

THE VOICES

FIVE SONGS FOR MEZZO-SOPRANO AND PIANO

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Preface

The Voices is a German song cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano. Starting with Beethoven's *An die Ferne Geliebte*, German song cycles have been an important part of classical vocal repertoire. Not only did they enhance the musical literacy of the middle class in the 19th century, but they also paid homage to the wealth of literature that was coming out of the German-speaking world at that time. From my voice lessons and classes at Haverford, I learned about these works and how composers used music to add another dimension to texts. During my semester abroad in Austria, I had an opportunity to study Lieder further in a class that spanned from 18th-century German songs to Schoenberg's *Book of the Hanging Gardens*. We studied the historical context of each of the song cycles, their texts, and how musical resources evolved over time in response to the texts. The pleasure I took in my Lieder class, along with my voice lessons and intense German classes in Austria, made it easy for me to decide upon a set of songs for my thesis in composition. Thus, *The Voices* came to be.

Finding the text required an extensive search. I finally found a set of poems by Rainer Maria Rilke whose haunting stories and imagery captivated me. *The Voices* contains one introductory poem and nine other poems that are songs of the destitute. Rilke wrote the poems as songs for many suffering people whose voices are rarely heard in society. I was inspired to set five of these poems to music. My sense of melody, background as a singer, and understanding of German helped me weave together the voice part. But the piano part challenged me. I did not want the piano to simply accompany the mezzo-soprano line. I wanted the piano to be an additional voice, speaking what the voice did not. So the piano also sings, pulling you deeper into the anguish of the blind man, the drunkard, the widow, and the suicide.

Miriam Abaya

1. Titelblatt

Die Reichen und Glücklichen haben gut
schweigen,

niemand will wissen was sie sind.

Aber die Dürftigen müssen sich zeigen,

müssen sagen: ich bin blind

oder: ich bin im Begriff es zu werden

oder: es geht mir nicht gut auf Erden

oder: ich habe ein krankes Kind,

oder: da bin ich zusammengefügt . . .

Und vielleicht, dass das gar nicht genügt.

Und weil alle sonst, wie an Dingen,
an ihnen vorbeigehen, müssen sie singen.

Und da hört man noch guten Gesang.

Freilich die Menschen sind seltsam; sie hören
lieber Kastraten in Knabenchören.

Aber Gott selber kommt und bleibt lang,

wenn ihn diese Beschnittenen stören.

2. Das Lied des Blinden

Ich bin blind, ihr draussen(draußen), das ist
ein Fluch,

ein Widerwillen, ein Widerspruch,
etwas täglich Schweres.

Ich leg meine Hand auf den Arm der Frau,
meine graue Hand auf ihr graues Grau,
und sie führt mich durch lauter Leeres.

1. Title Page

It's easy for the rich and fortunate to be silent,

nobody wants to know who they are.

That is why the destitute must show
themselves,

must say: I am blind,

or: that is what I'm about to become,

or: it's not going very well with me here on
Earth,

or: I have a sick child,

or: this is where I'm kind of all stuck
together . . .

And perhaps even that is not enough.

Despite everything, as if they were things,
people walk right by, and so they must sing.

And one hears good music there.

Truly, people are strange; They'd
rather hear castrati in boys' choirs.

But God himself comes and remains a long
time

when these disfigured ones begin to disturb
him.

2. The Blind Man's Song

I'm blind, all of you out there; that's a curse,

a repulsive something, a contradiction,
a daily heavy burden.

I lay my hand on the arm of a woman,
my grey hand on her greyest grey,
and she guides me through nothing but more
emptiness.

Ihr rührt euch und rückt und bildet euch ein,
anders zu klingen als Stein auf Stein,

aber ihr irrt euch: ich allein
lebe und leide und lärmte.
In mir ist ein endloses Schreien
und ich weiss(ß) nicht, schreit mir mein
Herz oder meine Gedärme.

