

The Boston Musical Intelligen

a virtual journal and essential blog of the classical music scene in greater Boston

Lee Eiseman, publisher; Robert Levin, advisor; David Moran, assisting editor; Bettina A. Norton, emerita editor

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Rewards From European Women Composers

by JULIE INGELFINGER



Alison Voth (file photo)

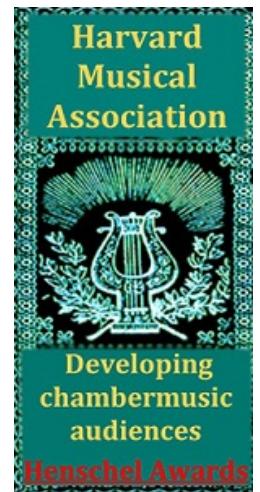
A profound and prodigious program rewarded the listeners at a Saturday night concert of German, French and English songs by women composers in the elegant American Academy of Arts and Sciences on the Somerville-Cambridge border. Kudos to Cantata Chamber Series director Allison Voth, who programmed the evening and had been scheduled to provide the pianistic accompaniment, but had to bow out, owing to an injury. Fortunately, the two pinch-hitting pianists, Douglas Sumi and Brian Moll, both highly esteemed for their work with vocalists, collaborated with distinction. Eight very pleasing singers conveyed the music and character of the the featured composers and texts, producing intimate and evocative nuances.

The examples from 19th-century German composers Clara Schumann, Alma Mahler and Fanny Mendelssohn all showed passion and poetic understanding in their text settings. Mezzo-soprano Molly McGuire, a Boston newcomer, opened promisingly in dulcet tones with Schumann's *Liebst du um Schönheit* from Op. 12, with text by Friedrich Rückert. The brightly focused soprano Felicity Salmon (soprano) continued with *Liebeszauber*, from the same opus (no. 3). Jason Sabol, a tenor with intelligent phrasing, offered the highly chromatic and innovative *Waldseligkeit* by Alma Mahler, followed by Tevan Goldberg's expansively voiced

baritone in *Ferne* (Opus 9, No. 2) by Fanny Mendelssohn, and Michael Merullo's clarion tenor in Mendelssohn's *Bergeslust* (Opus 10, No. 3).

In the French segment, the contributions of Pauline Viardot, Cecile Chaminade, Lili Boulanger, Nadia Boulanger, and Germaine Tailleferre numbered ten. Baritone Matthew Stansfield shared the splendors of his rich voice in Viardot's *Madrid* (text by Alfred de Musset) as he conveyed the multidimensional city, "princess of all Spains" with joyous abandon. Lynn Torgove's warm soprano soared to great effect in Chaminade's *Alleluia*, essentially an ode to spring from a text by Paul Mariéton. Tailleferre's (1892-1983) sensibility to 20th -century directness inspired Voth's choices of *Vrai Dieu, qui m'y confortera* and *Mon mari m'a diffamee* (both anonymous, 15th-century works, yet relevant to modern times), both dealing with incompatibility and even marital strife. The most striking music of the French section came in soprano Karyl Ryczek's haunting delivery of the short-lived Lili Boulanger's (1898-1918), *Parfois, je suis triste* (by Francis Jammes) and tenor Merullo's able dispatch of *Un poete disait*.

The selected composers from the U.K. all worked well into the 20th century and some beyond. The oldest still active one, Thea Musgrave (b. 1928), has lived in the United States since 1972. Indeed, all these women have created timeless commentary and focus with subjects such as shyness (Rebecca Clarke's *Shy one*, enacted by McGuire), losing a child, (*Stillborn*, by Emily Hall (b. 1978) and sung by Salmon). We heard from other composers no longer with us—Elizabeth Maconchy, Regine Wieniawski (Poldowski), and Florence Aylward—but we also enjoyed the still thriving Judith Weir, Rhian Samuel, Charlotte Bray, as well as Musgrave and Hall, who continue to produce important music.



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The evening closed with Musgrave's philosophical, a cappella, *Hate whom ye list* (words by Sir Thomas Wyatt) in which Amy Lieberman conducted the full ensemble for the only time in the program. This short, subdued piece about honesty seemed fitting as an end to a delightful chamber concert.

This concert featuring songs by women proved quite exciting, but it is sad that gender-based programming remains necessary in 2019. Here's hoping that concept will soon be anachronistic. As Thea Musgrave said in an interview with Naomi Lewin last year, "...when I'm composing, I'm a human being. It is not a matter of gender." In the meanwhile, don't miss the Cantata Singers April 26th chamber concert, "Women Composers of America," which will, without doubt, be a gem.

Also of note, Elizabeth Seitz, a professor and Head of Music History at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, gave an intimately erudite pre-concert talk. At the post-concert reception, most of the audience stayed to congratulate and interact with the multiple performers after such a memorable vocal feast.

Amateur pianist and long-time music lover Julie Ingelfinger enjoys day jobs as professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, pediatric nephrologist at Mass General Hospital for Children and deputy editor at the New England Journal of Medicine.

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