

Voice Repertoire: Program Notes

Ruth Michel

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“Widmung” by Robert Schumann

Although composer Robert Schumann spent much of his early career composing piano and other instrumental music, in 1840 he abruptly switched to composing more vocal music. In realizing that well-received compositional styles were changing, he expressed to Clara that “the piano is getting to limited for me...I am paying more attention to melody now” (Turchin, 392). He converted to composing mainly string quartets from 1838-1839, then turned over to German vocal lieder. Librettist Friedrich Rückert is believed to be Schumann’s favorite poet (Hallmark 1990, 4). Rückert sharpened his linguistic skills by studying the Turkish, Arabic, and Persian languages with Joseph Hammer-Purgstall (Hallmark 2001). By the time Rückert passed away, there were over 2,000 musical settings of his poetry composed by over 800 composers (Hallmark 2001). Rückert experienced a period in his life where much of his poetry was dedicated to his future wife, Luise Wiethaus. Schumann set many of Rückert’s love poems as dedications to his own wife, Clara Schumann, one of these being *Widmung* (Hallmark 1990, 5). The passionate, fiery text of the first section of the piece is set with fast rhythms large jumps throughout the singer’s range. However, once the text “you are the rest, you are the peace” is heard, the character of the piece changes using slower rhythms, a downward modulation from F Major to D flat Major, and a lower range of the singer’s voice.

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
du meine Wonn’, o du mein Schmerz,
du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
o du mein Grab, in das hinab ich ewig
meinen Kummer gab!
Du bist die Ruh’, du bist der Frieden,
du bist vom Himmel mir beschieden.
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,
dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
du hebst mich liebend über mich,
mein guter Geist, mein bess’res Ich!

You my soul, you my heart,
you my joy, you my pain,
you my world, in which I live,
my Heaven you, in which I float,
oh you my grave, in which into I eternally
my sorrow gave!
You are the rest, you are the peace,
you are the heaven to me granted.
That you love me, gives me worth to myself,
your glance has transfigured me in my own sight,
you raise me lovingly above myself,
my good spirit, my better self!

“Music When Soft Voices Die” by Roger Quilter

Roger Quilter was born into a wealthy family, and eventually studied piano and composition at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, Germany. Quilter studied composition with Ivan Knorr, who also taught Percy Grainger, Norman O'Neill, Balfour Gardiner, and Cyril Scott: a group that later became known as the “Frankfurt Group” for their contributions to contemporary music (Langfield 2001). He is most known for his vast collection of English art songs, and for the way that he sensitively tended to their lyrics. Quilter even claimed to love the poetry more than the music (Raphael 1953, 21). Poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of Quilter’s favorites, began as an intense writer who created prose about “striking intellectual courage, political radicalism, and atheism,” but eventually switched to lyric poetry (Dibble 2001). Shelley did not become popular among British composers until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. During this time, Quilter set Shelley’s *Love Philosophy*. In 1927, he set Shelley’s *Music When Soft Voices Die* as a part of his Opus 25 six song set. Quilter used his arrangement to complement the touching poem sensitively and delicately. The first section of text starts on a piano dynamic and gradually grows louder until the word “love” appears. Quilter places this word on the highest note in the piece and lets it ring for five full beats. A minor third is also heard on the word “dead” when the text refers to roses heaped for one’s death bed.

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory-
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved’s bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

“Après un rêve” by Gabriel Faurè

In 1854, Fauré traveled to Paris to attend the Ecole de Musique Classique et Religieuse where he studied organ, counterpoint, and church music to eventually become a choir master (Nectoux 2001). During his time here, he studied composition under the infamous Niedermeyer and Saint-Saëns. The text of *Après un rêve* highlights the pain and despair felt by one whose true love only came to him in a dream and departed the instant he woke up, leaving him to cry out to her in vain. The melody line of Fauré’s setting has sets of successive triplets that are sung against even eight notes in the accompaniment (York 1971, 25). Fauré used this tense two against three to embody the main character’s dilemma of seeking love that is a falsehood. Fauré placed the highest note of the piece on the word “hélas” which is shouted out as the character wakes from his sleep and faces reality (York 1971, 25).

Dans un sommeil que charmait ton image
Je rêvais le bonheur, ardent mirage;
Tes yeux étaient plus doux, ta voix pure et sonore,
Tu rayonnais comme un ciel éclairé par l’aurore.
Tu m’appelais et je quittais la terre
Pour m’enfuir avec toi vers la lumière;
Les cieux pour nous, entr’ouvraient leurs nues,
Splendeurs inconnues, lueurs divines entrevues
Hélas! Hélas, triste réveil des songes!
Je t’appelle, ô nuit, rends-moi tes mensonges;
Reviens, reviens radieuse,
Reviens, ô nuit mystérieuse!

In a slumber charmed by your image
I was dreaming of happiness, that fiery mirage.
Your eyes were gentler, your voice pure and ringing,
You were beaming like a sky lit up by the dawn.
You were calling me, and I was leaving the earth
To flee with you towards the light;
The heavens for us were lightly opening their clouds
Unknown splendors, divine radiance glimpsed
Alas, alas! Sad awakening from dreams,
I call you, o night, give me back your lies,
Come back radiantly,
Come back, o mysterious night!

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