1964

The Development of the Song Literature of Hugo Wolf

Edward J. Sand
Central Washington University

The Department of Music
Central Washington State College

presents in Graduate Recital

EDWARD J. SAND, Baritone

JOHN P. ALLEN, Accompanist

Program

I

Vittoria, mio core	Giacomo Carissimi
Lasciatemi morire	Claudio Monteverde
Di Provenza il mar, il suol, from "La Traviata"	Giuseppe Verdi
La donna e mobile, Canzone from "Rigoletto"	Giuseppe Verdi

II

Wohin?	Franz Schubert
Verborgenheit	Hugo Wolf
Zueignung	Richard Strauss
Meine Liebe ist gruen	Johannes Brahms

III

Vision Fugitive, from "Herodiade"	Jules Massenet

INTERMISSION

IV

Aria: Where'er You Walk, from "Semele"	George Frederick Handel
Even Bravest Heart May Swell, from "Faust"	Charles Gounod
Pilgrims Song	Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky

V

Boat Song	Gabriel Pierne
Mountains	Oscar Rasbach
I Must Down to the Seas Again	John H. Densmore

Wayne S. Hertz Music Hall
August 11, 1964
7:30 P.M.

NOTE: This program has been presented by Edward J. Sand in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education degree with a major in Music Education.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SONG LITERATURE OF HUGO WOLF

A COVERING PAPER

PRESENTED TO

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IN CONJUNCTION WITH A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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by

Edward J. Sand

August 1964

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE COVERING PAPER REQUIREMENTS IN CONJUNCTION WITH A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL FOR THE COMPLETION OF A THESIS.

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Wayne Hertz, Committee Chairman

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is chiefly as a song writer that Hugo Wolf takes his place in the history of music. The main part of his work in this field is a matter of intense concentration during a mere four year period, from the beginning of the Mörike volume in February, 1888, to the completion of the first book of the Italian Lieder, in December, 1891. His second Italian book in 1896, took him no more than five weeks to write. Owing to the high level of development to which Hugo Wolf brought the German Lied, one is inclined to view his songs as the culmination of the whole school (3:322).

Hugo Wolf had a great faculty not only for expressing in music every variety and shade of emotion, character, or scene suggested by various poems, but for reproducing the general cast of mind of a particular poet. In his portrayal of mental suffering and tension in general, Wolf is indeed the perfect example of the law of artistic evolution. Wolf's genius, however, was wide enough to enable him to enter just as much into the lightest phases of human psychology, and into all phases lying between these two extremes. One must turn to Wagner's operas to find anything like the same universality of humanism (8:2065).

I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to gain a perspective of the history of Hugo Wolf, the composers that influenced his work, and to identify and explain the pertinent elements of his Lieder that helped to make him reign as a master in this field.

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research paper discussed only the history and development of Hugo Wolf as pertaining to the composition of his German Lieder. It does not attempt to analyze any specific composition. He did some work in the fields of instrumental composing and opera but his great success was in the field of German Lieder.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Leitmotiv. This is the briefest self-existant melodic or rhythmic unit. The Wagnerian Leitmotiv may, however, be merely two or three notes or, on the other hand, an extended phrase.

Durchkomponiert. This is a German term which has no generally accepted English equivalent, but means "through composed". It designates a song with a shape of its own, set to a poem of several regularly grouped verses, but

disregarding the divisions, has a line whose music continues on its own with the words grouped according to their musical requirements. A song that is durchkomponiert is the exact opposite of a strophic song, where the same music is repeated for each verse of the poem (2:821).

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

I. EARLY LIFE

Hugo Wolf was born on March 13, 1860 at Windischgraz, Styria (Since 1919 Slovenjgradis, Yugoslavia), however, he is considered an Austrian composer as he spent most of his life in Vienna.

