Romantic Period (c. 1820 – 1910) : Key Musical Characteristics

- **Huge Orchestras:** Expansion of woodwind, brass, and percussion sections for maximum power and a wide palette of tone colours.
- **Tempo Rubato:** Rhythmic freedom where the performer subtly robs or adds time to heighten the emotional expression.
- **Adventurous Harmonies:** Frequent use of complex chords (e.g., diminished 7ths, added 9ths, 11ths) and chromaticism to create tension.
- **Emotional Melodies:** Longer, more lyrical, and highly expressive phrasing that reflects intense, deeply personal human feelings.
- **Nationalist Music:** Integration of folk tunes, native rhythms, and national lore to express love for a composer's homeland.
- **Programme Music:** Instrumental music written to tell a explicit story, illustrate a poem, or depict a specific landscape.
- **Lieder & Song Cycles:** German art songs for voice and piano, often grouped into unified collections to tell a narrative. (NB STROPHIC, THROUGH COMPOSED)
- **Extended Modulations:** Rapid and unexpected shifts to distant, unrelated keys rather than closely related keys.
- **Dynamic Extremes:** Use of massive dynamic contrasts, ranging from whisper-quiet *ppp* to thunderous *fff*.
- **Virtuosity:** Rise of the technical virtuoso (e.g., Liszt, Paganini), featuring highly challenging, show-stopping solo passages
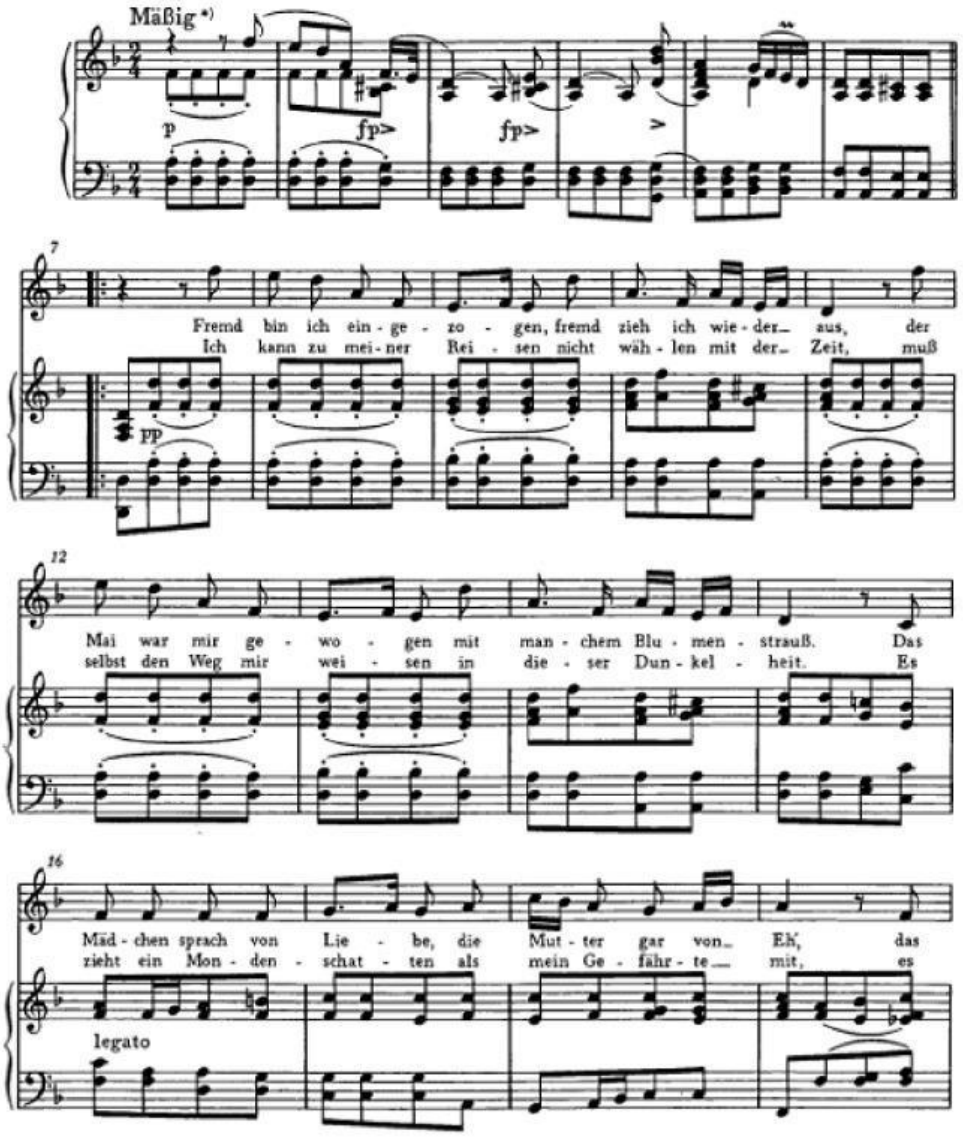
• SONG CYCLE

A **song cycle** is a collection of art songs (frequently ***Lieder***) designed to be performed as a continuous unit. Unlike standalone songs, a cycle is linked by a central narrative, character arc, or overarching theme to provide dramatic cohesion.
Composers achieve unity across a song cycle using several techniques:

- **Literary Themes:** Text bound by a common subject (e.g., isolation, nature, unrequited love) or taken from a single poet's collection.
- **Recurring Motifs:** Explicit melodic fragments or rhythmic ideas that return in later songs to represent specific characters, objects, or emotions.
- **Tonal Planning:** A deliberate sequence of related or contrasting keys that mirrors the emotional journey or narrative progression.
- **Textural Consistency:** Developing piano accompaniments that evolve alongside the vocal line to reinforce changing moods.
- **Structural Symmetry:** Balancing the order of tempos, forms, or movements to create a satisfying overall architecture

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to *Gute Nacht* from Schubert's "Winterreise" song cycle and answer the questions.



- Name the opening key (lines 1-4 of text)

_____

Name the key at bar 16 & relation to the tonic key

Key: _____

- ☐ Sub dominant
- ☐ Dominant
- ☐ Relative major
- ☐ Relative minor

_____

Comment on the use of piano accompaniment and how it reflects the journey of the wanderer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Translation of verse 1

I arrived a stranger,
a stranger I depart.
May blessed me
with many a bouquet of flowers.

The girl spoke of love,
her mother even of marriage;

now the world is so desolate,
the path concealed beneath snow.

LIVEWORKSHEETS
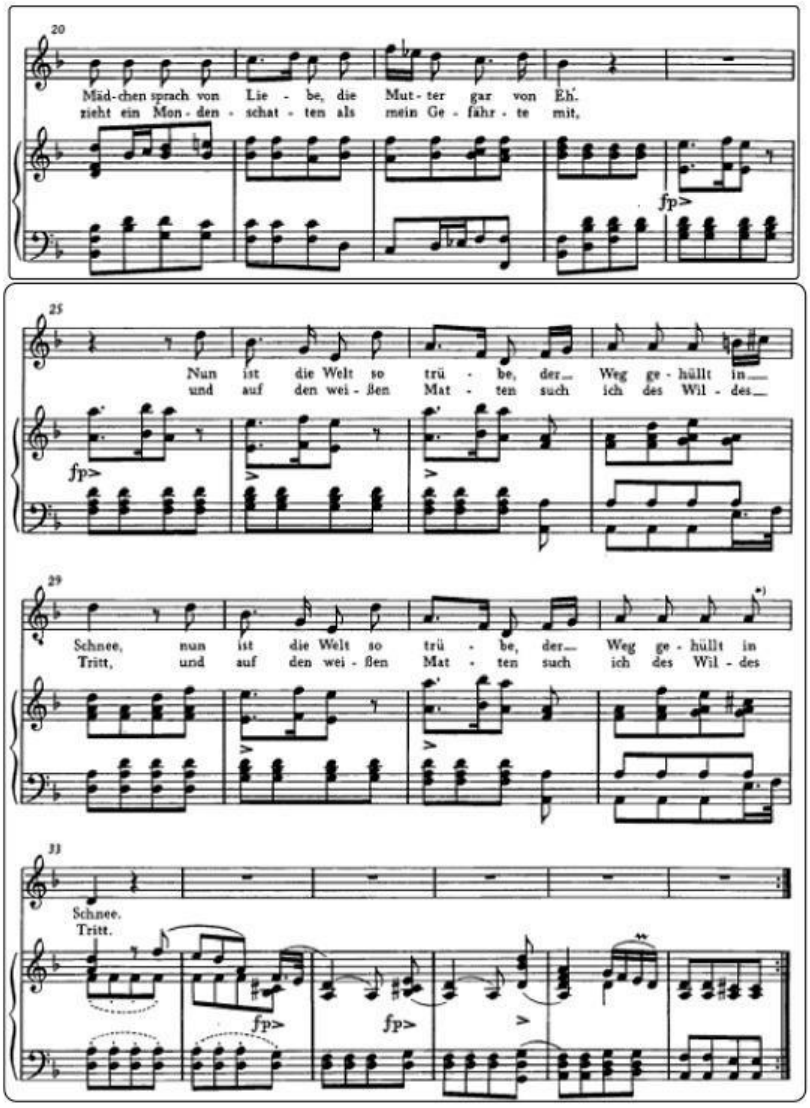
Name the key the music modulates to in bar 20 and its relation to the <u>key of bar 16 - 19.</u>

