

Werktreue Ideology in Clara Schumann's and Franz Liszt's Piano Transcriptions

DEIRDRE TOH

Clara Schumann¹ and Franz Liszt were contemporaries, and two very different personalities on the public concert stage in nineteenth-century Germany. One almost overshadowed the other with his charm and pianistic virtuosity, the other protected her *Werktreue* ideology and increasingly reacted against mechanical virtuosity that did not also bring out the work's spirit and depth. *Werktreue* loosely translates as 'true to the work'.² This often equates with the performance of canonic works, though it also goes beyond that to include an aesthetic mindset that hinges on a fidelity to a composer's perceived intentions, also known as 'fidelity to the score'. Karen Leistra-Jones is one author who uses this translation of *Werktreue* in her work on Joachim and Brahms.³ She characterizes this concept by its tone of seriousness, self-restraint, and the imperative of authenticity.

The present article explores the multi-faceted meaning of *Werktreue* as observed by Schumann and Liszt's devotion to their respective musical missions. To place Schumann and Liszt side by side is not to further propagate the differences or tensions⁴ between

¹ Throughout this essay, 'Schumann' refers to Clara Schumann and where her husband is concerned, 'Robert' will be used.

² Lydia Goehr was one of the first to discuss the musical work as having become reified. She traces the beginnings of this to the nineteenth century's revival of music from the past and of bringing musical masterpieces into the sphere of timelessness. See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). In this paper, the concepts work, and *Werktreue*, will be used interchangeably.

³ Karen Leistra-Jones, 'Staging Authenticity: Joachim, Brahms, and the Politics of *Werktreue* Performance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 66/2 (2013), 397–436; Leistra-Jones, 'Improvisational Idyll: Joachim's "Presence" and Brahms's Violin Concerto, Op. 77', *19th-Century Music*, 38/3 (2015), 243–71.

⁴ Schumann was impressed by Liszt in her first meeting with him in 1838. But her esteem for him gradually declined. The reasons for this are multifaceted. No doubt was she opposed to some aspects of Liszt's musical practice, as will be expounded upon later in this article. But some of these tensions might have been fueled by ideological debates about music in the 1850s. The New German School had

them—even if one-sided—but to understand the factors at play in creating this divergence in beliefs about faithfulness to the score. I suggest that, for Schumann, the opposing figure of Liszt spurred her forward with greater conviction in her high musical ideals. While Liszt is not known to have reciprocated Schumann’s negative reaction to his music, his response to her musical practice reveals that the concept of *Werktreue* could mean faithfulness to the work in myriad and diverse ways, each of which carries its own legitimacy and none of which are necessarily conflicting. Schumann is known to have played an important role in establishing the German canon through her compositional style and concert programming. Yet, Liszt, even in his bold artistic statements, was also in his own way invested in notions of fidelity. Transcribing the work of Weber, Schubert, Beethoven, and Wagner was one way in which he established himself alongside masters of the past. As Jonathan Kregor argues, Liszt sought to position himself at the forefront of Beethoven interpreters and to claim himself as the rightful heir of Beethoven. He did so in part by transcribing Beethoven’s nine symphonies to a level of difficulty rendered unplayable by his contemporary pianists, including Schumann.⁵

In addition to ideology, musical-social circles and musical training are also to shape the individual’s approach to *Werktreue*. This complex interplay of factors can be observed in Schumann’s and Liszt’s individual piano transcriptions of ‘Widmung’, which appear to reflect a conceptual contradiction of *Werktreue* because of their vastly different stylistic interpretations. Yet, there was also their musical meeting point with Liszt’s transcription of three Lieder by Schumann (part of the *Lieder von Robert und Clara Schumann*, SW569). That their stylistic choices diverge and converge on occasion is not due to any contradiction in the meaning of *Werktreue* but rather, an indication that the work as an entity need not be interpreted in one fixed way to be considered faithful to the text.

It is somewhat difficult to discuss the music of Schumann without drawing a comparison with or creating a context that includes her male contemporaries. In the

been a term coined in 1859 by Franz Brendel, who, as outspoken editor of one of the leading music journals, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, came to be considered the spokesperson for the New Germans comprising Liszt, Wagner, and Berlioz. Whereas the New German School advocated for progress in music, a conservative opposition championed the works of Brahms and the aesthetics of Hanslick. See James Deaville, ‘The New German School’, in Joanne Cormac (ed.), *Liszt in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). In March 1860, Brahms and three other musicians penned a declaration ‘protesting the “pernicious” influence of Liszt, Wagner, and their self-proclaimed *Zukunftsmusik* (music of the future)’. Schumann had intended to endorse the declaration but it was leaked before she got to do so. See Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 181.

⁵ Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131–8.

effort to correct the erasure of women composers and performers in music history, there is a risk of isolating women composers in their own guild. And yet to decline the invitation to consider women composers side by side with their male counterparts might perpetuate the problem. That which Laura Hamer defines as ‘the first wave of feminist musicology’ looked at women composers separately from their male counterparts. The gendered nature of the first wave and the regular subjecting of women musicians to gendered criticism often undermined their work by focusing on their appearance and lives.⁶ The second wave, by contrast, adopts a more inclusive view of women’s wider work in music, encompassing, amongst others, their roles as performers and educators, and a greater willingness to include women’s work in the prevailing channels of music scholarship. Unlike the first wave where scholarship was very much restricted to explaining women’s exclusion from the canon, thus taking involuntarily an apologetic attitude,⁷ the second wave is deemed to have shed the inferiority complex that went hand in hand with studies of the music of women musicians. The research in this paper is carried out in the spirit of the second wave of feminist musicology. Even though a comparison between the two composers poses a risk of overshadowing Schumann with Liszt, when we address these figures side by side, we get the opportunity to challenge the dominant narrative that has subjected the work of female composers to a gendered discourse and tried to distinguish women’s musical experience from men.⁸ By focusing on Schumann’s wider work in music which includes her interactions with her male counterparts, I hope to relieve her of gendered criticism from the past and thereby illuminate her artistry. I use Schumann’s and Liszt’s various approaches to *Werktreue* to account for their individual manner of transcribing ‘Widmung’. Additionally, Schumann’s passionate opposition to Liszt demonstrates her independence of musical thought.⁹ As will be illustrated below, the manner in which

⁶ Laura Hamer (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Women in Music since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), xxii.

⁷ Markus Tsetsos, ‘Postmodern Musicology and the Subjectivity of Value’, *New Musicology: Perspectives critiques* (2011), <https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/filigrane/pdf/286.pdf>.

⁸ Susan McClary and Marcia J. Citron were some of the forerunners of the first wave of feminist musicology. See for instance, Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁹ By the middle of the century, Schumann had begun—though privately, in her letters and diaries—expressing her disdain for Liszt’s compositions and piano playing. She had written in her marriage diary in December 1841 that ‘Liszt likes to play the way he wants. It is always clever enough even though tasteless at times, and that is especially true of his compositions. I can only call them horrible.’ She was also genuinely offended by Liszt’s manner of embellishing the music he played, which stood

Liszt transcribed Schumann's three Lieder provides valuable insight into the influence she exerted over him.