Philip Wolf, the composer's father, was a leather manufacturer of German heritage; his wife Katharina was of pronounced Slavonic strain. Philip Wolf had inherited his house and business but had very unwillingly followed his father in the leather trade. He was musically gifted and had taught himself to play the piano, violin, flute, harp and guitar. His mother was not musical, but possessed great energy and vitality (12:331). In the genius of Hugo Wolf one can see the development of the crude musical talents of his father; from his mother he inherited the temperament that so often enlarged the practical difficulties of his life and the iron will-power which alone enabled him to develop his genius (11:3).

Hugo was the second son and fourth-born in a family of eight children. They all received music lessons in piano and violin from their father and later, Hugo had lessons from Sebastian Weixler, the local schoolmaster. Hugo showed

that he possessed a remarkable musical memory and an acute ear. His father became devoted to the gifted boy and he easily became his favorite. His extra-musical education began at the Windischgraz Volksschule, which he attended from 1865 to 1869.

In September 1870, Hugo entered the lowest class of the "Gymnasium" at Graz, the Styrian capitol. At Graz, Hugo's educational troubles began. He was withdrawn at the end of the first half-year, his work classified as wholly inadequate. Another attempt to complete his education began in September, 1871, when he was sent to the Seminary attached to the Benedictine monastery of St. Paul, in the Lavant valley, Carinthia (11:9). There he spent two years, finally leaving the school after difficulties concerned mainly with his Latin studies. Music was already his chief interest in life and at St. Paul he played the organ for school Masses and the piano in an instrumental ensemble.

Wolf was next sent to the "Gymnasium" at Marburg in autumn 1873. There he worked more and more intently at his music, neglecting his other studies. He got to know the symphonies of Haydn and Beethoven and was filled with enthusiasm for their works. His first compositions date from this time. His Opus I was a Piano Sonata, composed in 1875 and dedicated to Herr Philipp Wolf, his father. He

left Marburg that year after having some difficult scenes with his teachers. His aunt Katharina Vinzenberg was visiting with his parents at this time and, together with his aunt, they convinced his parents to allow him to go and live in Vienna and attend the Conservatory (12:331).

II. MUSICAL TRAINING IN VIENNA

The Vienna Conservatory had been since 1851 under the direction of Josef Hellmesberger. Under his administration the young Wolf studied harmony with Robert Fuchs and the piano with Wilhelm Schenner (11:19).

As noted previously, Wolf was already started upon his career as a composer. When he got to the Conservatory he had to begin all over again with the study of elementary harmony. He felt this set-back strongly and was very impatient to get on to more advanced work. Outside the Conservatory, the concert-halls and opera-house introduced him to a far wider range of music than he had previously known (12:332).

During this time he was busily composing immature songs and part-songs. Most of the works in the larger forms were abandoned before completion. In his second year at the Conservatory he entered the composition class of Franz Krenn, whose formalistic instruction irked the young composer.

Early in 1877 he announced in a letter to Herr Hellmesberger that he was leaving the institution, where he was forgetting more than he was learning. This letter was actually a practical joke by one of his fellow students. For this, he was officially expelled, although he claimed he left voluntarily. In March he was recalled to Windischgraz by his father. The break with the Conservatory determined the end of Wolf's first Vienna period (11:36-45).

III. BACK TO VIENNA AS A TEACHER

For nearly eight months of the year 1877 Wolf remained at Windischgraz, until he was able to persuade his parents to let him go back to Vienna, where he hoped to support himself by teaching and accompanying. His return was made possible by the wealthy composer Adalbert von Goldschmidt, the center of a group of friends, including the music critics Gustav Schönaich and Hans Paumgartner and the artists Viktor Lilgner, Julius von Blaas, and Felix Mottl. These men arranged for him teaching positions among their friends, took him with them to concerts and opera performances, lent him books, scores, money, and generally, did much to make his life in Vienna pleasant and to widen his outlook and increase his knowledge (12:332).

He did not find it easy to earn a living, for he was ill-equipped with the patience necessary for the teaching of

young children. The only teaching positions he retained for very long were those in friendly homes where the maintenance of Wolf's income was regarded as more important than the progress of his pupils. His greatest friends in this way were the families of the actor Ludwig Gabillon and the well-known doctor and early collaborator with Freud, Robert Breuer (12:55-64).

