Article

"An Die Hoffnung", and Beethoven's use of Key Characteristics

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ABSTRACT: What would compel a composer to set the same poem twice? Ludwig van Beethoven first set the text of Christoph Tiedge's "An Die Hoffnung" (to Hope) between 1804 and 1805, and would later set the poem again, using even more of the text in 1815. While seeking context clues from what is known of his biography is crucial, another avenue of study lies within the pieces themselves. Through the study of key characteristics during Beethoven's lifetime in addition to what biographical information we know, we can infer Beethoven's intentions with each setting of the text and how this reflects his changing relationship to the text of "An Die Hoffnung".

Keywords: Beethoven; Tiedge; Key Characteristics; Lieder; Urania

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Ludwig van Beethoven, whose shadow continues to loom large over the world of Western Art music, said precious little on the subject of key characteristics. It is known for sure that he had opinions, and implied that his keys were chosen deliberately. In 1813, Beethoven wrote to George Thomson informing him "that he had transposed on the airs sent by the Scottish publisher from its original key of four flats...to another, unspecified key because 'this key hardly seemed natural to me, and scarcely analogous to the description Amoroso, which on the contrary, it would have changed to Barbaresco'"[1]. These characteristics span his entire body of work but are perhaps most easily deciphered in his art songs, pieces in which the text can function as a

[1] Michael C Tusa "Beethoven's 'C minor Mood':Some Thoughts on the Structural Implications of Key Choice". *The Beethoven Forum Volume 2.* (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln) 1993. 4.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

roadmap to the composer's intentions, and thus provide clues as to how the composer, in this case Beethoven, categorized other musical elements, such as the programmatic meaning of keys.

Ludwig van Beethoven wrote "An Die Hoffnung" (*To Hope)* Op. 32 in late 1804-1805, just a few years after he seriously considered taking his own life. According to musicologist John David Wilson, "it ranks as his most frequently selected key" and the relative minor ranks second at 6%[2]. While Beethoven undoubtedly affected future uses of this key, what motivated Beethoven to compose his first setting of "An Die Hoffnung"? Not only this, but he then set the text a second time in 1815, adding more of the poem, to drastically different harmonic results. By exploring both settings of the text as interpreted by Beethoven, one can infer how Beethoven crafted not just music for its own sake but crafted a story using harmonic and other compositional tools.

Before delving into Beethoven's mind, context will be provided for how the keys of the pieces were used before and during the periods in which they were composed. The first publication of *An Die Hoffnung* was composed primarily in E-flat major. E-flat major is a fairly new key compared to those making up medieval modes. The earliest note on this key in Rita Steblin's *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* comes from French composer Charpentier who called the key "cruel and hard"[3]in 1692. This appears to be an exception compared to the other descriptions. Johann Mattheson, whose writings were more likely to have been read by Beethoven, called the key pathetic. In 1787,

[2] John David Wilson, "Of Hunting, Horns and Heroes: A Brief History of E-flat Major before the *Eroica*", *Journal of Musiclogical Research* 32 (2013) 164.
[3] Rita Steblin *Key Characteristics of the 18th and 19th Centuries. 2nd ed.* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002). 245.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

Schubart published his now famous description drawing attention to the number of flats evoking the holy trinity, as well as the "pathetic" notion of an intimate conversation with God[4]. French composer Jean Francois Lesueur hopped on the Schubart bandwagon that same year, calling the key "religious"[5].

The pathetic, or soft quality given to this key by minds of the early 1700s harkens back to the idea put forth by Kirnberger and picked up by 19th century composers and musicologists that C major was a "pure" key, and the more sharps or flats a key had, the less pure it became[6]. In his *Observations sur notre instinct pur la musique* published first in 1754, Rameau attributes softness and weakness to the flat keys, and likens it to a voice lowering itself[7]. This was also supported by G. J. Vogler, who would publish descriptions of the key three times, on each occasion becoming more specific about what he means when he writes that E-flat major is "for night"[8]. In 1812, he not only gives the key dominion of "night pictures" but goes on to describe said night as "gentle...an affable key"[9].

