The Performer's Creative Voice in the Late Nineteenth-Century: A Reimagined Portrayal of Schubert's *Four Impromptus* Op. 90

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Abstract

This Artistic Research project focuses on the recomposition of Schubert's *Four Impromptus*, Op. 90, foregrounding the performer's transformative role as a co-author. It explores the integration of preludes and interludes, drawing on the nineteenth-century ideal of creative autonomy, where the performer's artistic agency stands on equal footing with that of the composer.

Building on this perspective, the project aims to construct a continuous musical discourse that links the *Impromptus* into a unified expressive arc. Central to this conception is the figure of the Romantic wanderer—a recurring archetype in Schubert's oeuvre—which anchors the narrative interpretation. Historical sources play a pivotal role in this process, not merely justifying interpretive choices but serving as points of departure for innovative re-readings of the work. They foster a creative engagement with the past that challenges conventional approaches to the canonical repertoire.

This process of recomposition sheds light on how artistic practice emerges from an hermeneutic dialogue with the work, its historical contexts, and performance traditions. Both the written commentary and the recordings serve as tangible outcomes of this enquiry.

Keywords: performer's autonomy; wanderer archetype; Liszt transcriptions; narrative plot; Schubert's *Impromptus* Op.90.

Introduction

This article explores the expressive and narrative dimensions of Franz Schubert's *Impromptus*, Op. 90 by integrating newly composed preludes and interludes informed by Franz Liszt's compositional aesthetics. Using cultural archetypes such as the Romantic wanderer as thematic anchors, it seeks to articulate the *Four Impromptus* as a unified narrative journey. Liszt's role is central to this approach, particularly through his transcriptions and editorial practices, where Schubert's works often function as points of departure for creative reconfiguration. Drawing on Liszt's expanded treatment of texture, articulation, dynamics, and silence, this study applies these stylistic principles to generate compositional interventions that enhance the emotional resonance and structural unity of the four *Impromptus*, reframing them as a continuous dramatic trajectory.

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In this context, the following research question emerges: In what ways might the integration of preludes and interludes—grounded in Liszt pianism and shaped by the narrative impulse of the Romantic wanderer—contribute to a hermeneutic framework for reinterpreting Schubert's *Impromptus*, Op. 90, fostering a dialogical engagement with their narrative potential, formal coherence, and expressive identity?

This question builds on a broader conception of the performer's agency, informed by Liszt's creative ethos. His approach emphasized the performer's role not merely as an interpreter seeking fidelity to the text, but as a composer-like figure, where the performance itself was considered "incomplete" without the performer's imaginative participation in recomposing (Sham 2018, 113).

This understanding of the performer also shaped the practices of nineteenth-century figures such as Carl Czerny, who demonstrated how preluding and improvisation became central to performance. Recent scholarship, notably Myriam Pias's (2020) study, highlights how Czerny's improvised preludes enhanced audience engagement by deepening the emotional connection to specific compositions. Such developments challenge traditional views of textual fidelity, particularly those reflected in what Nicholas Cook (2013) terms the "paradigm of reproduction"—a model in which meaning is understood as inherent in the musical work and merely transmitted by the performer. In contrast, this study embraces a more creative understanding of performance, in which interpretation becomes an active site of artistic agency.

The present work begins with a critical review of current scholarship in Artistic Research, highlighting key debates, methodological approaches, and theoretical frameworks—particularly those engaging with creative processes such as recomposition and historically informed interpretation. It then introduces the concept of hermeneutic interplay as the central theoretical orientation, framing a dynamic dialogue with conceptual models that inform the creative process. The discussion proceeds with an overview of the expressive trajectories in Schubert's *Impromptus*, Op. 90, emphasizing the role of preludes and interludes in shaping their dramatic flow and contributing to a unified narrative arc. Subsequent commentaries examine each *Impromptu* individually, analyzing their thematic, formal, and affective dimensions. The study concludes with a detailed reflection on the creative process behind the composition of preludes and interludes, focusing on their function as narrative and connective elements that guide the listener's experience through an evolving interpretive path.

Ongoing Debates and Practices in Artistic Research

Recent developments in Artistic Research—particularly those redefining the boundaries between performance and composition—have renewed critical attention to historical notions such as the performer's creative agency and, more specifically, to the nineteenth-century practices of improvisation and recomposition.

Building on these traditions, contemporary creative interventions—including the crafting of preludes and interludes—are increasingly recognized within academic contexts as strategies for questioning and expanding conventional music performance practices. Their impact is particularly evident when engaging with canonical works, as they not only reconfigure the

performer's role but also re-contextualize these compositions considering new aesthetic interpretations. As particular examples, scholars such as Anna Scott, Paulo de Assis, and Luca Chiantore have made significant contributions through various innovative approaches. For instance, Anna Scott's *Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity* (2014), challenges conventional interpretations by examining early recordings from Brahms's inner circle, notably from pianists such as Clara Schumann's students. Scott's work highlights how these recordings reveal interpretative practices that depart from contemporary performance conventions, encouraging performers to adopt more flexible, improvisatory approaches that were common during Brahms's time but have been largely forgotten.

Paulo de Assis, in *Logic of Experimentation* (2018), advocates for a radical shift away from the traditional pursuit of historical authenticity. Instead, he promotes a "logic of experimentation," where performers, as co-creators, are encouraged to engage in experimental, non-prescriptive interpretations of musical works. De Assis's methodology treats performance as a form of research, emphasizing the creation of new, divergent experiences rather than reproducing the work as a fixed entity.

In this context, Luca Chiantore's *InVERSIONS* project (2020) explores creative interventions by integrating extemporaneous elements and generating new versions that engage in dialogue with the original text, challenging the authority of the score through practices of improvisation and recomposition. For example, in his *InVERSION* of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 53 (commonly known as the "Waldstein" Sonata), Chiantore adds improvised fermatas, reimagines cadenzas, and includes previously discarded versions of movements, all of which engage in a dynamic conversation with the original. His aim is to re-contextualize these canonical compositions, not by seeking historical authenticity, but by opening them up to new, experimental possibilities that allow performers to act as co-creators in reshaping their expressive architecture. This exploration of creative interventions is also shared by performers like Josep Colom, who incorporates interludes and improvisations in his Chopin performances, revealing the potential of such practices to redefine the relationship between performer, work, and audience (Colom, 2020). Further extensions of this line of inquiry can be seen in Carles Blanch's improvisations for the vihuela (2018) and Ruth Mareen's research on classical improvisation methods for the violin (2023), both of which emphasize the re-signification of performance practice as a space for innovation and creativity.[1]

Building on these innovative approaches, my work proposes the composition of preludes as a means of intensifying the emotional connection with the work's opening, while the interludes function as pivotal nexuses that trace the psychological transformation of themes across a continuous discourse. These interventions are presented alongside a set of semiotic tools that clarify the decision-making processes underlying my creative practice. Central to this approach is the concept of hermeneutic interplay, which fosters a dynamic dialogue shaping the construction of a network of cross-referential relationships and contributing to the development of knowledge rooted in scholarly discourse and critical reflection. This exchange has been pivotal in shaping the conceptual foundations of my interpretative framework, encouraging engagement with cross-disciplinary associations, shared themes, and expressive reinterpretations, while integrating critical perspectives.

1. For a more extensive discussion of works following this line of research, see López-Cano and San Cristóbal (2014, 83-122). Models of such works can also be found in López-Cano (2024, 215-447).

Hermeneutic Interplay

As a theoretical framework, hermeneutic interplay refers to a dynamic process of dialogical engagement with musical texts in relation to their broader historical and aesthetic contexts. This involves tracing thematic resonances, identifying intertextual analogies, and applying hermeneutic tools to reframe established interpretations and open new pathways for meaning—while also exploring aesthetic relationships to reveal their reciprocal significance.

Building on this idea, Richard Kramer's (2016, 115) model of a "hermeneutical theatre" parallels a framework where compositions engage in a dialogic conversation through a shared lexicon of tropes and expressive figures. In particular, Kramer suggests that Schubert's works transcend their individual boundaries, resonating collectively like characters in a play whose voices interact and enrich the interpretive process. This is exposed through his exploration of interconnecting Franz Bruchmann's *Schwestergruß*, D 762, and Schubert's G major Piano Sonata, D 894. In this relationship, Kramer uncovers how the shared lexicon between vocal and instrumental works creates a "hearing of the poem that is not there," allowing the listener to engage in an interpretation that goes beyond the literal text, suggesting deeper narrative connections within Schubert's oeuvre. Additionally, Joe Davies's (2019, 303) exploration of intertextual connections complements Kramer's ideas by delving into how Schubert's instrumental works communicate through recurring motifs and thematic parallels. Davies's analysis of the dialogue between the *Adagio* of the String Quintet in C major, D 956, and the *Andantino* of the Piano Sonata in A major, D 959, uncovers shared aesthetic qualities, adding to the network of conversations between Schubert's instrumental works.

