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Owen H. Belcher

Analysis from a Dualist Perspective: “Frühling” from Richard Strauss’s *Vier Letzte Lieder*

ABSTRACT: The paper presents an analysis of Richard Strauss’s “Frühling”, the first of his *Last Four Songs* composed in 1948. I adopt the harmonic dualism of Moritz Hauptmann and Hugo Riemann—a theoretical perspective which reflects the ideals of German Romanticism. I contrast this approach with Schenkerian and Neo-Riemannian analyses of the song by Richard Kaplan and Richard Cohn. Two features central to my analysis are: 1) the rejection of enharmonic equivalence, and 2) the function of a special type of augmented sixth, a “Frühling sixth”, which propels the music forward and gives the song its characteristic chromatic sound. Using Riemann’s *Schritt/Wechsel* system, I chart the large-scale harmonic moves of the piece on a ‘Klangnetz’, showing how the various harmonic transformations articulate certain key areas and reflect the meaning of the song’s text.

Schlagworte/Keywords: dualism; Dualismus; enharmonicism; Enharmonik; Klangnetz; Hugo Riemann; Richard Strauss

We begin not with Strauss, but with Schubert. Figure 1 is Schubert’s “Trauer-Waltz”, the second of the *36 Originaltänze*, D. 365. In the second half, an E-flat dominant seventh resolves to the minor tonic, A flat. Then, a B-dominant seventh resolves to E major. The E major chord is respelled as F flat major leading to cadential six-four and a perfect authentic cadence in A-flat major. At least, that is how the music is notated. The harmonic annotations on Figure 1 reveal Schubert’s actual harmonic progression. In the third measure of the second half of the waltz, the music moves to a C flat dominant seventh which resolves to F flat. In the fifth measure of the second half, the notation is corrected when Schubert respells the E major chord as F flat major (Figure 1).

Enharmonic renotations like this one occur frequently in music. One reason for such respellings is practical: Nobody really wants to read music in C \flat major, B double flat major, or worse. Another reason is theoretical: if one’s understanding of tonality is based on major and minor scales, then enharmonic renotations are necessary in order preserve the integrity of the Roman numerals and scale degrees. Richard Cohn reviews this issue at length at the beginning of his book, *Audacious Euphony*¹. In a recent article in *Music Theory Spectrum*, Alexander Rehding ex-

1 Cohn 2011.

amines how Hugo Riemann and Artur von Oettingen responded to the enharmonic renotations in the funeral march of Beethoven’s op. 26 piano sonata.² Incidentally, like the Schubert movement, the Beethoven movement involves $A\flat$ minor moving to a notated B major. As Rehding explains, Riemann and von Oettingen reject Beethoven’s enharmonic renotation because their dualist conception of tonality is based on the *Klang*, not the scale. From their point of view, enharmonic renotation is unnecessary, because the music’s tonality does not depend on a particular spelling of scale degrees or Roman numerals³. The following analysis of “Frühling” adopts this dualist perspective. As a reminder: in dualist harmonic theory, minor triads are generated from what monist theory considers the fifth of the chord. Therefore, A-dual minor is spelled A-F-D. G- $E\flat$ -C is G-dual minor, and so forth. Major triads are labeled with +; minor triads are labeled with $^{\circ}$.

Trauer-Walzer. (1816.)

N^o 2.

$E\flat$ $A\flat$ C
 V i III

$F\flat$ $F\sharp$ $E\flat$ $A\flat$
 VI VI $V\sharp^4$ I

Figure 1: Franz Schubert, “Trauer-Walzer” No. 2 from 36 *Originaltänze*, D 365. The harmonic analysis reveals the differences between the notated score and Schubert’s actual progression.

Richard Strauss composed “Frühling” in 1948, setting to music a poem of the same name by Hermann Hesse. Strauss did not originally envisage “Frühling” and its three partners as a cycle; nevertheless, as Aubrey Garlington Jr. has shown, the

2 Rehding 2011.

3 Ebd.

four songs *were* conceived as a final musical testament—a testament she considers to be the quintessential “opus ultimum”⁴. According to Garlington and others, the valedictory tone of these pieces stems not only from their place in Strauss’s *oeuvre*, but also from their place in music history: stylistically, the four songs are the final manifestations of the German Romanticism that had dominated music and the other arts of central Europe for nearly a century.

