

German Lieder in the perception of the modern Australian listener and/or singer: a survey at the 30th National Liederfest

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Abstract

German Romantic Art Songs or German *Lieder* constitute a consistent part of every aspiring classical singer's repertoire around the world. This study investigates a contemporary Australian audiences' appreciation of the genre; it asks further what role the various Romantic characteristics play in German *Lieder* genre, gauges respondents' awareness of stylistic characteristics of *Lieder* and explores the importance of the "German-ness" of *Lieder*. A survey conducted at the prestigious annual competition National Liederfest elicited surprisingly passionate responses which suggest new ways of teaching *Lieder* in Australia.

Key words: German Lieder, Romantic art songs, Romanticism, perception of Lieder, teaching of Lieder

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German Romantic Art Songs

The combination of words and music in song lies at the beginning of all music making; each time has entrusted to its songs its most spontaneous emotions, its most fleeting moods and its most secret feelings; thus the song is a micro-cosmos of human history (Oehlmann, 2000). In the German speaking part of the world, songs of various description have been documented since the Middle Ages and with *Lied* (plural *Lieder*) simply being the German word for "song", the term refers, within German language usage, to all songs for solo voice from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. As Romantic art songs of the early 19th century, namely those by Schubert, became known beyond German language borders the term *Lied* has found its way into English (*German Lied*) and French (*Le Lied*) as the technical term for the genre of the German Romantic Art Song.

Whilst the genre has arguably been born with Schubert, the "source of nearly every Lied stream that flows through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth" (Miller, 1999) the term German *Lieder* nowadays includes all Art Songs written in the German language from the late 18th century (e.g. Mozart, Haydn), covering the whole 19th century (e.g. Beethoven, Schubert, Loewe, Franz, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf) and reaching well into the 20th century (e.g. Mahler, Strauss, Marx, Berg, Schönberg).

There are other traditions of Art Songs for instance in French, Russian, Norwegian, Czech, Italian, Spanish and English, but the *German Lied's* somewhat unique status is based on the immense influence of Schubert's and a bit later Schumann's *Lieder* on other countries' composers and the genre's extraordinary diversity and extensiveness. German Romanticism in music needs to be seen in the context of the reality of a musician's life in

the 19th century. The period between the years 1815, the year in which the *Vienna Conference* marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars and 1848, the year of the European Revolutions was fraught with political tension and rigid censorship. In the parts of Europe which belonged to the "German Confederation" (*Deutscher Bund*), this span is often referred to as *Biedermeier* period, a term pertaining to works in the fields of literature, music, the visual arts and interior design. The lack of outward freedom produced an art characterized by an idealization of the idyllic and a somewhat forced ignorance of the outside world (Bernhard, 1983). Particularly for musicians this imposed confinement resulted in a "inward revolution, a liberation, a finding of the self" (Fischer-Dieskau, 1985, p.67). The way music and word permeate each other in Romantic *Lieder* started a whole new development within vocal composition. In the ideal *Lied* every melodic or rhythmic movement remains, albeit musically independent, connected to the word. And whilst music and word keep their own characters in a delicate balancing act, both "double their energy as they unite" (Fischer-Dieskau, 1985, p.68). Or as Lehmann, 1945, p.12) says "the poet sings and the composer becomes poet and two arts are born anew as one. That is the *Lied*."

Every composer of *Lieder* developed their own musical idiom and reflected their time and personality through their choice of poetry. There is something intrinsically private about the *Lied*: the miniature-form and simple setting for piano and voice evoke the intimacy of a *Salon* - the term which originally just meant a 'larger living room' came, particularly in Central Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries to depict the social gathering of a smaller circle of guests in the homes of the educated, culturally interested bourgeois middle class in order to enjoy and discuss literary, artistic and/or musical performances (Rosen, 1995)

