Mastersongs by Great Composers

Franz Liszt

Twelve Songs
In Two Volumes

The English Translations by
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With a Critical Note by
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Franz Liszt's marvellous career brought him into intimate relations with all sides of his art. It was a career of fascinating brilliancy, marked by strongly contrasted episodes; of invincible success in most things that the world counts as success; of changing and advancing ideals; of strivings that lifted him ever higher and higher toward nobler conceptions of the functions of an artist. We find him first a virtuoso of perhaps the highest genius that the world has ever seen; a composer of bravura pianoforte pieces that only his technical powers could approach. We see then a deeper influence gaining control over his activities, turning him to the most serious forms of composition, to a philosophic consideration of problems underlying the aesthetics of music, and to an effort to lead his art into new paths, to establish new forms and set up new ideals. There is something profoundly impressive in the spectacle of this man, at the climax of the most triumphant career that a musician ever had, suddenly renouncing all the worldly success it brought him, and withdrawing from its allurements to devote himself to preaching a new evangel of art. He established himself as conductor of the opera and orchestra at the Court theatre of Weimar, with the distinct purpose of becoming the advocate of the new school of music, of forwarding with the prestige of his great name and the resources of his position the claims of an unpopular and misunderstood group of composers, whose works had otherwise little chance of a hearing; and at the same time he enlisted with enthusiasm under this same banner as a composer, fired with the same enthusiasm and animated by the same views of the artistic ideal. The close of Liszt's career as a virtuoso and the beginning of his activity at Weimar occurred at the end of the year 1841; and from about the same period of his life is to be dated his concern with the higher functions of creative art, and the beginning of a long series of compositions that have had a marked influence on the development.
of music. Among the great mass of the works of these maturer years his songs hold an important place.

It was distinctively a German ideal that he followed in this later development of his genius. This fact is clearly visible in his songs. They number more than sixty; with a very few exceptions they were conceived and composed on German soil, are settings of German poems, and, while essentially individual in their embodiment of Liszt's own genius, show plainly the influence of the German masters of song. In the late summer of 1841—he was then thirty years old—he took up his abode on the island of Nonnenwerth, in the Rhine. It is significant of the influence always exerted upon him by his environment that his first composition during his communing with the sacred river of Germany should be a setting of Heine's poem, "Die Lorelei." He had hitherto published but one song, a setting of Italian verse to music, unmistakably Italian in its quality, "Angiolin dal biondo crin"—another hint of the receptivity of his nature—that he had composed during a sojourn at Rome. The "Lorelei" was followed by a series of songs to words by Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Rückert, Geibel, Bodenstedt, Lenau, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, and other German poets. In 1842 he published a set of French songs chiefly to poems by Victor Hugo, which, according to his biographer, Fraulein Ramann, he had already conceived in Paris, and which bear in themselves traces of their French origin; but with this exception, the sixty odd songs that followed, written on his Rhine island and during his career at Weimar, are an endeavor to give voice to the German spirit and to interpret German ideals.

These songs have not escaped the fate of Liszt's other compositions in becoming the subject of great debate and controversy. They belonged to the "path-breaking" productions of the young German composers, who were trying to revolutionize the art of music and enlarge its boundaries; and as such they came in for the general condemnation with which the conservatives fought the new movement. But since the smoke and noise of that conflict have in large measure passed away, Liszt's claims to recognition as a creative genius, as a composer, have been resisted even by ardent supporters of the cause he espoused. Only a small proportion of his works has found wide acceptance from
the musical public, and, with comparatively few exceptions, the songs are among the less known. Some of them, such as “Die Lorelei,” “Du bist wie eine Blüme,” and “Es muss ein Wunderbares sein,” have gained a large measure of popularity. But it may be truly said of all of them that they are as entirely representative of the composer’s aims, methods, and inspiration as any of his compositions, both in their melodic quality and in their form and structure.

Most of these songs embody in the highest degree the dramatic idea—the abandonment of the purely strophic form of continuous melody in favor of a method of procedure that shall more accurately expound the changing sentiment of the text. Verse by verse, almost word by word, we find the music in them subordinated to the poem through changes of melodic motive, or the interruption of the melodic sequence with sudden breaks into declamatory passages; frequent differentiations of the tempo, shiftings of rhythm and of tonality, sometimes by adventurous modulations, sometimes by still bolder plunges into new keys without modulation; and everywhere the elaboration of the piano-forte accompaniment as an essential factor in the musical development. There are constant reminders of Liszt’s anxiety that exactly the right shade of meaning shall be given by the singer. Besides the fullest use of ordinary marks of expression, he gives directions in various languages as to the minutest details of performance. The half-spoken style is a favorite of Liszt’s, as may be gathered from the frequent appearance on his pages of such hints as “deklamirt,” “gesprochen,” and “fast gesprochen,” “parlando,” “parle;” he is frequently explaining just the dramatic nuance, accent, and vocal coloring he desires with such prescriptions as “mit halber Stimme,” “bestimmt,” “erst,” “däster,” “schwungvoll,” “geheinsäusser,” “phlegmatisch,” “hintraumend,” “schwankeid,” “sehr accentuirt,” “vibrato,” “pronunziato assai,” and so on. And, indeed, it is quite essential for the realization of the spirit in which Liszt conceived his songs that the singer should be guided by these directions to a perfectly free and dramatically flexible style of performance.