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for the 'Frühling' motive. The top system is the original score for Soprano and Piano. The middle system, labeled 'Reinterpreted as:', shows the same motive with guitar chords (Am, Am7, Gm7, BM) and a Soprano line. The bottom system shows a further reinterpreted version with guitar chords (°E+, 6th, 6th, C+) and a Soprano line, with a 'TW' label indicating a Terzwechsel transformation between the outer chords.

Figure 2: The “Frühling” motive as notated (above), and reinterpreted (below). In the reinterpreted version, the inner chords of the motive are augmented sixths. The outer chords of the motive are related by a ‘Terzwechsel’ (TW) transformation.

4 Garlington 1989.

The top two systems of Figure 2 excerpt “Frühling’s” primary motive from the short score (measures 7–10 are given). The “Frühling” motive (bracketed) occurs seven times throughout the piece at various transpositional levels, and encapsulates in four chords the chromatic slipperiness of the song. Like the Schubert and Beethoven, the “Frühling” motive involves a progression from $A\flat$ minor—that is, $E\flat$ -dual minor—to a notated B major. The bottom system renotates the motive to reveal Strauss’s actual harmonic progression. Published analyses of “Frühling” disagree on what to make of the “Frühling” motive. Richard Kaplan (1994), writing from a Schenkerian perspective, regards the motive’s two inner chords as passing sevenths. His view is reflected in the annotations of the top system. Mark Ashton Ellis, who chronicles the development of the augmented sixth chord, points out that the third chord of the motive is an augmented sixth chord.⁵ In fact, *both* interior chords of the motive function as augmented sixths. The lower system of Figure 2 reflects this interpretation, revealing how the motive’s first chord, an $E\flat$ dual minor triad, leads to a backwards-relating inverted augmented sixth, spelled $B\flat\flat$ - $F\flat$ - $D\flat\flat$ -G. The $B\flat\flat$ -G dyad is the operative augmented sixth. The third chord, renotated as $A\flat\flat$ - $E\flat\flat$ - $C\flat\flat$ -F with the augmented sixth interval $A\flat\flat$ -F, resolves across the bar to a $C\flat$ major triad in second inversion. The annotations on the lower system summarize how this works and also show the large-scale ‘Terzwechsel’ transformation that relates the motive’s consonant outer chords.

Interpreting the inner chords of the “Frühling” motive as backwards- and forwards- relating augmented sixths reflects the aural disjunction the motive evokes in the listener—a disjunction highlighted by the relatively large leap in the vocal part, the singer’s largest leap so far. We can think of the space between the two augmented sixths as a ‘dead interval’, articulating a chromatic seam. The mirrored resolutions of the augmented sixth chords also resonate with our dualist approach, with its emphasis on harmonic symmetry. Just as the adjacent augmented sixths articulate a chromatic seam across the span of the “Frühling” motive, the motive itself serves the same function for the song as a whole: from this point onwards, the notes on the page are enharmonic renotations.

Figure 3 gives the text of “Frühling”, along with the rhyme scheme. The poem has three stanzas, each organized by the same alternating rhyme scheme. In the first stanza, the narrator recalls dreaming of the arrival of spring from the darkness of “shadowy crypts”. In Stanza Two, spring arrives and bathes the narrator in light, in stark contrast with the first stanza. The narrator recognizes spring in

5 Ellis 2010, 45.

Stanza Two, and in Stanza Three, spring recognizes the narrator. Hesse’s poem characterizes spring and the narrator as friends or lovers, meeting each other and renewing their relationship after an extended absence.

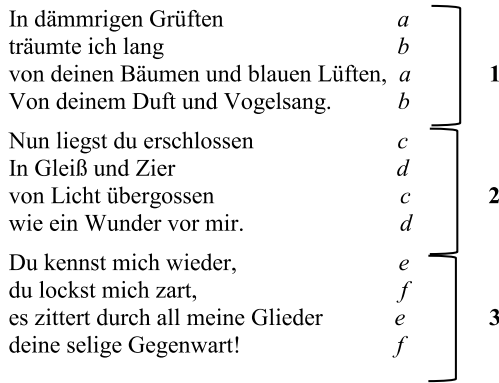


Figure 3: The text and rhyme scheme of “Frühling”

The climax of the poem is at the beginning of the second stanza. The first stanza is in past tense; the second and third stanzas are in present tense. The climactic moment for the narrator is the arrival of spring, and the fulfillment of the dream of Stanza One. Stanza Three functions as a continuation of Stanza Two—the narrator’s recognition of spring is answered in kind. In what follows, I will demonstrate how Strauss’s setting interacts with this interpretation of Hesse’s poem.

