



## **LIEDERKREIS: TOWARDS A PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHT**

**If-not God Moses<sup>1</sup> and Samuel Agbenyo<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Music, The University of Mississippi, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Music Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

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**ABSTRACT:** *The German term, Liederkreis, translated as a song cycle, refers to a group or cycle of individually completed songs, designed to be performed in a sequence as a unit. This paper employs a bibliographic strategy, seeking to trace the evolution of this musical genre, and determine its implication for music pedagogy, premised on the theory of contiguity. Saturated data, collected through document review, were subjected to thematic-textual analysis. Findings suggest that song cycles emerged, towards the end of the Classical period and rose to their highest point in the Romantic period, with Beethoven having the credit for pioneering the genre. The study also revealed that in Liederkreis, key relationship is important and plays a coherent role by making the songs an organic, composite whole in a manner which could be either formal or dynamic. It was concluded that Liederkreis has rich pedagogical prospects due to its focus on the strengths, talents, abilities of every student. The study recommended deliberate and adequate use of Liederkreis in the music classroom. By doing so, students could learn to value each other's uniqueness in strengths, abilities, and competencies thereby promoting a community of learners where music teaching and learning becomes simplistic and organic, allowing all to grow and bloom. Future research will examine the extent to which Liederkreis has been employed in various music instructional contexts.*

**KEYWORDS:** Liederkreis, Song cycle, Pedagogical, Students, Repetition.



## INTRODUCTION

The German term, *Liederkreis* or *Liederzyklus*, translated as a song cycle, refers to a group, or cycle, of individually completed songs designed to be performed in a sequence as a unit (Bateman, 2011; Tunbridge, 2010). The Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1955) defines the genre, *Liederkreis*, as a cycle (literally) or series of songs relating to the same poetic subject and forming one composition of music. Characteristically, a song cycle may derive from the text such as a single poet, a story line, a central theme or topic like love, nature, a unifying mood, poetic form or genre, as in a sonnet or ballad cycle. It may also be obtained from musical procedures including tonal schemes, recurring motifs, passages or entire songs or formal structures (Assouline et al., 2004). Historically, song cycles emerged towards the end of the Classical period and rose to their highest point in the Romantic period. With regards to the proponents, Barone (2019) states:

The beginnings of things can be fuzzy. However, someone tends to get credit for being the first, and in the case of the song cycle, that person is Beethoven. His *An die ferne Geliebte*, written in 1816, set a collection of six poems to music - not to be performed individually, but together as a single piece. He called it a *liederkreis*, or a song cycle. From that oversimplified starting point, the form blossomed (p. 5).

Also, Kulik (2004) corroborates Joshua Barone's finding by averring that any discourse on song cycle would be incomplete without the mention of the famous trio: Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, and Mahler, all of whom created famous song cycles that dealt with themes of nature and emotional issues. Mahler's *Songs on the Death of Children* dealt with themes of children and their journey into adulthood. He insisted to his wife Alma that the material had nothing to do with the actual death of children and that it was a metaphor for growing up (Tunbridge, 2010).

According to Kulik (2004), any discourse on song cycle would be incomplete without the mention of the famous trio; Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann. Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* op. 98 is the first song collection to be described as *Liederkreis*. Its unique and appreciated features include emotionalism, connecting transitions, stylistic simplicity and of course interesting repetitions (Kulik, 2004).

Also, Borisova and Klimenko (2018) argue that the song cycle belongs to the most popular genres of classical music, adding that there are so many song cycles written by Russian and foreign composers that its full list can hardly be made. As a beginner, a composer has to learn vocal composition and create a set of chamber miniatures. At the same time, almost every great master had left at least one book of such masterpieces. The majority of European schools of composition involved the genre of the song cycle, which often made distinctiveness of traditional music come in full force. Austrian-German tradition became famous with Schubert and Schumann, Brahms and Wolf, Hindemith and Strauss. Among French "melody" creators are Berlioz, Massenet, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. We can hardly imagine the Russian history of music without vocal cycles of Glinka, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Sviridov, Gavrillin and many others (Stanley & Benbow, 1983).

