



J. Lang: Lieder

aud 97.472



American Record Guide 3/2003 (John Boyer - 2003.05.01)



Josephine Lang (1815-80) suffered the typical life of a 19th Century woman composer: a domineering, jealous father, an unsupportive family, and more than her share of personal tragedy (she outlived three of her four sons). Like Carl Wieck, Lang's father tried to control every aspect of her education, musical and otherwise. When the young Josephine came to the attention of Felix Mendelssohn, he did his best to encourage her and see to it that she obtained a first class musical education, even offering to board her at the Mendelssohn home in Berlin where he could personally supervise her development. Her father refused. After the death of her father she married Reinhold Kdstlin, a professor of law who did nothing to encourage her to compose. As Ferdinand Hiller would later write, "the artist Josephine Lang disappeared before the Frau Professor; indeed, the art of music often had to yield to the art of cooking". The death of K6stlin in 1856 forced Lang to begin her career anew and, with the help of Hiller, Clara Schumann, and Rebecka (Mendelssohn) Dirichiet, she was able to re-establish herself as a piano pedagogue and composer of lieder.

Lang appears to have concentrated most of her musical efforts on lieder, rarely attempting anything on a larger scale. Only a few composers of piano miniatures and songs have established themselves in the repertory, since there is an expectation that a real composer must eventually attempt something greater. But there's a lot to be said for sticking to what one does well, and Lang, in her 150 published lieder, shows us that she was a very able composer. Mendelssohn waxed rhapsodic over her songs, and it is no wonder: she sounds exactly like him. In song after song, the spirit of Mendelssohn is never far. Grace, poise, elegance, beauty, and simplicity are her hallmarks. But Lang is no mere imitator of an established model. As a composer of songs, she's not just like Mendelssohn, she's often (dare I say it?) better Lang's songs have an extra something that all but the best of Mendelssohn's lack, making the elder composer's efforts sound like the imitations. With respect to her exact contemporaries Robert Franz and Robert Volkmann, she is consistently better. If she has a deficiency, it is that she never developed with time. Songs written in 1870 sound like those from 1840.

Serving this good music is soprano Heike Hallaschka's delightful singing. Confident and controlled, her bright pretty voice is ideally suited to the material. She also invests each song with subtle characterization, wisely avoiding the temptation to let them sing themselves. The engineers have captured the proceedings in ideal sound: realistic balance between singer and piano, both surrounded with just enough space to avoid a sense of being too close, but not with so much as to sound too reverberant.

An intelligent essay, reasonably well translated, and complete texts round out the release. Only the absence of translations for the texts mars the impression of this otherwise wholly effective and easily recommendable recording.

Bote vom Unter-Main Nr. 229/2003 (- 2003.08.26)

Lieder Josephine Langs (1815 bis 1880), die oft nur wenig beachtet wurden, bringen Heike Hallaschka (Sopran) und Heidi Kommerell (Klavier) auf einer audite-CD verdienstvollerweise wieder zu Gehör.

Classica-Répertoire mars 2004 (Jean-Jacques Groleau - 2004.03.01)

Il s'agit là d'une véritable première discographique. Depuis longtemps passée aux oubliettes, Joséphine Lang n'avait pas plus les honneurs des studios d'enregistrement que ceux des salles de concert. La compositrice avait pourtant les faveurs de Robert Schumann, qu'elle avait su séduire par ses seules qualités musicales (du moins l'histoire n'en dit pas davantage). Les auditeurs curieux trouveront donc là un terrain des plus intéressants, avec des mélodies qui font souvent penser à Mendelssohn, qu'il s'agisse de Félix ou de sa sœur Fanny d'ailleurs, ou même à du Benjamin Godard, surtout pour ce qui est de la partie de piano. La voix de Heike Hallaschka n'est pas inoubliable, mais sert avec une grande honnêteté cette musique, dont certains numéros ne laisseront pas indifférents, tel ce « Blick' nach oben », où les méandres harmoniques, les jeux d'ombre et de lumière montrent autant d'inspiration que de maîtrise de facture. Dans la notice, l'introduction (en anglais et allemand) de Holger Schneider sera précieuse à plus d'un titre, tant les informations manquent sur cette artiste, mais on regrette que les textes ne soient présentés que dans leur langue originale, réduisant l'accès de ces lieder aux seuls germanistes aguerris.