Here we have reached, as the distinguished English critic, Dr. Huetfer, has said, the consistent carrying-out of the poetic principle in lyric music to its final consequences.
Liszt has freed himself entirely from any reverential feeling for the abstract sacredness of the musical form; "he is a poet and nothing but a poet." He has endeavored to embody in the smaller frame of the song the principle that Wagner laid down for the lyric drama; that the means of expression, the music, should not be made the end; that the object of the expression, the drama—represented now by the poem—should not be made the means. The music must lend itself unreservedly and continuously to intensifying the emotional content of the text; the text must not be a mere peg upon which to hang a tune. Others before Liszt had found that a strict adherence to the strophic form in the art-songs was often impossible, and the "durchkomponirtes Lied"—the song in which the whole musical tissue is more or less modified to suit the changing sentiment of the verse—had justified itself to Schubert and even to Beethoven. None, however, had ever carried the principle to so complete a working-out as Liszt. That there is danger to the essentials of artistic unity and consistent development of the musical element in the extent to which he carried it, has been admitted by even ardent admirers of Liszt's methods and ideals. There is danger that not only the musical beauty, but the rhythmic organism of the poem may be injured, as Dr. Hueffer has pointed out. Liszt himself found numerous occasions when such a course did not suggest itself to him, as is seen in his purely lyric settings, such as those of "Du bist wie eine Blume" and "Es muss ein Wunderbares sein." Whether or not he has sometimes passed beyond the boundaries that circumscribe the true limits of song, is still a question unsettled. We cannot do better in stating the position of his followers than to quote still farther the opinion of the eminent English critic just referred to, who, in an analysis of the song, "Am Rhein," justifies Liszt in these words:

"The perfect blending of the two arts strikes the hearer with a feeling of beauty and harmony of a higher order, because it arises from the mutual surrender of two divergent elements in one common effort. In works like this Liszt has brought the efficiency of music for poetical purposes to a pitch formerly unknown in lyrical compositions."

RICHARD ALDRICH.
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Poem by Goethe.

Song of Mignon.

Adagio molto con desiderio.  

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen,  

From a rare skies the

spoken.  

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Kennst du es wohl?
Know'st thou it well?

De-hin, da-hin, da-
Tis there, 'tis there, 'tis

hinz. möchte ich mit dir, o mein Ge- lieb-ter, ziehn;
da
there. I'd fain with thee, my own be- loved, re-pair.

hin, da-hin, da-hin
there, 'tis there, 'tis there I'd fain, my own be-

colla voce
Kennst du das Haus? Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach, es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach, und Mar.-mor.-bil.-der rooms, re-splendent shine the halls, und Mar.-mor.-bil.-der stand and gaze on thee: Poor child, what sorrows light thy des-ti...
Kennst du es wohl?
Know'st thou it well?

Dahin, dahin, dahin
'Tis there, 'tis there, 'tis

dir, mein Beschützer, ziehn
there, my own be-loved, repair,
bin, mit dir, o mein Beschützer, zieh'n...

schützer, mit dir, o mein Beschützer, zieh'n."

a tempo Più mosso.

Kennst du den Berg und

sei - nen Wolken steig? Das Maul thier sucht im

path in clouds up-winds? The mule on mist - y
Nei - bel sei - nen Weg;
In

Wäh - len wohnt der Dra - chen al - te Brut,

ein

es stürzt der Fels,

und über ihn die Fluth.

Över crashing rocks

thunders the foaming flood?
Da-hin geht unser Weg, o Vater,
O meiν Beschützcr, Ge-lieb-ter, da-hin!
Siehe, dort geht unser Weg, e ν way doth lie! O Fa-ti-er
be-kv-ed, 'tis there!
"Es war ein König in Thule."

There was a king in Thule.

Original key.

Allegretto.

Es war ein König in Thule, gar

There was a king in Thule, ever

faithful to the

grave,

Whose

dying, him a golden beaker

gave, him a gold-en beaker

gave, gave, gave,

every feast he

gave, gave, gave.

Es ging ihm Nichts dar-

At every feast he
gleich, gänz' al - les sei - nen Er - ben, den Be - cher nicht zu -
Will' em a - way full light - ly, He' not the cup, whie -

gleich, gänz' al - les sei - nen Er - ben, den Be - cher nicht zu -
Will' em a - way full light - ly, But not the cup, with -

gleich, Er sass beim Konigs-mah - le, die Rit - ter um ihn
He' held a roy - al banquet, With knights on either

her - side, auf hohen Vä - der - san - de, dort auf dem Schloss am
In his fore - fa - thers' castle, You by the o - cean -
Allegro agitato.