Erkennt ihr die Lieder? Ihr sanget sie nicht,
nicht ganz in dieser Betonung.
Euch kommt jeden Morgen das neue Licht
warm in die offene Wohnung.
Und ihr habt ein Gefühl von Gesicht zu
Gesicht
und das verleitet zur Schonung.

3. Das Lied des Trinkers

Es war nicht in mir. Es ging aus und ein.
Da wollt ich es halten. Da hielt es der Wein.
(Ich weiß nicht mehr, was es war.)
Dann hielt er mir jenes und hielt mir dies
bis ich mich ganz auf ihn verließ.
Ich Narr.

Jetzt bin ich in seinem Spiel und er streut
mich verächtlich herum und verliert mich
noch heute
an diese Vieh, an den Tod.
Wenn der mich, schmutzige Karte, gewinnt,
so kratzt er mit mir seinen grauen Grind
und wirft mich fort in den Kot.

You push and pull and imagine yourselves
to sound differently than just stone against
stone,
but you are wrong: only I
live and suffer and complain.
In me is an endless scream,
and I can't say, is it my
heart that screams or my bowels.

Do you recognize the songs? You don't sing
them,
not quite in this arrangement.
Each day for you brings new light,
warm through the open window.
And you have this sense of moving from face
to face,
and that tempts one to be forgiving.

3. The Drinker's Song

It wasn't in me. It came and went.
I wanted to hold it. But the wine held it.
(I don't know anymore what it was.)
Then he held this out to me, then that,
until I gave myself over to him completely.
Stupid ass that I am.

Now I must play his game, and he tosses
me around for fun. He might lose me today
to that beast, Death.
And when he wins the filthy card that I am,
he scratches his grey head with me
and then throws me away in the muck.

4. Das Lied der Witwe

Am Anfang war mir das Leben gut.
 Es hielt mich warm, es machte mir Mut.
 Dass es das allen Jungen tut,
 wie könnt ich das damals wissen.
 Ich wußte nicht, was das Leben war —,
 auf einmal war es nur Jahr und Jahr,
 nicht mehr gut, nicht mehr neu, nicht mehr
 wunderbar,
 wie mitten entzwei gerissen.

Das war nicht seine, nicht meine Schuld;
 wir hatten beide nichts als Geduld,
 aber der Tod hat keine.
 Ich sah ihn kommen (wie schlecht er kam),

und ich schaute ihn zu, wie er nahm und
 nahm:
 es war ja gar nicht das Meine.

Was war denn das Meine; Meines, Mein?
 War mir nicht selbst mein Elendsein
 nur vom Schicksal gelieh'n?
 Das Schicksal will nicht nur das Glück,
 es will die Pein und das Schrein zurück
 und es kauft für alt den Ruin.

Das Schicksal war da und erwarb für ein
 Nichts
 jeden Ausdruck meines Gesichts
 bis auf die Art zu geh'n.
 Das war ein täglicher Ausverkauf
 und als ich leer war, gab es mich auf
 und liess mich offen steh'n.

4. The Widow's Song

In the beginning my life was good.
 It kept me warm, and it encouraged me.
 As it does all young people,
 but how could I have known that then.
 I didn't know what life was —,
 and then all at once it was just year to year,
 no longer good, no longer new, no longer
 wonderful,
 as if ripped in two through the middle.

That was not his, not my fault;
 we both of us had plenty of patience,
 but not Death.
 I saw him coming, Death, (how terrible he
 came),
 and I watched him, how he took and took:

of course it didn't really belong to me.

But what was really mine, its mine, his mine?
 Wasn't even my own suffering
 loaned to me by fate?
 Fate not only wants to have happiness back,
 it wants pain and screams back, too,
 and then buys the ruins as used.

Fate was there and got every
 expression on my face for a trifle,
 right down to the breed.
 That was the daily clearance sale,
 and once I was empty, it gave up on me
 and left me standing there, wide open.

5. Das Lied des Selbstmörders

Also noch einen Augenblick.
Dass sie mir immer wieder den Strick
zerschneiden.
Neulich war ich so gut bereit
und es war schon ein wenig Ewigkeit
in meinen Eingeweiden.

