

CD REVIEW

Franz Schubert, *Nacht & Träume: Lieder with Orchestra*

Wiebke Lehmkuhl *mezzo*, Stanislas de Barbeyrac *ten*
Accentus and the Insula Orchestra, Laurence Equilbey *cond*
Erato 9029576943, 2017 (1 CD: 50 minutes)

Laurence Equilbey's recent release of orchestrated Schubert lieder features two impressive soloists – tenor Stanislas de Barbeyrac and mezzo soprano Wiebke Lehmkuhl – alongside Equilbey's two ensembles, the Insula Orchestra and Accentus chamber choir. The disk comprises a selection from the extensive canon of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Schubert orchestrations, including arrangements by Berlioz, Liszt, Brahms, Reger, Mottl, Webern, Strauss and Britten; these are complemented by five new, minimally interventionist arrangements by Franck Krawczyk, with whom Equilbey had previously collaborated for the popular *Transcriptions* series.¹ While much of the music arranged for the *Transcriptions* disks is drastically reimagined, this potted history of Schubert orchestration only includes arrangements in which the vocal line(s) remain intact, and the piano accompaniment is reconfigured in a relatively straightforward manner for orchestra. The outward conservatism of the Schubert selection might stem from a modern distrust of lieder arrangement – Richard Capell once called Schubert orchestration an 'impropriety', and Graham Johnson reminds his readers that Schubert 'never felt the need' to orchestrate his songs himself.² Addressing such claims, Equilbey's liner notes assure the listener that the project is faithful both to the 'intimacy' of the genre and to 'the contemporary Schubertian colour' (by using nineteenth-century instruments) (p. X). I will return to the justifications for the project – unnecessary, and at times fallacious – at the end of this review.

The recording opens with four highly popular songs in a sequence that visits Schubertian melancholy, melliflence and mythology: 'Ständchen' (D. 957/iv), 'An Sylvia' (D. 891), 'Die Forelle' (D. 550) and 'Ganymed' (D. 544). The Serenade from *Schwanengesang* may be one of the most arranged of all Schubert songs; the version here is more restrained than most – Mottl's unobtrusive (and decidedly dark) instrumental textures complement well the opening softness of de Barbeyrac's interpretation.³ 'An Sylvia' (orch. Krawczyk)⁴ and 'Die Forelle' (orch. Britten) proceed with exuberant lightness, both an excellent fit for Equilbey's

¹ The *Transcriptions* disks (Naive 4947, 2003; Naive 5048, 2007; Naive 5116, 2008) involve a cappella transcriptions of non-choral music, including a number of lieder, and new texted adaptations of popular instrumental music, such as Vivaldi's 'Winter' and Mahler's 'Adagietto'.

² Richard Capell, *Schubert's Songs* (London: Ernest Benn, 1928): 38; Graham Johnson, *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs, Vol. 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012): 481.

period ensemble: in the latter, clarinets take the rippling arpeggiated motif throughout, quirkily dependable if occasionally unsynchronized with the rest of the ensemble; in 'An Sylvia', a repeated, chirping echo of the left-hand piano motif is given to the flute on the half bar, endowing the song with a veneer of genial intrigue. The better known the song, the more likely the listener will focus on the intricacies of its arrangement. Strauss's rich 1897 orchestral treatment of 'Ganymed' is an early highlight of this disk's thoughtful exploration of message and medium, its string-dominated textures increasingly propelling the poetic, melodic and harmonic momentum of Schubert's celebrated Goethe setting. Reger's c. 1914 version of 'Im Abendrot' is used to pivot between the opening set and the more explicitly nocturnal songs to come. With Schubert's songs as a constant, the difference between the orchestrators' styles is stark, and Reger's comparatively heavy textures fall short of providing a truly luminous orchestral glow befitting this most striking of Schubertian sunsets.