Section:	Introduction	Stanza I	Interlude I	Stanza II	Interlude II	Stanza III	Closing
Measures:	1 – 4	5 – 21	22 – 29	29 – 43	43 – 47	47 – 66	67 – 72
Notated tonality:	°G ↔ °E _b	°E _b → E _b ⁺	°E _b → C ⁺	C ⁺ → C ⁺	C ⁺ → A ⁺	A ⁺	A ⁺
Actual tonality:	°G ↔ °E _b	°E _b → F _b ⁺	F _b ⁺ → D _b ⁺	D _b ⁺ → D _b ⁺	D _b ⁺ → B _b ⁺	B _b ⁺	B _b ⁺

Figure 4: A form diagram showing both the notated and the actual large-scale tonal procedure of “Frühling”. As the song progresses, the actual harmonies become increasingly distant from the notated music. While the notated harmonies move sharpward, the actual harmonies move flatward.

Figure 4 diagrams the song’s form. After an introduction, Strauss separates each stanza of the poem with orchestral interludes. Even though the setting is not strophic, the similarity of the harmonic and melodic content of each section gives the impression of three strophes set off with instrumental interludes. Figure 4 also lists both the notated and actual large-scale harmonic areas for each section

of the song. Recall from Figure 1 that Schubert eventually fixed the enharmonic spelling when he renotedated the E-major chord as $F\flat$ major. By the end of the waltz, the notated score reflected the music’s actual harmonies. Figure 4 shows that Strauss does *not* correct the enharmonic notation. After the first occurrence of the “Frühling” motive in measure 9, the notated harmonies never again reflect the true harmonic progression. This information is displayed in Figure 6, which plots the initial and concluding harmonies for each section on a ‘Klangnetz’.

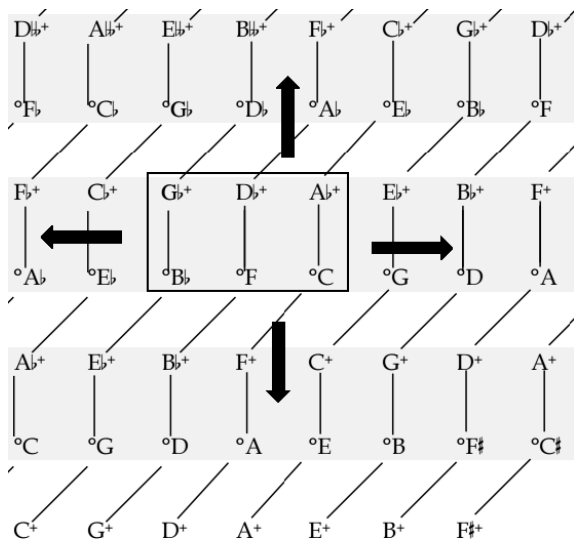


Figure 5: A ‘Klangnetz’. Pitch-class letters indicate major or minor triads. The ‘Klangnetz’ is generated by extending Riemann’s topography of a major and minor keys in all directions. Above, Riemann’s map of $D\flat^+$ (contained in the box) is extended.

A ‘Klangnetz’ is a dualist map of chord space where each node represents the indicated dual major or dual minor triad. A ‘Klangnetz’ is constructed by combining Riemann’s topographies of the major, major-minor, minor-major, and minor keys.⁶ Figure 5 shows how this works. The boxed segment of the ‘Klangnetz’ is the Riemann topography of $D\flat^+$ major. Extending the topography generates the ‘Klangnetz’.

Returning to Figure 6, the concluding harmony of the piece is not the notated A^+ , but $B\flat^+$, enclosed in a double circle on the ‘Klangnetz’ to indicate its cadential role. Arrows on Figure 6 indicate the direction of harmonic motion. The music begins by alternating $^{\circ}G$ and $^{\circ}E\flat$ triads—an oscillation that foreshadows the “dämmrigen Grüften” of the singer’s opening line with its ominous instability.

6 The structure of the Klangnetz is extrapolated from the Riemann’s harmonic topographies illustrated in Klumpenhouwer 2011.

Tonally, the alternating chords leave us at a loss: the listener is unable to establish a hierarchical relationship between $^{\circ}G$ and $^{\circ}E\flat$ as they are tonally equal. The singer’s opening $E\flat$ is the single pitch-class held in common between the oscillating opening chords.

