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MUTH 3510 Form Analysis

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Analysis of Robert Schumann's "*Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen*" from *Dichterliebe*

Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen is the 12th song of Robert Schumann's most famous song cycle titled *Dichterliebe*. The direct English translation is "*In the bright morning sun.*" Although it may seem to have such an uplifting title, I find this song to be quite the opposite. As the musical poet Schumann was, he tactfully implements a wide array of musical qualities in order to compliment such delicate lyrics. In doing so, he was able to create a story out of such a simple poem. Thus, the analysis in this paper will focus primarily on how the popular German augmented 6th chord plays an essential role in structuring the form of this song; as well as extending ideas from Arthur Komar's book *Dichterliebe: An Authoritative Score, Historical Background, Essays in Analysis, and Views and Comments*¹ in order to successfully interpret the rhythmic, harmonic, and intervallic detail used to carve an image along with the lyrics.

Oddly enough, Schumann decided to begin the song with an unstable German 6th chord and instead of immediately resolving to its I6/4 chord, it is repeated again but one octave above the original. Interestingly enough, if these two particular 6th chords were to be stacked from the root to the augmented 6th (as shown in example 1), an additional note would remain at the top of the chord: Bb.

¹Komar's book argues that Schumann's 16 song cycle, *Dichterliebe*, is actually one long song divided into sections through rhythmic, harmonic, and thematic variety. It is up to the listener to determine what, where, how, or why each piece may be connected or not connected to each other. Komar gives 7 different ideas on how the *Dichterliebe* is constructed and musically presents them to you song by song carefully analyzing the possible "plan" that Schumann put in place.

Ex. 1

Ger+6 I6/4 V7 I

This Bb can be viewed as a “hint” to what the intended key is. Although it is a very brief moment, the combination of this 6th chord with a top tone of the root creates a “head turning” experience of what’s to follow. The following 3 measures of I6/4 – V7 – I establishes that we are in the key of Bb Major.

As mentioned above, the translation of “Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen” is “In the bright morning sun.” I believe Schumann’s intention for the “falling” 16th note lines help to create a scene of “dew drops falling off leaves in the morning sun.” Each of these groups of 5 16th notes are completed by the root (majority of the time, unless preceded by a German 6th) of the next chord as the “dew drops hit the ground.” These groups of notes are repeated over and over throughout the song in order to continue a dream like experience for the character as he walks around the garden.

Measure 4 implements a common technique of a suspended note. As the bass holds the root of the subdominant at beat 1, the vocals begin with the word “morgen” on the 4th degree of that chord and create a suspension for a moment until resolving to the 3rd in which the piano follows with the completion of the IV chord with the usual 16th notes. This same technique is applied at measure 14, but interestingly enough is implemented on a different word: *Blumen* or flowers.

At this point, between measures 4 and 6, there is a very flowing chord progression of IV – V4/3/ii – ii – V7 – I. As shown in example 2, there is small contrasting movement between the bass and top quarter notes of the piano part.

Ex.2

IV V4/3/ii ii V7 I

This motion flows directly into the lyrics of “geh’ ich im Garten herum” or “I walk about the garden;” and combined with the chord progression, makes the perfect flowing movement of the character walking. The groups of 16th notes also support the image of a person walking, while the downbeats of the bass depict the heavy steps of his anger. As this phrase is resolved to tonic, another German 6th chord is thrown into the mix to keep the quality of a dreamland alive.

Again, like the first 6th chord, the Bb takes priority at the top of the descending 16th note line, but this time it is only played once and quickly resolves back to tonic in 2nd inversion. These German 6th chords, which also appear 4 more times in the song, act as dividers between every two lines of lyrics (with exception of the last A”), possibly suggesting a form as in Example 3 below.

Ex. 3

Mm: 3-7 A 7-11 A’ 13-16 A 17-20 A”
Gr+6 / Morgen-herum Gr+6 / Blumen-stumm Gr+6 / Blumen-an I4/2+5 / bese-mann Gr+6

In example 4, A' includes a dominant 7th chord that resembles a German 6th chord but does not resolve like one. Rather, it modulates to a weak Cb Major due to a missing 3rd in the first group of 16th notes, and the presence of an A. The instant modulation from Bb to Cb causes a rise in motion (the 2nd degree is held as a suspended note and calmly resolves to root) as the “flowers whisper and talk” giving hope to the angered character, but immediately tonicizes back down to Bb while he resumes “walking in silence.”

As this section comes to a close on I, Komar notices a “[c]urious rhythmic detail that occurs in m. 11. Except for the last eight measures, each measure contains two groups of five sixteenth notes. The first note of each group is held as a quarter note, with just one exception: m. 11, where the second sixteenth note, Bb, is held” (Komar 86-87). Indeed this entire work is made up of groups of 5 16th notes, but Komar takes the analysis one step further by noticing such a minute detail as shown in the example below.

Ex. 5

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass, in 6/8 time. Measures 10 and 11 are indicated above the staff. Measure 10 is labeled 'V7' and measure 11 is labeled 'I'. In measure 11, the first sixteenth note is a quarter note (Bb), and the second sixteenth note is also a quarter note (Bb), which is circled. The rest of the measure consists of eighth notes. The bass staff shows a simple accompaniment pattern.

Komar goes on to explain that the “[r]etention of Bb supports the voice’s cadential Bb, while the rhythmic placement of D provides a resolution for the preceding Eb at an appropriate attack-point” (Komar 87). Although very transparent, the quarter note on the second 16th note plays a vital role in strengthening the resolution of I. Since Bb is the root, it is only natural to

emphasize this fact especially after two measures of an unstable key (Cb), thus not allowing the D to be the “heard” note but just a passing resolution for Eb.

While A' has its own modulation, A'' also has a brief moment in another key but rather than being weak, it has a floating tendency due to a sustained G in the bass. This little section is a brief modulation to the relative minor of Bb. Although it does not begin with G Minor; but in G Major using the modally altered 3rd; it effectively strengthens the vocals. Mm. 8-11 and 17-20 are very much alike not in harmonies, but rather in melody, as in example 6.

Ex.6

8 9 10 11

Es flustern und sprechen die Blumen...

17 18 19 20

Sei unserer Schwester nicht böse...

What is musically effective in mm. 17-20, is that it is essentially a half step above 8-11. While the lyrics of mm. 8-11 are “the flowers are whispering and talking,” mm. 17-20 describe the flowers *telling* the poor man “Don’t be angry with our sister, you doleful, pale man” as if they were looking down upon him, hence the step up.

The postlude of this song is basically a recapitulation of what happened to the man in misery. Essentially, with the use of irregularly resolved German 6th chords, this postlude depicts the man walking away into the rising sun with no future. As far as the poetry itself, the German 6th chords played an important role in determining a structural form, both harmonically and rhythmically while at the same time kept a feeling of anticipation throughout the song.