At the center of the various sources examined here lies the archetype of the Romantic wanderer—a recurring figure in Schubert's oeuvre who embodies the marginalized individual's search for belonging and serves as a key reference point in shaping my narrative conception. This figure reflects a complex relationship between humanity and nature, one marked by distance and impersonality—a central theme in Romantic period literature. The tension between the inner world and external reality, alongside the oscillation between presence and absence, resonates deeply with this archetype, frequently engaging with the quintessential Romantic aesthetic of "longing for the infinite" (*Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen*).[2] The poet and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel defined this aesthetic as the longing "for something that we, as finite humans, can never possess, but which guides our search for knowledge and leads to the insight that the search is all we can hope for, not the possession" (Schlegel in Frank 2004, 21).

In the context of Schubert's oeuvre, the wanderer archetype holds a relevant role, as its expressive character informs works such as *Der Wanderer*, D 489 (1816), and in song cycles like *Die schöne Müllerin*, D 795 (1823), *Winterreise*, D 911 (1827), and *Schwanengesang*, D 957 (1829). Moreover, as Fisk (2001, 1–23) suggests, this archetype also permeates Schubert's instrumental compositions, including the *Impromptus*, Op. 90, the *Wanderer Fantasy*, D 760 (1822), and the late piano sonatas D 958, D 959, and D 960.[3]

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2. Manfred Frank's work provides a comprehensive survey of the notion of longing in German Romanticism. As Frank highlights, 'The early German Romantics, in reference to this infinite project, spoke of the "longing for the infinite" (*Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen*)' (Frank 2004, 55).

3. Charles Fisk observes how gestural content, tonal conflicts, and cyclic procedures in Schubert's *Winterreise* cycle relate to themes of exile and homecoming, which reappear in his later instrumental works. For a detailed discussion, see Fisk (2001).

Of particular interest is how Schubert gives expressive shape to this archetype through specific compositional strategies, employing devices such as subtle chordal progressions, dactylic rhythmic patterns,[4] diminished harmonies, chromatic modulations, and the persistent presence of a perpetually moving note—all serving to evoke the character's psychological transformation and enhance the wanderer's evolving emotional landscape (López Cano 2020, 334).

In expanding the concept of constructing a narrative centered around the Romantic wanderer as a protagonist—my interest in this figure also extends to Liszt's reimaginings, particularly his transcriptions of Schubert's Lieder and his editorial contributions to Schubert's *Impromptus*, Op. 90.[5] In addition to these sources, gestures from other piano compositions by Liszt, such as *Ave Maria from Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, S.173, also contribute to shaping textural environments that inform the expressive character of my narrative. These environments align with what Luis Ángel de Benito (2020) describes as "background landscapes"—textural layers that function not merely as sonic surfaces but also as vessels for metaphorical meaning, reinforcing Doğantan-Dack's (2012, 27) view that "imagery, metaphors, and graphic illustrations" were central to the multi-dimensional creative practices of nineteenth-century performer-composers.

Benito further emphasizes that these landscapes do more than merely reflect the protagonist's emotional state; they function as dynamic, evolving devices that mirror the psychological trajectory of a character. He describes how they may "reveal the emotional state of the hero: if the heart is troubled, the forest will appear gloomy; if the heart is joyful, the forest will sing, filled with mountains and rivers" (Benito 2010, 345).

The notion of unfolding emotional landscapes has informed my creative practice, providing a framework for reimagining textures, reworking original materials, and driving my recompositional endeavours—all aimed at heightening emotional expression and conveying shifting moods within the narrative. Building on this perspective, Miriam Gómez-Morán's (2008) study of Liszt's notational techniques—particularly their ability to evoke extra-musical imagery—offers further insight into how specific gestures can articulate emotional states and enrich musical storytelling. To illustrate these connections, the table below compiles key examples from Gómez-Morán's work (2008, 371–386), highlighting the metaphorical interpretations associated with each expressive gesture.

4. For an in-depth discussion on dactylic rhythms, refer to Oliver Neighbour's analysis in Brian Newbould's *Schubert: The Music and the Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chapter 10. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau interprets the dactyl as symbolizing "the secret heartbeat accompanying the tread of death, expressing the serenity of death alone" (Fischer-Dieskau 1976, 85).

5. Franz Liszt and Sigmund Lebert, eds., *Schubert. Impromptus, S.565b* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandl, ca. 1870).

MUSICAL SYMBOLS	
-Diminished 7th chord: This chord is frequently associated with the expression of doubt or inner unrest. Its expressive power stems from its tonal ambiguity: each of its pitches functions as a potential leading tone, creating a sense of harmonic instability and unresolved tension. **-Relationships by mediant chromatics:** This type of harmonic passage produces a sense of softness, a certain sophistication, and remoteness, while suspending the tonal center of the music and causing a noticeable change of harmonic color. Liszt uses it to create an impression of progress on the spiritual journey, both in the sense of "descending into the depths of the soul" and "aspiring upwards." A chromatic mediant relationship links two chords whose roots are a third apart, and at least one note in the second chord does not belong to the scale of the first. For example, moving from the C major chord (C–E–G) to the E♭ major chord (E♭–G–B♭) involves such a relationship, since E♭ and B♭ do not belong to the C major scale. **-Repeated chords:** A gesture particularly characteristic of the piano repertoire and central to Liszt's expressive vocabulary. In his works, they often symbolize humanity's striving toward the divine. This gesture reveals a distinctive connection between the physical and the psychological: maintaining repeated chords at a certain speed and intensity can generate in the performer a tangible sensation of urgency or transcendental aspiration—an embodied effort to reach beyond the self. **-Mordents:** The grotesque character of this ornament may suggest diabolical associations, depending on the context. **-Chorales:** The use of chorale-style passages—closely associated with Lutheran tradition—carries consistent religious connotations in Liszt's music. **-Recitative:** A style of musical declamation that resembles speech. In operas or oratorios, it typically precedes arias or chorales and conveys the dramatic narrative or core events. Liszt employs this device not only in vocal music but also in instrumental works, where it symbolizes the human encounter with a transcendent reality. **-Chromaticism:** A widely used musical device that frequently conveys a sense of pain or emotional suffering. **-End of a work or section with the 3rd or 5th degree in the upper voice:** This may evoke a sense of elevation or transcendence in the listener, often carrying symbolic associations with resurrection or spiritual union with the divine.	**-Formal scheme *lamento e trionfo*:** This scheme takes its name from Liszt's symphonic poem *Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo*, which portrays the tormented life of the poet Torquato Tasso and his posthumous recognition. The structure consists of a juxtaposition of two contrasting sections: the first is somber, anguished, or simply lamenting in nature; the second is luminous, hopeful, or triumphant. **-Tritone:** The augmented fourth interval is notoriously difficult to sing and has historically been regarded as dissonant or unsettling. In the Middle Ages, it earned the name *diabolus in musica* (the devil in music) due to its perceived unnatural quality. In Liszt's compositions, it is often used to evoke diabolical or infernal imagery.

EXTRA-MUSICAL SYMBOLS

-**Bells:** The symbolic use of bells appears in the works of various composers, including Debussy. Their musical representation may be either literal—as in orchestral works featuring tubular bells—or figurative. In piano music, figurative representations typically involve sequences of single or double notes outlining fourths or fifths, sometimes incorporating full chords. These passages are generally played at a moderate tempo with sustained damper pedal to create a resonant, bell-like sonority.

-Nature:

Storms: Their musical depiction often features diminished seventh chord progressions, extensive chromaticism, and richly detailed orchestration. In piano works, this is reflected in rapid parallel double notes, powerful octaves (often employing the so-called "Liszt-octave" technique), and an orchestral texture that fully explores the keyboard's entire range.

Water: Among the most common extra-musical symbols in Liszt's work, water is evoked in his piano compositions through flowing arpeggios, shimmering tremolos, light staccato figures, and gently undulating double-note passages. Through these textures, a sense of movement, fluidity, and shimmering surface may be suggested.

Table 1 / A selection of relevant extra-musical features in Liszt's music by Gómez-Morán (2008, 379-385).

