

The Lied of Five German Composers

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the Music Department of

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

by

Whitney Laine Westbrook

June 2010

© 2010 Whitney Laine Westbrook

The Lied of Five German Composers:

List of Repertoire

1. "Fussreise" (2:54).....Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)
2. "Sapphische Ode" (2:30).....Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
3. "Urlicht" (5:13).....Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)
4. "Erhebung"(1:13).....Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)
5. "Morgen" (3:50).....Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Fussreise

Hugo Filipp Jakob Wolf, born on March 13, 1860, in modern day Yugoslavia, experienced an early musical upbringing under the guidance of his father and later on studied with his local school teacher, Sebastian Weixler. Wolf displayed much musical promise, primarily within the realms of violin and piano. Although music exerted an influence over Wolf, school did not. Throughout his life, Wolf exercised a rebellion against many scholastic institutions, including the Conservatory of Vienna; this was his third school from which he withdrew.

Having escaped school, Hugo Wolf attempted to make a living in many trades, including teaching piano and accompanying various other artists. Although he became a “Jack of All Trades,” a steady income was not reaching Wolf, and he continued on living in poverty. Wolf did excel as a music critic, a profession that did supply a small income and yet Wolf earned resentment from his musical colleagues. The harsh criticisms that flew from the quick-witted critic alienated certain musicians who in return refused Wolf any help.

Most of Wolf’s music has been forgotten, except his songs: 245 songs were published, 103 were left unpublished, and some songs were even destroyed. Richard Wagner’s influence reigned over Wolf’s musical style ever since his first works, composed at the age of 15 when young Wolf’s artistry revealed Wagner’s omnipresent influence. Wagner’s kindness made Wolf his lifelong devotee, which shows in his application of Wagner’s dramatic methods in the Lied in order to intensify a poem with motivically-based music. Wolf’s meticulous choices and settings of words was revealed a great versatility and music sophistication in interpreting the broadest variety of poetry and mood in a memorable manner; this is what led him to become one of the most successful of the Lied composers. Wolf was also known as an astonishing master of humor.

On March 21, 1888, while alone in a borrowed summer home in Perchtoldsdorf, Austria, Hugo Wolf composed *Fussreise (A-Walking)*. Shortly after finishing this D-major composition, Wolf wrote to his friend Edmund Land stating that, although *Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens* was previously the best thing he had ever written, *Fussreise* was “a million times better...When you have heard this song, you can have only one wish—to die.” The beautiful rhythmic variations mimicking Eduard Mörike’s poetry, tossed into a winding melody, conveys a range of human emotion brought about during an exhilarating walk one might take through the outdoors. Wolf, in fact, plays upon our expectations of the Biblical creation story of Adam and Eve. A brisk walk is imagined to be as perfect as one that Old Adam may have had in the Garden of Eden long ago.

The Bible begins with God’s creation of Adam and Eve, who lived in the euphoric Garden of Eden until they offended God by partaking of the forbidden fruit. Mörike’s poetry supplied Romantic listeners with a song supporting the newfound love of nature that counterbalanced the new industrialized cities that were taking over. While protesting, the poem also served as a metaphor of a walk symbolizing an emotional journey through life. The rhythm of *Fussreise* is essential in providing multiple symbolic representations. The primary crisp and elated rhythm within the song represents the exhilaration of a morning walk. Mörike’s wish-fulfillment fantasy, confronted by reality, cries out with the desire to dream again; this is voiced clearly, not only in the poetry, but in the final piano interlude as well. Towards the end of *Fussreise*, the mandatory interlude rejoins the original tonic just as a winding road leads back to home; the melody is returning home alongside the narrator as the walk concludes and life resumes.