Using piano transcriptions as the primary basis of comparison allows us to define the parameters of this discussion. The medium of transcriptions in this instance deals with composed works rather than live performance, in that it draws out these composers' responses to an original source to reflect their interpretive aesthetics. While my discussion focuses on transcriptions as acts of composition, the domain of live performance is inadvertently drawn into its orbit because Schumann and Liszt were also performers, which influenced their manner of composition. Implicit in their composers' voices are therefore also issues concerning the aesthetics of performance. Because of this, it is difficult to discuss Schumann's compositions without also letting her performative voice speak. The music examples below reveal how such composer-performer identities that were more commonplace before the turn of the twentieth century problematize *Werktreue* and concepts of virtuosity and improvisation as they relate to the work.

Finally, the interactions between Schumann and Liszt challenge our received notions of *Werktreue*, for the concept of fidelity to the score takes on a very different meaning for each of them. Instead of treating the concept as static or fixed, the tensions between both composers invite us to consider *Werktreue* as an elastic concept, one that thrives on and is strengthened by the very principle of difference.

The Rhetoric of Romantic Transcendence

I refer to the work of Alexander Stefaniak and Ludim R. Pedroza to demonstrate how the ideological stances of Schumann and Liszt departed from one another. Stefaniak and Pedroza use the rhetoric of Romantic transcendence to explain how performers and composers navigated their *Werktreue* ideals. For both these writers, Romantic transcendence pursues the line of one's ideals and missions rather than the other-worldly loftiness; for instance, of Wagner or the Wagnerian spirit of dealing with the metaphysical, mythology or of transportation to a divine realm.¹⁰ Stefaniak mentions that Schumann was devoted to music's incorporeality and interiority, of which the latter can be understood as transcending virtuosity.¹¹ In Romantic aesthetics, scholars identify

contrary to her high musical ideals of bringing out the spirit and intent of the composer. See Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 200.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Grey (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Alexander Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann's Interiorities and the Cutting Edge of Popular Pianism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70/3 (2017), 697–765.

interiority to be a foundational ideal, a way for the performer to reconcile tensions between the ‘materiality of performance and the belief that music ideally possessed an element that lay beyond the sensuous world’. Interiority, with its supposed higher qualities, was used to conceptualize and therefore justify Schumann’s (as well as Chopin’s and Henselt’s) virtuosity. Virtuosity elevated through interiority—otherwise known as elevated virtuosity—became both an aspiration and a category that writers and musicians constructed to distinguish select works from supposedly superficial ones.¹²

Pedroza takes a slightly different approach, in that he considers the rhetoric of Romantic transcendence not just in terms of the individual’s control over the musical work, but also the individual’s power to be at the service of the communal or the masses. As he puts it, both Schumann and Liszt sought to protect the musical experience as a (personal) source of liberation, though in vastly different ways. Schumann committed to a *Werktreue* ideology; to preserving the integrity of the musical work and upholding the composer’s intentions. This goes some way to explaining the label ‘priestess’ used to describe her.¹³ By contrast, Liszt idealized music as the experience of ‘transcendence-via-ecstasy’ and in a way that seemed to defy Schumann’s subservience to the musical work as implied by her *Werktreue* ideology. The improvisatory figures and embellishments that we think of as typically Lisztian were regarded as ‘audiovisual spectacles where *ecstasy* and *furor* enveloped both performer and listener’.¹⁴ For Liszt, the ‘ecstasy’ and ‘rapture’ that were commonly used in reviews of his performances were the very effects he was seeking, for such outpouring of emotional intensity enabled him to pursue his ideology of ‘*music as experience*’. Additionally, Liszt exercised his power over and service of the community by elevating the status of the piano as a solo instrument.¹⁵ In view of these observations, reports of Liszt’s flamboyant performances,

¹² Stefaniak, ‘Clara Schumann’s Interiorities’, 701–702. German depth is a related concept here. Holly Watkins refers to depth as a metaphor, as something that is hidden from view and in need for deeper investigation of the truth. See Holly Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: From E. T. A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹³ April Prince, ‘Reconsidering the Priestess: Clara Schumann, Historiography, and the Visual’, *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 21 (2017), 107–40. Prince, as does Reich, uses this term to describe Schumann’s devotion to the musical work and the quiet dignity of her performances.

¹⁴ Ludim R. Pedroza, ‘Music as *Communitas*: Franz Liszt, Clara Schumann, and the Musical Work’, *Journal of Musicological Research*, 29/4 (2010), 295–321: 296. (Emphasis in the original). In the later nineteenth century, as seen by the case of Wagner, such ‘ecstasy’ would gain traction as romantic excesses. But to avoid reading history backwards, the focus here will be on Liszt alone, without recourse to what happens after his time.

¹⁵ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

both the visual and musical spectacles, can therefore be considered in the broader context of pushing the limits of the piano and piano repertoire, beyond just the aspects of Liszt's compositional style that Schumann regarded to be superfluous and to which she was implacably opposed.

But the *Werktreue* ideal is not all that distinguishes the ideological approaches of Schumann and Liszt. Pedroza also argues that the interplay between emotional phenomenon and the work as a conceptual construct should not be perceived as antithetical.¹⁶ If we consider Pedroza's assertion that emotional phenomena and, by extension, artistic temperament are intricately bound up with ideological conceptions of the work, then the reasons for Schumann's and Liszt's divergent approaches to Romantic transcendence become clearer. Pedroza argues that in the case of Liszt, musical ideas *and* emotional vigour were fused together. Schumann was opposed to this approach, as observed from the physical and emotional restraint she exercised to avoid drawing attention away from the musical work.¹⁷ Liszt's vivid, outgoing musicality is apparent in his relatively more flamboyant displays as composer and performer. In comparison, Schumann's expression of the rhetoric of Romantic transcendence was more in the manner of creative refuge;¹⁸ the seriousness with which she approached her work was no doubt bound up with her heavy responsibilities as a performer since she was a child. Adding to this was the difficult years of courtship with Robert and the years of hostility it brought about from her father. Being the conscientious pianist who cared about how her performances were received, and later, lacking the emotional and psychological support from her father because of their strained relationship, caused her severe performance anxiety and a major crisis of self-confidence.¹⁹ That she gravitated towards interiority and its attendant spirit and depth might suggest that she sought refuge in her creative output.

Differing Approaches to 'Widmung'

'Widmung' is a case in point, for their very different transcriptions reveal how Schumann and Liszt diverged from one another in their approaches to the work. 'Widmung' is the first piece in a collection of Lieder, *Myrthen*, Op. 25. Written by Robert in 1840, it was a wedding gift for Schumann. As a love song, the title of which means

¹⁶ Pedroza, 'Music as *Communitas*', 297.

¹⁷ David Ferris, 'Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck's Concerts in Berlin', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 56/2 (2003), 351–408.

¹⁸ Pedroza, 'Music as *Communitas*', 297.

¹⁹ Ferris, 'Public Performance and Private Understanding'.

‘dedication’, the original version of ‘Widmung’ by Robert encapsulates a tenderness in his setting of Friedrich Rückert’s poetry.