Key: _____
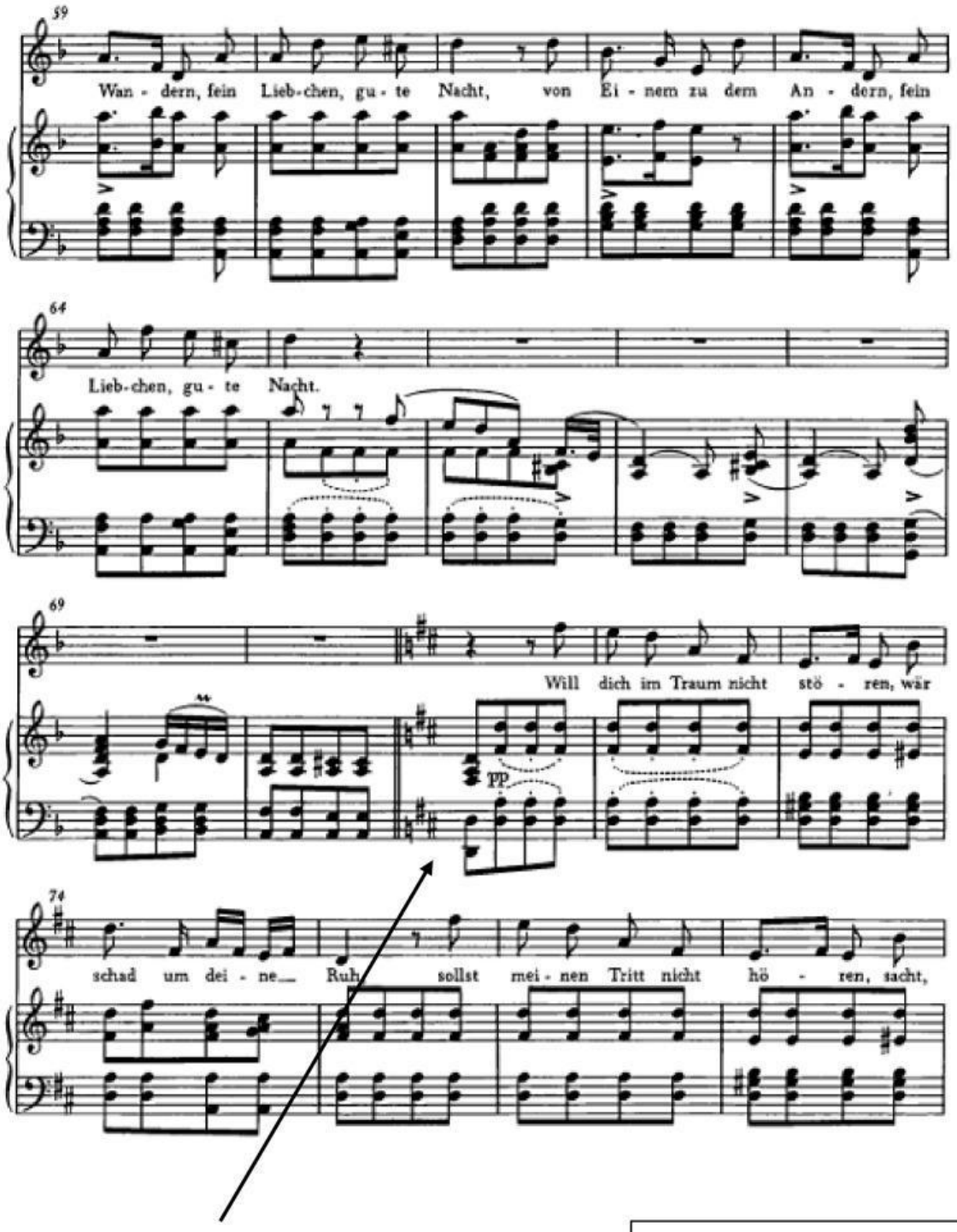
- ☐ Sub dominant
- ☐ Dominant
- ☐ Relative major
- ☐ Relative minor

What happens to the key in bars 27-33

_____

_____

How does the modulation affect the mood?

