

CD REVIEW

Schubert (Re)Inventions

Ensemble Palladino: Alberto Mesirca *gui*, Ursula Langmayr *sop*, Eric Lamb *fl*,
Firmian Lermer *vla*, Martin Rummel *vc*
Paladino Music 58, 2015 (2 CDs: 133 minutes), \$28

Franz Schubert's alliance with the guitar is a cause that has often been celebrated, most typically by guitarists eager to find a confederate in one of Europe's most celebrated composers. A.P. Sharpe, for instance, in his *Story of the Spanish Guitar*, suggested that the instrument was Schubert's near-constant companion: 'For many years Franz Schubert, not possessing a piano, did most of his composing on the guitar which hung over his bed and on which he would play before rising'.¹ Sharpe's enthusiasms notwithstanding, there is actually rather little evidence that the composer had any knowledge of or involvement with the guitar beyond what might have been expected of most musicians living in Austria in the early years of the nineteenth century. While it is true that Schubert provided a guitar accompaniment for an 1813 vocal trio to celebrate his father's name day ('Zur Namensfeier meines Vaters', D. 80), this hardly makes him a dedicated guitarist: the accompaniment, while competent enough, is rather clumsy in places, bespeaking a lack of familiarity with idiomatic writing for the instrument. And while it is also true that many of Schubert's songs were published with guitar accompaniments during his lifetime, there is no evidence that he viewed such arrangements as anything other than a strategy employed by his publishers to increase sales. This leaves us with the rather confusing situation created by the work with which Ensemble Palladino opens this two-CD collection of Schubert's music featuring the guitar: the Notturmo in D major for guitar, flute, viola, and cello (D. Anhang II/2). Although the work (here and elsewhere) is attributed to Schubert, that claim is rather tenuous, as the Notturmo is simply an arrangement Schubert made in February 1814 of a trio for guitar, flute and viola composed by Wenzel Matiegka, first published by Artaria in 1807.² The attribution surely will not do any lasting harm to our understanding of either Schubert's or Matiegka's legacy – Schubert did, after all, add the cello part and substantially alter the viola part of Matiegka's composition – but inasmuch as the guitar part is left almost completely untouched the work provides no evidence that Schubert's friendship with the guitar was anything more than of the most passing sort.

¹ A.P. Sharpe, *The Story of the Spanish Guitar*, 3rd ed. (London: Clifford Essex Music, 1963): 10.

² For a discussion of the history behind the quartet, see Reinhard Van Hoorickx, 'Schubert's Guitar Quartet', *Revue Belge de Musicologie/Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Muziekwetenschap* 31 (1977): 111–35.

Abandoning the notion that Schubert had any close affiliation with the guitar in no way diminishes the value of reimagining his works through arrangements for the instrument. It does, however, put this volume of Ensemble Palladino's (Re)Inventions in a somewhat different light: where previous recordings in the series found flautist Eric Lamb and cellist Martin Rummel reinterpreting keyboard works by J.S. Bach (Paladino Music 39), and a range of instrumental and vocal compositions by W.A. Mozart (Paladino Music 50), *Schubert (Re) Inventions* is rather more tame: almost everything on this recording is quite in keeping with musical performance practice of the nineteenth century. Put another way, Schubert is not so much reinvented here as he is rediscovered by shifting his music from the impersonal environment of the twenty-first century concert hall to the intimate confines of the nineteenth-century salon, a shift facilitated through a focus on works that can be presented whole or in part with the guitar.

As mentioned, the first work on the recording is the Matiegka/Schubert Notturmo, a thoroughly pleasant five-movement composition that summons the conviviality and sociality of a Biedermeier salon.³ Ensemble Palladino's performance is witty and balanced, if not quite sparkling: this was, after all, music that was intended to entertain and to facilitate social interactions rather than to impress an audience with virtuosic display. The one exception here is the slow movement (*Lento é patetico*): in part due to Matiegka's melodic conception (a flowing aria with guitar accompaniment), in part due to Schubert's addition of the cello (which allowed him to explore greater interaction between the bowed strings and the flute), the movement offers an opportunity for some quite soulful playing and thus a deepening of the affective terrain set out by the other movements of the Notturmo.

