

PART ONE

**Introducing a genre**

## Introduction: why the Lied?

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Of the many kinds of music to which composers from German-speaking lands have turned their attention, the Lied, or art song, is surely the most paradoxical. Among those who have fallen under the genre's spell, it is easy to discern fervent if not fanatical zealotry. Among those who have not, it is just as easy to detect bemused bewilderment as to how a musical rendering of a German poem is capable of inducing so profound a response. Suffice it to say, the Lied's fortunes seldom have been static.

The paradoxes do not end here. While Lieder often are thought of as diminutive, given that a great many last but a short time when compared to sonatas, concertos, symphonies, or operas, both the history of German song and the density of expression encountered in many works comprising the genre belie that characterization. Even in some of the most evanescent examples, such as Schubert's *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*, the timelessness that Goethe compresses into his poem combined with the music underscoring it yield an expansiveness precisely because the song is so short: succinct yes, diminutive no! At once the most private yet universalizing of art forms, the Lied, less than a century ago, stood at the forefront of late Romanticism. Together with orchestral and various types of instrumental music, and later the music dramas of Richard Wagner, it formed part of a Teutonic musical juggernaut widely regarded as without peer. On the eve of World War I, at the peak of the genre's popularity, song settings of German poetry were to be encountered almost everywhere. In Berlin alone, between 1900 and 1914, according to a recent tally, public song recitals, or *Liederabende*, averaged some twenty a week and invariably were sold out.<sup>1</sup> The Lied was equally ubiquitous in private performances, especially those sponsored by the artistic, intellectual, and economic elite. As one witness has recalled, "Lieder fitted particularly well into the atmosphere of . . . intimate social gatherings. The poem was generally read before each setting was sung. One could easily lose oneself in the mood produced."<sup>2</sup> Yet by 1948, when the eighty-four-year-old Richard Strauss completed his *Vier letzte Lieder*, the status quo had changed considerably, so much so that some have found it tempting to view Strauss's four songs as a requiem not only for German song but also for German culture as cultivated during the past two centuries.

While the supposition behind this last statement is fraught with greater complexity than most historians would care to admit, there can be little

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argument that the Lied enjoyed a special place within German musical life. And yet one wonders: what prompted the keen attentiveness shown this body of music in seemingly every household of a certain means from the northern reaches of Schleswig-Holstein to the southern regions of Bavaria or from Salzburg to Vienna? How long did this passion endure and why is one informed in most every general music history that it ended, that the Lied now lives on as a kind of museum rarity within the arena nowadays thought of as classical music? Although more complete answers to such questions appear in the chapters that follow, I would be remiss if I did not make the point here that, beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing for almost two centuries, poetry played a fundamental role in individual and collective life. More times than not, verse dressed in song was an essential means by which this rich body of literature was disseminated. Goethe succinctly summed up what I have in mind here when he asked: “Wer sichert den Olymp? vereinet Götter?” (Who secures Olympus, who unites the gods?); his answer: “Des Menschen Kraft, im Dichter offenbart!” (The power of man, revealed in the poet).<sup>3</sup> Mindful of such a pronouncement, it perhaps is easy to understand why a writer from more recent times has asserted that Germany is “the only country that could have taken seriously Shelley’s famous sweeping dictum that ‘poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.’”<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the heights to which it would soar, the Lied began, as did so much else in an age when communication was not instantaneous, in the home: the modest pastime of a small but growing middle class. Not surprisingly, given its initial environment, German song has reflected and often shaped individual identity. At the same time, it also has played a considerable part in giving voice – literally as it happens – to a burgeoning German national identity, so much so that by the second half of the nineteenth century the Lied had become a kind of sounding manifestation of cultural hegemony. It may not be too fanciful to suggest that the Lied’s development parallels that of Germany itself: from a collection of independently governed agencies bound only by language in the eighteenth century to a united country in 1871. Intriguingly, Germany’s saga has provided a compelling if seldom explicitly acknowledged analogue for those who would track the Lied’s history: ascent to nationhood, dominion, downfall, splintered afterlife. One can only speculate if, like reunited Germany, the Lied will experience a comparable revitalization.

