

„Cristalline Music“? – The first Movement of Schubert’s Piano Sonata in B flat major D 960 and why the Exposition must be repeated

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Schubert’s handling of sonata form has always been of primary importance in any discussion – either aesthetic or analytical – of his music, and it is still of immediate interest today. Although contemporary research has provided a considerable amount of new information about Schubert’s structural procedures, the portrayal of Schubert’s use of sonata form is still influenced by earlier research in being regarded essentially as a ‘casing holding melodic thoughts’. We have, on the other hand, Adorno’s assertion that ‘a genuine formal analysis of Schubert’ would have ‘to investigate primarily the dialectic at work between the over-arching sonata scheme and Schubert’s crystalline form which results in an alternative structure’, an assertion which he made in his essay on Schubert published in 1928. If this assertion is taken as the point of departure for a detailed musical analysis, details which have hitherto escaped the notice of Schubert research will become clear. An example of such analytical investigation is provided by the opening movement of the Piano Sonata in B flat major D 960 in which it can be seen how the idea of a traditional sonata model is treated by Schubert. It demonstrates that Schubert, while no longer utilizing the constituent elements of the structure of a sonata movement in the traditional manner, makes just as little use of his characteristic harmonic language to resolve the structure from within. He effects the sonata structure to a much greater extent in the sense of an abstraction, in that he distances himself historically from the sonata model. The latter is merely presented as one aspect of the whole form rather than – as required by the ‘formal structure’ – developed into a grand projected cadence. The musical-analytical results which accrue from this reveal in the end that Adorno got to the heart of the matter with his descriptive analysis, although he did not furnish us with technical analytical proof.