The Songs of Robert Schumann – 3

JULIANE BANSE soprano   GRAHAM JOHNSON piano

1  Loreley Op 53 No 2 (August Wilhelmine Lorenz) [1'23]
2  Jasminenstrauch Op 27 No 4 (Friedrich Rückert) [0'46]
3  Sag’ an, o lieber Vogel mein Op 27 No 1 (Friedrich Hebbel) [1'46]
4  Die Kartenlegerin Op 31 No 2 (Adelbert von Chamisso, after Jean Pierre de Béranger) [3'27]
5  Blondels Lied Op 53 No 1 (Johann Gabriel Seidl) [5'17]

FRAUENLIEBE UND -LEBEN Op 42 (Adelbert von Chamisso)
6  Seit ich ihn gesehen [2'44]
7  Er, der Herrlichste von allen [3'17]
8  Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben [1'35]
9  Du Ring an meinem Finger [2'45]
10  Helft mir, ihr Schwestern [1'55]
11  Süsser Freund, du blickest [4'26]
12  An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust [1'23]
13  Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan [3'59]
14  (Poem) Traum der eignen Tage [1'50]

15  Geisternähe Op 77 No 3 (Friedrich Halm) [1'57]
16  Die Soldatenbraut Op 64 No 1 (Eduard Mörike) [2'09]
17  Schneeglöckchen Op 96 No 2 (anonymous) [3'07]
18  Stiller Vorwurf Op 77 No 4 (Oskar Ludwig Wolff) [1'29]
19  Gesungen! Op 96 No 4 (Wilfried von der Neun [Wilhelm Schöpff]) [1'08]
20  Himmel und Erde Op 96 No 5 (Wilfried von der Neun [Wilhelm Schöpff]) [1'58]
SIEBEN LIEDER VON ELISABETH KULMANN Op 104
21 Mond, meiner Seele Liebling [2'30]
22 Viel Glück zur Reise, Schwalben! [1'22]
23 Du nennst mich armes Mädchen [1'34]
24 Der Zeisig [1'16]
25 Reich mir die Hand, o Wolke [1'45]
26 Die letzten Blumen starben [2'05]
27 Gekämpft hat meine Barke [2'22]
28 (Spoken) Nachschrift [0'46]

GEDICHTE DER KÖNIGIN MARIA STUART Op 135 (trs Vincke)
29 Abschied von Frankreich [1'44]
30 Nach der Geburt ihres Sohnes [1'14]
31 An die Königin Elisabeth [1'40]
32 Abschied von der Welt [3'06]
33 Gebet [1'40]

Recorded on 22-24 September 1997, 15 November 1998
Recording Engineers ANTHONY HOWELL, JULIAN MILLARD
Recording Producer MARK BROWN
Piano STEINWAY
Front photograph MALCOLM CROWTHERS
Booklet Editor EDWARD PERRY
Executive Producers EDWARD PERRY, SIMON PERRY

p& © Hyperion Records Ltd, London, MCMXCIX
SCHUMANN AND HIS POETS

If there is a theme uniting the songs on this disc, it is Schumann’s partiality for out-of-the-way and mediocre texts. Or so it may seem without understanding the all-important question of context which makes the study of this composer both rewarding and perplexing. Schumann, despite a lifelong love of literature inherited from his bookseller-publisher father, had little of Hugo Wolf’s intellectual rigour when it came to appraising poetry. ‘What is the point of that?’ he might have asked. He certainly set some of the greatest poems of his time (Heine, Eichendorff, Kerner, the astonishing anthology of poems that makes up Myrthen), but his muse was awakened not only by literary excellence. Schumann’s music is alive like the work of few other composers, with endlessly interwoven personal references and resonances, and for the creation of these dream-like strands of tone-poetry, inspiration came from many sources, including the music that had been written before him and which appears, as if in quotation marks, in some of his piano pieces and songs.

Schumann’s music is always about something, as those allusive musical quotes (such as those from Beethoven’s An die ferne Geliebte, one of them on this disc) make clear. Often it seems that a poem’s content, what it is about, is as important as the manner in which it is written. Schumann, like Schubert, weighed these questions in the balance and often decided in favour of friendly imperfection. For example, the composer noted that Julius Mosen’s Der Nussbaum was basically a weak poem, but he set it nevertheless, and gave it a prominent place (the third song in an alphabet sequence where C stood for Clara) in his wedding cycle, Myrthen (and weak poem or not, the song is a masterpiece). If it had been pointed out to Schumann that the poems of Chamisso’s Frauenliebe und -leben were inferior to those of the Eichendorff Liederkreis he might have agreed while also shrugging his shoulders. The important thing for him was that the poems seemed touchingly relevant to his own relationship with Clara Wieck; he wished to write a cycle of which she – the embodiment of das Ewig-Weibliche – was both muse and mouthpiece. The Chamisso poems were ideal for this purpose, and not bad poems either.

On other occasions the biographical background of the poets, who they were, was even more important than the quality of their work, judged objectively. In Schumann’s eyes, a poem was so imbued with the life-force of the person who wrote it that he found it difficult, or perhaps simply unnecessary, to separate the qualities of creator and creation. In many cases this had happy results. We probably owe the great Heine song-cycles to the fact that the poet happened to be in
an untypically receptive and kindly mood when the young Schumann met him in Munich one day in 1828. The gently ironic smile that played about Heine’s lips on that occasion (described in a Schumann letter) is what we hear in the music, the most sympathetic portrait by far, in any medium, that exists of that controversial man. If Heine had been an unbearable grouch on that day, who knows? But an amiable poet, a lieber Dichter, gave birth to a Dichterliebe. Another instance: Schumann’s veneration for the poet Lenau inspired the beautiful Op 90 cycle, but his desire to honour the poet’s memory (whom he believed to have died) prompted that cycle’s extraordinarily personal codicil, Requiem, as if the composer himself were eulogising at the graveside.

One of the charges usually laid against Franz Schubert is that he was far too easily inclined to set the indifferent poetry of his friends and contemporaries – local Viennese figures like Kenner, Spaun, Hüttenbrenner, Ottenwalt, Schlechta and so on. And yet Schumann was equally partial to the verses of friends and acquaintances, particularly as he got older. Like Schubert, he seems to have been easily able to overlook literary deficiencies as a result of his personal links with the poets in question. It is surely human nature to judge less harshly the artistic efforts of people whom one likes, and Schumann’s innate generosity perhaps made him willing to give people the benefit of the doubt when it came to membership of the Davidsbund. His friendships with such writers as Rückert and Hebbel were the fruitful collaboration of artistic equals, but communications with the unpublished amateurs Julius Buddeus, Charles L’Egru and Wolfgang Müller (all in Volume 1 of this series) produced music of some quality, despite the fact that we know little about these poets. We must presume that Schumann was touched and moved by these people and their various gestures of consideration and friendship – the word simpatico comes to mind – and it is this which has come down to us in the music.

The recital begins with a short group of five songs from 1840. Of the five poets, least of all is known of WILHELMINE LORENZ (Loreley, track 1) whose sister had married Schumann’s brother, Julius. She was thus a member of the composer’s extended family, and it is easy to imagine how a setting of her words would have delighted her. A number of the composer’s song texts were sent to him in letters, and this was almost certainly the case with Loreley. Gallant and amative by nature, Schumann had a soft spot for the work of female poets. Sadly, the great Annette von Droste-Hülshoff declined an operatic collaboration, and
Schumann only set some of her verses for unaccompanied chorus but, once again, greatness was not the most important thing that kindled his creative forces and set them ablaze. Personal contact helped, which is how he knew Wilhelmine Lorenz as well as Lily Bernhard (whose *Mädchen-Schwermut* is in Volume 1). If the poetry of neither Lorenz nor Bernhard is very significant, one can hear the kindness and affection with which Schumann was moved to give their efforts musical life.

FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT (*Jasminenstrauß*, track 2) was one of the most significant poets set to music by both Robert and Clara Schumann. He is also one of the important links between the song legacies of Schubert and Schumann. A biographical note will be included in Volume 4 of this Edition which will include the Op 37 *Liebesfrühling* cycle. That work, together with the quartet cycle *Minnespiel*, are Schumann’s most important collaborations with Rückert.

A biographical note on FRIEDRICH HEBBEL (*Sag an, o lieber Vogel mein*, track 3), whose play *Genoveva* was used by Schumann as the libretto of his only opera, will be included in a later volume. Hebbel was also the poet of two melodramas with piano, *Schön Hedwig* and *Ballade vom Haidenknaben*, which will also appear in a later issue of the series.

JOHANN GABRIEL VON SEIDL (*Blondels Lied*, track 5) was born in Vienna and established himself as a literary personality in that city at an early age. A friend of Lenau and Halm, he was a literary critic and *feuilletoniste* from the age of sixteen, and a published poet (*Lieder der Nacht*) at the age of 22. His work came to the attention of Schubert who was his senior by seven years. That composer’s Seidl settings include the beautiful nocturnes *Im Freien* and *Nachthelle*, the celebrated *Der Wanderer an den Mond*, and above all the composer’s last song, and one of his most haunting, *Die Taubenpost*. Schumann adored the Schubert songs, and with *Blondels Lied* for the first and only time he sets a text by one of Schubert’s friends. Seidl was astute in the best tradition of the Viennese artist-politician (even Schubert found him pushy at times), and part of his power-base included the musical almanac *Orpheus*. In the 1842 issue his poems are set in three of the musical supplements, as well as featuring in the main body of the book. Schumann’s song was tipped in at
the beginning of the volume, taking pride of place next to the handsome frontispiece of Mendelssohn. It is one of two songs that Schumann apparently wrote for this publication, but the second seems to have been lost.

It seems likely that Schumann was teamed up with Seidl by the editor of *Orpheus*, August Schmidt. In any case, even for a person of Schumann’s wide reading, Seidl’s reputation was
essentially Viennese. Although he could boast a setting each of Meyerbeer and Loewe his work was probably not well enough known outside his native town to excite the attention of German composers.

On the other hand, ADELBERT VON CHAMISSO (*Die Kartenlegerin*, track 4 and *Frauenliebe und -leben*) was one of the best-known literary figures of his time. He was born into an aristocratic family from the Champagne district (his full name was Louis Charles Adelaïde de Chamisso de Boncourt) which was forced to flee France during the Revolution and settle in Berlin. As a boy he was a page at the Prussian court, but mastered the German language rather late. When he entered the Prussian army as a young man he felt himself at a terrible disadvantage. Napoleon was at his height, and the French-born Chamisso felt that his contemporaries despised him as the enemy. His language skills in his adopted tongue developed quicker than a sense of belonging to his adopted country. After a profound study of German literature he found himself at the centre of the literary life of Berlin where his friends included August von Schlegel and Varnhagen von Ense. His early work, published in almanacs which he also edited, shows the influence of Novalis and Tieck. When he was drawn back to France on a visit in 1810, Schlegel and Varnhagen introduced him to Madame de Staël in Paris. He followed her to Coppet on Lake Geneva and as a result of time spent in Switzerland discovered, at the age of 32, the passion of his life – botany. He returned to Berlin to study this subject in earnest, but the military jingoism in the wake of Napoleon’s first wave of defeats engendered a mood there that made him want to leave Prussia. He wrote his most famous work, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, in self-imposed Polish exile. This has remained one of the most famous of all German tales: the story of a man who sells his shadow to the Devil in exchange for his soul has powerful resonances when possession of that shadow, as Thomas Mann remarked, represents bourgeois solidity and the feeling of belonging to a country and a community.

As the Napoleonic wars dragged on, Chamisso found his position, caught between two opposing
sides, increasingly untenable. Partly to escape, he departed on a three-year voyage around the world – a Russian expedition under Captain Otto von Kotzebue. This was the great adventure of his life, and the making of him: the specimens and information gathered on this journey (botanical, zoological and ethnological) furnished him enough research material to last for the rest of his life. He became an authority on the life of the South Seas and wrote a treatise on the Polynesian language (Über die Hawai’sche Sprache, 1837). The diary that Chamisso kept of his trip (Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1815-1818) has stood the test of time as one of the great German travel books. On his return to Berlin, and with the support of Alexander Humboldt, Chamisso held some of the most distinguished scientific posts: he was elected to the Berlin Academy and became the custodian of the Schöneberg Herbarium.

With his re-entry into Prussian literary life he re-established his interest in poetry and his works quickly became popular. Unsurprisingly, he was one of the first literary figures of the time to notice and understand what we may think of as a more modern problem: the displacement and alienation of peoples in the wake of war. His passionate nature allied to his scientific background inclined him to what we might now call left-wing social realism, and Chamisso injected a strong flavour of this radical approach into the Biedermeier romanticism of his time. The extraordinary breadth of his travels, his ruthlessly analytical eye, as well as his ambiguous nationality, equipped him to subvert the cosy self-assurance of German life and its narrow-minded assumptions. The musician knows Chamisso only as the poet of a Schumann song-cycle which it is all too easy to underestimate; but in the context of the poet’s life and political sympathies, the lyrics of Frauenliebe und -leben have a subtext which is as near to feminist egalitarianism as one will find in a male writer of his time. This poet’s technical skills and refined intelligence have won him many modern fans, and he is one of the minor classical writers whose standing is now much higher in his adopted country than it was fifty years ago.

Tracks 14 to 19 on this disc feature six songs written between 1847 and 1850. The earliest of
these, as well as the most successful and well-known, is a setting of EDUARD MÖRIKE (*Die Soldatenbraut*, track 16). There is a biographical note on that great poet on page 11 of the booklet of Volume 1 of the Schumann Edition.

FRIEDRICH HALM (*Geisternähe*, track 15) is the pseudonym of the Austrian poet Elegius Franz Joseph, Freiherr von Münch-Bellinghausen. Born in 1806 he was too young to figure in the Schubert circle, but it is just possible that he met the composer in the company of his friends Seidl and Bauernfeld. Had Schubert lived longer it is highly likely that Halm would have figured in his creative life. He wrote much poetry, although he is mainly remembered, if at all, for his dramatic works, in his play *Griseldis* the eponymous heroine has a strength of character and resource which Chamisso might have been proud to create. He became director of the Burgtheater in Vienna, and later of the Hofbibliothek – the Imperial Library – a post envied by Grillparzer, and to which Halm brought his considerable organisational abilities. Halm’s reputation was once enormous; this may account for the fact that both Brahms and Strauss set his poems.

We do not know who was the poet of *Schneeglöckchen* (track 17). On stylistic grounds Eric Sams thinks it possible that it was JULIUS BUDDEUS, a publisher and one of Schumann’s Düsseldorf friends. There is a note about him on page 9 of the booklet accompanying Volume 1 of the Schumann Edition.

OSKAR LUDWIG WOLFF (*Stiller Vorwurf*, track 18) was a much-published poet from Hamburg who specialised in the art of improvisation on any given subject; a high point of his life was in 1826 when he improvised before Goethe on the subject of his home city. He was a gifted translator and a specialist in languages, holding professorial positions in Jena and Weimar. He wrote many works on the history of literature and published a ‘Family Shakespeare’ that would have pleased Victorian prudes. Although entirely forgotten today, Wolff was a well-known figure of his time. Not only was he one of Clara’s suitors – one of Schumann’s competitors – but Sams points out that Wolff was the biographer of Carl Banck, the composer, critic and singing teacher.
who was another rival for Clara’s hand. This may have played its part in the choice of poem.

WILFRIED VON DER NEUN (Gesungen! and Himmel und Erde, tracks 19, 20) was the pseudonym of Wilhelm Schöpff (‘of the nine’ implies an alliance with the Muses, particularly Erato, the ninth Muse who is associated with love poetry). He was born into a clerical family in Dresden and it was there that Schumann met him. The composer’s Tagebücher show that both before and after the composition of Gesungen! and Himmel und Erde (on 27 July 1850) the poet visited the Schumann household. We shall never know what Schumann thought of these poems; it is possible that his settings were meant to help a deserving young artist (Schöpff was 24 at the time) to establish his reputation. The composer certainly set the poems from autograph copies; they were published only in 1852 in Herz und Welt. The poet devoted most of his later life to the church.

Schumann’s championing of ELISABETH KULMANN is even more unusual; indeed, it is one of the strangest enthusiasms in song history. She was born in St Petersburg in 1808 of a Russian father and German mother. The early death of the father threw the family into poverty, but the mother encouraged her gifted daughter to astonishing scholastic feats. Bilingual in Russian and German (she added French to these for the writing of poetry), by the age of fifteen Kulmann had mastered eleven languages including Latin and Greek. She was highly talented in drawing and music as well as in mathematics and botany. By the time of her death at the age of seventeen, her frail constitution racked with overwork, her literary output included the translation of Anacreon’s work in eight volumes, the translation into German of Ozerov’s tragedies, as well as translations (into Russian) of Metastasio, Alfieri, Camoens and Milton. Schumann owned the Gesamtausgabe of Kulmann which was printed in German in 1835 and had gone into its eighth edition by 1857.

As the long printed Widmung (dedication) to Op 104 makes clear, the composer regarded Kulmann with something little short of posthumous adoration. As Fischer-Dieskau points out, Schumann seems to have been touched by her orphan status.
Perhaps he remembered his own unhappy visit to Russia, and imagined how much he would have hated to eke out an existence in the frozen north, cut off from the culture of his fellow Germans. The composer kept a framed portrait of Kulmann in his study, and he thought of his song-cycle as a portrait of her life – a life which was, he claimed, a piece of poetry in its own right.

If Schumann had not brought Kulmann to our attention, who else would have done so? Is she worth rescuing? Well Schumann thought so, and in setting a cycle of her poetry ‘chosen’, as he writes, ‘from thousands of small Lieder, only a few of which are suitable for musical setting’, he gives us a unique work. The songs were meant to be propaganda for the establishment of Kulmann’s rightful place (as Schumann saw it) in German literature. These songs have not accomplished that aim. But there is no other group of songs known to me which has been designed to introduce the life-story of a poet to the public using a mixture of music and the composer’s own biographical notes (read between the songs on this disc). This is thus the earliest example of a song biography – a Songmakers’ Almanac format before its time – created out of the composer’s admiration for his posthumous protegé. Imagine the Mörike Lieder interspersed with Wolf’s own commentaries on the life of the poet, and one sees that Schumann has invented a new art form where the Lied goes together with the spoken word to produce a biographical narrative of one of its creators.

The settings of MARY STUART, QUEEN OF SCOTS are further evidence of Schumann’s susceptibility to female literature and his ability to time-travel in a way that suggests that he could quite happily fall in love with an historical figure. The seductive powers of that queen and femme fatale worked their magic in the unhappy year of 1852, even if, as we shall see, Schumann saw Mary primarily as a fellow-human, troubled and tragic as he felt himself to be. It is questionable whether all the poems of the Gedichte von Maria Stuart are the authentic work of Mary. Abschied von Frankreich is a fanciful re-working of the well-recorded fact that the young queen and widow, on leaving her beloved France, stood on the prow of her galley saying ‘Adieu France! Adieu donc ma chère France … Je pense ne vous revoir jamais.’ (Béranger’s version of this event spawned Wagner’s almost comically histrionic scena of 1840.) There is no proof that Mary wrote a prayer after the birth of her son, but the poem to Queen Elizabeth is a re-working of a sonnet that exists in French and Italian versions. Abschied von der Welt seems authentic but
is difficult to date precisely. The final Gebet is a translation of a Latin prayer, O Domine Deus! Speravi in te! Antonia Fraser wryly notes that ‘in his extremely detailed account of the queen’s last hours, Bourgoing does not mention that she paused to compose or extemporize the Latin prayer traditionally attributed to her on the eve of the execution.’ These poems were published in an anthology of English and Scottish poetry in translation entitled Rose und Distel (1853). Of course, Schumann set the songs in 1852 so he must have had access to the texts through private contact with GISBERT FREIHERR VON VINCKE. The son of a prominent Westphalian politician, Vincke was a lawyer by training who followed his father into distinguished public life in Potsdam and Münster, retiring in 1860 because of eye trouble. Like Freiligrath he seems to have been something of a specialist in foreign literature: his translation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream was created in collaboration with the music of Mendelssohn (through whom he possibly knew Schumann), and he worked on versions of many other Shakespeare plays. He also translated Sheridan, Calderon and François Coppée.

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧
August Wilhelmine Lorenz (1784-1861)

Looreley
2 April 1840; published in 1845 as *Romanzen und Balladen* Heft III Op 53 No 2

Es flüstern und rauschen die Wogen
Wohl über ihr stilles Haus.
Es ruft eine Stimme: “Gedenke mein!”
Bei stiller Nacht im Vollmondschein!
Gedenke mein!”
Und flüsternd ziehen die Wogen
Wohl über ihr stilles Haus.
“Gedenke mein!”

The waves whisper and murmur
Over her silent house.
A voice rings out: “Remember me!
When the moon is full and the night silent.
Remember me!”
And the whispering waves flow
Over her silent house.
“Remember me!”

This miniature from the great song-writing year has somehow been submerged by the wave of masterpieces from 1840 (many of which are arranged into cycles) which dominate the first volume of the Peters Edition. In some ways this neglect is easy to understand: the song does not have the advantage of a well-known poet, and the text itself seems curiously bland – short on imagery and originality. Nevertheless, the music’s sinuous undulations are attractive, and all the better for not outstaying their welcome. They call for a skilled and sensitive singer who must be able to convey the other-worldly nature of this rueful, moon-lit plaint. The music is an etiolated sea-borne afterthought; we are permitted to hear only an echo of the Lorelei’s once-seductive song, a repeated ‘Gedenke mein!’ set to a descending phrase, traversing a falling fourth, which makes its appearance on two different occasions. In the first verse we hear these words in G sharp minor – the relative minor of the dominant, B; but the second verse reserves the surprise of A major (the subdominant of the tonic) for ‘Gedenke mein!’’. This plagal progression reinforces the intimacy of the invocation, and also lends a certain prayer-like colour to the proceedings.

Instead of the Lorelei’s song being in the present, it is as if poet and composer have constructed a tiny elegy for a magic spirit who has died; the waves roll gently over the house which has been the seat of her former destructive power.

A month or so later, Schumann was to write music for another, much more famous and far more formidable Lorelei: Eichendorff’s frightening creation in *Waldesgespräch* (from *Liederkreis* Op 39), a song which, interestingly enough, is also cast in E major. In both works arpeggiated ripples in the tonic key alternate with diminished-seventh arpeggios which combine the fluidity of water music with the uncertainty and mystery of magical happenings. The composer probably adopted
this idea from the rolling diminished sevenths on a tonic pedal, daring and innovative for the
time, which permeate the accompaniment of Schubert’s Die Stadt (from Schwanengesang). In this
we hear the movement of water and wind, and we are made to scan the distant horizon of Heine’s
opening line. One also remembers the crucial change to the diminished seventh in Schubert’s
Nacht und Träume (at ‘Rufen, wenn der Tag erwacht’) where the harmony implies the act of
calling out into a void, or perhaps straining to listen to something from across a long distance.
Brahms uses the distancing effect of the diminished seventh in O wüsst ich doch den Weg zurück,
only in this case the distance is one of time rather than space. Loreley also shares its atmosphere,
and its epigrammatic nature, with the watery-grave music of Herzeleid Op 107 No 1 (Volume 1)
where the water whispers ‘Ophelia’ in a similarly elegiac fashion. It is perhaps little surprise that
someone who was driven by his own inner lorelei voices to attempt suicide by throwing himself
into the Rhine, seems fascinated by the soothing, rather than the frightening, aspects of death by
drowning.

Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)

Jasminenstrauch
March 1840; first published in 1849 as Lieder und Gesänge Heft I, Op 27 No 4

Grün ist der Jasminenstrauch
Abends eingeschlafen,
Als ihn mit des Morgens
Hauch Sonnenlichter trafen,
Ist er schneeweiss aufgewacht:
“Wie geschah mir in der Nacht?”
Seht, so geht es Bäumen,
Die im Frühling träumen.

The jasmine bush was green
As it fell asleep last night,
When woken by the morning breeze
And sunlight,
It was snowy white:
“What happened to me overnight?”
That, you see, is the fate of trees
Who dream in spring.

