

Music Reviews

by Sue Anderson

Changing Voices: songs within an octave for teenage male singers:

compiled and edited by Liza Hobbs and Veronica Veysey Campbell

published by Edition Peters (2012) 112pp, £12.50

Once again, AOTOS members have realised a need or gap in the available teaching repertoire and have set about fulfilling that need with expertise and finely-tuned understanding of the 'client' group. In this case, the client group is teenage boys, and the AOTOS members are Liza and Veronica. I do hope that this book continues the tradition of success that was established by the *Language of Song* series, initiated and designed by Heidi Pegler and Nicola Jane-Kemp.

At first sight, this is far removed from the normal Peters house-style. The cover is bright blue and yellow, the size of music print is considerably larger than normal, and the page layout is attractive, varied and vibrant! Apparently small details, like the printing of the song title down the edge of the relevant pages, make it so much easier (and quicker) to find the right place in the book. What a good idea! And I am delighted that the first page after the contents page is addressed to the singer, not the teacher; 'Your Voice: not breaking but changing'. The rest of this introduction gives a factual and positive guide as to why the voice changes, what you, as the possessor of a changing might expect, but emphasising that it is difficult to be categorical about how that change will occur. There are then further notes for the teacher, describing the philosophy behind the publication, and explaining the choice of songs, key or keys and clefs used.

Each new song has a page of introduction, giving keys and vocal ranges, a brief introduction to the song, genre and composer, written in accessible, non-patronising language. The text of each song is also printed in poetic format on this page, with

pronunciation guides where appropriate. Of great value is the 'performing advice', just a couple of paragraphs of succinct help into the particular priorities of each song – rhythm, text, sub-text, etc. This section also gently encourages uncontroversibly good physical habits for singing; 'stand tall with a feeling of lengthening your back', 'allow your knees to feel soft and slightly springy rather than tight and locked back', 'this song is good for practising diction while keeping the jaw relaxed and the tongue released' and so on. Those who have lucky enough to hear Veronica working with her students from St Pauls Cathedral and the Royal College of Music Junior Department will instantly recognise her clear exposition of technical matters, and also recognise Liza's abiding love of language.

There are nineteen songs in the book, offering a wide variety of 'musical standards, periods and styles', but all are (or can be) restricted to an octave in range, and there are no 'vocal gymnastics', so that the singer can focus on learning to handle their 'new, larger and temporarily less responsive instrument'. The texts are often interesting, questioning and thought-provoking, with twelve of the nineteen songs in English. Of the remainder, there are two in Italian, *Star Vicino & Pupille Arciere*, representing the *Arie Antiche* tradition, two German, and two French. There are some fine arrangements of traditional songs by John Owen Edwards, including *Erie Canal*, the shanty *Leave her, Johnny*, and the spiritual, *Ezek'el saw the wheel*.

Amongst the other songs in English there is considerable diversity, from Dowland to Flanders and Swann, but including Rubbra, *Runes of Hospitality*, and Vaughan Williams' *From Far*. As well as the new arrangements mentioned above, there are two new works commissioned specially for this volume. *Let It* by Errollyn Wallen is simple in style, small in range, but in the right hands would be very effective. Speaking of hands, I had to think quite hard about the RH chord which appears first in bar 3, from bottom to top it goes Eb F G and higher D. This is an unexpectedly awkward stretch, and it rather put me off the song. The longest song in the book is composed by Ben Parry, with words by Garth Bardsley, *Career Paths*, and romps through lovely rhymes, such as successful/stressful, Freud/devoid subliminal/criminal. I suspect that it will very soon make its appearance in recital programmes, as I am sure that many teenage boys will love it!

By approaching the compilation of this book from the real needs of a particular student group, the authors have produced a refreshing and exciting volume, raising the awareness of all concerned both to physical aspects of technique, and to the joy of combining text and music song.

