An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music

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Chapter 11. Improvised dance music[991]

11.1 Introduction

One topic receives very little attention in Czerny's comprehensive survey of piano improvisation, as well as in many other accounts with a pedagogical slant: dance music.[992] An explanation might be that much dance music was strongly linked to folk music, and as such belonged to a different category. There is no reason, though, to assume that folk music was considered something unworthy of 'serious' musicians: in 1870, Eduard Hanslick wrote that 'der Character jedes Volkes sich in seinen Melodien spiegelt'[993] [the character of every people is reflected in its melodies], a statement that he underpinned with analytical elaborations. Moreover, there are countless examples of literal or style quotations from folk music in art music, especially in the nineteenth century, and the allusions of both Brahms and Liszt to (what they saw as) the Gypsy style contributed to an important part of their fame. A discussion of the relation between folk music and art music in the nineteenth century exceeds the scope of this study, but it would be an omission to leave out improvised dance music altogether. First of all, it is one of the very few examples of an unbroken tradition of improvisation in classical music; since the end of the nineteenth century, pianists have been improvising dance music for the daily training of classical ballet dancers. Secondly, there are good historical reasons to pay attention to dance music, if only because of its popularity at the time. In this chapter, I will not attempt to provide a full historical overview, but instead zoom in on an area that still raises our interest today because of the connection with Franz Schubert: early nineteenth-century Vienna.

After a brief sketch of the Biedermeier culture in which this type of music flourished, I will focus on Schubert's dance music. It is known that Schubert liked to improvise waltzes, German dances, minuets and other dance forms, but he also composed and published them. Because of this dual background, this type of music may be considered very suitable for 'historically inspired' improvisations. I will show how analysis of scores may bring useful input that makes it possible to improvise such dances today as well. Some suggestions for teaching will conclude the chapter.

11.2 Vienna dances

During the *Vormärz* (the period before the revolution of March 1848), Vienna was famous for the enormous popularity of dance evenings. Many travel journals from the early nineteenth century show the surprise of foreigners when they were confronted with the untamable lust for dancing of

[991] An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Piano Bulletin*, the journal of the Dutch-Flemish branch of the European Piano Teachers Association (EPTA): 'Schuberts walsen als model voor improvisaties'. *Piano Bulletin,* Jaargang 35, no. 2 (2017); 7-19.

[992] For Czerny's text on composed dance music, see chapter 12.2.

[993] Hanslick, E.: *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien; zweiter Teil: Aus dem Concertsaal.* Wien, 1870; 23.

the Viennese, a need that to many seemed to verge on the obsessive. For instance, Mary Novello, who in 1829 arrived in Vienna together with her husband Vincent on the occasion of a visit to Mozart's widow, sighed that she heard waltzes everywhere, 'nothing but waltzes, eternal commonplace waltzes. Germany really appears to me at present the land of galops, waltzes and quadrilles'.[994] Many foreign diplomats who were in the city during the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815 also were entertained with a large number of magnificent balls; the Austrian field marshal Charles-Joseph Lamoral de Ligne reacted with a famous bon mot: 'Le congrès danse beaucoup, mais il ne marche pas' [the congress dances a lot, but it doesn't move], indicating that the negotiations themselves were going off very slowly. In her book *Musical life in Biedermeier Vienna*, Alice Hanson sketches a comprehensive view of the world of the Viennese waltz, the milieu in which composers and band leaders such as Joseph Lanner and the Strauss family experienced their hours of fame, and Johann Strauss Jr. later received the unofficial honorary title of *Walzerkönig* ('king of waltz'). A nineteenth-century silhouette shows the two Strauss brothers Johann Jr. and Joseph; the little poem reads: 'The king of waltz carries his crown / with dignity and cold blood; / But his brother is not left without either / on him the dancing looks very good.[995]

Example 11.2.1

[994] Quoted in Hanson, A.: *Musical life in Biedermeier Vienna*. Cambridge, 1985; 162.
[995] Schließmann, H.: *Wiener Schattenbilder*. Wien, 1892; 9.

It is probably not an exaggeration to call *Vormärz* Vienna a police state. Government control was so rigid that public dance evenings had to be approved by the police beforehand. An incidental fortunate result of this, and of the fact that taxes were levied on the participating musicians (the *Musik Impost*), is that detailed records of balls are still available today. Dance evenings were not allowed during specific periods; the 'high season' was during the carnival time from Epiphany (January 6th) till midnight before Ash Wednesday. Thanks to police information, we know that there were as many as 772 balls during the 1823 season, which were visited by more than 200.000 people.[996]

11.3 Schubertiades

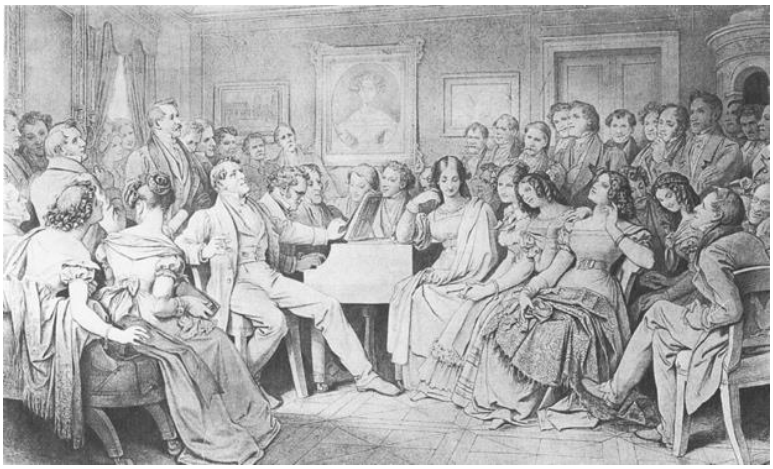
The music for large, public ball evenings in venues such as the *Redoutensaal* was performed by orchestras conducted by celebrities such as Johann Strauss Sr. However, not every ball was an event of these dimensions; in the homes of the middle-class citizens, more modest parties were organised at which dancing was an indispensable ingredient as well. Many houses, even outside Vienna, had a 'salon', a large room where the residents liked to meet with friends and acquaintances, big enough for dancing and small concerts. The restored houses of famous nineteenth-century musical couples such as Mendelssohn Bartholdy-Jeanrenaud and Schumann-Wieck in Leipzig still feature such salons, inevitably equipped with a grand piano. A picture of the salon in the former residence of Mendelssohn in Leipzig (now the *Mendelssohn-Haus*) gives an impression of the dimensions of such a room:

Example 11.3.1

[996] Hanson, A.: op. cit., 157.