“Sapphische Ode”

Johannes Brahms (Hamburg, 1833-Vienna, 1897) created many splendid masterworks, one of them being his beloved “Sapphische Ode (Sapphic Ode),” the fourth song from his Lieder cycle *Five Songs for Low Voice with Piano Accompaniment*. In the summer of 1884, Brahms collaborated with

poetic genius Hans Schmidt (1854-unknown) in order to birth this story surrounding a love like a rose that was so sweet and yet eventually died away, bringing tears of melancholy; it was in this season that Brahms would compose a love song to surpass any love song ever to have existed.

Johannes Brahms delved into music as a young teen playing piano in waterfront bars and brothels. Although noteworthy musical debuts were absent from Brahms' life at the time, the quiet and reserved young man worked hard to make up for the life of poverty into which he was born. At the age of 20, Brahms left the brothels for a life touring with world-famous Hungarian violinist, Ede Reményi. While on tour, Brahms was introduced to world-renown violinist Joseph Joachim, who later became his life-long friend; however, Joachim became more than just a friend to Brahms. Joachim recognized musical talent within the young pianist and, thus, sent Brahms to the house of Robert and Clara Schumann to study piano performance and composition. Brahms was received with excitement as the Schumanns also saw great talent within the young musician; this reception into the Schumann household was seen as the beginning of a tight bond between the Schumann family and Brahms.

Between 1851-1896, Brahms went on to publish 31 volumes and 194 songs for the solo voice and piano, as well as duets, 2 songs with viola, and 121 arrangements of German folksongs. "Sapphische Ode" was one song that out amidst the plethora of Brahms' creations. With singer Julius Stockhausen's "dark-toned voice" in mind to pair with the Lied's subject matter, Brahms originally wrote the 3/2 metered piece in the key of D Major; however, simultaneously a version of the piece was published in F Major, allowing a higher voice to partake in the Sapphic ode. The piece was orchestrated to be sung with orchestra, but was also composed to accommodate a single voice with pianoforte accompaniment.

Brahms chose Hans Schmidt's poem titled "Gereimte sapphische Ode (Rhymed Sapphic Ode)" for its beautiful story which described a walk through a rose garden at night. A once-sweet memory of a love experienced brings tears of sorrow to the singer when recalling her lost love's kiss. Schmidt titled his poem, after the female Greek lyric poet, Sappho, (c. 600 B.C.), who often used the same poetic form as Schmidt's poem. The structure of the poem is brought to life through Brahms' placing of harmonies and melodic line which coincide with the lyrics. Tenderness is perceptible within the *langsam* song due to the absence of *forte* dynamic markings. During the majority of the love story, the singer's voice does not exceed the boundaries between *piano* and *mezzo piano*. Although the story does surround the devastated songstress, the piano plays by itself as its own character. The piano can be seen as having two roles as it glides along in between the two stanzas: 1) to provide comfort to the singer's past lamentations and 2) to encourage the singer with happier thoughts that provoke another stanza filled with happier thoughts. As each stanza concludes, the harmony concludes on the tonic of F to provide closure to the last memory lived over for the last time.

"Urlicht"

Gustav Mahler was born July 7th, 1860, in Bohemia. Mahler studied music early and began composing before his 10th birthday. After graduating from the Vienna Conservatory, Mahler taught music while composing during his spare time. Mahler was recognized initially as an operatic conductor, yet, his fame did not stop at the baton. Mahler went on to write nine symphonies with Symphony No. 2 in C minor, the "Resurrection," being the one closest to his heart. Mahler was merely 27 when he began to compose this ambitious work. After completing Movement I in 1888, Mahler then went on hiatus, leaving it aside until inspiration later seized him again during the summer of 1893 when he continued where he left off composing the middle movements in Salzburg, Austria. On December 18, 1894, Mahler completed the autograph of the *Resurrection* symphony, which remained in his possession until his death in 1911. Using his own funds and borrowing from others to finance his concert, the symphony premiered in its entirety on December 13, 1895, in Berlin, performed by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra with the prominent vocal solo sung by Czech soprano Josephine von Artner. The day of the premiere, Mahler was struck with a migraine; after conducting the piece's first three movements, the baton was passed to his close comrade Richard Strauss to conduct the last two. Mahler's masterpiece grew three times its original

intended size, ultimately calling for a 115-piece orchestra. Later, the well known Hermann Behr adapted the piece for piano and voice in December of 1895.