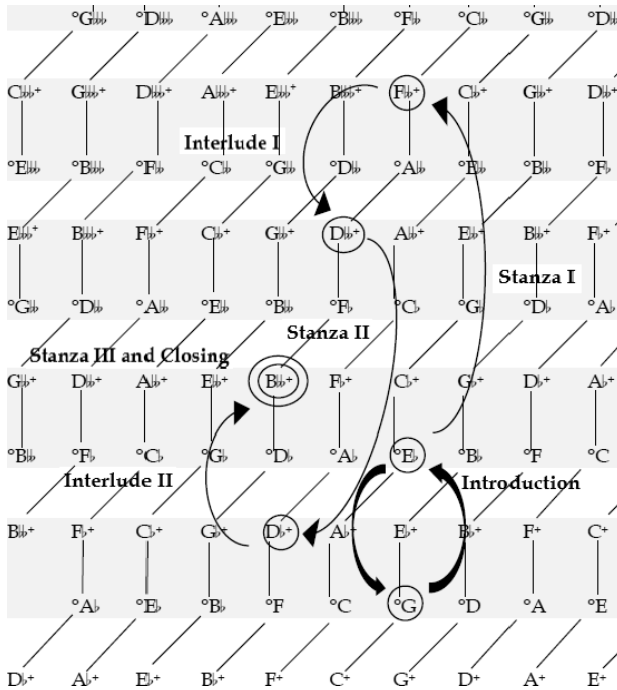


Figure 6: A ‘Klangnetz’ mapping of the actual large-scale harmonic moves of “Frühling”. The song begins with an oscillation between $^{\circ}E\flat$ and $^{\circ}G$ and concludes in $B\flat^+$.

The first stanza moves from the $^{\circ}G/^{\circ}E\flat$ oscillation to $F\flat^+$. The arrow labeled Stanza One in Figure 6 shows that $F\flat^+$ is extremely distant from the harmonies of the introduction. We can conceptualize the harmonic processes at work in “Frühling” as carrying out a departure–return script. The first stanza carries us far afield harmonically, and it is the job of the rest of the song to return. This reading is visually apparent on the ‘Klangnetz’. The large upward arrow symbolizing the harmonic work of Stanza One is answered in the following music with downward arrows, repairing the enormous harmonic leap of the first stanza. To emphasize the music’s harmonic goal, the third stanza and closing music both begin and end in the same tonality—a period of stability after the harmonic chaos of the opening. The harmonic movement of the introduction parallels the final modulation from the second interlude to the third stanza. The introduction consists of repeated ‘Terzschritt’ and ‘Gegenterzschritt’ transformations. The ‘Klang-

netz' represents the progression by the "up two left one" motion from $^{\circ}G$ to $^{\circ}E\flat$, and the inverse "down two right one" motion from $^{\circ}E\flat$ back to $^{\circ}G$. The transformation occurs again in the progression from the second orchestral interlude to the third stanza: the $D\flat+$ of Interlude II moves to the $B\flat+$ goal by an "up two left one" move. Thus, the oscillation of the orchestral introduction foreshadows in miniature the final large-scale harmonic transformation of the piece. The harmonic transformation represented by the "up two left one" motion on the 'Klangnetz' is a 'Terzschrift' and its inverse, a 'Gegenterzschrift'. Recall that another motion by a third, the 'Terzwechsel' defined the relationship between the consonant chords of the "Frühling" motive. So, both the large-scale harmonic transformations of the song and the internal chordal relations of the "Frühling" motive are governed by major-third relationships.

The harmonic structure of "Frühling" represented on the 'Klangnetz' in Figure 6 replicates aspects of the structure of Hesse's poem. Earlier, it was noted that the climax of the poem occurs with the arrival of spring at the beginning of the second stanza—an arrival accompanied by the narrator's change to present tense. Musically, a similar climax occurs with the arrival of $F\flat+$. Though not quite aligned with the poem's climax, $F\flat+$ represents a harmonic extreme of the song. Visually, $F\flat+$ lies at the apex of the song's harmonic path on the 'Klangnetz', and intervallically, it lies a tritone away from music's eventual harmonic goal. The harmonies climb out of the "dämmrigen Grüften" over the course of the first stanza.

