

The Blue Piano

After the four art song programs with Lia Pale – *A Winter's Journey*, *The Schumann Song Book*, *The Brahms Song Book* and *Sing My Soul (The Handel Song Book)* – I decided in May 2021 to create a fifth and final program in this genre of *creating arrangements of art songs*. Only this time the originals were to be my own. Thanks to literary scholar and cousin Peter Rusterholz, who gave me the decisive tips in the selection process, I finally concentrated on a single theme, (German-language) poems that deal with music and whose authors must have lived before 1945, for copyright reasons. This was not an easy task, as there is not even a single anthology around on this subject. The poets obviously didn't like to deal very much or very often with music, never tangible and almost always abstract and ambiguous. But thanks to the internet, I finally found what I was looking for.

In July, the final selection was made, with all of the seventeen poems stemming from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. I decided to write one melody each day – without piano, that is, without harmonies – in a period of no more than two hours per day. In a second round, I then worked on the harmonisation, the piano setting and the form, which included all the introductions and exits as well as the interludes. I tried to combine the romantic style with my own, while generally remaining more in the "classical" mode and avoiding jazz chords. Not wanting to curb my creativity, I had only dealt with the texts in an emotional-inspirational way and not "scientifically". Luckily so! I was amazed when I found out later that from this selection Franz Schubert had set to music *Serafina an ihr Klavier*, Franz Liszt *Wer einsam steht im bunten Lebenskreise*, and Alban Berg *Die Nachtigall*. And *Mein blaues Klavier* had inspired over sixty composers.

The "original" piano parts are played by thirteen-year-old Soley Blümel (born 2008), and the young baritone Benjamin Harasko (born 1995) is her counterpart. We worked on the pieces over a long period of time, and I kept making small corrections. But by June 2022 everything was in the can.

At the same time, in December 2021, I had begun to work on eleven of the eighteen pieces for our tried and tested "band" with percussionist Ingrid Oberkanins and bassist Hans Strasser, and Lia Pale of course - with whom I've been working together for 10 years now. And the two youngsters Soley Blümel and Benjamin Harasko are making their debut here.

My five favourite soloists, the Slovaks Juraj Bartos (tp), Roman Janoska (v), Stano Palúch (v), the Dutchman Joris Roelofs (cl) and "our" Mario Rom (tp) can already be heard on earlier albums. The English translations of the lyrics are by the American translator and singer Karin Kaminker, who lives in Geneva and has been "on board" for thirty years. Just like the good souls in the background, Julian Schoenfeld and Harald Tautscher. And who Bulhelm Wisch might be, will have hardly eluded you...:-)

Vienna, July 21, 2022
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