

the business of many so-called Urtext publishers to serve up similarly compromised editions that, while being eminently clear, are limited and crude in cultural perspective. The consumer is handed a documentary skeleton, the bare bones of musical understanding: correctly apportioned staccato and legato markings, conscientiously bracketed editorial indications – all perfectly aligned with computerized precision. But for today's inquisitive performers and scholars, something vital is lacking. Urtext editions often present such scavenged remains, a picked-over frame of past music sources separated from a 'fatally' rejected corpus of sonic culture, which, as exemplified by Weidinger's trumpet, once inspired – literally gave breath to – the compositional act itself. The prefix certainly demands reconsideration, for many similar Urtexts currently appear which are not truly 'original' in design, but are more accurately 'primitive.'

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*Selected Songs of the Munich School 1870–1920: Lieder for Soprano Voice and Piano*, edited by Robert W. Wason, Valerie Errante, Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, volume 54. (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2010), preface plus 208 pages.

Upon engaging with the first few entries in *Selected Songs of the Munich School 1870–1920*, one immediately wonders why this delightful repertoire, centring on the themes of nature, mythology, the night, song, and, above all, love, is not better known. These lieder, at times reminiscent of their counterparts from the early to mid-nineteenth century yet exploring more adventurous harmonies and some occasionally virtuosic accompaniments designed with the stronger projection of the modern piano in mind (p. xxvii), surely deserve greater currency today.

Wason and Errante present this volume with a dual purpose: to make available a collection of songs from a stylistically varied school, and to encourage performance of the same. (Take note: this anthology is intended particularly for sopranos; the editors point out that transposition of the songs for other ranges is not historically appropriate, as they have yet to find any song originally published in multiple keys.) Most of the songs have been out of print since their original publication, and very few have been commercially recorded, though soprano Rebecca Broberg (with Philipp Meierhöfer, Frank Strobel and Hans Martin Gräbner) has recently released two cds of lieder by Ludwig Thuille (1861–1907), including opp. 4, 5 and 24 found in this book.<sup>1</sup>

This anthology incorporates a wide-ranging sample of 58 songs written during a span of half a century, from the *Schlichte Weisen: Fünf Gedichte von Felix Dahn*, Op. 2 (1871) by Alexander Ritter (1833–1896) through the *Zwölf Gesänge mit Klavier nach Gedichten von Paul Verlaine*, Op. 42 (1920) by Richard Trunk

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Thuille, *Ausgewählte Lieder*, Oehms Classics CD OC 805 (2007) and *Urslamm-Idyll und Heiligenschein: Auserlesene Gesänge*, Thorofon Records CD CTH 2585 (2011).

(1879–1968). The *Schlichte Weisen* songs predate the Munich School, a nebulous body that grew from informal gatherings centred around Ritter in the 1880s into a wider group of composers who, in many cases, had direct connections with Ludwig Thuille. Three of the composers represented in this volume, August Reuss (1871–1933), Walter Courvoisier (1875–1931) and Walter Braunfels (1882–1954), studied with Thuille at the Akademie. The prominence of this composer-teacher as the central figure in the Munich School is confirmed in the generous selection of his works in the anthology, four distinct sets comprising a total of fourteen songs. Richard Strauss's shadow also looms large over this period; the introduction inserts him into the discussion both biographically (he and Thuille were friends from childhood) and musically (notes on the performance practice of his *Brentano-Lieder*). However, as he did not belong to this group, his works are rightly excluded from this volume.

Brief notes on the formation of the little-known Munich School, the composers, and each individual set of songs orient this material within its historical context: the school is characterized by the application of harmonic and tonal techniques of the New German School upon a classical approach to composition as derived from Joseph Rheinberger. If the primary commentators on the group, Rudolf Louis, Walter Niemann and Claus Neumann could not definitively agree on its boundaries, the modern reader is not likely to be much clearer on the subject, as even the *New Grove Dictionary* lacks an article on the school, including a mere two sentences on Thuille and his followers in the article on Munich, and brief mentions in some of the articles on individual composers of the school. *Musik in Gegenwart und Geschichte* allots five sentences to this topic within a discussion covering a much larger time period. Since information on this field is not easy to come by, a list of the 27 composers whom Louis – and, in response, the editors – consider to be included in the school would be a welcome addition.

