

HISTORICAL REISSUES

SCHUBERT: Die schöne Müllerin; Winterreise; Schwanengesang. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone; Gerald Moore, piano. EMI 127-01764/66, 3 discs.

Returning to the first Fischer-Dieskau-Moore Schubert cycle recordings, I have tried to turn back the clock and listen without reference to their long list of later performances. My first impression of Fischer-Dieskau was from the old Fritz Lehmann Saint Matthew Passion recording, in which he sang the Christus. I was enough impressed to become an avid collector of his recordings until they became too numerous for me. My first opportunity to hear him in the flesh was in Edinburgh in 1953, when he and Moore gave a Beethoven recital. Needless to say, I was present at his New York debut, Winterreise sung without interruption and without encores. Few singers of any period have been able to hold an audience so spellbound. It was in this frame of mind that I first heard this recording of Die schöne Müllerin.

The date of recording is given on the container - 3 and 7 October 1951. At 26 Fischer-Dieskau was already well established as a lieder singer of the first rank. We do not know how much time and study had gone into these songs, but presumably he felt he had arrived at his definitive interpretation. The records reveal a fresh young voice and a thoughtful approach. He presents a gentle apprentice miller, self-centered and reserved, vigorous and unsophisticated. I like the jauntiness of Das Wandern and the way both Fischer-Dieskau and Moore make the contrasts among the stanzas without jarring the musical line. A gentle accent here and there brings out a significant word, and the music flows. In Wohin? the singing is quiet and easy, with just a slight lingering at the line Das kann kein Rauschen sein. Der Neugierige, beginning really langsam as directed, demonstrates that the singer's hold on the audience was strong on records as well as in the concert hall. In some of the more intimate songs we might wish for a warmer tone, but we can be thankful that the sentiment is never overdrawn. When in the last two songs the Brook speaks, it is quiet, unsentimental and consoling. Throughout the cycle Gerald Moore takes his opportunities to bring out details.

Winterreise was recorded some three years later, on 13 and 14 January 1955. Some change has come over the voice. The singer makes increasing use of a mixed tone in the softer songs, and he indulges in very strong contrasts. Sometimes the two qualities do not match -- as for example in the seventh song, Auf dem Flusse. Of course the disillusioned lover of this cycle is a more complicated character than the young miller, and Fischer-Dieskau underlines every phrase that sheds light upon his sufferings. And throughout his career he has never tired of seeking new lights. I note that in a few places he disregards the dynamics indicated in the score - i.e., Was soll ich l'anger weilen in

the first song, sung at a good forte though marked with two p's, and again in Auf dem Flusse at the words Mit harter, starrer Rinde. This is certainly done with conviction and we may be sure it is not accidental. As we know, his interpretations were never stereotyped.

Schwanengesang is a composite recording, made at various times between October 1951 and May 1958. Of course this collection of songs is a cycle only by grace of the publisher. Schubert never intended them to be sung together. Essentially it consists of two groups, seven lieder by Rellstab and six by Heine, with an encore by Seidl. Even within the groups there is no thread to hold the songs together. Fischer-Dieskau recorded the Heine lieder in the same sessions that produced Die schöne Müllerin. Needless to say, these songs are very different. Schubert discovered Heine shortly before he died and his response was immediate. There has been much speculation as to where this would have led him had he lived. Ideally, I think, these songs call for a heavier, richer voice than Fischer-Dieskau's, and at that early stage of his career one feels he is working a little too hard to put them across.

Three of the Rellstab lieder -- Liebesbotschaft, Frühlingsbotschaft and Abschied -- were done four months after Winterreise, and I note the same tendency to contrasts, though in general these songs are light and they are not overdone. Kriegers Ahnung and Die Taubenpost date from September 1957. The first of these is full of contrasts, the second properly light and jaunty; in this final lied Moore's playing is particularly delightful. Strangely that once most famous of all Schubert songs, Standchen, along with Aufenthalt and In der Ferne, was not recorded until May 1958. By that time the contrasts were particularly strong, and I am afraid there is little warmth in the serenade!

SCHUBERT: Winterreise; Schwanengesang--No. 4, Standchen; No. 7, Abschied; No. 10, Das Fischermädchen; No. 12, Am Meer; No. 13, Der Doppelgänger; No. 14, Die Taubenpost; Der Erlkönig; Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren; Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt; Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass; Der Wanderer; An die Musik; Liebeslauschen; Der Musensohn; Horch, horch, die Lerch'; Widerschein. Gerhard Hüsch, baritone; Hanns Udo Müller and Gerald Moore, piano. EMI SHB 65, 2 discs.