In the *Lied*, poetry and music of often quite personal character offer an insight into a human soul's most vulnerable parts yet stay (almost) always perfectly within the boundaries of 'good

taste'. The subjects of *Lieder* are as varied as the literature of German Romanticism and cover every conceivable aspect of unrequited and unreachable love as well as marital contentment and friendship, loneliness, death, nature, war and religious faith. The reminiscence of medieval themes, typical for the Romantic era, is reflected in tales of fairies, elves, spirits and suchlike. A sometimes present certain emotional self-indulgence is made bearable and even lovable through either a pinch of irony or a naïve sincerity that defies cheap sentimentality. The music, going far beyond the only illustrative, complements the words in an interpreting and deepening way, adding layers to the one-dimensional and simplifying the complicated; the musician is inspired by the poetry in such a way that each melodic or rhythmic phrase, though bound by musical law, never loses its connection to the word. In *German Lieder* vocal and musical expression appear condensed and enlarged as seen through a magnifying glass (Oehlmann, 2000) whilst the very personal aspect in the expression of universal human emotions allows the listener to immediately relate to the work and the sentiments expressed. A sheer endless 'playground' for vocal colours and nuances as well as psychological study, their suitability for the singing studio is further enhanced by the fact that key transposition, inconceivable in Opera or Oratorio repertoire, is common practice in Art Songs; thus the majority of *Lieder* is available in different keys, allowing also singers of limited range and vocal ability to try themselves at a perfect (complete) work of art.

Vocally *German Lieder* belong to the Western Classical singing tradition and thus require a 'classical' singing technique. The voice quality we hear when a singer sings depends on a variety of factors affecting the voice source i.e. the sound generated when the vocal folds are set into vibration by an air stream from the lungs and the resonator i.e. the shape of the vocal tract (Thurman and Welch, 2000). Voice production depends on breath support and control, optimal vocal fold

closure and voice source characteristics that are described by mainly three different dimensions: fundamental frequency (pitch), amplitude (loudness) and spectrum (timbral characteristics) (Sundberg, 1987). These principles apply for all singing with every singing style having its particular sound ideal. McCoy (2004, pp 2-7) cautiously suggests a 'good classical voice' to be characterized by a clear (i.e. not breathy) and clean (i.e. not raspy) vocal tone with a certain 'ring' (i.e. vocal tone amplification of very high overtones, essential particularly in opera); a 'classical' voice further needs a certain vibrancy (i.e. presence of vibrato which can be defined as a long-term oscillation superimposed on a sustained note with the components pitch and loudness; oscillation of 4.5 – 7 cycles per second of a pitch range between a minor second to a minor third are perceived as well balanced) and a 'balanced' timbre (also referred to as *chiaroscuro* = light/dark). Of equal importance are clarity of diction and articulation including proper pronunciation of the respective language in which a piece is written (which, in the case of *Lieder*, would obviously be German) as well as flawless intonation.

Regarding artistic approach and interpretation, each genre has its own specific stylistic requirements; given that the *Lieder* genre covers songs from the late 18th century to the middle of the 20th century it is clear that there cannot be one definite 'Lieder-style'. Each *Lied* will have to be considered individually with an analysis of its composer and time of origin providing guidelines as to the correct stylistic approach.

However, a convincing rendition of a *Lied* calls for more than considerable vocal ability, musical and stylistic understanding, diligent pronunciation and thoughtful engagement with the translation of the German lyrics. The singer needs to fill each syllable with meaning, to find a personal experience, an image or a feeling to colour each word as it is sung. As Walter Berry, the great Austrian baritone (and the author's teacher and mentor) used to say "It is quite simple really - all you have to do is see each word as you sing it" (personal communication,

1996). Whilst this may sound modest enough, it has been suggested that the demands of interpretation in *Lieder*-singing can be such that they come into conflict with the imperatives of vocal technique. Like Lehmann (1945, p.17) says: whilst "control of the voice is the soil from which interpretation springs" because "the voice must be able to react with the greatest subtlety to every shade of every emotion, the very emotion which enables the singer to carry her audience with her into the realm of artistic experience is also the worst enemy of a crystal clear technique" and she goes on to say that "a singer who delights in (virtuoso) technique still in some way leaves my heart cold". It appears that the appeal of *Lieder* might lie precisely in this seeming conflict between technique and interpretation, in the never ending endeavour to do equal justice to all aspects and layers of a song.

It should also be mentioned that from the perspective of the native German the sheer fact of *Lieder's* familiar language and the strong 'local flavour' of many invariably makes them sound and feel like a piece of home. But whilst for the German speaker words and music are inseparably intertwined, *Lieder* also touch people who do not understand a word of what they hear. As *Lieder* have spoken and continue to speak to people all over the world who have never seen a linden-tree or the arrival of spring after a long cold winter, who have never heard a nightingale, strolled along a little creek, seen the river Rhine or who, for that matter, have never lost their heart to a blond girl - one wonders how important the 'German ingredient' is after all.