While the Munich School embraces stylistic diversity, the common thread linking the composers is harmony, particularly the use of the augmented and diminished thirds and sixths of 'alteration style'. Indeed, 'their promotion to structural significance is a primary characteristic' of the genre (p. xiv). The included harmonic analyses of five songs illustrate that, while rhythm and texture may recall or even refer to earlier lieder of Schumann and Schubert, the prevalence of the subdominant augmented-sixth chord firmly roots these songs in the idiom of turn-of-the-century Munich as described in Thuille's *Harmonielehre*.

While the song settings are likely to be unfamiliar, major poets such as Richard Dehmel, Clemens Brentano, and Stefan George are represented, in addition to translations of Paul Verlaine prepared by Stefan Zweig and Herman Hesse. Furthermore, several individual texts are part of the standard repertory as set by other composers. Strauss aficionados will recognize Thuille's use of *Allerseelen* (Op. 4, No. 4) and *Die Nacht* (Op. 12, No. 2) by Hermann von Gilm and *Ich wollt' ein Sträußlein binden* (Op. 24, No. 3) by Clemens Brentano. Indeed, striking rhythmic, melodic and structural similarities between the two settings of *Allerseelen* raise the question of how familiar Strauss, composing in 1885, was with his friend Thuille's setting, written between 1877 and 1880 but not published until 1886. Strauss's early letters to Thuille indicate that the two young men often sent their compositions to each other. On 21 December 1877, for example, the 13-year-old Strauss included a list of his compositions in a letter to Thuille, three years his senior, inviting the older boy to 'just write which of these you would like to have and I will send them to you'. In his next letter, ten days later, he tells

Thuille how much he is looking forward to his friend's forthcoming works.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, as Thuille's letters have not been preserved, we do not know exactly which compositions may have exchanged hands through the years. In any case, the editors of the collection under review refer to Thuille's version as 'a viable alternate reading to Strauss's famous setting', noting that Thuille once loaned Strauss a copy of the volume of Gilm poetry from which the text is taken (p. xviii). Other texts with well-known alternate settings include *Die Verlassene* (Thuille, Op. 4, No. 2 and Brahms, Op. 105, No. 2), *Aus dem 'Jahr der Seele'* (Braunfels, Op. 1, No. 4 and Webern, Op. 4, No. 2) and several of the Verlaine adaptations set by Trunk, including *Mondschein (Clair du lune)*, familiar in their original French settings by Debussy and others. The introductory pages provide English translations for every song, mostly newly prepared by Errante and Julia Wason Cook for this volume.

Wason and Errante are both performers, and they include in their introduction a substantial section on the unique performance practice of the late romantic lied. As performance moved from the small, intimate parlour of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the public concert hall in the middle of the nineteenth century, the resulting increased demands on clarity of enunciation led, by the century's end, to an exaggerated 'declamatory-dramatic' style, replete with gestures and emotional outbursts. After these extremes, the pendulum began to swing back in the other direction: voices lightened and moderation came into fashion. Having sketched out this wild trajectory of late-romantic performance trends, the editors rightly ask, 'what should *our* praxis for this music today be?' (p. xxx). Rather than attempting to adopt such extreme techniques, they advocate being 'aware of the complete range of expression characteristic of this music' (p. xxx). Above all, performers must know that these songs absolutely require a 'degree of interpretive "filling out"', as contemporary musicians would have been accustomed to singing with a great deal more nuance and character than appears in the markings in the score (p. xxvii).

The songs of the Munich School composers merit further performance and study. To assist with both, brief critical notes at the end of the volume list the publication information for the original editions as well as editorial discrepancies. It is to be hoped that this anthology will inspire both the public performance of its selections as well as an interest in bringing other related, neglected lieder back into the recital hall. In addition to beautiful music, the songs offer the performer a large degree of creative agency: 'The songs of the Munich School date from an era in which the various roles of composer, pianist, and singer were much less narrowly circumscribed than they have become, and one in which each interpreter had a creative role to play that was not entirely dictated by the score. Thus, they challenge us as complete musicians, and that is reason in itself for performing them once again' (p. xxx). Let us take up this worthy challenge.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Strauss – Ludwig Thuille: *Ein Briefwechsel*, ed. Franz Trenner. (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1980): 28–9.