Table 1: A comparison of ‘Widmung’ by Robert, Schumann, and Liszt

	Tonal plan	Robert (1840); Schumann (1873)	Liszt (1848)	Key differences (Liszt)
Introduction	A-flat major	1 bar	3 bars	
Section A		12 bars	12 bars	
Section A (repeated)			16 bars	Melody in bass. 4 additional bars of embellishments at the end.
Section B	E major	12 bars	12 bars	
‘Ossia’	A-flat major (ends on chord V)	4 bars	5 bars	Rising and falling arpeggios in middle voice; crossing of hands for arpeggiation in high register (colouristic effect). Additional bar of falling E-flat major arpeggios.
Section A’	A-flat major	10 bars	9 bars	Melody in chordal form, embedded in middle voice. Semiquavers accompaniment in right hand. IAC elided with repeat.
Section A’ (repeated) / Coda			10 bars	Triple fortissimo. Melody in top voice; triplets, dense chordal accompaniment;

				acciaccatura on chords in final bars.
Closing		5 bars	6 bars	
		44 bars	73 bars	

Schumann's transcription of 'Widmung' belongs to the set *Trente mélodies de Robert Schumann: transcrites pour piano par Clara Schumann*, written in 1873 for publication by the Parisian, Gustave Alexandre Flaxland. She had agreed to arrange thirty of Robert's songs for piano solo because it gave her the opportunity to provide authentic readings of his music, as well as to make his name better known in France. The relative simplicity of her transcriptions no doubt made Robert's songs accessible to amateur players. But apart from capitalizing on the commercial value of this set of transcriptions, Schumann believed that no one knew Robert and his music more than she did, and she saw it as her duty to protect his legacy and his music. She was aware that if she did not arrange Robert's songs for piano, someone else would do it. Schumann was not prepared to take chances with this, but rather she was determined to control Robert's posthumous reputation.²⁰ Therefore, even if the transcriptions in the set are almost a verbatim reproduction of the original songs, they demonstrate her fidelity to Robert's scores in striving to reproduce them as accurately as possible.

Unlike Liszt's transcriptions, adorned with virtuosic figurations, Schumann hardly adds anything to the original. The accompaniment texture remains the same; the number of bars, rather than lengthened as is the case with Liszt, remains unchanged for Schumann at forty-four bars. Schumann's transcription is more in the manner of a reproductive transferal than a recomposition or transcription. Yet, this does not need to be taken as reason for its relative obscurity as compared to Liszt's. Instead, it is more fruitful to think about how her transcription reflects her belief in being subservient to the composer, that which Pedroza calls the 'self-denying pianist-interpreter'.²¹ Schumann may not have added much in her transcription of her husband's song. Yet,

²⁰ Beatrix Borchard, 'Von Robert zu Clara Schumann und zurück?', *Schumann Studien*, 9 (2008), 81–96.

²¹ Pedroza, 'Music as *Communitas*', 296.

there is beauty in its simplicity, in embodying the spirit of *Innigkeit*.²² Put differently, her transcription of 'Widmung' demonstrates a *clarity* that she had encouraged of Robert—to be 'clearer' in his compositions.²³

By 1852, following Robert's appointment as Kapellmeister in Düsseldorf, and having left behind his identity as improvising pianist-composer, he had begun to spread 'the doctrine of mental composition'. This entailed composing away from the piano and correspondingly, rejecting the improvisatory figures that would have emerged from testing musical material at the piano. Instead, composing inside one's head demanded a rigorous concentration that helped to develop a rich 'inner' musicality and self.²⁴ Robert's approach to composition in his later years demonstrates a level of restraint that is apparent in Schumann as well, in their common rejection of musical flamboyance and excesses. What Robert was doing is in essence *romantic reflection*: a poetic consciousness that elevates above the unreflective, prosaic impulses seen elsewhere.²⁵ It is in this spirit of romantic reflection that I suggest we read Schumann's transcription. Rather than proving her worth as transcriber or composer or even giving in to the impulse of asserting her own voice over Robert's, Schumann's transcription projects a clarity that is consistent with her idea of being faithful to the composer.

On initial listening, Liszt's transcription seems to be marked by a technical bravura. As shown in Table 1 above, he expands Robert's original from forty-four to seventy-three bars. Most of these additional bars are attributed to the repeats of section A. His accompaniment texture is largely consistent with Robert's, but every so often he infuses embellishments or surface figurations that enhance the expressive quality of this love song. These embellishments mostly feature at the ends of sections and, while not extensive in duration, nonetheless prove effective. For instance, the cascading E-flat major arpeggios that span four octaves launch the return of section A'. This addition of just one bar sets up a dramatic anticipation for what is to come. The most significant addition—in terms of duration and effect—is the repeat of section A' or what we might call the coda. Here, Liszt is unreserved in allowing the song to take full flight as an outpouring of love. The coda might be a restatement of section A', but it is now

²² While we take this here to mean tenderness and intimacy, this translation is just one strand of a rich, multifaceted concept. See for instance, Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann's Interiorities', 701; and Jennifer Ronyak, *Intimacy, Performance, and the Lied in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018).

²³ Dana Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation: Free Playing in Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 182.

²⁴ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 179.

²⁵ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 188. (Emphasis author's own).

enhanced with florid gestures, amongst them ornaments that call for the crossing of hands, a triple fortissimo, and dense triumphant chords. Liszt without doubt makes a showpiece out of 'Widmung'. For this reason, and because it ends on a high and dramatic note, Liszt's transcription continues to be used as a finale or encore in piano recitals in the present day.

A showpiece like Liszt's transcription of 'Widmung' surely counts as virtuosic. At the same time, the embellishments and dramatic arpeggios serve as more than showcasing the performer's dexterity. Liszt exploits these musical figurations to communicate an intense outpouring of love in the absence of words. Introduced at selective locations in the score, such musical expression invigorates the original song's expression of love, and Liszt configures them in a way that a virtuosic exterior emerges. The integration of spiritual animation and mechanical acts in Liszt's 'Widmung' corresponds to Stefaniak's notion of interiority as elevated virtuosity. This notion of interiority that Stefaniak uses on Schumann can equally be observed in Liszt's transcription if we probe beneath its surface mechanisms and sensuality. At the same time, Stefaniak notes the multiplicity of meaning enclosed within interiority. The type he ascribes to Schumann seems to be primarily concerned with the *musical functions* that these features serve (that relate to other elements of the composition), such as harmonic suspense and formal digressiveness. But Stefaniak also recognizes another strand of interiority that is bound up with aesthetics and is couched in the rhetoric of transcendence; that which touches the listener's inner depth or possesses an essence, mind or spirit that animates the music.²⁶ The latter seems more apposite to describe Liszt's 'Widmung'.

If we can see Liszt the unapologetic virtuoso-improviser behind the score, then it should not come as a surprise that the domain of experience and the immediacy of feeling are prominent in his transcription. The physical dimension of his transcription threatens to overthrow the cognitive elements. But that is not to say that musical inventiveness is absent. Although Liszt's transcription might appear superfluous on the surface, careful deliberation can be observed by the trajectory towards a high finishing point and the fine balance he maintains between asserting his composer's voice yet letting Robert's be heard. There is much reverence for Robert's original in keeping to his tonality and preserving most of the accompaniment texture. I would go further and argue that the emotional rapture in Liszt's transcription in fact elevates it as a song of love. The intensity becomes gradually more pronounced from bar forty-four, approximately the mid-point of Liszt's transcription. But the expression markings are most telling. At bar forty-four, the semiquaver flourishes in the middle voice become

²⁶ Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann's Interiorities', 701.