The sales of pianos had boomed during the early nineteenth century, and the instrument had become an almost obligatory part of the bourgeois household. Dance evenings in salons therefore often made use of piano music, and as a result an urgent need for dance music for piano had arisen. Publishers jumped on that development by offering new anthologies with dance music every year, books with often beautiful titles such as *Halt's enk z'samm* [Stay close together], *Valses nobles* [Noble waltzes] or *Musikalisches Angebinde zum neuen Jahre* [Musical gift for the new year]. Many composers contributed to such collections, and one of them was Franz Schubert, who composed new dance music for similar anthologies every year from 1822 until his death. Like many colleagues, he also published series of dances outside the carnival anthologies, often loosely grouped by key. Collected in a modern edition, they make up one or two large volumes with countless small gems that are unfortunately little known. One might feel tempted to dismiss such publications as jobs on the side, purely meant to relieve his financial trouble; nevertheless there are indications that Schubert actually loved composing and performing dance music.

Still famous, for instance, are the 'Schubertiades' which were in fact gatherings of friends in a bourgeois salon, with Schubert as a key figure: his music was performed at such evenings. The common understanding today of the Schubertiades is to a large extent based upon a well-known drawing by Schubert's friend Moritz von Schwind, made four decades after Schubert's death:[997]



Example 11.3.2

This drawing shows Schubert at the piano with the singer Johann Vogl at his side. They are surrounded by a more than attentive crowd of friends that includes several artists, poets and musicians. The listeners look transported and the whole scene has a Parnassian touch. Surely this idealised picture has lent almost mythical proportions to the popular image of the historical Schubertiades. Most likely, however, they were rather informal meetings where especially the lighter

[997] Source: Wikicommons.

and more accessible works of Schubert were performed, such as certain songs and pieces for piano *à quatre mains*. At least as important as the musical part of the evening were the connecting meal, the drinking, the games – and the dancing! In his memoirs the actor Heinrich Anschütz writes how Schubert was once playing dance music during such an evening, which, however, took place during Lent. As dance evenings were not allowed during the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter, a passing police officer interfered and summoned the actor to cancel the party. It seems that this was much to the distress of Schubert, who exclaimed: 'Das tun's mir zu Fleiß, weil s' wissen, daß ich gar so gern Tanzmusik mach!' ['They are doing that to me, since they know that I enjoy so much making dance music!'].[998]

11.4 Schubert as an improviser

Eye-witness accounts inform us that the dance music that Schubert played for friends was completely or partly improvised. In order to be suitable for dancing, dance music has to fulfil several very specific conditions: a fixed metre, a strict organisation in eight-bar phrases, but also melodic characteristics and specific types of accompaniment. As any ballet pianist knows, the dancing quality of music is not so much about the time signature as such, but about a specific type of musical movement, a *Schwung*, a 'groove' (to use an anachronistic term). Often it is hardly possible to notate its rhythmical details. An example from nineteenth-century music is the Viennese waltz, which occupies centre stage at the annual New Year's concert that is broadcasted across the world from the *Musikverein* in Vienna. Normally notated in a 3/4 metre with an accompaniment in equal quarter notes, this is not the rhythm as it should be performed: actually the second beat is supposed to come slightly early, though the exact nature of this shift should preferably be communicated by experience. The correct dance timing can hardly be learnt from a textbook, an aspect it shares with other forms of subtle rhythmic nuances such as tempo rubato (→ chapter 7).

It is precisely such fixed written and unwritten preconditions that make dance music an attractive medium for improvisation. The dance rhythm and the compact, stereotypical phrase structure guide the musician's playing, as it were: they are loci communes. Not much is known about Schubert as an improviser. Most likely he was not a technically advanced pianist, witness the circumstance that he probably never or only briefly owned or rented a piano during his short life. However, we know from accounts of friends and acquaintances such as Leopold von Sonnleithner that he loved to improvise dance music during the Schubertiades. On the other hand, contemporaries write that Schubert's speed of composing was such that one may wonder whether this way of composing couldn't be seen as 'improvising on paper'. Karoline Pichler, for instance, describes Schubert's way of composing as

[998] Deutsch, O.E.: *Schubert: Die Erinnerungen seiner Freunde*. Wiesbaden, 1957; 256.

almost unconscious, and adds that he sometimes had already forgotten the music a few weeks after the act of composing.[999] With respect to his piano improvisations, it is assumed that he sometimes repeated improvised waltzes that pleased him, and that he notated them afterwards with or without changes. Now, it has been claimed many times that certain compositions originated as free improvisations that were notated afterwards, for instance Johann Sebastian Bach's Fantasy and Fugue in g minor BWV 542 for organ. Nobody can check to what extent such a claim is true; in any case, it seems unlikely that people who heard Bach improvising would have been able to remember a twelve minute piece so precisely that they were able to judge whether Bach's later composition was an exact account of the earlier improvisation. With short dance forms such as Schubert's *Ländler* and waltzes, however, the situation is different: the small scale of these pieces actually makes it possible for the improviser to get them firmly into his mind and to notate them rather accurately afterwards. This, too, is confirmed by the experience of modern ballet pianists. The daily training ('class') of dancers starts with thirty minutes of exercises at the barre, which are always performed twice: once with the left hand at the barre, once with the right hand. It is pleasant for a dancer to hear the same music both times he performs an exercise. This means that the pianist, when he is improvising, must try to repeat a piece of (usually) 32 'bars'. After some practice this turns out to be very well possible; it is even instructive for the pianist, because he is forced to be aware of what exactly he is doing during the improvisation. Schubert, too, must have repeated his music during a series of *Ländler* more than once. That, at least, may be concluded from an interesting remark by Leopold von Sonnleithner, mentioned above, who wrote about Schubert in 1857:

> Er besuchte manchmal Hausbälle in vertrauten Familienkreisen; er tanzte nie, war aber stets bereit, sich ans Klavier zu setzen, wo er stundenlang die schönsten Walzer improvisierte; jene, die ihm gefielen, wiederholte er, um sie zu behalten und in der Folge aufzuschreiben.[1000]
>
> [Sometimes he visited balls in the houses of familiar circles; he never danced, but he was always prepared to take place at the piano, where he improvised the most beautiful waltzes for hours; those which he liked he repeated in order to remember them and notate afterwards.]

