



Encounters with Schumann - ...tief im blauen Traum...

aud 97.532

EAN: 4022143975324



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www.musicweb-international.com (Robert Hugill - 2008.02.01)

This CD is something of a trap for the unwary, for those (like me) who put the disc on without reading the liner-notes properly. The first track consists of the first movement of Schumann's *Sechs Lieder, Op. 33* for four-part male-voice chorus. At the end of the movement, Schumann's final phrase repeats accompanied by a rasp of percussion. This continues and develops until we are in an entirely new world.

At this point your reviewer returned to the liner-notes and read them properly. The disc by Die Meistersinger and Detmolder Hornquartett consists of Schumann's *Sechs Lieder, Op. 33* and his *Fünf Gesänge, Op. 137* for four-part male-voice chorus and four horns. In addition they perform Uwe Kremp's '*...tief im blauen Traum...*' four-part male voice chorus and two percussionists and Mark Anton Moebius's *Fluchtpunkte eines Jägers* for four-part male-voice chorus, baritone solo, cor anglais and horn. The point to understand from the notes is that the movements of the Uwe Kremp piece are interleaved with the *Op. 33* lieder, so that the effect I perceived at the end of the 1st Schumann movement was deliberate. Similarly Moebius's piece is interleaved with the movements of Schumann's *Op. 137*.

Die Meistersinger is a male voice choir which has its origins in the Gächinger Kantorei. The ensemble was founded in 1998 and has been conducted by Klaus Breuninger ever since then. They have made a number of discs but this fascinating one seems to be their way of trying to re-vitalise the tradition of the male-voice chorus.

Schumann's works in this genre date from 1840 and seem to have been written for the Leipzig Men's Choir Association for whom Mendelssohn's *Op. 50 Lieder* were written. We know that in 1836 Schumann, Mendelssohn and friends tried out Mendelssohn's four-part male voice choir pieces - presumably singing one to a part - and Schumann's letters suggest that this might be the case also for his own pieces. This would make sense as we know that Mendelssohn tried out some of Schumann's solo songs before their publication.

The resulting pieces have a robust charm and their particular genre has an atmosphere redolent of the men's associations, glee clubs and the like. I know that Schumann's pieces are far more sophisticated than glees, but the very particular sound of the male voice chorus does give rise to these thoughts.

It is thus understandable that the performers should seek to vary the diet by interspersing Schumann's *Six Lieder* with Uwe Kremp's *Intermezzi*. Kremp studied composition in Karlsruhe with Mathis Spahlinger and Wolfgang Rihm. Kremp's *Intermezzi* use fragments of Schumann's texts, usually taken from the previous verse, to create a dream like extension of the Schumann pieces. Gradually, as the

Intermezzi proceed, Kremp dismantles the linguistic elements so that by the end the choir are just singing sounds, not sense. Into this mix, Kremp adds two percussionists "to create an additional resonance space for the noise-like aspects of the consonants in language".

The results are fascinating and make for an interesting mix; we end up listening to the Schumann pieces with new ears. I am not entirely sure that the experiment works completely, but it is certainly worth making and very much worth listening to.

Schumann's Op.137 songs for male-voice choir and French Horns are directly related to the Forest Scenes Op.82. The texts come from Heinrich Laube's Hunting Breviary and the pieces inhabit that Romantic huntsman's world which was tapped into by Weber and others. Mark Anton Moebius's *Fluchtpunkte eines Jägers* (Vanishing Points of a Hunter), uses a combination of voices, horn and cor anglais to link the Schumann items.

Moebius uses a text taken from Rilke's Eight Duino Elegy to create a series of pieces which meditate on the confrontation between man and animal, his intention being to illuminate the moment when the hunter looks the animal in the eye and recognises himself in it. Like the Kremp/Schumann combination, this is a potent mix which allows us to view and hear the Schumann pieces differently. The solo part requires the singer to mix both baritone and counter-tenor registers, something Hubert Wild does brilliantly.

Not everyone will like this experiment. Kremp and Moebius's pieces can be difficult but are quite approachable, but their alternation with Schumann's music will not be to all tastes. Personally I found it intriguing and fascinating, but would sometimes be tempted to re-programme my CD player so that I could get the Schumann pieces on their own.

Die Meistersinger under their conductor Klaus Beuninger are excellent, managing to perform both the Schumann and the contemporary piece as if they had been performing them all their lives. There was so sense of disjunction between the performances of the Schumann and the modern works, which is quite an achievement.

This is a fascinating disc and if you are open to experiment then you are sure to find much here, especially with such confident performances.