

Music Reviews

by Sue Anderson

The contents of my reviews are inevitably dependent upon the music received from the music publishers, and readers may have noticed a certain predictability creeping in. Some publishers regularly send more music than others, and it has gradually dawned on me over the past couple of years that there is an emerging pattern. Faber have tended to send examples of their Choral Basics & New Choral Works series and from Bärenreiter I receive the next volumes in their Urtext Editions of Handel and Mozart, scholarly books with clear pages and careful editing. The music from Universal Edition is often solo vocal music from more recent German and Austrian composers and Boosey & Hawkes and Schott, now sharing catalogues, send scores of mainly US composers. Of course, this is a simplification, but it represents the broad sweep. Just occasionally though a publishing house is bold enough to make a real innovation that is going to be of abiding importance to the singing teaching fraternity. The first item in this review is such an innovation. Alleluia!

NEW EDITION OF SOLO SONGS

The Language of Song, 2 volumes, elementary & intermediate

Available for high & low voices, edited by Nicola-Jane Kemp & Heidi Pegler, published by Faber Music (2006), each volume 80pp, £11.95 inc CD.

When I received the review copies of this new publication from Faber, they went straight into use – no time lurking in the box under my desk for them! At the AOTOS Summer Conference they were flying off the table manned by Heidi, and it was clear that singing teachers have been waiting for a publication of this nature for a very long time. Heidi Pegler and Nicola-Jane Kemp had discussed the lack of good teaching material for languages casually over coffee, but then they developed it way beyond the moan and groan stage. Finally they managed to convince Faber that it was a project that was worth considerable financial investment.

If you have not seen any copies yet, despite the vigorous marketing campaign launched by the publishers around the country at the various summer schools, I will describe the layout and contents of both books. For each song there is an introductory page, giving a brief background to the song, with the historical context and place in the plot, where appropriate. On this page there is also an idiomatic translation of the song-text, and the phonetic pronunciation, using the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). A word-for-word translation is printed underneath the text in the score, but the editors emphasise that this is not a singing translation; the whole point is that the student singer (aided by the teacher) is being given the tools to develop their ability to sing songs in the original language. On the accompanying CD is the text of each song spoken by a native speaker, followed by the piano accompaniment. At the back of the book you will find a pronunciation guide for each language. This follows to some extent the very useful layout found in the Alfred publications edited by John Glenn Paton.

The language consultants are all native speakers who have worked extensively with English-speaking singers in the music colleges and opera houses; they are Tina Ruta (Italian), Franziska Roth (German), Michel Vallat (French) and Ramon Izeta (Spanish). The inclusion of Spanish songs in the Intermediate volume is a very welcome recognition both of the wealth of vocal music in that language and also of the fact that Spanish is a very popular language in our schools. There is no acknowledgement of originator of the accompaniments for the Arie Antiche, except for the thick and ubiquitous piano writing of Albert Fuchs in *Tu lo sai*. In general the realisations are sparser, which make them easier both to play and to elaborate, depending on the keyboard skills of the pianist concerned.

The twenty songs of the **Elementary** volume are divided in the ratio 8:8:4 between Italian, German and French songs. In addition to the familiar earlier Italian songs, the editors have included the Neapolitan song, *Santa Lucia*, and the original of 'Silent Worship', *Non lo diro col labbro*, by Handel. There is some overlap between the German songs found in Peter's *Art of Song* volumes 1 & 2, but the editorial quality is so vastly superior in the Language of Song that there should be no doubt as to which books your students should now be buying. As well as the usual suspects, such as *Heidenröslein* and *An die Laute* by Schubert, there is his charming *Frühlingslied*. Brahms is represented, as one might expect, by his *Wiegenlied* and *Sonntag*, but there is also the beautiful but less familiar song, *Dein blaues Auge*. The French songs begin with a lively folksong, *Chevaliers de la table ronde*, and continue with the familiar *Bois épais* by Lully. The two Fauré songs, *En prière* and *Lydia*, present more linguistic challenges, but are fairly simple in melodic outline to compensate. There seem to have been a typographical glitch* about the use of symbols for some nasalised vowels, especially 'o', in the pronunciation guide both at the end of the book and for each song, so do make sure that you check with the actual sounds in the spoken text on the CD.

*Heidi has confirmed this problem; apparently it arose between final proof stage and printing. *Gremilins at work!* An errata sheet will be issued by Faber as soon as possible, meanwhile you could even take it as an opportunity for an IPA matching exercise.

The **Intermediate** volume has proportionately more German songs, with six in that language, five in Italian, four in French and three in Spanish. The Italian songs include *Toglietemi la vita ancor* by Scarlatti, which is new to me, and the lovely Bellini piece, *Vaga luna*. Of the six German songs, all have been published in easily accessible volumes before, but it is interesting to note that Mozart's *An Chloë* has been included in this Intermediate volume, suggesting that the editors consider it to be of exam standard grade 5 or 6, rather than the grade 3 standard given in the ABRSM syllabus. The French songs in this volume include *Le charme* by Chausson in addition to three familiar Fauré songs, *Le Secret*, *Aurore* and *Clair de lune*. The three Spanish songs are an excellent introduction to this repertoire, with *El majó discreto* by Granados probably being the most frequently sung. I already knew the song by Rodrigo, *En Jerez de la Frontera*, but the very individual style of Montsalvatge is a complete revelation. His song, *Cancion de cuna para dormir a un negrito*, is a wonderful slow lullaby that mingles Caribbean syncopation with European harmonic adventure.

These books offer a very valuable learning experience; they are very carefully thought out, and offer the best introduction to singing in other languages that I have come

across. If I mention the fact that nearly all the pieces are to be found in the examination syllabi of the ABRSM and the Trinity Guildhall, do not be tempted to look on them simply as exam material. This very practical consideration means that the books may well be bought with a specific exam piece in mind, but they will then be used and studied by both teachers and students for long after.

The Language of Song is a valuable new resource for singing teachers, and it is a tremendous achievement for the editors and the language consultants. I do hope that the sales will convince music publishers that singing teachers will buy new products that are relevant, well researched, and well produced. It is worth noticing that practising singing teachers generated this project, whereas most Faber educational initiatives come, I believe, from in-house development. One had almost begun to despair about the paucity of really good material for singers compared with the quality and quantity of methods and repertoire music available to piano teachers. Perhaps at last publishers will realise that there is an eager market amongst singing students and teachers for the right product.

NEW SOLO SONGS

The Flowing Sand for baritone and piano

by Rhian Samuel, five songs published in one volume by Stainer & Bell, (2006), 25pp £12.95

This work was commissioned by the School of European Studies, Cardiff University, with money from the Arts Council of Wales, to celebrate the centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth. The first performance was given on March 9th this year, by Adam Green (baritone) with Indre Petrawskaite (piano) at the opening concert of the Beckett/Proust/Deleuze conference in Cardiff. The song-cycle, which consists of settings of five Beckett poems, is described by the publishers as 'Artistically challenging yet well within the technical range of enterprising conservatoire students'. The texts of the poems are given, with the poet's intended absence of capital letters and punctuation, so that the singer has fewer clues than usual as to inflexion and meaning. As always with Rhian Samuel's music there is great craftsmanship and powerful rhetoric in both the vocal line and piano writing, but I find that I am drawn to the still centre of the group, a song just one page long, *Da Tagte Es*. With its austere piano texture at beginning and end, and rapid ignition of passion in the middle, it could feel too extreme, but it doesn't – instead the simplicity of means is haunting and the writing is supremely effective.

The first song, *what would I do*, falls into three sections dictated by the three repetitions of the title words. Each section is clearly defined, with contrasts