In the context of art song, not only is the word *cycle* attributed to implication of relatedness of members of a set, but also implications of interdependence. In a bona fide song cycle, the omission of any of the songs or the rearrangement of their order, constitutes a threat to the work



or negation of its cyclic character. Performers and scholars have long viewed Schumann's *Eichendorff-Lieder*, or *Liederkreis*, Op. 39, as a song cycle, but one in which the order of the songs does not in any way derive from the ordering of poems from pre-existing literary works. This is unlike the case of Schubert's *Die Schone Millerin* and *Die Winterreise*, and Schumann's *Heine Liederkreis* (Op. 24), and *Dichterliebe* (Op. 48).

The twelve *Eichendorff* poems that Schumann sets to music cycle do not come from a single, self-contained source; and although they closely knit together by a web of nature symbolism, imagery, and language, they present no single, logically necessary order. McCreless (1986) contends that the ordering of the songs in Op. 39 posed a unique compositional problem for Schumann; he clearly wanted the songs to work as a *Liederkreis* but since what holds the texts together is not a story, mood or symbol, he was free to order them according to whatever principles, musical or textual, he found most effective (Neumeyer, 1982). Nonetheless, this arrangement is done following the template of a narrative cycle.

Furthermore, Ferris (2000) posits that the organicism of song cycles could be either formal or dynamic. He reasons that Beethoven's cycle follows the formal organicism in that he treats a work in totality; as a whole. Conversely, the cycles of Schumann and Schubert exemplifies a dynamic organicism as it implies a whole through a series of fragments.

Many scholars hold that Beethoven's *Liederkreis* is a shift from the norm. However, its unique musical structures made it to be a model for cycles that followed (Luise, 1968; Bingham, & Otto, 1993; Carter, 2004; Ferris, 2000; Reid, 2007). Peake (1982) describes *An ferne Geliebte* as a song puzzle for the *Liederkreis* societies that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. He added that the cycle has a hidden message to be unraveled by an exclusive audience. The early nineteenth century marked the emergence of *Liederkrantz* societies. They include *Singakademie zu Berlin* founded by Carl Fasch in 1791, *Liedertafel* founded by F.H. Zelter in 1809; other groups led by prominent composers and poets including Goethe, J.F. Reichardt, F.H. Himmel and the likes.

In this paper, we have explored various features of *Liederkreis* (song cycle), and shed light on the connectivity that suggests pedagogical implications of the genre for music education.

### **Compositional Techniques and Devices in *Liederkreis***

In *Leiderkreis*, key relationship is important and plays a unifying role by making the songs a composite whole. Composers will connect song cycles in various ways to create a connection that logically stems from the previous song. For instance, the key signature may be connected in a song cycle. Thus, if the first song appears in C major, the second song might appear in G major since G serves as the dominant of C major. It is for a similar reason that even though Schumann employs tonal tension or ambiguity, the songs are still linked. Relatedly, Beethoven's selection of keys in his *An die ferne Geliebte* was not random; rather it was consciously planned based on a symmetrical key scheme. In op. 98, the selected keys were related in terms of dominant, sub-dominant and parallel relationships. Songs 1 and 4 maintained their given key. Song 3 does the same but in a changed mood whereas songs 2 and 5 modulate to the subdominant. More so, the piano transition(s) in op. 98 is Beethoven's deliberate effort to create a bridge between the keys thereby creating a sense of totality. It is clear to us that the uniqueness of each song (melody, form and key) is meant to serve the intended song cycle purpose.



Another means through which the individual movements in a song cycle are bounded to one another is through the use of ritornelli and transitions of the accompanying instrument. The authors of this paper have observed that a main melody is maintained for the strophes of the same poem, but since a song cycle comprises poems that are distinct from one another, a unifying approach becomes necessary. Coherence is achieved by creating an inner relationship (a basic idea) between the songs. This connection is realized through a tonal structure, cyclic returns or through piano transitions.

Additionally, we find textual interconnections between the musical motives in a song cycle. Certain motives or tunes can appear at particular times, structure and form. Some motivic features (often dramatic ones) can be interpreted as being time-determinate. Bingham (1993) pointed out that the motivic relationships serve as unifying cross-references, and mostly articulate the grouping structure of the songs. The reappearance of the piano postlude of *Am Leuchtenden* at the end of the cycle for example, involves both cross-reference and 'ordered' motivic relationship.