Gerhard Hüsch's very considerable reputation in America was built entirely upon his recordings, for he never sang here. More specifically, his recording of Winterreise, issued by subscription in 1933, and Die schöne Müllerin that followed in 1935 did much to promote lieder among the collectors of those days. To be sure, he was not the first to record the Schubert cycles. For the Schubert centennial in 1928 Hans Duhan did them both, and also Schwanengesang, and Elena Gerhardt gave us a selection from Winterreise. About that time too we had twelve songs from Winterreise by Richard Tauber. But there was a kind of magic in Walter Legge's idea of limited editions, once it caught on,

and the Hüsch recordings remained standard until the days of LP, when recording the cycles became a commonplace. In the thirties the two great baritone lieder singers were Schlusnus and Husch (Rehkemper's recordings were made in the 20's) and I can well remember many arguments among their partisans.

We now return to these recordings with the experience of many other performances behind us. Husch, needless to say, belongs to the older school of lieder singing. His voice was unusually beautiful and he relied on it for color to a greater extent than do some of the present day singers; he was not so concerned with extracting the meaning from every word he sang. He begins Winterreise rather briskly, omitting the second stanza of the first song (perhaps because of 78 rpm time limitations) but spreads himself more than I had remembered in the final stanza. Der Lindenbaum provides a good example of his way of emphasis within the musical line - the words Ich muss auch heute wandern suggest that the young man is really weighted down. As the cycle progresses the feeling of weariness is cumulative. Der Leiermann is sung staccato except for the final line.

Of the fourteen songs that comprise the pseudo-cycle Schwanengesang Husch recorded six, four of which were never previously released. His singing of the famous Ständchen reminds us what a masterpiece this much abused song really is. Abschied has less breathless excitement in this performance than many singers have brought to it. The young man in the song is going on a journey -- we are not told where or why -- but it is to be an adventure. Hüsch takes it in stride, happy to be going but contained. He brings a light touch to Das Fishermädchen, does not overdo the despair of Am Meer and builds a powerful climax in Der Doppelgänger. Die Taubenpost brings just the kind of relief we need at this point.

Once again in Erk König Hüsch shows his ability to present the drama without overdramatizing. To my taste the lovely song to the Dioskuren (the Gemini) could be dreamier and more sustained, but I have rarely heard it so. Two of the three Harfenspielerlieder seem to me just right, but Der Wanderer is disappointing. One wonders why he put it onto a ten-inch disc, for surely it is badly rushed. And I miss the fervor that would make An die Musik a great performance. I have no complaints about Der Musensohn or Hark, hark the lark. The two remaining songs are sleepers, for some reason very little known. Liebeslauschen is a pretty piece indeed, describing a picture in which a serenader stands beneath his lady's window. Widerschein is a scene on a bridge, where the waiting lover knows by the reflection below when his young lady arrives. Incidentally, there are two versions of the text; Husch sings one of them, the word leaflet contains the other.

These separate songs were recorded between 1934 and 1939. Hüsch's regular partner was the pianist Hanns Udo Müller for all but five of them. Gerald Moore is at the piano for Schwanengesang Nos. 7, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

As it happens a domestic release of this program plus Die schöne Müllerin is in preparation by Arabesque, on three discs.

SCHUBERT: An die Musik, D.547; Im Frühling, D.882; Wehmut, D.772; Ganymed, D.544; Das Lied im Grünen, D.917; Gretchen am Spinnrade, D.118; Nähe des Geliebten, D.162; Die junge Nonne, D.828; An Sylvia, D.891; Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D.774; Nachtviolen, D.752; Der Musensohn, D.764. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano; Edwin Fischer, piano. EMI ALP 3843. Pathé-Marconi Références C 051-00404.

MOZART: Ridente la calma, K.152; Oiseaux, si tous les ans, K.307; Dans un bois solitaire, K.308; Die kleine Spinnerin, K.531; Als Luise die Briefe, K.520; Abendempfindung, K.523; Das Kinderspiel, K.517; Das Traumbild, K.530; Das Veilchen, K.476; Der Zauberer, K.472; Im Frühlingsanfang, K.597; Das Lied der Trennung, K.519; Die Zufriedenheit, K.349; An Chloe, K.524; Sehnsucht nach dem Frühlinge, K.596. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano; Walter Gieseking, piano. EMI ASD 3858.