_____

_____

_____

_____



LIVEWORKSHEETS



Name the key at bar 71 (last verse) & relation to the tonic key
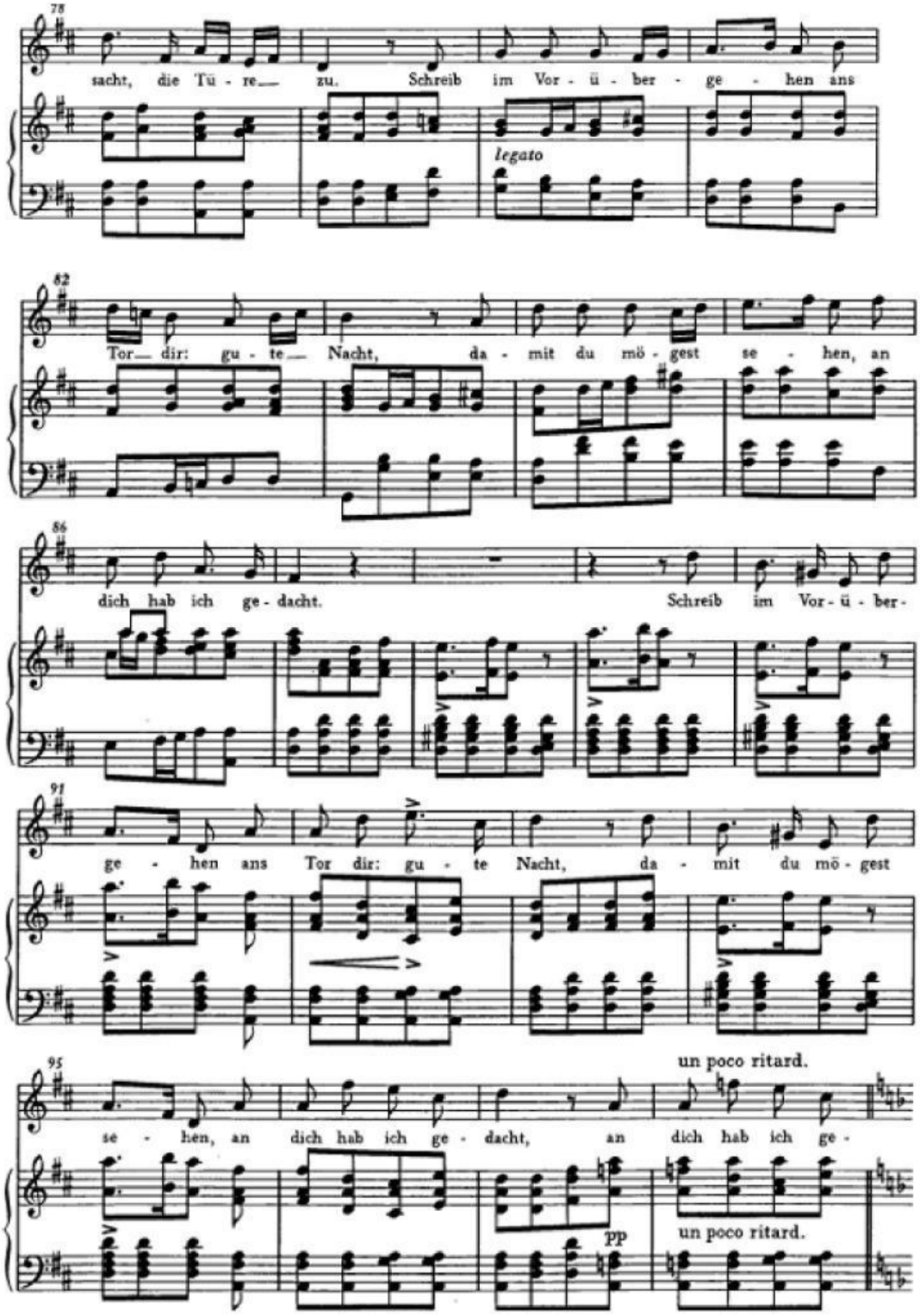
Key: _____

- ☐ Sub dominant
- ☐ Dominant
- ☐ Relative major
- ☐ Relative minor

Translation:

I will not disturb you as you dream,
it would be a shame to spoil your rest.
You shall not hear my footsteps;
softly, softly the door is closed.
As I pass I write
'Good night' on your gate,
so that you might see
that I thought of you.

LIVEWORKSHEETS
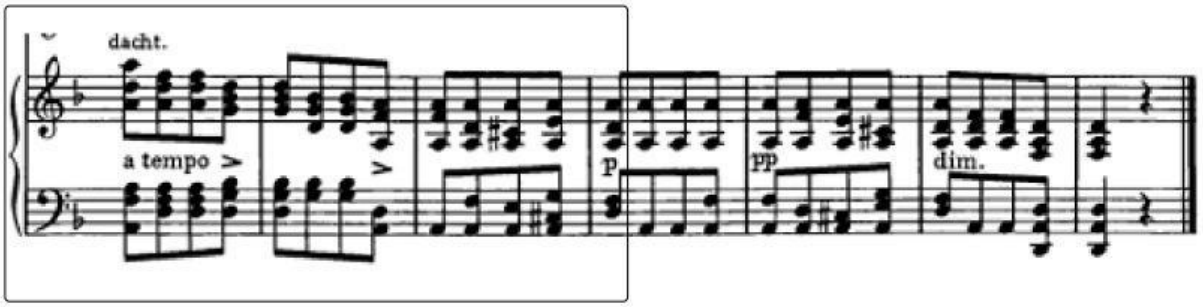


What key does the final line modulate to?