A survey

A German expatriate, the author has for years taken pleasure in teaching and performing *Lieder* in Australia and the *National Liederfest* offered a perfect opportunity to investigate how *Lieder* were perceived by Australian singers and an Australian audience. The *National Liederfest* is a high profile competition for singers and pianists

with over \$10,000 in prize money instigated by the *Lieder Society of Victoria Inc* and held annually in Melbourne. Entrants have to present a program solely made up of *Lieder* which they perform publicly to a panel of three adjudicators: a renowned singer with special expertise in *German Lieder* performance and interpretation, often from overseas, a pianist with special expertise in *Lieder*-accompaniment and a representative of the Goethe Institute Melbourne as a German language expert. The structure of the panel emphasises the expectation of a high level of cooperation between singer and pianist as well as language proficiency in this competition. The event is unique in Australia and attracts some of the finest singers and pianists as well as a highly interested, educated, appreciative yet critical audience.

Having gained Ethics approval through the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee, a survey was designed to gain an insight into respondents' perception and opinions of some aspects of the *German Lieder* genre. Upon picking up their tickets and programs, *Liederfest* attendees were invited to take an explanatory statement outlining the purpose of the study and to complete the anonymous survey; of the 129 who had picked up an invitation 82 (64%) followed through with completing the questionnaire which comprised of twelve open or closed questions and was estimated to take 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

The first three questions sought to gauge respondents' level of expertise regarding the subject of *German Lieder*. Respondents were asked about their 'approach to music', allowing for multiple answers. The great majority of respondents (84%) identified as singers (63%) and/or instrumentalists (46.5%) with another 19.2 % also identifying as voice teachers and/or instrumental teachers (6.8 %). The great majority of respondents (82.2%) also stated that they regularly listened to music at home and/or at live performances.

Respondents showed a relatively high affinity with in the German language, particularly if held

against the mere 0.4 % of the general Australian population who identified as German speakers in the 2006 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011): A strong 18 % of respondents identified as 'fluent German speakers' and another 27.5 % as 'speaking and understanding some German' whilst 26% were 'confident with the pronunciation of German but did not speak the language'. There were 5.5% who identified as 'struggling with German pronunciation' and 6.8% said they 'used to speak German but had lost the ability to do so' and 13.7% declared that they 'neither spoke nor attempted to pronounce any German at all'.

In regards to respondents' personal knowledge of German poetry/literature (e.g. Goethe, Schiller, Eichendorff, Brecht, Heine, Mann, Hesse, Grass) in an English translation - or the original for German speakers - it was found that, whilst 8.5% described their knowledge in this respect as 'non-existent' and another 14 % found it 'very vague', a majority (77.5 %) commanded some knowledge ranging from 'patchy - know one or two works' (33.8 %) and 'reasonably thorough - know three or works well' (29.6 %) to 'very thorough (know seven or more works well and have a good overview' (14.1 %).

These numbers testify that *Liederfest* attendees comprise a highly musically educated and culturally interested crowd with a relatively high number of German speakers. A high level of overall cultural interest and diversity was confirmed when respondents were asked to name the cultural tradition(s) in which they 'felt most at home/identified with'; the question was deliberately worded in a way that left room for choice and allowed multiple answers, rather than simply asking for an ethnic background. "Anglo-Australian" was named most often (58.9 %) , followed by "German" (13.7 %) , "Italian" (9.9 %) and "generally European" (5.5%) yet respondents identified also with other European cultures like "French", "Armenian" , "Anglo-Spanish", "British", "Celtic-European", "Austrian" and "Viennese" (notable here the deliberate distinction between 'Austrian' and 'Viennese' which is very telling

about the latter: a person born in Vienna tends to identify as 'Viennese' before and above 'Austrian'; The non-European cultures (apart from Australian) named were "Anglo-American", "Indonesian", "Chinese/Asian", "Near/Middle/Far -Eastern", and "all cultures".