The next few years were spent in cheap Viennese lodging-houses. His inner life, however, was rich in emotional experience. He explored the musical repertory of German and foreign literature, discovering the comformities of composers and writers of the past. In 1878 he fell in love and experienced for the first time the spasmodic creative fever characteristic of him all his life. He wrote later: "My Lodi in Song is known to have been the year '78; in those days I composed almost every day <u>one</u> good song, and sometimes <u>two</u>." (11:93) These songs included many poems by Heine, Lenau and other romantic poets, which he avoided in later years. His models were Schubert and Schumann.

IV. COMPOSER AND CRITIC

By the end of 1883 there was a crisis in Wolf's affairs. He was unable to earn a living and unable to get his songs published that he fell into a state of dejection.

He announced suddenly that he was going to emigrate to America, and then just as suddenly decided not to go. The Köchert family, who were important advertisers in the Wiener Salonblatt, a fashionable weekly newspaper, used their influence to secure the position of music critic for Wolf and thus brought this period of dejection to a close (11:147). Very few people knew, at this time, that the young musician was a composer, for his first songs were not published until four years later (4:275).

For more than three years Wolf's critical reviews of the musical life of Vienna were a feature of the weekly. He began really to make a name for himself, in somewhat different circumstances from any he had imagined in the days of his youthful self-confidence and pride (11:147). Wagner's opponents in Vienna had been attacking him for more than twenty-five years. Wolf now took his stand in opposition to them and began to retaliate by covering Brahms and his followers with ridicule on every possible occasion. Brahms, at that time resident in Vienna, was one of that city's most reverently worshipped gods (10:1126). Wolf also wrote much sound sense about music with which he was more in sympathy, and about the conditions in the opera-house and concert-halls of the Vienna of his day. However, Wolf's critical activities were deplorable in their consequences in his own life and struggle to attain recognition as a composer.

He made many enemies in high places, and his misdeeds were not forgiven him (12:335).

The winter of 1886-87 saw a revival of Wolf's creative activities. The issue of April 24 contained his final contribution to the Salonblatt (11:195).

V. MATURE SONGS

In the last months of 1887 a friend of Wolf's named Friedrich Eckstein succeeded in having a small Viennese firm publish twelve of Wolf's songs. The excitement of seeing his works in print seems to have had an extraordinary effect upon Wolf. Early in 1888 he obtained permission to make use of the Werner family's unoccupied house in the little market-town of Perchtoldsdorf. On February 6 he set to music Der Tambour, a poem by Eduard Mörike, and a few days later new songs, all settings of this poet, began to pour from within him in an apparently endless stream. He seemed to have become the helpless instrument of a higher power and himself watched with joy while song followed song. Often two were written in one day and sometimes three. In all, forty-three Mörike songs were written in three months at Perchtoldsdorf (12:335).

After a brief holiday he returned, in September, into solitude. More Mörike and Eichendorff songs were composed in a similiar creative frenzy (12:335). In October he

returned to Vienna and started off on yet another great cycle of songs, this time to poems by Goethe. In three and a half months fifty Goethe songs were composed. Recognition, although as yet only in a restricted circle, followed swiftly (11:214).

In May the composer returned to Perchtoldsdorf, where he completed his Christnacht, and made orchestral versions of the accompaniments of some of his Mörike songs. The Mörike songs were published by Wetzler early in 1889; the Eichendorff and Goethe songs by Lacom, another small Viennese firm, a little later (11:217).

In October, after visits in the summer to Rinnbach, Bayreuth and Windischgraz, Wolf returned to Vienna and reestablished himself in his retreat at Perchtoldsdorf. There he began his Spanish Liederbuch, settings of German translations from the Spanish by Paul Heyse and Emanuel Geibel. Twenty-six of these songs were written in the next two months, and after a short break, the volume was completed between March and April by the addition of sixteen more. The Spanish Liederbuch brought to a close this most creative period, during which more than one hundred and sixty songs had been composed in just over two years (12:336).