While this passive gentle quality continued to be spread amongst composers and musicologists, a new quality began to creep into the European consciousness as the eighteenth century came to a close. Composer A.E. M. Gretry is one of the first French composers to draw a similarity to Mattheson, when he called E-flat Major "noble and pathetic"[10]. In 1797 when this

[4] Ibid., 116.
[5] Ibid., 246.
[6] Ibid., 98.
[7] Ibid., 97.
[8] Ibid., 122.
[9] Ibid., 123.
[10] Ibid., 99-100.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

was published, E-flat major had undergone a bit of a transformation due to the European pastime of the upper classes: hunting. The hunt, as a luxury of the nobility, was associated with the *parforcehorn* thought to be the authentic horn used in the German hunt. John David Wilson details the role of E-flat Major and this hunt, in German culture leading up to and around the early 1800s. According to Wilson, the operatic "*cavatina* or *aria d'affetto*...were slow lyrical numbers emphasizing unhappy or unfulfilled love"[11]. In exploring the heroism of E-flat major, he discusses "*Tugend*", Germany's equivalent to England's chivalry.

Tugend is a code of conduct meant for medieval knights, adopted by the emerging middle class in the 18th century. Like chivalry, this code of conduct had a connotation of courtly love. The hunting horn became therefore, a symbol of not just hunting, but the honor code associated with first the upper and later the bourgeois classes.

However, Wilson, also points out, most horns were found in multiple sizes and tunings. The French ˆcor di casse for example, was standardized in F by 1705[12]. The *parceforcehorn*, though not standardized until much later, was most often found in F. It is possible therefore, that the seeds of nationalism already begun to distinguish the sound of German heroism from that of the French. Whatever the reason, Beethoven's musical heritage associated E-flat major with several things, and he used the key for different purposes.

Professor Barry Cooper, in Paul Reid's *the Beethoven Song Companion,* validates the presence of the publication in his introduction, when he points out that Beethoven's vocal

[11] Wilson 168-169.
[12] Ibid 171.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

repertoire is very much neglected in favor of his large symphonic works[13]. This is a loss, given what we can glean about the composer's tendencies by studying these pieces, that include the luxury of text.

Throughout the text, Beethoven's art songs composed either entirely or mostly in E-flat major are lamentations of unrequited love, or resignation to suffering in love. Figure 1 extracts the text that best highlights this emotional state associated with Beethoven's art songs in E-flat major.

(**Insert Figure 1)**

Of the songs listed, only "The Good Prince" and "Long live the Prince" ignore the longing central to his other lieder in this key. These two exceptions to the trend were composed by commission of wealthy patrons and seem to be using the key to highlight another feature often associated with it: nobility. Francesco Galeazzi called the key "heroic, extremely majestic" in 1796, while only a year before, Johann Jakob Heinse claimed that E-flat major "Represents men excellently because of their elevated standing".[14] Though this does prove that Beethoven's use of the key was not exclusively that of longing, or distant love, it does stand to reason that the key he used most would include some variety of purpose. In his book, *The Key to Beethoven: Connecting Tonality and Meaning in His* Music, Paul Ellison not only acknowledges this variety, but categorizes Beethoven's use of the key into three praxes[15]. According to Ellison, this first setting of *An Die Hoffnung* belongs in the third praxis, that of "fantasies of unhappy/failed love"[16]. He also reinforces the idea of the *sogno* piece, support by John Wilson in his own

[13] Paul Reid, *The Beethoven Song Companion (*New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), vii.
[14] Steblin 246.
[15] Paul Ellison, *The Key to Beethoven: Connecting Tonality and meaning in His Music* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2014) 78.
[16] Ibid 84.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

exploration of E flat major. Nevertheless, the above figure clearly illustrates that Beethoven heavily favored the key for this purpose in his art songs.

Beethoven's first setting of "An Die Hoffnung" was composed for Josephine Deym a year after her husband's death. In a letter to her mother, she praises the piece for using text from "Urania", a popular text she greatly liked. She had already shared the "pretty song" with her sisters in January of 1805, eight months before it was first published. In this setting, Beethoven chose to leave out the text in which the speaker questions the existence of God. Rather than beginning in angst, he begins with the Ode to Hope itself. Reid speculates, and I quite agree, that he wrote this piece as an attempt at courting Josephine.