To sum up, it may be said that Schubert's creativity seems to have been an interesting continuum of composing, improvising, and anything in between. One must be careful not to assume that composed music is always a residue of a former improvisation; in the case of Schubert's dance music, however, it seems justified to regard the composed waltzes as similar to his improvised ones, considering the practical requirements for producing dance music, along with eyewitness accounts

[999] Deutsch, O.E.: op. cit., 347.
[1000] Deutsch, O.E.: op. cit., 141.

of Schubert's manner of working.[1001] On basis of this information, it is a thrilling challenge to try and improvise similar short dance forms today, guided by the composed music of Schubert and his contemporaries. This objective invites a specific type of analysis that might be called practice-oriented. Music analysis, I argue, is not a goal in its own right, but a method to find answers to questions about aspects of pieces. In this case, one is looking for aspects that constitute the identity of the dance music in question: not the identity of the score of a single Schubert waltz, but the identity of a musical genre, its melodic and harmonic aspects, its rhythmic and metrical features. The type of analysis that I propose here focuses on the identification of loci communes: not of models to be filled in, or patterns to be copied, but of guiding principles that invite the performer to improvise new music in this style. In the remainder of this chapter, several aspects will be discussed: sections 11.5 through 11.7 successively investigate the different dance genres that Schubert composed, their background in folk music, and aspects of harmony in Schubert's waltzes (such as harmonic loci and phrase structures). Section 11.8 analyses a number of recorded improvisations that make use of loci as mentioned in the previous sections. Finally, section 11.9 will suggest ways to implement these findings in the (conservatory) training of musicians.

11.5 Dance forms in Schubert

The majority of Schubert's dances consists of pieces in 3/4 metre with titles such as *Deutsche*, *Ländler*, *Walzer* and *Menuett*. In addition, there are a couple of very short *Écossaises* (Scottish dances) in a fast 2/4. This chapter will deal with the dances in triple meter only. A culturally interesting phenomenon is that, except for the minuet, these dance types are originally folk dances from the area of present-day southern Bavaria and Austria that had become socially acceptable, a development that already had taken place in the eighteenth century.

The musical distinction between the different dance types is often unclear. A *Ländler* was a dance in a slower tempo than the later Strauss-waltz. The name possibly refers to 'dance from *Landl*' (an area in the current *Bundesland* Upper Austria), though it may also refer to 'dance from the

[1001] In *The Field of Musical* Improvisation, Marcel Cobussen writes that 'all music making, including composing and arranging, contains stages in its production process which could be called – or be interpreted as – improvisatory.' (Cobussen, M.: *The Field of Musical Improvisation*. Leiden, 2017; 81.) This statement corresponds with Bruce Ellis Benson's idea that improvising is 'reworking something that already exists' (→ chapter 1.2). In this study, however, I have put more emphasis on the simultaneity of invention and performance. In that sense, a composer who notates (in any form) a musical idea, instead of performing it, cannot be said to 'improvise'. I argue that the act of writing slows down the process to such an extent that a reflective quality enters – not to mention the option of revising or changing the original musical idea. The case of Schubert, discussed in this section, is an exception: according to eye-witnesses, he composed with an extraordinary speed and 'unconsciously', which strongly suggests that the reflective filter was absent (at times, that is: there are also compositions that show a careful planning and a staged composition process). It is in this sense that Schubert's composing sometimes may have resembled 'improvising on paper'. In addition, the fact that he may have consciously 'stored' in his memory some of his improvised waltzes, and notated them afterwards, is exceptional and should not be generalised. The relation between composing and improvising will be further discussed in chapter 12.6.

countryside'.[1002] The dancers form couples who make graceful and sometimes complex movements. A remarkable difference with an old court dance like the minuet was the fact that the two dancers had to hold onto each other most of the time, which was considered piquant by some. The *Ländler* was also known as a 'love dance', a dance for loving couples.[1003]

At the end of a series of *Ländler*, it became usual that the spinning pairs roamed the room, which was called a *Walzer* (*walzen* = to turn). Later the *Walzer* became an independent dance. It was difficult not to get dizzy during the *walzen*; apparently many young ladies fainted in the heat of the moment, which caused sharp disapproval of the waltz and eventually even led to a temporary ban – but this happened only after the death of Schubert, when dancing the waltz with the music of Strauss and Lanner had become extremely popular in the large Viennese ballrooms, and the tempo of the dance had become faster.[1004]

A nice detail in the *Ländler* as a folk dance was the *Schnadahüpfl*, a moment when the dancers started to sing (or maybe, to roar), accompanied by stamping their feet.[1005] Sometimes Schubert seems to evoke such jocular passages in his composed waltzes. It is less clear what kind of dance the *Deutsche* was. The term means 'German dance', but more specifically it seems to have indicated a dance related to the minuet, and slightly faster than a *Ländler*.

Schubert's dances were popular. Often he made copies of series of dances for friends, who enjoyed playing them. The most famous one during his life was probably the so-called *Trauer-Walzer* [Mourning waltz] D 365 no. 2, which was distributed anonymously and had sometimes even been attributed to Beethoven:[1006]

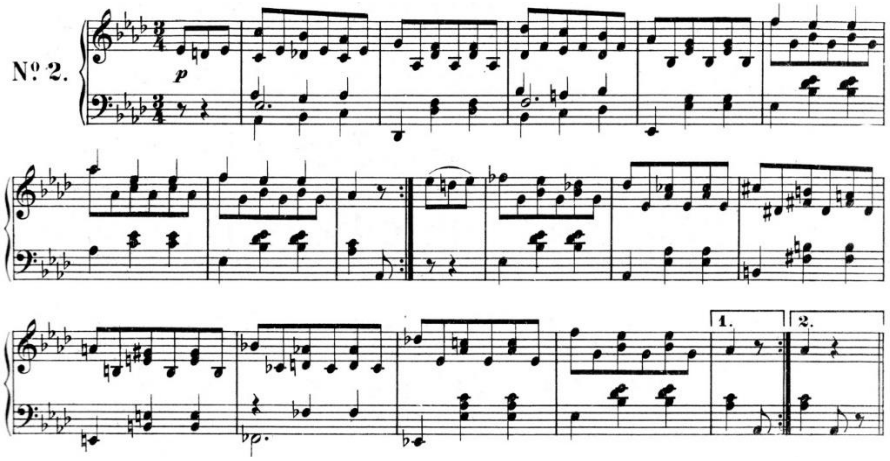
[1002] Flotzinger, R.: 'Ländler'. In: *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon. Online-Ausgabe*. Wien, 2002 ff (https://www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_L/Laendler.xml.

[1003] Neumeyer, D.: *Schubert, Dance, and Dancing in Vienna, 1815-1840*. 2012 / 2015; 5. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/29532/Neumeyer_Schubert--dance_and_dancing.pdf?sequence=3.

[1004] The fact that ladies were wearing corsets may have contributed to their fainting as well.