Jasminum officinale – known as ‘poet’s jasmine’ – with its shining green leaves and white flowers
is native to Iran and is the source of the attar of jasmine used in perfumery. We may assume that
this is the flower meant by the orientalist Rückert. Although it is an ornamental shrub which
blooms in summer, the song itself is redolent of the gentle perfume of spring, the season
suggested by the poem. The piano writing is as shyly fragile as the fronds of greenery which
weave their way through the stave; these are connected (by an occasional leap of the left hand) to
the earthiness of the bass, but the piano writing is free of the dark heaviness of the soil. At first all
is light and joy. To listen to this song in a matter of seconds is like watching a speeded-up nature
film; the overnight progress of the jasmine from green leaf to white flower is accomplished in a matter of seconds by the audible stirrings of the lissom semiquavers, an analogue for the incessant workings of nature. We literally hear the rising sap. It is perhaps the nearest thing we have in song to a musical enactment of Goethe’s celebrated poem Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen (‘The Metamorphosis of Plants’) when the poet writes ‘Werdend betrachte sie nun, wie nach und nach sich die Pflanze / Stufenweise geführt, bildet zu Blüten und Frucht’ (‘Consider the plant and see how by gradual phases, slowly evolved it forms, rises to blossom and fruit.’). Schumann might have even been aware of this parallel. He noted on the manuscript that the song was only an attempt at the all-but-impossible task of capturing the stirrings of nature in musical terms.

The spring-like key of A major (also beloved by Wolf to depict the same season – and cf Schumann’s Mörike setting Er ist’s) announces the jasmine in harmonically simple fashion, gently windswept and not yet laden with its characteristic white blossom. The direction of the upwardly-wafting accompanying semiquavers is temporarily reversed in a dying fall to reflect ‘eingeschlafen’; the phrase closes with a staccato quaver in the bass, a gesture which suggests something gently nodding as it falls asleep. A change of dynamic (from piano to mezzoforte) and a move to the relative minor (F sharp minor) betokens the vigorous new light of day which arrives within a single beat. Much has happened in the intervening hours which have been completely elided by the power of music. If the jasmine plant were a human head of hair it would be the stress of life and experience that has turned it white. In its anthropomorphic role, as it asks a question as if it were a human being, there is a touch of perplexed distress in the minor tonality of the music. For a moment we might imagine that we have entered autumn or winter rather than the flowerings of spring, but what seems to be a disturbing new development is in fact an encouraging new beginning. (This brings to mind Goethe’s poem Phänomen, where the ageing poet asserts the right of the white-haired to experience love.)

At ‘Wie geschah mir in der Nacht’ (a diminished-seventh harmony unfolding beneath a repeated C natural in the vocal line) the tree asks the question as to how this remarkable change in its appearance has come to pass. The cluster of notes on the keyboard, and the resulting halo of sound caught in the pedal, suggests a bough laden with blossom and an atmosphere heavy with perfume. Rückert is very different from Goethe; he is not content to glory in the scientific aspect of plant growth. Instead he adds a fanciful codicil as if he were chiding the tree for being a dreamer and not concentrating. It should now wake up to its own good fortune; after all, it is handsomely
rejuvenated. The shy cadence to which the final verb ‘träumen’ is set admirably reflects the dream-like mood that the composer has captured throughout this song. The potency of longing which seems to hang in the air brings to mind the altogether more leisurely Der Nussbaum.

The postlude is a capricious delight. A joyful upward flourish ending on a staccato note (which here signifies a dream), and an off-beat accent on a diminished chord, are matched and balanced by a further diminished chord which suggests doubt. In turn, this melts into a downward arpeggio. The equivocal situation in which the jasmine finds itself seems to be happily resolved in the concluding ripple of A major. The celebration of the tonic key seems like a smile at the tricks played on us by nature, as if to acknowledge that life brings something new and unexpected to us at every new stage of our growth and development.

Christian Friedrich Hebbel (1813-1863)

3 Sag’ an, o lieber Vogel mein

Tell me, my dear bird

c1840; first published in Lieder und Gesänge Heft I as Op 27 No 1

“Sag an, o lieber Vogel mein,
Sag an, wohin die Reise dein?”
Weiss nicht wohin,
Mich treibt der Sinn,
Drum muss der Pfad wohl richtig sein.

“Sag an, o liebster Vogel mir,
Sag, was verspricht die Hoffnung dir?”
Ach, linde Luft
Und süßen Duft,
Und neuen Lenz verspricht sie mir.

“Du hast die schöne Ferne nie
Gesehen, und du glaubst an sie?”
Du frägst mich viel,
Und das ist Spiel,
Die Antwort aber macht mir Müh.

Nun zog in gläubig frommem Sinn
Der Vogel übers Meer dahin,
Und linde Luft
Und süßer Duft
Sie wurden wirklich sein Gewinn.

Tell me, my dear bird,
Tell me where you journey to?”
I cannot say where,
Instinct guides me,
So it must be the right way.

“Tell me, O dearest bird,
Tell me, what does hope promise you?”
Ah, gentle breezes,
And sweet scents,
And a new spring it promises.

“You have never seen the fair distant south,
And yet you believe that it exists?”
You ask many questions –
An easy thing to do –
But I find them hard to answer.

With devout faith the bird now flew
Away across the sea,
And sweet breezes
And sweet scents
Were truly its reward.
This song is one of the earliest to show Schumann’s interest in what might be termed a musical style for children, and his ability to enter into a realm where childhood simplicity and wonder are written into his music. There is something about the melody, as well as the poem (despite the intended depths of Hebbel’s allegories) which suggests youthful voices piping and lisping in communal song. And what parent is not moved to hear the sound of bird-like voices, particularly if they belong to his own chicks before they have left the nest? Even the accompaniments in works of this kind seem geared to a child-like technical proficiency. Schumann had already written Kinderszenen, the piano pieces about childhood which should be played by adults, but it was not until the end of the 1840s, and the experience of having children of his own, that he was to write music which seems simplified for younger hands, voices and minds. However, in case one were tempted to regard Schumann as a musical educationalist, a Kodály or Hindemith for example, the composer simply seems to have been exploring, with great relish, that side of his own imagination which was to remain forever child-like. In other words, his children’s music, for the most part, seems written for himself. In his desire to re-visit those realms of Never-Never Land he idealises childhood in a way that suggests his own anguish at passing from that state. In the same way he lauds the idea of marriage (in works like the Rücker Liebesfrühling and Minnespiel settings) long after his day-to-day relationship with Clara had ceased to be happily uncomplicated. The importance of such aspects of happy family life was also part of the Zeitgeist. The celebration of these two cornerstones of respectable life – marriage and children – places the composer firmly within his bourgeois epoch. Indeed, these preoccupations separate the emotional worlds of Schumann and Schubert.

What Schumann does have in common with Schubert, however, is an ability to write tunes which seem as natural and as enduring as folksong. The accompaniment doubles the melody as if gently nudging uncertain young singers into the correct melodic grooves. But having sung through the melody once, we have learned it and are ready to repeat it in best folksong manner. In fact the first three strophes are identical, and the question-and-answer phrases suggest the schoolroom divided into two choirs. It is, however, part of Schumann’s genius to change hymn-like music that would be foursquare and dull in other hands into something genuinely touching and heartfelt. His melodies in this vein do not suggest the hopeless pedantry of the educational system of the time; rather do they seem to encapsulate deeply felt seriousness about even the little things of life which was one of the German qualities most admired by the Victorians – although it is difficult to imagine a lesson on bird migration given in this fashion at an English public school.
For the third strophe the adult composer, in the guise of father narrating a bedtime story, brings the song to a happy-ever-after conclusion. The bird is at last freed to fly outside the confines of the home key of C major, moving in sequences into dominant, subdominant and supertonic harmonies before happily returning to home base. The accompaniment flutters in right-hand triplets as the roving left hand navigates the twists and turns of flight. ‘Linde Luft’ prompts an ambitious arpeggio heavenwards, but this hardly disturbs the essentially modest and simple relationship between voice and piano. Eric Sams avers that this may be an early example of Schumann’s song-writing, pre-dating 1840. If so, it is astonishing how a young composer, renowned for his virtuosic keyboard writing in the 1830s, was able to rein-in his pianistic exuberance for the sake of the mood of a poem. But this sensitivity to literature, and a willingness to be guided by his poets, lies at the heart of Schumann’s genius as a composer of Lieder.

Adelbert von Chamisso (1781-1838) after Pierre Jean de Béranger (1780-1857)

### Die Kartenlegerin

July 1840; first published in 1841 in *Drei Gesänge von Adelbert von Chamisso* Op 31 No 2

1. Schlief die Mutter endlich ein
   Über ihrer Hauspostille?
2. Nadel, liege du nun stille,
   Nählen, immer Nählen, nein,
   (Legen will ich mir die Karten,)
3. Ei, was hab ich zu erwarten,
   Ei, was wird das Ende sein?
4. Trüget mich die Ahnung nicht,
   Zeigt sich einer, den ich meine,
   Schön, da kommt er ja, der eine,
   Coeur-Bub kannte seine Pflicht.
   Ja, er freit sie, ich vergehe,
   O verruchter Bösewicht.
6. Herzeleid und viel Verdruss,
   Eine Schul’ und enge Mauern,
   Karo-König, der bedauern
   Und zuletzt mich trösten muss.
7. Ein Geschenk auf artge Weise,

---

### The Fortune-Teller

1. Has mother finally fallen asleep
   Over her book of sermons?
2. You, my needle, now lie still,
   Stop this constant sewing.
3. I shall read the cards,
   Oh, what things can I expect,
   Oh, how will it all end?
4. If I am not deceived,
   One, I think of, will appear,
   Jolly good, here he comes,
   The knave of hearts has done his duty.
5. A rich widow? Dear, oh dear.
   Yes, he woos her, I’m undone,
   Oh! the wicked scoundrel.
6. Heartache and much vexation,
   A school with restricting walls,
   But the king of diamonds will take pity
   And comfort me.
7. A nicely delivered present,
Er entführt mich, eine Reise, Geld und Lust im Überfluss.
Dieser Karo-König da Fürst sein oder König
Und es fehlt daran nur wenig, Bin ich selber Fürstin ja.
Hier ein Feind, der mir zu schaden Sich bemüht bei seiner Gnaden,
Und ein Blonder steht mir nah.
Ein Geheimnis kommt zu Tage, Und ich flüchte noch beizeiten,
Fahret wohl, ihr Herrlichkeiten, Fahret wohl, ihr Herrlichkeiten,
O, das war ein harter Schlag. O, das war ein harter Schlag.
Hin ist einer, eine Menge
Bilden um mich ein Gedränge,
Dass ich sie kaum zählen mag.
Kommt das dumme Fraugesicht,
Kommt die Alte da mit Keuchen,
Lieb und Lust mir zu verscheuchen,
Eh' die Jugend mir gebracht?
Ach, die Mutter ist's, die aufwacht,
Und den Mund zu schelten aufmacht.
Nein, die Karten lügen nicht.

He elopes with me, a journey
Money and happiness in abundance.
This king of diamonds
Must be a prince or king,
Which means that it won’t take much
For me to be a princess.
Here’s a foe, who strives to soil
My name before His Majesty,
And a fair-haired man is there as well.
A secret comes to light,
And I escape just in time,
Farewell, O life of splendour,
Ah, that was a cruel blow.
The one is gone, a crowd
Surges around me
That I can scarcely count them all.
What’s this? A dumb female apparition,
A wheezing old woman coming my way,
To banish love and happiness
Before my youth has gone?
Ah, it’s mother, who’s woken up,
Opening wide her mouth to scold.
No, the cards never lie.

Schumann here displays a side to his creative nature that might almost be termed operatic. Or at least it is the same type of ‘operatic’ flair that Schubert also possessed in great measure: the ability to ‘stage’ a lyric as if a director’s hand had lovingly plotted gesture, movement, even lighting. Here a miniature is rendered more varied and eventful than one would have thought possible. On the other hand, the opposite skill of writing opera requires a command of the larger shape beneath all the detail – theatrical savoir faire lacked by both Schubert and Schumann, possibly as a result of their fervent response to verbal minutiae. Their capacity to illustrate words (one may say translate them into a musical language) may have led them astray in writing for the stage, but it propelled them to glory in song. The crux of this innate Lieder-composing ability lies in the way in which the accompaniment is developed not in general terms with a broad brush, but in response to the most tiny details. The prosody and inflection of the vocal line also counts for a
great deal, as does the movement of harmony – in *Die Kartenlegerin*, for example, each new turn of the cards is mirrored by a new twist in harmonic tension, as if a turn of the screw.

The time signature of 2/8 is unique in Schumann. The bars bustle to the point of overflowing with flouncing petticoats and feminine caprice. Schumann possibly knew that Béranger’s original poem was to be sung to the air of ‘La petite gouvernante’; the French poem tells us that the girl, Suzon, is sixteen, and everything in the music implies the delicacy and femininity of someone small and slender, even the miniaturised time-signature. And the ornamental detail in the piano writing seems to imply that she is dressed in the eighteenth-century dress that can be seen in illustrated editions of Béranger, *chansonnier* of his time. The actress Philine (from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*) who features in *Singet nicht in Trauertönen* (Volume 1) is also an eighteenth-century personality, and Schumann responds to her with music of similar flightiness contained within a strict duple pulse: in both these E flat major songs there are whalebone corsets beneath the free-flowing ribbons. Like Philine, this devotee of horoscopes and cards is a minx – no better than she should be, but rather more fun than the average German girl. And unlike Philine, the little fortune-teller is French. Like both Wolf and Brahms, Schumann had a theoretical fondness for ungovernable girls of southern sensibility. The petulance of this little *midinette* is to be found again in some of the women from the Geibel settings of 1849, notably *Weh, wie zornig ist das Mädchen* from the *Spanisches Liebeslieder*. At first sight, her wilfully self-centred character seems a long way from the most famous of Chamisso’s feminine creations, the deeply German protagonist of *Frauenliebe und -leben*. But both characters depend on marriage to better themselves. The girl admits (in Béranger’s original) that she is ‘peu faite pour être ouvrière’.

The demisemiquaver motif in the piano’s right hand which opens the song is a creation of genius. The bustle (as already noted, both sassy and sartorial), the youthful, and very feminine, energy, the suspense (and sheer fun) of a girl taking her pleasures behind the back of parental authority are all contained therein. The crispness of the texture also suggests the shuffling of cards where staccato chords in the accompaniment resemble the snap of a card turned up from the deck. The vocal line makes something memorable out of very little (it is the type of jingle that may come into the head as one is drumming one’s fingers with boredom) and the accompaniment is kept to a minimum too – pert little staccato demisemiquavers, at first on and then off the beat to show how all that sewing is driving our heroine to distraction. The accompaniment at the repeat of ‘nähen, immer nähen, nein’ suggests the whirring of stitching – a sewing machine could do no
better. All this work is thrown aside, and the piano staves are momentarily empty. The covert nature of what is about to take place is perfectly suggested by the conspiratorial little scales, first of all in the vocal line, and then matched by the left-hand accompaniment in contrary motion. The second strophe begins with the same music as the first, but soon diversifies in detail. The laddish gait of the Knave of Hearts is perfectly caught by the left-hand stride accompaniment under ‘Schön, da kommt er, ja der eine’. Her marital plans for this poker stud are ruined by the sudden appearance in the cards of a rich widow (an eloquent cry of ‘Wehe’ on a diminished chord escapes almost involuntarily) whose wealth seduces the would-be suitor. The curse of ‘verruchter Bösewicht’ is scarcely ladylike; had the sleeping mother been awake she would have been shocked by her daughter’s language.

Now that the first chance of a fairytale marriage has been ruled out, she must look for others. The tension mounts in a new section which the composer has marked ‘Schneller’ (at ‘Herzeleid und viel Verdruss’), a marking suitable for the combination of panic and lust of a young lady on the rebound. This section very cleverly uses sequences and subtle key-shifts to emphasise each new turn of the cards, the harmony staying in one place only long enough for the girl to interpret each new deal. In the right hand, the use of syncopation and off-beat accent is a perfect means of illustrating her gasps of pleasurable surprise. By the end of the strophe she has convinced herself that the love of the King of Diamonds will make her rich. There is an appropriate royal pomposity about the dotted rhythm settings of ‘Geld und Lust im Überfluss’. At the end of the strophe, in order to illustrate ‘Überfluss’, the vocal line spills over into the lower regions of the stave, and the contrary-motion scales collide between the hands as the surfeit of riches is matched by the clinking of glasses and jostling high spirits.

The fourth strophe begins with a small meditation on the pleasures of her future royal life. This is interrupted by the discovery of an enemy in the cards, and once again the girl is on her own. The support of the accompaniment is withdrawn on ‘Hier ein Feind’, and contrary circumstances are reflected by contrary scales. On the last word of ‘Und ein Blonder steht mir nah’ the semitone rise from B flat to B natural in the vocal line perfectly conveys a turn-up for the books (or cards), this time not exuberantly but in some trepidation. As in the earlier card-turning sequence, harmony plays a crucial part in the unveiling of the successive revelations. This time, however,
the key sequences fall rather than rise, and drain away all pleasurable expectation. Perky syncopations are replaced by lifeless quavers which are tokens of disillusionment. A short recitative closes this section: the appearance of a number of men, a crowd of them in fact, is no consolation. On the contrary, it prompts the most substantial interlude where the motif of the opening is brilliantly re-worked to show the pangs of confusion and distress. The flurry of this music had seemed pertly self-assured. But these mournful little demisemiquavers, punctuated by sighing motifs and tossed between the pianist’s left and right hand, sound stranded and lost in a sea of uncertain tonality. It seems that the girl is at a loss to interpret what she sees in the cards. (At this point Schumann leaves out a verse of Chamisso’s translation: in this Suzon meets a grey-haired landowner, marries him and goes to live in Paris, oblivious to his scolding and intent on a good time.)

The final strophe is a good-natured return to reality and to the music of the song’s opening. The cards predict the irascibility of an old woman who has come to ruin all her fun. With her mother awake and liable to scold her for wasting time at the card-table, the girl ruefully admits to the accuracy of her fortune-telling. In a remarkable touch of characterisation, Schumann suggests a girl’s shrug at this turn of events, merrily dispatching the song in a mood of high spirits. Her closing lines have been composed in such a way that we see that she only half believes in the power of horoscopes, and that she can laugh at her own gullibility. Her sense of humour (admirably emphasised by the chuckling descent of the postlude where all her plans topple over like a house of cards) is more important than any dalliance with the occult. Schumann and Chamisso succeed in making this girl rather nicer than the calculating operator encountered in Béranger’s poem (‘Je suis cruelle’ admits the French version). But that may merely be the difference between homely Leipzig and sophisticated, heartless Paris.

Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804-1875)

[5] **Blondels Lied**

October 1840; first published as a supplement to the almanac *Orpheus* in 1842, and then in 1845 in *Romanzen und Balladen* Heft III as Op 53 No 2

1. Spähend nach dem Eisengitter
   Bei des Mondes hellem Schein,
   Steht ein Minst’rel mit der Zither
   Vor dem Schlosse Dürrenstein,
   Stimmt sein Spiel zu sanfter Weise
   Peering through the iron bars
   In the bright moonlight,
   A minstrel stands with his zither
   Before Dürrenstein Castle,
   He tunes it for a gentle air
Und beginnt sein Lied dazu,
Denn ein Ahnen sagt ihm leise:
“Suche treu, so findest du!”

König Richard, Held von Osten,
Sankst du wirklich schon hinab?
Muss dein Schwert im Meere rosten,
Oder deckt dich fern ein Grab?
Suchend dich auf allen Wegen,
Wallt dein Minstrel ohne Ruh’,
Denn ihm sagt ein leises Regen:
“Suche treu, so findest du!”

Hoffe, Richard, und vertraue,
Treue lenkt und leitet mich.
Und im fernen Heimatgaue
Betet Liebe still für dich.
Blondel folget deinen Bahnen,
Margot winkt dir sehnd zu,
Deinem Minstrel sagt ein Ahnen:
“Suche treu, so findest du!”

Horch, da tönt es leise, leise
Aus dem Burgverliess empor,
Eine wohlbekannte Weise
Klingt an Blondels lauschend Ohr.
Wie ein Freundsersuf, ein trauter,
Schallt sein eigen Lied ihm zu,
Und sein Ahnen sagt ihm lauter:
“Suche treu, so findest du!”

Was er sang, das singt er wieder,
Wieder tönt es ihm zurück,
Süsses Echo klingt hernieder,
Keine Täuschung, sichres Glück!
Den er sucht auf seinen Bahnen,
Ach, sein König ruft ihm zu,
Nicht vergebens war sein Ahnen:
“Suche treu, so findest du!”

Heimwärts fliegt er mit der Kunde,
Da war Leid und Freude gross,
Blondels Lied is dissimilar to any of Schubert’s Seidl settings, but there are Schubertian resonances nevertheless. The phrase ‘Suche treu, so findest du!’ is similar to the conclusion of Schubert’s song Alinde, D904, where the singer finds his beloved after an exhaustive search. And then there is the poem’s historical context. Schubert was fascinated by the Crusades, and songs like Der Kreuzzug and Romanze von Richard Löwenherz, not to mention the libretto for his last opera Der Graf von Gleichen, show a partiality for medieval minstrelsy. The character of Blondel is even to be found in the 1818 Schubert song Blondel zu Marien. This enthusiasm may partly be explained as interest in local history: in 1192 King Richard I was imprisoned not far from Vienna by Leopold of Austria. In any case, the European fascination with the Plantagenet king’s rescue from captivity through the efforts of his faithful minstrel Blondel had been fostered by Grétry’s well known opera, Richard Coeur-de-lion. The international popularity of Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe prompted further interest in the reign of Richard I. And interest persisted. In the poem Richard Coeur-de-lion, written during the Second World War in occupied France, Louis Aragon wrote (in Louis MacNeice’s translation):

All French men are Blondel, in each he sings:
Whatever name we called her at the start,
Freedom – like a whispering of wings –
Answers the song of Richard Lionheart.

The modern ear inevitably finds longueurs in the ballad style of old Germany. Schumann casts Blondels Lied as a ballad-cum-strophic song which belongs to another, less sophisticated age. But the surprise is how well the composer accomplishes something noble and interesting within the deliberately archaic manner with which he frames the work, half pastiche and half deeply-felt response to the concept of unswerving loyalty. In this way, Blondels Lied about the Lionheart is a companion piece to Die Löwenbraut (Volume 2) which achieves considerable power despite its ludicrous story. The song was composed shortly after the marriage of Robert and Clara, and the
refrain ‘Suche treu, so findest du’ must have seemed like a justification of their own long struggle based on trust and loyalty through extended separation. It is one of the songs that gave much pleasure in the composer’s own domestic circle.

1, 2. The opening melody (repeated in the last strophe) belongs to the narrator. It is a sort of free variation on Blondel’s own song in the central sections of the ballad. The tune seems to be somehow instrumental, an impression reinforced by the fact that the unimportant words ‘bei’, ‘vor’ ‘und’ and ‘dem’ occur on strong beats. In the opening lines we hear of the castle of Dürnstein (now known as Dürrenstein in Lower Austria on the left bank of the Danube in the Wachau) and we are somehow reminded of the landscape of Auf einer Burg from the Eichendorff Liederkreis. The appearance of the music on the page is not dissimilar, with its foursquare tempo and predominance of minims and semibreves. For most of the song the piano leads and doubles the voice in a solemn chorale style, the sumptuous lower reaches of the piano well employed to capture the solemn and royal task at hand. Somehow we can hear we are in the realm of impenetrable thick-walled castles and craggy landscapes. Each of the strophes ends with the very simple but strangely haunting refrain ‘Suche treu, so findest du!’ At the beginning of the second strophe Blondel himself begins to sing. Despite a difference in melody, and the change of many small details, every strophe in this song seems closely related to the others, variations of the same melodic idea. This gives the impression of doggedly faithful repetition. The nature of Blondel’s tireless search (singing his song under the ramparts of every castle in Europe) is built into the music. In the same way, the vigil-until-death of Schiller’s Knight Toggenburg is admirably depicted by the tenaciously strophic structure of the conclusion to Schubert’s ballad Ritter Toggenburg.

