

Models and Analogies of the cycle *Bardenklänge*, by J. K. Mertz

Piano Miniature as a Model

The contexts of Mertz's musical language are primarily found in the piano miniature, which often blends with the instrumental genre known as the *Charakterstück* (character piece)¹. Characteristic pieces in early Romanticism overlap with their vocal counterparts, such as songs, or better known as German *Lied*. This instrumental genre is closely linked with its Romantic composers, among whom Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Chopin stand out. Although initially drawing from the principles of Baroque affective theory and following the works of French harpsichordists (e.g., Gottlieb Christian Füger's *Charakteristische Clavierstücke*, 1784), this instrumental genre quickly modernized and entered the Romantic era, especially in the works of Václav Jan Tomášek (1774–1850)².

In this context, it's impossible to overlook the Irish composer John Field (1782–1837), who is considered the creator of the *nocturne*, characterized by a *chanter* melody over an arpeggiated accompaniment. His unique style soon gained admirers. It finds its essence in ostinato patterns, melodies enriched with chromaticism, and above all in a specific sonority achieved through sensitive use of the pedal. After Field, who composed 18 nocturnes (1812–1836), Chopin brought this genre to its peak, creating 21 nocturnes between 1830 and 1848. Carl Czerny (1845–1848) also composed piano nocturnes in Vienna. Franz Liszt honored Field's nocturnes in the preface to a new edition from 1859, where he praised his art as: "... *vague eolian harmonies, these half-formed sighs floating through the air, softly lamenting and dissolved in delicious melancholy*."³

Fully developed characteristic piano miniatures, closely linked with vocal songs, appeared throughout the first half of the 19th century in the works of Schubert, Mendelssohn, his sister Fanny, Schumann, and Chopin. Since Mertz, thanks to his rich connections with both the Bratislava and Vienna musical circles, undoubtedly had access to piano and song literature, it is understandable that the models for his characteristic guitar compositions came from the works of these composers. Furthermore, two facts cannot be ignored. Mertz's wife, Josephine, was a concert pianist, so this music must have been present in their household. Additionally, since 1838, when Mertz's first opus was printed in Vienna, he maintained close ties with the Tobias

¹ More at: BROWN, Maurice, J. E.: *Characteristic [character-] piece* (Ger. *CHARAKTERSTÜCK*). In: Grove Music Online.

² *Eclogues* op. 35, 39, 47, 51, 63, 66, 83, *Rhapsodies*, op. 40 – 41, *Ditirambi*, op. 65

³ LISZT, Franz: Introduction / Vorwort to: *John Field – 18 Nocturnes*. Edícia Franz Liszt. Lipsko: J. Schuberth & Co., b.d. Edícia Schuberth č. 140. 1859. Accessed: <[https://imslp.org/wiki/18_Nocturnes_\(Field,_John\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/18_Nocturnes_(Field,_John))>

and Carl Haslinger publishing house, which could have provided him with the scores of these works.

Analogies in European Romantic Music

The *Bardenklänge* cycle was created in close proximity to Mertz's arrangements of Schubert's music⁴. In connection with the cycle's title, as well as some of its individual pieces, notable analogies can be found with the songs of Franz Schubert. One of the ten Ossianic songs (1815), Schubert titled *Bardengesang* (Song of the Bard, D 147), and among his other songs, we find titles like *Abendlied* (D. 516), *An die Entfernte*, *Gebet*, or *Sehnsucht* (D. 123, D. 636). Astrid Stempnik identifies such clear thematic parallels between Mertz's *Tarantella* and the final movement of Schubert's String Quartet, op. 161, D 887. She considers this movement a model and explores how Mertz could have come into contact with the score of this string quartet, which was premiered in 1850 and published a year later⁵.

