

Sometimes this comes to the fore in an almost explicit manner, though without pedantry. Most interesting are the transitions from the scherzo movements to the finales in both trios. The hesitating start of the Presto of op. 1/1 almost grows out of the *ritardando* of the coda of the foregoing Scherzo. To elucidate this quite Haydnesque way of ‘cranking up’ the Presto-theme, the Florestan Trio almost starts the final movement as an *attacca*. By doing so, they underscore, in a way, an ongoing interpretation of the (short) Scherzo as being at least as much an ‘introduction’ to the Presto as a movement in itself. (The motivic relationships between both movements (for example iv, bars 173ff. and iii, bar 2) in any case provides supplementary evidence to this analytical hypothesis.) In the second trio, the relatedness between the closing movements is even more explicit: the opening chords of the Presto are identical to those of the conclusion of the Scherzo. It is impossible of course to overlook this relationship, but the Florestan Trio adjusts the tempo of both movements in such a way that the Presto starts as a logical continuation of the Scherzo. These kinds of structural and motivic delicacies are characteristic and representative of the refinement of the Florestan Trio’s general approach. But also, on the surface of the interpretation, the listener’s attention is constantly sharpened by the lucidity of this performance. The clarity of the chromatic fill-ins of the descending scales in the op. 1/1 Presto, for instance, or the crystalline frenzy of the repeated-note motif in the finale of the second trio; the simple straightforwardness of the *cantabile* melodies, and so on: these are just a few examples of ‘choices’ that contribute to a performance equal to the music itself.

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Eichendorff Lieder

Lieder to texts by Joseph, Freiherr von Eichendorff (1788–1857) by Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Franz, Robert Schumann, Aribert Reimann, Hugo Wolf, Alexander von Zemlinsky, Erich Korngold, Hans Pfitzner and Othmar Schoeck.

Wolfgang Holmair *bar*, Imogen Cooper *pf*
Philips 464 991-2 (78 minutes: DDD)
Notes and translations included. £12.99

The art of lieder-singing might be said to require a sensibility that never fails to delight in a familiar stock of poetic images, but finds through each performance a new detail with which to move, surprise or even disturb us. By presenting a programme of songs all taken from Eichendorff’s poetry, Holmair and Cooper allow us to luxuriate in images of moonlit forests, deserted castles and haunting serenades. Such scenes are particularly suited to Holmair’s velvet tones at their lightest, and to Cooper’s astonishing range of pianistic nuances. Hearing some of the delicacies on offer here, such as the performance of Wolf’s ‘Verschwiegene Liebe’ or of Schumann’s ‘Mondnacht’, it is tempting to treat this CD like a rare box of chocolates, and to relish each song for its immediate evocation of mood. Eichendorff was probably the poet most responsible for establishing the ideals of

the 'Stimmungslied'. With their simple rhythms and stanzaic structures, his poems form into a bubble of memory that can hover between past and present, perfect, timeless and inviolate. Holzmair and Cooper capture this floating quality as one of their most daring technical feats, even if at times in 'Verschwiegene Liebe' and 'Mondnacht' the sense of hush is so extreme that the musical line almost vanishes, and once the musical line goes then, in poetic terms, our feelings of loss and nostalgia begin to override our sense of being part of Eichendorff's scene.

The subtlety of Eichendorff's art lies in his use of a veil of nostalgia to reveal both an object and subject to his listeners, both to draw us in to see what he sees and to reflect upon our own response. The exact balance of subject and object is for his receivers to determine – whether as composers, performers or listeners – and the clues to the range of possibility often lie in apparently incidental details. Holzmair and Cooper prepare us to pay attention to detail by placing the simplest settings by Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Franz at the head of their CD programme. Of the six songs they take from these composers, three evoke a concrete figure to sing the song – a page ('Pagenlied'), a hunter ('Jagdlied') or wanderer ('Wanderlied'). The composers create a sense of quotation by using familiar balladic rhythms, horn calls and carefully contained phrase-shapes; they preserve the 'box' of the past for their familiar figures. Yet even in Mendelssohn's 'Pagenlied', perhaps the simplest song of the whole CD programme, major/minor inflexions confirm that the page is not actually singing the serenade that he describes, for that would need the blessing of an Italian blue sky. Mendelssohn interweaves two songs in our minds, what the page sings to us and what he wishes he could sing, an oscillation that is caught perfectly by the delicate wistfulness of Cooper's playing of the prelude and the hardly perceptible lingering that Holzmair imparts to his skipping phrases. Our sympathy is engaged but at no point do the performers allow the page to step out of character – the song remains his, and all the more precious for it.

Wolf is perhaps most famous for prizing this quality of objectivity in song; he called himself an objective lyricist and required this quality from his performers also. In this respect he often said he was reacting against Schumann's over-sentimentalizing effect upon the lied, or rather against the effect of Schumann's indiscriminating imitators – among whom he included himself as a young composer. Schumann's injection of an explicitly subjective impulse into portrayals of familiar Romantic scenes influenced the view of Eichendorff irrevocably. There is no equivalent of 'Pagenlied' in the twelve songs of Schumann's op. 39 *Liederkreis*. The nearest might be the second in the set, 'Intermezzo', where the poet speaks of singing 'a lovely old song' to take him from the image of the beloved in his heart towards her real presence. One might hear echoes of 'the old song' in the melodic cantilena that the piano weaves around the vocal line, but across the setting as a whole these phrases become more and more absorbed into the central harmonic swell. The song unfolds as one expression of longing, which draws details inwards rather than projecting them outwards. Thus Holzmair's attempts to linger and find space within the vocal phrases, as though listening to the piano's echoes as something outside himself, here seem slightly misguided. A more straightforward and sustained utterance might have been more effective on this occasion. Holzmair rarely resists the temptation to offer a layer of commentary to us on what he is singing, such is the flexibility and nuanced beauty of his voice. In his performance of the starkly descriptive 'Auf einer Burg' the chorale-like simplicity of Schumann's vocal and piano lines is undermined by the singer's tendency to inject too much meaning into each note, so pre-empting the effect of