3. This strophe continues Blondel’s song to his king. The placid G major melody is replaced by a minore variation. The solemn, chorale-like crotchets that have dominated the piece so far yield to a more passionate aria in quavers. The closeness between the king and his minstrel is emphasised by the use of the ‘du’ form. Any hint at untoward intimacy between king and servant (Richard I has sometimes been depicted as homosexual) is dispelled by the mention of ‘Margot’, whoever Seidl meant her to be – perhaps he was confused between the famous Margot of Navarre (a queen from a later epoch) and Richard’s Queen Berengaria, also from Navarre.

4. For the first time the interlude, which has been firmly grounded in G major, takes us via a tonal
side-step into another key. An A-major semibreve introduces the pedal note upon which the whole of the next strophe is built. At ‘Horch, da tönt es leise, leise, aus dem Burgverliess empor’ the very appearance of the music on the page illustrates what is happening: pianissimo minims, swathed and phrased in airy ties, are suspended, hovering in mid-air, above bass octaves. This depicts, also in visual terms, the sound of the imprisoned king’s voice projected from deep in the castle dungeons (the foundations of which are the austere left-hand semibreves). The king’s song resounds in empty space, waiting to be heard. When the connection is made at last, the uncertainty of harmony (which has been clouded by the lingering doubt of a B flat major chord) resolves into an unequivocal A major. This chord is deliriously affirmed in arpeggios in both vocal line and piano, and opens out into the dominant seventh and a high G natural on ‘klingt an Blondels lauschend Ohr’. This widening of harmonic scope is an analogue for the listening ear, cocked and straining to catch every sound. When the king sings again, the sense of excitement at the discovery is underpinned by the continuing pedal which presses the music forward (Schumann also asks for an accelerando) towards the resolution of a D major chord. This point is reached at the end of an ecstatic ‘Suche treu, so findest du!’ which is set a fifth higher than before.

5, 6. As a means of continuing to turn the screw of tension, Schumann dispenses altogether with the piano interlude that separates all the other strophes. We have returned safely and firmly to the key of G major as the discovery of the king is affirmed. The composer directs that the music should be performed ever faster and louder, and there is a sense of general exultation. Only the ritardando for the familiar refrain of ‘Suche treu, so findest du!’ at the end of the verse signifies that the long search is over and Blondel’s task is done. The final strophe allows the narrator to tie up the loose ends of the story, more or less re-using the music of the first strophe. Seidl refers to the sorrow (‘Leid’) at home, as well as the joy (‘Freude’). Presumably the former reaction refers to Prince John and his allies who had hoped to be permanently free of Richard. Schumann adds a few decorative touches in the piano part – notably dotted left-hand rhythms to depict the courtly entourage which returns to Austria to ransom the king. A similar depiction of grandeur is to be heard in the postlude which departs from the simplicity of the piano’s usual ritornello to add a pair of regal flourishes, in dotted rhythm, to end the song. Although Blondels Lied is seldom heard in the concert hall, Schumann lavished considerable care and ingenuity in its composition, much of which is hardly apparent at first glance.
FRAUENLIEBE UND -LEBEN
July 1840; first published in July 1843 as Op 42

This is a cycle that every Lieder singer (soprano and mezzo that is, although the baritone Julius Stockhausen sang it in 1862) will be asked to perform. No one can deny that it is a work of enduring popularity. It happens that I first came across it thirty years ago at the same time as reading the newly-published feminist polemics of Germaine Greer. After having consulted the book of translations, this fledgling accompanist immediately decried the cycle for its clumsy and patronising depiction of female feelings and behaviour: surely only a male writer could depict a woman so lacking in spirit as to debase herself in front of a man, referring to herself (in the second song) as ‘niedre Magd’ – ‘lowly maid’? How bourgeois and complacent it was of poet and composer to devote songs to the engagement ring, to the wedding ceremony, to suckling the baby and so on! Later, I noticed to my surprise that the majority of female singers had fewer qualms about these things. For female singers, male competition does not enter the workplace; rivalry can only come, by its very nature, from other women (I can think of few other professions where this applies) and sisterhood, for its own sake, is not high on their list of priorities. Indeed, it was my experience that the majority of female singers tend to revel unashamedly in the emotions of Frauenliebe und -leben, although it must be admitted that when not artists of the first rank, this can reach cloying levels of sentimentality. This has always been the danger of the piece, and the trap for the performer.

It is sometimes the fate of works that are advanced for their time to be damned by later generations for not being radical enough. From the standpoint of Schumann’s time, the Chamisso cycle should be recognised and saluted as a remarkably forward-looking work, written by a man with an impeccable, and almost modern, attitude to human rights – indeed a man who supported the concept of female emancipation. On the work’s publication in 1831 (soon after the revolution in Paris which swept away the Bourbon monarchy and promised equality for all) the poet was greeted as the champion of women, and the work went into seventeen editions in as many years. Against the fashions of the time, Chamisso gave the role of the narrator to the woman, and she speaks for herself, in her own voice, from the beginning. She has the right to describe her feelings and, as shy as she is, she tells us why she finds the man attractive in the second song – his lips and eyes are as delectable as his gentle nature. In the sixth song she has already taken
over the reins of household management, and announces her pregnancy to the astounded husband who hears the news very much on her terms. In the next song she pities men for not being able to know the joys of motherhood – suckling the child is openly mentioned, and celebrated, which was far from usual for the time. By the time she reaches the final song (in Schumann’s cycle) she has developed into a formidable personality, capable of dealing with her bereavement in a way that convincingly includes anger as part of the range of emotions. In Chamisso’s closing poem (not set by Schumann, but here read by Juliane Banse) it is clear that the mother has brought up her daughter successfully without compromising her integrity and her belief in the power of love. It is little wonder that the work was a wild success with its women readers, and that Chamisso was proud enough of his cycle of poems to place it at the head of his collected works.

All of this still leaves open the question as to why the protagonist should be so tentative in the beginning, so star-struck and servile. And the answer here makes Chamisso’s achievement even more remarkable, because he is writing about that most difficult of relationships in nineteenth-century life, a love affair across the class- and wealth barriers. This is not a courtship of equals taken from the pages of a Jane Austen novel where the heroine is able to answer her suitors back with healthy aplomb. Instead we have a girl who refers to herself as lowly not because of her sex, but because the object of her affection appears to be completely out of her reach in terms of his social position. She is even prepared selflessly to bless, in the second song, the woman of higher birth who will make him a suitable wife. It seems inevitable that she should suffer with a broken heart while watching him build a life with someone from his own background.

Stefan Zweig in Die Welt von gestern describes how the Viennese rich imported domestic staff from country villages to provide sexual partners safe from disease for their sons. One feels that the abandoned maidservant in the famous Mörike poem Das verlassene Mägdlein is probably pregnant by the son of her employer. When Chamisso’s heroine refers to herself as a ‘Magd’ she could be referring to herself as a maidservant, below stairs, and within the same house as the object of her adoration. The first song suggests that she sees him daily, as if in a waking dream, which would fit the scenario of a domestic servant’s relationship with the son of the house. When she looks back on her former life in the fourth song (Du Ring an meinem Finger) she seems to have much in common with the poor governess Jane Eyre: ‘Alone I found myself in boundless desolation’, she says. It was common enough for the poor to be the sexual playthings of the rich,
but marriage was another matter. It is for this reason that our heroine can scarcely believe that he has chosen her as a bride, and that she claims that he has elevated and blessed here with his love. This does not refer to the elevation of a poor woman, *per se*, but to the triumph of love when a well-born young man insists on disregarding the social convention whereby he is allowed a mistress from the working-class, but not a wife. We are not told the social consequences of this marriage – we certainly hear nothing of his family. It is possible that he has been disinherited. This may account for the reference to her relatives (and not his) at the wedding (the fifth song), to the powerful sense of intimacy and emotional fragility on his part in the sixth, and to the feeling of her utter loneliness in the final song when she seems unsupported by anyone else on her husband’s death. Chamisso defied convention all his life, and it would make sense, in the context of his own sympathy for working-class characters (his poems are full of them) that this couple had done the same.

On the other hand one must beware of apologising for the different significance of marriage in another century. There is no doubt that the concept of duty and obedience to her husband would have been a natural part of Clara Wieck’s thinking, and also what Schumann would have expected as head of the house. The work was written in the same month as he made a down payment on a flat for his bride-to-be, and in the greatest expectation of the cosy marital bliss that is to be found depicted on some of these pages, a song cycle which takes place in the unique milieu of living-room and bedroom. Woven into this dream of cosy normality, however, we have fragments of Schumann’s own past which also played their part in his sympathy with the poems. Nine years older than Clara, the composer had already had his share of romantic adventures. In 1831 in Leipzig (as it happened, in the same year and town of these poems’ publication) Schumann had had an affair with a girl, poor and illiterate, who revered him and whose attitude to him could not have been far from the sentiments expressed in this cycle’s opening songs. He did not marry her, but perhaps, if he had resembled Chamisso’s wordless suitor and husband, he might have done so. The name of ‘Christel’ features fleetingly in Schumann’s diaries, but her ghost hovers through these pages side-by-side with the dominating presence who was the source of inspiration for so much music, the indomitable, the extraordinary, the far from servile Clara Wieck. It should also be noted that Schumann was not the first to set this cycle. That honour belonged to Carl Loewe in 1836.
(i) Seit ich ihn gesehen

Seit ich ihn gesehen,
Glaub ich blind zu sein;
Wo ich hin nur blicke,
Seh ich ihn allein;
Wie im wachen Traume
Schwebt sein Bild mir vor,
Taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel,
Heller nur empor.
Sonst ist licht- und farblos
Alles um mich her,
Nach der Schwestern Spiele
Nicht begehre ich mehr,
Möchte lieber weinen,
Still im Kämmerlein;
Seit ich ihn gesehen,
Glaub ich blind zu sein.

Since first seeing him,
I think I am blind,
Wherever I look,
Him only I see;
As in a waking dream
His image hovers before me,
Rising out of deepest darkness
Ever more brightly.
All else is dark and pale
Around me,
My sisters’ games
I no more long to share,
I would rather weep
Quietly in my room;
Since first seeing him,
I think I am blind.

The opening chords, *piano* and *mezzo staccato*, are shy and humble. This is perhaps something to do with the feeling of almost religious veneration engendered by the tonic-subdominant progression. Reverence for the nameless ‘ihn’ is instantly conveyed. It is astonishing that such a succession of chords (I - IV - V7) could be as potent as this, for in this scrap of melody we have the instantly recognisable beginning of one of the most celebrated of all lieder cycles. This accompaniment literally takes the singer by the hand and guides her through the song, gently shadowing the vocal line here, and anticipating it there; in every respect it offers support. This is the solicitude offered to someone in shock, someone who has been temporarily blinded, and can only move from one place to another with the guidance and the evidence of her own fingertips. Indeed, these carefully placed *mezzo staccato* chords imply someone tentatively *feeling* their way through the song.

The tempo marking of *Larghetto* (Schumann is seldom very helpful, or exact, in regard to tempo markings) can sometimes suggest a funereal tempo which makes the girl sound merely sanctimonious, and certainly not young. The singer (especially if the song is transposed to a lower key) has to beware a matronly heaviness to which this music can easily succumb if it is not kept on the move. It must seem to aspire to the light of a brighter star, and move forward as if pulled in that direction by an invisible force. In
musical terms it is a sarabande, and the pianist should not forget that a dance, however grave, is a thing of movement and progress. The piano provides certain moments of eloquent commentary: after the opening words – ‘Seit ich ihn gesehen’ – note the heartfelt chord, accented as if to emphasise a pang of emotion; after ‘blind zu sein’, the punctuation of a slightly tremulous and disorientated syncopation which speaks volumes for the girl’s state of mind, resigned and yet somehow expectant; the way the piano quits the singer’s own tessitura for the first time, leaving her to float ‘schwebt sein Bild mir vor’ with a new transparent clarity, the harmony, built on ambiguous sevenths, anchoring the phrase in the warmer reaches of the bass clef without bringing her down to earth.

And then the miracle of the song – the setting of ‘taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel heller, heller nur empor’ the musical and emotional scope of which seem suddenly, and unexpectedly, daring after the reticence of the opening. The word ‘tiefstem’ plunges a full seventh within a melisma obviously created to illustrate the adjective’s meaning, but the stirrings of the bass line, and the proliferation of suspensions in the piano part, like so many newly-developed emotional ties, suggest the simultaneous deepening of emotions which the girl has not known before. This is surely music for the growing-pains of the soul as it spreads its wings. The singer seems to mature before our very ears as she ponders a new and painful awakening. (Schumann makes this marvellous musical phrase fit the poet’s words by a repetition of ‘heller’.) The interrupted cadence on the last syllable (‘empor’) was apparently not in the manuscript’s first draft, but the sonorous bass F sharp which acts as an accented passing-note onto a G minor chord catches at the heart like few other moments: nothing of this magnitude can happen to someone without pain. The hymn-book music of the opening has not prepared her (or us) for a glimpse of heaven (as she sees him in waking dream), but this vision has been bought at the expense of glimpsing the darkest abyss plumbed by that low F sharp. The piano’s eloquent echo of the vocal line (musing on, and repeating, the melody of ‘heller, heller nur empor) is in a rich and mellifluous register of the piano as if happiness has been coloured and darkened by sadness. From the start, the impossibility of the relationship is built into this music of ‘irresolution and melancholy’ (in the words of Eric Sams).

The second strophe, an exact musical repeat of the first, and not always to the benefit of the word-setting, teaches us little more about the girl we have not gathered already. Provided the interpretation is not lachrymose or awash with self-indulgent rubato, she preserves her dignity and
poise. Shunning the games of her sisters (or perhaps the other young girls in service), and obviously unable to divulge her infatuation, she retires to her ‘Kämmerlein’ – the very small room that would have been assigned to her at the top of the house – and weeps. Only in the context of an impossible love does this make sense. As a youngster I remember despising Chamisso for depicting a woman in love incapable of anything but moping and weeping, but this girl is no milksop. She knows that what she longs for is out of the question, and dangerous. Thus her secret, and this intensely private music, both rapt and depressive, which conveys her dilemma as perfectly as her joy. The latter peeps out of the music here and there, despite itself.

Loewe’s 6/8 setting (also strophic) shares certain repetitive qualities suggestive of obsession and infatuation. It is well made in musical terms but his girl is quite straightforward (too much so for the words) and lacks the depths and equivocation of Schumann’s creation.

7 (ii) Er, der Herrlichste von allen

Er, der Herrlichste von allen,  He, the most wonderful of all,
   Wie so milde, wie so gut!      How gentle and how loving!
Holde Lippen, klares Auge, Sweet lips, bright eyes,
   Heller Sinn und fester Mut.     A clear mind and firm resolve!

So wie dort in blauer Tiefe, Just as there in the deep-blue distance
   Hell und herrlich, jener Stern,   That star gleams bright and brilliant,
Also er an meinem Himmel, So does he shine in my sky,
   Hell und herrlich, hehr und fern. Bright and brilliant, distant and sublime.

Wandle, wandle deine Bahnen, Wander, wander on your way,
   Nur betrachten deinen Schein, Just to gaze on your radiance,
Nur in Demut ihn betrachten, Just to gaze on in humility,
   Selig nur und traurig sein! To be but blissful and sad!

Höre nicht mein stilles Beten, Do not heed my silent prayer,
   Deinem Glücke nur geweiht; Uttered for your happiness alone,
Darfst mich niedre Magd nicht kennen, You shall never know me, lowly as I am,
   Hoher Stern der Herrlichkeit! You noble star of splendour.

Nur die Würdigste von allen Only the worthiest woman of all
   Darf beglücken deine Wahl, May your choice elate,
Und ich will die Hohe segnen, And I shall bless that exalted one
   Segnen viele tausendmal. Many thousands of times.

Will mich freuen dann und weinen, Then shall I rejoice and weep,
Selig, selig bin ich dann;
Sollte mir das Herz auch brechen,
Brich, O Herz, was liegt daran?

Blissful, blissful shall I be,
Even if my heart should break,
Break, O heart, what does it matter?

Of the songs in the cycle, this is the one which is most often to be heard as an excerpt and out of context; and it is certainly the song which has been most misunderstood by its interpreters. Although Schumann has taken care to mark the music ‘Innig, lebhaft’, this music can all too easily become, in the wrong hands, a battle-cry for an Amazon in pursuit of her prey. A song with a tune of this quality, and with such a stirring accompaniment, is too much fun for its own good. The repeated chords of the opening, despite the piano marking, tempt the enthusiastic accompanist to pound the keyboard. Thus encouraged, the trainee Valkyrie belts out phrases of dotted rhythms and diaphragm-shaking mordents that emerge as whoops of delight. In truth, until the third song, the girl has nothing to be delighted about, apart from the strength of her own feelings.

It is perhaps Schumann’s fault for having written a hit susceptible to amateur enthusiasm. But it is important to remember that the girl still inhabits a dream-world of impossible love where she can only fantasise about the man whom she finds so appealing. The key of E flat major follows naturally from the B flat major reverie of the previous song, and remains linked to that mood to a certain extent; the important word ‘Innig’ – heartfelt – is crucial to the conception. The music has a lively erotic side, certainly (hence the lively ‘Lebhaft’) – it is this which gives rise to the sinuously curving melody with its ecstatic rises and swooning falls, to the embellishments in the vocal line, and to the open-hearted generosity of the music’s broad sweep, but all these considerations are tempered by the pudeur of a girl who, in allowing herself to dream of the man’s beauty and goodness, realises that she can expect no reciprocation.

The task of musically describing the beloved, someone both masculine and gentle, is undertaken by a composer expert in differentiating Florestan from Eusebius. ‘Er, der Herrlichste von allen’ is set to a roving arpeggio culminating in an ascending phrase in dotted rhythms which betoken determination and virility (all within a piano dynamic, however, as he is seen through her eyes). This in turn is tempered by the softer and more emollient romanticism worthy of Eusebius: at ‘wie so milde, wie so gut’ the gentle turn on the second ‘wie’ emphasises exactly how fine he is, how poetic and gallant in an old-fashioned way. At ‘Holde Lippen’ the piano’s left hand (hitherto content to support the voice in phlegmatic octaves) enlivens the texture with echoing affirmation
of the vocal line, tiny flourishes in dotted rhythms which set the seal on her catalogue of admiration, as well as providing a tiny frisson of sensual excitement.

This moment of physicality is soon over, however, an avowal of sexual attraction which seems public but which is, in fact, still deeply private – the girl’s secret joy which brings her anguish in equal measure. The music of transition is a four-bar interlude where the piano music is derived from the melody of the opening. An arpeggio based on B flat 7 stretches heavenward for a moment (in response to ‘hehr und fern’) but, remembering its station, returns to the middle of the keyboard and that mood, combining happiness and dutiful resignation, which is often to be found in Schumann’s music. At the third strophe (‘Wandle, wandle deine Bahnen’) there is a new vocal melody, caressing and tender, and rising in impassioned sequences, addressed to the loved one as if face-to-face. The piano takes up the same tune and repeats it in canon, signifying that she will be content to follow her adored one at a respectful distance. At ‘nur in Demut’ (that word’s meaning – humility – is underlined by a sudden reversion to the piano dynamic) the pulsating quavers which have been in the background since the opening bars now, for the first time, are heard in both hands of the accompaniment. The effect is of a pounding pulse, a heart pulsating and overflowing with love – note the tiny fragment of melody which flowers in the right hand after ‘betrachten’. The words ‘selig nur und traurig sein!’ bring the vocal line to a cadence, aided by a ritardando. The elongated setting of ‘sein’ (always a challenge to the singer’s breath) and the change of harmony underneath it in the middle of the bar, convey the ambivalence of her feelings – in the changing harmonic colours we hear shades of both ‘selig’ and ‘traurig’.

‘Höre nicht mein stilles Beten’ (the poem’s fourth strophe) reverts to the melody of the opening, but with a crucial softening. Instead of an unadorned E flat major, the addition of a D flat changes the chord to the third inversion of E flat 7. In Blondels Lied the young minstrel strains to hear King Richard’s distant voice to the harmony of a dominant seventh; here the injunction not to listen similarly implies a song going for nothing, and resounding in the forlorn open spaces. The words ‘stilles Beten’ are also harmonised in gentler fashion in comparison to the determined plunging seventh of the opening at ‘der Herrlichste von allen’. On the words ‘darfst mich niedre Magd nicht kennen’ the melody takes an entirely new turn. When the girl refers to herself as a lowly maid, the performers are faced with the challenge of not making the music sound grimly triumphant (as has been the case in countless performances). The florid technical demands of
‘Hoher Stern der Herrlichkeit’, words which are set in a higher, star-like tessitura and are sung twice in almost operatic fashion, once again test the performers skill. We must never lose sight of the central character, but it is here, and in the following section, that the would-be Valkyrie is likely to emerge.

‘Nur die Würdigste von allen’ begins the section which is a hymn of praise to another woman, the imaginary well-born consort-to-be. It is here perhaps that Chamisso pushes his luck in depicting his heroine’s selflessness. Schumann gets carried away to the extent of giving the most passionate music (and highest note) to the girl’s blessing on ‘deine Wahl’ – the Other Woman in the girl’s imaginary scenario where her beloved will choose someone else. But this passage also contains many subtle touches; if the voice makes joyful sallies, as if putting a brave face on events, the piano’s drooping sighs (four of these – suspensions on falling seconds initiated by lachrymose minims) remind us of the emotional cost. It is an almost impossible task to capture musically the complexities of these emotions: words of opposite meaning such as ‘freuen’ und ‘weinen’ occur within a bar of each other; at one moment she declares herself joyful, at the next she tells us that her heart is breaking. Her struggle is that of a good German girl attempting to do the right thing, struggling to remember that true love chooses the beloved’s good, whereever that may lie. This self-abnegation is extremely difficult for her, as for anyone, and the composer provides us with important clues. The whole of the section remains in a shy piano dynamic, yet in ignoring this some performers make the high notes an excuse for something loud and fulsome. The words ‘viele tausendmal’ are set in a type of musical parenthesis, and the harmonies suggest rueful emotion – even after blessing the rival thousands of times, she will not be able to make herself truly rejoice; the ambivalence of this is also regularly ignored. How many times have we heard the ‘freuen’ delivered with a dazzling smile, and ‘selig, selig bin ich dann’ as if in an ecstasy of happiness? Of course this makes the heartbreak of ‘brich, O Herz, was liegt daran?’ (a remarkably apt setting of a tearful question, with just the right interrogative lift at the end of the sentence) seem insincere or perfunctory.

Chamisso’s poem actually ends here, and Loewe follows suit and ends his song with these words. As a result, the opening words of the next poem then make perfect sense when the girl is astounded to discover that she is loved in return. But Schumann cannot resist a return to the words and music of the opening. After ‘was liegt daran?’, three exquisite bars of interlude lovingly explore all three piano registers – high, low and middle – employing the familiar dotted-rhythm motto as if she were allowing herself to think of ‘Er, der Herrlichste von allen’ in different
lights and contexts, as well as herself in relationship to him. After this, the concluding verse is often performed with redoubled assurance and power, as if clinching the deal (sadly, there has been no ‘deal’ in the first place), brushing up the pieces of broken heart with no difficulty, and gleefully singing the praises of eyes and lips within seconds of the music of heartbreak. Unless handled carefully, this makes complete nonsense of what has gone before, as well as rendering inexplicable the girl’s surprise in the next song that she is the chosen one.

A closer look at the music shows that Schumann intended a mood which makes the girl’s disbelief at the beginning of Ich kann’s nicht fassen both believable and touching. When we hear ‘Er, der herrlichste von allen’ sung for the last time, Schumann sets the phrase a third lower than at the beginning. Sadly, this encourages many a singer to use a booming chest register to risible effect. But the music is meant to sound less, not more, certain. The brightness of E flat major has been replaced by C major with the chastening addition of a B flat, the ambiguous seventh chord. Indeed, the whole of this section depicts a burst bubble, a fantasy that she realises she has to let go. The tempo is the same, but the colour has changed completely. She bids her farewell to the dream with a lingering and crestfallen repeat of the music; she lingers over ‘wie so milde, wie so gut’ in the ritardando as if to emphasise that these qualities are even more meaningful to her than his physical attributes.

The postlude (initiated by those sighing suspensions in seconds from the central section) is a beautiful inspiration: in the final four bars, quavers, interwoven in close imitative counterpoint, stretch to the heights of the keyboard and gradually dissolve, like a daydream, as the music meanders, gently resigned, down the stave. Various strands of fantasy unravel one by one and leave a single thread of wistful feeling in the left hand to usher in the final cadence. If this is performed with humility and in a spirit of selfless valediction, the news that will change her life will come as a real surprise.

8 (iii) Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben

Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben,  I cannot grasp it, believe it,
Es hat ein Traum mich berückt; A dream has beguiled me;
Wie hätt er doch unter allen How could he, of all men,
Mich Arme erhöht und beglückt? Have exalted and favoured poor me?

Mir war’s, er habe gesprochen: He said, I thought,
“Ich bin auf ewig dein,” ‘I am yours forever,’
Mir war’s – ich träume noch immer,       I was, I thought, still dreaming,
   Es kann ja nimmer so sein.         After all, it can never be.

O lass im Traume mich sterben,       O let me, dreaming, die,
   Gewieget an seiner Brust,         Cradled on his breast;
   Den seligen Tod mich schlürfen    Let me savour blissful death
   In Tränen unendlicher Lust.      In tears of endless joy.

For the first time in the cycle a forte dynamic appears and, with it, the marking ‘Mit Leidenschaft’ – passionately. This song has to crown ‘Er, der herrlichste von allen’, not be dwarfed by it. The man has said to her ‘I am yours forever’, and it is this astonishing news which marks the turning point in the girl’s life, and her pathway to womanhood. In the skipping rhythm we hear a trace of the ‘Schwester Spiele’, the sisterly games referred to in the first song (no longer blinded by love, she has rediscovered her energy); but grafted on to this girlish childhood Bewegung, similar to that in the Eichendorff song Die Stille, we hear develop, before our very ears, a note of maturity and depth of emotional response that is founded on reality, not fairytale. The short, sharp shock of the opening is meant to bring us back to the real world after some minutes of daydreaming. Loewe chooses a 6/8 rhythm and the key of A major to relate this turn of events in amiable fashion, but Schumann is the greater lieder composer because he is armed with greater imagination and psychological understanding. She tells us of this great event breathlessly as if surprised, and not a little frightened. But the mood of the piece changes bar by bar, and is shot through with as many colours as a piece of finely-woven cloth under changing light. There is so much to consider, she seems to be saying, so many things to think about now that everything has changed.

Thus we hear minor-key panic in the opening two lines of the poem, for this revelation has been a shock to the system. The staccato of the accompaniment has the crispness of a sharp intake of breath. Imagine, too, the short, sharp hand-clasping movements necessary if one were attempting to catch hold of or grasp (‘fassen’) a bird in flight. The fingers would make a similarly short, staccato sound. In a sense those chords are played in the futile hope of catching a thought as elusive and incomprehensible as that man loving this woman. The passing possibility of deception (soon discounted) is illustrated by the diminished-seventh chord on ‘berückt’. And then a touch of joyful defiance, even cockiness, for the vocal grace note on ‘unter allen’ signifies a spring in her step, and that she has scotched the female competition. She has only had phantom
rivals of her own imagining, but she has vanquished them nevertheless. She can still refer to herself as ‘mich Arme’ but the act of raising her up to a different station occasions a lift of a fourth in the vocal line (at ‘erhöht’); the act of blessing her, a plunge of a fifth as if laying her safely to rest in the safety of home key.

Schumann now creates the equivalent of a musical oasis, a space specially prepared (Etwas langsamer) within the body of the music to house a sacred memory. The piano music is full of long notes and ties (as in Seit ich ihn gesehen at ‘taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel’). Just as visions of the beloved have appeared to float before her in disembodied fashion, so does his voice when recalled and imitated. But she is not afraid to re-live the moment of his confession of love. In music that approaches the informality and intimacy of recitative, she recounts what he has said to her, although she has been so moved by it that she can scarcely trust her ears or her memory. But with this news assimilated, she begins to blossom, and this adds a touch of vocal expansiveness and confidence (at ‘es kann ja nimmer so sein’) even as she protests that what is happening cannot be true. It is the music which sets our mind at rest and settles her doubts; these major-key harmonies seem to be affirming ‘Yes it can’.

Chamisso’s third (and last) verse talks of a sort of pre-Wagnerian Liebestod (‘O lass im Traume mich sterben’), but this passionately expressed sentiment is unashamedly voiced in the major key. In her determination to die ‘gewieget an seiner Brust’ we sense an unmistakable will-power born of erotic passion. We have glimpsed this in Er, der Herrlichste von allen, but here she speaks with a newly-won frankness. The words ‘In Tränen unendliecher Lust’ (marked by the composer ‘Adagio’) would have made a mawkish close to the song (as they do in Loewe). In order to show that the girl has been carried away into hyperbole by the strength of her emotion, Schumann alleviates the embarrassment of the imagery and cleverly throws away these lines as soon as he sets them. He does this by eliding the word ‘Lust’ with the return of the faster tempo, and the short, sharp chords of the opening.

The song’s first fifteen bars (with upbeat) are now repeated. These are followed by an exceptionally effective little interlude for piano which suggests, in its gently rocking rhythm, a game of sorts – a sort of internalised ‘he loves me, he loves me not’. The pianist’s little finger stretches up to an F at the summit of the musical phrase, and four bars later up to an A flat. Even this is not high enough to grasp and encompass the amazing fact of being loved as one would
have dreamed. The voice enters with yet another (and final) ‘Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben’ and underneath this last word the pianist launches himself up to a high C which at last seems to take in, and grasp, the enormous significance of the man’s pronouncement. The effort involved in this mental adjustment is reflected in the stretch and distance it represents for the pianist’s right hand. After the harmonic crunch on ‘es hat’, the succession of accompanying chords beneath ‘ein Traum mich berückt’ seem to resolve progressively, each bar presenting a less murky picture of the truth, as if clouds were clearing from the sky. ‘Berückt’ is now no longer a verb to fear: each new bar moves nearer clarity and peace. Three bars from the end a plagal cadence (F major - C major) leads to the broad and hushed arpeggio in the accompaniment with which all doubt is at last laid to rest.

9 (iv) Du Ring an meinem Finger

Du Ring an meinem Finger, You ring on my finger,
  Mein goldenes Ringelein, My golden little ring,
  Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen, I press you devoutly to my lips,
  Dich fromm an das Herze mein. To my heart.

Ich hatt ihn ausgeträumet, I had finished dreaming
  Der Kindheit friedlich schönen Traum, Childhood’s peaceful dream,
  Ich fand allein mich, verloren I found myself alone, forlorn
  Im öden, unendlichen Raum. In boundless desolation.

Du Ring an meinem Finger You ring on my finger,
  Da hast du mich erst belehrt, You first taught me,
  Hast meinem Blick erschlossen Opened my eyes
  Des Lebens unendlichen, tiefen Wert. To life’s deep eternal worth.

Ich will ihm dienen, ihm leben, I shall serve him, live for him,
  Ihm angehören ganz, Belong to him wholly,
  Hin selber mich geben und finden Yield to him and find
  Verklärt mich in seinem Glanz. Myself transfigured in his light.

Du Ring an meinem Finger You ring on my finger,
  Mein goldenes Ringelein, My golden little ring,
  Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen, I press you devoutly to my lips,
  Dich fromm an das Herze mein. To my heart.

Hugo Wolf liked this song enough to model his *Verborgenheit* on its confessional mood, its E flat major tonality, its sinuous accompaniment with its open fifths in the left hand, and its ABA
structure. But *Du Ring an meinem Finger* is perhaps the song that has caused the most opprobrium to be heaped on this cycle. There is something about one’s own engagement ring (like one’s own baby) which engenders a flood of sentiment which seems ridiculous when viewed from outside the perimeter of the happy events. This was the song which Kathleen Ferrier sang, accompanied by Bruno Walter, during which she contemplated an imaginary ring on her finger, and for which she was chastised in the press by Neville Cardus. Perhaps this great artist felt she needed to do something to enliven the proceedings, for it is a static moment in the cycle where reflection gives rise to some unfashionable eulogies, by today’s standards at least. Yet the tone of the correspondence between Robert and Clara Schumann fits this song perfectly: Clara’s devotion and determination to love, obey and serve her husband are made clear time and again. If a strong-minded, highly educated and talented woman should feel comfortable with the concept of ‘ihm dienen, ihm leben, ihm angehören ganz’ (as the song has it) it is little wonder that these words struck a chord with so many women of the time who nevertheless regarded Chamisso as a reforming and modernising writer.

We return to the key of E flat, and it was clearly part of Schumann’s plan for this cycle that the second and fourth songs, separated by a C minor scherzo, should be mirror images of each other – *Er, der Herrlichste von allen* more youthful and passionate, *Du Ring an meinem Finger* imbued with a new sense of maturity and responsibility. This deepening of emotion is even reflected in the tessitura: parts of the cycle lie uncomfortably low for soprano, but *Du Ring an meinem Finger*, in its original key of E flat, hugs the lower reaches of the stave, suggesting the timbre of a mezzo soprano. This makes the two songs seem very different, but Eric Sams (in *The Songs of Robert Schumann*) convincingly demonstrates how closely they are related in terms of similar turns of phrase. It is as if Schumann has adapted the material of the second song in order to make the fourth; indeed, one might use the metaphor of refashioning or adapting an item of old jewellery to make it fit, and fit for, the new bride.

And we are even allowed to see this ring in the song’s opening. The left-hand semibreves in the first bar of the accompaniment proudly display two opulent open circles of sound to fit the outstretched hand. (Hugo Wolf puns on the word ‘Ring’ in the same visual way at the end of his mighty *Grenzen der Menschheit.*) That image occurs only once, at the very beginning. After this, the song commences as if accompanied by a parlour harmonium of modest compass; it is the paradigm of domesticity, the vocal line following the accompaniment dutifully, the piano writing
humble and reflective, though full of feeling. Schumann has managed to write into the very fabric of this song his concept of, and longing for, safe domestic bliss. The girl feels herself rescued from her past when she existed ‘im öden unendlichen Raum’. Loneliness has been swept away by prospects of a shared life. The music clings and adheres, the physical proximity of voice and piano a metaphor for closeness and warmth. The courtship chamber is cosily heated, and there is many an embrace; but the proprieties are at first strictly observed. Then things get out of hand: the quickening music in the fourth verse (marked ‘nach und nach rascher’) clothes those controversial words of marital duty with harmonic progressions which suggest the quickening pulse of sexual excitement. It seems that serving and belonging, as well as being transfigured, are all exciting pastimes – even contemplating them makes the pulses race. But then, the rationalisation of desire as wifely duty is what one would expect of a respectable nineteenth-century fiancée. In Helft mir, ihr Schwestern, the bride-to-be tells of the moments of sexual impatience on the part of her beloved who can scarcely wait for the wedding day. Schumann himself was impatient for Clara in the same way.

Schumann, as is often his practice in this cycle, chooses to repeat the poem’s first verse. The return to the contemplation of the ring from the great climactic rise and fall of the song’s middle section is achieved with scarcely a pause for breath. One has the feeling that the woman (and the music) make the greatest effort to pull themselves together before things go too far. This music is, on the whole, so successful in depicting Germanic respectability that it seems an embodiment of the Biedermeier virtues almost to the point of parody.

Despite this, it deserves to be stripped of its varnish, the accretions of decades of sloppy self-indulgent performances, and looked at afresh. It contains countless tiny felicities, above all in the response to words. It is Schumann’s genius to be able to fashion a vocal line where the rise and fall of the melody, and the stretches between syllables, words and ideas seem both inevitable and revelatory. For a person with little vocal background in his formative years (how unlike Schubert he was in this regard) he has a remarkably sensuous response to the luscious ebb and flow of a phrase as if it were a living thing with a will of its own. Thus the notes of this song’s opening phrase rise and fall in alternation, but the climactic point of the phrase is the lowest note – ‘Finger’. In this depth of tessitura we feel how deeply she has responded to this change in her life, and the withdrawal into privacy suggested by the shape of the phrase makes us the
privileged viewers of something shown only to close friends. This is but one example of Schumann’s husbandry of words: he lovingly nourishes them, fills them out, transfigures them. To do this, he provides a blueprint for a flow of sound where breath unites with intelligence. But he also understands the visceral miracle at the heart of singing as the vocal chords cry out with the pain of what it is to be human. One has to love the voice to write for it; perhaps one has to love the singer too. And to write something for and about someone in love (as in this song) all the above apply. The postlude is one of the cycle’s best; like the celebrated Nachspiel of Widmung we are privy to the composer’s own feelings of veneration for the bride-to-be. At the same time the music’s gentle repetitions perfectly convey the dreamy, aimless contemplations of the woman’s present love and future happiness.

10 (v) Helft mir, ihr Schwestern

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,  
Freundlich mich schmücken,  
Dient der Glücklichen heute mir,  
Windet geschäftig  
Mir um die Stirne  
Noch der blühenden Myrte Zier.

Als ich befriedigt,  
Freudigen Herzens,  
Sonst dem Geliebten im Arme lag,  
Immer noch rief er,  
Sehnsucht im Herzen,  
Ungeduldig den heutigen Tag.

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,  
Helft mir verscheuchen  
Eine törliche Bangigkeit,  
Dass ich mit klarem  
Aug ihn empfange,  
Ihn, die Quelle der Freudigkeit.

Bist, mein Geliebter,  
Du mir erschienen,  
Giebst du mir, Sonne, deinen Schein?

Help me, my sisters,  
With my bridal attire,  
Serve me today in my joy,  
Busily braid  
About my brow  
The wreath of blossoming myrtle.

When with contentment  
And joy in my heart  
I lay in my beloved’s arms,  
He still called,  
With longing heart,  
Impatiently for this day.

Help me, my sisters,  
Help me banish  
A foolish fearfulness;  
So that I with bright eyes  
May receive him,  
The source of all my joy.

Have you, my love,  
Really entered my life,  
Do you, O sun, give me your glow?
Lass mich in Andacht,  
Lass mich in Demut,  
Lass mich verneigen dem Herren mein.  
Streuet ihm, Schwestern,  
Streuet ihm Blumen,  
Bringet ihm knospende Rosen dar,  
Aber euch, Schwestern,  
Grüss ich mit Wehmut,  
Freudig scheidend aus eurer Schar.  
Let me in reverence,  
Let me in humility  
Bow before my lord.  
Scatter flowers, O sisters,  
Scatter flowers before him,  
Bring him budding roses.  
But you, sisters,  
I greet with sadness,  
As I joyfully take leave of you.

This is the most public of the songs in the cycle, and its change of mood and tempo come as a relief after four songs of a more private nature. In *Widmung* (the first song in the *Myrthen* cycle) Robert Schumann had declared his love for Clara Wieck to the world; here the young husband and wife-to-be have come to declare their love in a wedding ceremony before God. So it is little surprise that these two songs, both concerned with an important occasion and consecration of marriage, should have similar accompaniments which bustle with pianistic fanfares that suggest pomp and ceremony. The result is both joyful and serious, celebratory and full of the deepest emotion.

The key is B flat major and, in coming full circle, it is the culmination of what might be termed a cycle-within-a-cycle of the first five songs that has progressed in the following way: B flat - E flat - C minor - E flat - B flat. The tempo marking is C, *Ziemlich schnell*. Sometimes one hears the song really fast – one in a bar – with the singer encompassing four bars in one breath. This whirlwind approach is not convincing; if the composer had wanted an *alla breve* tempo he would have asked for it. This is no shotgun wedding, and the tempo of the opening should match that of the march at the close of the song (still a brisk four-in-a-bar, nevertheless). Only then are we able to hear, and enjoy, details that Schumann has included in the music and which can easily be lost in the scramble to the altar. In the opening lines of the song there are simply too many syllables crammed into the lines to gabble them; the poet has deliberately created this word-music, rich in explosive consonants and breathless in metre, to suggest the sound of excited female chatter as the bride dresses for the ceremony. The finishing touch is the garland of myrtle, the German symbol of marriage, which bedecks her brow. Like all great song composers, Schumann has chosen a motif for the accompaniment which seems appropriate for a variety of images: lighthearted impatience certainly, also girlish high spirits; but with the words ‘Windet geschäftig / Mir um die Stirne’ we hear that the act of winding a garland around her forehead seems equally
appropriate for the *Bewegung* of music which also seems to be going around in circles.

At the beginning of the second verse the vocal line proceeds as if this were a strophic song, but the piano writing changes: quavers continue in the middle voices while the outer settle into longer sustained notes. At ‘sonst dem Geliebten im Arme lag’ there is a line of syncopated quavers jangling in the tenor line and marked *sforzato*. Once again various interpretations of this are possible – these pulsating left-hand quavers could betoken the lover’s panting impatience. Taken together, however, these pianistic devices suggest a tintinnabulation of pealing bells, some in slower rhythm, and others more agitated. (If we choose, we can hear church bells a-ringing, calling the congregation to the ceremony, from the very beginning of the song – the peal of the bell on the first beat, the remaining quavers reverberating within its nimbus). The third strophe depicts the maidenly trepidation at what lies ahead on the wedding night; it is typical of Chamisso that he should broach this subject from the woman’s point of view (it is not impossible that she was, as were many of this poem’s readers, ill-informed of what to expect). Schumann chooses not to rise to the bait and make too much of it. The desire to receive her beloved conquers all uncertainty, and the music for this strophe is an exact repeat of the first.

In the fourth strophe we hear a new colour, a moment of introspection and, musically, a return to the world of *Er, der Herrlichste von allen*. Mezzo staccato quavers reintroduce, and gently propel, a vocal line which is radiant with expectant joy, but this time it is not a daydream. The strength of the left-hand minims underpinning these female flutterings remind us of the man’s reliability, and the turn on ‘deinen Schein’ of his gallantry. But there is a new confidence and assurance about *her* reactions: the settings of ‘Andacht’ and ‘Demut’ (reverence and humility) rise confidently up the stave rather than wilt submissively (compare the way ‘Demut’ bends meekly in on itself with a subito *piano* in *Er, der Herrlichste von allen*). The setting of the verb ‘verneigen’ reaches out to one of the highest note of the song in direct contradiction of its meaning; it no longer occurs to her to bend the knee. He is no longer the unattainable ideal, he is an equal partner in a relationship where one senses she will have much to say. Loewe’s setting of this poem is one of the best and most imaginative of his cycle, but he sets these words in a more obvious manner – within a *ritardando* and with descending phrases that suggest abasement. There is a feeling of hard-won triumph over adversity in Schumann’s setting of the last word of the verse (‘mein’) which lasts six beats and which is tied over into the beginning of the song’s final verse. Underneath the tenacious radiance of the voice we hear, once again, the ceremonial motif of the opening accompaniment.
The final strophe begins as before. Only at ‘Aber euch, Schwestern, grüss ich mit Wehmut’ is there a remarkable sideways shift into the key of G flat major, the tonic of B flat becoming the third of the new key. This two-bar excursion is an unexpected and masterful interpolation, a vivid depiction of intimacy and tender regret which the composer requires to be sung within a ritardando. It catches exactly the right scale of sadness – not nearly enough to make our heroine have serious regrets on her joyous day, but enough to make her linger a moment with a smile and a hug for her beloved sisters, and to kiss her girlhood goodbye. This is Schumann at his most poetic and imaginative – one may also say at his most considerate, for who can deny that throughout this cycle there are many signs of the composer’s own gentlemanly kindness? The recapturing of the main tempo at ‘freudig scheidend aus eurer Schar’ shows her ultimate joy and determination despite any previous trepidation. And then there is the wedding march. One can almost be certain that the composer had the music from Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in mind. After all, the whole cycle is a Mendelssohnian work in terms of its Leipzig-based domesticity. Schumann views the wedding ceremony from the vantage point of the younger girls left behind at the back of the church. The ceremonial procession moves away from him (and us) in a long diminuendo. The ceremonial strains become thinner and less audible.

The end of this song is neither triumphant nor ebullient. There is no ritardando, but the piano ends on a first inversion of a B flat major chord which leaves the future open to question. In actual fact that bass note of D, the mediant of B flat major but also the dominant of G major, is the harmonic key to what will happen in the couple’s new phase of life. For the first time we are moving house tonally, and domestic happiness is to be depicted in sharp, rather than flat, keys.

### (vi) Süßer Freund, du blickest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Süßer Freund, du blickest</th>
<th>Sweet friend, you look</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mich verwundert an,</td>
<td>At me in wonder,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannst es nicht begreifen,</td>
<td>You cannot understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie ich weinen kann;</td>
<td>How I can weep;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lass der feuchten Perlen</td>
<td>Let the unfamiliar beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungewohnte Zier</td>
<td>Of these moist pearls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freudighell erzittern</td>
<td>Tremble joyfully bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dem Auge mir.</td>
<td>In my eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie so bang mein Busen,</td>
<td>How anxious my heart is,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie so wonnevoll!</td>
<td>How full of bliss!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wüsst ich nur mit Worten,</td>
<td>If only I knew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46
This song deals with a subject which was considered too delicate for open discussion in nineteenth-century life. This *pudeur* even affected Chamisso who does not allow his heroine to announce her news in a straightforward manner in the body of the poem. The fact is that the young bride has recently discovered that she is pregnant. We must imagine that her husband has discovered her weeping for happiness. Concerned, as ever, for her well-being, he cannot understand why. ‘What is wrong?’, he says, – ‘What is the matter? You don’t seem to be upset; indeed, you are smiling through the tears. Why, then, are you crying?’

It is here that the music begins. As if in answer to these bewildered but loving questions, the song opens up like a flower, petal by exquisite petal. In the first bar, the piano’s right hand alone on a third – D and F sharp. This chord has emerged from the pivotal harmony (on D and B flat) at the end of the last song, and will lead us away from the flat keys of the songs of courtship and marriage ceremony. The right hand thumb slides, via C sharp, down to a C natural and then a D7
chord underpinned, in the second bar, by an open fifth in the left hand – G and D. In this state of blissful suspension the voice enters on ‘Süsser’, a beautiful and soothing word which resolves on to ‘Freund’ as the harmony itself resolves into G major. In this locking of harmonies, like a glance which seeks, then receives, reassurance, Schumann has found a wonderful tonal analogue for complicity – the interrogatory of love, the wordless communication of partners who only have eyes for each other. Momentary angst is soothed as soon as various questions, posed by the absence of the wavering tonic, are answered by its reappearance. In this way there is continual tension and relaxation in this opening section: new doubts are countered and dissolved by the husband’s support, moment of fear at what lies ahead in the pregnancy are counterpointed with the serenity and peace of her emotional security.

This is the only song in the cycle which features the man’s physical presence, and Schumann makes the most of it. The husband is denied a singing voice in the proceedings but the switch of the piano writing to the bass clef after ‘verwundert an’ establishes his place in the dialogue. Throughout the song’s first two strophes the opening motif is repeated in treble and bass clefs in alternation, the lower version in the cello register registering masculine support and encouragement, a gentle squeeze of the hand, as if to help the woman find the words she is seeking. He still does not realise that he is to be a father. This music is a remarkable mixture of recitative and arioso, half melody and half speech, and it perfectly conveys the intimacy of bedroom confidences. The mezzo staccato crotchets under ‘ungewohnte Zier’ are teardrops in the best Schubertian tradition. In the second strophe, under ‘hier an meiner Brust’, they seem to underline the considerate gentleness of a man who embraces his wife, uncertain of what ails her, with concern rather than passion. The setting of ‘will in’s Ohr dir flüstern alle meine Lust’ is particularly affecting with the highest note of the song so far reserved for ‘flüstern’; well sung, this tiny excursion upwards is a marvel of intimacy, with just a hint of smiling, even teasing, pleasure in the forthcoming revelation.

The interlude is a mighty challenge for the pianist, for it contains the words that the poet was too delicate to put into the mouth of the mother-to-be. It can easily go for nothing, merely a bridge passage giving the woman time to whisper the happy tidings. But Schumann meant it to be more than that. As it moves in sequences upwards through the stave, this is music for a dawning realisation. We do not hear her words, but we hear his reaction to them. The unrealistic hairpin
markings on the minim chords, first on D7, then on G7, culminating in an ecstatic semibreve on the second inversion of G7 (with a similarly impossible request for a crescendo and diminuendo within that one held chord), imply that the composer invested each of these progressions with mounting significance: in this dumb show, disbelief yields to the wide-eyed assimilation of the news, followed by a joyful embrace of gratitude. One would need an accompaniment of strings to realise fully the composer’s musical intentions for these swells of emotion.

‘Now do you understand my emotion?’ she says. And the music moves into a duet where the husband’s interjections are represented by sighing phrases of cello-like melody which are given over to the pianist’s left hand. The woman’s sentence is broken up as if she succumbs to tears of emotion between phrases; the man’s soothing words, or gestures, dovetail with the various fragments of her aria. Now that he knows the reason for her feelings, she can allow herself to weep openly. The music has moved into C major and the plagal implications of the modulation are ideally suited to what seems to be the couple’s holy moment. The setting of ‘du geliebter, geliebter Mann?’ is a marvel of tenderness; this moment, when both of the pianist’s hands come together in palpitating quavers, recalls the mixed emotion of ‘Selig nur und traurig sein’ in the cycle’s second song.

There now follows something of a set-piece aria, a song-within-a-song where she establishes, once and for all, her new-found strength; in pressing him ever closer to her breast, she is offering protection and solace as much as requiring it for herself. The composer calls for the music to move faster (Lebhafter), and the pianist begins to sing his heart out with a familiar melody. One can usually trust this composer to find an apposite musical quote from his pantheon of musical allusions, but the sixth song of Beethoven’s An die ferne Geliebte seems, at first, a curious choice. Schumann had already reworked the melody to memorable effect at the end of the first movement of his C major Fantasy Op 17 – on that occasion also in C major. (It seems likely that Schumann knew the song cycle in its printed transposition of C major rather than the original key of E flat.) ‘Nimm sie hin denn diese Lieder’ says the composer (Schumann as well as Beethoven) – ‘accept these songs’ – everything that I create is yours and, because you are my muse, everything that I write has come to life through you. (Hugo Wolf said much the same to Melanie Köchert about his songs). Süsser Freund is a song about another sort of shared creation where the singer is neither composer nor poet but the creator-mother, the composer of a new human being; the father is her
muse – as if she might sing to him ‘Nimm es hinn denn, dieses Kind’. The child is her masterpiece, and it is her gift to him. Empowered by nature, her aptitude for her new task grows mightily: at ‘dass ich fest and fester nur dich drücken mag’ the music reaches new levels of confidence and elation.

A short bridge passage leads back to the poem’s last strophe, and plans for the future. The music is that of the opening once again – here earnestly seeking approval and agreement for all the choices and decisions that have to be made together. The child’s cradle will stand by the bed. Either they are not a rich couple, or this child is to be brought up in the modern manner, near to its mother and not in a distant nursery. The woman cannot wait for the day until her dream will be realised – a child that will look back at her with the face of its father. The postlude is typical of Schumann who, at moments like these, can be counted on to provide a moment of magic. It is fashioned from materials already used, and is reminiscent of the music with which the expectant mother broke the news to her husband, with the addition of a marvellous Adagio bar of dreamy suspensions which lingers in the mood of rapt tenderness and expectation. Schumann seems to have been especially touched by the words ‘dein Bildnis’ which he, not Chamisso, repeats. This has the effect of emphasising that, however much she is taken by the idea of a child, the beauty of her man still lies at the centre of her dream. (The newly-married Schumann, like most husbands, was not keen to be displaced too soon by children.) It is probably too fanciful to suggest that the composer has here imagined the moment following childbirth when she wakes to greet the new child, sleepily affirming, as she does so, that it is indeed her husband’s living image … ‘dein Bildnis’. Such is the nature of the Lied that it is, like childbirth, full of contractions. As in a film, one can, at will, speed up or edit the action, flash back or fast-forward. If childbirth itself makes unsuitable viewing, the child’s first embrace by its mother makes a most touching vignette.

(vii) An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust

An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust,  On my heart, at my breast,
Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust! You my delight, my joy!
Das Glück ist die Liebe, die Lieb ist das Glück, Happiness is love, love is happiness,
Ich hab’s gesagt und nehm’s nicht zurück. I’ve always said and say so still.
Hab überschwenglich mich geschätzt, I thought myself rapturous,
Bin überglücklich aber jetzt. But now am delirious with joy.
Nur die da säugt, nur die da liebt Only she who suckles, only she who loves
Das Kind, dem sie die Nahrung giebt; The child that she nourishes;
Nur eine Mutter weiß allein
Was lieben heißt und glücklich sein.

O, wie bedaurl’ ich doch den Mann,
Der Mutterglück nicht fühlen kann!

Du lieber, lieber Engel, du
Du schaust mich an und lächelst dazu!

An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust,
Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust!

Only a mother knows
What it means to love and be happy.

Ah, how I pity the man
Who cannot feel a mother’s bliss!

You dear, dear angel, you,
You look at me and you smile!

On my heart, at my breast,
You my delight, my joy!

Two chords (A7 in first inversion), the first a loud knock, the second more diffident, open the double doors of the bedchamber and lead us into the key of D major. We encounter the intimacy of a domestic scene unique in Lieder – the sight of a mother nursing and suckling her child. If Chamisso has been reticent about allowing his heroine to announce her pregnancy in so many words, he is unashamed to have her describe the joy and satisfaction of this most feminine of tasks. In the South Seas the poet would have seen, and rejoiced in, the open and unselfconscious breast-feeding of children. Until relatively recently, even in our own century, it was considered something very private, not to be done in public; at one time, many a ‘refined’ singer would have thought twice about including the cycle in her recital programmes because of the phrase ‘Nur die da säugt’. This is good to remember if we now patronise this work for being hopelessly old-fashioned. The poem is set by Schumann with charm and sensitivity; but it is surely because men (as the young mother herself is quick to point out), even the empathetic Chamisso, had not experienced these emotions for themselves. It is perhaps for this reason that this song makes a pretty picture rather than something deeper. ‘The verse offers no sustenance to the composer’ as Eric Sams puts it, and Chamisso, abreast of all recent developments in botany, can pay only lip service to something as age-old as motherhood. He chooses a versifying style of deliberate simplification – rhyming couplets. This suggests baby-talk, and hardly encourages deeper thoughts on motherhood.

In musical terms everything is lighter and airier than what has gone before, a necessary foil for the profundities of *Süsser Freund*. The tone of the music is set by the marking ‘Fröhlich’ (cheerful), but the word ‘Innig’ (heartfelt – a key expression for the interpretation of the whole of this cycle) tempers the mood of ebullience, and it has proved a necessary warning for performers. I have heard this song many times at breakneck speed, or even sore-nipple tempo; if someone
attempts to suckle a child at the same time as moving it from side to side in rollicking fashion, accidents are bound to happen. In any case, Schumann specifically asks for three tempi in this music, each slightly faster than the one before. It is safer to begin with the *Bewegung* of a *Wiegenlied*, two rocking motions per bar, where the semiquavers fill up the musical texture and flow as gently and reliably as mother’s milk. An interesting feature of the accompaniment is the longer notes sustained by the little finger of the left hand. These underpin the vocal line, singing through the flutterings of the more transient semiquavers, and they add lustre to this little folksong melody, the chief virtue of which is the strength of the two-part writing.

There are four musical verses, each using a pair of rhyming couplets. Each of these verses comprises a melody of eight bars, the first four of which – a jingle-like tune that suggests a skipping song – remain the same for each strophe. Or nearly the same. At ‘aber jetzt’ (at the end of the third couplet and in the middle of the second musical verse) a new colour is introduced (as if in parentheses, and confidentially, a woman’s discretion in deference to men’s egos) by a tiny shift of direction, via a C natural, on the word ‘aber’. This introduces a modulation into G major, and the accompaniment moves an octave into the higher reaches of the keyboard. As she talks of something exclusively female, and exclusively to be understood by females, the composer follows suit by setting this music in an appropriately lighter and higher tessitura. At ‘Das Kind, dem sie die Nahrung giebt’ the second musical verse comes to an end. Because there is now a new tempo (Schneller) one is tempted to think of it as a new musical section. But this is simply a sign that the woman is warming to her theme, and proceeds to promulgate (with charm and humour) her doctrine of feminine superiority. Man is no longer her only source of light and life; he is rather to be pitied for his inability to know the joys and fulfilment of mother love.

In the last verse we have to assume that the child has finished feeding and that it is now playtime. Schumann asks for yet a faster tempo (*Noch schneller*), and this page has always been a challenging task for singers. There are so many words, and the slew of rhyming doggerel allows never a pause for breath. The *sforzato* and staccato chords in the accompaniment suggest that the baby is being rather brusquely bounced on the knee every half bar. (How sedate, and Victorian, the Loewe setting seems in comparison!) One may forgive Schumann (not yet a father, and probably inexperienced in the handling of children) for creating a knockabout experience for the baby that would be more appropriate for an older child.
The song is saved from nursery-jingle status at the last minute by the impassioned nature of the woman’s closing lines. The final ‘An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust’ (much of the phrase fixed on one note, as if to drive the point home) is delivered forte and, despite the surrounding levity, in a seriously engaged manner. Mother’s love is not just about running down men’s ineptitude, it is about being prepared to give your life for your child, and this we suddenly hear in a peroration where we glimpse how painful, even unthinkable, it would be for our heroine to lose this happiness. The bouncing game has not lasted long – this is swept aside by a rush of feeling where embrace is more appropriate than horseplay. There is blazing conviction in ‘Du meine Wonne’, and the slight stretching of the music at the final vocal cadence (‘du meine Lust!’) highlights the happiness of the last word – ‘Lust’ – in an unforgettable way.

This ‘Lust’, it seems to me, re-initiates playing with the baby. The postlude itself seems to suggest physical movement (like the rest of the song), and it is launched by the spread left-hand chord and right-hand arpeggio which coincide with, and complement, the ‘L’ of ‘Lust’, as well as the word’s happy meaning. This postlude is one of the cycle’s more puzzling aspects. Every pianist who has to play it must have his own ideas about what it may represent. A broadly arched phrase in flowing triplet quavers rises to a sforzato climax and subsides. And this happens twice in the same manner. This repetition suggests play to me, and there is an element of childlike laughter built into the rise and fall of those right-hand quavers. The mother holds the baby firmly by the waist and raises it above eye level before whooshing it down, as if it were in a swing on its downward trajectory. As R L Stevenson puts it: ‘Up in the air I go flying again / Up in the air and down!’. The mother laughs, and the child gurgles with delight. The high point of this journey through the air (the sforzato of Schumann’s musical phrase) is marked by a cry of ‘Wheeee’, starting in the soprano register and dropping downward with the flightpath. And the child’s delighted cries follow suit. That is the picture I have, though I admit that in real life the child’s dinner would probably make an unwelcome return on the unwise parent. Every pianist will have a different solution. It is perfectly possible, for example, to imagine the music is the rising and falling of strong waves of maternal feeling. The final two bars, ritardando, return to more gentle caresses as the child is returned to its cradle. Right at the end we hear an echo of the melody of the final ‘dein Bildnis’ from Süsser Freund. This is a sign that this child is indeed the promised article, the living incarnation of what has been a dream, one song, and only a few minutes, earlier.
Now you have caused me my first pain,
   But it struck hard,
You sleep, you harsh and pitiless man,
   The sleep of death.
The deserted one stares ahead,
   The world is void.
I have loved and I have lived,
   And now my life is done.
Silently I withdraw into myself,
   The veil falls,
There I have you and my lost happiness,
   You, my world!

The savage and forte opening chord in D minor could not come as more of a surprise. (It is a curious coincidence that Loewe’s setting also begins with a forte minim chord of D minor.) This utterly negates, at a stroke, the mood of D major domesticity that has depicted, in the previous song, the relaxed happiness of mother and child. The heavily accented opening note of the vocal line is an accusatory ‘Nun’ as if bringing the husband to account. Of course, he has never been anything else than loving, and he dies through no fault of his own. But Schumann follows the poet’s psychological understanding of the nature of bereavement: the death of a loved one gives rise to feelings of anger. The song begins as if he were guilty of betrayal, and at first the mood of this woman is hardly different from that of Ariadne left to die on Naxos, or Dido abandoned in Carthage.

Despite a real sense of drama, this is not the song of a hysterical widow – here we encounter someone of immense maturity and gravitas. Schumann gives this woman a formidable musical presence: the journey travelled since Seit ich ihn gesehen is a long one; diffidence and other-worldly idealism have yielded first to the joys, and now the bitter struggles, of the real world. The musical style is that of a recitative without the whimsy flexibility of rubato and casual invention. Everything here is sung within an iron-clad straitjacket of rhythm; this is appropriate to the intractability of her fate where there seems little room for personal manoeuvre. The die is cast, and so be it. The vocal line itself is in mourning – too tired and grief-stricken to undertake outside engagements, and moving, if it has to, only in small intervals Often it prefers to stay fixed to one note, as if holding on to the handrails of the stave before taking the next difficult steps. But even
these do not falter in terms of rhythm or determination; they progress with bravery and dignity.

This is a portrait of a good and strong-willed German wife, and Schumann could not know how closely Clara was to conform to the noble picture created here.

The piano chords, percussive and embellished with extra sforzato and forte markings, suggest a number of things: anger, as we have seen; searing flashes of painful grief; the slow tolling of bells and the solemn ceremonial of burial. It is even possible to see the whole of the song played out to the background of a dead march – the dotted rhythms of ‘Schmerz getan’ and ‘unbarmherz’ger Mann’ seem gestural, the solemn left-hand octaves at ‘der aber traf’ and ‘Todesschlaf’ grand enough for the public obsequies of someone of importance. Schumann adds interesting details. For example, he ensures that the minim ‘schlaf’ (in ‘Todesschlaf’) is accompanied for only half its length by a crotchet chord – this leaves the woeful vowel betokening the sleep of the dead to resound on its own for a moment in melancholy solitude.

After six bars of intense and hard-edged public mourning we are allowed into the more tender and vulnerable realms of the woman’s mind. The diminished chord before ‘Es blicket die Verlassne vor sich hin’ is the entry point into her private grief, and fifteen of the most intense and rapt bars in any Schumann song. Dotted rhythms and portentous left-hand chords are no longer audible. The rhythm becomes more simple, the harmonies more complex. Minim chords underpin the vocal line which now wanders into some distant regions: ‘die Welt ist leer’ strays into B flat minor, the second inversion of that chord (with F in the bass) melting in particularly devastating manner into a repeat of these words (the composer’s idea, not the poet’s) on a diminished seventh with the same bass note. The world really does seem empty with two such arid harmonies at different points of the compass. At ‘Geliebet hab ich und gelebt’ there begins a long and resigned descent down the stave: love was the apex of her life’s experience, and now it seems downhill all the way.

From ‘Ich zieh mich in mein Innres still zurück’ the remainder of the song is sung within the constricted interval of a minor third: C sharp to E at the bottom of the treble stave, with one painful excursion up to a G on ‘verlornes’ She has withdrawn into the deepest and most private regions of mourning and memory. The ‘Innres still’ of which she sings is small and cramped; she is hardly able to move in the small dark space. At ‘der Schleier fällt’ the vocal line rises, rather than falls. But, after those words, the resolution of the diminished harmonies into the home key of D minor seems a miraculous tonal analogue.
for the falling of the veil. We are drawn even further into her grief by a sixth chord grounded on G minor, the subdominant. This unexpectedly shifts to A major, and as it does so we glimpse the radiant quality of the ‘verlornes Glück; we understand what she has lost. This last-minute discovery of a major chord is an almost unbearably poignant masterstroke on Schumann’s part. The wonderful phrase ‘Du meine Welt!’ brings the singer’s role to a close, the composer illustrating the last word with a pianissimo (yet deeply sonorous) chord of A major in a solemn bank of semibreves in the bass clef. This round white semibreve has represented a ring in the fourth song, but the orbs making up this chord are more like a solar system – the openness and light of the universe, and its boundless possibilities. When she met him, this light blinded her at first; but it rescued her from the darkness of the ‘Kämmerlein’ of the first song, and this is his enduring legacy. In finding that chord, and that word, she seems to have found a way out of the impasse of mourning. And that key, empowered by the strength of memory, now turns in the musical lock.

For a long while the pianist lingers on the fermata of that A major chord. From there it is a short but significant journey into F7, the A in the pianist’s little finger a note in common with both chords. There is an F resounding deeply in the bass, and that is the dominant of B flat major. As if drifting towards a consoling beam of light, the pianist’s right hand gently wafts up the stave touching ethereal notes in its path before changing direction and returning to a chord of B flat – the same chord which began the cycle, it seems, so long ago. The door opens and memory begins the healing process.

Part of the moving inevitability of this cyclical coup de foudre is the careful way in which Schumann has planned the key scheme for his cycle. Thus: (i) B flat major - (ii) E flat major - (iii) C minor - (iv) E flat major - (v) B flat major - (vi) G major - (vii) D major - (viii) D minor, with a return, in the postlude, to B flat major. The postlude is nothing more or less than a recapitulation, not of the song Seit ich ihn gesehen, but of its accompaniment. A lesser composer might have engineered a transcription of the song to include the vocal line; but here its exclusion is appropriate. What seems like emptiness will, in time, be filled with new melody, a different vocal obbligato, perhaps one that can be sung to the old accompaniment. Until then it is half a song for half a life. The challenges to the pianist are obvious enough. Playing like this is like broaching the recapitulation of a Schubert sonata which has already endured the transformations
of a stormy development. One may not step into the same river twice, and it is not enough to play this music for a widow as if it were still for the maiden who is in love with love. The tone must deepen and somehow darken. Some of Clara Schumann’s words at the death of her own husband come to mind here – words which are both tragic and calm, grave yet collected, heartbroken but somehow in the major key:

— ‘On Tuesday the 29th July 1856 he was to be released from his suffering. At 4 o’clock in the afternoon he fell peacefully asleep. His last hours were quiet.’

— ‘His head was beautiful, the forehead so transparent and slightly arched. I stood by the body of my passionately loved husband, and was calm. All my feelings were absorbed in thankfulness to God that he was at last set free.’

But think of the memories of music that were there to sustain her, and remained to do so for the next forty years of her life!

Loewe’s cycle, published in 1836, concluded with An meinem Herzen. In the same year he composed settings of both Nun hast du mir and the final poem in Chamisso’s cycle, Traum der eignen Tage, although he did not initially judge these songs worthy of publication. The complete Loewe cycle as performed today reconstitutes the nine songs, although the last is musically anti-climactic, perhaps predictably. For reasons of poignant dramaturgy, Schumann was wise to avoid it. However the poem is read here by Juliane Banse to complete the story as Chamisso originally conceived it.

[14] (ix) Traum der eignen Tage

Traum der eignen Tage,  Dream of my own days
   Die nun ferne sind,      That now are distant,
Tochter meiner Tochter, Daughter of my daughter,
   Du mein süßes Kind,     You sweet child of mine.
Nimm, bevor die Müde Take, before the weary one
   Deckt das Leichentuch,  Is covered by a shroud,
Nimm ins frische Leben Take into your young life
   Meinen Segenspruch.    My own blessing.
Siehst mich grau von Haaren, You see me grey-haired,
   Abgezehrt und bleich.  Emaciated and pale.
Bin, wie du, gewesen  
Jung und wonnereich,  
Liebte, so wie du liebest,  
Ward, wie du, auch Braut,  
Und auch du wirst altern,  
So wie ich ergraut.

Once I was like you,  
Young and blissful.  
I loved, as you now love,  
Became, like you, a bride,  
And you too will grow old,  
Like my hair has turned grey.

Lass die Zeit im Fluge  
Wandeln fort und fort,  
Nur beständig wahre  
Deines Busens Hort;  
Hab ich’s einst gesprochen,  
Nehm ich’s nicht zurück:  
Glück ist nur die Liebe,  
Liebe nur ist Glück.

Let time fly  
On and on,  
But preserve for ever  
The treasure of your heart;  
What I once said  
I shall not take back:  
Happiness alone is love,  
Love alone is happiness.

Als ich, den ich liebte,  
In das Grab gelegt,  
Hab ich meine Liebe  
Treu in mir gehegt:  
War mein Herz gebrochen,  
Blieb mir fest der Mut,  
Und des Alters Asche  
Wahrt die heilge Glut.

When I buried  
The man I loved,  
I cherished my love  
In my faithful heart:  
Though my heart was broken,  
My courage stood firm,  
And the ashes of old age  
Preserve the sacred glow.

Nimm, bevor die Müde  
Deckt das Leichentuch,  
Nimm ins frische Leben  
Meinen Segenspruch:  
Muss das Herz dir brechen,  
Bleibe fest dein Mut,  
Sei der Schmerz der Liebe  
Dann dein höchstes Gut.

Take, before the weary one  
Is covered by a shroud,  
Take into your young life  
My own blessing:  
If your heart must break,  
May your courage stand firm,  
May love’s sorrow then be  
Your dearest possession.

※  ※  ※
Love in adversity was always a theme dear to Schumann (particularly in works composed in the months leading up to his marriage in September 1840). Here the composer returns to this subject that had haunted his past – the fear that Clara just might have married someone else. Long after this danger was over, he continued to respond to stories of the misfortunes of lovers abandoned by their girls. In 1850 he came across a newly-published set of eight wedding poems by the poet Halm whose plight – his beloved had married another man – seems to have reminded Schumann of his own fears over a decade earlier. Instead of setting the whole cycle, however, Schumann settled on the last poem (which hardly gives the flavour of the whole). For this reason, Geisternähe is a fragment without a story. It is hardly terror-stricken or dramatic like Der Spielmann, or even Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen from Dichterliebe. The protagonist, unlike those of the two former songs, is not even present at the wedding. But the setting is born of the same pathos, which seems at best a mannerism and at worst a type of helpless masochism with the self-limiting mute adoration that we find in such songs as Mein schöner Stern. On this disc it follows Frauenliebe und -leben, and its final un-set poem, as if to suggest the consolatory
stirrings of remembered love from long ago. Indeed, without knowing the poem’s context, one would have thought this music was related to the yearning, but essentially optimistic, mood of Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte*.

The piano writing is, at first, delicately evocative; the curling triplet semiquavers waft chromatically through various keys and descend the stave in insinuating sequences; the delicacy of the rubato suggests the freedom of movement appropriate for perfumes of spring. This is a good start. The singer’s curiosity as to the nature of the breeze is reminiscent of the first of Schubert’s *Suleika* songs and the eponymous heroine’s questions to the East Wind. In this atmospheric meandering, Schumann is at his most characteristic. There is little in the first four bars to anchor us to any tonality; at ‘laue Frühlingsluft’ the music settles briefly into the home key of A major, and hovers beside the ghost of another spring song in that tonality – *Er ist’s* (Op 79, Mörike). At the end of the first strophe the words ‘wie süßer Rosenduft?’ occasion a temporary excursion to E major.

A shift back into the A major tonic would now seem to be obvious, but the second strophe initiates an interpolation into the subdominant, the better to make the final strophe in A major, when it at last arrives, the climax of the piece. For now, the easy rise of a tone in the vocal line (at ‘Es ist’) belies the slightly awkward shift sideways into the plagal (and thus rather reverential) reaches of D major. The singer answers the questions of the first strophe within a *forte* dynamic, as if in a state of exalted reassurance: yes, even if she has married another, she really loves me best – after all, it is her thoughts that circle my brow in caressing comfort. The triplet accompaniment denotes a full heart, supporting and amplifying the vocal line with passionate throbings. This is something of a Schumann commonplace. We glimpse it in some of the Kerner songs, Op 35, but it is particularly typical of this late period. The same could be said for the harp music which begins on cue under ‘Und was wie Harfen klänge’ in the third strophe. This composer seems to have been much occupied with harp sonority in his later years, particularly as an accompanying device. The build-up of piano sonority (where the harp-writing seems anything but ethereal) seems counterproductive for the verbal imagery: the poet’s name is supposedly being whispered by the beloved – or so his hopeful fantasy informs him – but here it is sung to the rooftops. Another, rather more successful song in A major with an accompaniment in rolling demisemiquavers comes to mind – *Aufträge* (Volume 1), which is actually part of the same opus number.
The peroration, the final strophe, is in A major, and this finishes the song with almost operatic fervour. Any reference to soft, floating winds and spiritual whisperings is swept away by the *forte* dynamic and the piano writing churning with triplets and demisemiquavers. Such is the radiance and confidence of this music that any original sympathy we might have felt with the emotional plight of the singer seems misplaced. Perhaps Schumann intended this flood of unrealistic confidence to engender our pity, as if the young man were going off his head. (The determined and alarmingly misplaced confidence of *Mein!* from *Die schöne Müllerin* come to mind.) He claims that he is drawn back to her heart by these spiritual messages, but this is all pie-in-the-sky. As if to remind us of this, the postlude, fashioned from the introduction, is once again wistful and shy. The song ends humbly and crestfallen, and the final impression causes confusion: is the singer a winner or a loser? The song’s lyrical touches are individually effective, but they fail to come together to make an unforgettable song.

Eduard Mörike (1804-1875)

Die Soldatenbraut
May 1847; first published in 1847 in *Romanze und Balladen* Heft IV as Op 64 No 1

Ach, wenn’s nur der König auch wüsšt’,
Wie wacker mein Schätzelein ist!
Für den König, da liess’ er sein Blut,
Für mich aber eben so gut.

Mein Schatz hat kein Band und kein’ Stern,
Kein Kreuz wie die vornehmen Herrn,
Mein Schatz wird auch kein General;
Hätt’ er nur seinen Abschied einmal!

Es scheinen drei Sterne so hell
Dort über Marien-Kapell;
Da knüpft uns ein rosenrot’ Band,
Und ein Hauskreuz ist auch bei der Hand.

---

The Soldier’s Sweetheart

Ah, if only the king also knew
How brave and bold my dearest is!
He’d lay down his life for the king,
And just as willingly for me.

My dearest has no ribbons, no stars,
No crosses like the gentry,
My dearest will never become a general:
If only he were at home on leave!

Three stars shine so brightly
Over the Lady’s Chapel;
We’ll tie the knot with a pink ribbon,
And he’ll soon have a cross to bear at home!

This is one of this composer’s apt and amusing miniature song-portraits. If Schumann lacks the natural identification with the female psyche that is one of Schubert’s special gifts (in the Gretchen, Mignon and Lady of the Lake songs among others), no one could accuse him of not trying very hard. He is a ladies’ man enamoured of women, with a story to tell. Schumann is amused by pert and bossy characters like Goethe’s Philine (noticeably avoided by Schubert) and
he gives a platform to the formidably angry highland widow, *Die Hochländer-Witwe* of Robert Burns. He seems predisposed to smallness of stature, delicacy of foot and strength of character which suggests that this composer is Dickens to Schubert’s Shakespeare. *Die Kartenlegerin* has already been dealt with on this disc, and that little card is a closer relative of *Die Soldatenbraut* than of the earnest bride and mother of *Frauenliebe und -leben* – an exemplary character like Agnes Wickfield or Florence Dombey. But the girl who dreams of being the soldier’s wife is both pushy and silly, unworldly to a fault, yet adorable. Dora Spenlow, David Copperfield’s first wife, comes to mind.

The whole premise of the songs such as these, where *Bella vita militar* confronts the fairer sex, goes back to Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* when Fiordiligi and Dorabella bid their lovers a tearful goodbye, only to fall in love with Albanian interlopers – the same lovers in disguise. *Sie blasen zum Abmarsch* from Wolf’s *Spanisches Liederbuch* is a good example of a march-song which brings echoes of the opera back to mind, and *Der Tambour* (Mörike) complains of homesickness from the young drummer’s point of view, where even the moon seems to shine in French. But for the nearest equivalent to *Die Soldatenbraut* one must look to Wolf’s *Italienisches Liederbuch* and the imprecations, half tearful, half sarcastic, of the singer of *Ihr jungen Leute* as she begs leniency and special treatment for her lover unused to the rigours of the military campaign. The theme of the soldier returning to find life with a demanding wife just as difficult as fighting battles is amusingly treated by Wolf in the Gottfried Keller setting *Tretet ein, höher Krieger*.

*Die Soldatenbraut* is built around the rhythm of a mock march, where the scale of the proceedings is never allowed to be expansive enough to encompass the battlefield. Soldiers’ music (cf the serious and disturbing *Der Soldat*, Volume 2) permeates the song. But the neat little rhythm where the fourth beat of the bar is cutely phrased up toward the first of the next, and the staccato march is as crisp as a lick of new paint, suggests the toy cupboard rather than the real world. After ‘Ach, wenn’s nur der König auch wüsst’ a brief interjection in dotted rhythms indicates the girl’s petulant displeasure – the king really ought to know how bold her beau is! A brief passage in a more military-sounding C minor envisages the young man laying down his life for the king, but somehow we don’t believe a word of it – particularly when the vocal interval of the descending diminished seventh of ‘Blut’ seems so arch, and the teasing harmonies of the next phrase (the bridging chords are G minor and is C7) under ‘für mich aber eben so gut’ seem so cute as to make the comparison deliberately silly. Laying down one’s life does not mean anything as serious
as *dying*. Our charming commentator does not have the slightest idea about the battlefield and its horrors.

The second verse is a chance to hear the catchy tune once again. (The song’s structure is basically AABA with coda.) Once again the piano’s interjections illustrate annoyance – this time that the lover is not decorated with military star and ribbon; of *course* he should be! – and the pomposity of the general’s rank (those C minor chords again) is contrasted with her exasperation that he is not allowed home on leave. Woe betide the general if she were ever to meet him! One realises that Schumann relishes the girl’s tenacity and faithfulness, and the fact that she is unimpressed by the bigwigs: military power is unable to order and regulate a woman’s love.

Like many a soldier’s wife-to-be, the wedding is the most important campaign of all. The middle section of the third strophe (marked ‘langsamer’ – slower) casts a magical spell; the girl, mainly a mover and shaker, allows herself to dream for a few bars. An echo of the dotted march rhythm remains in the tenor voice of the accompaniment but, smoothed out by the slower tempo and in this verbal context, it seems descriptive of blinking stars. The piano’s chords under ‘dort über Marien-Kapell’ are touched with antiquity to suggest church music and the harmonium accompanying the wedding hymns. And now Mörike uses verbal puns to show us that the little minx is not going to be a passively adoring wife. Words that have described the ribbon and cross of military honour and decoration are re-employed to depict the wreath of red roses (‘Band’) that will seal their bond (also ‘Band’ in German’). Once on the leash he will have a different type of cross to bear, and this is underlined by the fact that ‘Hauskreuz’, meaning domestic trouble and strife, will be his new *croix de guerre*. The piano interlude, rattling semiquavers followed by terse and determined staccato quavers, implies that her new legal status as a wife will make her a force to be reckoned with, someone to keep both the new husband, and his wretched employers, on their toes.

The last verse is a repeat of the first. We are reminded that the marriage is, as yet, a fantasy, and is a female counterpart of the drummer-boy’s dreams of mouth-watering food in Wolf’s *Der Tambour*. And then we remember that these two wonderful songs, though by different composers, have a great poet in common. The subtlety of Mörike accounts for the marvellous mix of innocence and malevolent wit (the girl is so shamelessly *ambitious*, both for herself and her fiancé). The extended postlude is a worthy end to a delicious little song. The pert staccato
chords, little military rumbles in semiquavers in both hands, and the voice joining in right at the end (with a final ‘für mich … aber eben so gut’) remind us that she is very much in charge of the proceedings and that, whatever the politicians say, the world revolves around her, the mother of future generations of little soldiers. The piquant little flourish (two forte chords, then a piano one in the nimbus of the louder, as if a feminine smile at blustering authority) ends the song as if knocked into a cocked hatbox.

Anonymous text, possibly by Julius Buddeus (b1812)

17 **Schneeglöckchen**
July 1850; published in *Lieder und Gesänge* Heft IV as Op 96 No 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Die Sonne sah die Erde an,</td>
<td>The sun looked at the earth,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es ging ein milder Wind,</td>
<td>A gentle breeze blew,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und plötzlich stand Schneeglöckchen da,</td>
<td>And suddenly a snowdrop appeared,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das fremde blasse Kind.</td>
<td>A strange pale child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und plötzlich brach mit Pomp und Braus</td>
<td>And suddenly, amid pomp and clamour,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der alte Winter auf,</td>
<td>Old Winter set off on his travels,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Wolken eilten pfeilgeschwind</td>
<td>Clouds scudded as swift as arrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zum dunkeln Nord hinauf.</td>
<td>Away to the dark north.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisscholle lief, Schneeflocke schmolz,</td>
<td>Ice-floes drifted, snowflakes melted,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Stürme heulten drein,</td>
<td>Storms went howling by,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schneeglöckchen stand gesenkten Haupts</td>
<td>The snowdrop stood with bowed head,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dem Gewühl allein.</td>
<td>Alone amid the tumult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ei komm! Du weisses Schwesterlein,</td>
<td>Come, then. O little white sister,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie lange willst du stehn?</td>
<td>How long will you stand there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Winter ruft, das Reich ist aus,</td>
<td>Winter announces the end of his reign,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wir müssen nach Hause gehn!</td>
<td>We must now go home!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und was nur rings auf Erden trägt</td>
<td>All things on earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die weisse Liverei,</td>
<td>That wear his white cloak,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das schürze sich, das tummle sich</td>
<td>Should now be on guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zur Abfahrt schnell herbei!</td>
<td>And make haste for a swift departure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schneeglöckchen sah sich bebend an</td>
<td>The snowdrop quivered and looked at itself,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und dachte halb im Traum:</td>
<td>And thought half in a dream:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Was soll um Winters Liverei</td>
<td>Why is Winter’s cloak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Der grüne, grüne Saum? Hemmed with vivid green?
Wob ihn wohl um das weisse Kleid Was it woven by Winter’s rough hand
Des Winters rauhe Hand? Around the white cloak?
Wo komm’ ich her? wo geh’ ich hin? From where do I come? Where am I bound?
Wo ist mein Vaterland?” Where is my fatherland?

One wonders whether Schumann knew Schubert’s long flower-ballad Viola (published in 1830) where the fate of a helpless and abandoned flower is decided by the weather. When listening to certain passages in Schneeglöckchen, the similarities seem too strong to be coincidental. We must admit Schubert’s musical superiority, both in terms of musical invention and a command of rondo form which was even praised by Tovey in an analytical study. And the poem about Viola by Schober (although easy to decry as sentimental) seems positively masterful when compared to this anonymous hotch-potch.

From the opening, the scale of the music, and the prosody, seem somehow inappropriate for a snowdrop. It is as if a song about a starling were conceived in terms of an scena for an eagle. The vocal line is far from shy and retiring. Indeed it is a challenge to any soprano. Instead of diffident little notes betokening grace and exquisite smallness, healthy minims and dotted minims (one of these, a top note poised shamelessly on the awkward and inappropriate word ‘und’) need to be filled with sound in a tessitura that discourages intimacy of mood. The word ‘Schneeglöckchen’ itself is set on a drooping chord which suggests the flower’s plight, but for ‘das fremde blasse Kind’ the composer’s empathy seems to have abandoned him; the music here seems the epitome of health. There are pomposo rumblings for ‘und plötzlich brach mit Pomp und Braus der alte Winter auf’ which are complicated by rhythmic hiccups due to a change to 2/4 for ‘alte Winter’ – a hemiola which seems to accomplish very little that is usefully expressive. It seems that the composer is more interested in composing a piano piece with incidental words than a song which obeys the text. This is rare, but then so is an anonymous text. It is as if the unknown provenance of the words has freed Schumann from any sense of responsibility to a respected collaborator.

The first movement of the piece has been characterised by a high-lying vocal line accompanied by rolling quaver arpeggios. At the beginning of the poem’s third verse the speed changes to that of a weaving scherzo in the Mendelssohn manner. Here we find a harmonic daring that is
impossible to imagine ten years earlier; whether its disjointed musical grammar has been planned
or is the result of haphazard chance remains the question. This disorientated darting around the
keyboard is meant, no doubt, to depict the whirling storms which threaten the snowdrop’s life, but
there seems no real danger – the sound of the music seems still rather genial, if confused. At ‘Ei
komm! Du weisses Schwesterlein’ the mood changes yet again as wind music is replaced by the
bustle of communal activity. The departure of winter is made synonymous with music for the
arrival of spring: without demur, the music changes into a merry mode (including Schumann’s
favourite spring key of A major) to cajole the snowdrop away. The end of King Winter’s reign
and talk of his livery (perhaps Schumann’s ugliest melisma ever is devoted to an elongated setting
of ‘Liverei’) promotes a piece of busy nonsense of a kind one is more used to filling out the pages
of the lesser Strauss operas where everything works itself up into a rare old tumult to no great
purpose. Schumann seems to have become so preoccupied with the lordly status of King Winter
going for a spring holiday (there are even miniature trumpet fanfares implied in the piano writing)
that he seems to have forgotten the snowdrop completely. The departure of the stagecoach (the
dancing phrases on ‘das schürze sich, das tummle sich zur Abfahrt schnell herbei’) is worthy of
an operatic set-piece. The comparison with Strauss seems apposite, for he was a composer
capable of note-spinning to splendid effect, especially when colour and movement were used to
disguise periods of musical inactivity. Four bars of piano interlude based on an E7 chord and
signalling the return of the snowdrop seem uncannily like an analagous passage in Schubert’s
Viola. (It is something of an achievement for a song simultaneously to suggest the song-writing
styles of past and future.)

The last page of the song reintroduces us to the slightly awkward vocal and piano writing of the
opening. We return to music that attempts to underline the pathos of a flower at home in neither
winter nor spring – belonging to both, and yet to neither. Under ‘Was soll um Winters Liverei der
grüne, grüne Saum?’ Schumann invents a rich and eloquent counter-melody in rising sequences in
the accompaniment that would seem better suited to a piece of chamber music than to this Lied.
Quaver figuration eventually peters out and is replaced by crotchets and minims. The sweep of
melody cedes to frightened and confused recitative. The questioning flower, its fate unsettled,
seems to stand (as Sams has pointed out) for the composer himself who is ‘already claimed by
some other more ominous realm, yet allowed to remain for a while’. The faltering and elongated
prosody of the song’s closing phrase (‘wo ist mein Vaterland?’) exactly mirrors the confusing, and
confused, fragments of speech gently mumbled by Schumann when confronted by visitors who expected enlightening conversation, and waited in vain. As this was some years before his internment in Endenich this song cannot be lightly written off as a product of illness. But there are many songs which are more lucid advocates of the composer’s later style.

Oskar Ludwig Wolff (1799-1851)

**Stiller Vorwurf**
cJuly 1850 (begun 1840); first published in 1851 in *Lieder und Gesänge* Heft III as Op 77 No 4

In einsamen Stunden drängt Wehmut sich auf,  
Da brechen die Wunden, die alten, mir auf.  
O lass sie nur bluten, sie schmerzen nicht sehr;  
Als du sie geschlagen, da schmerzten sie mehr!  
Ob du es bereuest, was du mir getan,  
Mit andern dich freuest, was geht es mich an?  
Was auch du beginnest, vorbei ist die Pein,  
Ich kann dir nicht zürnen, kann dir nur verzeihn.

In lonely hours melancholy wells up,  
My old wounds open once more.  
Oh let them bleed, they are not so painful;  
When you inflicted them, they hurt far more!  
Whether you regret what you did to me,  
Or are happy with others – what is that to me?  
Whatever you are doing, the pain is past:  
I cannot chide you, I can only forgive.

Both Sams and the Schneider catalogue agree that this song originally dates from 1840, and refer to one of the composer’s periods of alienation from Clara. Bearing this in mind it is perhaps surprising that with its halting spareness of texture, and an *arioso* style derived from recitative, it seems happily typical (if that is an apt expression for something so melancholy) of the late-Schumann style. By comparison, the inflated eventfulness of *Schneeglöckchen* seems an aberration – its jollity somehow forced and inappropriate, and its dimensions out of proportion with its subject-matter, as if a tornado has been created to uproot a snowdrop.

This song begins weighed down with the legacies of the past: old wounds have long healed with a protective crust so that the blood no longer flows. The musical pathos of dried-up inspiration and exhausted creativity is a fitting (if unwitting) metaphor for the poem. But once the chords begin to move in their chromatic grooves, old issues reassert themselves. There is the feeling that something rusty is creaking back into life as the wounds re-open. But not quite. There are no fresh crimson colourings of feud, passion or hate; instead of gushing wounds there is only a trickle of old, rust-coloured blood. The pain has faded, the initial reasons for the anguish have been dulled, if not soothed, by the passage of time. For these sentiments, Schumann’s setting seems ideal. It looks phlegmatic on paper, in much the
same way as songs by the Fauré of the third period appear bare and underwrought, although they are, in fact, packed with feeling of a less demonstrative kind. There is little excuse for the pianist to work himself up into a state of passion or excitement; apart from occasional szforzato and tenuto minims, and wilting cadences formed by mezzo staccato crotchets, the vocal line is underpinned by a discreet commentary – despairing gestures which never add up to a sentence, or soar into independent melody. Vocal declamation is all, but the singer has carefully to gauge the performance of intense words which are anti-intense in their intention. The mood is one of acceptance, even indifference. Joy and pain merge into one. Forgiveness is offered in the song’s final lines, but the song seems to belong to that genre of masochistic mute suffering which was a Schumannian speciality. At one point the poem seems to accept blood-letting as if it were a useful and casual first step to suicide.

The composer of 1850 who revised and prepared this already old song for publication is in no mood to feel superior in the matter of an old quarrel. He is only too aware that he too has sinned and, as if frozen by fear, awaits nemesis as if an execution. And this forges a link with an even later Schumann song: the shared A minor tonality, and the air of indifference and/or forgiveness grafted on to a background of bitterness, bring to mind Abschied von der Welt, the penultimate song from the Maria Stuart Lieder. In both songs the narrator has experienced too much pain and suffering to care about the world’s opinion; there is a similar mood of indifference to the sorrows of the past. Old enemies and friends seems as one; hatred and dissension will go to the grave, but then so will love. These two songs are different versions of Schumann’s need to absent himself from the world, and their similarities are not coincidental.

Wilfried von der Neun (pseudonym of Wilhelm Schöpff, 1826-1916)

Gesungen!
July 1850; first published 1851 in Lieder und Gesänge Heft IV as Op 96 No 4

Singing!

Hört ihr im Laube des Regens starke Schläge? Do you hear the rain lashing the leaves?
Höret ihr brechen die Äst im Sturmgefege? Do you hear branches snap in the sweeping storm?
Hört ihr doch drinnen der Vöglein süsse Kehlen Hear too the sweet song of the birds,
Preisend der Liebe des Herrn sich anempfehlen! Commending themselves to the love of God!

Seht ihr im Lande der Zwietracht Fackel lodern? Do you see the torches of strife flare in the land?
Hört ihr den Frevel das Recht zum Kampfe fodern? Do you hear the righteous fighting evil?
Drum mit des Herzens Gewalt friedvoller Lieder Tame with the power of your heart’s peaceful songs
Zaubert das wilde Geschrei des Wahnsinns nieder! The savage cries of madness!
This slightly gruff music could have been Schumann’s *An die Musik*, a hymn of praise to the sweet and humanising power of song. But it was not to be. Sadly, both poet and composer busy themselves to such an extent with the depiction of the wildness and wickedness which music is theoretically able to tame, that the central message – the magical, healing power of song – is lost and forgotten in a welter of oscillating semiquavers. Schumann has succeeded once before in a song with a double message of this kind: *Lust der Sturmnacht* from the Kerner cycle Op 35. There the storm on the outside is cleverly contrasted with the feeling of cosy elation in being indoors, protected by love and domestic comfort. In this song, however, the contrast between the opening seven bars of storm, and the following seven of soothing birdsong are insufficiently differentiated, particularly in terms of texture and tessitura. Admittedly, the composer asks for a different dynamic level, but the rather clumsy words of Schöpff (or ‘von der Neun’ as he called himself) hardly help to make the contrast clear. Schumann seems unduly caught up with somewhat fruitless games of musical imitation, contrapuntal gestures between the bass and vocal lines as if to suggest (although none too clearly) that in passing from one register to another, sound reverberates through the world. This gives a rather portentous, and even academic, feel to the music. It is difficult to believe that this is the same composer who wrote those wonderful undulating fantasies in pulsating semiquavers, Eichendorff’s *Schöne Fremde* and *Frühlingsnacht*.

The second strophe poses even greater problems in that the poem wallows in the kind of grandiose imagery that is beyond all but the most extravagant musical expression, preferably aided by orchestral colourings. These words seem inappropriate for a strophic song of this sort. The rumbling bass octaves and the oscillating, flickering semiquavers seem just about acceptable to depict the flaming torches of strife, but once the righteous and evil locked in combat are brought into play we require an opera based on *Ivanhoe* at the very least! A Lied of two pages is not enough: we need at least fifty pages, equerries, heralds and all the other cast members necessary for a full-blown tournament. The final sentence of the poem which juxtaposes ‘friedvoller Lieder’ within seconds of ‘wilde Geschrei’ is a word-setter’s nightmare, and Schumann in his right mind would have avoided this slew of contradictory images – to illustrate one is inevitably to negate the other, reducing both to a compromise mush of something indeterminate and all-purpose. This is what happens, despite the bold crescendo and flourish that end the song as if a powerful point has been made. Madness has been banished forever as it is consigned to hell with the drop of a fifth.
If only this had been so. It is easy to see that the poem has moved Schumann because it tells him what he wants to hear: that the power of music is stronger than that of the madness that he so feared lay in store for him, and that if one keeps on singing, whistling down the wind, depression will be kept at bay. Thus he produces a song which, on first hearing, seems effective enough musically. Closer study reveals that the poem’s images are empty and all but unusable, that the poet makes large and meaningless generalisations. But before we blame the composer too harshly, much of Schumann’s inadequate response can largely be laid at the door of von der Neun.

Wilfried von der Neun (pseudonym of Wilhelm Schöpff, 1826-1916)

**Himmel und Erde**

July 1850; first published in *Lieder und Gesänge* Heft IV as Op 96 No 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie der Bäume kühne Wipfel</td>
<td>How boldly the treetops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zu des Lichtes Höhen streben!</td>
<td>Reach up to the light of heaven!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie der Berge greise Gipfel</td>
<td>How the grey mountain peaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In des Himmels Wolken schweben!</td>
<td>Soar up to heaven’s clouds!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie im Mai der Wiesen Blühen</td>
<td>How in May the meadow flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mit des Äthers Blau verschwimmet!</td>
<td>Mingle with the sky’s blue!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie der Wälder herbstlich Glühen</td>
<td>How the autumn glow of the woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In des Frührots Licht verglimmet!</td>
<td>Fades into the light of the dawn!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O so seid ihr denn Verwandte,</td>
<td>So are you then both related,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himmel du und Mutter Erde!</td>
<td>O heaven and mother earth!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freudig trag ich irdsche Bande,</td>
<td>My earthly fetters I bear with joy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da ich dein, O Himmel, werde!</td>
<td>Since, heaven, I shall be yours!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This poem, every bit as flamboyant as *Gesungen!*, is concerned with heavenly aspiration: everything in nature is drawn upwards. Mother Earth is united with heaven, just as man’s soul will be reunited with its Maker. In the poem’s concluding lines, the author, barely hiding his self-satisfaction, counts himself among the phenomena of Creation destined for higher things. (Wilfried von der Neun may well have won his place in heaven for good works, but his poems would earn him no place in the Poet’s Pantheon.) Schumann, the man of cultivated literary taste who had been among the first to set the matchless poems of Eichendorff, now finds himself inexplicably drawn to texts more fulsome and ambitious but infinitely less distinguished and suitable for music. The grandiose words are ill-suited to Schumann’s innate modesty. Another composer would have attempted something embarrassingly strident, but this setting is more
thoughtful than expansive, and the markings ‘Feierlich’ (solemn) and ‘Innig’ (introverted) moderate any tendency to overweening musical grandiloquence on the part of the performers.

A bel canto melody in A flat major of a quasi-Italianate inspiration moves to a middle section in B major, and then back to A flat. The vocal line of Himmel und Erde is almost memorable (for example, an effective upward leap for ‘zu des Lichtes Höhen streben’), but not quite. It is in the aria style typical of late Schumann, where work on opera and oratorio has altered (some would say clouded) the composer’s original pellucid conception of the piano Lied. The accompaniment is busy in an orchestral manner: the right hand with continual triplets while the left enlivens the texture with dotted quaver-semiquaver figures which punctuate the vocal line and propel it forward. And then an echo of the distant musical past. The turn on ‘Himmels Wolken schweben’ is reminiscent of the ecstatic yet courtly idealism that has animated Er, der Herrlichste von allen from Frauenliebe und -leben. In very similar harmonies, reference to the graciousness of the Lord brings about a mordent similar to that inspired by the lordly husband-to-be (‘wie so gut!’).

