> Mr. Best knew music, he knew the organ, he knew literature. He cultivated all these with a refinement which, savouring of precision, conferred a classical stamp on all his achievements: but his classicism was warmed by an energy never excelled by the wildest impulses of extempore genius … The combination of force and fire and feeling with brilliant nicety and fastidious purity constituted the distinguishing glory of Mr. Best as an organist. On his gravestone in Childswell Cemetery, Liverpool is inscribed simply 'Here rests in hope the body of William Thomas Best'.[12]

Paul Hale
Southwell Minster

Mahler

Lieder und Gesänge (selection)
Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen
Fünf Rückert-Lieder
Kindertotenlieder

Stephan Genz *bar*, Roger Vignoles *pf*

Hyperion CDA67392 (73 minutes: DDD)
Notes and translations included.

Comparatively young (30 at the time of making this recording), the baritone Stephan Genz has already established himself as a major force in, among other things, the field of Lied performance. His debuts in London (1997) and New York (2000) were highly acclaimed, while his recording partnership with Roger Vignoles has included three volumes of Wolf Lieder, one of Brahms's German folk songs and a Gramophone-award-winning set of Beethoven Lieder from 1999, all but the Brahms with Hyperion. In terms of his Mahler performances, Genz seems to me to show very clearly the influence of two of his most illustrious teachers, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, whose own 1968 recording of the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* songs with Georg Szell and the LSO has of course attained legendary status. Even in the more intimate setting of the piano version or reduction, and within the smaller structural scope of the earlier *Wunderhorn* works and others from the so-called *Lieder und Gesänge* collection sung here, Genz exudes Fischer-Dieskau-like authority and produces a highly focused and strongly projected tone quality and range of expression typical of his forbear. These characteristics are particularly evident in, for example, the folk-like 'Hans und Grete' (track 2) where the assiduous attention on the part of both performers to Mahler's surprisingly complex and constantly changing tempo, dynamic and mood indications intensifies the song's inner imagined dialogue of bravado and nostalgia, whilst also bringing home the fact that even from his early years the composer was always far from being some simple 'finespun "singer of Nature"'

12 Levien, *Impressions*, 53.

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as he complained in a letter of 1896.[1] Similarly 'Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz' and 'Nicht Wiedersehen!' (tracks 5 and 6) show a wonderful variety of vocal colouring, the ambiguous emotional and tonal flavour of the latter's final verse being brilliantly characterized without the least hint of sentimentality. Whilst one might have wished for a greater sense of humorous abandon in 'Ablösung im Sommer' (track 4) – some more of that elusive Mahlerian *Keckheit* derived not just from tempo but phrasing, articulation and colour, and captured more closely in, for example, Bruno Walter's brusque 1947 recording of the song with Desi Halban[2] – there is no doubt that Genz has genuine empathy with the more wide-ranging bitter-sweet sentiments of many of these early Mahler settings.

For this reason, he also appears to be thoroughly at home in the structurally more extended songs of the *fahrenden Gesellen* cycle. It is here also that Vignoles is able to put into operation his idea, expressed in the booklet notes, of complementing the accompanists' traditional practice of deriving colour by 'thinking orchestrally' with an acceptance that a composer's orchestral thinking may often be influenced by the keyboard medium: in other words acknowledging that there is a symbiotic relationship at work (and this is especially the case with Mahler) whereby a pianist's attempt to interpret 'orchestrally' can in turn be re-assimilated into an indigenous keyboard praxis; it is this constant awareness that seems to inform Vignoles's interpretation, tempering potentially inappropriate flamboyance without sacrificing timbral sensitivity or de-naturing the instrument's capabilities. These are, on the whole, spirited performances, a little pacier than those of Genz's most serious rival in the Mahler repertoire, Thomas Hampson.[3] This is most noticeable in the outer songs of the cycle, 'Die zwei blauen Augen' (track 11) being over a minute longer in Hampson's performance. Where the latter tends to milk phrases for a fuller sense of emotional weight, Genz is more concise and disciplined, and thereby perhaps better attuned to the often acerbic qualities of Mahler's verses, taut phrase structures and idiosyncratic tonal language, the last of these brought into even clearer focus by the piano (listen to the false relation at 'dunkle Heide' in this song). Neither performance of 'Ging heut' morgen übers Feld' (track 9 in the recording under review) is, however, anything like Mahler's own quite eccentric 1905 piano roll.[4] Notwithstanding the obvious technological problems associated with such a recording medium, the apparent unrestrained variability of Mahler's propulsive tempi and his occasional left-to-right-hand asynchronicity seem bizarre in the context of current performance traditions, and certainly provide a stark contrast with Genz and Vignoles, who take the composer's *gemächlich* marking to heart. Indeed there is a conspicuous sense of ease about their interpretation, carried right through to the pianissimo top G♯ of the last vocal phrase, in which no trace of strain is audible. 'Ich hab' ein glühend Messer' (track 10) offers the greatest challenge to Vignoles's theories, and there are times when the piano seems to struggle to project enough seething power to complement the high-register vocal enunciations and violent textual associations. This is presented in a more Schumannesque vein of muted anguish, a reading that the final song continues very effectively, its gentle concluding *Wiegenlied* section made all the more pathetic through Genz's well-judged tenuti at the highpoints of each phrase.

1 Knud Martner, ed., *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (London, 1979), 197.
2 Sony SMK 64 450 (1994).
3 Recorded in 1994 with the pianist David Lutz (Teldec 9031-740002-2).
4 The Kaplan Foundation GLRS 101 (1993).