Key: _____

- ☐ Tonic
- ☐ Sub dominant
- ☐ Dominant
- ☐ Relative major
- ☐ Relative minor

Analyse the chord structure of the final line



Chord name	
Position	
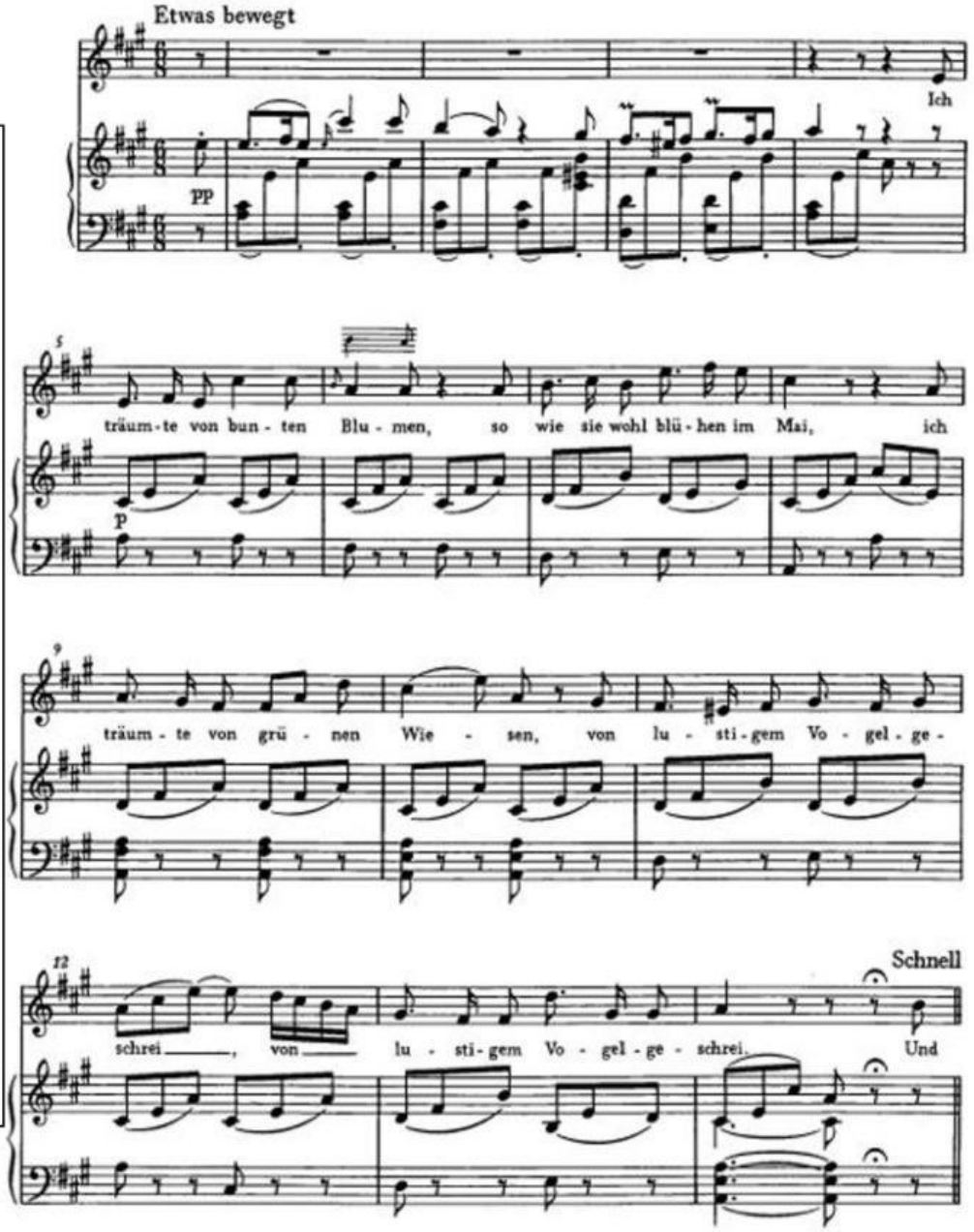
LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to Frühlingstraum from Schubert's "Winterreise" song cycle

This lied illustrates several key Romantic characteristics:

- Word Painting / Textural Contrast: The song contrasts a light, flowing piano texture in a major key (representing the dream of spring and love) with a harsh, dissonant, low-register texture in a minor key when the singer wakes to the cold winter reality and the sound of crows.
- Tonal Planning: Schubert uses sudden shifts between a bright A major (for the dream) and a dark, heavy A minor / D minor (for reality), representing the unstable psychological state of the wanderer.
- Thematic Cohesion: The song embodies *Winterreise* themes of wandering, isolation, and unrequited love
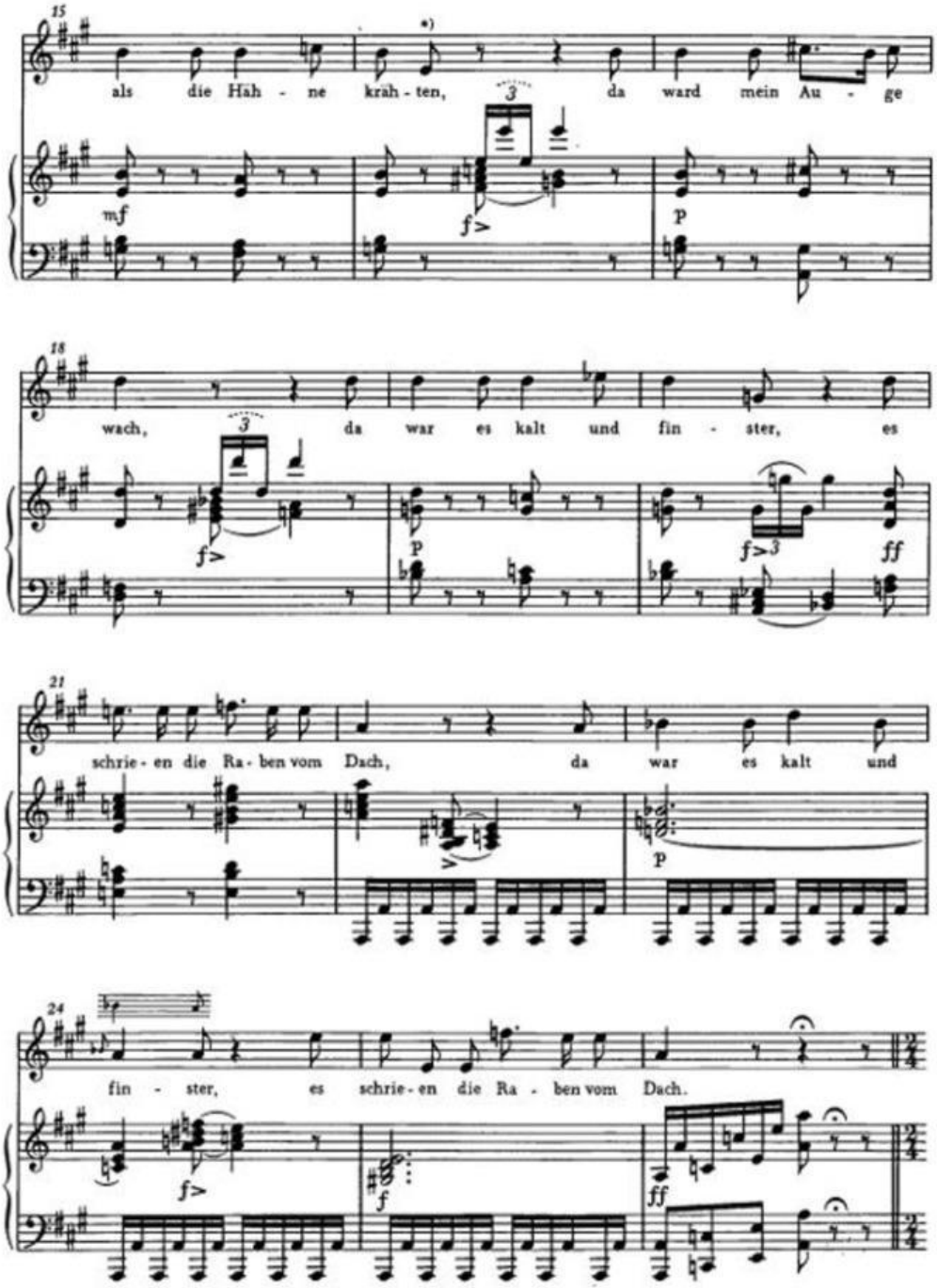
Comment on the musical techniques Schubert uses to create the pleasant dreams of verse 1. Think about **melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, articulation and texture.**