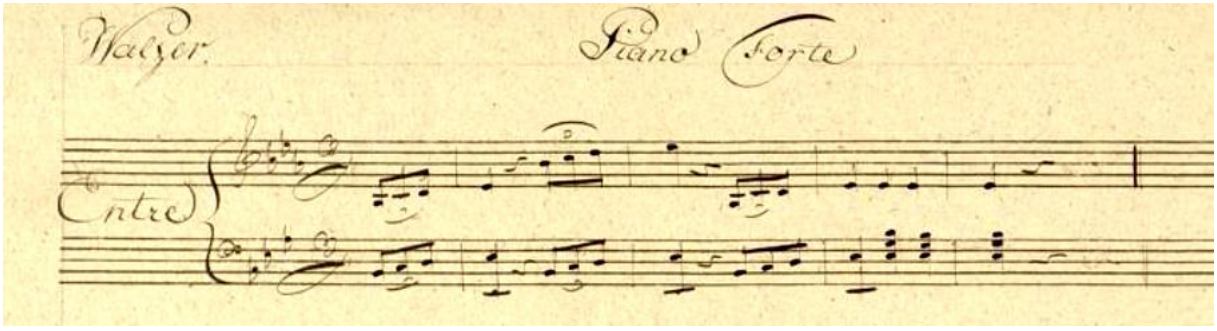
[1005] Neumeyer, D.: op. cit., 13.

[1006] *Franz Schubert's Werke*, Serie XII, Nr. 1 (J. Epstein, ed.). Leipzig, 1889.



Example 11.5.1

Besides his contributions to Carnival anthologies, Schubert published much dance music in collections of 12 to as many as 38, often grouped by key. The dances were performed in several combinations. Most well-known (and also seen in the minuet and trio in many sonatas and symphonies) is an ABA-structure, in which the first dance is repeated after the second one has been played. It is very possible that Schubert also adhered to this structure when he was improvising. Longer, rondo-like structures were also possible such as ABAB, ABACABA, etc.[1007] People were not always dancing to his music; sometimes they simply enjoyed it for listening, or the dancers liked it so much that they stopped dancing. It is not unlikely that short introductions were improvised to the composed dances, because dancers simply needed this for their preparation – this, too, is something that ballet pianists typically need to do. A written example of such an *Aufforderung zum Tanz* (invitation to the dance, as the title of Carl Maria von Weber's famous composition has it) can be found in a manuscript from 1826 by a certain Eggert, which shows the following *Entré* [introduction] to a group of 10 waltzes:[1008]



Example 11.5.2

[1007] Neumeyer, D.: op. cit., 21.
[1008] https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/blbihd/content/titleinfo/3909101

In order to provide Schubert's dance music with a context, it might be useful to compare it with similar compositions of contemporaries, and with the folk music that inspired it.

11.6 Folk music

Various collections of notated dance melodies have been handed down, mainly musical 'playbooks' of anonymous local musicians. Of course, these pieces are much simpler than dance music of composers such as Mozart, Beethoven or Schubert. However, such melodies might show the most 'pure' form of the various dance types, whereas the 'art' dances are stylised versions of the originals; these stylised dances are both melodically and harmonically much more developed, and tend to mix characteristics of the original dances anyway. Besides, there is historical evidence that Schubert's *Deutsche* and *Walzer*, for instance, were used for different dances such as the *Cotillon* as well.[1009] Interestingly, even in folk music it is not always easy to distinguish musically between the different dance types (they are usually not indicated), and some melodies show features of different dances. Obviously, it is not necessary to establish an exact musical demarcation of different dance types here, but it is useful for an aspiring improviser to formulate for each dance type discussed here a characteristic trait, borrowed from folk music – that is, a locus communis. To that end, I will make ample use of the essay *Der Deutsche* by Walter Deutsch.[1010]

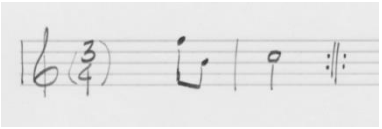
a. Melodic features

A general feature is the extremely regular phrase structure within a binary form. A standard musical phrase is eight bars long; usually such a group of eight bars is repeated, followed by a second group of eight bars, which is in turn repeated. Sometimes Schubert composed a second part of double length, which is also repeated; this asymmetrical form (which can have features of a ternary form) can be found in folk music as well.[1011] There are variations on those types: sometimes Schubert writes out a varied (often modulating) repeat, omitting the repeat signs. In this chapter, the focus will be on the symmetrical form type of two repeated eight-bar sections; the *Trauer-Walzer* is a good example.

The traditional *Ländler* distinguishes itself musically by multiple arpeggiated triads in eighth notes. Some commentators see a connection with yodeling here, although this type of melody also occurred outside the Alp region. Another feature of *Ländler* melodies is the melodic cadence at the end of an eight-bar phrase: often this is a variant of the melodic turn ^4 - ^7 - ^1, which is supported

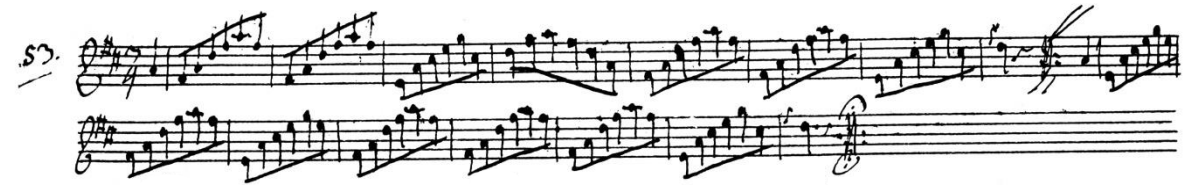
[1009] Dürr, W. & Krause, A. (eds.): *Schubert Handbuch*. Kassel, 1997; 445.
[1010] Deutsch, W.: 'Der Deutsche'. In: Schusser, E. (ed.): *Tanzmelodien aus München um 1800*. Bruckmühl, 1988; 22-46.
[1011] On the other hand Heinrich Christoph Koch writes that a minuet that is meant for dancing should always have two parts of equal length, which leads Walburga Litschauer (in her contribution to the *Schubert Handbuch*) to the assumption that asymmetric dances were meant to be enjoyed as listening music (Dürr, W. & Krause, A. (eds.): op. cit., 442).

harmonically by a V^7 – I cadence in which the fifth of the dominant seventh chord (or the ^2) is missing.



