

Sketches for the Oratorio

Christus am Ölberge, Opus 85

The oratorio *Christus am Ölberge* had been given its first performance on April 5, 1803, and accordingly the bulk of the preliminary sketching for it had taken place in the Wielhorsky sketchbook, where it occupies almost eighty pages at the end of the book.¹ But the sketches in Landsberg 6, as Tyson shows, were undoubtedly made in connection with Beethoven's revision of the work as he prepared for its second performance, on March 27, 1804.² As we saw in chapter 3, Tyson also posits the existence of another sketchbook between Wielhorsky and Landsberg 6, now lost, which should have contained additional sketches for the oratorio.

The Landsberg 6 sketches for *Christus am Ölberge* are all for the first two numbers. Tyson points out that the sketches for No. 1 belong to two passages, one in the middle and another at the end. Tyson writes, "The 1803 version of the aria in the first number has not survived complete, but a sufficient number of deleted bars remain in the Berlin score [Artaria 179] to show that m. 162 was originally followed by a tutti in E $\flat$ forming the ritornello."³ Apparently, Beethoven's first task in revising this number in Landsberg 6 was to rework this passage so that it did not cadence in E $\flat$. On page 172, st. 1, he sketches mm. 163–71, and the F on the word

FIGURE 30. Op. 85, No. 1, reversal of dominant harmonies between mm. 123–24 and 162–63

m. 123	dominant of C minor
m. 124	dominant of E $\flat$ major
m. 162	dominant of E $\flat$ major
m. 163	dominant of C minor

mir presumably is part of the same dominant harmony to C we find in m. 163 of the final version. The new harmonic juncture between mm. 162 and 163 is particularly remarkable because it reverses the dominant chords found in mm. 123–24 of the final version, as shown in Figure 30. In the first case, the harmony swerves from C minor toward E $\flat$ major. In the second case, it does just the opposite.

On page 172, st. 2, Beethoven continues his sketch of mm. 163–71 with the music from m. 171 but the text from m. 124, "Wie ein Fieberfrost ergreift mich die Angst." On page 173, st. 8, m. 4, Beethoven changes this text to "Meine Seele ist erschüttert . . .," which is found in the final version at the beginning of the section. The result is that in the final version, each verse begins (mm. 113 and 170) with the same text and the same opening melody but for a C-minor arpeggiation in mm. 113–15 and a C-major arpeggiation (now part of a V⁷/iv) in mm. 170–72.

1. See Tyson, "1803 Version of Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberge*" 49–82; and JTW, 133–34.

2. See Tyson, "1803 Version of Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberge*" 53.

3. *Ibid.*, 81.

Beethoven's changes demonstrate the particular attention he pays to the relationship between C minor and C major as well as C minor and E $\flat$ major. These keys were already contrasted in the original version of this aria, but Beethoven seems to have intensified their juxtaposition and created deeper interrelationships between the keys in his revised version.

Philip Gossett points out that Beethoven's "preoccupation with the keys" of C minor and major flourished in the years 1803–5. Regarding these years, he writes, "The contrast between C minor and C major is given profound symbolic meaning by Beethoven's use of them in his major works: the *Eroica* Symphony, *Christus am Oelberge*, and *Leonore*."⁴ The revisions to the first aria in Landsberg 6 reinforce this key relationship as well as the one between C minor and E $\flat$ major. There are numerous parallels to the "Eroica" Symphony. Both C minor and E $\flat$ major are primary keys of the symphony. In addition, the revised harmonic progression in mm. 162–63 of Op. 85, No. 1, avoids a cadence in E $\flat$ by utilizing a transposition of the progression Beethoven also used at the beginning of the fourth movement in the symphony, as presented in Figure 31.

Beethoven's revision of mm. 162–63, accompanying the text "nimm den Leidenskelch von mir," keeps the first verse from ending in a key other than C minor. Beethoven's revision at the end of the second verse accomplishes the same purpose. The text is again "nimm den Leidenskelch von mir," and mm. 216–18 do prepare the listener for a strong cadence in C minor. However, the first sketch of this section in Landsberg 6, on page 172, st. 13ff., shows that in the early sketch, Beethoven planned to stray from the home key into the remote region of D $\flat$ major. By page 173, this modulation is nowhere to be found, and the text "nimm den Leidenskelch von mir" (st. 15, m. 3 – st. 16, m. 1) cadences firmly in C minor. The remaining sketches for this aria, on pages 173, 175, 178, and 179, are all devoted to the closing C-minor material.

Christus am Ölberge's second number, the Seraph's aria, was revised on pages 174–77. The sketches are almost entirely of those bars in which the chorus of angels was added (mm. 123ff.). Beethoven's first sketch on page 174, st. 1–12, corresponds

FIGURE 31. Progression in Op. 85, No. 2, mm. 162–63, and Op. 55, IV, mm. 1–11

Christus am Ölberge, 1803 version—in C minor: V/III to III

Christus am Ölberge, revision—in C minor: V/III to V

"Eroica" Symphony, mm. 1–11—in E $\flat$ major: V/III to V

to mm. 113–207. Within this sketch, at st. 10, m. 6, Beethoven arrives at m. 167, beat 1, of the final version. Curiously, this bar continues as if he was now at m. 194 of the final version. This is possible because both measures 167 and 194 conclude sections that end with the text "in Glaub' und Hoffnung seid." The final version's bars 168–93 are absent in this sketch.

It is possible that Beethoven planned at this point in the revision process to omit the dramatic harmonic shift found in measure 168 of the final version to B $\flat$ and E $\flat$ chords. Beethoven then adds a "+" marker at page 174, st. 10, m. 5, to connect to st. 14. This later line provides many of the missing bars, although not the harmonic shift, and it corresponds to measures 178–94 of the final version.

The sketches on pages 176–77 are for the fugal ending that Beethoven added to the original 1803 version. The passage goes from measures 207–98 in the final version, but the Landsberg 6 sketches continue only to measure 266.

The Wielhorsky and Landsberg 6 sketches are briefly discussed by Anja Mühlenweg in her dissertation on the origins of the *Christus* oratorio, but without providing transcriptions from either sketchbook. However, she does point out that in the surviving autograph scores of both versions of the oratorio, No. 6, the final Trio of the work, underwent "massive corrections, sketching, and later insertions," and she suggests that for this final number, Beethoven may have proceeded to "recompose the Trio directly in the autograph with only a small amount of preliminary work."⁵ Mühlenweg also points out the existence of a brief sketch for No. 6 on a leaf (folio 34r) of the Berlin MS Aut. 19c, which she associates with the revision of the work for its performance in late March 1804.

4. Gossett, "Arias of Marzelline," 173.

5. Mühlenweg, "Ludwig van Beethoven, *Christus am Oelberge*," 94.