Halten sie mir den Löffel her,
diesen Löffel Leben.
Nein ich will und ich will nicht mehr,
lasst mich mich übergeben.

Ich weiß das Leben ist gar und gut
und die Welt ist ein voller Topf,
aber mir geht es nicht ins Blut,
mir steigt es nur zu Kopf.

Andere nährt es, mich macht es krank;
begreift, dass man's verschmäht.
Mindestens ein Jahrtausend lang
brauch ich jetzt Diät.

5. The Suicide's Song

All right, just a moment.
That they always take the rope away from me
and cut it.
Lately I've been so prepared,
and there was already a little bit of eternity
in my guts.

Hold me the spoon here,
this spoon-fed life.
No, I want to and I don't want to anymore,
let me give in, throw up.

I know that life is whole and good,
and that the world is like a full dish,
but for me it doesn't get into my blood,
it just goes straight up to my head.

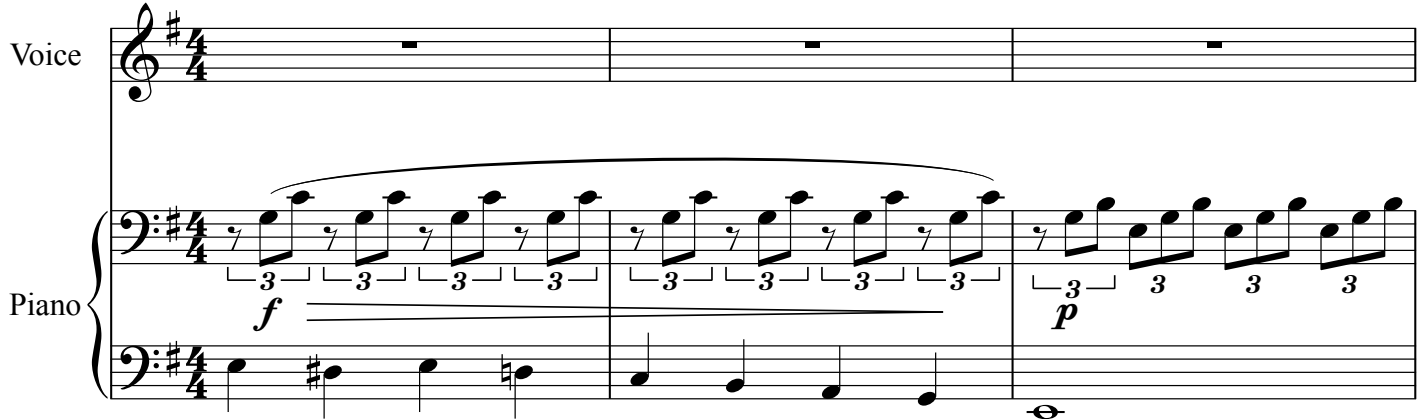
For others it's nourishment, me it just makes
sick;
Understand, that one can despise it.
For at least a thousand years
I'll have to fast.

Source: "The Voices: Nine Leaves with a Title Leaf". *The Book of Images*. Rainer Maria Rilke. Bilingual Edition translated by Edward Snow. North Point Press (division of Farrar, Straus, Giroux), New York: 1991.