In relation to other sources that contribute to the hermeneutic interplay framework, I was guided further by two key theoretical perspectives: Robert Hatten's (2004) concept of expressive genres, particularly the tragic-to-transcendent trajectory, and Lauri Suurpää's (2019) model of the protagonist-antagonist dynamic. Hatten's exploration of this tragic-to-transcendent journey, particularly in his analysis of the slow movement of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata* (1994, 9–28), provides a model for understanding how musical expression evolves from conflict toward transcendence. His concept is structured around archetypes, genres and styles, discursive themes, and broader aesthetic classifications, all of which are critical in shaping the music's narrative arc. In my interpretation of the narrative trajectory within Schubert's *Impromptus*, I employ a framework that traces a progression from conflict and tragedy toward emotional catharsis or transcendence—an arc mirroring the narrative structure of Schubert's *Winterreise*. In *Winterreise*, the protagonist navigates a journey filled with despair, longing, and existential uncertainty, ultimately arriving at a state of resignation or enlightenment by the cycle's end. In a similar vein, Fisk (2021, 115-141) posits that the *Impromptus* can be understood as embodying two facets of the same narrative continuum, each reflecting the protagonist's emotional and existential struggles.

Additionally, a core feature of this tragic-to-transcendent journey is the concept of "abnegation," which Hatten (1994) defines as a self-imposed acceptance of an inevitable negative outcome.[6] In my interpretation, this idea is exemplified by the shift from C minor to C major at the conclusion of *Impromptu* No. 1, as well as the unexpected resolution of *Impromptu* No. 4, where the final cadence in A-flat major contrasts with the initial key of A-flat minor. These instances of abnegation reflect how emotional uncertainty in the discourse is not traditionally harmonically resolved or reconciled, but instead elevated to a higher emotional or philosophical expressive plane. For instance, the aura of abnegation is also present at the end of Schubert's *Winterreise*, particularly in the final song, *Der Leiermann* (The Hurdy-Gurdy Man), where the protagonist encounters a destitute hurdy-gurdy player, whose repetitive, haunting aura symbolizes isolation and resignation to fate. The protagonist's choice to follow the hurdy-gurdy man suggests a form of abnegation, as no resolution is found for the existential turmoil present throughout the cycle. Instead, the protagonist accepts his fate, exemplifying the concept of willed resignation or abnegation, as leading to transcendence despite tragic circumstances.[7]

Complementing the above, Suurpää's analytical framework, developed through his study of Schubert's Piano Sonatas D 958 and D 960, presents a model based on the interaction between two musical personae: the protagonist as a positive force striving for resolution, and the antagonist, a negative force that introduces harmonic tension and contrasting material. Suurpää (2019) posits that the dialogue between these imaginative characters is integral to the music's dramatic and expressive evolution, arguing that the expressive path of a narrative is inherently linked to its structural elements, emerging through the understanding of thematic development, harmonic progressions, and voice-leading techniques (Suurpää 2019, 284-285).

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6. A deeper understanding of the abnegation aura in the *Impromptus* and its relationship to the elegiac genre can be gained from the work of James William Sobaskie, who discusses how *Impromptu* No. 3 may be regarded as a self-elegy (Sobaskie 2008).

7. As Suurpää outlines, Deborah Kessler follows similar lines when she writes about "the hero's resignation, which is conveyed by a poignant motion to E major" (2006, 269). Such acceptance of a catastrophic outcome might be described using the term abnegation, which, in Hatten's words, is "willed resignation as spiritual acceptance of a (tragic) situation that leads to a positive inner state, implying transcendence" (1994, 287).

Building on Suurpää's insights, the interaction between protagonist and antagonist is pivotal to understanding how I have shaped my own dramatic arc, further informed by Vladimir Propp's taxonomy of binary oppositions. According to Propp's framework, the protagonist's journey unfolds in three stages: (1) embarking on a quest, (2) encountering and overcoming obstacles, and (3) returning transformed, equipped with new knowledge or power (Propp 1968, 80).

Charting the Expressive Insights of the *Four Impromptus* and the Role of Preludes and Interludes

Drawing on Propp's taxonomy of binary oppositions, my overall expressive trajectory for plotting the *Impromptus* unfolds in three key stages:

1. **Departure and Confrontation** (*Impromptus* No. 1 and No. 2): The protagonist sets out on a journey marked by internal conflict, alternating between hope and despair, and grappling with self-doubt and disillusionment.

2. **Temporary Resolution and Reawakening of Struggle** (*Impromptu* No. 3): An illusory escape from emotional turmoil gives way to a renewed confrontation with unresolved inner conflict, highlighting the cyclical nature of the protagonist's journey.

3. **Transformation** (*Impromptu* No. 4): The final *Impromptu* suggests a potential resolution, but it ultimately remains ambiguous at its end through the aura of abnegation, reflecting the protagonist's acceptance of internal ambiguity and his perpetual wandering state.

Regarding the impact of the preludes and interludes within the expressive trajectory outlined above, each interlude serves a dual function: first, it acts as a bridge, facilitating smoother transitions between each *Impromptu*; second, it recontextualizes thematic material, reinforcing psychological shifts and preparing the listener for subsequent developments. The following table offers an overview of each prelude and interlude, highlighting their expressive roles. It examines how they introduce thematic material, anticipate or set the stage for subsequent sections, and recontextualize motifs from related works. See Table 2:

Prelude to *Impromptu* No. 1:	**Interlude between *Impromptu* No. 1 and No. 2:**	**Interlude to *Impromptu* No. 3:**	**Interlude to *Impromptu* No. 4:**
Thematic Introduction: The obsessive dactylic rhythm associated with *Der Wanderer*, along with gradual harmonic progressions (diminished chords and chromatic descents), mirrors the wanderer's sense of alienation, conflict, and relentless striving at the outset of his journey, set against an imaginative landscape of clouds and roaring water. **Anticipation**: Establishes unresolved rhythmic and harmonic progressions, offering a lens into the dramatic instability that unfolds throughout the *Impromptu* No. 1. **Seamless Transition**: Harmonic ambiguity sustains unresolved tension, transitioning directly into *Impromptu* No. 1 with forceful *ff* unison octaves creating an urgent need for resolution throughout.	**Solace and Renewal**: Evokes a temporary sense of solace and calm, bridging the aura of abnegation that closes *Impromptu* No. 1 while anticipating the contrasting pastoral mood of *Impromptu* No. 2. Establishes a brighter tonal landscape, integrating gestures from Liszt's *Ave Maria* (*Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*), where silence decays and new textures emerge, creating a sense of renewal. **Emotional Transition**: Frames the emotional transition to the deceptively calm outset of *Impromptu* No. 2, establishing an illusory peace that contrasts with the protagonist's underlying disquiet. **Dissolution of Tension**: Chromatic mediants and arpeggiated figures dissolve the tension of *Impromptu* No. 1, continuing seamlessly from its last measures. The interlude also foreshadows darker harmonic material, introducing the dark keys that will appear in *Impromptu* No. 2's turbulent B minor and E-flat minor sections, portraying that the tranquillity is fragile.	**Psychological Shift**: Introduces a gradual psychological shift from the tragic key of E-flat minor to the more introspective and detached character of G-flat major, reflecting the protagonist's attempt to withdraw from conflict. **Uncertainty and Continuity**: Creates an emotional space of uncertainty through continuous arpeggio triplet figures, establishing a sense of ongoing searching and outlining the rhythmic figurations that will appear in the melodic accompaniment of *Impromptu* No. 3 **Abrupt Disruption**: At the outset, an abrupt trill in the low register disrupts the resolution of *Impromptu* No. 2, indicating that psychological unrest lingers. The emotional trajectory remains in turmoil and suspension, unresolved until the gradual introduction of dactylic rhythms in G-flat major, which seamlessly transition into the opening of *Impromptu* No. 3.	**Existential Crisis and Confrontation**: Anticipates an existential crisis and confrontation by incorporating gestures from *Der Lindenbaum* and *Der Doppelgänger*, while introducing harmonic ambiguity and stasis that foreshadow the protagonist's ongoing search for resolution in *Impromptu* No. 4. **Fragmented Identity**: Frames the protagonist's crisis through static harmonic progressions and tremolo effects, evoking numbness and psychological uncertainty. **Suspension and Despair**: Sustained notes and fragmented phrases evoke a sense of suspension, gradually giving way to new rhythmic figurations in *Impromptu* No. 4. The fragmented and dissonant atmosphere heightens the impending existential confrontation, transforming the interlude into a moment of self-recognition and despair.