Ich träumte von bunten Blumen,
So wie sie wohl blühen im Mai,
Ich träumte von grünen Wiesen,
Von lustigem Vogelgeschrei.

I dreamt of bright flowers
that blossom in May;
I dreamt of green meadows
and merry bird-calls.

LIVEWORKSHEETS



Comment on the musical techniques Schubert uses to create the jolt back to reality of verse 2. Think about **melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, articulation and texture**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Und als die Hähne krähten,
Da ward mein Auge wach;
Da war es kalt und finster,
Es schrieen die Raben vom Dach.

And when the cocks crowed
my eyes awoke:
it was cold and dark,
ravens cawed from the roof.

LIVEWORKSHEETS
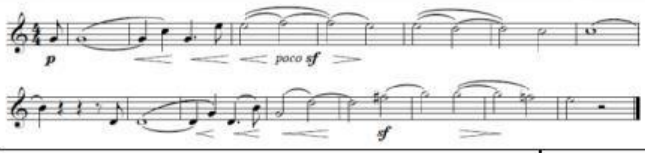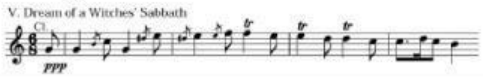
Leitmotif & Programme Music

• Leitmotif

A **leitmotif** is a short, recurring musical theme associated with a specific person, place, idea, or emotion. Composers use it to provide structural unity and drive a narrative without words.

***Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) – Berlioz**

- **Genre:** A seminal example of a **Programme Symphony** (instrumental music written to depict an explicit story).
- **Structure:** Unique for its time, it contains **five movements** rather than the traditional classical four.
- **The Programme:** Subtitled *"Episodes in the Life of an Artist"*, it is inspired by Berlioz's unrequited obsession with actress Harriet Smithson. The narrative follows a heartbroken musician who overdoses on opium, triggering a series of intense, vivid hallucinations.
- **Musical Execution:** The beloved woman is represented by a specific leitmotif melody (which Berlioz termed the **Idée Fixe**). This theme appears across all five movements, transformed via altered orchestration, rhythm, and dynamics to reflect the changing, surreal moods of the artist's dream

1. Reveries – Passions	Introduced in its pure, expansive form. Long, lyrical phrasing represents the artist's initial yearning & obsessive love.	**Violins and Flutes** in unison. Creates a bright, singing, and intensely romantic string-dominated timbre.
		
2. A Ball	The artist spots his beloved at a grand party. Transformed into a gliding **waltz** rhythm	**Flute and Clarinet** supported by harps. Elegant, sweeping textures evoke the atmosphere of a ballroom.
		
3. Scene in the Country	Set in a pastoral landscape. Opens with an **antiphonal** dialogue between a **cor anglais** and an off-stage **oboe** mimicking shepherds.	**Flute, Clarinet, and Oboe**. Gentle, exposed woodwind solos invoke a rustic, isolated countryside atmosphere.
		