The great variety of respondents' cultural identities - a majority named more than one - is suggestive in many ways. Apart from testifying to the multicultural nature of modern Australia it shows a certain bias towards continental Europe, which is not surprising given the nature of the event which brought together the respondents. The above manifested relatively high level of affinity with the German language and literature coexists in the majority of cases with non-German cultural identities which suggests that a high level of cultural knowledge and interest exists rather independent of ethnicity.

Romantic

Next respondents were asked to jot down their spontaneous associations with the word 'romantic'. The word had been deliberately spelled with a lower case "r" in order to evoke connotations with the adjective rather than (just) the cultural period. The ambivalence caused by this dual meaning (romantic/Romantic) was exactly what made this question so interesting. The responses paint a wonderfully varied picture of what 'romantic' can mean: 41 % associated a musical period and/or a specific kind of music which was described as "passionate", "songs of love", "long, lyrical sustained vocal line", "lots of swelling, musical and otherwise" but also as "a piece of music that is concerned with being big and brilliant, but has no harmonious beauty" and "a decline from the classical". Some respondents named one or more composers e.g. Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Carl Maria von Weber, Wagner, Liszt, Brahms, Puccini, Strauss, interestingly also Gershwin, Porter, Berlin. Some composer names were given with

annotations like "Wagner, Liszt and not Brahms and Schumann" (respondent's underline) or "Wagner, Strauss, Wolf – dislike!" It becomes clear that although the association between "romantic" and "music" is frequent, there is some controversy as to what music is perceived as the most typical - and it is also evident that 'romantic' music is not in every case embraced as desirable ideal.

The "Romantic period" i.e. the whole cultural period of music art and literature was associated by 15% of respondents. The period was also referred to as the "19th century", "end of 18th - 19th century", or, placing it later and more narrowly: "a period between 1860 – 1910".

"Love", "Lovers", "loving feelings" were named by 22.5 % of respondents, also in a tongue-in-cheek way as "courted by a handsome man, wearing a smile and not much else" and 9.8 % of respondents named "feelings", "emotion", "emotional expression". Apart from these broader categories, "romantic" was being associated with: "individualism", "exaggeration", "freedom", "grandeur", "full-bodied", "heartfelt", "sincere", "beautiful", "fantasy", "poetic", "flowing", "striving to impress or to do good for someone", "forests", "nights", "moving into a more idealized world of contemplation of some aspects of beauty", "metaphysical exploration through aesthetic means", "happiness", "aspiration", "yearning", "heightened senses" and "emotions associated with life's profound aspects".

One is left to marvel at the great variety of descriptors and associations which testify to a high level of individualism and cultural insight amongst respondents.

In modern language usage 'romantic' seems to appear mostly in connection with 'love' and in Google 'romantic' throws up a whopping 199,000,000 hits, which confirms that the concept is alive and well today. It seems that the '(R)romantic' ideal has lost nothing of its enchantment as it touches on men's (and women's) deepest desires: 'true' love and a feeling of unity and oneness of men, nature and God (Huch, 1951).

Lieder and the singer and/or listener

In the next two groups of questions respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding *German Lieder*; the first group of statements were to be answered 'from the point of view of the singer' – with non-singers also invited to take a guess and although just 63% had identified as singers, these questions were answered by 87.7 % of respondents. The second group of questions were to be answered 'from the point of view of the listener'. As some statements concerned similar issues, put in different wordings to 'singers' and 'listeners', they are here presented together to highlight parallels in responses. The rating scale gave the options: 'agree', 'agree with reservations', 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'disagree'. For greater clarity the two positive ratings ('agree' and 'agree with reservations') are given in one figure (with the breakdown given in brackets) then the neutral rating and then the negative rating.

The notion that 'Lieder are easier to sing than operatic arias because they are shorter and less technically demanding' was agreed with by 20% (3% and 17%) neutral by 18% and disagreed with by 62%. On the other hand, 'Lieder are harder to sing than operatic arias because they call for a deeper understanding of music and text and greater subtlety in expression' was agreed with by 51.4% (17.2% and 34.2 %) neutral by 29.6 % and disagreed with by 18.7 %. And from the listener's perspective: 'Lieder are easier to listen to than symphonic or operatic works' was agreed with by 23.9 % (7% and 16.9%) neutral by 39.4 % and disagreed with by 36.6 %.