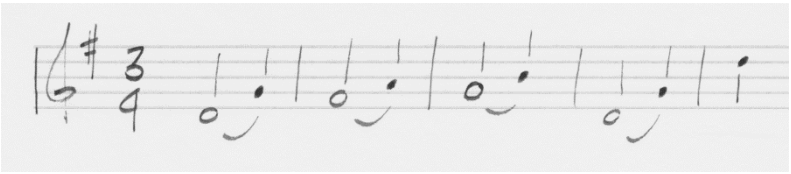
Example 11.6.1: Melodic cadence in a Ländler

Both features are present in the following melody from the region of Munich (ca. 1800) – incidentally called a *Deutsche* in the manuscript, which again shows the absence of a strict demarcation of names for dance types:[1012]



Example 11.6.2

Melodically, the *Walzer* frequently uses motifs consisting of a (strong) half note slurred to a quarter note – often in triad arpeggiations, but also stepwise. An example from folk music:[1013]



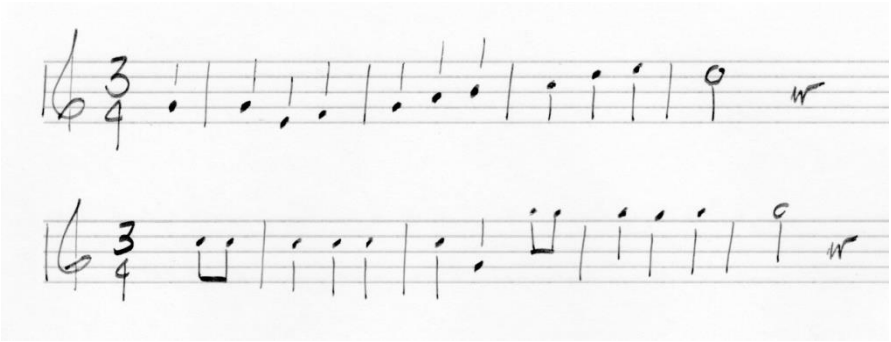
Example 11.6.3

The individual phrases of a waltz tend to span the full eight bars. This is an important difference with the *Deutsche*, which is melodically organised in groups of four bars (*Viertakter*). Another feature of the *Deutsche* is a melodic curve that is more varied than in a *Ländler*: the eighth note movement is less stereotypical, and it is more interspersed with quarter notes.

The minuet finally has a more stately movement that is primarily based upon quarter notes, which also goes for the bass line; the harmonic rhythm is often faster than in the three previous dances. As a result, the minuet often does not have the familiar oom-pah-pah accompaniment. Sometimes the

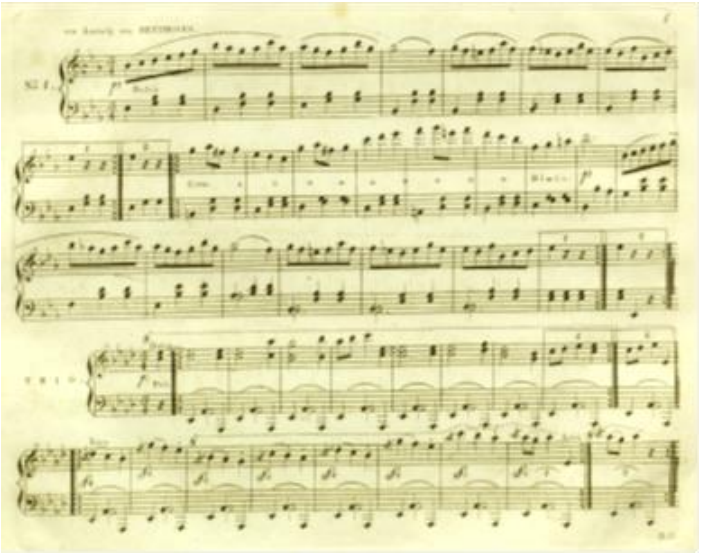
[1012] Schusser, E. (ed.): op. cit., 19.
[1013] Schusser, E. (ed.): op. cit., 31.

melody contains fanfare-like motifs. Here are two examples of minuet-type melodies from the collection of folk music from Munich quoted from before:[1014]



Example 11.6.4

The anthologies with dance music that were published every year contained pieces by a large variety of composers; as could be expected, most of them have been forgotten today. While browsing through such books, however, one sometimes suddenly comes across names that are still known today. The collection *Musikalisches Angebinde zum neuen Jahre* from 1824, for instance, presents forty new waltzes by just as many composers, among whom one finds Schubert, Beethoven and Czerny. Though the pieces are announced as waltzes on the front page, different types of dances are actually represented within the collection. Beethoven's composition, for instance, seems to have the character of a *Deutsche*, judging by the almost total absence of waltz rhythms and by the prevailing phrasing in *Viertakter*. The trio, on the other hand, does manifest the characteristic movement of a waltz.[1015]



Example 11.6.5

[1014] Schusser, E. (ed.): op. cit., 29.
[1015] Müller, C.F. (ed.): *Musikalisches Angebinde zum neuen Jahre.* Wien, [1824]; 1.

b. Harmonic features

The melodies in collections of folk music are usually not provided with an accompaniment. Given the extremely simple harmony these melodies are based on, this would not be necessary. Most melodies can be harmonised with just two chords: a tonic and a dominant triad. The accompaniment of the *Deutsche* quoted above in example 11.6.2, for instance, shows the following pattern:

I | I | V | I | I | I | V | I :‖: V | I | V | I | I | I | V | I :‖

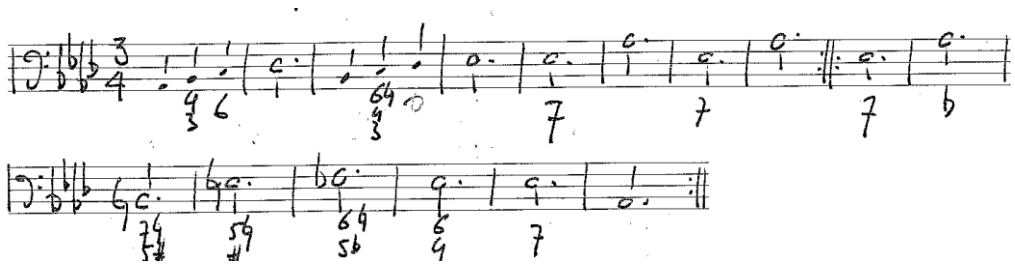
An accompanying band – e.g., double bass and guitar – could easily fill in the required accompaniment on the spot. Other folk melodies show similar simple harmonic patterns, which appear in a few variants. Not surprisingly, the composed dance music that was printed in the carnival collections is usually harmonically much richer, featuring secondary dominants and modulations as well. The stylistic similarities among the different pieces in these anthologies are considerable, possibly because the composers in the end were consciously attempting to sound 'folk-like', despite the greater harmonic variety.

The examples from folk music may provide a general orientation for determining the character of the different dance forms in Schubert, and be a source of inspiration for new melodies.