increasingly frequent. Yet, instead of emphasizing its technicality, this must be interpreted to be subdued – as colouristic effect – because Liszt calls for this to be played *dolce armonioso* (sweetly and harmoniously). The dense chords at bars fifty-six and sixty-five – the latter accentuated by acciaccaturas – rather than hammering the piano, are to be played *con somma passione* (with great passion). Finally, that the coda calls for *vibrato assai* (more vibrato) not only shows Liszt alluding to song, the original medium of Robert's 'Widmung', but pushing the piano to do what it technically cannot do: sing, and with vibrato. Unlike the surface figurations that admittedly leave room for performative interpretation, expression markings are comparatively more literal in conveying the composer's musical ideas. And these expression markings point towards emotional rapture as a driving force of the outward displays. Liszt's transcription projects an appearance of freedom and spontaneity that is consistent with his ideal of 'music as experience'. It is for this reason that Liszt's previous identity as virtuoso-improviser needs to be drawn into the conversation to address the virtuosity question more thoroughly. The lasting effects of Liszt's performance career on his compositional output after 1847 imbues his transcriptions with a spirit and depth that is of a different nature compared with Schumann. While Schumann sought to preserve the integrity of the work and to convey its essence with clarity, in other words to be faithful to the letter, Liszt in contrast is more concerned with fidelity to the spirit. To this end, he has no qualms about invigorating 'Widmung' with a freedom of expression.²⁷

Observing the chronology of Liszt's career might go some way to account for the virtuosic figurations that evoke improvisation. Liszt transcribed 'Widmung' in 1848, the year after his career as a virtuoso-improviser had concluded and from which time he turned more decidedly towards composition. In the years 1838 to 1847, prior to 'Widmung', Liszt had already felt the need to rein in free improvisation in his public performances because he registered it as an excess akin to virtuosity. To avoid the perception of improvisation as a deep reserve of feeling that was released spontaneously in the moment of inspiration, he reinvented it 'in line with ascendant musical values

²⁷ The rhetoric of the sublime was another category through which certain instances of virtuosity were privileged in the nineteenth century. Central to the sublime experience were the powerful, overwhelming effects that could 'inspire a mixture of attraction, admiration, trepidation, even discomfort'. Robert and his supporters used the rhetoric of the sublime to identify instances of virtuosity that they believed rejected superficial pleasure, and this also meant that inaccessible and shocking virtuosity could be treated as serious and admirable. Although Robert had mixed reviews of Liszt's performances and compositions, he had extended the mantle of sublimity to Liszt, describing him as a purveyor of the sublime experience. Ultimately, however, the rhetoric of the sublime as it was used to justify serious virtuosity, is found in music's visceral, immediate intensity rather than in the ideological concept of the work. See Alexander Stefaniak, 'Robert Schumann, Serious Virtuosity, and the Rhetoric of the Sublime', *Journal of Musicology*, 33/4 (2016), 433–82: 436–40.

stressing “work”-like craft and integrity’.²⁸ Knowing that overtly mechanical displays potentially trivialized high art awakened in him a strong desire to channel improvisation towards different ends in the next phase of his career from 1848.²⁹ Yet, as both Kenneth Hamilton and Dana Gooley point out, Liszt’s (as well as Chopin’s) early training in improvisation meant that this had become second nature to them, and therefore such figurations became encoded and stylized in their compositions.³⁰

The Rhetoric of Improvisation

Nevertheless, I suggest that the concept of elevated virtuosity is insufficient for fully coming to grips with Liszt’s stylistic choices for ‘Widmung’, for the figurations that would showcase the performer’s dexterity and velocity also evoke the art of improvisation. This leads me to another crucial point of consideration: the difference in the rhetoric of improvisation between Schumann and Liszt. I aim to use the history of improvisation to nuance nineteenth-century attitudes towards virtuosity, and at the same time to provide a critical discourse around these two concepts. As I do this, Schumann’s and Liszt’s dual roles as composer and performer must be allowed to merge to reflect the musical culture of their time. As composer-pianists, it is likely that their *Werktreue* ideals remained constant whether they were composing or performing.

The type of improvisation considered in this article, as practised by both Schumann and Liszt, can be traced to the tradition of preluding that began to decline towards the middle of the nineteenth century.³¹ Schumann’s method of improvising, in the form of preluding at the beginning of works or in between pieces as transitions, was central to this tradition. Improvisations gave performers the opportunity to reflect on the work before performing it, and to prime listeners for what was to come.

Cadenzas in a concerto were also a zone for the soloist to improvise on the work’s themes. I turn to Schumann’s improvised cadenzas as an example of how she allows herself the freedom of improvisation and with that, virtuosic displays, while foregrounding her brand of *Werktreue*. Traditionally the highlight of a concerto, the cadenza is when the orchestra comes to a standstill to allow the soloist to display their

²⁸ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 200.

²⁹ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 206–207.

³⁰ Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138.

³¹ Valerie Woodring Goertzen, ‘Clara Wieck Schumann’s improvisations and Her ‘Mosaics’ of Small Forms’, in Rudolph Rasch (ed.), *Beyond Notes: Improvisation in Western Music of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 153–62.

technical prowess, to recall and improvise over previously heard themes and spin forth new ideas. Yet, Schumann continued to exercise her trademark restraint even when permitted to riff freely in the cadenza. Stefaniak observes that Schumann, in her performance of the cadenza from the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, points the audience back to Beethoven's design, 'lingering over, exploring, and expounding upon each theme in turn and in order'.³² Schumann retraces Beethovenian pathways in her cadenza's larger outlines, 'whether out of a conscious decision to discipline her own fantasy or out of an affinity for Beethoven's work that conditions even her uncalculated musical utterances'.³³ In the third movement cadenza, she creates a cyclic summarizing panorama of all three movements, and this 'recollection becomes a springboard for one of the most dazzling virtuosic displays in Schumann's version of this concerto'.³⁴ Stefaniak calls Schumann a 'revelatory interpreter' because she gradually reveals Beethoven's compositional voice. But more than that, Schumann in her performance demonstrates her faithfulness to the work by acting as a conduit to the composer and his music, while continuing to sound her own compositional voice through the dexterity of her improvisation.

For Schumann, a clear boundary existed between improvisation as a convention of preluding and cadenzas, and stylized *improvisatoriness*³⁵ that were written out in the work. Preserving the integrity of the work meant that, outside of designated zones for improvisation, the work was to be faithfully interpreted—not improvised over—to reveal the essence of the work with clarity. The question of where and in what form *improvisatoriness* was legitimized in Schumann can be explained with reference to her Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7. The work exudes a quasi-improvisatory freedom but this is not due to improvisatory elements embedded within it. Rather, this quality emerges in part because of the harmonic freedom and thematic richness—what Claudia Macdonald refers to as its performance-oriented gestures—that enable the soloist to project a sense of the improvisatory.³⁶ Furthermore, the concerto's progressive formal development creates a trajectory across the entire work in the form of a two-dimensional

³² Alexander Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann: Performance Strategies and the Aesthetics in the Culture of the Musical Canon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 120.

³³ Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 120.

³⁴ Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 121–3.

³⁵ See footnote 41 for explanation of the term used by Gooley.