The second verse modulates to B major and, in this sumptuous tonality, May flowers and autumn forests are hymned with delicacy and intimacy. Much of the vocal line is mezzo staccato, and the piano figurations are similarly inflected, sometimes echoing the voice at a distance as if in diffident duet. Vocal duplets stretch languidly against pianistic triplets, and entwine, creeper-like, with fragments of contrapuntal pianistic melody. This is undoubtedly the most successful section of this song, and it seems prophetic of Johannes Brahms who showed a propensity for this sort of rhythmical cross-current from the beginning of his song-writing career.

The third strophe returns to the A flat major of the opening. Despite a feeling of recapitulation, this music is nevertheless newly invented within a structure that is far from a straightforward ABA. Although the older composer set himself firmly against Wagner, such was the power of the man’s music and theory that one detects Schumann experimenting with the flexibility of continual melody almost despite himself, and much against the nature of his own gift. To mirror the words, as if to show that heaven and earth are musically united, the piano writing blossoms with fragments of vocal melody, including the prominent rising and falling sevenths after ‘O so seid ihr denn Verwandte’. This tiny instrumental-like interjection would be well suited to an oboe. This writing seems dense even by Brahmsian standards, and it reinforces the impression
that Schumann is no longer truly interested in the piano as an accompanying instrument: here he seems to have constructed a short score where an array of instruments might do better justice to the various strands of sound promising, but never quite delivering, counterpoint. The result is earnest (no one can doubt the composer’s heartfelt sincerity) but rather leaden. The poem talks of striving upwards to the light, but Schumann is in no state of mind to achieve lift-off. The work appears shackled by his less than ecstatic preoccupations. In the postlude, fragments of solo melody are grafted onto accompanying figurations. This sets the seal on the impression of a rather awkward-to-play short score crying out for something vividly imagined by the composer, but not quite realised on paper.

Elisabeth Kulmann (1808-1825)

SIEBEN LIEDER VON ELISABETH KULMANN ZUR ERINNERUNG AN DIE DICHTERIN
Seven Songs to words by Elisabeth Kulmann, in memory of the poetess
May 1851; published in 1851 as Op 104

Why and how Schumann decided to embark on this cycle has been explained in the introduction. There, alongside a biography of Elisabeth Kulmann (page 11), one may also see a picture of the teenage poetess, dressed as something between a nun and bride, and old before her time, like so many children of the nineteenth century who were groomed as geniuses. Schumann had long shown his interest in, and sympathy for, childhood and its musical depiction. He had been a lifelong admirer of contemporary poets. Indeed his admiration for such figures as Lenau and Hebbel, not to mention Goethe, was nothing less than reverential. When he came across the poems of a child, these enthusiasms were united, although Elizabeth Kulmann had already been dead for a quarter of a century. And it was also of emotional importance to Schumann that Kulmann was a girl: the composer was a fond father of daughters (though it is noteworthy that of his children only his son Felix wrote poetry) and his study of the character of Goethe’s Mignon (who also died young) predisposed him to see the pathos of her story in terms of femininity and unfailing dutifulness. The same impulse, admiration for what he might have termed, along with Goethe, das Ewig-Weibliche, had drawn the composer, via Clara of course, to Chamisso’s Frauenliebe -und leben. Even if the vicissitudes of marriage had taken their toll on the relationship between husband and wife, it is as if the composer were continually searching for a heroine on whom to lavish his worshipping admiration. This may further explain Schumann’s
fixation on Kulmann, as well as his empathy with the tormented life of Mary Stuart.

In comparison to the von der Neun settings, here is all transparent simplicity. The pretensions of orchestral accompaniment are swept aside and the homely piano is reinstated in the parlour. The texture is childlike, and one thinks of some of the enchanting songs from the Op 79 *Liederalbum für die Jugend*, no less effective for their sparse accompaniments and folksong-like melodies. Schumann had already set the words of a handful of female poets (Lily Bernhard, Catherine Fanshawe, Wilhelmine Lorenz and Marianne von Willemer) but here, for the first time, he sets his cap at a style suitable for feminine poetry. This is a subtly different concept from finding a style for songs about women; indeed, as an equivalent, one thinks of the conscious decision of Francis Poulenc, ninety years later, to find an appropriately feminine musical language to suit the poems of Louise de Vilmorin. Like Schumann, Poulenc conceived his Vilmorin songs (*Fiançailles pour rire*) as a result of an empathy not only with the poetry itself, but with the biographical circumstances surrounding it.

**DEDICATION**

These unpretentious songs are dedicated to the memory of a girl who departed from us long ago, and whose name is known to very few. And yet she was one of those wondrously gifted beings who appear only very rarely on earth. The sublimest teachings of wisdom, expressed here with the utmost poetic perfection, come from the lips of a child; and it is in her very poetry that we read how her life, spent in quiet obscurity and the greatest poverty, became richly happy. These few small songs, chosen from several thousands, of which only a few lend themselves to composition, cannot give even an approximate notion of her character. Though her whole life was one of poetry, only a few moments from this rich existence can be selected.

If these songs could help introduce the poetess to many circles where she is still unknown, their purpose will have been fulfilled. Sooner or later she will certainly be greeted in Germany too, as she was thirty years ago by some in the north, as the bright star which will gradually shine forth across every country. (Düsseldorf, 7 June 1851)

**Mond, meiner Seele Liebling**

The poetess, who was born on 17 July 1808 in Saint Petersburg, lost her father and six of her seven brothers at an early age, the latter on the battlefield during the wars of 1812-14. Only her mother, whom she revered and loved until she died, survived. The following poem has been selected from the many that were addressed to her mother.

Mond, meiner Seele Liebling,
Wie schaust du heut’ so blass?

Moon, my soul’s beloved,
Why do you look so pale today?
Ist eines deiner Kinder, Is one of your children,
O Mond, vielleicht unpass? O moon, perhaps unwell?
Kam dein Gemahl, die Sonne, Did your consort, the sun,
Vielleicht dir krank nach Haus? Perhaps come home ailing?
Und du trittest aus der Wohnung, And you have emerged from your home
Weinst deinen Schmerz hier aus? To weep out your sorrow here?

Ach, guter Mond, ein gleiches Ah, good moon, a similar
Geschick befiel auch mich. Fate has befallen me too.
Drin liegt mir krank die Mutter, My mother lies ill indoors,
Hat mich nur jetzt um sich! With only me now to tend her!

So eben schloss ihr Schlummer Sleep has just closed
Das Aug’ ein Weilchen zu; Her eyes for a while;
Da wich, mein Herz zu stärken, And I have left her asleep,
Vom Ort ich ihrer Ruh. Seeking strength for my heart.

Trost sei mir, Mond, dein Anblick, May the sight of you, moon, comfort me,
Ich leide nicht allein: I do not suffer alone:
Du bist der Welt Mitherrscher, You are one of the world’s rulers,
Und kannst nicht stets dich freun! And cannot always be happy!

The music seems shorn of all pretension. The voice, as in this song, often begins without the ceremony of an introduction. The key is G minor which, together with its relative major of B flat, governs all but the last song of this little cycle. The time signature is a modest 2/4. For the first two verses (treated strophically) the mezzo staccato chords in right-hand quavers alternate with a simple cello-like line in the bass. Even when the melody changes and wanders waywardly for the third and fourth strophes, the accompaniment remains modest, often hugging the vocal line in demure fashion. The transparent texture seems suitable for moonlight, and the tone of filial piety with which Kulmann describes caring for her sick mother successfully avoids the sickly-sweet or sentimental. The change into the major key for the last verse is a predictable analogue for consolation. This last verse is a variant of the opening music without being a repeat of it. A casual first hearing might have diagnosed a more simple form for this song than is actually the case. For better or worse, it is clear that the composer has lavished considerable care on giving the music the appearance of childlike naivety.
Although she was of German origin and wrote in German as well as her mother tongue, the poetess remained an ardent patriot; many passages in her writings praise the beauty of the northern skies, as the following poem illustrates.

Viel Glück zur Reise, Schwalben!
Ihr eilt, ein langer Zug,
Zum schönen warmen Süden
In frohem, kühnen Flug.

Gern möchte wohl die Reise
Ich einmal thun mit euch,
Zu seh’n die tausend Wunder,
Die darbeut jedes Reich.

Doch immer käm ich wieder,
Wie schön auch jedes Land,
Und reich an Wundern wäre,
Zurück in’s Vaterland!

Good luck on your journey, swallows!
You hurry in a long skein
To the beautiful warm south
In joyful, fearless flight.

I should love to travel
With you one day,
To see the thousand wonders
That each realm has to show.

But I should always return,
However fair each country,
And however rich in wonders,
To my native land!

The time-signature of this delectable little song is once again 2/4; the key is B flat major. Delicate demisemiquaver figurations ripple up the stave, delineating the flight-path of the swallows on their way to the warmer south. But this music flits rather than floats, and the autumn departure is enlivened by a spring in the step. On the second beat of each bar a staccato bass note is followed by a crisply exuberant chord (also staccato), high in the treble, which pings like a tambourine. This foot-tapping Bewegung, sustained more or less throughout the song, suggests a dance. In Der Hidalgo (in Volume 2) Schumann had used polonaise rhythm to stand in for a Spanish bolero: Spain and Poland seemed equally distant and exotic. At first one might imagine that the composer had intended to suggest a Russian dance of some sort in honour of Kulmann’s (and the birds’) patriotism; but in the end this music also invokes Schumann’s Spain, and the 2/4 music for O wie lieblich ist das Mädchen and its corollary Weh, wie zornig ist das Mädchen from the Spanisches Liebeslieder. This may seem puzzling at first. Kulmann’s ‘die tausend Wunder, die darbeut jedes Reich’ leaves the birds’ travel agenda wide open; but Schumann has seized on the idea of the ‘schönen warmen Süden’, and where else but Spain? The poet makes the point, admired by Schumann, that the swallows, in returning north after their southern migration, would remain loyal to their homeland. Kulmann would like to go with them, but would also remain a loyal Russian.
the meantime, however, the birds are holiday-bound, and the song is an excited musical postcard of their imagined travels. They will return home with Spanish suntans, and legs tired with dancing.

**Du nennst mich armes Mädchen**

*Many uncomprehending children reproached her for her poverty; the following song is her reply.*

Du nennst mich armes Mädchen;  
Du irrst, ich bin nicht arm.  
Entreiss dich, Neugier halber,  
Einmal des Schlafes Arm und schau'  
Mein niedres Hüttchen,  
Wenn sich die Sonne  
Hold am Morgenhimmel hebet:  
Sein Dach ist reines Gold!  
Komm’ Abends, wann die Sonne  
Bereits zum Meere sinkt,  
Und sieh’ mein einzig Fenster,  
Wie’s von Topasen blinkt!  
Du nennst mich armes Mädchen;  
Du irrst, ich bin nicht arm.

‘Poor girl’, you call me:  
You are wrong, I am not poor.  
Rouse yourself, out of curiosity,  
From the arms of sleep,  
And see my humble cottage,  
When the sun rises in beauty  
In the morning sky:  
Its roof is pure gold!  
Come in the evening, when the sun  
Is sinking into the sea,  
And see my only window  
Sparkle with topaz jewels!  
‘Poor girl’, you call me;  
You are wrong, I am not poor.

The unselfconscious gaiety of the second song now yields to something approaching pathos. The tonality reverts, predictably, to G minor. If we no longer share the Victorians’ taste for the moving testimony of disadvantaged people stoically insisting on their happiness (in the manner of much in Dickens, designed to bring a tear to the eye) we must blame the Zeitgeist. Here Schumann writes his equivalent of Schubert’s *Der blinde Knabe*, Colley Cibber’s poem about the blind boy who is pathetically grateful for small mercies and asks plaintively ‘What is this thing called light?’. The song opens with the freedom of recitative that provides a dim echo of the speech-like opening of *Süßer Freund* from *Frauenliebe und -leben*. Eight bars of gentle reproof to an imaginary interlocutor are followed by a new section in E flat major marked ‘Lebhafter’ – a quickening of pulse as Kulmann describes her blessings. As if to negate the topography of ‘niedres Hüttchen’ the vocal line soars upwards as the harmonies move into the ever warmer regions of the flat keys for ‘die Sonne hold’. The concept of the purity of gold (for the hut’s roof) returns the piano arpeggios to the unadulterated reiteration of E flat major. And then faster still (*Schneller*), and the accompaniment begins to pant in triplets; sunset seems an inappropriate moment for such heightened activity, and the composer soon winds down the tempo for a return
to ‘Du nennst mich armes Mädchen’. It would be charitable to Schumann to suggest that the awkwardness of this music was his deliberate attempt to depict a teenage girl obliged to defend herself against demeaning pity, confident and embarrassed in turn.

**Der Zeisig**

A song written when she was a young girl, perhaps in her eleventh year. Hundreds of other poems written at this time are similarly naive and charming. She always reflects reality in the profoundest way.

Wir sind ja, Kind, im Maie,
Wirf Buch und Heft von dir!
Komm’ einmal her in’s Freie,
Und sing’ ein Lied mit mir.
Komm, singen fröhlich beide
Wir einen Wettgesang,
Und wer da will, entscheide,
Wer von uns besser sang!

It is maytime, child,
Cast aside your school books!
Come out into the open
And sing a song with me.
Come, let us vie with each other
In cheerful song,
And let who will, decide
Which of us sang better!

Time and again Schumann proves himself a devoted naturalist. Flowers figure everywhere in his output, and his song menagerie includes lions, a butterfly, a ladybird, and a couple of old steeds. His aviary is even larger: it contains birds of every description from predatory ravens to a cute little owl. This finch is not the least enchanting of his creations and, as Eric Sams points out, if it had been a part of the Op 79 set of children’s songs, we would be better acquainted with it.

Schumann is tickled pink that Kulmann was very young when she wrote the poem; he finds a miniature time signature, 4/16, which seems perfectly tailored to the smallness of the song and its creator. The idea of a singing contest (‘Wettgesang’), however informal, between child and bird, is charmingly caught by the fragments of canon and imitation between the vocal line and the accompaniment. This is the epitome of deftness and delicacy, the separate double-tailed semiquavers on the stave suggesting a feathery line-up of individual finches. The spiky birdlike Bewegung is reminiscent of the charming birdsong duet Das Glück (Hebbel), another exercise in competitive canon, which was to make a reappearance in the opera Genoveva. The song is marked Da Capo ad libitum, and it is our pleasure to re-run the contest.
Reich mir die Hand, o Wolke
As often in her poetry, she concerns herself here with a visionary depiction of her deceased family. She clings to this world with heart-felt love, to the flowers, the gleaming stars, the noble human-beings she meets during her brief stay on earth. But she has a foreboding that she will soon have to leave them.

Reich mir die Hand, o Wolke,
Heb mich zu dir empor!
Dort stehen meine Brüder
Am offnen Himmelsthor.

Sie sind’s, obgleich im Leben
Ich niemals sie gesehen,
Ich seh’ in ihrer Mitte
Ja unsern Vater steh’n!
Sie schau’n auf mich hernieder,
Sie winken mir zu sich.
O reich’ die Hand mir, Wolke,
Schnell, schnell erhebe mich!

Reach me your hand, O cloud,
Lift me up to you!
There my brothers stand
At the open gate of heaven.

There they are, though in life
I never once saw them,
And in their midst
I see our father too!
They look down on me,
They beckon me to their side.
Reach me your hand, O cloud,
Quickly, quickly raise me up!

There is an immense difference in emotional scale between a merry and successful ditty about a finch and a song where the poetess, imagining her dead relatives in excelsis, expresses a wish to join them there. The poem seems an uncomfortable choice for a cycle of miniatures: the composer obviously wishes to write songs of childlike simplicity and purity, and yet he chooses a poem which seems maudlin and shamelessly manipulative. (One is reminded of the Victorian ballad which begins ‘Give me a ticket to Heaven; that’s where Dad’s gone they say’). This reaction may seem cynical, but even by nineteenth-century standards Schumann’s unquestioning credulity stretches belief. It is hardly surprising, then, that Reich mir die Hand, o Wolke, extremely short for the emotional range of its subject matter, fails to rise to the occasion, much less to lift the poetess to heaven on wings of song. If the ageing Schumann has truly invented a new type of Lied, as supporters of his late style aver (and I am one of them on occasion), one would search in vain for evidence of this here. The text seems not even to have inspired the composer to new thoughts. As Eric Sams has pointed out, the music is a re-working of Gesungen! the von der Neun setting heard earlier on this disc. The singer is allowed to sound fervently sincere; the pianist’s left hand makes much of stretching a tenth (and, on occasion, even more) as
if to reach out for the young girl’s hand in response to her pleas; the incessant semiquaver movement generates drama of a kind, though of a rather generalised nature. The postlude seems a pale echo of Der Himmel hat eine Träne geweint which quotes the opening of Giordano’s Caro mio ben in descending sequences. All in all, we weep for Schumann. The song tells us more about his depression and suicidal tendencies than about his skill as a pioneer of a new Lieder style.

26 Die letzten Blumen starben

A poem full of the presentiment of death, probably dating from the last year of her life. Next to her ‘hut’ there was a little garden, in which year after year she grew flowers. There was also a poplar nearby.

Die letzten Blumen starben,  
Längst sank die Königin  
Der warmen Sommermonde,  
Die holde Rose hin!

Du hehre Georgine,  
Erhebst nicht mehr dein Haupt!  
Selbst meine hohe Pappel  
Seh ich schon halb entlaubt.

Bin ich doch weder Pappel,  
Noch Rose, zart und schlank,  
Warum soll ich nicht sinken,  
Da selbst die Rose sank?

The last flowers have died,  
The fair rose, queen  
Of the warm summer months,  
Has long since gone to rest!

You, gracious dahlia,  
No longer raise your head!  
Even my tall poplar  
Has lost half of its flowers.

And I, who am neither poplar,  
Nor delicate slender rose,  
Why should I not fade,  
If even roses fade?

The style of this reverts to the transparent music of the opening song: the same 2/4 movement, and a texture that is depouillé to say the least. A choice of French adjective is apposite here because, not for the first time, one notices that late Schumann has a lot in common with the style of the late Fauré and a song-cycle like Le jardin clos. For those moved by late Fauré, the music seems more profound and deeply meant than ever; for others, the non-believers, it seems arid and uninspired, a sad case of creativity in decline. And there is some strange link between Fauré’s tinnitus and the head noises and repeated notes which tormented Schumann. The parallels between the two composers are clear enough not only from the partisan reactions of the enthusiasts and debunkers of their late styles, but also from the sheer sound of the late music. Die letzten Blumen starben is undemonstrative to the point of apathy, the compass of the melody confined, more or less, to the compass of a fourth. A similarly floral subject is treated with great lusciousness by Chausson (Le temps des lilas) but how differently would Fauré have handled it. Self-effacement
will always have its fans, and Schumann’s, when he is in this mood, is slowly gaining its partisans. Where does ‘reserved’ end and ‘inarticulate’ begin? It was a question also asked by those who knew Schumann personally in the last years of his life. The accompaniment is economical, as if more notes would be disastrously expensive, and thriftiness a rigorous virtue. Within the confines of this three-verse structure (AAB) drained of effusive lyricism, a portrait of Elisabeth Kulmann emerges as someone no longer of this world, exhausted, and slowly dying, fading away like her garden. She accepts death with humility and equanimity. Schumann’s verbal introduction seems, in this song particularly, to be an integral part of the music’s effect.

27 Gekämpft hat meine Barke

*Probably written shortly before her death. She seems certain of her imminent end; only the thought of the mother she leaves behind causes her profound pain.*

Gekämpft hat meine Barke
Mit der erzürnten Flut.
Ich seh’ des Himmels Marke,
Es sinkt des Meeres Wut.
Ich kann dich nicht vermeiden,
O Tod nicht meiner Wahl!
Das Ende meiner Leiden
Beginnt der Mutter Qual.
O Mutterherz, dich drücke
Dein Schmerz nicht allzu sehr!
Nur wenig Augenblicke
Trennt uns des Todes Meer.
Dort angelangt, entweiche
Ich nimmer mehr dem Strand,
Seh’ stets nach dir und reiche
Der Landenden die Hand.

My barque has struggled
With the angry sea.
I can see the heavens,
The ocean’s rage abates.
I cannot avoid you,
O death I did not choose!
When my suffering ends,
My mother’s grief begins.
O mother, let not sorrow
Oppress you too sorely!
Only for a few moments
Will Death’s sea keep us apart.
Once I have arrived,
I shall never leave that shore,
I shall always look in your direction
And help you land.

This is the only song in the cycle which is in E flat major. After six songs in either G minor or B flat major, the effect is that of branching out in a new direction and moving away into something distant and unknown. The metaphor, more pagan than Christian, of the poet’s barque struggling through the sea and sighting at last a new horizon, brings a French comparison once again to
mind. In the sea-and-sailing metaphors of Gabriel Fauré’s very last song cycle *L’horizon chimérique*, Kulmann shares with the poet Jean de la Ville de Mirmont (killed as a young soldier in the First World War) the vision of death as *un grand départ inassouvi*, the unappeased longing for a great adventure. Even the layout of the music on the page has a Fauréan appearance—a moto perpetuo accompaniment where groups of right-hand quavers glance off a strongly rhythmic bass; the music moves forward with scarcely a pause for breath, exploring various harmonic twists and turns. The melody, as if energised by a groundswell of current, seems more vital than in any of the preceding songs. If the approach of death is frightening, it is to be welcomed as a release from pain. There are moments of apt harmonic illustration—notably the strange augmented harmonies on ‘erzürnten Flut’ (denoting the turbulence of the water and suggesting that the ‘Flut’ has Styx-like attributes), the appropriate sideways step into D flat major on ‘vermeiden’ (‘avoid’), and the asides to the poet’s mother spoken in an attempt to comfort her. As an original, if unusual, piece of work, this seems superior to any of the other serious songs in the set (the charm of the two lighter songs is not in doubt). The postlude, with its yearning melody in the pianist’s little finger, seems to illustrate Kulmann herself—ever selfless, ever helpful—stretching out to new arrivals on death’s shore, and greeting them. Perhaps Schumann, who was to attempt suicide by drowning, imagined that the eternally young Elisabeth would be on hand to ease his faltering steps on to the promised land. He could not resist adding a postlude to the music in his own words. The song is printed in a way that makes it clear that the composer wishes the listener to be left to ponder his short eulogy which follows the music’s dying strains.

She died, writing poetry to the very end, on 19 November 1825, in her seventeenth year. Among her late verse is the remarkable ‘A Vision after my Death’, in which she describes her own death. It is, perhaps, one of the sublimest masterpieces in all poetry. Thus she departed, as airy as an angel passing from one shore to another, but leaving behind her the luminous trail of a heavenly vision, gleaming afar.
The popularity of this cycle, Schumann’s last, has far exceeded that of any of the other late songs. They were written in a short period of calm at the end of 1852 – a disastrous year during which Schumann had been unable to compose for months at a time. The appointment as Music Director in Düsseldorf was a catastrophe, and his work as a conductor was considered a farce. A trip to Scheveningen seems to have done him some good, and there was a six-week gap during which his creative faculties returned – whether in full or only in part remains a question of some controversy. At Christmas he was able to present the completed cycle to Clara.

It is significant that once he had the energy to contemplate composition, his interests should have turned to another biographical song-cycle. Like Elisabeth Kulmann, Mary Stuart was a tragic figure whose poetry enabled her to speak in her own words; for her supporters she was a martyr, to her enemies an adulteress and murderer. Even after a quarter of a century these camps tended to divide along Catholic and Protestant lines. Could the Queen of Scots be better understood, even redeemed, through Schumann’s musical intervention? He had done his best to make the world aware of the sad story of Elisabeth Kulmann; here he was counsel for the defence for a more famous plaintiff. As a critic he had done so much to welcome Brahms, and many others, into the musical world; it seems that he still felt the need to champion those he thought deserving of his support.