These two recitals were landmarks in the early days of LP. The Schubert came first -- in 1953. There were no real novelties on the program - Nachtviolen, Wehmut, Ganymed and Nähe des Geliebten were comparatively unfamiliar, but all had been recorded before. Most of the others were well known. Nor was it the first time a famous singer had collaborated with a celebrated pianist -- one thinks immediately of Teyte and Cortot, or Bori and Copeland. The Mozart recital, now released for the first time in stereo on discs, was recorded on 13 and 16 April 1955. Here the artists were on less familiar territory. Mozart's songs were looked upon as elegant trifles -- with the exception of one masterpiece, Das Veilchen. Perhaps a handful of others were considered good enough for an occasional hearing. More recently many of us have come to prize the lovely Abendempfindung, the haunting Das Lied der Trennung, the amusing little drama of Als Luise die Briefe ihres ungetreuen Liebhabers verbrannt, to name but a few. There had, of course, been recordings, but mostly in combination with other lieder.

Schwarzkopf had been known to us first by imported recordings of Bach, Handel and Mozart that reached this country in the late forties. She was still patently a disciple of Maria Ivogün, with a lovely high, limpid voice. By 1953 she had achieved international status as a lieder singer; her tone had taken on a darker quality and she favored an intimate -- sometimes even confidential -- style. She was always a musical stylist and a cool interpreter. Everything was neat and in its place. Her phrasing was shapely, though occasionally she would break a phrase for emphasis, or perhaps for enjambment. Though definitely of the "modern" school, she did not rely on her diction (sometimes clouded by darkened vowel sounds) but rather on dynamics and rhythmic flexibility. Schubert's Im Frühling is a good example of the freedom she allowed herself. For the Mozart songs she used a lighter tone quality; indeed, in her opening number, Ridente la calma, she hardly sounds like the same

singer. She could, however, sing out when the situation called for it - as in Als Luise die Briefe - or disguise her voice almost to the point of caricature, as in Die Alte.

Her two pianists, needless to say, provide their full share of the interest here. Fischer, whose recording of the Schubert Impromptus was a favorite of mine during the thirties, could be counted on for stylish playing. Looking back to a review I wrote of the original issue, I find myself critical of him, as of an old-fashioned accompanist. With remastering for this new release some improvement has been made in the balance, and now I would rather say that Fischer was a gentleman. The interpretations, surely, are Schwarzkopf's primarily; he goes along with her like a true partner. In all the freedom of Im Frühling his playing of the interweaving piano melodies is lovely indeed. And if Gretchen's spinning wheel is a bit erratic I would blame this on the overdramatization of the singer.

Giesecking's assignment is naturally a lighter one. But though only Das Veilchen has a fully developed "piano part" - as opposed to an accompaniment - the ritornellos can provide little thrills of their own in the hands of such a master. Then, when the piano is quietly accompanying, Giesecking is always right with Schwarzkopf. And happily I note a considerable improvement in the sound of this stereo version over the original issue.

ERNA BERGER, zum 80. Geburtstag: MOZART: Idomeneo--Frühlingslüfte, leis' und linde (1); Die Entführung aus dem Serail--Traurigkeit ward mir zum Lose (2); ...Martern aller Arten (1); ...Welch ein Geschick (with Rudolf Schock, tenor) (2); Nozze di Figaro--Ich weiss nicht, wo ich bin, was ich tue (3); ...Sagt, holde Frauen (3); ...Wenn die sanften Abendlüfte (with Elisabeth Grümmer, soprano) (2); ...O säume länger nicht (3); Così fan tutte--Beim Männervolk, bei Soldaten (3); ...Schon ein Mädchen von fünfzig Jahren (3); Zauberflöte--O zittre nicht (4); ...Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen (4); ROSSINI: Barbiere di Siviglia--Frag' ich mein beklomm'nes Herz (5); DONIZETTI: Don Pasquale--Wollt ihr den Zauber kennen (2); NICOLAI: Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor--Nein, das ist wirklich doch zu keck! (with Charlotte Müller, contralto) (6); SMETANA: Prodana nevesta--Wie fremd und tot ist alles umher (2); VERDI: Traviata--Ah, fors' è lui (7); Rigoletto--Feuer Name dessen Klang (8); ...Hab' ich erst vollbracht, was noch muss geschehen (with Willi Domgraf-Fassbaender, baritone; Walter Grossmann, basso; Walter Beck, baritone) (5); PUCCINI: Bohème--Mann nennt mich jetzt Mimi (2); ...O du süssetes Mädchen (with Schock) (2); Madama Butterfly--Mädchen, in deinen Augen liegt ein Zauber (with Schock) (2). Erna Berger, soprano; various orchestras; Josef Krips (1); Wilhelm Schüchter (2); Berislav Klobucar (3); Sir Thomas Beecham (4); Fritz Zweig (5); Wilhelm Franz Reuss (6); Johannes Schüler (7); Clemens Schmalstich (8), conductors. EMI Electrola 137-46 104/105, 2 discs.