Lieder ohne Worte (Songs Without Words), the characteristic piano genre of Felix Mendelssohn, intended for amateur players, clearly became a model for Mertz's guitar miniatures in *Bardenklänge*. Mendelssohn published eight volumes in total, each containing six pieces. The first volume, titled *6 Original Melodies for the Piano-forte* op. 19, was published in London in 1832, and its opus number corresponds to the songs *Sechs Gesänge*, op. 19, which Mendelssohn composed during the same period. The non-musical character is generally not explicitly acknowledged, and the composer's titles for the pieces are rarely found (most of the known titles were added later by the publishers). Mendelssohn also found inspiration in the polyphonic textures of Baroque keyboard music, and it is clear that he was familiar with the music of Bach and Scarlatti. Salvoni⁶ has no doubt about the influence of Mendelssohn's miniatures on Mertz's *An Malvina*, *Abendlied*, *An die Entfernte*, *Gondoliera*, and *Gebeth*. The phrases built over a defining bass and the frequent presence of polyphonic structures are decisive qualities of many pieces in *Bardenklänge*, confirming the closeness between Mertz's and Mendelssohn's musical languages.

In connection with Mendelssohn, an undeniable analogy can be made with a reference to the natural monument on the uninhabited Scottish island of Staffa, *Fingal's Cave*, which was the source of inspiration for perhaps the most famous Ossianic composition, the orchestral overture *The Hebrides* (1829). Felix Mendelssohn, along with his friend Karl Klingemann, visited Staffa

⁴ 6 *Schubert'sche Lieder* (1845), *Beliebte Gesänge mit Begleitung der Gitarre* (1847)

⁵ STEMPIK, Astrid: *Caspar Joseph Mertz: Leben und Werk des letzten Gitarristen im österreichischen Biedermeier, Eine Studie über den Niedergang der Gitarre in Wien um 1850*. [PhD Thesis.] Berlin: Freien Universität Berlin, 1989, p. 333.

⁶ SALVONI, Graziano: *Caspar Joseph Mertz: L'ultimo Pionierre della Chitarra a Vienna – La Vita, I Concerti, Le Opere*. Lulu.com, 2021, c. d., 2021, p. 236.

and the famous Fingal's Cave in stormy weather on August 7, 1829, an experience he vividly described in a hotel in Glasgow three days later (August 10, 1829).

In our context, an interesting detail is Mendelssohn's visit to Pressburg (Bratislava) in 1830. At the time, he was still struggling to complete his Ossianic overture and visited the city during the coronation of Ferdinand V. The 21-year-old composer, in a letter to his brother dated September 27 and 28, describes the city, its people, the course of the coronation, and his personal impressions and experiences during his stay in great detail.⁷

Almost all studies of Mertz's music also find parallels with the piano music of Robert Schumann. Simon Wynberg, the editor of the first modern complete edition of Mertz's works, mentions Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* op. 6 (1837) and *Kinderszenen* op. 15 (1838), where Mertz could have found a model for his *Elfenreigen*, *Kindermärchen*, or refers to other similarities in titles with Schumann's *Abendlied* (op. 107/6 (1851), op. 85/2 (1849))⁸. Unlike Schumann, who conceived his *op. 15* as a collection intended to cyclically connect individual pieces on various levels⁹, Mertz's cycle lacks such relationships, and the unifying aspect remains primarily the theme of Ossianic tradition.

There are also notable similarities at multiple levels with the generation-younger American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869), whose talent was recognized in Paris by Chopin and Liszt. His piano miniatures, of which he composed more than one hundred, follow the European piano tradition but are enriched with his " *New World sense of adventure alongside the vernacular melodies of New Orleans streets, South American dance halls and North American music halls*".¹⁰ In our context, it is worth noting his *Danse Ossianic* op. 12 (ca. 1850), and especially *Ossian: deux Ballades pour piano* op. 4 (1846/1847, published in Paris in 1850), which, with their texture, strikingly resemble the song-like pieces in Mertz's *Bardenklänge*.

⁷ MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY, Felix: *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy from Italy and Switzerland*. Boston, Oliver Ditson – Co. Accessed: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/39384/pg39384-images.html>

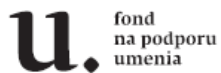
⁸ WYNBERG, Simon: *Johann Kaspar Mertz. Zv. I – X* (Notes in collected publication of the cycle by pub. Chanterelle Verlag). London, 1985, s. II, III.

⁹ KNECHTGES-OBRECHT, Irmgard: *Robert Schumann op. 15*. Accessed: <https://www.schumann-portal.de/op-15.html>

¹⁰ ZOVLUCK, Ileen: *Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Piano Music*. Booklet of CD Naxos 8.559145

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