the surprising reference to the bride's tears in the poem's final line. From the point of view of aesthetic sympathy, both performers seem more at home with the ironic, humorous or detached perspectives that Wolf finds within Eichendorff, even though the tender lightness of Holzmaier's voice would seem to make him an ideal Schumann performer. His lightness is seen at its most engaging in responding to the rippling breezes of Schumann's 'Frühlingsnacht', where both performers pace the moments of pause amidst the swelling movements of spring to perfection.

When it comes to Holzmaier and Cooper's performances of the nine Wolf Eichendorff settings selected for this CD it is tempting simply to call each one a gem. Even the potentially turgid 'Heimweh' gains momentum from the change in colours the performers give to each harmonic twist and turn on their journey to the mountain-top, from where the precious homeland can be seen. This song caused nationalistic demonstrations when it was performed within Wagnerian circles in Vienna. Although Wolf believed the demonstrators had completely misunderstood his art, it has to be admitted that a performance of the song gains much from the pianist playing with boundaries of taste and proportion in the exhilarating peroration, as Cooper is not frightened to reveal. The humorous songs 'Lieber alles' and 'Der verzweifelte Liebhaber' also require larger-than-life dramatizations from their performers, at times verging on slapstick. The explosive energy and uninhibited dynamic contrasts of Holzmaier and Cooper's performances of these songs provide a welcome release from the veiled sonorities that are in danger of becoming the norm for the CD as a whole. Hushed sonorities re-emerge for the performance of Wolf's 'Das Ständchen', however, as befits the poem's reference to the invasion of memories upon a serenade that the poet hears in the present. Through their transparent control of timbre Holzmaier and Cooper beautifully balance the 'song' in the voice with the 'song' in the piano; each song seems to move freely in and out of focus within its own world, while also responding precisely to what the other is singing.

The performance of 'Das Ständchen' must be considered one of the high-points of the Eichendorff CD, though I doubt its impact would be so great if it were not given the context of so many variations upon a poetic theme. The serenade image is indeed a thread that the performers use to link their CD programme together; it extends to the fascinating collection of later Eichendorff settings by Pfitzner, Korngold, Schoeck and Zemlinsky, and even to the Webernesque world of Aribert Reimann. The five Eichendorff poems that Reimann selects for his *Nachtstück* cycle evoke a string of isolated sounds and images from nature – birds calling, trees rustling. The composer picks these out against an eerie background of silence, except for the climactic central song where the reference to a minstrel's serenade produces a flurry of more connected rhythms, as though an accelerated reminder of lost songs. Holzmaier and Cooper respond to such nightmarish contrasts with timbres that take them well beyond their usual range, though their intermixing of full-blown drama seems by no means out of place in a tribute to Eichendorff's imagination. Constant poetic and musical references to the veiling effects of twilight would become dangerously meaningless if there were no moments that revealed the horrors beneath the veil.

Cooper and Holzmaier finish their recital with the simplest possible echoes of Romantic balladry, from Zemlinsky, Erich Korngold and Schoeck, so taking us back full-circle to the bitter-sweet serenades of Mendelssohn and Franz. Even Pfitzner's more luscious pianism resolves itself periodically into eloquently simple rhyming phrases. It is on this bitter-sweet quality, the sound of nostalgia, that the performers build their appeal to the listener, like two literal serenaders. The charm

of such an appeal to the past should certainly not be underestimated. Yet the value of this CD lies most perhaps in those moments within the Reimann and Wolf performances when the artists transcend their own categories and succeed in releasing Eichendorff's rampant imagination into the present.

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Fauré

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Hyperion CDA67333 (Vol. 1: 69 minutes: DDD), CDA67334 (Vol. 2: 68 minutes: DDD), CDA67335 (Vol. 3: 73 minutes: DDD) and CDA67336 (Vol. 4: 67 minutes: DDD)

Notes and translations included. £13.99 each

Hyperion's release of a series dedicated to Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) honours the legacy of the composer whose sixty-year career produced over one hundred *mélodies* now at the core of French vocal literature. Didactic as well as artistic, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* joins other sets in the Hyperion French Song Edition, such as those devoted to Emmanuel Chabrier and Ernst Chausson, which offer aural portraits as enlightening as they are compelling. Common to these recordings, as well as Hyperion's forty-disc *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*, is Graham Johnson, whose sterling pianism distinguishes every track.

For casual listeners and the newly initiated, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* amply demonstrates there is more to the composer's art than the notorious 'Après un rêve' (1877; Vol. 2) and the justly famous 'Clair de lune' (1887; Vol. 2), 'En sourdine' (1891; Vol. 1), and 'Soir' (1894; Vol. 4).¹ Indeed, Hyperion's four-disc set also offers a multifaceted view of Gabriel Fauré himself. Along with the sixty songs from the first two phases of his career, as well as the cycles of his later years, a number of rarities provide personal glimpses.

¹ Dates are from the catalogue in Jean-Michel Nectoux's indispensable *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 525–58, as opus numbers and publication years may mislead; volume numbers refer to the recordings under review.