



Alma & Gustav Mahler: Lieder

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"To render me harmless he simply took away what living things he did not know how to handle. I was the little girl he had desired and was now going to educate. I shall reinforce the ground he walks on with my hard earned calm. . . In exchange, I have a wise guide and endless conversation. I am filled to the brim with my mission of smoothing the path of this genius!
I feel so often how little I am and have in comparison with his immeasurable riches."
(Alma Mahler Werfel)

The book was inscribed 1958, the cover was torn, and I bet I hadn't looked at it in almost that many years, but in my mail box one day this spring I opened a package from the German pianist and music historian Heidi Kommerell, and the book *And the Bridge is Love* took on another meaning - albeit a more mature one, a fascinating one - based on the richness of the experiences of its author, one of the late 19th and early 20th century Europe's most beautiful and talented women. Alma Mahler Werfel, daughter of Emil J. Schindler, the Austrian Empire's foremost landscape painter, became the friend, student, lover - or a combination of the list and more - to several of the most artistically influential men of the first half of the 20th century. To name but a few - painter Oscar Kokoschka, composers Gustav Mahler, Hans Pfitzner, Kurt Weill, Arnold Schönberg, and Alexander Zemlinsky; architect Walter Gropius; and writers Gerhard Hauptmann, Franz Werfel, Erich Maria Remarque, Thomas Mann, and Max Reinhardt. Three of these noteworthy men - Mahler, Gropius, and Werfel - became her husband.

Alma & Gustav Mahler
My Music - Your Music
Not a Composing Couple

The evocative subtitle of this CD grew out of the extensively documented relationship of Gustav Mahler and his much younger wife Alma Schindler. Musicologist Christoph Becher and the performers Sabine Ritterbusch and Heidi Kommerell have made a close study of the notes, letters, and later autobiographical publications pertaining to the eight and a half years of Mahlers' marriage and the effect it had on the musical production of the couple.

The booklet notes, in German and also in the excellent English translation of David Babcock, include a conversation with both performers moderated by Becher in which he has discuss the songs and their personal thoughts in relation to the music and the poetry as it was.

The four songs from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn” (“Ich ging mit Lust”, “Scheiden und Meiden”, “Nicht wiedersehen”, and “Rheinlegendchen”) and two each composed to the poetry of Richard Leander and Friedrich Rückert by Gustav Mahler and included in this recording are among his best known and surely most beautiful. The great majority of Alma Mahler’s possible 100 compositions were lost during WWII, but the eight songs included on this CD, representing half of her extant repertoire, can be enjoyed by listeners for the first time in this premiere recording.

Soprano Sabine Ritterbusch has been a member of the Hamburg State Opera since 1993, has made guest appearances in several other important opera houses, but has included time in her schedule for numerous recitals, recordings, and radio broadcasts, many performed together with pianist Heidi Kommerell. For the last dozen years Kommerell has spent endless hours researching and performing the music of many lesser-known and under-appreciated composers – many of them women, of course. Her devotion to her concert series “Music in Context” has led to invitations to perform in Europe, Latin America, Israel, Asia, and the USA and to a close collaboration with many of the most important public radio stations in Germany and the national radios of Switzerland, Israel and Ireland. She plays beautifully and accompanies her vocal partner with a high level of musical backing, that is always supportive and never intrusive.

After listening to Alma & Gustav Mahler for hours on end, there is nothing more to say than this is a beautiful recording of gorgeous music.