VI. LAST YEARS

Hugo Wolf's greatest composing was over. His first book of Italian Lieder, settings of poems by Michelangelo,

was completed in December, 1891. His second Italian book occupied him no more than five weeks in 1896. He had worked and experimented in other fields of composition but had never reached the goal he had set for himself in these areas. If he had lived longer, he possibly would have decided himself, that he had composed in Lieder all there was to compose.

His procedure of production of songs, as abnormal as it was, put his life in an alternation of feverish activity and despondent lethargy. It was while at work on Manuel Venegas, his second opera, that Wolf showed such signs of mental disorder -- the result of physical disease -- that he had to be placed in an institution on September 20, 1897. He was discharged on the 24th of the following January, apparently cured, but on October 7, he was taken to the Lower Austrian Asylum in Vienna, where he died on February 22, 1903. His remains now rest near those of Beethoven and Schubert (8:2065).

CHAPTER III

ELEMENTS OF HUGO WOLF'S SONGS

"Hugo Wolf has been hailed as one of the greatest song-writers of the world--second only to Schubert, if to him. But judgements differ." (10:1126)

In a sense, however, Wolf is akin to no other German writer of Lieder, even his purely musical treatment being often associated with the new Leitmotiv procedure of Wagner's music-dramas and Liszt's symphonic poems (3:322).

> His threefold plan of composing a song is (a) to unify the song formally in the piano part, (b) to make this part in itself follow all the changeful moods of the poem, (c) to express these moods in the voice part also, and at the same time to leave the words complete freedom to strike into the tissue. (8:2065)

I. INFLUENCES

It should be remembered that Hugo Wolf was practically contemporary with Brahms, a composer whom he, as a disciple of Wagner, cordially disliked. Of all his predecessors, Wolf owes most, perhaps, to Schumann, although it would be unwise to exclude the influence of Liszt (3:322).

"Humperdinck was enthusiastic about Hugo Wolf (who regarded him as one does a kind uncle and called him 'My dear, good Humpi')." (4:268)

He took from Wagner certain technical elements, not because they were especially Wagnerian, but because they

were the blood of the art of music as it had developed by Wagner's time--especially Nineteenth-Century harmonic chromaticism, which Wolf took still farther than Wagner; freedom of form (in comparison with older German songs), and attention to the natural accent and phrasing of the words in vocal music (8:2065).

Wolf's mind and his composition, however, were as entirely his own as those of any other composer who has taken a particular line of evolution to its conclusion.

II. TEXT

The singer who attempts to sing Hugh Wolf must above all be conscious of the relationship between the text and the music. Wolf himself believed that the music of a song must not merely be inspired by the poetic idea in the text, but that it must follow, interpret and illustrate the poem. This approach to the relationship between the text and the music, although popularly called "Wagnerian", is almost as old as the composed song itself. In the songs of Wolf, however, this attitude is so extreme that the demand for a definite and a sympathetic approach to his manner of setting the text to music seems to be of primary importance (6:243).

The writer has discovered that all authorities agree with the treatment of the text being the most outstanding feature of Hugo Wolf's songs. However, there is disagreement

as to how he approached the treatment of text. Sources present differing views: Eric Sams states:

> Generally speaking, his musical style varies with each songbook. In the majority of the Mörike songs it is the verbal music of the words that seems to count, and the vocal and instrumental melodic lines that carry the primary musical inspiration, to correspond to this verbal music. In the Goethe volume the proportion of such songs is significantly less; and with the Spanish songs, this trend becomes even more marked. Rhythmical ideas, accompaniment figures, formal constructions, begin to dominate the musical expression. It seems that this aspect of Wolf's work derives directly from the poetry of his songs. (9:19)

Newman discusses it in this manner:

> Wolf's songs are the outcome of a desire that has manifested itself in different forms at different epochs throughout the ages, to give the words not only their intellectual due but their natural phrasing in a union of speech and music, as against the implicit claim of music to go its own way in more or less ruthless disregard of its companion. Wolf 'gives the words their due' in various ways. Sometimes he breaks up altogether the old formal balance and repetition of phrases, as in An die Geliebte (in the Mörike volume), in which the vocal line flows on from start to finish without the smallest repetition at any point; at other times, after securing formal unity by the lay-out of the piano part, he allows the voice part to play freely above and in and out of the instrumental tissue, ignoring both the poetic line-lengths and any conventional symmetry of musical phrase. (8:2065)

Scholes comments further:

> With Wolf as a song-writer there was a very deliberate excitation of inspiration, his process being to examine in the greatest detail the poem he intended to set and to saturate himself in it, 'living its life for the moment'. He always conjured up before his mind's eye a realistic picture of the scene. He neglected nothing, in fact, that could help him to concentrate his whole faculties upon the little pictures to be pointed or the drama to be acted, so that his hypnotic possession of it might be complete. He would go to sleep, and in the morning the

> song would be already made by some mysterious alchemy--so fully formed that in noting it down his pen could hardly keep pace with his brain, while scarely a note or rest of it required to be altered afterwards. The poems literally set themselves. Wolf was only the expressive medium through which all the deeper significances that were latent in the poem were made visible and audible. (10:220)

Erskine summarizes:

> Stress must be laid first and foremost on the care he showed in choosing poems to set to music, and the skill, unrivalled before or since, with which he handled words. No composer has ever equalled Wolf in his psychological penetration of literary meaning. Alike in the fifty-three songs by Mörike, the forty-seven by Goethe, and the twenty by Eichendorff that he set to music, his grasp of the implications of a poem is almost uncanny. No kind of style or subject seems alien to him. Moreover, he is able to suggest an atmosphere or depict a situation with that economy of means that comes from the highest possible degree of concentration. In short, it may be doubted whether music as a whole can show any art-products more beautifully finished than the songs of Hugo Wolf. (3:323)

III. MELODY, HARMONY AND RHYTHM

Hugo Wolf's songs are rarely lyrical in the manner of Brahms or Schubert, but are delightful to sing for anyone able to grasp the principles of their fluid lines (3:22). Most of his songs are musically not overcomplex. In some instances, however, his chromaticism and his use of rhythmic devices, used to insure the proper recitation of the poem, may make a song seem difficult at first reading (6:243). He could write broad swinging tunes when his text required them, as in Fussreise. His genius lay, however, in writing

restrained melodic lines that are not only beautiful but serve to sustain the meanings of the words (9:4).
He is noted as one of the leading composers of durchkomponiert songs, however, many examples of songs in strophic form may be found.

Wolf's music is noted for its concord and his occasional dissonances do not sound particularly daring nowadays. It could be said that all his harmonic resources are used to match the mood of the poem. Modulation in the ordinary sense is a great rarity in Wolf's songs. It is used sometimes in the piano interlude as a bridge from one key to the next. He heard sharp keys as brighter and more colorful than flat keys so his favorite mediant key-sequences for brightening effect add four sharps to (or take four flats from) the key signature. His harmony is often more helpful than the marked dynamics in determining the climactic moment of a song, as in Verborgenheit, performed on the writer's graduate recital.

Rhythm played a central part, since it is a common factor to both poetry and music. It provided formal shape and continuity, as in In der Fruhe, and added meaning. This can be illustrated in the crisp rhythm of a song about the exhilaration of a morning walk, as in Fussreise, or the slow throbbing rhythm of a song about a beating heart, as in Alle gingen, Herz, sur Ruh (9:2). Most of his songs are in duple or quadruple time, set out in regular two-bar and four-

bar phrases, which occasionally leads to monotony when the musical material is not at its best. This regularity, however, is one of the factors that enables Wolf to achieve his perfection of formal construction. In German, as in English, accent is by stress of syllable rather than by length, so this accent is most directly translated into equal pulses (9:2). Because all of Wolf's music responds to poetry, this rhythmic translation can be found in the piano part as well.