1. Titelblatt

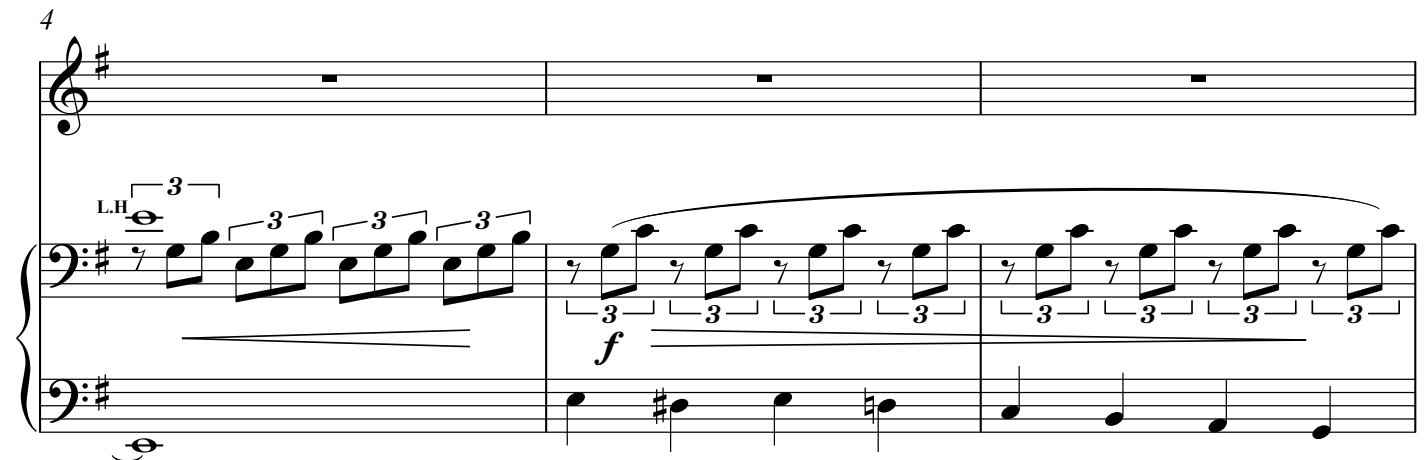
♩ = 135; Agitato

Voice



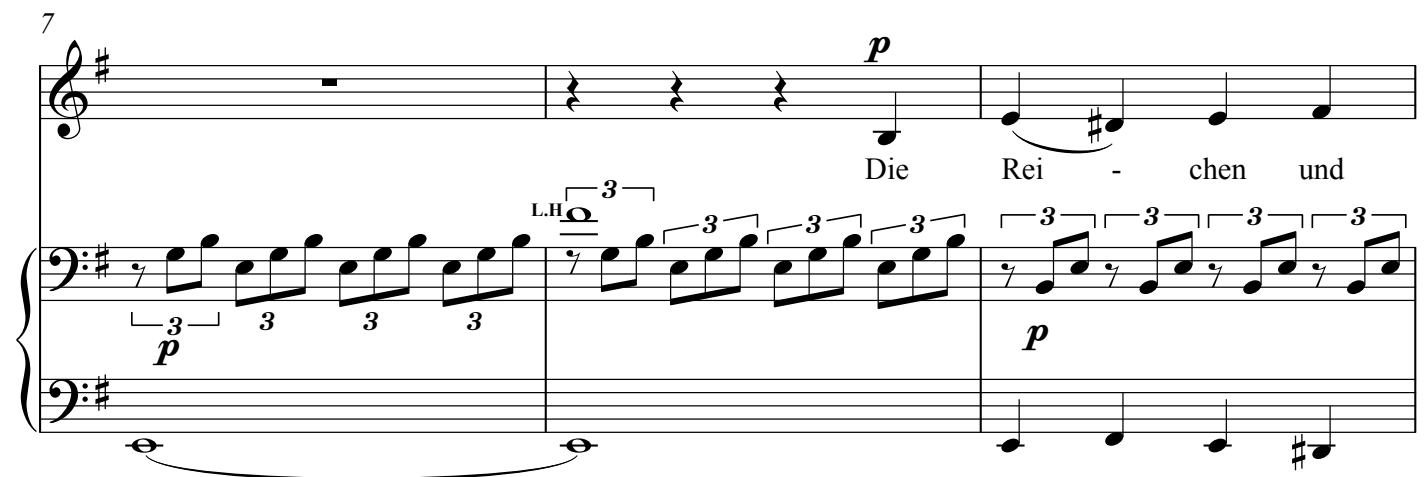
Piano

4



Piano

7



Voice

Die Reichen und

Piano

10

Glück - li - chen ha - ben gut schwei gen,

The musical score for measures 10-12 features a vocal line in G major with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part consists of a steady eighth-note triplet pattern in the left hand and a simple harmonic accompaniment in the right hand. The lyrics are: "Glück - li - chen ha - ben gut schwei gen,"

13

mf

nie - mand will wis - sen was sie sind.