³⁶ Claudia Macdonald, 'Critical Perception and the Woman Composer: The Early Reception of Piano Concertos by Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach', *Current Musicology*, 55 (1993), 24–55: 24.

sonata form³⁷ as observed by Benedict Taylor.³⁸ There is a thematic link between movements: the second and third movements grow out of the first, and the principal themes of all the movements retain the rising scalar figure of the first. The second movement accounts for the first's missing development section, while the finale is thematically linked to the first movement, even if it does not explicitly reprise material from it.³⁹ The *attacca* linking all movements blurs those conventional boundaries, creating an impression that the concerto flows from beginning to end in a singular, overarching sonata form.⁴⁰ These elements confer a sense of the music composing out, allowing the performer to project an instinctiveness alluding to improvisation; an aura which also resonates with the concerto's brilliant technical writing. But these elements remain distinct from stylized improvisatory elements written out and embedded in the work. A closer look at the work's formal procedures reveals a complex design that is far more cerebral and demanding of rational control than the sense of spontaneity conferred by stylized improvisations.

In the case of Liszt's later works and his 1848 transcription of 'Widmung' —a work composed during his transition from travelling virtuoso to full-time composer—the virtuosic figurations that evoke the art of improvisation are deeply woven into the fabric of the music. For Liszt, therefore, the boundary between performed improvisation and

³⁷ Steven Vande Moortele, 'Beyond Sonata Deformation: Liszt's Symphonic Poem Tasso and the Concept of Two-Dimensional Sonata Form', *Current Musicology*, 86 (2008): 41–62. According to Vande Moortele, 'this form can be conceptualized as the projection of a sonata form onto an entire through-composed sonata-cycle. The result is a form that unfolds in two *dimensions* — the dimension of the *sonata cycle* and that of the *overarching sonata form*'. The entire composition is a sonata cycle and sonata form simultaneously. Both are complete and both comprise the entire composition.

³⁸ Benedict Taylor, 'Clara Wieck's A minor Piano Concerto: Formal Innovation and the Problem of Parametric Disconnect in Early Romantic Music', *Music Theory and Analysis*, 8/2 (2021): 215–43.

³⁹ Taylor, 'Clara Wieck's A minor Piano Concerto', 218–21.

⁴⁰ When Stefaniak discusses Schumann's Piano Concerto No. 7 as an example of interiority, he refers to the virtuosic passages that contribute to formal ambiguity and harmonic suspense. These accord the concerto a level of depth that Schumann hoped would win over connoisseur listeners (Stefaniak, *Clara Schumann's Interiorities*, 722–6). In contrast, the two-dimensional form that Taylor identifies is concerned with the concerto's design on a formal-structural level. Both authors are looking at the same work with a different agenda and from different angles: because Stefaniak is primarily concerned with virtuosic passages that can be legitimized with certain musical elements, he pays less attention to its formal construct and therefore he treats the unconventional formal design as ambiguous. What he is arguing for aligns with interiority because he primarily addresses the surface, virtuosic elements that possess deeper meaning especially as it is perceived by the listener. Taylor is concerned with the sophistication of the concerto's overarching design; the fundamental construction which then accounts for the looseness of the other surface figurations. By pointing towards the complexity of the concerto's long-range design, he situates it more comfortably in the category of compositional virtuosity.

the perception of written-out improvisation within the work itself becomes blurred. As Dana Gooley puts it, *improvisatoriness* was ‘an aesthetic quality that could emerge from fixed compositions as well as from freely invented pieces’.⁴¹ Unlike Schumann, Liszt—as well as Chopin—did not feel any incommensurability between improvising and composing.⁴² Neither did they view improvisation as being inimical to the work. Chopin, just like Liszt, was known to have improvised in private company and many of his pieces, ranging from the sentimental nocturnes to the majestic polonaises, fuse together sentimentality and embellishments that are essentially written-out improvisations.⁴³ In other words, despite Liszt’s break with his virtuoso past, the bodily dimensions of performance and improvisation had become embodied for him to the extent that the method by which he transcribed or composed remained essentially the method of virtuoso improvisation.⁴⁴ This points to the problematic categories of work and improvisation; categories that prove to be much more inseparable for Liszt than for Schumann. I therefore argue that the embellishments we observe in Liszt’s ‘Widmung’ stem from the tradition of preluding and improvisation rather than virtuosity for its own sake, and for very dignified purposes that transcend technicality.

To consider Schumann’s and Liszt’s approach to improvisation and how improvisation becomes stylized—or not—in their transcription, is to dig beneath the surface of the interiority-virtuosity divide. The question of where ‘virtuosity’ issues from is a significant one. As the gulf between Schumann and Liszt shows, the interiority-virtuosity divide is bound up with many complexities that cannot be reduced to a simple binary. Implicit in this divide is also the anxieties towards the bodily, physical dimension of the compositional process: head versus hand or mind versus body. In addition to spreading the doctrine of mental composition, as expounded above, Robert also actively cautioned Schumann against improvising too frequently. This broader hesitation towards improvising, a distrust of experimentation as opposed to formal

⁴¹ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 215.

⁴² Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 198.

⁴³ Chopin’s *improvisatoriness* opens yet another area for discussion. It is worth noting that this feature in Chopin tends to be de-emphasized and he is construed as both virtuoso *and* poet while Liszt is generally perceived as only a virtuoso. Roger Moseley reminds us that in Chopin, hand and keyboard were united in their mechanical subservience to music’s impalpable qualities. For this reason, Chopin’s technicality could efface all traces of the mechanical. See Roger Moseley, ‘Chopin’s Aliases’, *19th-Century Music*, 42/1 (2018), 3–29.

⁴⁴ David Trippett uses Liszt’s *Dante* Sonata to illustrate the collision between Liszt’s identities as performer and composer. See David Trippett, ‘Liszt: Virtuosity and *Werktreue* in the “Dante” Sonata’, *19th-Century Music*, 32/1 (2008), 52–93.

mastery or learnedness, was closely tied to the reception of Liszt's virtuosity.⁴⁵ Such ideas were further propagated by the theorist A. B. Marx, in whose work Robert had taken an active interest. The 'relentlessly rationalistic' approach to composition that Marx advocated for was one that prized the skill of motivic development, without which, 'even great fertility of ideas is of little or no value, as every idea will remain fruitless'.⁴⁶ To this end, both A. B. Marx's and Robert's seemingly exaggerated valuation of objectivity can be understood as a response to what they perceived as dangerous overvaluation of the subjective.⁴⁷ Put differently, this objectivity was supposedly an antidote to the excesses of Liszt.

I argue that the notion of elevated virtuosity, as has been applied to Schumann, is also problematic because of the implicit hierarchy of value attached to it. The idea that virtuosity could be legitimized with interiority or in other words, that interiority had redeeming qualities, carries with it an implicit value judgement. Stefaniak astutely calls out elevated virtuosity as an aspiration and category, an ideal constructed to distinguish between favoured works and supposedly superficial ones. And as stated above, underpinning these categories are anxieties and ambitions as driving forces. More importantly, Stefaniak makes it clear that readers—himself included—might not subscribe to beliefs that the physical and mechanical are problematic qualities to begin with or of lesser value.⁴⁸

Even then, the Schumanns' response to Liszt's transcription reveals just how torn apart they were on the matter of what constituted an appropriate transcription. In 1848, Robert had written a letter of thanks to the pianist and composer Carl Reinecke for his transcription of 'Widmung', which is much closer in style to Robert's than Liszt's.⁴⁹ He remarked that 'I am not a friend of song transcriptions, and the Lisztian ones are in part a real atrocity. But under your hands, dear Mr Reinecke, I feel quite comfortable, and that is because you understand me like few others do: the music just sounds in another

⁴⁵ Trippett, 'Liszt: Virtuosity and *Werktreue*', 67.