Ze - cher, trank letz - te Le - bens-gluth, und warf den heil’-gen rev - ler, Life’s part - ing glow to_ drain: Then hurl’d the hal - lowed
beak - er Far out - ward in the main, hin - un - ter in die

Dort stand der al - te up - rose the a - ged

13
trank nie einen Tropfen mehr,
Drank he never more, I trow,
„Es muss ein Wunderbares sein.“
“It must be wonderful, withal!”

Poem by Redwitz.

Schwebend.


cw elevazione.

Es muss ein Wunderbares
It must be wonderful, with -

sein, ums Lieben zwei er See len, sich schlies sen

al, When two, with hearts confid ing, Are each to

granz ein an der ein, sich nie ein Wort ver hel len,

other all in all, Nor 'en a thought are hid ing.
In joy or pain, in weal or woe
With each the

In love a-lone still
In love a-lone still

From first fond kiss till death lay low,
In love a-lone still

and Fried und Leid,
and Glück und Noth
so mit ein-

and der tragen,
other bearing,
with each the other bearing,

vom ersten Kuss bis in den Tod
From first fond kiss till death lay low,

sagen,
sich nur von Liebe sagen.
in love a-lone still sagen.

langsamer
più lento

pp rit.
Poem by Goethe.

"Freudvoll und leidvoll."

"Joyful and Woeful."

Original key.
trübt, prone,

him-mel-hoch jauchzend, zum To-de be-wild-ly ex-si-tant, de-spair-fu-ly

Ostia

liebt, blest

liebt, blest is the heart, blest is the heart of a

See-le, die

See-le, die liebt.

S.see-le, die liebt.

See-le, die liebt.

Ossia

lein ost die heart of a

Ossia

lein ost die heart of a

Ossia

lein ost die heart of a

Ossia

lein ost die heart of a

Ossia

lein ost die heart of a

Die Schlüsselblumen.
Aus „Mutter Gottes Sträusslein zum Maimonate."
Poem by Joseph Müller.

Frisch belebt.

The Primroses.
From "The Virgin Mary's Nosegay for the Month of May."

Original key Ab major.
mit dem Veilchen um die Wette
Vying with the early violet
They perfume the balm-y air.

sie, des Lenzes erste Kinder
They, the spring-tide's earliest children,

sind gar früh schon erwacht, stiegen aus den Gärten Dunkei
Do beatimes their eyes un-close, From the gloom-y earth arising

Ere der Ostern- mor gen tagt, sie erschlossen froh die Erde
Ere the Easter sun arose, At the first warm sigh of spring-time
Bei dem Lenzes erstem Weh
Glad their fetters off they shake,
und verkünden,
And they tell, the

Dass sie nahe, älter Bliitzen Auf-erstehn,
Time is nearing When the flowers shall all awake, 
und verkünden, dass sie nahe,
And they tell, the time is nearing

Alter Bliitzen Auf-erstehn.
When the flowers shall all awake.

Langsam
Andante

Die se Blümchen lassen einemtschen, Him - mehkö - ni - gin, der sein,
May these flowers be a to - ken, Queen of Heaven, to thee above,

Andante
How on Earth I gladly tender All my heart to thee in love.

How on Earth I gladly tender All my heart to thee in love.

schliesse fruhs es auf zur Tu -
gend, mocht es jung an Schatzen reich,

Early wake it to virtue, May it feel thy heavily pow'r,

nach langsamer

rein und gol - den lass es glän - zen, den be - scheiden Blüm - chen gleich,

Pure and gold en ev - er shin ing, Like to yon der hun - ble flow'r,

dolce

nach langsamer

rein und gol - den lass es glän - zen, den be - scheiden Blüm - chen gleich,

Pure and gold en ev - er shin ing, Like to yon der hun - ble flow'r,
"In Liebeslust:"

"In Love's Delight"

Poem by
Hoffmann von Fallersleben.

Schnell... sehr bewegt und gliihend.
Allegro, molto agitato ed ardente.

Original key A♭ major.

Lie - bes-lust, in Sehn - sucht
Qual o hö - re mich, o

loves de-light, in yearn - ing...
sore, O list to me, O

hö - re mich! Eins sing' ich nur viel tau - send - mal
list to me! A thou - sand times I sing it _ o'er,

und
And
Ich sing’ es durch die ganze Welt:
My song to all the world shall tell,

Ich fie­be dich, ich lie­be dich,
I love but thee, I love but thee,
ich liebe dich!
I love but thee!

Und träumend noch in stille
And dreaming even in silent

Nacht, muss singen ich, muss singen, ich singe, wenn mein Auge
night, Still haunteth me, still haunteth, That song I sing at morning

wacht, ich liebe dich, ich liebe dich! und
light, I love but thee, I love but thee! And
wenn mein Herz im Tod eblicht; oh sähst du mich, du
when my heart in death shall yield, Art thou by me, Thou'

ich lie - be
I love but

ich lie - be
tue, I love but thee, I love but thee, I love but

ich lie - be dich!
I love but thee!

langsam
meno mosso

Adagio

pp dolce

da capo