The musical score for measures 13-15 features a vocal line in G major with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part continues with the eighth-note triplet pattern. The lyrics are: "nie - mand will wis - sen was sie sind."

16

mp

A - ber die Dürf - ti - gen müs - sen sich

The musical score for measures 16-18 features a vocal line in G major with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part continues with the eighth-note triplet pattern. The lyrics are: "A - ber die Dürf - ti - gen müs - sen sich"

19

cresc. poco a poco

zei - gen, müs-sen sa-gen ich bin blind o - der

22

ich bin im Be-griff es zu wer - den o - der es geht mir nicht gut auf

25

Er - den o - der ich ha - be ein kran - kes Kind, o - der

28

da bin ich zu - sam - men - ge - fügt

31

und viel - leicht daß das gar nicht ge -

34

nügt. und viel - leicht daß das

37

rit.

$\text{♩} = 100$

p

p

gar nicht ge - nügt.

Und weil al - le

41

sonst, — wie an Din - gen, an i - hen vor - bei - ge - hen, müs - sen sie

47

mf

sin - gen. und da hört man noch gut Ge - sang

50

da hört man noch gut Ge-sang. Frei-lich die Men - schen sind

54

selt - sam; sie hö-ren lie-ber Ka - stra - ten in Kna - ben

59

chö - ren. A-ber Gott Gott sel - ber kommt und bleibt lang wenn ihn die-se Be

64

f

schit - te - nen stö - ren. A - ber Gott sel - ber

69

kommt und bleibt lang wenn ihn die - se Be - schit - te - nen

74

stö - ren.

accel. ♩ = 135

p

f

78

Musical score for measures 78-80. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff (top), a bass clef staff (middle), and a bass clef staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The treble staff contains whole rests. The middle bass staff features a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom bass staff contains a bass line with whole notes and half notes, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. A bracket labeled "L.H." spans the first two measures of the middle staff.

81

Musical score for measures 81-83. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff (top), a bass clef staff (middle), and a bass clef staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The treble staff contains whole rests. The middle bass staff features a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom bass staff contains a bass line with whole notes and half notes.

84

Musical score for measures 84-85. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff (top), a bass clef staff (middle), and a bass clef staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The treble staff contains whole rests. The middle bass staff features a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets. The bottom bass staff contains a bass line with whole notes and half notes. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 85.

86

rit.

attacca

Musical score for measures 86-88. The system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff (top), a bass clef staff (middle), and a bass clef staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The treble staff contains whole rests. The middle bass staff features a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom bass staff contains a bass line with whole notes and half notes, marked with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 88, followed by a final chord in the bottom staff.

2. Das Lied des Blinden

$\text{♩} = 72; \text{Grave}$

p

Ich bin blind, ihr drau-ßen, das ist ein Fluch, ein Wi-der wil-len, ein Wi-der

$\text{♩} = 72; \text{Grave}$

p

9

declarative

p

spruch, et-was täg-lich Schwe-res. Ich leg mei-ne Hand auf den Arm der...

f *p*

17

f *p*

Frau, mei-ne grau-e Hand auf ihr grau-es Grau, und sie führt mich durch lau-ter Lee-res.

f *p*

24

p

Ihr rührt euch und rückt und_ bil-det euch ein, an - ders zu klin-gen als

p

32

f *p*

Stein auf_ Stein, a - ber ihr irrt_ euch: ich al-lein. le - be und lei - de und lär-me.

f *p*

40

p

In mir_ ist ein_ end - lo-sesSchrein und ich_

48

f



weiß nicht , schreit mir mein Herz o-der mei - ne Ge - där - me.