The *Resurrection* symphony's story stemmed from the tale of the hero Todtenfeier (that was depicted in D Major Symphony No. 1) who goes on a quest to discover the meaning of life. Prior to the creation of the "Resurrection, as part of his work on the *Wandershron* poems, Mahler wrote "Urlicht (Primeval Light)," a short piece for arranged for piano and alto voice, without any intention of inserting it within the symphony. Later, "Urlicht" became an ethereal 4th movement that would preface the climactic 5th movement, causing it to become critical to the symphony as the transition between an orchestral movement and the huge choral finale. Mahler later stated:

In conceiving the work I was never concerned with detailed description of an event, but at most with that of a feeling. The conceptual basis of the work is clearly expressed in the words of the final chorus, and sudden alto solo cast light on the first movements. The fact that in various individual passages I often retrospectively see a real event as [if] it were taking its course dramatically before my eyes can easily be gathered from the nature of the music.

"Urlicht" represented one event, broken into 3 sections, bathed in music that tells a story. The three sections of the piece are delineated through the use of key changes. The first section serves as a peaceful preface before an emotional war, ranging from *pianissimo* to *piano*. The next key change indicates the second section, containing most of the song. A slight hint of anxiety and confusion is detected in the music in correspondence to the text, "[I] came to a road...then came an angel; he tried to refuse me...." The minor key becomes a disorienting wave that sweeps over the panic-stricken narrator after being told she shall suffer separation from God. The most emotional section is yet to be revealed in the third section of the song. Although turned away, the narrator does not accept an eternity of separation from her Savior. Another key change mimics the narrator's tone expressing her strong determination not to be torn from God. Strength courses through the melody like blood through the narrator's veins as she imagines the radiant and beautiful eternal light that will guide her through life and eventually to her Beloved Lord's throne in the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Erhebung"

Arnold Schoenberg believed that "music is a simultaneous and a successiveness of tones and tone-combinations, which are so organized that its impression on the ear is agreeable, and its impression on the intelligence is comprehensible, and that these impressions have the power to influence occult parts of our soul." In tune with his views, Schoenberg created the Lieder *Four Songs for Voice and Piano*, Opus 2 in November 1899. In this set Schoenberg included the song, "Erhebung (Exaltation)" no. 2, which surpassed the others in its beauty. The short little number was steeped in pure romance as Schoenberg paired it with the poetry of Richard Dehmel. Together, Dehmel and Schoenberg gave life to a song that held true to its title in how it would affect anyone who listened—pure "Exaltation."

Austro-Hungarian composer Arnold Franz Walter Schoenberg (Vienna, 1874-Los Angeles, 1951) grew up in poverty. Unlike many other composers, Schoenberg did not possess musically-inclined parents but received most of his cultural and musical influence from his uncle Fritz Nirchod. During childhood, Schoenberg taught himself many musical skills such as violin at the age of eight and began composing chamber music and songs. Schoenberg attended school to pursue his music studies but had to eventually withdraw after his father's death in order to work as a clerk and support his family. Schoenberg married in 1901 shortly before moving to Berlin, although, his stay there did not last long, for he took a position at the University of Vienna mentoring composition pupils such as Alban Berg.

Schoenberg's teaching career took him to the Boston Conservatory in October of 1933, eight years prior to receiving his American citizenship.