4. March to the Scaffold	The artist dreams he has murdered his beloved. He is marched to his execution. The theme is a final, fleeting thought.	**Solo Clarinet**, interrupted by a massive **Tutti Orchestra** chord and a pizzicato snare-like drop representing the severed head.
		
5. Dream of a Witches' Sabbath *(Songe d'une nuit de sabbat)*	The artist witnesses his own funeral in hell. The theme is completely distorted into a vulgar, grovelling dance tune. 	**High Eb Clarinet** accompanied by low strings and brass. Grotesque trills and a piercing woodwind register sound demonic.

LIVEWORKSHEETS
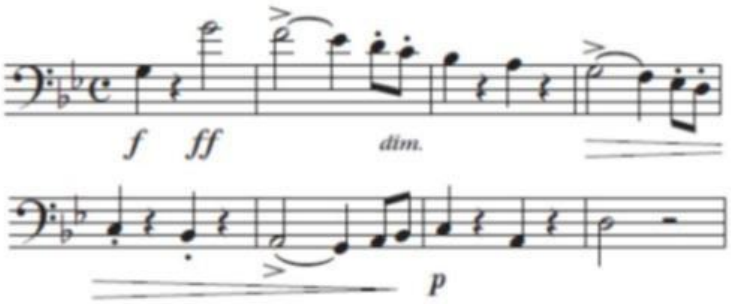
Listening task – March to the scaffold

During this movement, the artist dreams that, insane with jealousy, he has murdered his beloved and is dragged to the scaffold. This movement opens with a repeated **MOTIF** played by muted horns, timpani and **PIZZICATO** low strings.

1. Which of the following rhythms best matches the repeated **MOTIF** that you hear?



2. Theme A is then heard
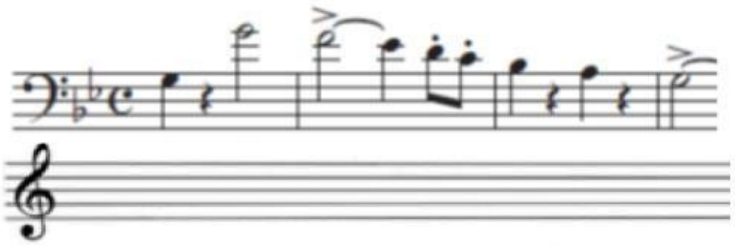


a) What instruments play this theme the first time it is heard?

_____

b) What instruments play this theme when it is repeated?
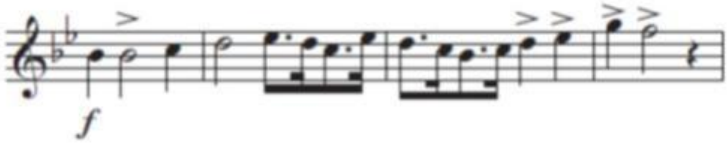
_____

c) Describe the **TONALITY** of Theme A? _____

d) How is the choice of **TONALITY** suitable to the descriptive nature of this movement?

_____

e) Transpose the bracketed notes so they sound at the SAME PITCH in the treble clef.



3. Another theme is heard in the brass and woodwind.



a) How does the **TONALITY** of this theme compare with Theme A _____

b) How would you describe the **RHYTHM** of this theme?

_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4 a) Now listen to the last section of *March to Scaffold*, which features the idee fixe on the clarinet towards the end. Comment as fully as you can on the table below.

MELODY / HARMONY	RHYTHM/ TEMPO	TEXTURE / STRUCTURE	TIMBRE / DYNAMICS

b) Write a statement on the style / period of this excerpt and justify your answer

LIVEWORKSHEETS

- ## Nationalism (Nationalist Music)

Nationalism is a prominent late-19th and early-20th-century style where composers intentionally infuse elements of their homeland's unique culture, history, and folklore into Western art music. This movement often emerged as a form of creative resistance against dominant German, Italian, and French musical influences.

- **Folk Integration:** Incorporating authentic folk melodies, native scale structures (such as modal inflections), and traditional dance rhythms (e.g., mazurkas, polonaises).
- **Programmatic Elements:** Works are frequently **programme music**, written to depict specific national landscapes, historic events, legends, or myths.
- **Vivid Orchestration:** Massive, rich orchestral textures and vibrant instrumental timbres to paint a sense of place.

Key Listening Examples

- **Smetana:** *Vltava (The Moldau)* – A symphonic poem vividly depicting the journey of Bohemia's main river.
- **Grieg:** *Peer Gynt Suite* – Incidental music celebrating Norwegian folklore and landscapes
- **Sibelius:** *Finlandia* – A highly political, patriotic symphonic poem written during Russian censorship

Listening Task: Nationalist Case Study 1
Finlandia was composed by Sibelius as a covert protest against strict Russian imperial censorship in Finland. Originally masquerading under various names to avoid bans, the piece uses powerful, dark orchestration and a serene, hymn-like chorale to express national struggle, resilience & ultimate hope. It remains one of the most powerful symbols of Finnish cultural identity.

Listen to the two contrasting excerpts from *Finlandia* and complete the grid below.