If the Lied has traveled a bumpy road during the last fifty years compared to its earlier glory days, its stock shows signs of having risen recently, thanks in no small measure to the renewed interest in music of the nineteenth century – the genre’s heyday. Critical editions of the works of Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi have been launched.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, an

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entire journal devoted to the music of what its editors call “the long century” recently marked its twenty-fifth anniversary: *19th Century Music* (University of California Press). A great many composers have been reclaimed, at least partially so, after periods of obscurity. Others, including a fair number of women, have been made known to a broad public for the first time after having been consigned to the shadows in their own day, among them Fanny Hensel, Clara Schumann, and Josephine Lang. While such figures as Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms continue to crowd concert programs, ways of listening to their music have been tempered by new insights and interpretations, some of which have been hotly debated.<sup>6</sup> Historically informed performance practice – a generation ago the exclusive province of Baroque and earlier music – now has reached beyond the nineteenth century to Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* and Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps*. Detailed analyses of nineteenth-century music stand alongside studies devoted to its social and intellectual backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, a listener can embark upon the life-altering adventure of listening to *all* of the Lieder of Franz Schubert, thanks to the Lied pianist Graham Johnson, a legion of singers, and the Hyperion label. Launched in 1987, *The Hyperion Schubert Edition* would not attain completion until 1999 with the thirty-seventh CD. On the heels of this staggering achievement, Johnson is off again, this time to record all of the Lieder of Clara and Robert Schumann, an endeavor estimated to take twelve CDs.

Mention of Schubert and the many CDs required to record his more than 600 Lieder serves as a reminder that this composer’s songs as well as those who followed after him – Schumann, Brahms, Wolf – constitute for most people the sum total of the genre’s history. Previous investigations to some degree have fostered this viewpoint, given that the nineteenth-century Lied has garnered the lion’s share of scholarly attention. This last statement is not meant to question the usefulness of such investigations, only to point out that the complete history of the Lied remains obscured behind the lofty vistas formed by German song during its most dynamic period. Without diminishing the value of the scholarly achievement now in place for either nineteenth-century music or the Lied, in particular, from the same period, the fact remains that German song existed before the first one completed by Schubert, dated March 1811 (*Hagars Klage*, D5), and after the last finished by Hugo Wolf, on 28 March 1897 (*Fühlt meine Seele*; he destroyed one further song as unworthy). More times than not excoriated by recent criticism, the eighteenth-century Lied may be shown to have influenced the style shift from the Baroque to the Classical periods, just as the Lied in the twentieth century was taken up by those at the forefront of early modernism and also contributed to a great many of the positive developments in popular music. Problematic and controversial, such statements seem even more so because

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both the pre-Schubert and post-Wolf Lied have been underserved by extant scholarship. Although neither of the subjects can be covered completely in the chapters devoted to them here, it nonetheless is hoped that the information that is provided will spark greater interest in these repertoires as well as additional research and an increased number of performances than heretofore has been the case.

All of which leads to the aim of this book: to document the Lied in essays starting with its birth in the 1740s to its presumed demise during World War II. The first three sections deal with the chronological unfolding of German song, its early history in the Age of Enlightenment, its halcyon days in the Age of Romanticism, its supposed fragmentation in the Age of Modernism, while a fourth addresses issues of reception and performance. Jane Brown leads off with a consideration of the Lied's relationship with German poetry from the generation before Goethe in the eighteenth century to Bertolt Brecht in the century just past. At one extreme, poets of the earlier age succeeded in creating verse that mirrored the growing fascination with subjectivity and self, while Brecht's texts set to music by such composers as Paul Dessau, Hanns Eisler, and Kurt Weill primarily were concerned not with individuals but with classes of people and their various struggles. Given that the Lied had long stood at the center of German musical life, composers and other individuals quickly realized that song provided a ready-made medium for social causes. As the title of a song by Eisler from 1930 proclaims: "Change the world, it needs it!"<sup>8</sup> Predictably enough, supporters of right-wing concerns looked to song for the very same reasons; this especially is to be seen in some of the more radical offshoots of the many *Wandervogel* groups in post World War I Germany. Walking through the woods or crowded around campfires, what did German youth do when brought together in companionship in the first third of the twentieth century? They sang. As the subsequent history of the twentieth century tragically affirms, what they sang about – the lyrics with their emphasis on a "reawakening of a genuine Germanness"<sup>9</sup> – proves all too well the power of song as well as its susceptibility to conscription.<sup>10</sup>