Figure 7 traces the harmonic progression of the first verse in "Frühling". Unlike the 'Klangnetz' in Figure 6 which only displays the opening and concluding harmonies of each section, the map in Figure 7 shows every consonant harmony of the first verse. Crosses indicate instances of the "Frühling" motive. The "Frühling" motive is largely responsible for the stanza's ascending harmonic trajectory. The journey is not easy, however. The first "Frühling" motive takes us from $^{\circ}E\flat$ to $C\flat+$. Here is the first instance of an "up two right one" move, which takes us even higher to $B\flat+$. But on reaching $C\flat+$, the harmony has moved too high too quickly on the 'Klangnetz'. Or put another way, the harmony has moved too flat too fast. As a result, the music falls downwards to $^{\circ}C\flat+$ and starts the climb again by means of another "Frühling" motive, which takes the harmony from $^{\circ}C\flat$ to $A\flat+$. Again, the trajectory moves by "up two right one", to the dominant of the dominant of $F\flat+$, the harmonic goal of the verse. Although the "up two and over" moves travel similar distances on the 'Klangnetz', the direction and location of these harmonies on the 'Klangnetz' change the transformations involved a great deal. "Up two left one" moves and their inverses are related by major-thirds. "Up

two and right” moves and their inverses are related by step—a much more distant relation. Perhaps the comparative weakness of the step relation is responsible for the unstable climb and subsequent fall of the harmonies over the course of the first verse.

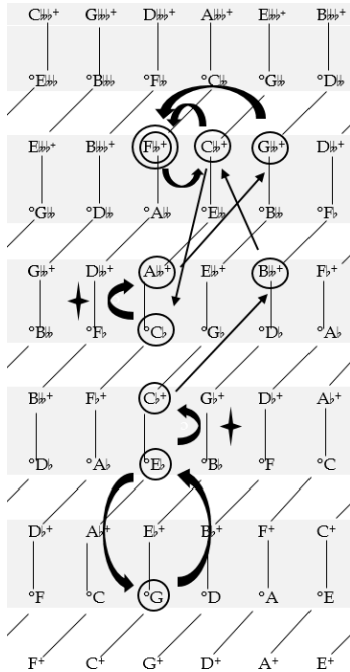


Figure 7: A ‘Klangnetz’ mapping of the harmonies of the introduction and first verse. Crosses indicate “Frühling” motives. The music moves up the ‘Klangnetz’, with the first verse concluding in $F\flat^+$.

The preceding discussion differs significantly from other views on “Frühling”. In these analyses, written from a perspective of harmonic monism and using enharmonic equivalence to conform to scale space, “Frühling” begins with an alternation of C minor and $A\flat$ minor triads and slowly moves sharpward, concluding in A major. That analyst can then explore how the move from minor to major and from flat to sharp reflects the narrator’s awakening from the dream and rising from the dark crypts to meet the arrival of spring. This is a tidy narrative, but it is also technically a false one. The more we enharmonically renotate Strauss’s harmonies, the further we are from the genuine harmonic progression. When we track the renotated progressions, we find that the harmonies are pulled *flatward* over the course of the song—the exact opposite trajectory from the enharmonically reinterpreted version. The flatward movement of “Frühling” conflicts with the narrative of the poem. We would expect, after all, a correlative rise in key over the course of the song, matching the perceived ascent of the narrator from the depths of winter to the height of

spring. The fact that Strauss's actual harmonic procedure doesn't provide this correlation might trouble us. Fancifully, we could consider "Frühling's" harmonic trajectory in light of the song's place in Strauss's *oeuvre*. Coming at the end of six years of war, twelve years of dictatorship, and a long and fruitful career, "Frühling" heralds the beginning of a new era for Europe, but one that Strauss would not live to see. In this context, the gradual descent of "Frühling's" harmonic language provides an ironic commentary to Hesse's exuberant text.

The analysis here has its own narrative connections with the song text. Specifically, the major event in Hesse's poem—the arrival of spring—is reflected visually in the large-scale arch shape formed by the harmonies on the 'Klangnetz'. In this regard, we see how the harmonies of "Frühling" enact a departure-and-return script within a global flatwards trajectory. The harmonies of the first verse climb up the 'Klangnetz' to F \flat + —a harmony visually equidistant from the song's opening and its B \flat + cadential goal. Much of the movement on the 'Klangnetz' relies on a particular harmonic transformation, which on the 'Klangnetz' appears as an "up two over one" move, and a particular chromatic motive—the "Frühling" *motive*—which serves as the lynchpin for the song's chromatic surface. The significance of these devices only becomes apparent when we renotate the score to reflect genuine harmonic relations and when we utilize an analytical methodology—harmonic dualism—which is much-maligned in American theoretical circles today but which dominated German harmonic thought during Strauss's lifetime.

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