Question	Clip 1: Opening	Clip 2: Finlandia Hymn
a) What is the **time signature and tempo?**		
b) Describe the **texture.**		
c) Which **orchestral family** is most prominent, and how is it used?		
d) What **dynamics** are used, and what is the emotional effect?		

LIVEWORKSHEETS
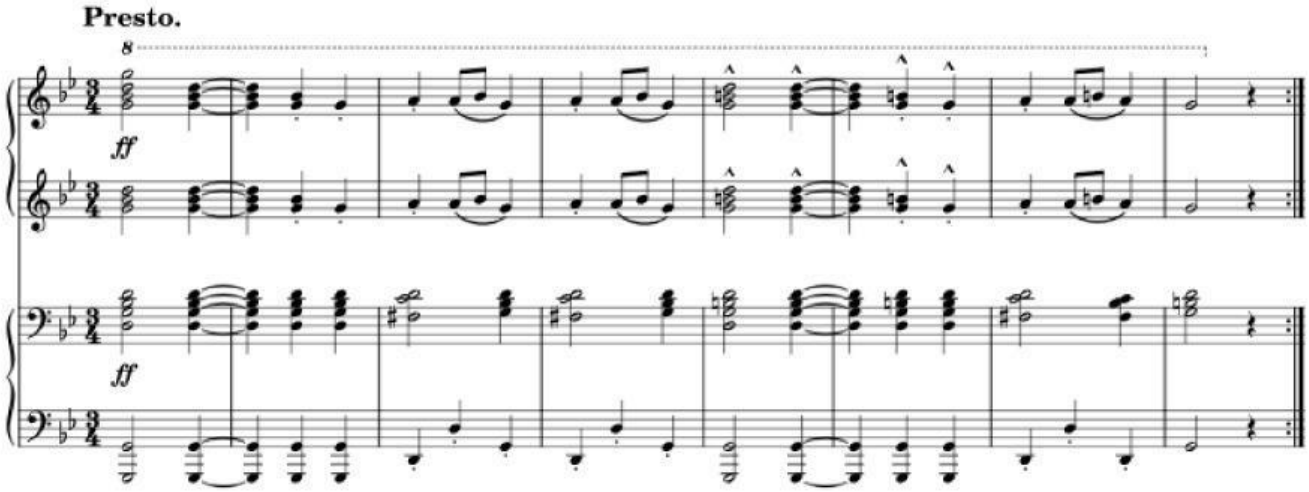
e) How does Sibelius use the orchestra in Clip 1 (Opening) to musically create a sense of struggle, tension, or oppression?
Think about chord structures, low registers, and accents.

_____

_____

_____

f) How do the melody and harmony in Clip 2 (Finlandia Hymn) evoke a feeling of unity, peace, or patriotism?
Think about phrasing, step-wise motion, and vocal/hymn-like textures.

_____

_____

_____

g) How do structural changes in tempo, dynamics, and orchestration across both clips allow Sibelius to communicate a programmatic narrative moving from "oppression" to "hope"?

_____

_____

_____

Listening Task: Nationalist Case Study 2
Dvořák – *Slavonic Dance No. 8* (Op. 46, No. 8)

Dvořák composed the *Slavonic Dances* in 1878 to celebrate the vibrant folk traditions of his native Bohemia (now the Czech Republic). Rather than quoting actual folk tunes directly, Dvořák wrote completely original melodies that perfectly captured the rhythmic spirit of traditional Slavic dances. This specific piece is a **Furiant**—a fiery, rapid Bohemian dance famous for its sudden shifting accents and rhythmic energy, which became a powerful musical symbol of Czech national identity.



Listen carefully to the full performance and answer the following questions.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

- **Rhythm / Tempo**

a) Explain how Dvořák creates a cross-rhythm or ***hemiola*** effect in Section A to give the music its characteristic folk-dance energy.
Think about where the main accents fall and how the time signature feels destabilised.

_____

b) **Describe how Section B contrasts with Section A in terms of melody and harmony to showcase a different side of Bohemian national style.**
Comment on phrasing, modes/keys, and the overall mood change.
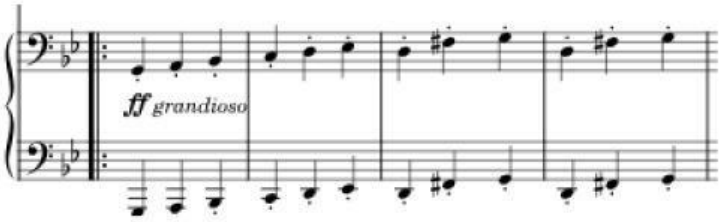
_____

c) Nationalism often relies on bold orchestral textures. How does Dvořák use percussion and brass to evoke a sense of outdoor village celebration and national pride?

_____

_____

- **Melody/ Harmony**

a) Describe key melodic features

_____

b) What key is the piece in, and how does Dvořák use changes in tonality?

_____

c) What type of scale is heard here?

_____



- **Texture/ Timbre/ Dynamics/ Articulation**

a) How does the **texture** change throughout the piece?

_____

b) Which **instruments** feature most prominently, and how is orchestration used to create contrast?

_____

_____

c) How do the **dynamics** change throughout the piece?

_____

d) Describe the variation of **articulation** in the piece.

_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS