next conference in 2024.

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