It is notable that *Lieder*, though in comparison with operatic arias usually shorter, more limited in range and mostly devoid of displays of vocal virtuosity are not widely perceived as 'easier' than operatic repertoire. There is even a, albeit slight, tendency of appreciating their demand for subtlety as greater and therefore more challenging. And it appears to be that same appreciation of *Lieder's* multi-layered texture,

depth and subtlety of expression that keeps them from being perceived as easy to listen to.

An interesting and somewhat controversial subject is the transposition of *Lieder* into a key that is comfortable for the student/singer. Particularly for the young singer and their singing teacher it is doubtlessly an advantage to be able to find any song in the 'best' key for one's voice. Some composers even transposed their own songs at times in order to accommodate particular singers (Montgomery, 2003); hundreds of *Lieder* are readily available in different keys for 'high', 'middle' or 'low' voice and modern music editing computer software makes transposition easier than ever. With the exception of opera and oratorio this practice is in fact generally accepted for most vocal music and is also endorsed by official bodies like the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB).

On the other hand there is the argument that key transposition must take into account a composer's "larger tonal plan" (Montgomery, 2003, p.30), particularly when groups of songs or song cycles are concerned where "key relationships are part of the structural design" so that if a cycle is being sung in a lower key, "all songs should be transposed accordingly", as Miller (1999, p.19) points out. This seemingly common sense notion is however all but ignored and well known editions like Peters think nothing of publishing songs-cycles like *Winterreise* (Schubert) *Dichterliebe* (Schumann) or *Frauenliebe und Leben* (Schumann) for 'middle voice' in which only a number of the songs has been transposed with the others remaining in the original (Schubert, no date, Schumann, no date). Apart from tonal relationships between songs, specific keys also represent specific tonal colours and "especially Schubert and Schumann searched for colours associated with specific keyboard ranges" Miller (1999, p.19).

In order to shed light on their take on this issue, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements: 'from the singer's viewpoint: it is a great advantage that *Lieder* can

be sung transposed into any key' was agreed with by 66.3 % (30.8% and 35.5 %) neither agreed nor disagreed with by 25 % and disagreed with by 8.8.%. It is notable that whilst two thirds of respondents agreed (with or without reservations) with the statement, there is also a relatively large number of neutral voices and a small number in disagreement. When this statement is somewhat turned on its head in: 'from the listener's viewpoint: it is a bad habit that Lieder are being sung transposed into any key because this ignores the original intention of the composer' it elicited a much more spread response with 35.2 % in agreement, (18.3 % and 16.9 %), 33.8 % neutral and 30.9 % in disagreement. Not surprisingly, the number of those who had wholeheartedly agreed with the advantages of transposition is mirrored in the number of those who consequently disagree with it being a bad habit (30.8% and 30.9% respectively); but there are more respondents in agreement with the second wording and an even greater number neutral. This suggests that respondents were at least to a degree aware of the controversies associated with the issue of transposition.

There were four statements (two from the singer's viewpoint, and two from the listener's) which drew rather unanimous responses: 'In Lieder-singing, one has to be aware of every word's meaning and give great attention to detail' was agreed with by 95.1%, (90.3% and 4.8%), neutral by 3.2% and disagreed with by 1.6% and the statement 'As long as the singer has a pleasant and expressive voice, it is not so important that he/she knows exactly what he/she is singing' was agreed with by 7.1% (1.4% and 5.7%), neutral by 4.2% and disagreed with by 88.5%. The strong negative response to this statement mirrors the strongly positive response to the previous statement and testifies that thorough text understanding is deemed vital in *Lieder* singing. The statement 'The singer needs to be familiar with the piano accompaniment as it is just as important as the singing voice in Lieder' was agreed with by 95.2%

(87.3% and 7.9%), neutral by 4.7% with no-one disagreeing and 'In *Lieder*, piano accompaniment and singing voice are of equal importance' was agreed with by 90% (70% and 20%), neutral by 2.8% and disagreed with by 7.1%; The fact that the importance of the piano was rated similarly high from the point of view of the singer and the listener shows that in *Lieder* the pianist has long left that role of "accompanist" to stand on a par with the singer; this makes one wonder why, whilst *Liedbegleitung* (song accompanying) is a course of professional study for pianists in Europe, it is all but ignored in most Australian Universities.

