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The Schubertian



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Reviews

Book Review: Paul Ulanowsky, *The Arts of Song and Accompaniment* (<http://paul-ulanowsky.org>, 2003, no charge)

Paul Ulanowsky (1908-1968) was a famous piano accompanist and long-time collaborator with the soprano Lotte Lehmann. This book was edited and published in 2003 by the author's son Philip from his father's incomplete draft manuscript of 116 pages.

The writing style, just like the playing, is very engaging, and never the least bit posturing – it gives the impression of speaking one-to-one with the reader in a relaxed way in his or her own home. Many anecdotes are included, usually referring to particular artists anonymously so as to give no offense. There is plenty of humour, sometimes wry: thus, some well-wishers after a concert “appear to rank the services of an accompanist roughly between a shoeshine and a haircut...” (p.5); or Ulanowsky includes a hilarious anecdote about the great pianist Ignaz Friedman on tour as an accompanist (p.17); or “... the green room. I am not sure whether this latter name has anything to do with the complexion most commonly met in these purlieus, but the suggestion is close” (p.24).

Topics covered include: Preface on the status of accompanists (pp.5-9); Technique, including transposing (pp.10-19); Concerts and recitals (pp.21-34); Choosing the program and encores (pp.35-56); Accompanying instrumentalists (pp.57-64); Languages (pp.65-69); Accidents (pp.71-72); Recitative (pp.73-75); Breathing (pp.77-78); Interpretation (pp.79-95); Liberties (97-107); Rhythm and ornaments (pp.109-116).

Here are a few personal highlights: (i) Ulanowsky's great ability in transposing acquired "by constant practice rather than by evolving any method" (p.13). (ii) Languages, written and pronounced, of which he had an extensive mastery down to fine details (pp.65-69). (iii) The relation between music and poetry in German Lieder (pp.92-95); Ulanowsky placed Goethe's "Wanderer's Nachtlied II" on such a high poetic level that even Schubert's beautiful setting (D768) did not quite match it, largely because the poem is "irregular in length, rhythm and rhyme, in other words, presenting handicaps in the three most important aspects of fitness for musical setting" (p.94). (iv) Dotted and triplet notation, including the matter sometimes elsewhere called "assimilation" (pp.110-111).

All Schubertians will be glad to be reminded that "In no other culture [than that of the German Lied] can we observe for a century or longer the happy phenomenon of a simultaneous flowering to highest perfection of poetry and music. The coexistence and parallel creative activity of genius in either field of artistic expression and their mutual inspiration [led] to ever greater heights of perfection." (p.92).

Special gratitude is due to his son Phillip for making this book available. The editing of the sketchy manuscript posed some problems, especially concerning foreign languages. The above-mentioned Friedman anecdote ends with "*Lapienti sat*" (p.17), possibly a pun on the standard "*Sapienti sat*" and meaning something between "enough said, for those who understand" and "he cried all the way to the bank"; erudite readers may be able to help here. The book will certainly be of interest to Schubertians and obviously to accompanists. Further material is available on the website mentioned above, including a discography and some recent mouth-watering audio discoveries. Highly recommended!

Nigel Nettheim