IV. ACCOMPANIMENT

The Romantic Period saw an enormous growth of importance in the piano parts of songs, demanding as great technical and artistic ability on the part of the pianist as on that of the vocalist (10:220). Often the piano part demands a technic of great brillancy; sometimes almost the entire burden of musical illustration and interpretation of the text is left to the pianist (6:243). Wolf is not restricted to the type of song where the piano part is complete in itself, with the vocal line phrasing the poem freely above and within it. On the contrary, many of his songs are strophic in form, with a piano accompaniment of the traditional kind. But the greater number of his best Lieder are songs for "voice and piano." His ways of handling this are varied, but two types occur most frequently. In Auf dem grünen Balkon, the piano

part makes a virtually self-existent piece of music if the voice part is removed. It is only when the two are performed together that one realizes that they are inseparably connected. In Komm, O Tod, one tiny figure, presented in differing ways, suffices for the whole instrumental part of the song (8:2065).

Erskine summarizes the importance of the piano part as:

> Indeed, Wolf's treatment of the piano in relationship to the voice has been compared with Wagner's treatment of the orchestra. For whereas Wagner's vocal line is often subordinate in interest, Wolf's admirers claim for him, with reason, a contrapuntal sense so admirable that he succeeded in attaining a perfect parity of interest between the vocal and the instrumental parts of his songs. Many of the German song-writers, notably Schumann, attached great importance to the piano, but none of them carried the principle so far as Wolf. The piano parts of his songs not only are as important as the vocal parts, but often seem to be almost complete in themselves. (3:322)

V. DEVICES USED FOR SPECIFIC EFFECTS

Hugo Wolf had certain concepts of melodic, harmonic or rhythmic devices which portrayed to him the specific feeling or mood he wished to create. A particular rhythm often appears, usually in open fifths in the left-hand piano part, in songs where the words express the idea of worship. A proportionate rhythm is found to give the ideas of childish helplessness or weakness. The idea of smallness is conveyed by the repeated interval of the minor second, with both notes played either together or consecutively, usually high in the

piano register and in small note-values. The basic idea of a strong rising bass line, sometimes chromatic, sometimes diatonic, usually in dotted rhythm gave the feeling of manileness or virile force. The simplest and most self-evident of ideas--a scale passage rising to the tonic, usually in the piano treble gave his songs vitality and gaiety. The use of the rising "horn passage" gave an immediate association with the chase, the huntsman, the open air. Longing or yearning are suggested by a recurring snatch of melody in the right-hand piano part. In Wolf's love-music, two strands of melody converge, moving in two part harmony towards unison. Isolation or loneliness was brought out by the piano part; the right hand having repeated chords, from which the left hand moves away downwards, usually in single notes. Mystery is protrayed by a chordal progression, often dominant sevenths, in slow time, using a chromatic shift in which two unrelated tonalities are placed side by side. Chords of the augmented fifth were used in songs of strong emotion (9:7-18).

These particular aspects of Wolf's style have been presented as they were used in specific songs. The quality of his song-writing lies in the way in which certain of these aspects are combined in the music of each particular song.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

This research paper has only attempted to obtain an overview of the composer's history and the important factors which were pertinent to the development of Hugo Wolf's Lieder. It does not dwell on any specific point or individual composition. It should be noted that Schumann and Wagner's music influenced him greatly; he believed that the music of a song must follow, interpret and illustrate the poem; his songs are rhythmically not overcomplex and his harmony is concord; his best Lieder are songs for "voice and piano," the piano part being as important as the vocal line. He is noted as one of the leading composers of durchkomponiert songs. He had certain concepts of melodic, harmonic or rhythmic devices which portrayed to him the specific feeling he wished to create. The quality of his song-writing lies in the way in which certain of these aspects are combined in the music of each particular song. For one to gain a deep insight into the songs of Hugo Wolf, each composition should be studied separately in detail to examine its style and techniques, thereby discovering the consistencies and differences of the composer and gaining a knowledge of his songs.

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