It is notable that the last four statements (regarding text understanding and the piano part) got similarly high levels of agreement – or disagreement in the case of the negatively worded one. This means that also respondents who were unsure about some of the other statements had a rather clear opinion with these four. However one cannot but notice a certain discrepancy between this ideal notion and the still all too often encountered practice where the singer has but a general idea of the text and just a vague, if any, formal knowledge of the compositional structure and harmonic progressions of the piano part.

Another strong response was elicited by the statement '*German Lieder* are just as effective when sung in English (or any other language)' as it was only 'agreed with reservation' by just 7.2% (with no-one agreeing wholeheartedly), 8.6% being undecided and disagreed with by 84.1 %. This response is particularly interesting in view of recent discussions for instance in *The Australian* (Westwood, 2011) regarding the performance of opera in English in order to make it more accessible to the audience. One might argue that, with the text being of prime importance in *Lieder* and with a vocal line that is, other than in opera, usually written so as to promote text understanding, *Lieder* might lend themselves even more than opera to be sung in translation; and indeed there is a well received edition of songs from "Beethoven to Mahler" in "singable

translations" (Kirchberger, 1993). With only of 18.5% fluent German speakers in the audience, the level of disagreement with the notion of singing translations as a viable option is quite remarkable. It seems that, as much as the German language might at times act as a barrier for both for singers and for the audience, its merits and beauty are still widely perceived and acknowledged as vital ingredient to *Lieder*. This result also reflects Millers (1999, p.19) verdict that "it is not a serious artistic option to sing *Lieder* in translation. *Lieder* translations belong in the program notes, not in the mouths of performers".

The Romantic in *Lieder*

Next, a number of characteristics of 19th century Romanticism were offered to respondents who were asked to rate in as far – in their opinion - these were reflected in *Lieder*. The options given on the rating scale were "Strongly in certain songs", "Somewhat", "I don't know" and "Not at all". For greater clarity, the positive ratings "Strongly in certain songs", "Somewhat" are here given in one figure (with the breakdown in brackets).

'A focus on love and longing' was found to feature prominently in *Lieder* by 91.3 % (82.8 % and 8.5 %) with 8.5% unsure and no negative rating. Similarly positively rated the 'unashamed display of intimate thoughts and feelings' with 91.2 % (53.6 % and 37.6 %) with 8.6 % unsure and again no negative rating and a 'focus on nature' which was rated positively with 91.1% (67.6 % and 23.5 %) with 1.4 % unsure and 7.3 % negative rating.

It is no surprise that these characteristics were recognized by a majority of respondents as vital ingredients for *Lieder* as there are countless examples in which these feature prominently (e.g. *An die ferne Geliebte*, *Adelaide* (Beethoven/Jeitteles, Mathisson), *Dichterliebe*, *Widmung*, *Liebeslied* (Schumann/Heine, Rückert, Goethe), *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Das Lied im Grünen* (Schubert/Reil, Müller).

'Metaphysical longing for a unity of man, nature and God' was recognized in *Lieder* by 84.5 % (43.7 % and 40.8%) with 2.8 % unsure and 12.6 % believing it had shaped *Lieder* not at all. The high positive rating for this hard-to-grasp aspect of *Lieder* suggests that respondents were not only thinking of specific songs like *Mondnacht* (Schumann/Eichendorff) or *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen* (Mahler/Rückert) but sensed and appreciated a particular metaphysical longing define and permeate the entire period of Romanticism.

The 'influence of a focus on medieval stories, myths and legends' got a less clear cut response with 68.5 % (20% and 48.5 %) of positive rating, 11.4 % unsure and 20.1 % believing it had shaped *Lieder* not at all. The relatively high number of "I don't know" ratings is as telling as the 20.1 % of "not at all" is surprising: songs about medieval stories, myths and legends abound in the *Lieder*-genre to the point of forming a sub-genre within the repertoire, particularly in the form of *Balladen* (ballads, e.g. *Der Erbkönig*, *Der König in Thule*, *Der Zwerg*, (Schubert/Goethe, Collin), *Belsazhar* (Schumann/Heine) , *Der Feuerreiter*, *Nixe Binsefuss*, *Die Geister vom Mummelsee* (Wolf/ Mörike) and virtually everything by Carl Loewe). It might be that these songs rank less prominently in the minds of an in the majority non-German speaking audience as these 'story-telling' songs depend possibly even more than other *Lieder* on text understanding and some historical context for their appreciation.