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The shift from the *Wunderhorn* and *Gesellen* world to that of Rückert is not an easy one to negotiate, and in general I feel that Genz's voice and approach is less well suited to the later repertoire. These songs are of a very different order, and this is not simply a question of textual content or vocal technique. The way that Mahler blends elements of through-composition with strophic construction in these works is highly sophisticated, and this manifests itself in moment-to-moment evocations of meaning and emotional hues through subtle variations and irregular organic development of melodic phrases, and through the expansion of a harmonic palette to embrace more fluid kinds of chromaticism, pentatonicism and modal manipulations. All of this presents a greater interpretative challenge to performers in the balancing of local expressiveness with overall structure. More than elsewhere I also missed orchestral sonorities, and there is a sense in which, however accomplished the pianist, the inevitable compromise in the timbral articulation of independent contrapuntal lines so essential to Mahler's new leaner style of instrumentation – as, for example, in the first of the *Kindertotenlieder* (track 17), and in pure sustaining power in songs such as 'Um Mitternacht' (track 15) and 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' (track 16) – is too great. That said, the Bach-like dirge of 'Wenn dein Mütterlein' (track 19), with Vignoles's evocative quasi-pizzicato bass notes, comes across very well, and the gentle *moto perpetuo* character of 'Ich atmet' einen linden Duft' (track 12) and 'Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder' (track 14) is obviously well suited to the medium. The last of the *Kindertotenlieder* and the final track on the recording, 'In diesem Wetter', encapsulates my rather polarized impressions of the Rückert performances. More than most of the songs, this is a game of two extremely disparate halves. Here the restless surge of the opening sections seemed somewhat pallid in comparison with what can be generated from divisi cellos and basses (even muted ones) doubled by bassoons, harp and occasionally double bassoon in the orchestral version. However, the emergence of the cradle-song final verse is a moment of magic: here the music-box sonorities of the high subdued piano create a haunting dreamscape of loss and memory that even the celeste in the orchestra struggles to match. Genz's pervasive, if somewhat constraining, lyricism throughout these songs here provides the perfect touch, and the Schubertian diatonic warmth of the piano epilogue substantiates Vignoles's claim: piano becomes celeste and strings which once again become piano.

As mentioned above, Vignoles contributed accompanying notes of more than one kind to this project. Those of the verbal type are well presented, and he is particularly adept at capturing in words the subtle moods reflected in the Rückert settings, although I would challenge his attempt to link 'Um Mitternacht' so directly with Mahler's near-fatal haemorrhoidal haemorrage of 1901. Also the suggestion that the little chromatic postlude to 'Liebst du um Schönheit' (track 13) could be viewed as a 'premonition of Alma's subsequent infidelity' is surely going too far, particularly as Vignoles later acknowledges that the similar kind of myth associated with the *Kindertotenlieder* and Mahler's daughter is part of a 'sentimental tradition'. Slightly more concerning is his reference to the '*Lieder und Gesänge* of 1892' without clarifying that these three volumes of songs contain material composed from as far back as 1880; similarly, it is far from clear that the 'first version of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* … [was] written for piano accompaniment': the precise chronology of the piano and orchestral versions is still open to debate. Finally, it is misleading to state that 'the twelve *Knaben Wunderhorn* songs … were composed directly for orchestra'; they exist in keyboard versions that either pre-dated or were worked on concurrently with the orchestral

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versions (see the editorial reports in the critical editions of the keyboard and orchestral versions of the *Wunderhorn* songs).[5] Ironically, these findings would add yet further support to Vignoles's inspired approach to the art of accompanying.

Jeremy Barham
University of Surrey

Richard Strauss

Symphony No. 2 in F minor op. 12
Romanze in F major
Six Songs op. 68

Eileen Hulse *sop*, Raphael Wallfisch *vc*, Neeme Järvi *cond*, Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Chandos Classics CHAN 10236 (76 minutes: DDD: 24-bit/96 kHz digitally remastered)
Notes and translations included.

Few would argue that there is a shortage of recordings of Richard Strauss's music. Indeed, his tone poems, most of his operas and many of the *Lieder* are core works for any representative collection; and the multiplicity of performances – both recent and historical – available for most of his mature compositions makes picking definitive recordings of works such as *Don Juan*, op. 20 (TrV 156), or *Till Eulenspiegel*, op. 28 (TrV 171), both a challenge and a pleasure for anyone who cares about Strauss's music.[1] In recent years even Strauss's less well-known works have begun to appear in multiple recordings, and that welcome development focuses our attention on compositions that give us a better – that is, a more accurate picture – of Strauss's place in late nineteenth-century musical culture.

Strauss left a more accessible record of his early works than did many other nineteenth-century composers. Eighteen of his scores were published before the premiere of *Don Juan* in 1889 placed his name at the forefront of the German avant garde, and many of those early works have been recorded at least once or twice on various boutique or speciality labels. The first of those scores, the *Festmarsch* (TrV 43) of 1876, appeared in 1881 as Strauss's op. 1 in the catalogue of Breitkopf & Härtel only because the composer's uncle covered the expense of engraving that work. Later that same year, the Munich firm of Aibl Verlag issued Strauss's op. 2, a string quartet, thereby inaugurating a business relationship that lasted for almost two decades. Aibl published 29 other works by Strauss – including all of

5 Gustav Mahler, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vols 13/2b, ed. Renate Hilmar-Voit and Thomas Hampson (Vienna, 1993) and 14/2, ed. Renate Hilmar-Voit (Vienna, 1998).

* * *

1 'TrV' numbers refer to the chronological order of Strauss's works in Franz Trenner, *Richard Strauss Werkverzeichnis*, Veröffentlichungen der Richard Strauss-Gesellschaft München 12 (Munich, 1993).

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