Given that I have indicated that this book covers the entire history of German song, a logical question is why has its scope been restricted to the period it has? Does the term Lied not encompass a larger time span, whether the polyphonic Lied of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries or the Baroque continuo Lied? Limitations have had to be set and, in so doing, I have opted for an investigation of "the modern Lied," a German poem set to music, generally for solo voice and keyboard – in the nineteenth century almost always piano – from its self-effacing start in the 1740s to Strauss's empyrean paean to this tradition, the previously-mentioned *Vier letzte Lieder*.<sup>11</sup> The first book in English to cover the full history of German solo song as so defined, it nevertheless does not treat everything. The American Charles

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Ives turned on occasion to poetry by Goethe, Heine, and other German poets, just as did the Norwegian Edvard Grieg. It is my hope that some future book will include these and other subjects not touched on here.

Following Brown's poetical overview, I provide a summary of eighteenth-century Lieder after which Amanda Glauert looks at four focal composers from the same period. Ruth O. Bingham scrutinizes the ways in which diverse composers in the first half of the nineteenth century took up the song cycle. A sub-genre within the Lied's larger history, the song cycle is important because of the magnitude and merit of music with which composers responded to its potential and the way in which it allowed the genre to expand from within. James Deaville surveys the Lied during the middle of the nineteenth century and Christopher H. Gibbs examines how German song reached beyond its own boundaries to influence other musical genres, ranging in time from Schubert to Mahler. As a glance at the table of contents confirms, most chapters treat the individual composers who have come to be regarded as the genre's most important. Marie-Agnes Dittrich turns to Schubert, not to endorse yet again his position as the "inventor" of the Lied but rather to inquire critically into the composer's ties to his predecessors, the nature of his achievement, and the ways in which composers after him responded – or did not – to that legacy. Of these later composers, Jürgen Thym turns to Schumann and, among other things, reveals that Schumann tended to underrate the composer of *Erlkönig*; for Schumann, Beethoven was the trailblazer when it came to German song. For Lied enthusiasts this volume also contains a surprise: a chapter on the Lieder of Franz Liszt, a composer better known for his virtuoso piano works and as the creator of the symphonic tone poem. As Rena Charnin Mueller argues, the Lied played a special role within this composer's compositional career, one previously overlooked. Heather Platt explores Brahms and his union of words and music, an examination based in large measure on remarks he made to his only composition student, Gustav Jenner. Susan Youens assesses the rare composer known almost exclusively for his contributions to the Lied, Hugo Wolf. Moving into the twentieth century, James L. Zychowicz takes up two composers for whom song was equally important – if for different reasons – Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. I follow with an appraisal of the Lied to the middle of the twentieth century; although many have claimed that German song died during this period, the work of such disparate composers as Reger, Pfitzner, Zemlinsky, Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Eisler, Dessau, Krenek, and a host of others belies this overly facile supposition. David Gramit begins Part IV with an outline of the "double circulation" of the Lied, both as an art form and as a commercial commodity, the latter an influence largely ignored in previous accounts of the genre but one that has shaped it just as forcefully as aesthetic considerations. Graham Johnson

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concludes this section and ends the book at precisely the point I hope many will take as a point of departure: with performance.

The book's chronological organization notwithstanding, it may be that the reader will wish to dip in at whatever point is of immediate interest. With the exception of my own two chapters, a different author has written each and there are no overarching threads to be missed should the reader take chapters out of sequence. In whatever manner this book is utilized, a few additional words may assist by way of placing the Lied in context. In offering a précis of what the Lied has meant to composers, performers, and listeners during the past 250 years, I hope to explain here, at least in part, why the Lied and indeed all song matters.

Most people who cherish the Lied do so because it is a refuge of intimacy. An art form given over to poetry and music, song relies on the bond between the two. Depending on the period or the composer in question, one or the other component may dominate; yet it generally is assumed that the ideal relationship is one where music and words are weighted equally. Intriguingly, composers have tended to honor such a happy medium in the breach, the result being that the way in which the two halves come together frequently strikes the listener as a fascinating balancing act.

However the two ingredients are joined, it generally is agreed that the resulting union possesses a power exceeding what either words or music are capable of on their own. At its most epoch-making, the union that lies at the heart of German song may be expressed thus: "At the sound of songs all time and space recede." These words, in English translation, are by Alois Isidor Jeitteles, an obscure poet and medical student living in Vienna from about 1815 to 1820, who provided Beethoven with the literary starting point for his Op. 98 song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (1816). Within Jeitteles's poem and Beethoven's setting, the line quoted here launches the concluding fifth stanza of the cycle's first song. Although at first glance they seem hyperbolic, it nevertheless is a truism that those devoted to the Lied share a belief that the coupling of words and music possesses special power if not Orphic dynamism. As the eighteen-year-old Schumann put it in 1828, shortly after having absorbed Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*, ballads by Loewe, and Lieder by Schubert and Marschner, "Song unites the highest, word and tone."<sup>12</sup> Viewed thus, the twenty-second Lied from Schubert's 1827 song cycle *Winterreise*, *Mut*, delivers much of the devastating blow it does because the now delusional wanderer claims he does not hearken to the sentiment of his own song: "When my heart speaks in my breast I sing loudly and cheerfully. I don't listen to what it says to me, I have no ears." Stricken with such affective deafness, Schubert's lamentable pilgrim loses much more than this: he is irrefutably helpless. Isolation and madness remain. Schubert's music

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matches the clash at the core of Wilhelm Müller's text: energetic rhythms proclaim the wayfarer's resolve to sing, yet the phrase units do not match the 2/4 meter. The key signature is G minor yet with the appearance of the voice one hears three measures in tonic minor followed by two measures of parallel major to which the piano echoes two measures more in the major, for a total of four. Müller's protagonist claims one thing and Schubert, sensitive to his internal discord, supports that assertiveness while simultaneously repudiating it. The message is clear: to be in the presence of song and not listen is risky business.

One reason why this is so is because song – along with many other modes of creative expression – came to be thought of as an essential element in that late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German formulation of self-cultivation or self-education. Known to Germans as *Bildung*, the program it inscribed was one whereby an individual strives for self-actualization unfettered by guidance or interference from others.<sup>13</sup> As Goethe discloses in what is surely the most celebrated example of the *Bildungsroman*, or educational novel, his 1794 *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, such a forging of self depends on the equilibrium of a number of components, be they head and heart or the earthly here and now and the boundless beyond.<sup>14</sup> The poet Justinus Kerner muses on exactly this in his 1826 poem "Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend," set to music two years later by Schumann as one of twelve songs forming his Op. 35. Deprived of the "wondrous forest," the seat of unspoiled nature and, more importantly, the locus of spiritual harmony where "in the twilight places bird song and silver stream" inspired "many a song fresh and bright," Kerner's protagonist is now "desolate and mute." The songs of yore "seldom stir," a condition not unlike "the mere half-song of the bird parted from tree and leaf."

I daresay all of the authors represented in this volume would agree that this "Lied sensibility," as I call it, is palpably to be experienced throughout the genre's history even if it is difficult to explain. For the poet Paul von Heyse, in 1860, and Wolf, in the twenty-third song of his *Italienisches Liederbuch* (1890–91, 1896), the empathy for words coupled with music is expressed in terms of a life force whose source *is* nature. "What song can I sing that would be worthy of you?" Heyse demands. "Where can I find one? I should like best to dig it deep out of the earth, where no creature has ever sung it; a song that no man or woman, however old, has ever heard or sung to this day." Earlier, the important philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer, in his *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen* (6 vols., 1846–57), declared: "Song is something that grows from nature; it can generate itself from life."<sup>15</sup> Climbing from beneath the rubble of World War II a century later, the historian Friedrich Meinecke still could write in 1946 when he was eighty-four of the reciprocity between poetry – and by extension