The three works that follow on the recording are each a bit closer to a reinvention. The first is an arrangement of Schubert's Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano (D. 821) for cello and guitar. The composition has long vexed Schubert scholars, both because of its use of an instrument that did not fit into ready categories (the arpeggione was a short-lived experiment that was tuned like a guitar but bowed like a cello) and because of the modest designs of the musical whole.⁴ Here that modesty presents few if any problems: Rummel uses his cello to create a singing if not overly profound counterpart to Alberto Mesirca's guitar, which draws from the rather sparse original piano accompaniment to create an effective and sympathetic partner. The arrangement for cello and guitar may also create a work more balanced than the original: by all accounts, the sound produced by the arpeggione was rather subdued and easily overwhelmed by the early-nineteenth century piano, a problem eliminated by placing the work in the hands of the cello and guitar. The last two works on the first CD are guitar arrangements of compositions originally for piano. The second of these, the Minuetto from the Sonata in G major (D. 894), is by Francisco Tárrega, perhaps the foremost guitarist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tárrega wrote a substantial number of compositions for the guitar and made arrangements of works by a wide range of composers from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, all with the aim of

³ Indeed, as Alice Hanson shows in her *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), the guitar was a typical part of such salons.

⁴ For representative discussions see Karl Geiringer, 'Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata and the "Super Arpeggio"', *The Musical Quarterly* 64 (1979): 513–23 and Leo Black, 'Schubert's Ugly Duckling', *The Musical Times* 138, no. 1857 (1997): 4–11.

expanding the repertoire for the instrument. (It bears mention that while most of Tárrega's original compositions are still in the repertoire his arrangements are not.) His arrangement of Schubert's minuet, while charming in its way (and certainly useful for expanding his students' harmonic palette), comes off as a rather pale reflection of the prototype: the intimacy engendered through performing the work on the guitar is simply not in keeping with the sharp contrast between bluster and delicacy central to Schubert's original. The arrangement of Schubert's 'Ungarische Melodie' (D. 817) by Mesirca and Angelo Gilardino is, by comparison, quite winning, lending the work an intensity fully in keeping with the notion of reinvention.

The second CD in this volume may have the most to offer to scholars of early nineteenth-century music, for it presents arrangements of ten of Schubert's songs that were done by his friend Franz von Schlechta and that have not been previously recorded. As Mesirca observes in his notes on the recording, these arrangements were part of a manuscript that included 99 arrangements that Schlechta made between 1840 and 1846, a collection that included 39 songs by Schubert. The songs chosen for this recording include 'Die Alpenjäger' (D. 588), 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen' (D. 774), 'Drang in die Ferne' (D. 770), 'Der Jüngling am Bache' (D. 638), 'Nachstück' (D. 672), a selection from *Rosamunde* (D. 797), 'Schäfers Klagelied' (D. 121), 'Sehnsucht' (D. 879), 'Wanderers Nachtlid' (D. 224) and 'Wehmut' (D. 772). A number of these songs – including 'Nachstück', 'Schäfers Klagelied' and 'Wehmut' – were published with guitar arrangements during Schubert's lifetime.⁵ Although Schlechta's arrangements show marked similarities to these earlier versions, it is clear that he adapted them to his own designs. In many cases – for instance, 'Die Alpenjäger', 'Drang in die Ferne', 'Schäfers Klagelied', 'Sehnsucht', 'Wanderers Nachtlid' and 'Wehmut' – the adaptation is quite successful: what is lost in fullness of texture in the transfer of the accompaniment to the guitar is more than made up for through subtle shifts in the balance between accompanying voices and re-imaginings of accompanimental patterns. In other cases – 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen', 'Der Jüngling am Bache' and 'Nachstück' – the arrangements are rather less convincing, often due to the omission of small details that prove to be essential to the way Schubert's music shapes our understanding of the text. In all cases soprano Ursula Langmayr is in fine voice, matching well with Mesirca's sensitive rendering of the accompaniment. That said, one could imagine performances somewhat less dry and more in keeping with the intimate and interactive environments within which these songs would have been performed. Langmayr, for instance, does a wonderful job of capturing the urgent tone of the youth dreaming of an escape from his all-too-comfortable home in 'Drang in die Ferne'. Would that she had explored a bit more shading on songs like 'Schäfers Klagelied' that would have allowed her to capture the shepherd's momentary engagement with the fond memories that will ultimately be tempered by the acknowledgment of his loss. Such shadings are often very effective in pairings of the voice with the guitar, not least because of the subdued dynamic range and ready availability of timbral contrasts that typify the instrument's sound.

