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The practical matters of programming text: approaching vocal music beyond the traditional Lied

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Background in [discipline A]  
Musicology/performance

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Musicology/performance

Aims  
Contemporary concert practice is dominated by only a handful of familiar and closely-defined musical genres, whose practical execution is facilitated by well-established, pre-existing instrumental and vocal forces (symphony orchestras, choirs, string quartets, soloists). This narrow range does not reflect the large number of different types of composition which have flourished in past centuries. In the case of nineteenth-century vocal repertoire, this manifests as an almost exclusive focus upon choral works and lyrical solo song recitals. Drawing on interviews with teaching staff and student at the Royal College of Music, this paper will explore a range of issues surrounding this ‘narrowing’ of the repertoire, including

(i) the practical considerations of performing repertoire requiring unusual forces or performance styles  
(ii) the unspoken limitations imposed upon practitioners when they are confronted by non-traditional genres  
(iii) the cross-disciplinary implications such as the different ways in which vocal music can relate to its root text

The genres which fall into these categories include small-scale vocal ensemble repertoire, narrative genres such as melodrama and compositions for a variety of instrumental and vocal forces which are yet to be categorized. Specific works to be considered include Schubert’s melodramas for piano and spoken voice, Schumann’s Szenen aus Goethes ‘Faust’, Brahms’s vocal quartet O schöne Nacht and also his narrative cycle Romanzen aus Tiecks ‘Magelone’.

Main contribution  
A co-delivered spoken paper with recorded illustrations.
Implications
This presentation has two types of implication. The first is that the practitioners with whom we conduct our research (primarily vocal teachers/coaches) will be encouraged to examine their teaching practice and re-evaluate how they select repertoire for their students. By drawing attention to the unspoken limitations we impose on ourselves when we programme repertoire, we also hope to encourage a more open attitude to programming.

References

Biography of Contributor A
Katy Hamilton is in her final year of doctoral study at the Royal College of Music, and also holds the post of Junior Fellow in Performance Documentation in association with the RCM’s Centre for Performance History. Her doctorate focuses on the vocal quartets of Johannes Brahms, and combines practical and theoretical approaches to the repertoire, including the production of recordings of music by some of Brahms’s lesser-known contemporaries. She gained a first class degree in Music, specializing in piano performance, from the University of Nottingham, where she also completed her MA in Musicology with distinction in December 2005.

In addition, she is an active chamber accompanist and repetiteur, having worked with instrumentalists, singers and choirs in England, Ireland, Spain and Germany. She is acting as Graham Johnson’s research assistant for his forthcoming Schubert Song Encyclopaedia for Yale University Press; and is also the Course Organiser of ISSMUS, a specialist summer school for singers, composers, conductors and pianists.

Biography of Contributor B
Natasha Loges is Deputy Head of Undergraduate Programmes at the Royal College of Music. She gained her BMus in piano performance at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and her MMus at King’s College, London. She completed her doctoral thesis at the Royal Academy of Music, entitled Text and Context in Brahms’ Lieder. Natasha has also worked as a song accompanist, and has performed in various venues overseas and in the UK including St John’s, Smith Square and the Holywell Music Rooms, Oxford; she has also broadcast live for BBC Radio 3.