The notion of 'A naïve worldview' was the most controversial with just 58.1% (16.4 % and 41.7%) finding is characteristic for *Lieder*, with 22.3% unsure and 19.4% believing it had shaped *Lieder* 'not at all'. This response might be due to the quite ambivalent, if not slightly negative connotations of 'naïve'. Yet, if taken to mean "simple, ingenuous, unsophisticated, natural, unaffected" (Fairfax Dictionary, 2011) and considering that Romanticism has understood itself as a counter movement to enlightenment and rationalism,

one might indeed see a, at times even somewhat deliberately naïve worldview in some of the poetry e.g. *Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust, Der Jüngling auf dem Hügel*, (Schubert/Müller, Hüttenbrenner), *Oh liebliche Wangen, Sonntag* (Brahms/Fleming, Uhland).

Now and then

Next respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding certain aspects of life which had changed since the 19th century Romantic era; respondents were also asked to state if they thought this change had been for the better or worse. The level of agreement could be indicated by ticking 'agree', 'agree somewhat' or 'disagree'; for greater clarity, the positive ratings ('agree', 'agree somewhat') have been combined in one figure (with the breakdown given in brackets); the change itself could be rated as either 'good', 'undecided' or 'not good'.

The statement that 'interpersonal communication has become easier (e.g. email/sms instead of letter writing)' was agreed with by 91.2 % (61.8 % and 29.4%) and disagreed by 8.8 %; this was rated to be good by 36.7 %, undecided by 46.7 % and not good by 16.7 %.

The statement that 'today's relationships have lost their mystery' was agreed with by 70.8 % (26.4 % and 44.4 %) and disagreed by 29.2 %; this was rated to be good by 17.4 %, undecided by 38.6 % and not good by 43.9%.

The statement that 'nature has lost its mystery' was agreed with by 46.4% (20.3 % and 26.1 %) and disagreed by 53.6 %; this was rated to be good by 37.7 %, undecided by 35.8 % and not good by 26.4%.

The statement that 'the demise of social classes had broken down barriers' was agreed with by 77.6 % (38.8 % and 38.8 %) and disagreed by 22.4%; this was rated to be good by 64.3 %, undecided by 23.2 % and not good by 12.5 %.

The statement that 'people's personal horizons tend to have expanded' was agreed with by 84.9 %

(57.6 % and 27.3 %) and disagreed by 15.2 %; this was rated to be good by 71.4 %, undecided by 16.1 % and not good by 12.5 %.

The statement that 'globalization has demystified the exotic' was agreed with by 83.6 % (35.8 % and 47.8 %) and disagreed by 16.4 %; this was rated to be good by 30.4 %, undecided by 44.7 % and not good by 25%.

These results suggest a strong consensus that 'interpersonal communication has become easier', but it is largely undecided if this is good or bad. It was also relatively widely acknowledged that 'today's relationships have lost their mystery', and this fact was only welcomed by a minority. The greatest common agreement was found in the welcoming of the 'demise of social classes' and the 'expansion of people's personal horizons'. In general, it becomes apparent that views on these issues differ widely and would benefit from further research and discussion. The most striking comment regarding this question was however: "all of the above have become worse, not since, but because of the romantic era". One can only begin to contemplate what the respondent might mean by this.

The German in Lieder

The last question asked if respondents thought there was 'anything specifically 'German' about *Lieder* – apart from the language (e.g. culturally)'; if answered in the affirmative, respondents were asked to specify characteristics they found in or associated with *Lieder*. This question was skipped by a relatively high number of respondents (16.1%). Of those that answered however were 33.3 % "No" and 66.6 % "Yes" responses followed by a number of at times highly intriguing personal perceptions of the "German-ness" of *Lieder*: Many perceived the "music as characteristically German" specifying a compositional style which exuded "musical precision", "harmonic chromaticism", "formality", "textural expansion", "a focus on linking language to music, including its natural rhythms", "a mood