In the 1805 "An Die Hoffnung" the key of E-flat is firmly established immediately. A tonic dotted half with ornamental arpeggios of the one chord imitate an organ's pedal and fingered keys. As the singer transitions from singing about "you (Hope) who adore the holiness of the night" to "the sorrow which tortures tender hearts"[17]Beethoven likewise modulates into the key's relative minor. C minor, much like E-flat major, is associated with passivity. Schubart's definition is reflected in this piece when he calls the key a "declaration of love and at the same time the lament of unhappy love"[18]. When juxtaposed to the longing of E-flat major, c minor appears to represent the pain of that longing. When the positive force of hope is first in the piece, the piece utilizes the pure key of C major. The phrase "O Hoffnung [oh Hope]" features an ascending major 6th interval, the lower note, G is barely accompanied by the piano's right hand to a full open C major chord on the downbeat of the next measure, emphasizing the word

[17] Reid 61.
[18] Steblin 231.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

"Hoffnung" with an E natural, that bright third of the triad ringing with prominence. However only three measures later, E- flat is reintroduced, though as a minor seventh chord. The text under this, features the speaker referring to him/herself as the "Dulder (sufferer)". In the subsequent verses, the E-flat is reintroduced on the words "Mitternacht" and "Edrentraumes" or midnight and earthly dreams, respectively. When a D-flat is introduced, it implies the key of F minor. This key is almost unanimously associated with sadness and despair. In 1797, Andre-Ernest-Modeste Gretry called it "the most pathetic of all"[19], and "lugubrious" was used to describe the key by both Jacques Lacombe in 1758, and Charles Masson in 1697[20]. Beethoven soon moves into B-flat major, which, has a brighter reputation that F minor. Similar to other keys featuring flats, B-flat major is associated passive or "feminine" qualities. Francesco Galeazzi called the key "tender, soft, sweet, effeminate", and Georg Vogler goes as far to say that B-flat major's tenderness is borrowed from E-flat major[21]

In measures 27 and 28, he moves to an E minor seventh chord, a key associated with "gentle lamentation[22]**.** Measure 28 outlines a solid A-flat triad, which in this case acts as the subdominant IV chord leading into the eventual authentic cadence back into the tonic, in which the singer hopes that angels will at least count his tears[23]. In other words, a hope that someone is listening to his lament.

In the following verses, these strophic musical phrases do not appear congruent to the key characteristics as the first verse was. The second verse further laments the speaker's state and asks that, "wenn längst verhallt, geliebte stimmen schweigen; wenn unter abgestorbenen

[19] Reid 263.
[20] Ibid., 262.
[21] Ibid., 288.
[22] Ibid., 256.
[23] Reid 61.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

zweigen", *when long hushed voices are silent underneath dead branches Memory sits desolate* that then this entity come comfort him. In an obviously major key, this may sound strange, compared to the lovely night scene established in the first verse, but it does also harken to the idea of E flat major as a key of passive lamentation, the praxis this appears to use. It does add extra meaning too, to the raising of the A and B in measure 9 on the word "verödet"[24] which means *desolated.* The brief moment of G major heralds the relative minor's impending arrival. The phrase in which the speaker urges Hope to then come near falls on measure 15. Just as Hoffnung's first appearance utilized the E natural, so too does the second verse.

The final verse once again, uses the first two lines to set up a circumstance, and then follows this up with a subsequent request. The bitter circumstances continues from E flat major into c minor, then upon the phrase "Dann laß' ihn um den Rand des Erdentraumes, Das Leuchten eines Wolkensaumes,Von einer nahen Sonne seh'n"[25] which translates to *let him see at the end of this earthly dream, at the rim of this earthly dream, The light of the cloud's hem From the near-by sun,* the piece ascends into C major, before following like the previous two verses, into the tonic, when the speaker mentions the nearby sun. Though strophic, Beethoven's use of the versatile E flat major highlights the poetry's meaning in all three verses, a credit to the poet, as well as the composer.

E-flat major was used for different layered reasons, particularly within the German circles. In the case of "An Die Hoffnung", Beethoven utilizes the passive side of flat keys to paint a picture of internal sadness but laced with a growing hope. While the speaker in the Tiedge poem is talking about the hope that God exists, the timing of this piece's publication, so soon after Deym's husband's death, bears closer investigation. Josephine herself confirms

[24] Beethoven Op 32, 1.
[25] Beethoven Op 32, 1-2.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

through letters to her mother that the piece was written for her and given to her before the piece was published. This biographical information, mixed with Beethoven's tendency toward using E-flat major in the context of distant and/or unattainable love, points to a man attempting to court a woman with song. Unfortunately, like so many of his romantic trysts, Beethoven's relationship with Josephine Deym did not flower into a true or lasting romance.