⁵ These songs were included in Franz Schubert, *Sixteen Songs with Guitar Accompaniment*, ed. Thomas F. Heck (Boston, MA: Tecla Editions, 1980). For a discussion of questions related to performing Schubert's songs with guitar accompaniment see Thomas F. Heck, 'Schubert Lieder with Guitar ... Permissible?' *The Soundboard* 3, no. 4 (November 1976): 10.

The song settings are rounded out by arrangements of 'Der Tod und das Mädchen' (D. 531), done by Napoléon Coste in the 1830s (originally published with a French text), and of 'Nachtgesang' (D. 314), recently done by Tilman Hoppstock and published in 2009. Coste's arrangement is not wholly satisfactory: neither the agitation of the maiden nor the gravity of Death's voice is convincingly portrayed in his adaptation. By contrast, Hoppstock's arrangement works quite well, suggesting that what is wanted for an effective adaptation of any of Schubert's songs for guitar is not only a thorough understanding of the resources and limitations of the instrument but also a thoughtful consideration of what constitutes the essential features of the song.

The CD concludes with six arrangements of Schubert's songs for solo guitar: 'Lob der Tränen' (D. 711), 'Liebesbotschaft' (D. 957/1), 'Aufenthalt' (D. 957/5), 'Ständchen' (D. 957/4), 'Die Post' (D. 911/13) and 'Das Fischermädchen' (D. 957/10). The arrangements, first published in 1845, were done by Johann Kaspar Mertz, and they take inspiration and guidance from those made for piano by Franz Liszt, although there is evidence that Mertz also consulted Schubert's originals.⁶ (It should be noted that the order of the songs printed in the programme book for the CD is incorrect. I have given the correct order here, which follows that of Mertz's edition.) That said, some of the arrangements are more effective than others: by far the best is that of 'Ständchen', perhaps because it does not slavishly follow the original but instead uses the song as a source of inspiration for a work that evokes the spirit, if not the letter, of Schubert's conception. Far less successful is the arrangement of 'Die Post', which simply lacks the instrumental resources necessary to evoke the energy and drive of the original. Although this arrangement might have been more effective with a reinforced bass (something that would have been possible for Mertz, who played a guitar that had four additional bass strings), such reinforcement could not have made up for all the deficiencies of sound mass inherent in Mertz's arrangement. A further problem concerns tuning: 'Aufenthalt', 'Die Post' and 'Das Fischermädchen' are all marred at a number of points by faulty octaves between the fifth and second strings, aural smudges not corrected on this recording. In the end, Mertz's solo arrangements are of perhaps more historical than musical interest: the arrangements point to the importance of sonic re-creations in an era before recording as well as to the nineteenth century's increasing fascination with the genius of Schubert's songs.

Contemporary musicians are constantly pressed to find new paths through familiar territory, both to establish themselves as artists who can make unique contributions and to create commodities that combine immediacy and novelty. Despite its title, *Schubert (Re)Inventions* resists this pressure and instead offers, through the instrumentality of works that can be presented whole or in part with guitar, something closer to a time capsule, one created by placing a microphone in front of the echoes of the nineteenth century. It is thus interesting to think about how this recording might have been different had it attempted to recreate some of the spontaneity, joy and playfulness of a nineteenth-century salon. To be sure, sombre emotions circulated in these environments (if one can judge by songs like 'Nachtgesang'), but one hopes the gloom was tempered – both in performance and in pacing – by the pleasure of play. Reinventing Schubert through a return to

⁶ Mertz's strategies in arranging the songs are discussed in some detail by Simon Wynberg in his introduction to the modern edition of the arrangements. See Johann Kaspar Mertz, *Six Schubert Songs Arranged for Solo Guitar by Mertz*, vol. 7 of *Guitar Works*, ed. Simon Wynberg (Heidelberg: Chanterelle Verlag, 1985).

the salon could thus be part of a process of reinventing ourselves, encouraging listeners and scholars to explore not only the sonic treasures of the past, but also the social and cultural circumstances that made those treasures possible.

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doi:10.1017/S1479409816000525