11.7 Harmony in Schubert's waltzes

A harmonic reduction of a Schubert waltz in the form of a figured bass provides a clear summary of the harmonic and phrase structure. Collecting a considerable number of such reductions results in what could be seen as a sampling of Schubert's harmonic language – primarily for this type of composition, but at the same time representing the harmony of Schubert'music in a nutshell.[1016] Of course, it is not possible within the limited framework of a sixteen bar dance form to make room for large scale harmonic developments such as extended sequences or distant modulations, but chromatic mediant relationships or modulations by means of the German sixth chord, both characteristic for Schubert, do occur often enough. There are also harmonic loci communes that are familiar from the Neapolitan partimento tradition as well as other sources, and that have been listed in this study in the context of methods for preluding (→ chapter 9.5). The Trauer-Walzer (example 11.5.1) shows such a sequence in the first *Achttakter*; it is a Monte sequence that has been embellished harmonically with passing harmonies in bars 1 and 3:

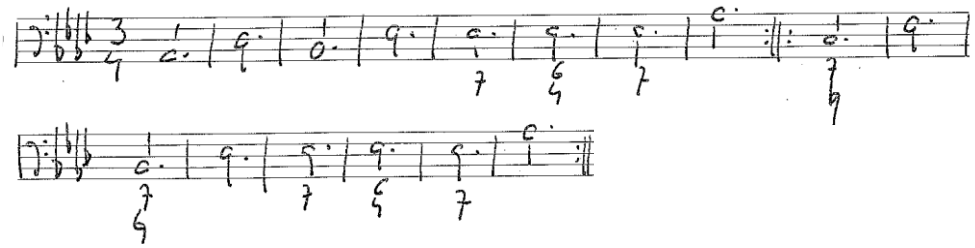
[1016] A collection of 20 waltz reductions, together with recordings, can be found in the appendix.



Example 11.7.1

[11.7 #1 Harmonic reduction of D365 n. 2]

A 'cleaner' version of the same sequence turns up in the (connecting) following waltz D 365 no. 3 in the same key:



Example 11.7.2

[11.7 #2 Harmonic reduction of D365 no. 3]

These two waltzes therefore share the harmonic opening gesture, and also the cadential progressions are practically identical. It is like starting a game of chess: a standardised opening can provoke different continuations, which makes it interesting to compare both waltzes. In both pieces the first eight-bar phrase starts and finishes on the tonic. This has implications for what follows. If the second phrase would have the same harmonic structure, starting and cadencing on the tonic as well but with a different melody, it would not sound like a logical development from the first phrase, but like the new start of something different; the rhetorical function of the second phrase would be unclear because it wouldn't follow 'logically' from the first one. To use the metaphor of an orator: it would be as if a statement were made in a sentence, after which a different topic would be broached. To the listener, the relation between the two topics will be unclear because the second one does not clearly relate to the first in any 'organic' way (another favourite nineteenth-century metaphor); for instance, it doesn't amplify, develop, explain, or even deny it.

It is precisely the terseness of the small musical dance forms that so beautifully reveals these important rhetorical principles. In order to produce a compelling continuation, one needs tonal contrast. Both D 365 nos. 2 and 3 have this contrast, in both cases in the form of a temporary minor mode. No. 2 continues in bar 9 in the parallel minor key, which clears the way for a fast and typically

Schubertian modulation to the flattened sub-mediant (with a return via the German sixth chord in bar 13). In waltz no. 3 the colour of minor is found in the sixth degree harmony in bar 10 (f minor), after which the return happens conventionally through a diatonic falling-fifth sequence.

Monte sequences occur often and in various forms, with and without inversions, diatonic and chromatic. Other frequent harmonic loci that were already listed in chapter 9.5 are: several kinds of authentic cadences (sometimes including a clearly marked seventh chord on the raised fourth degree, for instance in D365 nr 29), falling fifth sequences, the Romanesca (D783 no. 16), the 'reversed Romanesca' (D783 no. 5), the Monte-Romanesca (D969 no. 11), and the 'alternative scale harmonisation' mentioned at the end of chapter 9.5*d* (D734 no. 13).

11.8 Historically inspired waltzes

Also after Schubert's death, improvised or semi-improvised dance music remained a recurring element in art music. As a law student in Heidelberg, Robert Schumann loved to improvise dance music, and his acquaintance with Schubert's waltzes kindled the conception of his *Papillons* op. 2.[1017] Brahms also paid his tribute to Schubert and the Viennese dancing culture in his *Walzer* op. 39 and the *Liebeslieder-Walzer* for voices ops. 52 and 65. In his youth he toured with the violinist Eduard Hoffmann Reményi; as a duo they were very successful with their Gypsy-style melodies for which Brahms improvised his accompaniments.[1018] Later in his life, Brahms based his *Ungarische Tänze* WoO 1 upon these performances.

Thus not only the concrete historical situation of Franz Schubert improvising dance music for his friends, but also the way this music lived on in later musical styles, may still be a source of inspiration for improvisations today. In this section, I present a few recordings that exemplify this statement. They are not recordings of live performances or studio sessions; rather, they should be seen as audio snapshots I made when I had the opportunity to get to know a number of historical pianos. The Viennese provenance of these instruments invited me to improvise dance music as described in this chapter. My goal was not to deliver original, interesting, or 'correct' music; the focus was entirely on exploring the characteristics of the individual pianos. For this reason, the musical result is to a certain extent involuntary – a musical counterpart of automatic writing (*écriture automatique*), in a way. This shows in the form: not all waltzes are built according to the strict model of two repeated eight-bar phrases. It also shows in the themes that are often new, but sometimes borrowed from music I knew. What makes the recordings relevant for this study is that they show clear loci communes: the phrases themselves are usually eight bars long, the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of Viennese dance music are present, and harmonic loci as discussed earlier in this study can be recognised. As for

[1017] Tadday, U. (ed.): *Schumann Handbuch.* Stuttgart, 2006; 225.
[1018] Swafford, Jan: *Johannes Brahms: A Biography.* London, 1997; 61.

the goal itself of the recorded sessions: they are meant to demonstrate how the sound characteristics of the various pianos may serve as loci communes in that they, too, strongly invite specific musical content. The first two recordings present Viennese instruments from the early nineteenth century. Such pianos often had up to 6 pedals, controlling various 'stops' or sound effects; of these, only the damper pedal and the soft or *una corda* pedal survived later. The type of action is invariably the Viennese *Prellzungenmechanik* [German action]. The second and third recordings were made on a late-nineteenth-century successor of this type of instrument.