56

p



Er - kennt ihr die Lie - der__ ? er - kennt__ ihr die

65

f , *p*



Lie - der? Ihr_ san - get sie nicht, nicht ganz in die - ser

Rubato

73

Be - to - nung. Euch kommt je - den Mor - gen das

Rubato

82

A tempo**f**

neu - e Licht kommt je - den Mor - gen das neu - e Licht warm in die of - fe - ne

A tempo**f**

90

p*cresc. poco a poco*

Woh - nung. Und ihr habt ein Ge - fühl von Ge - sicht zu Ge - sicht, Ge

97

f *f*

sicht zu Ge-sicht, und das und das ver-

106

lei-tet zu Scho-nung, ver-lei-tet zu Scho-nung.

p

115

121

rit.

The image shows a musical score for piano and treble clef. The piano part is in the lower register, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The treble clef part is in the upper register, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score is in 2/4 time and features a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The piano part begins with a series of eighth notes, followed by a half note, and then a series of eighth notes. The treble clef part begins with a series of eighth notes, followed by a half note, and then a series of eighth notes. The score concludes with a double bar line. Dynamics include *f* and *ff*. Tempo markings include *rit.* (ritardando) above the treble clef and *ff* below the piano part.

3. Das Lied des Trinkers

♩. = 60

p

Es

5

war nicht in mir. Es ging aus und ein. Da wollt ich es hal-ten. Da hielt es der Wein. (Ich

9

weiß nicht mehr — was es war.) Dann

mf

13

cresc. poco a poco...

hielt er mir je nes und hielt mir dies bis ich mich ganz auf ihn ver-ließ. Ich

17

Narr. _____ Jetzt

21

bin ich in sei - nem spiel und er streut mich ver-rächt - lich he - rum und

24

ver-liert mich noch heut an die - se Vieh, an den Tod.

27

p *cresc. poco a poco...*



Wenn der mich, schmut-zi ge Kar-te ge-winnt, so

30

f *pp* *f*



kratzt er mit mir sei-nen grau-en Grind und wirft mich fort in den Kot. und

34

p



wirft mich fort in den Kot.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a whole rest in each of the three measures. The middle staff is a grand staff, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff contains a sequence of chords: a B-flat major chord (Bb, D, F) in the first measure, a B major chord (B, D, F#) in the second measure, and a B-flat major chord (Bb, D, F) in the third measure. The bass clef staff contains a sequence of notes: a whole note B-flat in the first measure, a whole note B in the second measure, and a whole note B-flat in the third measure. A dynamic marking *pp* is placed between the two staves of the grand staff in the second measure. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the third measure.

4. Das Lied der Witwe

$\text{♩} = 70$

p

Am An-fang war mir das Le-ben gut. Es heilt mich warm, es mach te mir

$\text{♩} = 70$

p

5

mf *p* *f*

Mut. Daß es das al - len Jun-gen tut, wie konnt ich_ das da-mals wissen. Ich wuß-te

mf *p*

11

p

nicht was das Le-ben war, auf ein-mal war es nur Jahr und Jahr, nicht mehr gut,_ nicht mehr

mf *p*

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system starts at measure 5 and features dynamics of mezzo-forte (*mf*), piano (*p*), and forte (*f*). The third system starts at measure 11 and features dynamics of mezzo-forte (*mf*) and piano (*p*). The lyrics are in German and describe a widow's perspective on life and death.

16 *cresc. poco a poco* *f*

neu, nicht mehr wun-der - bar, wie mit-ten ent - zwei ge - ris -

21 *f*

sen. Das war nicht sei - ne, nicht mei - ne

27 *p* *with force*

Schuld; wir hat - ten bei - de nicht als Ge - duld, a-ber der

32

mf

Tod _____ hat kei - ne. Ich sah _____ ihn kom - men (wie

mf

37

schlecht er _____ kam),_ und ich schau - te ihm zu wie er _____ nahm_ und

42

f

nahm: es war_ ja gar nicht das Mei - ne.

f

47

Was war denn das Mei - ne; Mei - nes,

51

Mein? — War mir nicht selbst — mein

54

E - lend - sein nur vom Schick - - -

58

sal ge - liehn?

mf *p*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 58, 59, and 60. The vocal line starts with a long rest in measure 58, followed by the lyrics 'sal ge - liehn?' in measures 59 and 60. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings *mf* and *p* are present.