Erna Berger's career was so long and so active that it is hard to believe she retired as long ago as 1968. When she came to the Metropolitan in 1949, at age 49, her voice was still so youthful that it was surprising she limited her American career to two seasons. But now here she is with an 80th birthday retrospective! Appropriately, the first two sides are devoted to Mozart. She made her debut as the First Boy in Zauberflöte at the Dresden Staatsoper in 1925. By 1932 she was singing Blonde in Die Entführung at the Salzburg Festival (having already sung at Bayreuth and taken part in one world premiere) and her career was well launched. Though Rossini, Donizetti, Nicolai, Smetana, Verdi and Puccini were important to her repertoire, she is remembered chiefly as a Mozart singer.

The earliest recordings here were made in 1932, the last on 12 November 1959. But one would be hard put to it to guess even comparative dates on the performances in this set. The Rosina of 1932 is followed by the Norina of 1953, but the recordings might almost have been made on the same day. The two songs of Cherubino and the two of Despina were made in her last session, but they sound as young as ever. Some of the most attractive singing on the second disc is in the spirited duet from The merry wives of Windsor with the excellent Charlotte Müller, made in 1933; this is followed by my personal favorite from The bartered bride, dated 22 years later. One disappointment on the second disc is the Traviata of 1948, the only selection in Italian, which suggests she may not have been at ease in the language, though she sang it well enough later on. Her voice seems light for Violetta, and the recording is rather shallow. Caro nome and the scene from the second act of Rigoletto (with Willi Domgraf-Fassbaender), both made in 1932, show her to better advantage. The Bohème selections, to my ears, suffer more than most from the German translation, but on their own terms both Berger and Rudolf Schock show up well (1954).

The Mozart disc restores several of Berger's most admired recordings. The opening Idomeneo was the pride of many collectors in the 50's, and her Martern aller Arten had few rivals in its day. The two Queen of the Night arias, needless to say, are extracted from the Beecham set, and here again she had little competition. Only the flashy Miliza Korjus and the short-lived Luisa Szabo could stand up to her.

Berger was that unusual combination, a brilliant coloratura singer who was essentially a lyric soprano. Her work was always distinguished by neatness and accuracy. The very girlishness which characterized her tone early and late in her career meant, perhaps, that she never probed the depths of emotion, but she made up for that in charm. She recorded well, and almost all of her records do her justice. The transfers in this set bring her back just as we remember her.

PETER PEARS, BENJAMIN BRITTEN: The early recordings. BRITTEN: 7 Sonnets of Michelangelo; The Holy Sonnets of John Donne; Folk song arrangements: The Plough boy; Come you not from Newcastle?; O waly,

waly; The foggy, foggy dew; The King's gone a-hunting; GRAINGER: The jolly sailor boy; Six dukes went a-fishin'; COPLAND: Old American songs: The boatman's dance; Long time ago; The dodger; Simple gifts; I bought me a cat; SCHUBERT: Im Fruhling; Auf der Bruck; PURCELL (arr. Britten): The Queen's epicedium; Fantasia no. 13; in F, Z.746 (Upon one note). Peter Pears, tenor; Benjamin Britten, piano; Zorian String Quartet with Benjamin Britten, viola. EMI RLS 748, 2 discs.

The Michelangelo cycle was the first fruit of the Britten-Pears collaboration. The score was completed in Amityville, N.Y., on 30 October 1940. The recording was made just two years later, 20 November 1942, a month after the first performance in London's Wigmore Hall. The Donne cycle had its premiere also in Wigmore Hall, 22 November 1945; the recording sessions were on 29 August and 12 December 1947. Both cycles were to be recorded again for Decca-London, the Michelangelo in 1955 (London LL 1204, mono), the Donne in 1969 (OS 26099, stereo). What is special about these early performances is a certain freshness of voice and incisiveness of delivery. While there is a slightly better balance in the later versions, I for one find these performances particularly exhilarating. I have sometimes wished, for a change, to hear some other singer in Britten's music, and of course on records this is possible. Alexander Young, with Gordon Watson at the piano, recorded the two sonnet cycles for Argo. They were released in this country as Westminster RG 25 in 1954. Later we have had the Michelangelo from John Stewart (Desto DC 7127, 1972) and Robert Tear (EMI HQS 1310, 1974). Of the three Stewart is the most impressive, but even so one comes back to Pears for the definitive performance.