Crescendo 5/2002 (JM - 2002.10.01)



... Da gehen von den Kompositionen der Romantikerin Josephine Lang erheblich mehr Reize aus, auch dank der aparten, jungmädchenhaften Stimme Heike Hallaschkas. Die Pianistin Heidi Kommerell hat in gleicher Sache früher schon mal Claudia Taha begleitet.

Fono Forum 10/2002 (Christian Wildhagen - 2002.10.01)



"Wie sehen die Meisterwerke so berühmter Namen so winzig aus gegen diese frische Musik!" Hingerissen schwärmte Mendelssohn von den Liedern der Josephine Lang (1815-1890), die offenkundig zu den größten Begabungen seiner Epoche gehörte, deren Talent aber, wie so oft, in den Zwängen der Konvention zerrieben wurde. "Ihre Tonkunst mußte vielfach der Kochkunst weichen", vermerkte Ferdinand Hiller sarkastisch. Dennoch schrieb Josephine Lang zeitlebens Lieder, die ein reizvolles Amalgam aus den Stilen Mendelssohns und Schumanns bilden, ohne epigonal zu sein. Erfreulich, dass auch die beiden Interpretinnen dafür weit mehr zu bieten haben als missionarischen Eifer - ihnen ist diese Musik spürbar eine Herzensangelegenheit. Und das mit Recht.

Journal of the Int. Alliance of Women in Music February 2003 (Dr. Suzanne Summerville - 2003.02.01)

Hardly less impressive is the second of the CDs entitled *Fee'n-reigen* (Fairy-dance). It features Lieder by Josephine Lang (1815-1890) performed by Heike Hallaschka, soprano, and Heidi Kommerell, piano.

Felix Mendelssohn, who had been Lang's piano teacher when she was sixteen, was hugely enthusiastic about her as a pianist, composer, and singer of her own songs - and that alone should be reason enough to rescue the composer Josephine Lang from oblivion. Whoever experiences the sound of her Lieder on this world premiere recording asks all the more why the musical world has ignored this treasure for so long. The twenty songs included on this CD were written over most of Lang's lifetime - from childhood to late maturity by a simply brilliant song composer - and feature the words of three of the 19th century's most famous poets - Heine, Goethe, and Byron - as well as six written to the words of her husband, C. R. Köstlin, a professor of law at the University of Tübingen.

Heike Hallaschka and Heidi Kommerell are able to move their listener with energy, pathos, expressiveness, soaring excitement, and they even put in the exclamation points in Goethe's "ja, sie liebt mich!" (yes, she loves me!)

The program notes by Holger Schneider in a translation by David Babcock are extensive and present to the listener a narrative of her life, with all of the difficulties faced by the grown up recipient of so much teenage wonder, as wife, and mother of six children.

For those readers who might want to teach other German composers besides Clara Schumann and Fanny Hensel in their Women in Music or Women's Studies classes, Josephine Lang and Alma Mahler Werfel would make excellent examples of 19th and 20th century composers with real talent who managed to fill their lives in music-making at the same time were confronted with all of the societal barriers facing creative women, each with arduous family responsibilities, and in the case of Alma Mahler Werfel, the perils of two world wars. Many thanks to Heidi Kommerell, Heike Hallaschka, Sabine Ritterbusch, and the producers and editors of these fine CDs for making such options possible.

Main-Echo Nr. 229/2003 (- 2003.08.26)



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Stuttgarter Zeitung 193 (jha - 2002.08.21)



Lieder von Josephine Lang

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Viva Voce Frühling 2003 – No. 64 (- 2003.03.01)

Die Pianistin Heidi Kommerell ist für ihr Engagement in Sachen „Komponistinnen“ seit langem bekannt. Als jüngstes Zeugnis legte sie zwei CD-Einspielungen mit Werken der Spätromantik vor. Mit der Produktion „Josephine Lang – Lieder“ haben Kommerell und Heike Hallaschka ein musikalisches Porträt in 20 Liedern vorgelegt, auf dem neben häufiger eingespielten Liedern der Süddeutschen auch bislang selten Gehörtes vorgestellt wird.



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