which is relatively more serious and descriptive than a graceful French chanson"; "often with a hint of melancholy"; "music seems more masculine"; "beautiful, melodic music"; generally the "poetry and setting of music, the color, the feeling"; others focussed more on "German culture" and "love, expression, poetry"; "the prevalence of German thought and exploration of philosophy of the mind, particularly their predominance throughout the 19th century" which was "reflected in their music"; also "a need to encapsulate experience, a poetic sensibility"; "emotional sensibility"; the "innate realization of poetry, beauty and the German 'Soul'"; "striving for deeper understanding in relationships, including humans"; Someone wrote in German: "Liebe zur Heimat, Natur, Sehnsucht, Kennst Du das Land, etc." (Love of home land, nature, yearning, know'st thou know the land, this last alluding to the beginning of one of the *Mignon* poems by Goethe which has been put into music by Beethoven, Schubert, Wolf and others); Some comments were rather critical, like "nationalist feeling and a sense of place"; "black and white thinking"; "perfectionism"; "darker, more depressing (night and death)"; "takes itself too seriously, too intense"; "generally a display of power".

Although these perceived German characteristics could have been reported in a summarized way, the author felt that the responses to this question had been so strong and diverse that they all deserved their place.

Discussion and Conclusion

Carrying out a survey amongst attendees of a highly specialized event like the *National Liederfest* meant that respondents were part of a pre-selected group that cannot claim to be representative of modern Australia. Considering however that classical music in general tends to appeal to a minority only and that the genre of *German Lieder* again occupies but a niche within

this musical cosmos this targeted approach seemed justified so as to elicit meaningful responses. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to gauge respondents' 'competency' regarding *German Lieder* and it could be shown that the audience at *Liederfest* comprised to a large part active musicians and/or singers who were musically and culturally knowledgeable and displayed a strong affinity to continental European traditions. Although the audience showed great diversity in aspects like age and ethnic background, their common denominator was clearly their shared interest in a specific art form.

Although the survey has provided a snapshot-like insight into contemporary Australian singers' and listeners' perception of *Lieder*, there was nothing particularly Australian about the responses. It appears that appreciation of *German Lieder* and affinity to German Romanticism far outweighed the ethnic identity of respondents. This seems to cautiously suggest that, were the same survey conducted at a similar event anywhere in the world, responses might be rather similar. One might even go as far as to suggest that this includes German speaking countries, because even a German or Austrian audience would only be able to respond meaningfully to the survey if they had a specific interest in the *Lieder* genre – namely the kind of interest found in the Australian *Liederfest* attendees.

Lieder have long become universal property in that they belong to whoever opens their ear, mind and heart to them. As Lotte Lehmann's (1945, p.9) said: "*Lieder* speak an international language which is understood by all – the language of the heart, the language of the soul and indestructible beauty".

The at times passionate responses to this survey testify not only to an enthusiastic audience but also to a subject matter that is able to elicit fervent interest. At this point one cannot but notice a discrepancy between this impressive confirmation

of the zest *German Lieder* can evoke and current practice of teaching *German Lieder* repertoire in Australian schools and universities which does, to put it mildly, not always succeed in capturing students' minds and imagination.

This study has renewed and confirmed the author's conviction that *German Lieder* can be of great merit not only to the singer/musician but to anyone who cares to listen. For the singer/musician *Lieder* provide a sheer endless resource of short yet perfect (i.e. complete) works of art which are eminently suited for honing listening skills, attention to detail and subtlety of expression. The study of *Lieder* affords the equally humbling as rewarding experience of incessantly striving to refine every last nuance yet rarely – if ever – fathoming a *Lied's* whole depth and one's own possibilities of expression.

The *Lied's* modest miniature form and unspectacular character stand in stark contrast to a fast paced show-world in which outward appearance is virtually everything; it constitutes an antithesis to a time "when there is much in the window, but nothing in the room" (The 14th Dalai Lama, 2011 quoted in The World Institute of Slowness). Despite the high level of engagement befitting the subject of *Lieder* neither the beginning singer/musician nor the non-singer/musician should feel daunted; the beauty of *Lieder* reveals itself instantly to those who listen and whilst deeper involvement will always be worthwhile, any engagement with this art form might well turn out to be one way of remedying some of the rushed emptiness of modern life.

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