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Robert Schumann - Romances and Ballads

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1993, 87-226.

³ See T. Herman Keeney, ed. *Pierre de la Rue. Opera Omnia VI in Corpus mensurabilis musicae 97* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: American Institute of Musicology and Hänssler-Verlag, 1996), X1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII.

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Robert Schumann

Romances and Ballads, op. 67, 69, 75, 91, 15, 146

Romances and Ballads I, op. 67: *Der König von Thule; Schön Rohtraut; Heidenröslein; Ungewitter; John Anderson.*

Romances and Ballads II, op. 75: *Schnitter Tod; Im Walde; Der traurige Jäger; Der Rekrut; Vom verwundeten Knaben.*

Romances and Ballads III, op. 145: *Der Schmid; Die Nonne; Der Sänger; John Anderson; Romanze vom Gänsebuben.*

Romances and Ballads IV, op. 146: *Brautgesang; Der Bänkelsänger Willi; Der Traum; Sommerlied; Das Schiffelein.*

Romances and Ballads, op. 69: *Tamburin; Waldmädchen; Klosterfräulein; Soldatenbraut; Meerfey; Die Capelle.*

Romances and Ballads, op. 91: *Rosmarin; Jäger Wohlgemuth; Der Wassermann; Das verlassene Mädlein; Der Bleicherin; Nachtlied; In Meeres Mitten*

SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart; Rupert Huber, conductor

Recorded: Sendesaal Villa Berg, Stuttgart; 1997-98

Hänssler Classic; CD 93.002; 76:04; [DDD] [ISRC]

ALTHOUGH the *Romances and Ballads*, op. 67, 75, 145 and 146, on this compact disc receive little recognition in the overall scheme of Schumann's compositional output, they play a much greater role in the life of the composer.

The majority of them were composed in 1849, only a few years after Schumann

faced numerous medical maladies, family losses and personal tragedies. While composing more than forty works during this year (Schumann's most fruitful as a composer), he regained a much needed, renewed sense of confidence and self-reliance in his compositional skills

Yet, even a new beginning didn't assure Schumann a smooth road. Having salvaged strength from his previous personal battles, he was squarely caught in

the middle of the events of the mid-century revolutions. When the king of Saxony dissolved the Landtag and fighting broke out, Schumann, his wife, and eldest daughter fled Dresden ultimately to settle in Bad Kresicha. (The rest of his family would eventually join him there later.)

Seemingly unaffected musically by the revolutionary events which surrounded him, Schumann continued to compose. It would probably be safe to say that these

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compositions wouldn't have the personal, sometimes intense, character they have without the events preceeding and surrounding Schumann's life during this time. In fact, Schumann knew of their personal therapeutic value and what role they played in his reinvigoration as a composer, but he was well aware, as viewed in his correspondences from that time, that they were a composer's response to, and reflection on, the civil unrest that surrounded him.

With Schumann taking on the conducting responsibilities of Hiller's Liedertafel and later his own group, the Chorverein, he also had a more practical reason to add repertoire to the Romantic accapella tradition.

Schumann chose texts from some of Germany's leading poets with Goethe, Chamisso, Mörike, and Eichendorff being represented in these four opera. All the texts were carefully chosen to make a strong statement about the political climate, since each deal with, either directly or indirectly, social issues. Compositionally, the pieces contain extreme modulations, complicated rhythmic gestures, and are atypical in other ways, despite their prevailing homophonic textures.

In their recording of these pieces, the SWR Stuttgart Vocal Ensemble (the new name of the former Stuttgart Radio

Choir) seem to relish the task of performing the compositional and emotional complexities in these opera. Under the baton of Rupert Huber, their chief conductor, the ensemble shows a wonderful expressive range. Whether the music and text call for controlled singing or more spirited singing, the ensemble brings out the inherent emotional qualities of the music.

Excellent dynamics and articulations also help to highlight the individuality and character aspects of these compositions. Warm tonal colors pervade the ensemble's singing, except in those rare instances in which the text calls for a more strident, urgent tone.

Of particular interest are the ensemble's performances of *Der Rekrut*, op. 75, *Die Nonne*, and *Romanze vom Gänsebuben*, op. 145. Each seems to bring out the best efforts of the group.

In the *Romances for female voices*, op. 69 and 91, the women of the SWR Stuttgart Vocal Ensemble continue right where the mixed ensemble left off. In fact, their singing in Opus 91 is perhaps the best on the recording. It doesn't hurt that this is just stunningly beautiful music.

The recording production of Hänssler is also first-rate. The only disappointment is the lack of translations in the liner notes.

In pieces where the music and text seem inexorably linked for a number of reasons, it would have been helpful to include them.

Needless to say, the performance of these pieces could easily have become a simple musicological gesture; the examination of some lesser-known works of Schumann. But, in the capable hands of this ensemble and conductor, these pieces are treated with subtlety and musical clarity. Conductor Rupert Huber continues to program and record contemporary compositions and lesser-known music from the past. One can only look forward to more recordings with this fine ensemble.

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