Two of the folk songs given here were not included in the later Pears-Britten recordings - London LO 30, 1948, 78rpm; LD 9136, 1954, 10"; OS 25327, 1962, stereo. Pears did sing The foggy, foggy dew to the harp of Osian Ellis (Decca SXL 6793, 1977) but The King is gone a-hunting, now published for the first time, is the only recording. Also previously unreleased was Grainger's The jolly sailor boy. The Copland group, the only Pears-Britten performance, now appears for the first time on LP. These songs were recorded in 1947 and 1950, the two Schubert lieder in 1950, the Purcell in 1947. As an extra dividend we have the Purcell Fantasia, our only reminder that Britten was also a violist. This is thoroughly enjoyable though Britten's part is restricted to a monotone.

Britten (like Ives) professed to loathe "a beautiful voice," making an exception in the case of Kathleen Ferrier. Presumably he was endorsing the old axiom that the singer with the loveliest tone is rarely endowed with exceptional brains or musicianship. The Pears voice is certainly not to be described as sensuously beautiful; in my own case I had to get used to it. But it is an exceptionally expressive instrument, and there is no problem in understanding the words he sings. The passing years have seen remarkably little change. Perhaps a slight deepening of the tone may be noted in later recordings, but the voice was always unmistakable. In going back to these early performances we hear him at

his vocal best, with youthful brightness and a clarity that is unique.

A LJUBA WELITSCH RECITAL: (from broadcasts 1947-8) BRAHMS: Zigeunerlieder, Op. 103; (Ernest Lush, piano); SCHUBERT: Im Walde, D.834 (Frederick Stone, piano); MARX: Und gestern hat er mir Rosen gebracht; Valse de Chopin; Der beschiedene Schäfer; Hat dich die Liebe berührt; Windräder (Joseph Marx, piano). Ljuba Welitsch, soprano. BRAHMS: Liebeslieder Walzer, Op. 52. Irmgard Seefried, soprano; Elisabeth Höngen, contralto; Hugo Meyer-Welfing, tenor; Hans Hotter, basso; Friedrich Wuher & Hermann von Norberg, piano duo (15/16 November 1947). EMI World Records SH 373.

In this country Welitsch flashed like a meteor, sighted at the Metropolitan on 4 February 1949, brightening our skies for 3 seasons, then vanishing. Of course she did come back two decades later to play a character part, but that is another story. It is surprising to be reminded by John Steane's introductory notes that her career actually began in 1934 and lasted over twenty years. One more war casualty. Precisely when she should have been making her international reputation she was on the wrong side of the lines. She reached London in 1947, where her Salome created the kind of sensation she repeated in New York two years later. She sang other roles, of course, Donna Anna, Aida, Tosca, Rosalinda, and a rather sensational Musetta, but it is as Salome she will always be remembered. Here we have her in a less familiar role, as a lieder singer. Steane makes a statement that these are her only lieder recordings (discounting "a not entirely satisfying recording of Strauss' Four last songs") but he has overlooked a program she made for American Columbia including, among other things, two of the Marx songs offered here (Odyssey Y 32675). Her pianist was Paul Ulanowski, and the recording was professional. Some of my readers may know the present Marx group, plus two more of this composer's songs, on an UORC disc, which, however, was less skillfully transferred. Steane says of the recordings, "Technically, they were in badly flawed condition, and a great deal of work had to be done on the originals to make tolerable listening of them." A salute is owing to Keith Hardwick, who has restored them remarkably well. As to the performances of Brahms and Schubert, Welitsch does not seem altogether at home, though she never fails to hold our attention. The first of the Zigeunerlieder, in particular, is taken at an erratic tempo. The peculiar (and fascinating) timbre of her voice does not allow for a wide range of color, and she has her own way of running words together on a very smooth legato line. Im Walde is a long and ambling song, with melodies enough for two or three. One recurring effect that the singer makes with groups of eighth notes has a haunting power.

As indicated above, Hat dich die Liebe berührt and Valse de Chopin are more successfully recorded with Ulanowski, but this Marx group is historic because the composer is at the piano. It is notable, too, for the fact that here Welitsch does not seem out of her element. Is it Marx's coaching or the fact that these songs are built on bolder lines - or both?

The coupling with Brahms' Liebeslieder is appropriate enough, as long as there was only enough Welitsch material for one side. This performance of the waltzes dates back to November 1947, and I remember it fondly as a two-disc import on 78. I have wondered why it had not been transferred, but now I think I understand. It must have been a difficult assignment. For in the final result the recording seems overloaded and the ensemble lacks clarity. Still, the performance is a stylish one and for years it seemed to me the best we had. Three of the singers, certainly need no introduction, but there are a few lines of biographical information on the jacket. But what about the pianists, and the tenor - who's Hugo?

Philip L. Miller