

The ERL KING – Franz Schubert

WARNING: The following analysis is by my esteemed colleague Dennis Foster and is EXTREMELY detailed. You will most likely only need to know a fraction of this information for your exam!

Please note there is also a great interpretation of lyrics by Dennis, available for download from www.blitzbooks.com.au

The Basics

Poem by: *Goethe*

Song type: *German Lieder*

Key signature: *2 flats (G minor)*

Music by: *Franz Schubert*

Song form: *Through-composed*

Time signature: *C (common time, 4/4)*

Special features: *One singer has to use his or her voice to depict the 4 different characters of the song, Narrator, Father, Son and Erlkonig. The long passages of unison octaves and chord triplets in the RH make this a difficult and tiring song for accompanists to play.*

Section	Poem	Vocal line	Piano accompaniment	Dynamics
Stanza 1 (Bars 1-32) G minor	Narrator sets the scene. It's late on a windy night. Someone is galloping past – a father, holding his son close to him.	The calm melody is composed of scale note steps and arpeggio leaps. Mostly set in middle register of the singer's voice.	15 bar introduction establishes the quaver triplet rhythm that is the rhythmic foundation of the accompaniment: The triplets represent the galloping horse, but also create an agitated, rushing mood. RH chords in quaver triplets. LH rising triplet motif that increases tension. It could represent a gust of wind or the father's unspoken fears.	f
Stanza 2 (Bars 33-54) G minor	L1: Father–worried over what is upsetting his son L2-3: Son – tells father he sees the Erlking L4:Father–Tries to calm boy, says he can only see mist	Father: Melody in lower register, starts with leap of 4 th (D-G) rises mostly by step. Son: Melody in higher register of singer's voice. Many leaps of 5ths and 6ths. Semitone step from C –Db (eg at words <i>den Erlkonig</i>) is a distinguishing feature of the boy's melody.	2 bar introduction. Father: RH unison octaves and chords in quaver triplets. LH silent or long note. Absence of rising figure when father speaks. Son: RH chords in quaver triplets, LH rising quaver triplets and long notes (semibreves and minims)	pp
Stanza 3 (Bars 55-71) Bb major (relative major)	L1-4 Erlking–luring boy with prospect of games and flowers	A tuneful and lyrical melody. Wide vocal range. Rhythmically diverse, dotted minims, crotchets, quavers, quaver triplet.	3 bar intro. Quaver triplets divided between hands, First quaver of triplet in LH unison octaves. Second and third quavers in RH filling out the harmony of the chord	pp
Stanza 4 (Bars 71-84) B minor/ E minor	L1-2: Son–tells father that he hears Erlking speaking L3-4: Father–tries to calm boy, says he hears only the rustling of dried leaves blowing in the wind	Son: Semitone step at <i>Mein Vater</i> raised a tone, now D-Eb. Melody in upper register. Except for one leap, vocal line moves in semi-tone steps Father: Starts with leaps of 4 th (F#-B) then moves mostly by step or chord note.	Half a bar intro. Son - RH unison octaves (d-D) quaver triplets; LH unison octaves or single notes. A very spare accompaniment, often only 2 notes that do not always define tonality. Conveying the idea that the boy is leaving the solidity of life on earth. Father: LH-Solid long-held bass notes; RH chords in triplets, defining tonality. Conveys the idea that father is staying in the living world.	f

<p>Stanza 5 (Bars 85-95) C major</p>	<p>L1-4: Erlking – Again trying to entice boy to go with him, speaks about his daughters and the fun they will all have together.</p>	<p>A lyrical, jolly melody, marked <i>ppp</i>. The meoldy and quiet volume perfectly match the Erlking's sneaky attempts to trick the boy into going with him to the land of the dead.</p>	<p>2 bars intro. RH arpeggio notes in triplets. LH: Lines 1 and 2, quaver note on each beat, unison octaves or single notes on root of the chord. Lines 3 and 4, unison octaves on root of chord but different rhythm, Regular quaver on the beat in LH of L1-2 is comforting, but the more insistent rhythm increases tension, as the Erlking begins to lose patience with the boy.</p>	<p><i>ppp</i></p>
<p>Stanza 6 (Bars 96-111) E major</p>	<p>L1-2 Son – child asks Father if he can see the Erlking's daughters waiting for him. L3-4 – Father says he can see things clearly, but there are no daughters where the boy is looking, just willow trees.</p>	<p>Son: The same vocal line as the boys last words (Stanza 4) but raised a semitone. Semitones at <i>Mein Vater</i> are now E-F. The rise in pitch conveys the boy's heightened fears. Father: Father's last words. The melody moves to and from chord notes only.</p>	<p>Son – similar to Stanza 4, but raised a semitone. RH unison octaves (e-E) triplets; LH unison octaves or single notes. A very spare accompaniment, conveying the idea that the boy losing the battle for life. Father – RH some unison octaves but mostly chords. LH single long notes (semibreves, minims) or silence.</p>	<p><i>f</i> decresc.</p>
<p>Stanza 7 (Bars 112-130) D minor</p>	<p>L1-2: Erlking – Says he loves the boy, but if he doesn't agree to come willingly he'll be taken by force. L3-4: Son- Terrified. Screams the news that the Erlking has grabbed him and he is hurting.</p>	<p>Erlking: L1 is Erlking's last tuneful pretence. L2 moves in chromatic steps. These lines convey the idea that Erlking has lost patience and will take the boy by force. Son: The <i>Mein Vater</i> phrase (L3) same as in Stanza 4 and 6 but raised a further semitone, now F-Gb. L4 reaches climax of song. Set in high register of voice, loud. The phrase 'dies away' from 'g' above the staff to 'G' at middle of staff, an octave lower. The boy's screaming and death are drowned out by the galloping hooves and the wind.</p>	<p>5 bars intro –RH unison octaves, LH rising motif. Starts <i>ff</i>, moves to <i>p</i> for Erlking's entry. Erlking: RH unison octaves then chords in triplets. Mostly <i>p</i>, but at Erlking's final word <i>Gewalt</i> the accompaniment erupts from <i>p</i> to <i>fff</i> for the climax of the song. Son: Marked <i>fff</i>. RH mostly unison octaves. <i>sf</i> on the first and third beats accent the strong beats of the last 3 bars of the boy's words</p>	<p><i>pp</i> <i>fff</i></p>
<p>Stanza 8 (Bars 130-147) G minor</p>	<p>L1-4: Narrator – Tells of the Father riding like the wind and finally reaching the safety he was seeking. The boy in his arms is dead.</p>	<p>Wide range starting at D below the staff, rising to g above staff at word <i>ächzende</i> (moaning), then moving back to end on the D below the staff, the dominant of the tonic key G minor. Recitative: 1st inversion Ab major chord played in both hands for half a bar. Voice enters as the notes of the chord die away, then continues unaccompanied. A pause over a <i>Dim7th</i> leads to the final vocal cadence but the accompaniment must finish the song.</p>	<p>The accompaniment of the last verse is very exciting. It starts with both hands playing a bar of unison octaves of G. RH some chords in triplets and unison octaves. LH mostly unison octaves, sometimes the rising motif. Chromatic octaves from C to Ab. The last six words of the song are set as a <i>recitativo secco</i>. After the constant driving triplets of earlier parts, the simple chords and silences under the voice increase the drama. There is no comforting postlude, an abrupt perfect cadence finishes the song. We are left in shock like the father.</p>	<p><i>f</i> accelerando sf sf fp pp p Andante f</p>