The trajectory of this discussion is premised on the paradigm of relativity. It is therefore very interesting to us, from the music education perspective, to comprehend that the concept of song cycle is implanted with themes and applications that resonates with music pedagogy.

### **Maintaining a Pedagogical Cycle**

The systematic approaches to continuity in *Leiderkreis* are worth emulating in a music pedagogical domain. Brown (1884) confirms that all knowledge is organic; being made up of group of related ideas. Hence, no new idea can be acquired without a link to other ideas. He expresses the truism thus; the more they have in common, the closer is their relation. The less they have in common the more remote is their relation.... The mind recognizes the old in the new and just needs [to] attend to those elements in which it differs.

This law of memory is an advantage in song cycles as well as in teaching and learning of music. "From the known to the unknown" is a sound educational doctrine that has been echoed continuously. Using what is known to teach the unknown is a useful and rewarding principle of teaching. Music teachers can draw from past or common knowledge and experiences of their students. It will not be out of place to teach musical concepts by making reference to already established knowledge. For example, describing a scale as a musical ladder or stairs is simple and vivid too.

However, common knowledge is relative and dependent on the people involved. Hence, musical preferences for connecting ideas should synchronize with the environment and the people involved. It is no wonder that Meadow's (1995) resents the monopoly of using art music as the sole music when teaching musical concepts. This is because not everyone may be familiar with art music. Hence, the principle of teaching from the known to the unknown will not be applicable in this case.



## Contiguity and Repetition

There is abundant proof that song cycles exhibit elements of contiguity and repetition (Nilson, 2016; Assouline et al., 2004; Carter, 2004; David Ferris, 2000). A special feature of *An die ferne Geliebte* is the musical da capo. Beethoven reinterprets the opening song both poetically and musically. First, he restated the melodic material and then proceeded to develop motives from the tune.

Coincidentally, this idiosyncrasy is largely applicable in music pedagogy. Learning is an ancient tradition as well as a lifelong process which is governed by theories. Two important learning theories that are relevant in modern times include the principles of contiguity and repetition. The former entails learning by association, especially coincided experiences while the latter concerns recurrence as a mean of instruction. The authors are of the view that these theories are expressed in the motivic repetitions employed in song cycles. It seems to us that these theories further apply to any sonic adventure that is named “song cycle.” Van Dyke Parks (born January 3, 1943) is best known for his 1967 album. His Song Cycle is known for designing flow and contiguity into melodies that would yield implied connections between the songs and the topics that they present (Carter, 2004).

Guthrie’s contiguity theory specifies that “a combination of stimuli which has accompanied a movement will on its recurrence tend to be followed by that movement” (Guthrie, 1938, p.1). According to Guthrie, all learning is a consequence of association between a particular stimulus and response. Furthermore, he argues that stimuli and responses affect specific sensory-motor patterns; what is learned are movements, not behaviors.

Contiguity theory is intended to be a general theory of learning, although most of the research supporting the theory was done with animals (Guthrie, 1938). In contiguity theory, rewards or punishment play no significant role in learning since they occur after the association between stimulus and response has been made. Learning takes place in a single trial (all or none). However, since each stimulus pattern is slightly different, many trials may be necessary to produce a general response

One interesting principle that arises from the position of contiguity is called “postremity” which specifies that we always learn the last thing we do in response to a specific stimulus situation (Guthrie & Horton, 1946). Contiguity theory suggests that forgetting is due to interference rather than the passage of time; stimuli become associated with new responses. Previous conditioning can also be changed by being associated with inhibiting responses such as fear or fatigue. The role of motivation is to create a state of arousal and activity which produces responses that can be conditioned.

Since the theory of contiguity attributes forgetfulness to interference rather than the passage of time, repetition then serves as a suitable complement. This consideration is also factored in the composition of *Liederkreis*. The principle of repetition is the formation of association through repeated experience. Repetition aids both acquisition and retention of knowledge and has gained currency in modern experimental psychology. The pioneering work of a German investigator Hermann Ebbinghaus showed the importance of repetition in the process of learning. Irvin Rock (1958) explains that a single experience of two contiguous items establishes only a partial connection between them in the nervous system. At this stage, the learner cannot yet articulate. Hence, the need for a repeated experience.