The gently measured semiquavers that underpin the entirety of 'Nacht und Träume' (D. 827) might be difficult to imagine outside of the tactile control of a pianist's fingers; to this end, Krawczyk effectively reimagines the texture and voicing, prioritizing a 'cushioning' effect over direct replication of the piano's rhythm. The song's hallowed shift into the flattened submediant is often articulated by voice-piano duos through a slight *rallentando* or *diminuendo*, but here the work is done by the arranger: the texture is recast, the surface semiquavers are slowed into triplets, and a violin countermelody emboldens de Barbeyrac into unrestrained lyricism as he calls for night and dreams to return. Susan Youens memorably describes 'Nacht und Träume' as 'a compendium of Romanticism's favourite emblems',⁵ and this new version is insightfully placed here to precede 'Die junge Nonne' (D. 828), the song with which it was originally paired for publication and which foregrounds a very different selection of Romantic poetic imagery (or, as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson puts it, 'clichés').⁶ The troubled young nun sings of the storm that surrounds her and looks towards her impending salvation; the vocal line has a driving intensity, and the dynamic piano part, at once tumultuous and delicate – storm and church bell – seems to exceed its instrumental confines. It is little wonder that this was one of the first of Schubert's songs to be widely orchestrated: its extroverted gothic sensibility found a home on Parisian concert stages soon after Schubert's death, and Liszt was inspired to create both a piano transcription (1838) and the orchestration (1860) included here.⁷ 'Die junge Nonne' is followed by another dramatic lied: 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' (D. 583), in one of a handful of Schubert orchestrations made by Brahms

³ More extreme arrangements of 'Ständchen' include versions that appear in the *Dreimäderlhaus* reworkings *Blossom Time* (1921) and *Lilac Time* (1922), and, more recently, its appearance in D. J. Firehorse's *Shoebird* (1999).

⁴ While Krawczyk is credited online and in digital data for the orchestration of 'An Sylvia', the track list on the CD itself identifies the arranger only as 'Anon', leaving some uncertainty.

⁵ Susan Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83.

⁶ The two songs were published as Op. 43 by Pennauer in 1825. On different interpretations of 'Die junge Nonne' across its recording history, see Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Sound and Meaning in Recordings of Schubert's "Die junge Nonne"', *Musicae Scientiae* 11 (2007): 209–36.

⁷ On the song's French reception and orchestrations in the 1830s, see Xavier Hascher, 'Quand Schubert "entra dans la gloire": Adolphe Nourrit et les versions orchestrées de "La

in the 1860s for baritone Julius Stockhausen. Brahms's choice of Schubert's Schiller setting reflects the two composers' shared fascination with classical myth and its Romantic mediations (his other Schubert orchestrations include 'Memnon', D. 541; 'Greisen-Gesang' D. 778; and 'An schwager Kronos' D. 369.)⁸ Lehmkuhl and the orchestra powerfully articulate the spectacular scene-setting and the hurtling trajectories of this pair – a whole gamut of vocal, instrumental, and expressive dynamism is explored, and there is no question that both songs rise magnificently to their textural expansion.

After 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' comes the orchestral Entr'acte No. 3 from *Rosamunde* (D. 797), providing a deliciously Schubertian harmonic relaxation from the stark D minor chords of the song's finale into the orchestral movement's opening B-flat major, with its prominent third linking both harmonies. The disc returns to orchestrated song with another extract from *Rosamunde*, 'Der Vollmond strahlt auf Bergeshöh'n'. Equilbey's anxieties about historical fidelity suggest that 'Der Vollmond' might be included as a Schubertian lynchpin, or even a justification: outside of its staged context, it is essentially an orchestral song, for which a piano version also exists in Schubert's hand. Schubert's orchestration is poised, perfect for Lehmkuhl's sweet rendition, but, ironically, it does not match the heightened textural interest of some of his later orchestrators. This expansion of genre continues for the remainder of the disk, which reaches into Schubert's relatively overlooked body of part-songs and choruses, including the ensemble setting of Mayrhofer's 'Der Gondelfahrer' (D. 809), the *Fräulein vom See* 'Coronach' (D. 836), and the third version of Salis-Seewis's 'Das Grab', for piano-accompanied chorus (D. 377). Krawczyk's orchestration is especially effective in 'Das Grab', where a delicate brass chorale introduction is added, and in the rich filling-out of the sparse piano part of 'Coronach' that provides a comforting underpinning for the voices' lilting mourning. There is nothing to fault with 'Der Gondelfahrer' unless a particular interpretative insight is sought – and persuasive readings of the song's political subtext might encourage such pointed listening: versions by Liszt (piano transcription, 1838) and Hans Zender (orchestration, 1986) do much more with the song's shift to the flat submediant and its evocative strikes of midnight.⁹ The woeful 'Coronach' and the pessimistic solace of 'Das Grab' are thrown into stark relief by Berlioz's highly effective orchestration of 'Erlkönig' (D. 328) – another of Schubert's most celebrated Goethe settings, and one that has inspired hosts of arrangers over the years. Here the dynamic orchestral surface is controlled and exciting (although the reduced difficulty of the accompaniment removes a level of enthralling instrumental frenzy), and de Barbeyrac is a sage and enticing storyteller.¹⁰ The disk concludes with Webern's version of 'Du bist die Ruh' (D. 776), with arranger, soloist and ensemble all highly attuned to the fine fluctuations