Even though he taught, Schoenberg still dedicated much time to write compositions that astounded audiences. Several artists' works influenced Schoenberg's compositions, especially the poetry of Richard Dehmel. Using Dehmel's texts, Schoenberg produced songs that were sharply focused on specific experiences, especially those dealing with love. Schoenberg held Dehmel in high regard, once stating, "For your poems have had a decisive influence on my development as a composer. They were what first made me try to find a new tone in the lyrical mood. Or rather, I found it even without looking, simply by reflecting in music what your poems stirred up in me." Schoenberg finally met Dehmel in Hamburg and the two collaborated on "Erhebung (Exaltation)," to "elevate" a song that embodied all that Dehmel's poetry represented in the realm of love.

The story within "Erhebung" revolves around the singer's excitement of being with her love and sharing a life with him. The song starts in the middle of a thought, as if the singer were just bursting to take her love's hand and show him nature's beauty, as in Richard Strauss' "Morgen," (later on in the CD). The most essential part of the song lies in the form of word-painting; this makes the song flow more easily and paints the beautiful picture of the narrator's colorful love. The most influential word-painting lies towards the song's end. Constant triplets drive the underlying harmony as the melody gradually builds up to the climax at *sonne kahn* (the "sun's great glow"). The melody reaches for a high A as the narrator's excitement mimics that of the Sun's luminous rays piercing the sky. The song concludes with an ascending scale as if the narrator and her love shall continue to rise up to the sun in a state of ecstasy.

"Morgen"

Richard Strauss (Munich, 1864-Garmisch, 1949) was born into wealth through his mother and to music through his father. Strauss modeled his musical ideas on those found in Wagner's music, but his father attempted to squash this influence. Strauss performed publicly as a pianist, but was known primarily for his conducting. Between the ages of 6 and 83 years old, Strauss composed just over 200 Lieder; out of this sum, Strauss dedicated one of his most beautiful songs to the love of his life—Pauline de Ahna. "Morgen (Tomorrow)," no. 4 of *Four Song for Soprano with Orchestra*, Opus twenty-seven became Strauss' love letter to the one woman who would capture his heart.

Richard Strauss met Pauline de Ahna in 1887 when she came to him as a student to be coached on her operatic roles. Strauss sought to not only advance her vocal and acting techniques, but her career as well. Eventually the two fell in love and the two were wed in Weimar on September 10th, 1894. For his new bride, Strauss composed "Morgen" for a wedding gift; from this point on, Strauss and Pauline were inseparable in and outside of music. Pauline de Ahna devoted herself to her husband's songs and performed many recitals that exclusively presented his Lieder from the year of their marriage until the end of her singing career in 1980. Coinciding with Pauline's career, Strauss' most intense period of songwriting occurred between 1899 and 1901, when he and Pauline performed the greatest number of concerts together. Most of Strauss' compositions were written with his wife's high lyric soprano voice in mind. Pauline de Ahna's ability to flawlessly emote the poetry of "Morgen" was addressed when Strauss wrote in his *Recollections of My Youth and Years of Apprenticeship*:

She certainly did sing my Lieder with unrivalled expression and poetic fervor. Nobody even remotely approached her in the singing of "Morgen."

"Morgen" was originally written for orchestra but was later changed to accommodate a duet between soprano voice and piano.

“Morgen” possesses a peaceful, flowing sound, which is achieved in numerous ways, starting with the first measure’s marking, “*siempre più tranquillo*.” The piano floats on from this point with consistent arpeggios flowing like water, which continue throughout the piece. In mid-thought, the voice enters on the note of G-sharp, as if having been carried upon the flowing waves of the piano’s arpeggiated harmonies. Little ornamentation is provided, so as not to distract from the breathtaking text floating upon a very legato and step-wise melodic contour. Although the singer floats through the song as if in a dream, organization within the piece is still present. The piano’s accompaniment serves also as an organizing force holding the song together; its arpeggios start the song and close the song, providing listeners with a very clear ABA-coda form. The arpeggiated harmonies do provide peace, but alternating consonance every few bars with dissonance occasionally brings the listener and songstress back down to earth and to reality.