⁴⁶ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 185. All these ideas should also be read in the context of A. B. Marx's larger mission of producing a flourishing musical public through criticism and education.

⁴⁷ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 187.

⁴⁸ Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann's Interiorities', 702–703.

⁴⁹ Carl Reinecke, 'Myrthen Op. 25: No. 1, Widmung', *Poetic Scenes: Works for Piano*, performed by Vasco Dantas, Ars Produktion (2020), <https://open.spotify.com/album/68zRiIIV6lcPA266TiezMo?highlight=spotify:track:14h9waSa6AxsfoCpFu4qnv>.

container without all the spices of Liszt'.⁵⁰ Apparently, Robert did not approve of Liszt's transcription. We might even say that Schumann, with her transcription of 'Widmung' in 1873, was showing Liszt how to transcribe in a way in which Robert would have approved. It is possible that Liszt was sensitive to this because his transcription of both Robert's and Schumann's Lieder in the following year closely aligns with the latter's style.

Transcribing the Lieder von Robert und Clara Schumann

Liszt's *Lieder von Robert und Clara Schumann* were transcribed for piano in 1874. This is a set of ten songs, with seven pieces from Robert and three from Schumann (Table 2). Although the numbers seem to suggest that the set weighs heavily towards Robert, a deeper reading of this arrangement suggests that Liszt was thinking more of Schumann than of Robert. Liszt departs from his usual style of utilizing the range of the piano and infusing embellishments. He hardly adds anything to the original nor asserts his 'transcriber' voice. This is unusual considering that 'Liszt understood transcription to be a creation of difference; that is, an act of violation of—even violence toward—the original ... Liszt made the transcriber visible'.⁵¹ Yet, Liszt is anything but visible in this, the style of which recalls Schumann's transcription of 'Widmung' the previous year. 'Ich hab' in deinem Auge' for instance, closely aligns with Schumann's original. Liszt retains the close voicing in the piano and a voice-leading efficiency, things that require what Anna Scott calls Schumann's 'covered' technique as opposed to the more vertical and percussive techniques of professional virtuosos.⁵² Additionally, it is hard to make a case for why Liszt would adopt this manner of romantic reflection for Robert's Lieder when, just two years before, in 1872, his transcription of the latter's 'Frühlingsnacht' was much closer in style to *Liszt-the-transcriber* that we know. This set stands as an anomaly within Liszt's transcription output even when we take into consideration the stylistic diversity of his later years.⁵³ Listening to this set, one keenly awaits the moment when the flamboyant Liszt would emerge; which of course, does not happen.

We do not know the context for which Liszt transcribed these pieces or why he chose to put the Schumanns together. But we know from his letters of correspondence that

⁵⁰ Jonathan Kregor (ed.), *Arrangements for solo piano / Clara Schumann* (Middleton: A-R Editions, 2012), xii.

⁵¹ Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*, 4.

⁵² Anna Scott, *Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity* (PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2014), 127.

⁵³ Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*, 200.

this was a concerted effort. Liszt had originally intended for this set of ten songs to be published in a volume alongside his other transcriptions of songs by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Robert Franz, and Wagner. In his letter dated 24 November 1874 to the publisher Breitkopf und Härtel, he emphasized his stance to ‘print only what has been carefully worked out and will prove tolerably acceptable’. He also requested for yet another copy of the manuscripts to proofread before publishing. ‘To have the things arranged as accurately and appropriately for the piano as possible. And for this I require the last proofs, in order finally to revise them in reading and playing them over’.⁵⁴

Table 2: Lieder von Robert und Clara Schumann, SW569, 1874

	Title	Key	Poet	Original work, year	Composer
1.	‘Weihnachtslied’	G major	H. C. Andersen	Op. 79 (1849)	Robert Schumann
2.	‘Die wandelnde Glocke’	G minor	J. W. von Goethe		
3.	‘Frühlings Ankunft’	G major	A. H. Hoffmann von Fallersleben		
4.	‘Des Sennen Abschied’	C major	F. von Schiller		
5.	‘Er ist’s’	E major	E. Mörike		
6.	‘Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt’	G minor	J. W. von Goethe	Op. 98a (1849)	
7.	‘An die Türen will ich schleichen’	C minor			
8.	‘Warum willst du and’re fragen’	A-flat major	F. Rückert	<i>Drei Lieder</i> , Op. 12 (1841)	Clara Schumann

⁵⁴ Franz Liszt, *Letters of Franz Liszt Vol II*, ed. La Mara, trans. Constance Bache (London: Hazell, Watson, and Viney, LD., 1894), 263.

9.	'Ich hab' in deinem Auge'	A-flat major		<i>Six Lieder, Op. 13</i> (1842-4)
10.	'Geheimes Flüstern'	D-flat major	H. Rollett	<i>Six Lieder aus Jucunde, Op. 23</i> (1853)

The events surrounding this 1874 transcription might also offer some clues about Liszt's stylistic choice. 1873 was a pivotal year in Schumann's performance career. After this time, she was forced to slow down somewhat—likely a reduction of concert tours and teaching—due to pains in her arms and other incapacitating illnesses.⁵⁵ But there were other contributing factors: her mother died in March 1872; her daughter Julie had died in November 1872, the day before Schumann was scheduled to perform with the contralto Amalie Joachim, Joseph Joachim's wife. But, Schumann, not wanting to inconvenience everyone else, told no one and went ahead with the concert;⁵⁶ her father died in October 1873. Schumann was known to maintain an outward appearance of emotional steel, something she had learned as a musician that helped her to prevail over difficulties in her marriage and tide over the passing of her loved ones, including Robert. But the culmination of all these events must certainly have taken its toll, manifesting as physical ailments just as the severe performance anxieties that plagued Schumann in her adolescence were triggered by mental distress but manifested physically. Nonetheless, this slowing down was clearly not her wish, as observed from her letter to Brahms: 'I get so melancholy when I cannot be active ... I have no talent for lazing about.'⁵⁷

In 1873, Schumann transcribed for piano some of Robert's Lieder into the collection, *Trente mélodies de Robert Schumann*, of which 'Widmung' had been the first piece. As previously mentioned, her reasons for this were concerned with controlling his legacy. But, it was not until 1877 that she devoted herself in earnest to editing Robert's collected

⁵⁵ Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 163.

⁵⁶ Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 146.

⁵⁷ Clara Schumann letter to Johannes Brahms, 2 June 1874 in Berthold Litzmann (ed.), *Clara Schumann–Johannes Brahms Briefe aus den Jahren 1853–1896* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927). Cited in Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 163–4.

works. Promoting Robert's works had been one of her later missions and it seems that to this end, Liszt was (quietly) supporting her efforts with his 1874 transcription of Robert's Lieder *and* in the manner of romantic reflection that Schumann thought was befitting to Robert. If we extend this line of reasoning, then it is also no coincidence that Liszt selected Robert's lesser-known Lieder for this purpose—works that could do with more publicity. Meanwhile, it is harder to pinpoint Liszt's reasons for choosing Schumann's three Lieder. Unlike the seven Lieder by Robert, these ones by Schumann are not unknown and certainly not in need of publicity. 'Warum willst du and're fragen', for instance, is also based on Rückert's poetry and is in fact part of the joint publication, *Zwölf Lieder* (Op. 37/12) by the Schumanns. What is stark and common to all three Lieder, however, is their flat keys (A-flat major and D-flat major) that not only stand in contrast to the brighter keys and character of the seven Lieder by Robert, but which also embody a darker hue that encourage introspection. It is perhaps for this reason that Liszt decided on them, for such introspection—as it invites contemplation of the work's spirit and depth—aligned with Schumann's reverence for the work. I suggest that his careful treatment of it demonstrates a deep reverence for her and perhaps a homage to her at a time of transition in Schumann's career.