Beethoven would tackle the text once again in 1815, after having met Tiedge, the poet whose text he used. This time, however, he returned the text he left out of his first setting. The inclusion of the following text puts the poem into context, and therefore, narrows the piece's potential interpretations.

> "Ob ein Gott sei? Ob er einst erfülle, Was die Sehnsucht weinend sich verspricht? Ob, vor irgend einem Weltgericht, Sich dies rätselhafte Sein enthülle? Hoffen soll der Mensch! Er frage nicht!"[26]
>
> *"Is there a God? /Does he fulfill/the longing, crying promises? /whether in any world court/ Will this enigmatic Being reveal itself? /Hope is for Man/ Not to question!*

The song then continues with the text found in the first setting. This time, Beethoven chooses to begin in the key of b flat minor. It is similarly to E flat major, associated with night. Schubart called the key "a quaint creature, often dressed in the garment of night"[27]. More pertinent to this piece, Schubart also associates it with "Mocking God and the world; discontented with itself and with everything"[28]. Henri Weikert equated the key with "discontent

[26] Reid 63.
[27] Steblin 291
[28] Steblin 291.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

and grumbling" in 1827, while August Gathy combined the thoughts of the previous two men when he called it "Ill humour, grumbling, night" in 1835 in his *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexicon*[29]. Beethoven appears to have used the key as described by Schubart. The opening text is written as "a recitative"[30]. The vocal line is sung either unaccompanied, or over mostly sustained chords. In this case, Beethoven uses both the key but also the structure, or rather lack thereof, to highlight the speaker's uncertainty and subsequent fear at the notion that there is no God. That is, however, until he reaches the word "Hoffnung" for the first time. Once again, Beethoven prioritizes this word with a change of tonal center, when he writes a long-held D that descends to A, a perfect 4th interval that implies much about the new key. Once this word is reached, consonance is also, and the piece now appears to center on D major[31]. This key was associated with military triumph and as Schubart, says "The key of triumph, of Hallejuahs, of war-cries, of victory-rejoicing. Thus, the inviting symphonies, the marches, holiday songs and heaven-rejoicing choruses are set in this key"[32]. Indeed, Haydn's famous Hallelujah chorus from his *Messiah* oratorio is in D major[33]. There is some evidence that this association came, similarly to E flat major's history, from a need to accommodate certain instruments. Jean-Francois Lesueur declared that the key "combined with gay sounds of the oboe, the bright sounds of the trumpet, and the ringing timpani is more brilliant than the other keys"[34]. Ellison specifies that Beethoven also uses the key to express "tender love"[35]. However, in this case, the D is really functioning as

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[29] Steblin 292.
[30] Reid 64.
[31] Ludwig van Beethoven, *An Die Hoffnung*, from *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke, Serie 23: Lieder und Gesänge mit Begleitung des Pianoforte, Nr.223* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1863).

[32] Steblin 133.
[33] Ellison "The Key" 64.
[34] Steblin 132.
[35] Ellison "The Key" 66.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

the dominant of the key this piece finally settles on: G major. The key only requires one sharp. According to Kirnberger's sharp flat principle, this key would therefore be quite close to the pure C major, with an added active energy to the key. In a slight contrast, Schubart called G major "Everything rustic, idyllic and lyrical, every calm and satisfied passion, every tender gratitude for true friendship and faithful love, --in a word every gentle and peaceful emotion of the heart is correctly expressed by this key". Mattheson believed the key "suited to both serious and cheerful things"[36]. In 1823, Wagner cited Papageno's aria "Der Vogelfänger" from the beginning of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* as a prime example of this key's use[37]. Beethoven appears to have used the key for different purposes. According to Ellison, he used two praxes: the first being "calm, gentle, rustic, pleasant, pastoral" and the other "brilliant, cheerful"[38] . In this way, Ellison acknowledges Beethoven's apparent blend of the different views of contemporaneous musicologists, and showing that later musicians, such as Wagner, were influenced by Beethoven's choices. Beethoven appears to have added one extra use of G major in his art songs, as illustrated in the collection below.

(**Insert Figure 2)**

While there are several pieces, namely "An Gott" which follow the celebratory first praxis, and several others of a more tender kind, these second praxis pieces often contain an added element of distance or sadness into that tenderness, perhaps best illustrated with the quote from "Es kehret der Maien". Why then, did Beethoven simply not compose these pieces in E flat major, as he did with so many other songs of a similar subject? In the case of Beethoven's

[36] Steblin 270.
[37] Ibid., 271.
[38] Ellison "The Key"106-109.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

second “An Die Hoffnung” G major is a key more closely associated with God, and therefore, is more fitting for this particular use of the *Urania* text.

The previous D major passage is merely a portal through with the speaker tries to shed his doubt, and begins to pray to Hope, and it is implied, by both text and key change, to a God in which the speaker wants to believe. Using G major in its tender form, rather than the more frequently used E flat major, implies that the speaker tends toward belief in God, as both its more passive and active uses are overwhelmingly considered positive.

Once in G major, the time signature changes also, from cut time to common time, a slightly more stable key signature. This first verse has a less anguished feeling than it did in the previous publication. There is a non-chord tone that creates a diminished fifth in measure 31 on the phrase “gram verschleierst” or *veiled grief*[39], but other than ornamentations such as these, the musical phrases are within the key. When the phrase “o Hoffnung” appears leading into measure 34, the perfect 4th returns this time, A ascends to D, and the second syllable of “Hoffnung” completes the major triad, though it is now more explicitly a dominant triad[40]. Unlike Op 32, this setting of the text also repeats certain phrases of the poetry. “O Hoffnung” is repeated twice more in an ascending sequence during which the accompaniment flattens the third of the tonic triad, adding urgency and desperation to the speaker’s prayer. The text “ein Engel seine thränen zählt” or *an angel counts my tears* in repeated three times before settling into an authentic cadence in G major in measure 45[41].

This piece also differs from Op 32 in that it is not strophic. The following verse begins its own melody in Beethoven’s most used key, E flat major. While the text appeals to the Hope

[39] Beethoven op94, 2.
[40] Ibid 2.
[41] Ibid 3.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

figure, the key is almost certainly in E flat major, in this instance, Schubart's conversation with God appears to be used, but when the work "ausgetorbenen" *dead branches,* appears, the key shifts on a fully diminished A natural seventh chord, followed by a series of tonality shifts centered around A natural, suggesting that A minor is soon upon us, but then in measure 53 the piece makes a full modulation into C major. As established before C major almost unanimously is considered the purest key, due in great part to the sharp flat principle. During this moment in C major, the singer is asking for hope to stay close to him. In the following measure however, the pieces slide into the parallel minor. In this context, the key is used to set up another tonicization of g minor. The former being used as a mix of the first two praxes, one of lament and the other of longing, the latter being used purely in second praxis[42] . This conclusion is reached based on the gentle longing of the text.

On the word "stützt" or *supports,* the key finally falls on d minor, the key for which the two previous tonicizations existed. the rapid accompaniment and the melody's dramatic ascent in measure 59, suggests, as does Paul Ellison who considers this passage to be part of the third and most aggressive praxis, that of storms and divine vengeance[43]. The final passage of the poem, beginning in measure 63, is composed in B major. This key is used by Beethoven in the "second praxis...an intense heavenly vision: the sublime". It is during the final line of the poem, in which the speaker sings of viewing the near-by sun, similar to Carl Ludwig Seidel's description of the key, which he called "glaring coloring, shingin fire-color"[44].

[42] Ellison 56-59.
[43] Ibid., 75.
[44] Ibid., 166.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

After this phrase ends, Beethoven modulates into G major again at measure 72, in which he recycles both text and melody from the previous G major passage[45], and once again, asks for angels to weep for him. In the final measure, after an authentic cadence, he cannot help but provide one more in the form of "O Hoffnung" sung on the upper dominant, down to the tonic[46]

In Beethoven's first setting of this text, personal circumstances colored his use of the *Urania* text. E flat major proved particularly useful for a strophic setting, as it is associated with multiple uses. The poem also retains a similar sentiment throughout the text, which must be acknowledged, but it cannot be overlooked that Beethoven recognized and utilized the poem's structure to the fullest. Meeting the poet could have inspired him to return to the text, and to take a meaning with more similarity to the original poem, especially since this version includes the direct doubt of God's existence. Just one small addition to the text completely changed the meaning of the poem to Beethoven. This small change in context likewise completely changed the context of the composition. The fact that the same words could be treated so differently by the same composer shines a spotlight on Beethoven's use of key characteristics to enhance and make clear his interpretation of the text. In the case of *An Die Hoffnung,* that interpretation was subject to change, and so reflected in his music.

[45] Beethoven op94 5.
[46] Ibid., 6.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202212.0099.v1

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