Table 2 / A chart outlining the expressive function of preludes and interludes in shaping the narrative trajectory of Schubert's *Four Impromptus*, D. 899.

Expressive Trajectories of the *Impromptus* and the Creative Process Behind Preludes and Interludes

The following commentary provides a formal-thematic description and expressive insights into each *Impromptu*, incorporating contributions from scholars such as Charles Fisk (2001), Kinderman (1997), McKay (1988), Bell Young (1988), and Ishihama (2017), all of whom have informed the modeling of the expressive aura in each work. The commentary further explores harmonic progressions, thematic repetition, and tonal contrasts, detailing how these elements evoke emotional themes of wandering and alienation. Additionally, it draws connections with Schubert's *Winterreise*, emphasizing the psychological and narrative depth shared between the two works. After the description of each *Impromptu*, I outline the process by which particular semiotic tools have informed me in shaping the creation of preludes and interludes.

To deepen the reader's engagement, the complete scores of my preludes and interludes are provided in an appendix, accessible via the QR code included in this article. Additional QR codes link to videos with synchronized score and audio.

Impromptu in C minor D 899 No. 1

With an ABA'B'A'' thematic form, the first *Impromptu* begins with a call to attention through abrupted double octaves on the note G (dominant), which leads into a declamatory and processional melody, an atmosphere that seems to evoke the landscape of ceaseless wandering familiar from Schubert's song cycles (Kinderman 1997, 167). The principal theme, comprising 16 measures (mm.1-16), suggests association with the *ombra* style,[8] conveying a sense of unease at the onset of the wanderer's journey.[9] This expressive aura resonates with Charles Fisk's interpretation, which draws connections between the first *Impromptu* and Schubert's *Winterreise*, particularly the song *Gute Nacht* D 911. Fisk examines how the processional character, repeated homophonic chords, and dactylic rhythms evoke the wanderer's journey through bleak landscapes, reflecting both the wanderer's emotional and physical departure from home (Fisk 2001, 28).

Throughout the exposition, the main melody is elaborated with key changes from C minor to E-flat major, yet the cadence in C minor remains unchanged, creating a sense of stasis in this initial section. Similarly, the dynamics gradually increase (from *pp* to *ff*), imparting greater dynamic contrast to the statement, yet it remains confined and unresolved within the dark aura of C minor. This stasis is broken by the sudden modulation to A-flat major (the key of the second theme) through the Neapolitan D-flat chord (m.40).

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8. The *ombra* style, derived from the Italian word for "shade," is frequently characterized by its ominous and foreboding nature, evoking feelings of horror, terror, and death, thereby creating a sense of unease in the listener. This style often employs musical features such as limited melodic range, sustained pedal effects, chromatic progressions, dotted rhythms, continuous basslines with repetitive patterns, sudden harmonic shifts, deliberate pauses, and marked variations in dynamics. According to McClelland (2001), *ombra* scenes typically utilize a slow tempo to establish a portentous or mysterious atmosphere. He further explains that rhythmic characteristics play a pivotal role in the *ombra* style: "The so-called 'dactylic rhythm' is one of the specific applications of the *ombra* style ... [which] relates the use of a homophonic texture with 'ecclesiastical' suspensions and cadences" (McClelland 2001, 283).

9. In the discussion of the expressive trajectory of each *Impromptu*, all measure numbers refer to Schubert's original score unless otherwise indicated. Measure numbers referring to my own recomposed materials are used when discussing each prelude and interlude and correspond to the score included in the appendix.

The second theme, highly lyrical, appears as a relief from the unease presented earlier. Its balanced construction seems to raise a recurring question—one that is never satisfactorily answered (McKay 1988, 88). At the same time, the first theme interrupts the idyllic state of the second theme twice (in A' and A"), with the recurring opening octaves from the outset of the piece, evoking an aura suggestive of the *tempesta* style.[10] In the reappearance of B (B'), the unease of the first theme seems to have permeated the second: the melody is no longer accompanied by the "gentle stream of triplets," but rather by agitated semiquavers that push it along. Near the end, the triplets disappear, and the initial declamatory phrases are sounded together with subdued references to the octaves on G from the beginning of the work (m.87), and the music concludes movingly in C major (Kinderman 1997, 167).

The key relationships in this *Impromptu* are defined by harmonic transformations such as leading-tone exchange, parallel motion, and relative shifts. For instance, the transition from C minor to A-flat major is achieved by raising the fifth of the C minor chord (G) to A-flat, smoothly shifting the tonal center. Similarly, the modulation from A-flat major to C-flat major uses an intermediary A-flat minor chord, employing parallel and relative transformations. These harmonic movements create a circular, journey-like structure, where tonal areas revolve symmetrically around a central pitch, ultimately returning to the tonic, evoking a sense of exploration and return (Ishihama 2017, 76-79). The final modulation from C minor to C major in m.201 marks the culmination of the harmonic journey, providing a contrasting and somewhat unexpected resolution. However, this shift brings with it a lingering ambiguity. In my view, the arrival at C major does not evoke a sense of complete relief. Even though the piece concludes in C major, with no return to the minor mode, the tonality remains elusive—neither fully grounded nor entirely resolved—ultimately leaving the listener in a state of unresolved tension.

Prelude to Impromptu No. 1

Recording 1 (QR 1) / *Prelude to Schubert's Impromptu in C minor*, D 899 No. 1.
Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

In writing the beginning of my prelude, I was influenced by the recurring patterns associated with the wanderer archetype, which Schubert frequently revisits in his compositions. Particularly, at the beginning of the song *Der Wanderer*, D 489 (formerly D 493), Schubert incorporates chordal foundations and dactylic rhythms,[11] diminished chords, chromatic

10. For additional context regarding the portrayal of supernatural presence in music, *ombra* and *tempesta* styles, refer to McClelland (2014).

11. For instance, dactyl rhythms can be observed in various Schubert compositions, such as the combination of a minim

harmonic shifts, and an obsessively repetitive note in constant motion, posing different psychological transformations that seem to permeate the work. Building on elements from such a song, I chose to employ the dactyl rhythm pattern and a pp dynamic, where a repeated note and the transformations of its rhythmic structure evoke a sense of energy emanating from a distant location. As the note is repeated and modified throughout the prelude, it acquires diverse psychological characteristics, gradually embodying an uncontainable force. This force ultimately finds resolution in the unison octaves that Schubert introduced at the beginning of the piece, thus reimagining the sense that a wanderer has gradually reached a fixed point. This momentum, to me, is reminiscent of Friedrich's painting, where the protagonist is depicted as having expended significant effort to arrive at a remote location, prompting him to pause and reflect on his journey with introspection. See Figure 1:

Figure 1 / *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich (c. 1818).

In my composition, the use of diminished chords, chromaticism, and a repetitive note pattern contributes to a feeling of exertion, portraying a sense of long distance from its inception. As suggested by Gómez-Morán, the repetition of chords may generate a palpable sensation of anxiety in the discourse, provoking a sense "to reach something higher than himself" (2008, 381). Also, as she noted, the diminished chords align with the uneasy and uncertain atmosphere that pervades the scene, while the chromaticism likewise serves to further infuse a sense of pain.

This atmosphere of exertion and emotional tension finds a parallel in Schubert's *Der Wanderer*, which draws on Georg Lübeck's text to evoke a sense of remoteness and melancholy—a mood

and two crotchets in *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (D 531) or *Schwestergruss* (D 762), or with a crochet and two quavers in *Wanderer-Fantasie* of 1822 (D 760) and *Wandrers Nachtlied*. Another example is Liebesbotschaft from *Schwanengesang* (D 957), which combines a quaver and two semiquavers. According to the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, the dactyl rhythm represents "that secret heartbeat which accompanies the tread of death, and by means of which Schubert expresses that serenity which is death's alone" (Fischer-Dieskau 1976, 85).

that closely mirrors the protagonist's experience in my own compositional narrative. The bleak landscape portrayed in Lübeck's poem—silent, joyless, and remote—resonated with my compositional aim to heighten the sense of isolation. In my interpretation, the undulating motion of the surrounding water shapes the protagonist's perception; its rhythmic ebb and flow acts as a sonic backdrop that metaphorically intensifies the emotional disquiet at the core of the journey.

To deepen this introspective atmosphere, I incorporated various gestures drawn from the second movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat major, D 960. These gestures, characterized by harmonic suspension and lyrical pacing, are developed into a melodic sequence beginning in m.6. I also incorporated a pattern from Schubert's Piano Sonata in C minor, D 958 into m.14 to emphasize a harmonic progression, working in tandem with descending chromatic lines in the left hand that suggest the roaring water, creating background textures that foster deeper metaphorical engagement. See Example 1.

