

STEPHEN RODGERS, *THE SONGS OF CLARA SCHUMANN* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), ISBN 978-1-108-83425-4, 193 pp, £85.

Stephen Rodgers's *The Songs of Clara Schumann* is the most substantial analytical monograph on Clara Schumann to have been published in the English language. Divided into two halves (Part I: Context and Style; Part 2: Analysis), each containing two chapters, the whole is bookended by an inspiring Introduction and a richly thought-provoking Epilogue. This book takes into account all of Clara Schumann's 31 songs: those with and without opus numbers; those songs we are certain she wrote, and those for which there remains a hint of authorial ambiguity; and the songs of each of the poets she set throughout her career including Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), Emanuel Geibel (1815–1884), Hermann Rollett (1819–1904), Johann Peter Lyser (1804–1870), Robert Burns (1759–1796), Friederike Serre (1800–1872), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and Justinus Kerner (1786–1862), as well as those songs for whom the poets are not known (for example, "Der Abendstern").

Each of the chapters in Part I of the book has a tripartite shape. Chapter 1, 'Three Assumptions', outlines the predominant ideas that underpin Rodgers's study: that 'Clara Schumann Is Her Own Song Composer'; that 'Music Analysis Can Reveal a Lot About Clara Schumann's Songs (and Vice Versa)'; and that 'Song Form Depends Upon Poetic Form (and Meaning)'. Chapter 2, 'Three Hallmarks', grapples with the compositional and artistic fingerprints that define Clara Schumann's song output which, at their most basic level, include 'Expansive Themes'; 'Undermined Cadences'; and 'Expressive Accompaniments'. As the book unfolds, it revisits many of Schumann's songs repeatedly in subsequent chapters. The reader therefore has the opportunity to take each song as a musical object and consider it from a variety of different vantage points. The composite picture that emerges of each song, and of the broader aesthetic of Clara Schumann's song composition, is compelling.

One of the foundation stones of the book is a fervent argument for the intrinsic value of Clara Schumann's compositional output, as distinct from that of her husband (and other major composers of the nineteenth century). Rodgers brings her music into fruitful conversation with those other major composers while avoiding the risk of allowing it to be dwarfed by their more sizeable output (which is largely bound up with their patriarchal advantage) in the nineteenth century. Examples include the discussion of sentence structure in Clara Schumann's songs in relation to the musical output of Franz

Schubert, or the rich exploration of Schumann's sensitivity to—and thwarting of—musical closure in relation to, among other composers, Fanny Hensel's tendency to avoid cadential closure.<sup>1</sup> In *The Songs of Clara Schumann*, this composer takes her place amongst equals, each page of Rodgers's book strengthening the case for why her music is every bit as deserving of, and every bit as rewarding as a result of, this musicological and analytical interrogation.

This is one of the first books to bring the new *Formenlehre* into conversation with the practice of art song composition in the nineteenth century in a serious and systematic way. This approach to formal readings of music with text was adumbrated by a number of articles by Nathan Martin in the realm of opera,<sup>2</sup> and Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, and Harald Krebs on the nineteenth-century Lied.<sup>3</sup> Rodgers's work builds substantially on this foundation. His book is also the first to provide a substantive and sustained analytical overview of the art song output of a woman composer, and to apply the methodology of formal analysis to Romantic song.<sup>4</sup> The results are richly satisfying and often unexpected.

One of the greatest gifts of Rodgers's book is that it challenges the received wisdom that complexity in and of itself is a marker of high musical quality, while extolling the virtues of musical simplicity. This binary opposition is packed full of gender implications, which Rodgers unpacks and challenges in dynamic and invigorating

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1 On Fanny Hensel's avoidance of cadential closure in her songs, see Stephen Rodgers and Tyler Osborne, 'Prolongational Closure in the Lieder of Fanny Hensel', *Music Theory Online* 25/3 (September 2020); and Tyler Osborne, ' "You too may change": Tonal Pairing of the Tonic and Subdominant in Two Songs by Fanny Hensel', Stephen Rodgers, 'Plagal Cadences in Fanny Hensel's Songs', and Jürgen Thym, 'Reading Poetry through Music: Fanny Hensel and Others', all in *The Songs of Fanny Hensel*, ed. Stephen Rodgers (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021).

2 Nathan John Martin, "Formenlehre Goes to the Opera: Examples from *Armida* and Elsewhere," *Studia musicologica* 51/3–4 (2010): 387–404; John Nathan Martin, "Mozart's Sonata-Form Arias," in *Formal Functions in Perspective: Essays on Musical Form from Haydn to Adorno*, ed. Steven Vande Moortele, Julie-Pedneault-Deslauriers, and Nathan John Martin (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 37–73.

3 Harald Krebs, "Sentences in the Lieder of Robert Schumann: The Relation to the Text," in *Formal Functions in Perspective: Essays on Musical Form from Haydn to Adorno*, 225–251; Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, "Beyond Vierhebigkeit: Phrase Structure and Poetic Meaning in Three Lieder by Clara Schumann," *Music Theory & Analysis* 8/11 (2021): 54–73.

4 Stephen Rodgers, ed., *The Songs of Fanny Hensel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), is relevant in this regard but, as an edited collection, it lacks a sustained, single authorial voice throughout.

ways. He raises fascinating questions concerning gendered modes of analysis (p. 17 and elsewhere), the conventions and stereotypes that go along with these modes of analysis, and the opportunities and imperatives for scholars to reach beyond entrenched ways of thinking.

The timely reconfiguration of how complexity in music is valued allows Rodgers to shift the reader's focus to other expressive effects such as multi-layered textures, the subtlety and richness of piano accompaniments, piano parts that are both challenging and that also lie within the pianistic reach of a gifted amateur, tonal structures that are "artful," "wonderfully expressive," and perhaps even "surprising," but not "ahead of their time," (p. 21 and elsewhere) and phrase structures that, while they embrace four-bar phrases, also create a sense of fluidity and continuity through a highly sophisticated treatment of cadential structures. Building on the work of scholars including Jennifer Ronyak, Marcia Citron, and Alexander Stefaniak, he illuminates how the songs of Clara Schumann—and nineteenth-century Lieder in general—value inwardness and poetic sensitivity.

*The Songs of Clara Schumann* confronts the question of how to discuss the intricate compositional relationship between Clara Schumann and her husband Robert without overstating the degree to which either composer was independent of the other's influence, or tacitly endorsing the cliché that one may have been unduly influenced by the other. An example of how Rodgers achieves an admirable balance is found in the discussion of 'Volkslied', a poem by Heinrich Heine, that was set by Clara Schumann in 1840, and by Robert Schumann in 1841 (pp. 91–98).

Over the course of the entire book, Rodgers identifies a taxonomy of Clara Schumann's compositional fingerprints that makes a significant contribution to the analytical discourse on her music. These fingerprints include, for instance: static sentences; compound antecedents; lack of alignment in poetry and music (as, for example in 'Am Strande'), the concept of vocal echo; postludes as a form of commentary in song; substituting non-cadential closure for cadential closure; deliberate misreadings of poetic texts; and the capacity to forego four-bar hypermeter, or to vex hypermeter altogether, in favour of more fluid and continuous phrase structures. These musical observations and analytical explorations are matched by a keen sensitivity to the poetry. The glimpse inside Schumann's compositional machine that Rodgers offers does not dull my curiosity for how that music works. On the contrary, it invigorates that understanding, elucidates the song output, and whets the appetite for avenues of

exploration that reach beyond song itself, as well as providing tantalizing insights into the instrumental music.

The exploration of ‘An einem lichten Morgen’ (pp.36–39) provides an evocative description of this song, outlines the harmonic and cadential features with lucid clarity, and grapples with the compositional process, providing compositional alternatives that may have been open to Schumann. The discussion of ‘Ich hab’ in deinem Auge’ offers a compelling example of how passages that were originally cadential—as evidenced in the manuscript—became non-cadential in the published version. Score and manuscript study of this kind is particularly valuable and illuminating for Clara Schumann studies in providing insight into the compositional process for which little documentary evidence survives. This is coupled with a sensitive reading of Rückert’s poetry and, again, an interpretation of the array of compositional alternatives that could be posed in response to this poetic and musical material, such as one might imagine were open to the composer.

In many ways, this book pivots around endings, about which Rodgers provides a fascinating discussion in Chapter 3. This enters into a rewarding conversation with the work of Michael Baker and, through him, Leonard Meyer’s two types of musical incompleteness: the first being instances where something is left out or skipped over, the second being endings that, though seemingly complete as far as they go, are not felt to have reached a satisfactory conclusion. ‘Der Wanderer’ is offered as an example of the stunning sensitivity of Schumann’s text-music relationships. Rodgers illuminates how Schumann substitutes non-cadential closure for cadential closure at the end of the third line of the second stanza of Kerner’s poem, illustrating how, for this composer, ‘weaker linguistic closure begets weaker musical closure’. (67) ‘Der Wanderer in der Sägemühle’, a song that begins on a dominant, and prolongs this harmony throughout all six strophes, to wonderful expressive effect. The authentic cadence that Schumann offers in the piano postlude seems like an ‘afterthought’, an expressively compromised—and thereby all the more satisfying—conclusion.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ‘outward facing side of Clara Schumann’s contribution to art song’ (133) in the fifteen songs in her collections with opus numbers—Opp. 12, 13, and 23 (Op. 12 being one part of the couple’s collaborative *Liebesfrühling* cycle, Op. 12/Op. 37). Rodgers’s aim is to elucidate how these songs sound differently from those explored in Chapter 3, venturing that the published songs are more accessible, and perhaps even more conventional, than their unpublished counterparts. Within this

output of predominantly strophic songs, he pays attention both to ‘the straightforward and the striking, the expected and the enchanted’. (135) He divides these strophic songs into three categories: those with no modification, those with terminal modification (where the modification of the strophic form pertains to the end of the song), and those with successive modification (where the modification can be found in each strophe of the song). He further divides the published strophic songs into those that are tonally closed and tonally open. Through all of these categories, he is keen to emphasize that what ‘really defines each song is not its membership in a larger category [...] but the novel way Schumann treats that form’. (152)

The discussion of ‘Liebeszauber’ in Chapter 2 illustrates Schumann’s penchant for creating fluidity and continuity in a theme, and sheds light on the degree to which the forward impetus and resting points in this song are deeply sensitive to the flow of Geibel’s poetry. On returning to this song in Chapter 4, Rodgers significantly builds on this reading with an interrogation of the artistic ingenuity and sensitivity with which Schumann sets this final stanza as a kind of a texted coda, one that is bound up with memory and recollection. Geibel’s poem unfolds in five stanzas, the first four depicting elements of the natural world around the poet, and stanza five depicting the poetic speaker in a moment of deep contemplation and remembrance. A structural cadence in the tonic coincides with the end of the fourth stanza (bar 39), and the beginning of this final, subjective rumination in the fifth, with its introduction of the lyric ‘I’. The performance direction at this point changes from ‘bewegt’ (‘animated’) to ‘langsamer’ (‘slower’). This final stanza, Rodgers asserts, ‘is no mere appendage’. Rather, ‘it is the emotional core of the poem, for it encapsulates the poem’s central predicament, the characteristically Romantic state of existing within nature but also apart from it’. (154) Throughout the book, there is a thoughtful reading of the poetry from a structural perspective in relation to Schumann’s settings. Wonderfully perceptive in this regard is Rodgers’s ‘marvel’ at Schumann’s ‘musically “simple” but emotionally complex’ strophic setting(s) of Heine’s poem ‘Sie liebten sich beide’, a poem that concerns the static situation of unacknowledged and perhaps extinguished love. Rodgers reads Schumann’s setting to be “the perfect musical metaphor for that tragically unchanging state.”

My one wish coming away from this book is that there might have been a more in-depth discussion of the poets Schumann set, of how or why she chose those particular poets and poems, and of the intrinsic value of that chosen poetry. *The Songs of Clara Schumann* offers score study, manuscript study, archival findings, intuitive analytical readings, and rich expressive, interpretive, and artistic evaluations. Pedagogically, the

book is a gold mine! Those wishing to introduce this repertoire to students will find in-depth analytical discussions as well as hints and suggestions for productive paths forward for future musicological and analytical projects on Clara Schumann. The book also offers a wealth of critical engagement with the analytical conundrums surrounding women composers that any scholar working on this repertoire confronts all too frequently. These include the ongoing debate about whether traditional music-analytical tools are up to the task of doing justice to music by women composers, the question of whether the tools of the new *Formenlehre* ought to be the preserve of 'the (mostly) large-scale, (mostly) publicly oriented "masterworks" written by (mostly) male, (mostly) Austro-Germanic composers' (17), an idea that Rodgers strongly contests, or whether there is value in using these tools to analyse music by women, and compositions that were geared toward 'private audiences and more amateur musicians'. (17) The epilogue provides abundant material on lesser-known women composers of the nineteenth century whose art song repertoire remains largely unexplored, but whose compositions deserve to be more widely known and appreciated. This outstanding book is to be highly recommended to all those who are interested in Clara Schumann's compositional process, her inestimable contribution to the genre of the *Lied*, and to those with an interest in the poets under consideration here and their further contributions to the realm of art song.

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