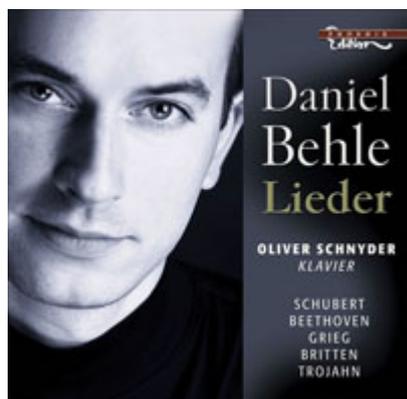


OPERA NEWS

Daniel Behle and Oliver Schnyder: "Lieder"

by Beethoven, Britten, Grieg, Schubert and Trojahn. Texts. Phoenix Edition 154



The young German tenor Daniel Behle is the pupil (and son) of the Wagner soprano Renata Behle; from the present evidence, she has done her job well. Little known in the U.S., Behle *files* has been establishing himself in Europe as a Mozart/Rossini specialist. But this disc indicates that he is also a natural recitalist.

He brings a fine instrument to the task. It's the lightest of lyric tenors, with a faint hint of smokiness that keeps it from cloying. At the top, it takes on a trace of *voce mista*, achieved seamlessly, which allows him to maintain an unbroken legato when the line takes him through the register break. Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the voice is its ability to maintain its essential color at low dynamics. At rare moments, such as the climax of Grieg's "Ein Traum," Behle offers a taste of a full-out tone that no doubt serves him well in opera. But through most of this disc, he hones his voice down to a thread of well-knit sound. He knows that good lieder singing doesn't overwhelm its audience but instead asks us to lean forward and listen closer.

The recital's first half covers familiar ground - three Schubert chestnuts, two by Beethoven, and Grieg's *Sechs Lieder*, Op. 48. All benefit from Behle's carefully considered readings. He makes something fresh even of the well-worn opening selection, "Der Musensohn," using small, precisely placed accents to animate the song's galloping rhythm, abetted here, as throughout, by Oliver Schnyder's deft accompaniment.

The second half is more adventurous. In Britten's terse, allusive "Hölderlin-Fragmente," the subtlety of Behle's singing - its avoidance of showiness - conjures memories of Peter Pears, the cycle's first performer. Behle ends with four Goethe lieder by the contemporary German composer Manfred Trojahn, who has dedicated these songs to Behle. One can easily hear why. Not only does Behle negotiate the often gnarly intervals with poised exactitude, but the freshness and ingenuousness of his voice provide a pleasing counterweight to the tortured, neo-expressionistic sound-world of the music - an ideal mating of performer and material.

Considering how beautifully Behle animates his texts, it would have been nice to look at English translations, especially of the rarer modern material. But small matter: this is wonderful singing, intelligent, detailed and utterly at the service of the material. □

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