Example 1 / mm.1-16 from my prelude to *Impromptu* No. 1.

Upon reviewing Liszt's solo piano transcription of *Der Wanderer* and Schubert's original song, Liszt notably introduces mordents with chromatic elements, which may symbolically evoke the sound of rushing water—a motif he employs in certain instances to create a funereal atmosphere.[12] In Liszt's transcription, after the integration of such chromatic elements, the accompaniment takes a distinctive perspective that seems to be fueled by something more mysterious. Such a figure can be interpreted as also suggesting something macabre and diabolical, as indicated by Gómez-Morán in the Table 1. Particularly, its integration to the left-hand texture adds a new dramatic element to the song's transcription and initiates irreversible changes over time. As the music progresses, Liszt uses hairpins and gradual chromatic ascending patterns in the last beats of each measure to create a more intense portrayal of water's motion. See Example 2:

Example 2 / mm.9-12 from Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer*, D 489 (formerly D 493).

In Liszt's writing, such a figure reinforces a sense of swelling, culminating in an f dynamic when the text references es *braust das Meer* (the ocean roars) in m.12 from the above example. From this moment, Liszt starts to employ large arpeggios throughout both hands along chromatic lines to accentuate the turbulent waves more prominently, resulting in a landscape where the water from afar has taken over the foreground. Drawing from Liszt's contributions, I have integrated chromatic figures from m.15 of my prelude that parallel the left-hand figuration with the roaring effect of water. These elements progressively imbue the discourse with an inexorable force, ultimately culminating in an unavoidable outburst in mm.21-23. See Example 3:

12. As Monelle remarks, "this string figure, with two or three crushed rising notes before the arrival on the beat, is a universal imitation of the *Wirbelschlag*" (Monelle 2006, 178).

Example 3 / mm.17-24 of my prelude to *Impromptu* No. 1.

On the other hand, I also have been interested in evoking how sound dissolves into silence. This idea is prominently illustrated in m.6 of my prelude, particularly in the interludes bridging *Impromptu* No. 1 and No. 2, as well as those preceding the trio section in *Impromptu* No. 4. Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer* served as a key stimulus, particularly through his use of *diminuendo molto* in mm.6-7 of his transcription, which creates a sense of vaporized energy that gradually dissipates into silence before the main theme is introduced in m.8. See Example 4:

Example 4 / mm.1-8 from Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer*, D 489 (formerly D 493).

Additionally, I inserted a fermata in m.6 of the prelude to introduce a moment of suspension that sets a more introspective tone for the thematic material that follows (see Example 1). This shift from C minor to E-flat major aligns with the mediant chromatic relationships outlined by Gómez-Morán in Table 1, potentially, as she suggests, evoking a sense of refinement, detachment, or spiritual elevation. Schubert's *Der Wanderer*, D. 489, similarly employs this technique by introducing the key of E major alongside the words *Ich wandle still* (I wander in silence), creating a sharp contrast with the preceding C-sharp minor.

Impromptu in E-flat major D 899 No. 2

The second *Impromptu* follows a ternary A-B-A form and is based on a triple meter. In the A sections, the figuration features a continuous cascade of triplet motion in the right hand. Although the *Impromptu* is in E-flat major, both E-flat minor and B minor serve as important pivots. The juxtaposition of these tonal areas underscores a key aspect of the piece's formal structure, distinguishing the A and B sections both harmonically and expressively. Furthermore, as Fisk notes, the structure resembles a *perpetuum mobile*, continuously returning to its starting point rather than progressing linearly (Fisk 2001, 46). The repeated phrases and harmonic oscillations create a sense of circularity, reinforcing the theme of return. Fisk also interprets the shifts from major to minor as symbolic of the wanderer's vacillation between

hope and despair. The minor mode may reflect the reality of suffering and alienation, while the initial major mode represents the fleeting nature of the wanderer's aspirations and dreams (Fisk 2001, 46). McKay similarly observes that while the piece begins gently, beautifully, and with calm grace, it soon becomes restless, particularly as it passes through E-flat minor (McKay 1988, 89). This raises the question of whether the piece can truly be considered to remain in E-flat major.

Unlike *Impromptu* No. 1, where sectional changes generate drama through gradual transformations, here the shift between sections occurs abruptly. Although the A sections and the coda begin in E-flat major, they consistently conclude in its minor mode, reinforcing the endings with dynamics marked *fortissimo* and *sforzando*. This type of disruptions may reflect the wanderer's inability to escape his predicament, reinforcing the notion of being trapped in a cycle of hope and disillusionment (Fisk 2001, 46).

In contrast to the fluidity of the triplets in section A, which Kinderman describes as resembling an "etude-like moto perpetuo in E-flat major" (Kinderman 1997, 167), section B presents a central episode *al Vongarese* in B minor.[13] This section is built on rhythmic variations of a recurring motif, revolving around the tonal axis of B minor and F-sharp minor, and spanning a dynamic range from *piano* to *fortissimo*. The repetition of this motif gives the music an almost obsessive quality, reinforcing the impression of relentless musical movement. As McKay observes, the music manifests a "tortured soul" and culminates in a battle for tonal supremacy between B minor and E-flat minor, which ultimately resolves in favor of the latter (McKay 1988, 90-91).

Interlude to Impromptu No. 2

Recording 2 (QR 2) / *Interlude to Schubert's Impromptu in E-flat major*, D 899 No. 2.
Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

In this interlude, I incorporated various motifs from Liszt's *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* III, S. 173; No. 2, *Ave Maria*. The religious input from such a work served to establish a connection with the aura of abnegation I envision at the conclusion of *Impromptu* No. 1, engaging with what Hatten (1994, 86) describes as the "transcendent state of acceptance through positive resignation."[14] The spirituality rooted in the *Ave Maria* helped me invoke a further sense of transcendence and spiritual insight in my imagery. By incorporating a discourse that flows

13. The term *al Vongarese* refers to a Hungarian or Gypsy-inspired musical style, characterized by dance-like, syncopated rhythms and folk-like ornamentation. For further discussion, see Searle (1966).

14. In this context, the notion of abnegation is referred as the existential isolation of a protagonist, achieved through surrendering to a higher spiritual power, ultimately leading to a positive outcome of transcendence. See Hatten (1994, 86).

and spreads horizontally, the interlude creates a transitional, dreamlike quality that evokes an idyllic ambience as one enters the pastoral landscape in *Impromptu* No. 2.

In the concluding measures of *Impromptu* No. 1, following the final *homophonic texture*, continuity is achieved by incorporating ascending arpeggios, which move toward the higher register, enhancing a sense of transcendence. As noted in Gómez-Morán's Table 1, the idea incorporating the third and fifth on the upper register appeared to engage a sense of elevation and spiritual ascension, thereby creating a connection to the attainment of a higher spiritual state. In connection with this religious aura, I have also incorporated chorales spanning mm.280-286. See the following examples regarding mm.225-332 showcasing the outset of my interlude, and mm.277-284 concerning the integration of chorales. See Example 5:

Example 5 / Excerpts illustrating mm.225-332 and mm.277-284 of my interlude to *Impromptu* No. 2.

The use of chorales also offers insight into how the ephemeral nature of the A section in E-flat major of *Impromptu* No. 2 evokes and ultimately transforms into a tragic realm in section B, in B minor. This shift is marked by a more abrupt intervention after the fermata in m.279, as illustrated in the above example.

Bell Young's insightful review of Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 2 draws attention to the use of a B-flat pedal note in the left hand during the A section, which generates a subtle yet palpable

sense of tension, anticipation, and a longing for resolution (Bell Young 2009, 96). The presence of this figure continues into the B section, where the B-flat pedal note is transformed into a B instead, imbuing further a threatening quality, which, as Elizabeth Norman McKay related allegorically, "might well be the manifestation of a tortured soul" (McKay 2009, 90-1). I have sought to capture a glimpse of this thematic struggle between E-flat major and B minor, as evidenced in m.251 and m.272 of my interlude, alluding to both tonal areas. See the following Example 6:

Example 6 / Excerpts illustrating mm.250-256 and mm.269-276 of the interlude, highlighting E-flat major and B minor usage.

In addition to Liszt's use of rhetorical silence in his transcription of *Der Wanderer*, Schubert also makes adept use of this device in his own compositions, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the interplay between sound and silence. As Susanne Kogler points out, such moments of pronounced emptiness may lead to the "disappearance of music itself" (2003, 89). Kogler provides an example of how Schubert's song *Dass sie hier gewesen* D 775 effectively considers pauses and extreme softness to create an affective atmosphere that is nearly silent, where "the nearness of death becomes palpable" (Kogler 2003, 91). In my interlude, I use comparable approach, particularly the employment of extreme soft dynamics (*ppp*) and extended pauses, not only to reflect the feeling of emptiness but also to heighten the tension between absence and presence, as if the music itself hovers on the verge of vanishing. This approach allowed me to conjure a delicate balance between loss and renewal, specifically in the transition between mm.247-250, where the silence becomes a space for anticipation and emotional depth, bringing the listener into a moment of reflection and unresolved tension. See Example 7:

Example 7 / Excerpt illustrating mm.244-256 of my interlude to *Impromptu* No. 2.

Impromptu in G-flat major D 899 No. 3

This *Impromptu* presents a more unified structure due to its smoother transitions and less abrupt contrasts. It is a broadly lyrical and meditative work, described as "a song-without-words in all but name, and one of intense expression" (McKay 1988, 92). Set in G-flat major and structured in a straightforward A-B-A form, it features a simpler harmonic design compared to the other *Impromptus*, with smoother modulations primarily based on third relations. The cyclic harmonic progression (G-flat major → E-flat minor → C-flat major → E-flat minor → G-flat major) establishes a strong sense of unity and coherence (Ishihama 2017, 84). Fisk interprets the use of G-flat major as a temporary escape or illusion of peace, in contrast with the darker emotions expressed in the preceding *Impromptu*. However, this sense of relief is fleeting, as the music gradually returns to more dissonant and unsettling harmonies, reflecting the wanderer's ongoing struggle to find lasting solace (Fisk 2001, 46).

The ternary structure of the piece is articulated through its tonal areas (G-flat major → E-flat minor → G-flat major). In stark contrast, the central section, set in E-flat minor—one of Schubert's darkest keys— introduces a tonal and rhythmic environment suggestive of inner turmoil.[15] This sense of anguish is intensified by *f* dynamics, broad descending phrases reminiscent of a lament, and emphatic accents—most notably through a recurring falling motif that evokes a sense of gasping or desperation (McKay 1988, 92).

This turbulence stands in contrast with the opening of the *Impromptu*, where a continuous flow emerges from the first measures—reminiscent of a flowing stream or a turning wheel, a recurring image in Schubert's songs.[16] The restless movement of the wheel remains constant in the composition—an element that in allegorical terms, I see as part of the protagonist's own soul, like the heartbeat of his yearnings.

15. For further contextualization on Schubert's use of dark keys, see McKay (2009).

16. An illustrative instance of this type of landscape metaphor can be found in Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin, D 795 - 2. Wohin?*

A notable feature in m.19 is the use of a trill in the left hand. This element serves to dramatically enhance the melody's expression of sorrowful longing, which is characterized by a sigh-like motif. In my view, it introduces a sense of emotional turmoil, underscored by the delicate *pp* dynamic. The combination of these elements—the trill and the sigh-like gesture—effectively heighten the sense of vulnerability and fragility conveyed by the right hand's singing line.[17] Regarding such a trill, Deborah Mutch Olander refers to its expressive nature as [a] "trouble trill":

> These two trills are understandable as symptoms of an illness—in this case, symptoms sensed but ignored ... This analysis therefore refers to these trills as "trouble trills" (Mutch Orlander 2008, 146).

Schubert's use of G-flat major as the tonal center in this composition was uncommon during his time. However, throughout the nineteenth century, composers' sensibilities led to deliberate experimentation with this key.[18] The strangeness of considering six flats in Schubert's signature, as Hugh MacDonald remarks, "would strike a contemporary listener at once as something distinctively odd, unpleasant even" (MacDonald 1988, 223). Conversely, according to some eighteenth-century theorists such as Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, the characterization of such a key as E-flat minor may involve:

> Feelings of anxiety and deep turmoil of the soul; of suppressed despair, of blackest melancholy, of the gloomiest state of mind. Every fear, every quake of the shuddering heart is aired in terrible Eb-minor. If a ghost could speak it would probably speak in this key (Schubart in MacDonald 1988, 223).

In my view, the opening harmonic gesture of the piece—the first harmonic shift from E-flat minor to G-flat major from mm.1-2 of Schubert's writing—appears to be something that gently revisits a tragic event. The remoteness of the G-flat key in section A enhances the melodic line's mourning quality, while its relative E-flat minor creates the sinister and sorrowful scenario for the central section (m.25) in which the left hand incorporates a fanfare triplet figure, pushing the plot towards further symptoms of sighing. In my imagery, I see G-flat major as the suitable place for isolation and recollection, portraying a sense of remoteness after the long journey from the trajectories established in *Impromptus* No. 1 and No. 2.[19] I find it compelling to relate the beginning of the *Impromptu* with the narrative technique *racconto*, as the moment when a character thoroughly revisits the past, gaining a retrospective outlook. Furthermore, the dactylic pattern that forms the basis for the rhythmic logic of the *Impromptu* main theme is a figure that also resonates with the *Fremdling* stanza in Schubert's song *Der Wanderer* D 489.[20]

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17. This trill is a common device which Schubert also has considered in other works as the String Quintet in C major, D 956, or the Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D 960.

18. For further contextualization, see MacDonald (1988, 222).

19. Sobaskie has found it compelling how Schubert's *Impromptu* in G-flat major embodies a lyrical lamentation, suggesting it communicates a self-elegy. He refers to how the piece may portray "a mourning of one's own anticipated death." He remarked that "self-elegies became more common during the mid-nineteenth century," conveying "grief, conflict, and reconciliation through the simulated pursuit of a musical problem not surmounted until near its end" (Sobaskie 2008, 71-72).

20. Historically, since the Renaissance, dactylic rhythms have played an influential role in both elegiac and lamenting pieces. They may be rooted in the majestic processional dance Pavane base, where pieces under the title *Pavane* were intended to express grief and longing. For further context, see McClelland (2003, 30) and Young (1997, 100).

As the play moves forward, such interaction between both keys returns to play a major role in the middle section, where C-flat major seems to release the prevailing tension from the sorrowful E-flat minor aura. For instance, it can be argued that the progressions from mm.9-12, and mm.17-20 of Schubert's writing establish a sequence model that emphasizes the yearning sensitivity of the C-flat major key, which becomes increasingly important in the middle section.[21] Upon reflecting on the connection between E-flat minor and C-flat major, it appears that the interaction between these keys possesses the potential to elicit a transitional experience from a state of mournful reality (E-flat minor) to one of illusion (C-flat major). Particularly, in my narrative interpretation, the idea of "presence" interacts with the tragic environment in E-flat minor, creating a sense of an unavoidable direction that is established from m.25. However, the unexpected transition to C-flat major in m.31 suggests to me yearning through a veil of illusion, as the desire for an unattainable reality. In those measures, the persistent application of evasive cadences[22] and deliberate avoidance of the fundamental chord in E-flat minor indicates a progression that correlates with the longing to break free from the negative connotations of E-flat minor and enter the illusory realm of C-flat major. From a hermeneutic perspective, one could argue that the protagonist is actively rejecting the E-flat minor antagonist scenario, implicitly saying, "No, I will not accept this, as I refuse to embrace the reality it represents." From my perspective, the protagonist prefers to explore areas in C-flat major or G-flat major since they look closely related to a longing veiled throughout pleasant memories. The continual shift between those two contrasting sound worlds is a thought-provoking paradox that cannot be resolved. This particularly appears at the end of the piece, as is common in the elegiac genre, portraying a sense of abnegation that poses an unavoidable acceptance of this unachievable condition.[23]

Interlude to Impromptu No. 3

Recording 3 (QR 3) / *Interlude to Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat major*, D 899 No. 3.
Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

Following the above expressive insights, several noteworthy elements have influenced the creation of this interlude, which may require additional contextualization. As a starting

21. In the development of these lines, I drew significant inspiration from conversations with Brian Black and Lauri Suurpää. These interactions yielded novel insights, particularly concerning the implications of harmonic analysis on musical practice and the evolution of my narrative perspective. Additionally, the writings of Brian Black had a notable influence on my approach to harmonic and narrative interpretation (Black 2016,113-31).

22. Regarding the interplay between C-flat major and E-flat minor, as well as the use of evaded cadences, please refer to Black (2016).

23. A deeper understanding of the abnegation aura in the *Impromptu* and its relationship to the elegiac genre can be gained from the work of Sobaskie, who discusses how the *Impromptu* No. 3 may be regarded as a self-elegy (Sobaskie 2008, 71-78).

point, I present in Table 3 the various factors involved and subsequently elaborate on their significance.

Element	Description
Accompaniment	Left hand with sixteenth-note triplets serving as an allegory for a flowing stream or a spinning wheel, as commonly seen in Schubert's Lieder.
Voicing	The horn call serving as a coloring resource, to evoke a sense of distance.
A dactylic rhythm	In the melodic line as often encountered in Schubert's depiction of the wanderer.
The use of evaded cadences	Particularly when transitioning from E-flat minor to C-flat major, envisioning C-flat major as an escape from the negative associations of E-flat minor.
The use of "trouble trills"	As a disruptive force.

Table 3 / Central expressive elements explored in *Impromptu* No. 3.

At the beginning of my interlude, I introduce the "trouble trill" on a G-flat in the left hand, placed immediately after the forceful cadential close of *Impromptu* No. 2. This intervention is meant to destabilize the strong sense of resolution created by the final E-flat minor chord. Such a trill is followed by a cascade of ascending and descending arpeggios in sextuplet figurations in the right hand. The harmonic shift in such arpeggios attempts to recolor a bass F note functioning as the VII chord of E-flat minor and alternately as the V chord of G-flat major. Such a harmonic function is based on the one established in m.54 of Schubert's writing in which the V 6/5 chord of G-flat major meant to prepare the perfect authentic cadence (PAC) for the re-exposure of Theme A. See Example 8:

Example 8 / mm.54-55 from Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 3.

The alternation between these harmonies, in my interpretation, creates a sense of suspension that seeks resolution in G-flat major. Once the PAC in G-flat major is confirmed (m.594 of my interlude), I introduce the dactylic rhythm in the left hand and reintroduce the wheel-like motion in the right, preparing a transition into the opening of *Impromptu* No. 3. See Example 9.

Example 9 / mm.54-55 from my interlude to *Impromptu* No. 3.

Interlude 2 for Bridging the Recapitulation

Recording 4 (QR 4) / *Interlude 2: Bridging the Recapitulation in Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat major*, D 899 No. 3. Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

In addition, I have included an interlude in the middle of the plot, after the fermata in m.54 of Schubert's writing. Such an elaboration allowed me to enhance a sense of recollection for the subsequent re-exposition of the main theme. In m.651 of my portrayal, the right hand ascends to an E-flat, which subsequently descends in chromatic motion finding resolution in an unexpected G major key.

Example 10 / mm.55-58 from the Liszt's edition of *Impromptu* No. 3.

Informed by Liszt's creative intervention, the melodic line played by the right hand in my interlude is presented an octave higher through arpeggiated chords (m.652), while the middle voice accompaniment in sextuplets has been transferred to the left hand, as shown in the following example.

Example 11 / mm.651-52 from my interlude in *Impromptu* No. 3.

In terms of the abrupt change from G major to G-flat major key, m.660 of my rendition features the V degree of G major (D major), which then undergoes a chromatic shift by incorporating a D minor chord on the third beat. This chord progression culminates on the fourth beat, where an E natural in the bass gives place to an E-flat chord, thus connecting to the A-flat minor chord in m.661. See the following Example 12:

Example 12 / mm.660-61 from my interlude in *Impromptu* No. 3.

Through my imagery, this pivotal moment is strengthened as a defining moment for the protagonist's aspirations, evoking a sense of spirituality that expands into a celestial realm. It acts as an epiphany accompanied by feelings of enlightenment and inspiration for the protagonist.[24] It is noteworthy that such a sudden harmonic interplay between G-flat and G major resonates with how at times "music speaks to us most strongly when certain events or moments in the piece have a 'bizarre and disruptive effect' on the musical continuity defined by the work's specific conventions" (Granat 2022, 149). I was motivated to delve into these artistic insights given how James Joyce in his works considers epiphany to reveal inner lives and moments of spiritual insight for the characters. For instance, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the epiphanies are particularly evident in the final chapter where Stephen, the protagonist, experiences a sudden and profound insight into his own artistic mission and his place in the world.[25]

Impromptu in A-flat minor D 899 No. 4

The thematic structure of this work is tripartite (A-B-A), with two identical A sections and a B section labelled as the trio. Concluding in A-flat major, Schubert explores tonal ambiguity from the outset, alternating between the minor and major third throughout. As in songs like *Auf dem Wasser zu singen*, it showcases the emotional strength of the major mode as it emerges from the minor and becomes firmly established in the piece's conclusion. Interestingly, Fisk identifies a connection between the fourth *Impromptu* and Schubert's song *Der Wanderer*, particularly in the trio section (m.107), where the melody and key engage with the wanderer's inner conflict. According to Fisk, the trio's C-sharp minor tonality evokes feelings of longing

24. In this context, the term "epiphany" is employed to denote a manifestation or appearance, often associated with divine and religious insight. This premise is congruent with the religious framework established earlier in the interlude, which highlighted the religious influence of Liszt's *Ave Maria* patterns.

25. See Joyce and Johnson (2008).

and alienation, resonating with the theme of being a *Fremdling*, a stranger in unfamiliar lands (Fisk 2001, 72–73). This expressive environment is momentarily anticipated in section A, where the music briefly swells to a *ff* climax in D-flat major (mm.64–67), subtly foreshadowing the heightened drama of the trio's enharmonic C-sharp minor passage (McKay 1988, 94).

As Ishihama (2017, 87–88) explains, the piece modulates from A-flat minor to C-flat major in m.13 through single-tone displacement. Similarly, the modulation to B minor in m.19, also achieved via single-tone displacement, employs a G-flat major chord as a dominant pivot, bridging the flat and sharp keys. These transitions exemplify Schubert's deft manipulation of tonal space, creating fluid connections between contrasting harmonic regions. Fisk interprets these harmonic shifts not merely as structural transitions, but as expressions of a thematic sense of wandering, as the protagonist perceives himself as a *Fremdling* (stranger) (Fisk 2001, 74–77).

The repeated attempts to establish a stable tonal center from the beginning of the work may align with the wanderer's search for a true beginning or home. Fisk interprets this as a metaphor for the protagonist's struggle for direction and purpose, with the contrast between major and minor tonalities symbolizing the oscillation between hope and despair (Fisk 2001, 74–77). The final resolution in A-flat major in m.242 suggests a sense of ultimate arrival, offering closure that contrasts with the earlier tonal wanderings. However, while the final measures could have ended in quiet repose, Schubert instead chose to conclude the work with a transcendental quality. This trajectory, especially when compared to the dark, introspective aura of the outset, or even when reflecting more deeply on the departure journey established in the first *Impromptu*, in my view, aligns with Hatten's (2004) framework of expressive genres, particularly the tragic-to-transcendent journey. This comparison highlights how the entire set of *Impromptus* moves from a conflicted beginning to a luminous and transcendental conclusion, incorporating themes of abnegation—as a self-imposed acceptance of an inevitable negative outcome—before ultimately rising above this resignation toward transcendence.

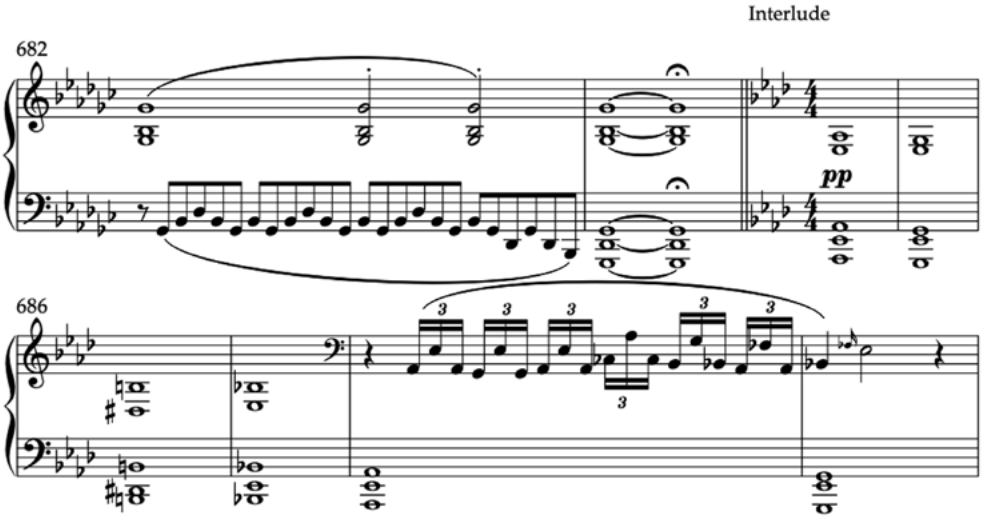
Interlude to Impromptu No. 4

Recording 5 (QR 5) / *Interlude to Schubert's Impromptu in A-flat major*, D 899 No. 4.
Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

In particular, the composition of this interlude was imaginatively guided by the protagonist's encounter with his *Doppelgänger*, which serves as a pivotal moment in the overarching narrative of the *Four Impromptus*. This encounter is reminiscent of Heinrich Heine's poem in Schubert's *Schwanengesang* D 957, in which a protagonist is confronted with an unearthly double of himself, precipitating an identity crisis. Schubert similarly explores the theme of

duality and self-reflection in the song cycle *Winterreise*, D 911—specifically in *Der Leiermann*—accentuating the protagonist's internal conflict through a process of self-questioning that, by the end of the cycle, functions as a catalyst for existential transformation.

To imbue my interpretation with such evocative imagery, I seized upon a moment in which, after the final chord of *Impromptu* No. 3, I sought to incorporate a new beginning that draws parallels with Schubert's opening motif from the song *Der Doppelgänger* D 957. The mournful *passacaglia* at the beginning of this song is characterized by static harmonies, which illustrate a persona's emotional numbness and physical stillness. This harmonic progression portrays an ambiguous quality due to the missing note in the chord texture. The lack of this note makes it difficult to determine the exact harmony that the chords represent. Specifically, the absence of the third note in the first chord makes it unclear whether the chord is major or minor, and it is uncertain whether the second chord, as can be observed in mm.684-687 of my score, is a first inversion of an E-flat minor chord or a second inversion of a C minor chord. See the following example:



Example 13 / Excerpt from mm.682-689 of my interlude to *Impromptu* No. 4.

Such a realization, in my view, is consistent with the large number of harmonic excursions considered during the exposition of the *Impromptu* No. 4, in which Schubert appears to obscure the clear tonal goal. As the interlude repeats this pattern from the outset, the density of the block chords gradually takes control of the scene and accentuates its inevitability aligning with the poem's depiction of frantic horror. Along with introducing such a *passacaglia* pattern, I also have included in the right hand a flow of triplets in allusion to *Der Lindenbaum* D 911, in which such figurations establish a connection with the cascading notes that open *Impromptu* No. 4 (see m.688 from Example 8).

Interlude Before Trio Section

Recording 6 (QR 6) / *Interlude Before Trio in Schubert's Impromptu in A-flat major*, D 899 No. 4.
Arranged and interpreted by Óscar Caravaca (2024).

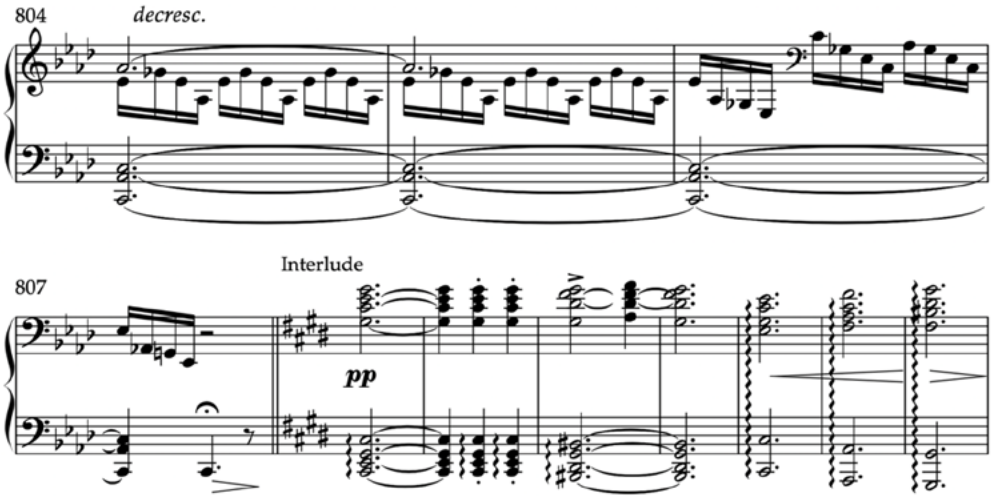
In m.808 of my rendition, I introduce another interlude that evokes associations with the song Der Wanderer, D 489—more specifically, with the stanza "Die Sonne dünkt mich hier so kalt" ("The sun seems so cold to me here"), which appears in m.23 of the lied. Schubert appears to establish a connection with this stanza in the *Impromptu*, particularly at m.107, where he introduces the C-sharp minor trio section while preserving a closely related melodic contour from the lied. In the song, this stanza portrays a captivating and pivotal moment, wherein the main character openly declares his status as an outsider (a *Fremdling*), as an impulse to find his psyche mirrored within the landscape.

The static quality of the A-flat arpeggios in m.103 of Schubert's writing is noteworthy for its anticipatory function, foreshadowing the developments in the trio section. In my view, this shift recalls the effect of *tremolans*—a gesture that obsessively revolves around a single note. In this case, the figuration centered on E-flat suggests feelings of fear and agitation typically associated with such an effect.[26] See Example 14:

Example 14 / mm.103-6 from Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 4.

After the *tremolans* figure, I have incorporated two extra measures featuring a descending arpeggio that culminates in a C bass note in the left hand as shown in m.807. See example 15:

26. See McClelland (2014, 285).



Example 15 / mm.804-94 from my interlude.

To allow the resonance of the preceding note to fully emerge within the ensuing silence—and to reinforce the sense of isolation and remoteness at this pivotal moment—a fermata has been added in m.807. Subsequently, I incorporated a supplementary passage, a *quasi*-literal reference to the mentioned *Fremdling* stanza from Schubert's song, functioning as a preamble to the bridge with the trio section in C-sharp minor originally proposed by Schubert. Throughout this transitional phase, silence plays a crucial role. Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer* offers valuable insight—particularly in how silence can be used to heighten pivotal moments, which I interpret as instances of *anagnorisis*: the dramatic recognition in which a character uncovers a vital truth about their condition (López-Cano 2020, 337). Example 16 illustrates Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer* in mm.23-25, while Example 17 shows how my interlude has been informed by Liszt's writing.

Example 16 / Liszt's transcription of *Der Wanderer* in mm.23-25.

Example 17 / mm.801-814 from my interlude in *Impromptu* No. 4.

Conclusion

The explorations presented here illustrate how I have interwoven my roles as both performer and composer, broadening my capacity to engage with a wider array of expressive possibilities in performance. Navigating this uncharted territory presented challenges, particularly as it required me to recalibrate my auditory perception towards unconventional interpretative approaches, especially after having approached the *Impromptus* through a more traditional lens. However, as Owen Norris astutely observes, the process of acclimating to new modes of listening is much like adjusting to tea without sugar: once accustomed, "you can't imagine how you used to tolerate it any other way" (Norris 1990). Additionally, I realized that the narrative framework I was constructing became deeply intertwined with my personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within this framework, my interpretation explored the theme of longing through the lens of a wanderer, emphasizing the dialectic between "presence" and "absence." This dichotomy reflected a yearning for presence, grounded in tangible reality, while absence became a space for abstract contemplation and self-realization—often clouded by illusion. Furthermore, the concept of abnegation played a significant role, revealing how negative past experiences informed the appreciation of positive moments.

As I approached the culmination of this compositional endeavor, I became aware of an unforeseen alignment between these artistic concerns and my personal experience, particularly during the pandemic. That period was marked by a constant oscillation between the paradigms of presence and absence, which profoundly shaped my musical engagement. In terms of presence, the emotional and physical confinement of lockdown made envisioning a hopeful future feel remote. Conversely, absence grew more resonant, as reflections on past joys—now inaccessible—nurtured a deeper sense of abnegation, reframing negative experiences as opportunities for growth and insight.

In conclusion, this artistic journey has deepened my sense of intellectual independence, enabling me to question established models and pursue alternative modes of creation. It has encouraged me to chart a personal artistic course, free from inherited conventions. I hope the reflections offered here inspire other performer-scholars to cultivate a similarly critical and exploratory mindset in their own practice. Through sustained reflection and inquiry, performers can continue to reinterpret their materials, generating new meanings that enrich both their individual trajectories and the broader academic discourse.

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Appendix Scores

Caravaca, Óscar, arr. F. Schubert: *Four Impromptus* Op. 90 - A Reimagined Portrayal (Preludes and Interludes)

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