Repetition is one of the most essential learning tools. It is by repetition that we learn to recognize the letters of various alphabets, associate appropriate animal sounds with the correct animal, and memorize names, addresses, phone numbers, multiplication tables, and a host of other information that is fundamental to conceptual learning. Brain research reveals that repetition strengthens neural connections (Saville, 2011).

Apart from the song cycle, another vivid use and effect of repetition is seen in Wagner's *leitmotifs*. It is *Das Rheingold*, it becomes easier to recognize recurring motifs and themes, for example the Ailing Tristan and Desire motifs by means of repetition. Music education typically emphasizes repetition because of its success in the development and refinement of psychomotor skills. The most basic type of repetition is that of simple imitation. Imitation is easily observable in infants, who, when exposed to an observable action, begin to imitate the action. Imitation involves the process of trial and error. Early trials of imitation are often inaccurate, but through repetition, psychomotor skills are mastered and developed.

The role of repetition in the practice session of musicians cannot be overstated. Maynard (2006) reveals that repetition leads to increased accuracy, fluency, velocity, consistency, automaticity and flexibility. Her investigation indicates that "one of the defining characteristics of excellent musicians is their tenacity in repeating fairly short passages many times over." (p. 70). Types of repetition include Simple Repetition (Imitation), Disguised Repetition, Performer-Switching Repetition, Surprise Repetition, Call-and-Response Repetition, as well as Competitive Repetition.

Simple repetitions, which is otherwise known as imitation, involves the process of modeling music which requires students to develop the ability to listen analytically and to refine their ability. Through each repetition, they develop the ability to apply the modeled example to their own musical situations. Although some teachers worry that this can lead to rote learning, careful listening and imitation play a critical role in the development of musical perception and achievement as employed in song cycle composition and performance. A typical repetition-oriented music instruction requires the listener (student) to (a) identify one issue that needs to be improved, and model the solution through singing or playing an instrument and (b) to perform the passage and imitate the modeled passage.

Disguised Repetition (where content does not change) implies that each teaching strategy will reframe the exercise so that each repetition will appear to be new. This is precisely characteristic of song cycle where motifs are repeated with variation or elaboration. However, it is important to ensure that any change or modification done is faithful to the content of the original piece. This necessity must have prompted Davies (1988) to offer blueprints for transcription and other creative processes.

In addition, there is the Performer-Switching Repetition; strategies that do not require the instructor to change any portion or element of the passage that is to be repeated, but it does require the instructor to provide accurate and timely feedback so that the purpose for each repetition is clear. Wagner's *Leitmotifs* for example are purposely repeated for the sake of emphasizing a person, thing, mood or idea. Berlioz' *Idée fixe* also features in this line of thought.

Furthermore, the Surprise Repetition can be understood by considering the analogy of opening the refrigerator door, and every time you reopen the door, you find something totally new and



unexpected. This phenomenon is not different as regards the composition and consumption of song cycle. For each repetition, a composer or teacher must open the refrigerator door for students or the audience to find something new. This variety can be achieved through changing the tone of one's voice, adding drama to body motion or conducting, giving a dramatic pause before getting feedbacks, asking students to stand up and perform, etc.

Although the list may be inexhaustive, one effective way to buttress this concept is to consider the works of Schumann which can well be described as a fusion of tradition and innovation. Change in rhythm, mode, dynamics or the use of chromaticism and silence serves as a means of creating variety. Sometimes, composers may go as far as breaking the norms of composition (for example, the use of unconventional ranges) just to make a difference. Mahler's works are captivating though typical of recycled motives, recurring figures and repeated materials. Thus, it implies that an ideal pedagogist and composer is one who is capable of saying the same thing in different interesting. By so doing, they make a distinction between monotony and purposeful repetition.