Interiority and the Boundaries of Virtuosity

This way of labouring over the work, of deliberating on it, corresponds with how Valerie Woodring Goertzen conceptualizes Schumann's creative agency as observed through her 'mosaics' of short pieces for performances. Schumann ordered these short pieces and connected them through improvised preludes, thereby creating a program with contrasting styles, characters, and keys.⁵⁸ Her programming of the mosaics represented acts of compositional agency. Sometimes, this aimed at canon formation, of explicitly connecting her contemporaries and herself with the legacy of Bach and Beethoven. Other times, it involved creating contrasts and connections to highlight the relationships among pieces by different composers.⁵⁹ More germane to my argument here is how

⁵⁸ Goertzen, 'Clara Wieck Schumann's improvisations and Her 'Mosaics' of Small Forms', 153.

⁵⁹ Take for instance Schumann's 1836 concert in Dresden where she programmed four pieces by their keys and created a trajectory towards an exhilarating finish. Bach's Fugue in C-sharp major was followed by the finale of Beethoven's Sonata in F minor, Op. 57 (*Appassionata*), the keys in the two pieces connected by a transition passage based on a diminished seventh chord on E provided by Beethoven. The third piece, Chopin's Nocturne Op. 15, No. 2 in F-sharp major, sets up a contrast in mood. Finally, Schumann brought the mosaic to a dramatic close with Chopin's Etude Op. 10, No. 2 in C minor (*Revolutionary*), a piece that allowed her to showcase her dexterity. In the later stage of her

Schumann ordered these pieces to create a sonic structure that was dramatic and effective for her concerts.⁶⁰ Stefaniak asserts that Schumann created in her mosaics 'trajectories that culminated with dazzling displays of virtuosity'.⁶¹ Such a trajectory of her mosaics is one more way in which we can understand how Stefaniak conceptualizes elevated virtuosity in Schumann. Take for instance an 1840 concert, when Schumann programmed the finale piece to be Liszt's transcription of Schubert's 'Erlkönig'. With its 'thundering rapid-fire octaves', this made for an effective closer to her mosaics.⁶² On other occasions, she also programmed Chopin's Scherzo in B minor, Op. 20 and Robert's 'Traumes Wirren' from *Fantasiestücke* for such endings. If we imagine Liszt's 'Widmung' being performed as a closer, just like his 'Erlkönig', it seems that it could fit quite nicely into the framework of one of Schumann's mosaics. Perhaps if Schumann had experienced it this way, she might have been more receptive to Liszt's 'Widmung'.

Schumann's tolerance of virtuosity is most pronounced when we compare Liszt's transcription of 'Widmung' and 'Erlkönig'. I argue that Schumann would not have been receptive to Liszt's 'Widmung' even as a closer, most notably because its virtuosity, expressed in the spirit of written-out improvisations, would be considered by Schumann to be an affront to the integrity of the work. Whereas the thundering octaves that Stefaniak observes in 'Erlkönig' can be understood as one amongst many other musical elements demanding great facility from the performer for the purpose of dramatizing and evoking the forceful abduction of a child. Liszt retains most of Schubert's musical elements and elevates them. The thundering octaves are present at the outset of Schubert's original as a bass motif and as a single line. Liszt transforms this into octaves in the bass and in doing so brings the motif in tandem with the clearly defined textural density of his transcription.

It is not surprising that Schumann used Liszt's 'Erlkönig' as a closer. The thundering octaves fuelling the aura of fear and foreboding is just one component of the dramatized writing in 'Erlkönig' that would channel her mosaics towards a high finishing point. Liszt clearly juxtaposes the voices of the elf king and the boy. Sustained dissonance in the form of minor seconds is used to portray the boy's protest: E–F in the first and second

mosaics, around 1854, Schumann also began to include Robert's pieces in her programming to promote his music. She conventionalized Robert's pieces to make them more acceptable to the audience, fitting them into a familiar 'lyrical middle-fast finale' pattern found in sonatas and concertos. See Goertzen, 'Clara Wieck Schumann's improvisations and Her 'Mosaics' of Small Forms', 158–62; and Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 139.

⁶⁰ Goertzen, 'Clara Wieck Schumann's improvisations and Her 'Mosaics' of Small Forms', 162.

⁶¹ Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 135.

⁶² Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 134–5. Stefaniak uses the term 'closer' to refer to the culminating piece in Schumann's programming of her mosaics.

instances, and F–G-flat in the third. The jarring dissonance is accentuated because the minor seconds now constitute part of the persistent bass, even if or exactly because, these are in the middle voice. These sections are marked by a deeply unsettling cacophonous sound world that is perhaps metaphorical of the boy's predicament of feeling trapped. As the main melody and minor seconds dissonances are both clustered around the middle-C register, a tension is set up between the two elements, with the main melody competing to be heard. It is almost as if the boy's cries for help are being drowned out. Liszt calls for all three iterations of the boy's protest to be played *precipitato* (rushed, impetuously). This state of frenzy is further intensified by the three-octave leaping figurations in the right hand, dancing around the main melody—demanding of the pianist quick-fire finger work—which can be imagined to embody the boy's desire to escape from the elf king's relentless pursuit.

By contrast, the elf king's attempts at luring the boy are marked by serenity. Here, virtuosity can be understood as legitimized through performance gestures that illustrate the rhetoric of enchantment. In the first appearance of the elf king, Liszt embellishes its melody as arpeggiated chords; the melody rising to the top of the spreading motion of these chords embody a sense of expanding its reach. The expression marking *Misterioso espressivo* (mysteriously and expressively) lends voice to the lusciousness of the arpeggiation. The elf king's second appearance, while less explicit in this endeavour to charm—perhaps because it is losing patience—nonetheless retains some of the sensuous arpeggiation. The markings *leggiero amorosamente* (lightly and tenderly) and *Molto appassionato* (always passionately) on the second and third appearances respectively indicate a sonority consistent with trying to get a tantalizing grip onto the boy.

Schumann must have identified something in Liszt's transcription that she deemed worthy of performing as a closer. Even if, as Stefaniak points out, she withdrew it from her repertoire in 1842 and most often selected closers with light-fingered, quick-silver passagework that were her trademark.⁶³ I propose that Lisztian fingerprints of '*music as experience*' in 'Erlkönig', instead of pursuing the line of transcendence, takes a more literal form of embodied pianism in the physicality of the elf king and boy as attractive and trapped respectively; the arpeggiation directing the elf king's melody and the clashing of hands illustrating the boy's predicament are not only aurally distinct, they are experienced under the pianist's hands. Such performative gestures might have contributed to making 'Erlkönig' more palatable to Schumann. Its virtuosic elements, because they are guided by the original narrative as impetus, can be justified and elevated to the level of interiority. Therefore, I argue that Liszt's stylistic approach in 'Erlkönig' leans towards interiority in its construct because its difficulty of execution

⁶³ Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*, 135.

arises from the contrast in voices set up by the original narrative, while 'Widmung' by association contains a deeply embedded rhetoric of improvisation. Because of this fundamental difference, I maintain that Schumann would not have found 'Widmung' acceptable even as a closer.

