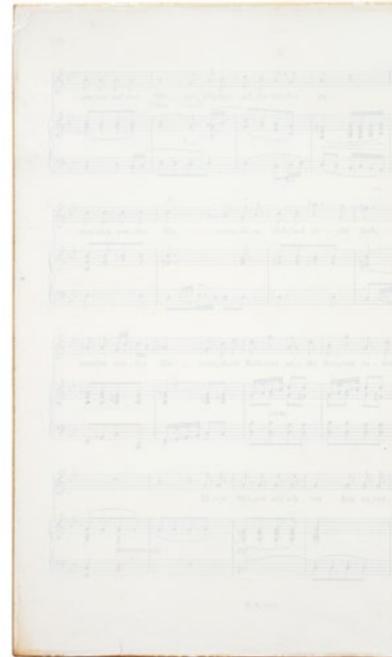
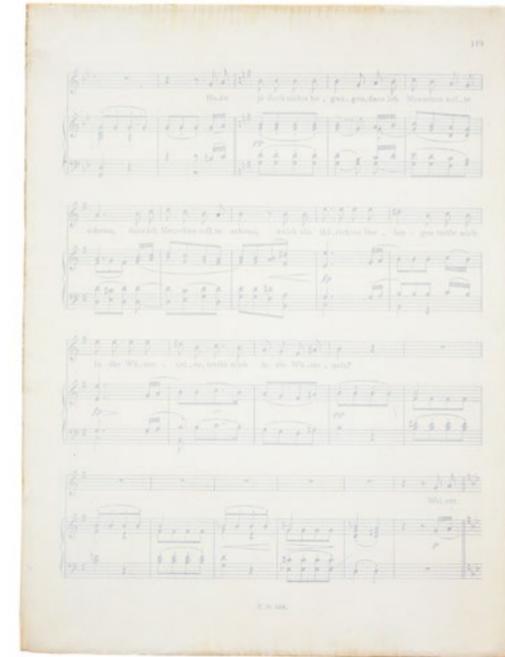
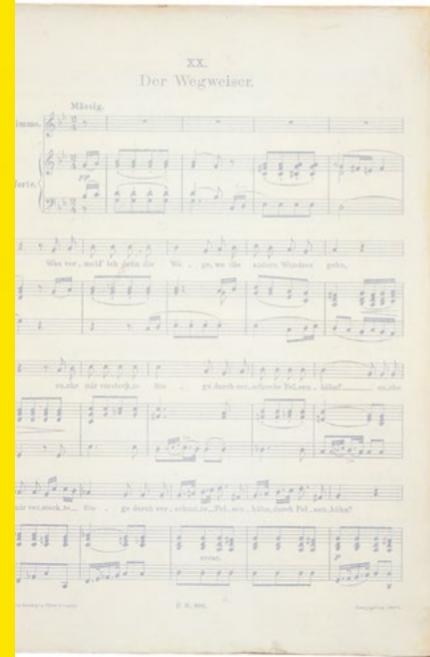




Sarah Day-O'Connell

on Seminar as

Schubertiad



Or, a New Journey for Schubert's *Winter Journey*

In summer 2017, Associate Professor of Music Sarah Day-O'Connell interviewed Tim Rollins and senior K.O.S. members Angel Abreu and Rick Savinon about their twelve-panel painting *Winterreise* (songs XX–XXIV) (after Schubert), a study for a seventy-panel work, from 1988. She was, in part, preparing for her fall course “Music 344: Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven,” which focused on how European composers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw music as a truly interdisciplinary endeavor, integrally connected to other fields of inquiry throughout the arts and sciences. In that spirit, she assigned students to create multimedia responses to the Tim Rollins and K.O.S. work, itself a visual response to Viennese composer Franz Schubert’s song cycle *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*), 1827, which uses Wilhelm Müller’s poems of the same name. Students performed these responses on November 16, 2017, in the exhibition *Other Side: Art, Object, Self*, where the artwork was on view.

Detail from Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (established 1981) *Winterreise* (songs XX–XXIV) (after Schubert), 1988. Acrylic and mica on music pages mounted on linen, 12 × 132 in. Gift of Ruth and William S. Ehrlich, 2012.18a-1

Twelve music majors enroll in a seminar about late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century music: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert. We’ll analyze scores, of course. We’ll listen to recordings, of course. If we’re lucky, we’ll go to some concerts.

Concerts. Music majors love concerts. A group of performers, the specialists, gather on one side of the room to play music they’ve rehearsed and polished. Another group occupies part of the same room, but it’s a separate space. They are the audience; they listen.

All music majors have been both, many times: performers and audience. But not at the same time, of course. You can’t be in two places at the same time.

Yes, in this class there are scores and recordings—loads of them. But there are also other primary sources, the traces left by the composers and their contemporaries: letters, journal entries, newspaper articles, and treatises. There are contemporary accounts of concerts, but the picture that develops is just as clearly one of circles of friends and families who are simply gathering to play music together—to discuss it, interpret it, argue about it, reinterpret it, and play it in many different ways.

They are performers and audience—at the same time.

Franz Schubert’s circle met in literary and musical salons; they had discussion parties. The nickname for their version of non-concert musical gatherings: “Schubertiads.”

1827

According to a friend, Schubert's mood was "gloomy." Pressed, the composer explained, "Well, you will soon hear it and understand." At the next Schubertiad, "I will sing you a cycle of chilling [*schauerlicher*: horrifying, gruesome, eerie] songs." So the friends gather and Schubert sings the entire song cycle *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*) "in a voice wrought with emotion." "We were utterly dumbfounded by the mournful, gloomy tone of these songs." Schubert notes the reaction. "I like these songs more than all the rest," he says. "And you will come to like them, too."