[11.8 #1 Matthias Müller. Rec. 2018]

On this recording of an instrument built by Matthias Müller around 1815-1820 (FF – c5, 6 pedals), I played three waltzes that explore some of the instrument's stops. In the first waltz, I can be heard struggling with the noisy damper pedal that only allowed for an 'off' and 'on' position, still far removed from the later subtleties in pedalling; the second waltz (0'53") is played with the combined *una corda* and moderator stops, and the last one (2'00") makes use of the drum and bells stop. Harmonically the first waltz shows ordinary cadential patterns and falling-fifth sequences; the only peculiarity is the modulation towards the third degree in the first phrase. The third waltz almost repeats this harmonic plan; the second waltz is harmonically conventional.[1019] Melodically, the waltzes stay close to the world of Schubert, as well. In the second one, the tenderness of the sound and the fast-decaying tone invite left hand arpeggiations; the extraordinary singing quality of the instrument (even with the moderator switched on) leads to rubato in the right hand melody, lengthening the expressive high notes. In the final waltz, the drum / bells combination naturally evokes some imaginary 'Schnadahüpfl'.

[11.8 #2 Andreas Stein. Rec. 2018]

An instrument built by Andreas Stein (CC – f4) in the 1820's already has a more 'Romantic' character, which invites the performer to play with thicker chords, octave doublings in the melody and bitter-sweet diminished seventh chords, as heard in the first waltz . The second waltz (1'10", *Ländler* type) is in the flat submediant, a common Romantic key relation. The third waltz (1'48") features the diminished seventh chord (with 4-3 suspension) on the raised fourth degree; the key relation with the previous waltz is again a movement to the flat submediant, one more major third down. The fourth waltz (2'39") is in a minor key a fifth lower from the previous key; as a result it is in the relative minor key of number 1. The last waltz (3'38") reuses the idea of repeated chords, as in

[1019] Similar harmonic plans or gestures in successive waltzes also occur in Schubert's cycles (→ section 11.5).

the last waltz of the previous set, though in a minor key that has no clear connection with the other waltzes of this set; its tonic is a whole step below that of the previous waltz.

In 2017, I enjoyed the opportunity to play the original 'J.B. Streicher & Sohn' grand piano (1880) that once belonged to Richard and Maria Fellinger, close friends of Johannes Brahms. This is the very piano that can be heard on the only existing recording (1889) of Brahms's piano playing.[1020]

Example 11.8.1

Today, it is part of the collection of the Brahms-Museum in Mürzzuschlag, located in an apartment that Brahms used as a summer residence.[1021] The action is similar to the much older instruments of Müller and Stein, only the instrument as a whole is bigger and heavier in all respects. The relation with the early nineteenth-century Viennese pianofortes, though, is immediately clear to a player: the action offers a similar directness and promptness of response. Its tone has a strong singing quality; it is much more powerful and long-lasting than on the early instruments, and allows for a great richness of nuances. The utterly late-Romantic character of the piano invited me to a slow and melancholic waltz with much space for colouring in the chords and in the inner voices. Its structure is a loose ABA' with coda; there are several loci that recall Brahms, for instance the important role of the subdominant (the pendulum-like I – IV – I motion in the A part, the continuation of the antecedent on II in the B-part), or the ample use of octave doublings in the melody in combination with parallel thirds or sixths.

[11.8 #3 Streicher (1), *Valse lente*. Rec. 2017]

[1020] For instance on https://youtu.be/H31q7Qrjjoo; information about the instrument on the website of its restorer, Gerd Hecher: http://www.hecherpiano.com/brahmspiano_e.html#BRAHMSFLUEGEL.

[1021] Many thanks to director Robert Fuchs for generously allowing me to play the instruments in the museum outside the opening season.

Needless to say that it was a very special and moving experience to play an instrument that Brahms touched, located in a room where he spent many happy hours. But apart from the influence of the 'genius loci', the instrument's sustained and very expressive character also fits in very well with a more extensive use of chromatics, which is what I did in the first waltz in the last and longest set:

[11.8 #4 Streicher (2). Rec. 2017]

For clarity's sake, the waltzes of this series will be described here one by one:
Waltz no. 1: When the many chromatic passing notes and appoggiaturas in the melody are disregarded, the harmony of the opening theme consists basically of a fragment of the rule of the octave. This harmonic locus had a long history, but as a way of opening a waltz it would have been uncommon in Schubert. Not so in Brahms, however, as seen in his waltz in D minor, op. 39 no. 8. After finishing the first phrase on the tonic, I clearly make use of contrast by a change of mode, as discussed above, in the second phrase (0'55").

In the subsequent waltzes I gradually explored the dynamic and virtuosic extremes of the instrument, sometimes adopting Brahmsian features. For instance, the use of parallel sixths can be heard throughout; it may be tempting to think that they were called forth by this instrument, but it might as well be the other way around – i.e., that the awareness of the link between this piano and Brahms put me on that track. Anyway, the rich and dark colour of the Streicher's tone makes this type of voice-leading work very well and thus invites the player to apply it. The second waltz (1'41") harmonically recalls the previous one in the rising scale in the bass, but this time in major. The repeat of the beginning (2'01") explores the effect of the *una corda* pedal.

The third waltz (2'19") makes use of (not very Brahms-like) virtuosic arpeggios.

Number 4 (2'49") borrows the opening motif from Schubert (D 790 no. 6) over a falling-fifth progression (a VI – II – V – I cadence). The hesitation between the major mode and its relative minor recalls Brahms.

In the fifth waltz (3'40") I tested the instrument's capacity for quick trills and other fast and light passages (quite un-Brahmsian). The finishing motif on 4'06" is an unconscious repetition of the end of the first waltz of this set (1'32").

In number 6 (4'09") the simple melody in parallel sixths almost has a schmaltzy flavour.

In the next waltz (number 7, 4'54") the sixths are extended to sixths-plus-thirds, again one of Brahms's favourite textures. The bold energy of this waltz was definitely inspired by some of the *Liebeslieder-Walzer*.

The cycle finishes with an epilogue (5'46"), just as Brahms did in his *Neue Liebeslieder* op. 65 ('Zum Schluß'), or Schumann in the *Papillons* ('Finale'). Also Schubert occasionally wrote a 'Coda' (D 420).

11.9 Teaching waltzes à la Schubert

There are several ways in which material from sections 11.5 through 11.7 can be applied pedagogically. The focus will here be on the collection of figured bass reductions that I mentioned in section 11.7. The written reductions are accompanied by recorded realisations on harmonium.[1022]

Such a collection of material is very versatile: it can be used for a large variety of courses with different learning goals. The recordings make excellent ear training exercises, for instance, and the figured basses can obviously be realised at the keyboard or even on a monodic instrument.[1023] However, when the goal is to acquire fluency in this specific musical language, it will be good to identify and internalise different loci.[1024] One advantage of studying early nineteenth-century Viennese dance music is that the stylistic framework is unusually clear, which makes it a fascinating case study. Another advantage with respect to teaching purposes is that the technical demands this type of music puts to the player are modest, quite different from improvised cadenzas or even preludes, for instance. After all, the composed dance music from the 1820's was meant to be playable by a wide range of amateur pianists. Needless to say, this doesn't preclude true musical beauty! It is important that the latter aspect be appreciated by the 'idiomatic improviser'. When the improviser does not feel the desire to make something beautiful, to 'tell a musical story', improvising on a historical model becomes a dry and technical exercise.