61

Das Schick - sal will nicht nur das

p

Detailed description: This system contains measures 61, 62, and 63. The vocal line begins with a rest in measure 61, then sings 'Das Schick - sal will nicht nur das' across measures 62 and 63. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. A dynamic marking of *p* is shown.

64

Glück, es will die

f *mf*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 64, 65, and 66. The vocal line starts with a rest in measure 64, then sings 'Glück, es will die' across measures 65 and 66. The piano accompaniment features a more active rhythmic pattern. Dynamic markings *f* and *mf* are present.

67

Pein_ und das Schrein_____ zu - rück_____ und es kauft für

71

alt_____ den Ru - in. Das_____

74

Schick - sal war_____ da und er-warb für ein Nichts_____ je - den

78

mf *p*

Aus - druck mei-nes Ge-sichts bis auf die Art _____ zu gehn.

83

f *p*

Das war ein täg - li-cher Auf-ver-kauf und als ich leer war, gab es mich auf _____ und

88

f

ließ _____ mich of - fen stehn. of - fen, of - fen

93

stehn. und ließ mich of - fen stehn.

p

p

rit.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 93 through 97. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The vocal line has a long slur over the words 'ließ mich' and a dynamic marking of *p* at the end. The piano accompaniment has a dynamic marking of *p* and a *rit.* marking at the end of the section.

98

f

rit.

pp

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 98 through 102. The vocal line is mostly silent with a few notes. The piano accompaniment starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and ends with a *pp* marking. A *rit.* marking is present in the middle of the section.

5. Das Lied des Selbstmörders

$\text{♩} = 65$

p; mournfully

Al-so noch ei-nen Au-gen-blick. Daß sie mir_nim-mer

p

Ped *sim.*

10

wie der denStrick ver schnei-den. Neu-lich war ich so gut be-reit und es war schon ein

18

f; with force

we-nig E-wig-keit in mei-nen Ein-ge-wei-den. Hal-ten sie mir_den

f

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 65. The first system starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 9. The second system starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 17. The third system starts at measure 18 and ends at measure 25. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. There are dynamic markings: piano (p) and forte (f). Performance instructions include 'mournfully', 'with force', and 'sim.' (sustained pedal). The lyrics are in German and describe a suicidal act.

27

Löffel hier, Die-sen löf - fel Le-ben. Nein ich will und ich_will nicht mehr

36

laßt mich mich ü-ber - ge-ben. Ich weiß das Le -

mp; warmly

mp

45

ben ist gar und gut und die Welt_____ ist ein vol-ler Topf, a-ber mir geht

53

*with force****f***

es nicht ins Blut, mir steigt es nur zu Kopf. An-de-re

62

nährt es, mich macht eskrank; be - greift, daß man's verschmäht. Min -

70

des - tens ein Jahr - tau - send lang brauch' ich_ jetzt Di - ät.

79

f; ominously

brauch' ich_ jetzt_ Di - ät.

mp

This system contains measures 79 through 88. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 79, followed by the lyrics 'brauch' ich_ jetzt_ Di - ät.' in measures 80-82. The piano accompaniment consists of a flowing sixteenth-note melody in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present in measure 84.

89

pp *pp* *pp*

mf

This system contains measures 89 through 98. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic patterns. The right hand features several chords marked with *pp* (pianissimo) in measures 89, 90, and 91. A dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) is present in measure 92. The system concludes with a double bar line in measure 98.

99

rit.

f

8va

This system contains measures 99 through 102. The piano accompaniment continues. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in measure 100. The system concludes with a double bar line in measure 102. Above the final two measures, there is a dashed line labeled *8va* and two chord symbols: $\text{C} \cdot \text{D} \cdot \text{E} \cdot \text{F} \cdot \text{G} \cdot \text{A} \cdot \text{B} \cdot \text{C} \cdot$ and $\text{C} \cdot \text{D} \cdot \text{E} \cdot \text{F} \cdot \text{G} \cdot \text{A} \cdot \text{B} \cdot \text{C} \cdot$.