

Pastorale for Violin and Piano, and the *Suite de Ballet* for Flute and Piano, most likely date from just before the First World War, but were not published until later, posthumously in the case of the flute suite; the Romance for Viola and Piano was also a posthumous publication, and its date of composition is even more obscure than that of the other two works, though the style suggests the 1920s or early 1930s. All the performances on these discs, especially in the unpublished works, are vivid, passionate, convinced and convincing: one cannot reasonably ask for more. Overall, then, a magnificent achievement on all counts, for which Hyperion and the Nash Ensemble are to be warmly thanked.

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## Wolf

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### *Lieder nach Heine und Lenau*

Stephan Genz *bar* Roger Vignoles *pf*  
Hyperion CDA67343 (67 minutes: DDD), £14.99  
Notes, texts and translations included.

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With the recent centenary of Wolf's death on 22 February 1903, the issue of this recording is particularly timely. Except for the setting of Heine's 'Wo wird einst' which dates from 1888, the period of Wolf's mature Mörike Lieder, none of these songs appears to have been recorded before and none was published in his lifetime. Instead some of them were gathered together by Ferdinand Foll in the year of the composer's death and subsequently published by Lauterbach and Kuhn of Leipzig as *Lieder aus der Jugendzeit*.

Foll was one of many musicians coming through the circles of the Viennese Wagner Society who sought to ensure a niche for Wolf alongside Bruckner and Wagner. Comparisons with Wagner helped to emphasize the psychological significance of Wolf's penetrating sketches. Taking up the banner of Nietzsche, Wolf even claimed that his songs could surpass Wagner in their search for 'truth', by condensing the power of *Tristan und Isolde* into one harmonic progression. Yet as Susan Youens has pointed out in her monograph *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music* (Princeton, 1992), Wolf served his musical apprenticeship 'under the sign of Schumann' not Wagner. As a 16-year-old student of the Vienna Conservatoire the composer openly acknowledged his debt, and in 1876 he began his Heine settings with two poems that had been famously set by Schumann, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh'. The first of these settings is a dutiful reworking of the master's song, shadowing its approach to line, texture and phrasing and, as confirmed by listening to this recorded collection, similar reminiscences of Schumann re-emerge throughout the Heine songs. When Wolf first measured up to Wagner in his Mörike volume, he seemed mature enough to rethink and recast every Wagnerian trait. Any recognition of a pre-existing musical style became part of a game to underline Wolf's distinctive reading of the poem. Yet in the Heine settings

Wolf's response to Schumann seems to loom larger than his response to the poet himself. Wolf's style blurs into Schumann's, their voices blend into Heine's, and we are not sure what we are listening to beyond a poignant repetition of the 'same old story' of unrequited love – to quote from Wolf's favourite song from *Dichterliebe*, 'Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen'.

In his CD notes, Roger Vignoles says we might appreciate these early songs more if they were in another composer's name. It is true that, knowing the explosive range of feeling and characteristic sharpness of the later Wolf, it is difficult not to be disappointed by the ease with which the composer appears to agree with Heine that he is here writing 'little songs' – in the words of the poem 'Aus grossen Schmerzen', which in 1878 Wolf placed as the centrepiece of his first Heine *Liederstrass*. In setting 'Aus grossen Schmerzen' Wolf smoothes over the hint of self-castigation or irony, which Heine injects into such words, with the Chopinesque filigree of his piano writing and the evenness of his vocal line. Yet the delicacy of Vignoles and Genz's performance turns this unexpected restraint into pure joy. They excel in tracing such carefully measured arabesques as also emerge in the second and sixth songs of the set, 'Ich stand in dunklen Träumen' and 'Mein Liebchen wir sassen beisammen'. These songs are effectively offset by the dramatic sweeps of the third song, 'Das ist ein Brausen und Heulen', where the performers dare to release the power that has just been expressively withheld. The performance of 'Mir träumte von einem Königskind', the fifth song, is one of the few occasions where Vignoles and Genz seem to allow their knowledge of the later Wolf to cloud their response. Despite its chromatic inflections Wolf keeps a swinging balladic tone throughout 'Mir träumte', a continuity which is slightly endangered by the intensity of gesture which the performers impose upon it. In some of the songs from Wolf's second Heine series of 1878, such as 'Es war ein alter König', there is again a tendency to slow down, to exaggerate the changes of tempo or moments of declamation, which mars the sense of the performers' absorption in the detail that is given, as though they were missing the Wolf that is yet to come.

Of course, such a CD album has to be seen as a loving tribute to all we know of Wolf. Yet the truth of the 'Erlebnislyrik', which Wolf pursued as uncompromisingly as Heine, demands a 'performance' of experience that defies the preparation of knowledge. In his 1879 setting of the Lenau poem 'Frage nicht', Wolf instructs the pianist to play 'convulsively, as though passionately boiling over'. One is reminded that these Lenau poems were partly chosen as an outlet for the composer's feelings over the end of his affair with Vally Franck. Yet these instructions are not borne out by the song's immediate harmonic and melodic language, and one appreciates the deeper pain brought out by Vignoles's more subtle approach. The way he controls the fluidity of line allows for the exchange of harmonic and rhythmic inflections between voice and piano that are the peculiar delight of this recording, and the Lenau performance in particular. Such expressive details turn what could have been dutiful homage to an unknown repertoire into immediate lyricism of the highest quality.

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