New melodies on existing basses

A transitional stage may be to invent new melodies on the basis of the reductions of selected Schubert waltzes. Historically, the idea of creating a new piece with the bass of an existing composition has its roots in eighteenth-century pedagogy, where it was a usual way to teach music-making. Friedrich Erhard Niedt also specifically applied the principle to dance music, showing how one simple bassline

[1022] For these recordings I again used a nineteenth-century Alexandre reed organ. These instruments allow the player to 'shape' a harmonic phrase and clearly express its gestural character; another advantage is that in this way a too familiar sound colour is avoided, while at the same time this instrument belongs to the 'sound of the nineteenth century'.

[1023] Even on monodic instruments, it is possible to play harmony (as Baillot showed, → chapter 9.4). In order to internalise the harmonic course through playing or even singing, the chords may for instance be arpeggiated. When several students are working together, one of them may perform the bass line while others play or sing the harmonic voices. Such ear-training exercises allow for many useful variations and extensions, which, however, fall outside the scope of this study. Since the natural focus of these groups of musicians tends to be on melodies rather than on harmony, the skill of imagining harmony often requires some 'catching up' and is therefore an important part of ear training.

[1024] It is essential not to skip the step of familiarisation with Schubert's waltzes (and possibly with dance music of contemporaries as well); after all, a living experience with a musical language is a prerequisite when one intends to produce something in the same idiom. Experiences with students from different backgrounds show that especially those who had been exposed to this style relatively early in their lives – for instance because this type of folk music is still alive in their home regions – turned out to be very capable of coming up with convincing music. For novices it is recommended to play attentively through many of such pieces, possibly also transposing them in order to really master the scores. For monodic instruments, it is very well possible to make an *à vue*-arrangement with an ensemble, based upon the piano score; each instrument will choose a part, for instance the melody line, the bass, a middle voice, etc.

could lead to the invention of a whole suite.[1025] It implies inventing a 'good' melody on the given harmony, and turning the harmonic basis into a stylistically convincing accompaniment. It should be noted that any unaccompanied upbeat is not shown in a reduction, since it is usually unharmonised; in reality, many dances (both Schubert's and from folk music) start with an upbeat, typically two or three eight notes, or one quarter.

It is important that everything happen in real time without stopping, so that the student learns to think of musical phrases as single gestures. When there are two pianos available in the room, it can be rewarding to play with two pianists at the same time, or to make them alternate by playing different versions of a waltz.

Experience shows that students to whom this style is relatively unfamiliar, and who are also unexperienced improvisers, may come up with somewhat disorientated melodies that show little coherence. At this stage it may be a good idea to return to (other) original Schubert waltzes as reference material. Just as Fink advised the performer to make his own cadenza first and afterwards compare it with Czerny's example (→ chapter 10.5b), it will be instructive for students first to acquire experience with their own waltzes and then to compare those with good originals, because their own attempts will have sharpened their ears and eyes. One of the things that may become clear in this way is that Schubert's compositions show that he was very economical with his motivic material. It is interesting that this insight alone often already leads towards much better melodies; the same thing goes for the observation that a melody with a good singing quality generally tends to move rather stepwise than by leaps. Here the importance of a sound realisation of the figured bass, and especially of good and smooth voice leading, becomes clear. After all, the analysis of scores shows that melodies in a huge variety of tonal styles tend to be based upon one of the harmonic voices from an underlying four-part texture, or on a successive combination of such voices (cf. chapter 4.6). This is because the basic idea of the so-called harmonic chord connection coincides with that of a cantabile melody: few leaps, a flowing line, and a good counterpoint with the bass.

An extra stylistic inspiration might come from the characteristic features of original folk dances as they were mentioned above. The incredible variety of Schubert's melodies might be too diverse to be of much direct use, but simple melodic principles as they were established for the different dance types can actually be quite inspiring. The fact that some of these models (notably the *Ländler*) were characterised by frequent arpeggiations (and therefore melodic leaps), does not at all conflict with what was written about a 'good' melody above. Triad arpeggiations in a melody often represent an ornamental level of activity; put differently, even when there are only arpeggiated chords in a melody

[1025] Niedt, F.E.: *Musicalische Handleitung zur Variation des General-Basses, samt einer Anweisung, wie man aus einem schlechten General-Bass allerley Sachen, als Praeludia, Ciaconen, Allemanden, etc erfinden könne.* Hamburg, 1721 (part 2, 2nd edition by Johann Mattheson).

like in a *Ländler*, there will still be a higher-level melodic structure that conforms to the melodic principles mentioned. In the *Deutsche* from Munich, for instance (quoted above), there is a hidden upper voice a – g – c# - d that definitely represents a melodic quality.

Monodic players and singers may use the recordings as an accompaniment, ask a fellow musician to accompany them, or (in the case of singers) accompany themselves at the keyboard. Incidentally, it might seem surprising to work on this type of improvisation with singers, since the repertoire seems to be typically instrumental. In folk music, however, it is by no means unusual to sing waltzes (above the level of the *Schnadahüpfl*, too), and Brahms's beautiful vocal waltzes were already mentioned above.

Improvising new waltzes

The exercises and assignments that were discussed above may be seen as preparatory to the ultimate goal: freely improvising 'Biedermeier' dance music. This final section will therefore be relatively short. By becoming familiar with a large number of loci – not only with respect to harmony, but also melodic gestures, phrase structure, and dance movement[1026] – students will eventually be able to start 'speaking' actively the language of early-nineteenth-century Viennese dance music. Especially by internalising harmonic loci, in combination with the phrase structure, they will learn how to deal with many possible harmonic 'routes' that may be used within such a small form.

Pianists may be eager to explore exciting harmonic possibilities; for non-keyboardists, the situation is less simple. As I mentioned above, it is possible to play (or at least suggest) harmony on a monodic instrument as well; however, as Drouët wrote, arpeggiated chords are less effective and therefore need more time (→ chapter 9.8). This means that, within the concise frame of a waltz, it is advisable that singers, as well as wind or string instrumentalists, not be too ambitious concerning harmonic complexity while improvising. What they can do in terms of melodic inventiveness and expression, however, may arouse the jealousy of many a keyboard player.

[1026] Not to mention aspects that have not been discussed here, for instance the application of dissonances.