Student performers:

Samantha Abrams, William Bresee, Alastair Canavan, Rachel Chang, Olivia Cox, Taylor Fohrhaltz-Burbank, Brennan Mitrolka, Caroline Moe, Nicole Mooers, Rachel Perez, Jordan Shedrofsky, Rebecca Sohn

Sarah Day-O'Connell is associate professor in the department of music at Skidmore College. Her courses combine musical analysis with interpretation of literary, visual, and material culture in order to explore how musical activity has historically reflected and shaped broader social concerns. She has published on late eighteenth-century music history, historiography, culture, and aesthetics as well as theories of performance, and she is coeditor of *The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia* (due to appear in December 2018).

1988

Tim Rollins and K.O.S., a group of renowned visual artists who happen also to be a teacher and a bunch of teenagers, are studying *Winterreise*—reading the lyrics by Wilhelm Müller, listening repeatedly to Schubert's setting for voice and piano, and identifying with the protagonist, a lonely, lovelorn Wanderer. Spurned, yes, but his crisis seems to be utterly existential. Who am I? Why am I here? He is a misfit, an outsider. *I came here a stranger / As a stranger I depart.* There are accented dissonances in Schubert's introduction, but they subside as the Wanderer speaks to himself, coaches, peptalks himself. What can he do but walk, move forward, set one foot in front of the other?

It is not a pilgrimage, exactly, but a journey of self-discovery.

"Keep marching," says Tim.

It's cold: snow turns to ice. *Ah tears, my tears, / And are you so tepid / That you freeze to ice / Like cool morning dew? / Yet you burst from your source / In my heart so burning hot / As if you wanted to melt / The entire winter's ice!* Melodic motives and second-beat accents repeat in persistent agitation. Is he frustrated with himself, his inability to express what he feels inside? The teens recognize this frustration. They recognize themselves; they confess that they recognize themselves. The Wanderer keeps going: *Walking kept me going strong / On the inhospitable road.*

"Keep marching," says Tim.

Sometimes the Wanderer despairs: *The frost has spread a white sheen / All over my hair / I thought I had become an old man / And was very pleased about it / But soon it melted away / And now I have black hair again / So that I am horrified by my youth / How long still to the grave!* The last line is rendered in a haunting, solitary unison by voice and piano, unharmonized, unadorned, like the long, lonely life stretching ahead of him.

"This is slow-burn suicide material," Tim says to the teens.



"Keep marching," he says.

For some of the kids, this is their introduction to classical music. Tim takes them to the Morgan Library & Museum in New York to examine the manuscript. But it's not a pilgrimage. "Don't go to gawk," he says, "or to have a religious experience, you know. It's good to have an experience, but we're really going to *steal*."

Back in the K.O.S. studio, the Schubertiad reconvenes. The studio is filled with color, color for the ears—with timbre, tone color, piano, and voice. The lush velvet maroon of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's lyric baritone, the silver-shimmer-teal of Gerald Moore's piano accompaniment.

But the paint on the artists' brushes is white, all white. White with flecks of white mica, like ice crystals in snowflakes. Seventy panels of Schubert's *Winterreise* score, each painted marginally but perceptibly whiter than the last. Finally, opaque.

Assembled on the wall, the panels stretch for fifty-eight feet. To take them in, you walk. You take the journey with the Wanderer. "Keep marching."

Toward the end, the Wanderer considers the nature of courage. *When the snow flies in my face, I shake it off again.* Major and minor tonality jockey one another.

He thinks of resting but is turned "unmercifully" away. A return to the tonic major, and the vocal range sinks lower and lower. Resignation? Comfort?

Well onward then, keep marching, my loyal walking staff!

2017

Tim and two members of K.O.S. visit Skidmore to discuss their *Winterreise* (*songs XX–XXIV*) (*after Franz Schubert*), now almost thirty years old. Angel Abreu recalls:

"We come together as a group and decide what it means to us, what it could mean to the author or composer, and what it will mean in the future." Schubert's "OK with the way we've interpreted it," he says. Rick Savinon adds, "It's like the work is holding on to you. [. . .] There's no ending to the story, or the journey."

Tim concurs: "We're here and we're working again and Schubert comes right on down and he's looking at us with a big smile on his face—for once, right—and I know what he's saying. He's saying, 'Listen, I didn't write this music just for conservatory students, I didn't write this music for people that can afford to go to the symphony every week; I wrote this music for people like you.' And he's right, and we say, 'Thanks a lot. OK, see you.' [And we] get to work."

"That was a Schubertiad!" I tell them.

And then I tell them about my upcoming seminar, my hopes for a class project that is not a concert but a present-day college-music-major Schubertiad. Dialogue about and with and through the music and the poetry and each other and Schubert himself. And with Tim and Angel and Rick. Performers and audience all at once.

"We'll be walking over to the Tang to see your *Winterreise*," I tell them. But it's not a pilgrimage, I say. We'll be there to borrow and steal and discuss and reinterpret for our journey.

A new journey for Schubert's *Winterreise*.



Bibliography

Bostridge, Ian. *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*. New York: Knopf, 2015.

Gibbs, Christopher H. *The Life of Schubert*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

von Spaun, Josef. "Aufzeichnungen über meinen Verkehr mit Franz Schubert (1858)" in Otto Erich Deutsch, ed., *Schubert die Erinnerungen seiner Freunde* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1957). Translations by author.

Youens, Susan. *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's "Winterreise"*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.