### **Kolb's Learning Cycle**

It is quite remarkable that the nuances of Kolb's learning cycle resonate with some characteristic features in song cycle. Kolb's learning cycle enables one to learn through four phases: (a) Concrete Experience (CE), (b) Reflective Observation (RO), (c) Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and (d) Active Experimentation (AE). The first stage of learning (Concrete Experience) mainly relies on feeling. This phase is similar to the emotions evoked by a song cycle. Following is the Reflective Observation which involves a conscious observation to get the meanings and implications of ideas and situations. This observation is applicable in the consumption of song cycles. It takes a deliberate action to unravel the supposed puzzles embedded in song cycles.

The Abstract Conceptualization stage focuses on systematic analysis of symbols and theory building. This stage of Kolb's cycle has a direct bearing to song cycles. Nilson (2016) specifies some personality traits that function in this stage including precision, discipline and rigor. These traits are also useful in the process of analysing song cycle. For example, it takes keen eyes and attentive ears to decipher the key scheme that may be used in a song cycle. Only at this stage of learning can one develop "an appreciation for elegant ... models." (Nilson, 2016, p. 250).

Finally, the Active Experimentation is centered on a practical and concrete thinking, thus influencing people's opinions and situations. The authors think that the conception or reception of song cycle is subjective. Individual levels of self-expression, creative imagination and prior knowledge informs the composition and interpretation of song cycles. I suppose that program music is one approach to streamline the divergence in music interpretation.

### **Goethe's *Verschiedene Empfindungen an einem Platze*: An Exemplar of Simplicity**

The Doctrine of Affection privileges a simple and strophic poem setting. This is because strophic songs were adaptable to new poems that have the same affect. On the other hand, through composed songs did not support parodies within *Liederkrantz* societies. Goethe exemplified this aesthetic idea with his group of four songs, *Verschiedene Empfindungen an einem Platze* (1796). The four poems are brief and he used sameness of rhythm as well as



rhyme schemes to unite the poems. However, he attempted a Singspiel in his song cycle in a bid to avoid monotony.

The increasing complexity of the world as reported by Brody and Ryu (2006) has also manifested in curriculum contents and methods. However, research and practice has shown that maintaining simplicity in instructional approaches is needed to help students grasp knowledge easily. Just like Goethe's model, simplistic teaching is well suited for all category of learners. When teachers operate with the principles of simplicity, they can adapt to the needs of students and support growth irrespective of their abilities.

Cohen (2011) suggests several principles that are helpful in achieving this simplistic teaching goal. The first is to focus on the strengths, talents, abilities, characteristics and competencies of every student. In the same vein, composers explore their areas of strength. By doing so, students and composers learn to value each other's strengths and abilities and support the development of a community of where all can grow and bloom. In this environment, learning becomes simplistic and organic. Metaphorical distance for example becomes simple when composers approach it from a convenient stance. Schuman may choose to play with open pedals, giving the harmonies a blurred contour. Another may attempt acoustic modification through strategic positioning (for example, putting an orchestra in a pit or somewhere else). In the end, the result is the same. There is no doubt that ingenuity is closely related to simplicity.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Today we live in the world where everything is expected to be visualized and entertaining. However, it seems a disputable question as to whether song cycle is readily enjoyable or requires intelligent listening as well as the ability to create a semantically colorful mental picture towards a holistic understanding. Song cycle is interpretation-based, and brings about a composer-performer-listener connection through a poetic and musical discourse. Song cycle portrays elements of Romanticism including individualism, originality, emotionalism, nature and the natural, sublimity and mental transcendence.

Whether in a Medieval banquet hall, a nineteenth century salon, or a present-day venue, open-air stage or a classroom, the song cycle has always maintained relevance and will continue to be one of the most essential forms of musical expression and powerful communication. Furthermore, song cycle has rich pedagogical prospects due to its focus on the strengths, talents, abilities of every student. It is recommended that the genre is employed deliberately and adequately utilized in the music classroom. By doing so, students could learn to value each other's uniqueness in strengths, abilities, and competencies thereby promoting a community of learners where music teaching and learning becomes simplistic and organic, allowing all to grow and bloom. Future research to examine the extent to which *Liederkreis* has been employed in various music instructional contexts will be helpful.





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