Jeune Religieuse" et de "Roi des Aulnes"', in *Cahiers F. Schubert* 19 (1999): 30–70. Liszt's piano transcription is found in his *12 Lieder von Franz Schubert* (S. 558/vi).

⁸ On Brahms's Schubert orchestrations, and especially 'Greisen-Gesang', see Paul Berry, *Brahms Among Friends: Listening, Performance and the Rhetoric of Allusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 276 ff.

⁹ On Schubert, Mayrhofer and 'Mitternacht', see David Bretherton, 'The Shadow of Midnight in Schubert's "Gondelfahrer" Settings', *Music & Letters* 92/1 (2011): 1–42.

¹⁰ On the arrangement history of this song, see Christopher H. Gibbs, 'The Presence of 'Erlkönig': Reception and Reworkings of a Schubert Lied' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1992).

of instrumental colour – a suitable conclusion to this carefully constructed and finely executed recording.

An unusual promotional stunt accompanied the release of the disk. In a two-part online video entitled 'The Schubert Trial' ('Le procès Schubert'), veteran French news anchor Claire Chazal introduces coverage of Equilbey, who is detained for questioning on charges of 'counterfeit' and of 'infringing the moral rights of Franz Schubert'.¹¹ Setting aside the welcome glimpses into rehearsals, engaging interviews, and occasional quips about trout, the light-hearted investigation into the ethics of orchestrated lieder targets common suspicions and criticisms of arrangements: that a work's transformation contravenes the original composer's intentions, and in so doing disrupts the privileged notions of authorship and of the musical work upon which, for many, musical appreciation depends. The imaginative mockery succeeds to an extent, but Equilbey's defence against these charges depends upon a number of unhelpful tropes that propel less-than-critical thinking about arrangements. Equilbey protests that her project (unlike others, presumably) is acceptable because most of the orchestrations are by 'great' composers who use their creativity to illuminate different facets of the original; because the arrangers treat Schubert's music with the utmost respect; and because a degree of sonic authenticity is maintained by using nineteenth-century instruments.¹² But all these elaborate justifications are wholly unnecessary. The arrangements cohere narratively and musically on their own terms, illuminating multiple facets not only of Schubert's songs but also of their reception through this long tradition of arrangement. Marketing gripes aside, this excellently edited and produced disc is a welcome addition to the growing discography of orchestrated lieder.

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¹¹ The video is introduced on Insula Orchestra's website: 'La chef d'orchestre Laurence Equilbey pourrait être mise en examen pour contrefaçon, par atteinte au droit moral du compositeur Franz Schubert. Un reportage dans les méandres des Lieder orchestrés présenté par la journaliste Claire Chazal pour Classical Music News'. See 'Le procès Schubert', www.insulaorchestra.fr/en/c/le-proces-schubert (accessed May 2018).

¹² All quotes from 'Le procès Schubert', Parts 1–2, available on YouTube (English captions given, translations slightly modified).