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music – and nature when he sketches the means by which his country might salvage itself and in part atone for recent horrors. “In every German city or larger village” Meinecke longs for the establishment of “a community of like-minded friends of culture” who would take upon themselves “the task of conveying to the hearts of the listeners through sound the most vital evidence of the great German spirit, always offering the noblest music and poetry together.” Aware that so many libraries have been destroyed, the historian argues that it is only in such societies that the young might get “their first access to the imperishable poems of Hölderlin, Mörike, C. F. Meyer, and Rilke.” Within these groups, Meinecke longs for nothing less than that union of words and music that is the Lied: “lyrics of the wonderful sort, reaching their peak in Goethe and Mörike where the soul becomes nature and nature the soul.”<sup>16</sup> In commenting on Meinecke’s reflection, Peter Gay has written: “in the impressive literature of German self-accusation, I know of no passage more instructive and more pathetic than this.”<sup>17</sup> Given the history of German song and verse, I would add that there are few others more heartrending, unless it is Adorno’s statement that “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding this German empathy for song, how does one explain the continuing hold that, say, Schubert’s 1814 *Gretchen am Spinnrade* exerts on listeners, many of whom neither read nor speak German and who are aware of Goethe’s poem only because they are following a text translation? Is the dominion that Lied composers or their champions claim real? Is a publication devoted to this music needed? This last question may be answered in the single word “yes” and for at least two reasons: firstly, the sheer quality and quantity of works making up the Lied and secondly, the role the genre has played in German culture. The inception of the Lied in the 1740s was premised on matters artistic as well as those relating to nascent nationalism. Poets and composers alike, weary of what they perceived as the Baroque predilection for extravagance, found song a ready medium for the emerging neo-classical aesthetics of naturalism and simplicity. As the literary critic Johann Christoph Gottsched asserted in his widely-read *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen* (1st edn., 1730), not only was Italian Baroque *opera seria* artificial and lacking in reason, it was “a promoter of lust and a corrupter of upright morals.”<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the more earnest fare of the Lied, as the influential poet Johann Friedrich von Hagedorn noted in 1747, “soothes our earthly life, allays grief, and generously augments joyfulness.”<sup>20</sup> Georg Philipp Telemann had expressed much the same outlook six years earlier when, in the introduction to a collection of his own Lieder, he expressed the hope that his songs might spark a “renewed golden age of notes” worthy of the ancients while also showing “foreigners how more maturely we [Germans] are able to think than do you!”<sup>21</sup> By 1826,

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Telemann's dream had become reality. As Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, editor of the music journal *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, asked in January of that year: "Has there ever been an age more prolific in song than ours?"<sup>22</sup> During a single month of 1826, German music lovers found themselves inundated by over a hundred newly-published *Lieder*. The sum is altogether unheard of when one knows that during the years from 1736 to 1799 only 779 collections of songs had found their way into print (in other words, from a rate of one collection per month during the stated sixty-four years to one hundred times that by 1826). Henceforth, the periodical stated, it would be possible to review only a small portion of this ever-growing number. As the century progressed the trend continued, so much so that in 1889 Friedrich Nietzsche could intone: "The German imagines even God himself singing *Lieder*."<sup>23</sup>

From this it in part is evident that the *Lied* stood at the heart of German musical life beginning slightly before the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing throughout the nineteenth, and into the twentieth. At its easy-going best, it worked, as the poet Hagedorn stipulated, to ease earthly existence, assuage anxiety, and promote human happiness. At its most ambitious, like the best Rembrandt painting, the *Lied* seems to anticipate a quality of photography – not in the flash-bulb glare or literal reproduction of a scene but in the assurance that the whole of a character or a mood can be implied by the revelation of a single poetical-musical instant. At once frozen into a single frame yet unbounded by music's ever and ongoing future, this isolated moment has the power to suggest the continuum of a life from which it has been discerningly cropped. At their most sharply focused, such caught moments can do still more, offering links with posterity – a connection between the then of the *Lied* in question and the present of those who would listen.

A few words about some practical concerns may be in order. While it may appear that English translations of German titles have been capriciously included, the policy has been to include them only where the original German seemed not otherwise obvious. Titles of German poems are given within quotation marks; those of musical settings of poems in italics. Dates of individuals figuring in the history of the *Lied* – especially in chapters relating to broad time spans – are given on pp. xxxii–xxxv. This seemed prudent given that some chapters were in danger of becoming weighed down by long lists of names and dates. It is hoped that the reader will not mind having to turn the occasional page.