



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

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There's a fine men's choir at work in this program, billed as Encounters With Schumann – gorgeous accounts of the five hunting songs of Opus 137 and the six selections that make up Opus 33. But before you run to the record store or (more likely, these days) your computer, know that there's a gimmick involved. Uwe Kremp (b 1964), a prize-winning German composer, has crafted *Tief im Blauen Traum* (Deep in the Blue Dream) for men's choir and percussion. It is a set of five fragmented intermezzos that deconstruct Schumann's Op. 33 beyond recognition. Another contemporary composer, Mark Anton Moebius (b 1973) has taken Schumann's hunting songs, complete with the horn quartet, and turned them into *Fluchtpunkte eines Jägers* (Vanishing Point of a Hunter), a set of commentaries on hunters and their prey that takes the metaphor of the chase for what it is – an act of killing. There's interesting music in both sets, but here's the thing: the contemporary pieces keep alternating with the Schumann songs. Some may find themselves engaged by this dialog, but it drives me up a wall. I find it impossible to settle into either idiom.

Mind you, the level of artistry is high all around, so if you don't mind bouncing back and forth between the 19th and 20th centuries, this could be of interest. But if (like me) you'd prefer to take your Schumann straight and move on to the modernists only after Robert is finished speaking, this could prove jarring in the extreme. For these same songs blissfully uninterrupted, try the terrific MDG 6221316 (Nov/Dec2005).