And now from Elisabeth to Mary, with an off-stage role for another less angelic Elizabeth, the Queen of England. (The linking of these names would not have been lost on Schumann, always aware of such strange coincidences.) Schiller’s play Maria Stuart, for all its historical inaccuracies, had made Mary Stuart well enough known as a larger-than-life figure, but Schumann’s way of coming to her rescue was low-key. The cycle, in four of its five episodes, is lacking in overt histrionics and melodrama, and that is perhaps one of its strengths. Schumann succeeded in introducing Mary Stuart into the world of song, and with much greater success than anything achieved by Wagner with his scena entitled Les adieux de Marie Stuart (Béranger,
1840), and even Donizetti in his opera (Maria Stuarda, 1835) based on Schiller. The combination of history and understated pathos has held the recital stage with increasing regularity and conviction.

The span of the cycle is twenty-six years in a woman’s life – many more than that of Frauenliebe und -leben. There is no reference here to love between man and woman, nor to any of the Queen’s three husbands, source of the controversy surrounding her life, as well as of the accusations against her. Instead we see a young girl devoted to her adopted land of France, a young mother concerned for the legacy of her son, a proud imprisoned queen forced to write a pleading letter, the same prisoner some years later renouncing hope in life and, finally, praying before a fearful death. This is certainly an extraordinary Frauenleben expunged of the Liebe that was at the heart of Mary Stuart’s tragedy.

Schumann expected his public to know the life story of Mary Stuart, making sense of the biographical gaps. Today’s listener is probably equally well-informed. I apologise for the necessary abridgements and simplifications in the following chronology:

Mary Stuart was born in Linlithgow on December 8, 1542. The death of her father, King James V of Scotland, left her Queen of Scotland at the age of six days. She was sent to France when she was five, and she was brought up at the court of King Henri II. She was groomed for marriage to the Dauphin and, on the accession of François II in 1559, became, very briefly, the Queen of France, Scotland and England (the latter title claimed on her behalf because of the technical illegitimacy of Elizabeth Tudor). The death of the young and sickly François in 1560 left her a widow at eighteen and made her superfluous to the political plans of her powerful uncles, the Ducs de Guise. The Queen Mother, Catherine de Médici, was hostile to her and, although Mary wished to stay quietly in France, she was sent back to Scotland at one of the most turbulent moments in its history. In a state of uneasy truce with England, it was a land ravaged by religious strife. The Queen’s own Catholicism assorted ill with the country’s predominant Protestantism and its formidable spokesman John Knox. In comparison to life in the châteaux of the Loire valley, life in Scotland offered comparatively primitive living conditions, an immoderate climate, and much political and personal danger. Mary set sail from France for Scotland in August 1561. She was five months from her nineteenth birthday.
Abschied von Frankreich
Ich zieh dahin, dahin!
Ade, mein fröhlich Frankenland,
Wo ich die liebste Heimat fand,
Du meiner Kindheit Pflegerin!
Ade, du Land, du schöne Zeit.
Mich trennt das Boot vom Glück so weit!

Doch trägt’s die Hälfte nur von mir;
Ein Teil für immer bleibt dein,
Mein fröhlich Land, der sage dir,
Des andern eingedenk zu sein! Ade!

Farewell to France
I am going away, away!
Farewell, my happy France,
Where I found the loveliest homeland,
You the guardian of my childhood
Farewell, O land, O happy time,
The ship bears me far away from joy!

Yet it takes but half of me;
One part will be for ever yours,
My happy land, recalling to you
The memory of that other self! Farewell!

The key is E minor. The accompaniment’s rippling right-hand semiquavers contain the barest outline of a hidden melody casting an immediate spell of sadness; here is something more immediately vivid than anything in the Kulmann set, appropriate to the life of a monarch rather than a modest poet. The Bewegung is also that of water music; we are aware of the swell of the current and, with it, the question ‘Wohin?’ – a sense of the danger and trepidation facing the inexperienced Queen. Schumann masterfully conveys her affection for her adopted country: the semiquavers accompanying ‘mein fröhlich Frankenland’ undulate as gently as the landscape of her beloved Touraine, the articulation of ‘meiner Kindheit Pflegerin’ (with a prosody typical of late Schumann) imply an affectionate embrace, as if the nurse were a real person. The troubled diminished chord on ‘schöne Zeit’ shows Schumann’s awareness of Mary’s story: her time in France had been luxurious and safe, but fraught with political intrigue and cruelty. For example, the massacre of the Protestants at Amboise had taken place during her short reign as Queen of France. Accordingly, ‘schöne’ is coloured, in passing, with a harmony which adds conflict to the word’s meaning. The song is constructed as a single continuous melody based on speech inflections; this shows the extent to which Wagnerian theory had infiltrated Schumann’s music-making, almost despite himself. As the song progresses, Mary is carried further away from France and towards the unknown. The poetic postlude begins with a plaintive melody in sustained crotchets in the pianist’s right hand: this seems an almost physical analogue for her last, crestfallen farewell wave. The final ‘Ade’ ushers in a repeat of the song’s opening bar of music, both resigned and fearful. The piano’s final cadence is a sudden pang of anguish. She was never to see France again.
Although Mary’s pretensions to the English throne had enraged Elizabeth I (who refused to acknowledge the Queen of Scots as her successor), Mary made a relatively successful beginning in Scotland despite her difficulties with the country’s fractious and unruly nobility. She relied on her half-brother James, Earl of Moray, for support, and she was permitted to practise her own religion as part of a policy of religious toleration. The succession of disasters which blighted her life was initiated with her reckless marriage to the handsome and dissolute Henry, Lord Darnley, in July 1565. This antagonised Mary’s brother, the Earl of Moray, who rebelled against her. The Queen quickly fell out of love with Darnley. She relied for emotional support on her court favourites, including the Italian musician David Rizzio who was murdered by Darnley and a group of nobles at Holyrood House in Edinburgh. This butchery took place in front of the Queen who was six months pregnant. (Darnley claimed that Rizzio was the baby’s father.) Mary’s son and heir was thus born at a period of great instability and uncertainty, her crown threatened by her half-brother’s ambitions and a number of other Protestant nobles who were afraid of a Catholic succession.

This song is set in Edinburgh Castle in June 1566, and the Queen is aged 24. This single page (the key is E minor) superbly conveys both post-natal exhaustion (she was in any case in bad health at the time) and fears for the future. It is far from certain that the baby boy will ever become king. (In actual fact he was to become King of Scotland the next year, 1567, when Mary was forced to abdicate; and he was to become King of a united England and Scotland in 1601, following the death of Elizabeth.) The Queen is surrounded by those who wish her ill. The whole tone of this musical setting suggests a prayer murmured in secret. The monody of liturgical prayer and plagal progressions (‘Herr Jesu Christ, den sie gekrönt mit Dornen’) entwines with the chromaticism of more turbulent events (‘beschütze die Geburt’nen des hier Geboren’) which show Mary’s inner anguish. This was well justified: her child was taken away from her and she was never able to
develop a relationship with him. The birth of Mary’s child was reported to have caused considerable anger and jealousy on the part of Elizabeth who is said to have exclaimed: “Alack, the Queen of Scots is lighter of a bonny son, and I am but of barren stock.”

*** Mary’s biography now enters a period of events that have been much contested over the centuries. It is very possible that after the birth of her son she began a passionate liaison with James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. There is an unproven theory that the adulterers planned to murder Darnley, the Queen’s husband, who was suffering from syphilis. On 9 February 1567 his temporary residence, the house at Kirk o’ Field, was blown up and Darnley was strangled as he tried to escape. He was detested by the Scottish nobles who remain the most likely suspects for the murder; but the shadow of this crime hung over Mary for the rest of her life. Badly advised, and personally reckless, her marriage to Bothwell three months later seemed to be an admission of complicity. The Scottish nobility were suspicious of this marriage, and Bothwell was hated. An armed uprising ensued. Mary saw Bothwell for the last time at Carberry Hill, outside Edinburgh, in June 1567, when they were both captured and taken into separate custody. She never saw him again and he ended his days incarcerated in terrible conditions in Denmark. Mary was deposed from the throne and imprisoned on the island of Loch Leven. She escaped and rallied her supporters, but her forces were defeated decisively at the battle of Langside in May 1568. She might easily have chosen to flee to France where she would have been an embarrassment, but at least she would have been treated with the courtesy due to her rank. Instead, almost on the spur of the moment, she decided to throw herself on the mercy of Elizabeth I. On 16 May 1568 she embarked in a little fishing boat for the four-hour journey across the Solway Firth. On landing, she stumbled as she came ashore, which some took to be a terrible omen. She expected to be treated as an equal, and imagined that an early meeting with the Queen of England would settle their differences. Detained in Carlisle Castle between the end of May and October, Mary wrote some twenty letters to Queen Elizabeth. She even wrote a poem to her chère soeur. French and Italian versions of this survive. Vincke’s German translation is reasonably close to the original.

An die Königin Elisabeth

Nur ein Gedanke, der mich freut und quält,
Hält ewig mir den Sinn gefangen,
So dass der Furcht und Hoffnung Stimmen klangen,
Als ich die Stunden ruhelos gezählt.

To Queen Elizabeth

One thought alone gladdens and grieves me
And dominates my mind,
So that the voices of fear and hope resound,
When sleepless I count the hours.
This is one of the most effective letter arias outside the annals of opera. It is a brief reappearance of the musico-dramatic imagination and empathy that had enabled Schumann to give *Die Kartenlegerin* such vivacity and life. The use of the key of A minor (the only one of the cycle’s five songs not in E minor) symbolises a desperate attempt on Mary’s part to break free – to step outside her pre-ordained destiny and persuade Elizabeth to a change of heart. The opening pianistic motif in dotted rhythm binds the piece together. The Queen is writing alone at a table. The vehemence of her thoughts and the speed of her writing are part of her nature; she writes from the heart and without premeditation. At twenty-six she is still a young woman; her thoughts are poured onto paper almost at the speed of speech. After she finishes a phrase, and as she thinks of the next, the feather-tipped quill pen is dipped into the inkwell, returning to its task with a flourish. (These were the early days of her imprisonment and she was still allowed her retinue and certain luxuries.) In this gesture, translated into the accompaniment’s governing motif, we hear all of Mary’s impetuous pride and royal temperament. This is a real achievement on Schumann’s part. The lie of the vocal line expertly implies the tone of a letter written in a rush of emotion. Mary is speaking to the Queen, her gaoler, and yet not face-to-face: that seems utterly clear from the pacing of the music, and the gaps between sentences as the pen is replenished with ink. The words seem sharply etched into the vocal line, as if they were scratched on to parchment. The single moment of diplomatic caution exists with the words ‘vor euch nicht, vor euch nicht, Schwester’. Schumann’s repetition of the words suggests a phrase underlined; for a moment Mary pauses for thought, aware that it is dangerous to suggest that the person on whom her welfare depends is untrustworthy. After the first ‘dem wir vertraut’ the
handwriting motif signifies the addition of a signature, imperious and still proud, to the letter. But as it is folded and sealed, the repeat of those words ‘dem wir … vertraut’ in hollow, monodic fashion, shows a return to reality after high-flown rhetoric. Whatever it is politic to have written in a letter, at heart she does not trust Elizabeth an inch. The IV - V - I cadence of the final three bars (accompanied by the mezzo staccato crotchet chords of fear and trepidation) foreshadow Mary’s doom in chilling fashion. ‘Put not your trust in princes’ they seem to whisper.

*** The suspicions of Mary’s guilt in the Darnley murder case were the ideal excuse for her continuing detention. The conference at York in October 1568 was supposed to settle the matter, but this was nothing more than an exercise in the most cynical politics. Mary refused to accept the authority of the court, and nothing could be proven against her. Nevertheless the so-called ‘casket letters’ were produced, supposedly Mary’s intimate correspondence with Bothwell which depicted her as an adulterous murdereress. Were these the expert forgeries of William Cecil’s secret service? Historians take opposing views. It slowly dawned on Mary that it suited the English queen’s advisers to keep her imprisoned, come what may. Her half-brother Moray was made Regent of Scotland (although he was soon to assassinated) and Protestantism was securely entrenched in Scotland.

These were difficult times for English security. The rising of the northern Earls in 1569 was partly inspired by Mary’s presence, and there were various schemes, always harebrained, to spring her release. Despite Mary’s pleas, Elizabeth had no intention of meeting Mary. (She never did so, despite the famous fictional encounter in Schiller’s play.) For the next eighteen years of her life, Mary was held captive in a number of prisons in England, some of them extremely bleak and uncomfortable. She had the consolation of her religion, and she was allowed various small pets, as well as the relaxation of embroidery. But considering her former zest for life, these things were woefully inadequate outlets for her energies. One might also imagine the cost to the psyche of a passionate woman who found herself cut off from any source of physical love. The ordeal of imprisonment, particularly after she realised that continued pleas to Elizabeth had fallen on deaf ears, wore her down. The well-known portrait of 1578 shows a woman in a black dress and white veil, looking considerably older than her 36 years. Imprisonment and lack of exercise tarnished her legendary beauty and thickened her waistline. This poem probably dates from the 1580s when it was clear to Mary that she would never be released, and that only death was capable of performing that office.
Abschied von der Welt
Was nützt die mir noch zugemess’ne Zeit?
Mein Herz erstarb für irdisches Begehren,
Nur Leiden soll mein Schatten nicht entbehren,
Mir blieb allein die Todesfreudigkeit.

Ihr Feinde, lasst von eurem Neid:
Mein Herz ist abgewandt der Hoheit Ehren,
Des Schmerzes Übermass wird mich verzeihen;
Bald geht mit mir zu Grabe Hass und Streit.

Ihr Freunde, die ihr mein gedenkt in Liebe,
Erwägt und glaubt, dass ohne Kraft und Glück
Kein gutes Werk mir zu vollenden bliebe.

So wünscht mir bess’re Tage nicht zurück,
Und weil ich schwer gestrafet werd’ hienieden,
Erfleht mir meinen Teil am ew’gen Frieden!

Farewell to the world
What use is the time still allotted me?
My heart is dead to earthly desires,
My spirit is severed from all but sorrow,
The joy of death alone remains.

Cease envying me, O enemies:
My heart abjures all honour and nobility,
Excess of anguish will devour me,
Hatred and schism will soon be buried with me.

O friends, who will remember me with love,
Consider and believe that without power or fortune
There is nothing good I can achieve.

So do not wish for the return of happier days,
And because I’ve been sorely punished here on earth,
Pray that a share of eternal peace might be mine!

Some years seem to have have elapsed between this song and its predecessor. Although it begins as if in A minor, this harmonic sleight of hand briefly disguises a return to E minor for this, the second of the ‘Abschied’ songs in the cycle. The first, a farewell to France, chronicled an earlier catastrophe; but this second farewell is a measure of the ever-deepening crises that made up the life of Mary Stuart, and the way in which she gradually lost every one of the mighty advantages in life to which she had been born. The opening phrase, a fragment of descending melody contained within a fifth of an A minor triad, is as bleak a melodic and rhythmic cell as has ever contained a prisoner without remission. This little motto, appearing at first in the treble register, is repeated a twelfth below in the tenor register, as if in grave counterpoint. The reappearance of this little accompanimental melody binds the song together, and paragraphs its various clauses. Here one can understand why Fischer-Dieskau has cited the ‘simple melodies of Elizabethan songs’ as being an inspiration to Schumann in this cycle. There is something here of the pessimistic beauty of a Dowland lute song in confessional mode, like In darkness let me dwell, and also something of its lucid transparency of texture. Much of the piano writing, including mezzo staccato chords, suggests the clarity of plucked strings.

Fischer-Dieskau also contrasts the Schumann of 1840 who might have said ‘I want to keep singing like a nightingale until I die’ with the composer of 1852,
now drawn to Mary’s opening words in the poem – words which, one suspects, also reflect the composer’s view of life: ‘What is the use of the time still left to me?’ As in An die Königin Elisabeth, the inflection of the vocal line rings true as a characterisation of a great queen, this time in a much-chastened mood. The letter to Elizabeth was an impassioned address to an equal, but this is the solemn address of someone born to rule, regal deportment in every fabric of her being as she speaks to subordinates. There is bitterness here, but she is very much in control. Each appearance of the motif appears to initiate a new paragraph of a last will and testament, read aloud firmly, but softly. This is a point to be remembered by interpreters tempted into verismo histrionics by sympathy with the character. The change into the major key at ‘Ihr Freunde, die ihr mein gedenkt in Liebe’ is of the utmost sweetness and gentleness. It is as if the queen has allowed herself a momentary sad smile. When she mentions eternal peace, Schumann makes a remarkable setting of the words ‘ew’gen Frieden’ – a leap of an octave (on Es) between the two words. This is a bold and moving piece of word-setting and it is difficult not to believe that Hugo Wolf profited from it: in So lasst mich scheinen from the Goethe Lieder, his Mignon also takes her farewell to life with the phrase ‘ewig jung’ sung on the same two notes, and with the same poignant vocal stretch toward eternity.

*** After many years in captivity, a younger generation of English Catholics idolised Mary as a legendary princess cruelly imprisoned by the wicked heretic queen. It was inevitable that her presence in England made her the focus of plots to restore Catholic rule in England. The bleakness of her life, and its sense of desperate futility, ensured she was foolishly open to any suggestion that might reverse her fate. The English Machiavelli, Walsingham, trapped her into incriminating herself in a plot led by young and inept enthusiasts. On the collapse of the Babington Plot in 1586, the English had all the evidence they needed to put the Queen on trial for treason. Despite the fact that she was the sovereign of another country, Mary was tried and found guilty by an English court. Elizabeth prevaricated for months before signing the death warrant. When the impatient officials at last wheedled this from the Queen (who would deny, the next day, that she meant the execution to go ahead), Mary Stuart was given less that twelve hours to prepare for her end. Legend has it that the following poem was written (in Latin) in the early morning of 8 February 1587, just hours before her execution at Fotheringay Castle, near Peterborough, aged 44. She met her fate with the greatest bravery and dignity.
This is the second Gebet in this cycle. The first had been for the safety of Mary’s son and heir. Ironically, at the time that Mary penned the second poem, James Stuart’s dynastic position was more or less assured. Indeed, he was more concerned to succeed to the English throne than to attempt to save his mother’s life. In Schumann’s cycle the two single-page prayers are related in tonality and concision. In other ways they are different. The first conveys fear for the distant future, but in this Gebet, written in the shadow of a terrible death, Mary’s fears for her imminent fate are woven into the majestic musical tapestry. Not for the first time we are aware that Schumann, whether he liked it or not, was a contemporary of Wagner. As Fischer-Dieskau writes: ‘It is fascinating that at this moment in history two composers, holding diametrically opposed positions, came close to each other through their declamatory styles. From their respective positions they were able to define a new kind of diction in German song’. It is true that the vehemence of ‘Im harten Gefängnis’, capped by an anguished sequence, a tone higher, for ‘In schlimmer Bedrängnis’, would have been worthy of a Wagnerian monologue. It is here that the desperate piety of the Queen of Scots recalls the self-abasement of Amfortas. At the same time, Schumann calls upon the shade of the seventeenth-century music.

In the manner of the great Bach chorales with which Schumann was well acquainted, this plea for salvation, despite its urgency, never loses its dignity. As always with this composer, evoking the music of the past is a means of heightening the emotions of the present. And one cannot escape the feeling that these words refer to his present ondition, as much as Mary Stuart’s tragic past. The interrupted cadence in the vocal line (at ‘und rette du mich!’) is an unnervingly inconclusive ending for a queen whose head was severed from her body as she whispered prayers on the block. With the solemn organ-like postlude, Schumann’s song-writing came to an end, his creative life axed before its time, as surely as the life of his last heroine.
Soprano Juliane Banse was born in the South of Germany and spent her childhood in Zürich, Switzerland. She began playing the violin at the age of five and whilst still at school trained as a ballerina at the Zürich Opera where she also appeared on stage. She began singing lessons at the age of fifteen, her teachers being Paul Steiner and Ruth Rohner (Opera Zürich). After leaving school she continued her studies with Brigitte Fassbaender and Daphne Evangelatos in Munich.

Juliane Banse has been awarded numerous scholarships and prizes. In June 1989 she won First Prize in the singing competition of the Kulturforum, Munich, and in December 1993 the International Franz Schubert Institute awarded her with the Grand Prix Franz Schubert for her interpretation of that composer’s works. She made her operatic debut as Pamina at the Komische Oper Berlin in 1989 and was subsequently reinvited for Ilia in Idomeneo in 1991 and for Susanna in Le Nozze di Figaro in 1992. Further engagements led her to Leipzig, Salzburg (Sophie), Glyndebourne (Zerlina), Deutsche Oper Berlin (Pamina, Sophie and Massenet’s Manon), Vienna (Zdenka, Pamina, Susanna, Sophie, Marzelline etc.) and Cologne (Musetta in La Bohème). The season 1998/99 commenced like a bombshell. The international press showered her with ‘rave’ reviews for her performance of the title role in Heinz Holliger’s new opera Schneewittchen, premièred in Zürich.

Juliane’s work as a concert singer is of equal importance to her and she appears frequently in concerts and recitals all over the world. She regularly appears with Helmuth Rilling. In November 1994 she made her debut with the Vienna Philharmonic under Claudio Abbado, where she sang Berg’s Lulu-Suite. The orchestra immediately re-invited her for concerts with Carlo Maria Giulini and André Previn. She made her American debut in 1995 with Mahler’s Symphony No 2 (St Louis Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin) and at the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra under Raymond Leppard (Haydn’s Seasons).

Juliane Banse is a dedicated Lieder singer. A recital tour of Germany in May 1997 was much acclaimed by audience and press. After the final recitals of the Schubert Series in Cologne, the press hailed her as ‘Star of the Evening’. She is a regular guest at the Schubertiade Feldkirch.

**GRAHAM JOHNSON**

After arriving in Britain from his native Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Graham Johnson studied at London’s Royal Academy of Music and subsequently with the late Geoffrey Parsons. In 1972 he
was official accompanist at Peter Pears’s first masterclasses at The Maltings, Snape, and thereafter worked regularly with the great tenor. In 1975 he was invited by Walter Legge to accompany Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. In 1976 he formed The Songmakers’ Almanac to further the cause of neglected areas of piano-accompanied vocal music and to place the staple repertoire of song in new and challenging contexts. This endeavour was much supported by the late Gerald Moore, whose guiding influence in Johnson’s career was of crucial importance.

Apart from devising and accompanying over one hundred and fifty Songmakers’ recitals, Graham Johnson has presented a number of summer recital cycles for London’s South Bank and Wigmore Hall, as well as a seven-part cycle of Goethe settings for the Alte Oper, Frankfurt. He has written and presented programmes for both BBC Radio and Television on the songs of Schubert, Poulenc, Liszt and Shostakovich. He is Professor of Accompaniment at London’s Guildhall School of Music and a Fellow of that School as well as of the Royal Academy of Music. He has given masterclasses as far afield as Finland, New Zealand, and the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California.

Mr Johnson has accompanied such distinguished singers as Elly Ameling, Victoria de los Angeles, Arleen Auger, Brigitte Fassbaender, Lucia Popp, Tom Krause, Jessye Norman, Peter Schreier, Marjana Lipovsek, Felicity Palmer, Ann Murray, Christine Schäfer, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Matthias Goerne and Dame Margaret Price. He has accompanied Dame Felicity Lott since their student days at the Royal Academy of Music where they worked together with the late Flora Nielsen.

Graham’s ten year project to record the entire Schubert Lieder for Hyperion continues to attract critical acclaim, including the ‘Gramophone’ Solo Vocal Award in both 1989 (for his disc with Dame Janet Baker) and 1996 (for Die schöne Müllerin with Ian Bostridge); his other collaborators in the series include Thomas Allen, Brigitte Fassbaender, Thomas Hampson, Christoph Prégardien, Dame Margaret Price, Dame Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, Edith Mathis, Philip Langridge, Arleen Auger, Lucia Popp, Marjana Lipovsek, Christine Schäfer, Matthias Goerne and Peter Schreier. He has now embarked on a new project for Hyperion, to record the entire Lieder of Schumann. The first disc in this series, with Christine Schäfer, won the 1997 ‘Gramophone’ Solo Vocal Award.

Graham Johnson was awarded an OBE in the 1994 Queen’s Birthday Honours list.
SIEBEN LIEDER

zur
Erinnerung an die Dichterin

für
EINE SINGSTEMME
mit Begleitung des Pianoforte

von
ROB. SCHUMANN.


LEIPZIG, BEI FR. KISTNER.

1846.