What then, can we make of Liszt's 'Widmung' and his transcription of Schumann's three pieces? Do his diverse methods of transcription point to a fickle or experimental nature, that which gives further credence to his predilection for improvisation? I suggest that Liszt was fully aware of his musical decisions and equally devoted as Schumann was to the composers he was transcribing. The diversity that we observe in his transcriptions shows that for him, the notion of 'fidelity to the score' took on a more diverse meaning. While Schumann's *Werktreue* ideals might have drawn her favourably towards one end of the spectrum, the same cannot be said of Liszt. Liszt might have prioritized one over the other but, as Pedroza puts it, he 'did not perceive *music as experience* and *music as ideal* to be in obvious conflict'.⁶⁴ It might be for this reason that Liszt never spoke poorly of Schumann, not even in the later years when, as Schumann's letters and diaries reveal, her disdain for Liszt intensified.

Conclusion

As I hope to have shown, both Schumann and Liszt sought to protect the musical work as they each saw fit, though on different terms. Their individual paths towards Romantic transcendence can be further paved by what Gooley and Pedroza agree is the larger utopian idea of *liberation*: a championing of the high German tradition on the one hand and improvisation's purported freedom of expression on the other.⁶⁵ Because of this divergence, it is unwise to fault either of their approaches or to impose our value judgements too quickly. I suggest that implicit in these tensions is the difficult question of *how* one ought to transcribe. As a way of navigating these tensions, my final point would be to further interrogate the meaning of *Werktreue* and the implications this has on creative agency. To this end, I refer to Peter Szendy's work on listening and transcribing in which he challenges our received notions of the *Werktreue* tradition.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Pedroza, 'Music as *Communitas*', 297. (Emphasis in the original).

⁶⁵ Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation*, 280.

⁶⁶ Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Although Szendy does make some distinction between translation and transcription, especially as it pertains to Liszt, he also classifies arrangements, adaptations, and translations in the same category of derivative works. As it is not essential to the purpose of this article to distinguish between translation and transcription, I have elected to use these terms interchangeably.

A twentieth-century construct that has fossilized the idea of the work, *Werktreue* treats the original as sacred and therefore as something that must be adhered to. Such reverence must be lauded for it protects the work. Yet, it becomes problematic when the significance of fidelity assumes a literalness and subsequent versions of the work are measured by and restricted because of this imposed standard, even if loosely defined. Szendy asserts that translation as an enterprise of *transmission* or *preservation* results in a wrong reading of the Romantic age. This is because for both Robert and Liszt, ‘the original and the arrangement are complementary, contiguous in their incompleteness and their distance from the essence of the work’. And this essence, far from being established in the original, is held in suspense, endlessly deferred, and in fact relies on translation to set into motion a continuous search for the work’s meaning.⁶⁷ Szendy also triangulates this with Robert’s position as a music critic: translations are a form of music criticism that explore the potential of the work and bring it on a path towards (not to) completion.⁶⁸ Essentially, Szendy turns the *Werktreue* ideology on its head. If a work is never complete or fixed to begin with, then how appropriate or productive is it to speak of being faithful to it? Similarly, Holly Watkins reminds us that Robert ‘did not believe musical works possessed a single meaning ... the appeal of Schumann’s [Robert’s] music lies not in its meaning, but in its promise of meaning’.⁶⁹

In the same way that Szendy’s work implicitly argues for a more elastic meaning of *Werktreue*, I suggest that the notion of ‘fidelity to the score’ or ‘faithfulness’ to the work should not be taken too literally. Instead, it can be understood as acceding to the request to set the work on its endlessly deferred path towards completion. And if this entails exploring myriad possibilities of the work, then we ought to permit multiple ways of transcription that reveal the work’s plurality of meaning and henceforth its greatest potential. Indeed, we saw that the act of transcribing took on different meaning for Schumann and Liszt. This more diverse understanding of *Werktreue* seems to justify Liszt’s ‘Widmung’ in that he builds on Robert’s work to explore its fuller potential as a song of love. Yet, I argue that this equally valorizes Schumann’s efforts. There is nothing to say that a transcription cannot turn a work in another direction: making the work simpler to reveal its building blocks to let Robert’s voice be heard with greater clarity; something that had been one of Schumann’s missions. If we subscribe to Szendy’s idea of transcriptions as a measure of a work’s plasticity,⁷⁰ then a work’s ability to seek

⁶⁷ Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, 38.

⁶⁸ Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, 61.

⁶⁹ Holly Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: From E. T. A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 87.

⁷⁰ Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, 36.

meaning in all sorts of directions points to its translatability. This translatability, to Szendy, reflects the work's value. If that is the measure, then both Schumann's and Liszt's transcriptions are composite in creating meaning; in expressing Robert's 'Romantic ideal of open-ended, unlimited depth'.⁷¹

Finally, this brings us back to address the notion of 'fidelity to the score' and what this means for creative agency. Having seen the interactions and responses between Schumann and Liszt, as well as the ideology bound up with these decisions, I argue that music on the page alone is inconclusive in determining creative agency. Both the examples from Schumann and Liszt demonstrated the wealth that a simple transcription might reveal when it is considered in its wider context. Rather than dismissing its simplicity and calling into question the composer's creative agency, such anomaly within a composer's output should in turn prompt a circumspect investigation. Schumann's ability to demonstrate multiple ways of responding to a given text, in the form of transcribing, improvising cadenzas or programming mosaics, shows that she was able to pull out the appropriate set of tools for a given occasion. And these tools were carefully selected, even at times withheld, out of reverence for the works she was dealing with. In this sense, Schumann's reputation as priestess still holds and I would argue, assumes an elevated position when we permit a macroscopic vantage point that encompasses her conviction in establishing the German canon and asserting her place in it, as well as her steadfast opposition to Liszt. But this can only happen when we are willing to acknowledge the elasticity of *Werktreue*: what our received notions tell us, but also with consideration of the broader currents and issues surrounding nineteenth-century aesthetics relating to the work. Without doing so, the description of Schumann as 'faithful to the score' runs the risk of presenting as uninspiring banality, which cannot be further from the truth because in the larger scheme of things, it is clear that Schumann exercised so much creative agency across a variety of outputs.

I hope to have demonstrated that by comparing the transcriptions of Schumann and Liszt, as well as their responses to one another's musical practice, a richer and more dynamic picture emerges that would not have been possible if Schumann's work was considered as discreet and separate from Liszt. From such comparison, subtleties of virtuosity emerge that can be further nuanced into interiority and improvisation, and yet these strands evince a continuous relationship within the discourse. If we must insist on demarcations within these strands of virtuosity, then such boundaries must remain dynamic rather than static, and they must be allowed to shift according to one's *Werktreue* ideal. Only from such comparison does Schumann's *Werktreue* materialize more visibly. Furthermore, the interactions between both composers are not only a

⁷¹ Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought*, 87.

crucial part of the historical account, they cannot be ignored because fundamentally, Schumann's resistance to certain aspects of Liszt's work must have had a formative influence on her own *Werktreue* ideology. Without the counter-figure of Liszt, it might have been unlikely that Schumann's *Werktreue* ideology would have taken shape the way it did. If this is the case, then the tensions arising from these interactions are of great historical interest and point to Schumann's artistry side-by-side with Liszt.

Deirdre Toh

University of California, Irvine.