

BRAHMS

Four Songs for Horn & Piano (arr. Martin Hackleman)

Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn, Op.105 No. 1

Die Mainacht, Op.43 No. 2

Der Gang zum Liebchen, Op.48 No. 1

O Wüsst ich doch den weg zurück, Op.63 No. 8

Four Songs for Horn and Piano (arr. M. Hackleman)

Johannes Brahms

(b. Hamburg, 1833 / d. Vienna, 1897)

For a composer who never even contemplated writing an opera, Johannes Brahms devoted a great deal of his output to vocal works. Most of these were gathered into sets of shorter songs for choir or solo voices, with Brahms distinguishing between “Lieder” (by which he typically meant stylistically simpler, shorter, often strophic songs) and “Gesänge” (longer, richer, more complex songs in forms other than strophic).

This program features four excerpts, from four separate song collections, spanning decades in Brahms’ career. Moreover, the voice in each song has been replaced by the horn. Martin Hackleman is one of Canada’s most distinguished and venerable horn soloists, and a former member of the Canadian Brass.

“I think I did about six songs,” Mr. Hackleman recalls. “I was doing a recording with Jane Coop of the Brahms Horn Trio (Op.40) and the night before the recording, the CBC said to me that we’re a little bit short of music for the CD – do you have anything you could do?”

So with about 24 hours’ notice, Hackleman turned to some Brahms songs, and found enough that he could make work for horn. “Brahms destroyed a lot of his stuff, so I knew anything he let stand was going to be really good,” Hackleman says, noting that the melodic consideration of the music was a higher priority than the words of the songs themselves. “But I wanted variety, I didn’t want the songs to all sound the same.” He is more than happy that his arrangements are being given fresh performances on the Winspear stage. The original recording, by the way, is now available on the Skylark label.

In program order, we begin with the first song from a set of five published in 1888 as Brahms' Opus 105. The entire set are scored for lower voice, and set texts by five different poets. "Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn" ("Thoughts, like melodies, steal softly through my mind") is a poem by Brahms' friend Klaus Groth, and is clearly a melody Brahms liked, as he used it in the first movement of his *Second Violin Sonata*, written at about the same time as the song.

Brahms' set of four as his Opus 43 were published as Gesänge as opposed to Lieder, and are a relatively early series. In fact, the third and fourth songs were not among Brahms' best, and he knew it, only including them with the superior first and second songs to please his publisher. No. 2 is "Die Mainacht" ("The May Night"), a text by Ludwig Heinrich Christoph Hölty.

"Der Gang zum Liebchen" ("The walk to the beloved") is the opening song from a set of seven published in 1868, in a flurry of Brahms song collections. Op.46 through 48 were all sets of songs – Brahms was by now famous enough that the announcement of any new collections were eagerly anticipated by singers, as well as audiences.

The last song in our program is from one of Brahms' most diverse, yet most clearly thought-out collections. In the Nine Songs (Lieder and Gesänge), Op.63, three different poets are represented, the last of whom is, once again, Klaus Groth. The final three songs (all to Groth texts) are all titled by Brahms "Hemiweh" ("Homesickness"), and were written in 1874, not long after the death of Brahms' father. The second of these (no. 8 of the collection of nine) is one of Brahms' most popular songs, to a Groth text which begins, "O wüsst ich doch den Weg zurück" ("Oh, if I but knew the way back").

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