The best of singing grades 1-5: selected and edited by Heidi Pegler

4 volumes grades 1-3 for high and low voices, grade 4-5 for high and low voices, published by Faber Music (2012), 64pp £12.99 inc CD ISBN 0-571-53683-2, 0-571-53684-0, 0-571-53685-9 0-571-53686-7

Addressing quite a different need are these new publications from Faber, which claim to 'bring together some of the best repertoire from the current singing examination syllabuses'. At the top of each song is the relevant grade and list, with all songs being in the current ABRSM syllabus, but fewer being also from the Trinity Guildhall selection. At least three songs are included from each ABRSM list for each grade. Both high and low volumes carry the same repertoire. The books come with a CD giving the accompaniment, and for grades 1-3 a 'guide melody line' is heard. There is also a short introduction for each song.

In the grades 1-3 volumes there are thirty songs, with strong representation of folk songs, including a lovely little Italian song, *Ma Bella Bimba*, which I haven't seen in print before, and an equally large proportion of songs from musicals. There are four lovely songs by Lin Marsh, who writes in such a persuasive style for these early vocal stages, easy to learn, fun to sing, with texts which rejoice in the natural world. Not surprisingly, there are only three songs from the German 'lied' tradition, Brahms' *Marienwurmchen*, Schubert's *Wiegenlied* and *Zwei Braune Augen* by Grieg.

For the higher grades, the selection moves completely away from folk-song settings, with eight out of the twenty songs coming from musicals. It is no surprise that *Caro mio ben* is included, as well as *Dove sei?*, although I must admit that *The fountain Statue at Tsarskoye Selo* by Cui is new to me, but it is a lovely song prompting a broader line above lovely romantic harmonies. Another new song for me is *The Early Morning*, an evocative setting by Graham Peel of words by Hilaire Belloc, which is published separately by Faber custom print. I do hope that its appearance in this volume will give it the much wider audience it deserves. This is probably also true for the setting of Lord Byron's poem, *She walks in beauty*, by Alexander L'Estrange; another song that is well worth exploring.

Both volumes offer very enjoyable and rewarding repertoire, and it certainly would be possible to travel the journey from Grade 1 to Grade 5 ABRSM with just these two volumes, if that is your chosen itinerary.

Sing Musical Theatre grades 1-5: selected and edited by John Gardyne and Luise Horrocks

Foundation (grades 1-3)

Any Dream will do ISBN 0-571-53555-0

Wouldn't it be lovely? ISBN 0-571-53556-9

Intermediate (grades 4-5)

Over the Rainbow ISBN 0-571-53557-7

Whistle Down the Wind ISBN 0-571-53558-5

published by Trinity College London with Faber Music, (2011), 96pp. £14.99 inc CD

Each volume has 14 other songs from the shows in addition to its title song. They provide complete support for the Trinity Guildhall Musical Theatre and Performance Arts candidates (and their teachers), which doesn't specify particular items in the syllabus. It is, of course, also very useful for anyone else who is looking for a well-presented repertoire collection. In the Foundation books there is a section on Vocal Warm-Ups, rather curiously placed at the back of the book in *Any Dream will do*, but at the front in *Wouldn't it be lovely?* For each song the full page introduction includes singing tips, useful technical points relating directly to each song. Apart from these pointers, the emphasis is mainly on the dramatic context, characterisation, mood, background as to where the song came from, and a thought-provoking section 'Beyond the Song' nudging the performer to think about wider issues related to a key aspect of the song. The same format is found in all four books.

To give you a flavour of the approach, I have focussed on 'Wouldn't it be lovely?' from *My Fair Lady*. The Background section describes the relationship of the musical to Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, and the performance notes locate the song within the timeframe of the musical, and invite the singer to look at the lyrics in some detail. The singing tips explore the words, trying out different accents, and adding exercises for tongue flexibility, toffee chewing and blowing raspberries. 'Beyond the song' draws attention to the fact that the condition of homelessness continues for children today; 'imagine what it would be like to be cold, dirty, hungry and alone. What would be most important to you? How would you see your future?' Overall a very welcome addition for the libraries of those teaching in this area.