



Modern Lied: Holliger, Lachenmann, etc CD review – Sarah Maria Sun's unflinching exploration of the voice

Sun/Schulze(Mode)

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Soprano Sarah Maria Sun's collection of songs with piano is, she says, the result of her attempt to "find out what some of the path-breaking composers of our time think about voice and Lied". Because of the dominance of pop music today, she thinks, there's no longer any common ground among composers for presenting the complex music and texts that Lieder has traditionally dealt in. Certainly there is very little that's shared stylistically between the settings by the six composers that she includes in this anthology, which ranges from the late 1950s to 2015.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the earliest songs here, Heinz Holliger's six settings of poems by Christian Morgenstern, composed while Holliger was still in his teens, come closest to what one thinks of as the mainstream of the Lieder tradition. Their language seems rooted in Alban Berg, though there are also echoes of Debussy and Ravel. Salvatore Sciarrino's Due Melodie are relatively early pieces too, dating from 1978, though the fluttering, trembling style of vocal

writing that's so typical of Sciarrino's later music is already apparent, as is the equally nervous piano writing.

György Kurtág's 1987 *Requiem for the Beloved* - tiny settings of poems by one of the composer's favourite writers, Rimma Dalos - is typically exquisite and typically expressionist. In Wolfgang Rihm's *Ophelia Sings* from 2012, consistency goes out of the window as the music swings tipsily from romantic seriousness to folksy reverie, and the sung words of the songs from *Hamlet* are punctuated with spoken phrases of the text that surrounds them in the play. Bernhard Lang's *Wenn die Landschaft Aufhört* is different again, delivering its stream-of-consciousness text in a breathless fusion of rap and *sprechgesang*.

Sun and her pianist Jan Philip Schulze take all of these stylistic excursions in their accomplished stride, but it's the extended centrepiece of the disc that demands the most of both of them. Helmut Lachenmann's *Got Lost*, composed in 2008, is an exuberant showpiece, built around three sharply contrasted texts - a fragment of Nietzsche, a poem by Fernando Pessoa, and a sign asking for the return of a lost laundry basket that Lachenmann spotted in a Berlin elevator. The soprano veers from whispering to shouting, from droll speech to elevated *arioso*, while the pianist has to exploit all the acoustic resources of his instrument, from inside and outside. Sun and Schulze never flinch.

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