

# UCL Chamber Music Club

Newsletter No.8 May 2017



## In this issue:

'Music should belong  
to everyone' –  
a homage on the  
occasion of the f f ieth  
anniversary of



'I vividly remember one day [...] picking up a broken instrument that had been left [...] For me that broken bassoon became a symbol of how, if musical culture was to be recreated in Hungary, one would have to build it from fragments of the past.' (Eösze, p.13)

Kodály's concerns about the lack of awareness of Hungarian cultural heritage and national identity were confirmed in 1900 when he moved to Budapest in order to enrol for university courses in German and Hungarian Language and Literature. Simultaneously he entered a four-year course in composition at the Academy of Music where he was taught by the German Professor János Koessler, who also counted Béla Bartók, Ernest von Dohnányi and Leó Weiner among his students. Concert halls and the Music Academy were dominated by German musicians and teachers with the result that an urban elite, knowledgeable in German language and with affinity to German culture, uncritically consumed conventional interpretations of the works of German composers, from Haydn to Liszt and Brahms, without reflecting on new cultural developments that would address contemporary societal concerns. Foremost amongst these was the growing divide between Hungary's rural and urban populations. From a pedagogical point of view, but also from his perspective as an ambitious young artist, Kodály sought to address the mismatch, being aware that 'the works of art that exert the most powerful influence throughout the world as a whole, are those that express most fully the national characteristics of the artist.' (Eösze, p.88) Finding a like-minded companion in Béla Bartók, both men launched extensive research into centuries-old Hungarian folk music that was still alive in remote villages across the country. Simultaneously, they found inspiration in the work of Claude Debussy, who, by integrating pentatonic and church modes in his musical language, also sought to escape perceived outdated German tradition. Through an amalgamation of these two inputs, the latter clearly audible in his *Méditation sur un motif de Claude Debussy*

had completed his PhD thesis in 1905 on 'The strophic structure of Hungarian folk-songs'), and having attained membership of Europe's most celebrated avant-garde, he and Bartók obtained high positions within the Hungarian educational sector. In 1920 Kodály became Deputy Director of the National Academy of Music under the leadership of Ernő Dohnányi, and Bartók became an appointed member of the

latent ability.' (Eösze, p.68)

There have been several encounters with British music traditions that decisively inspired Kodály. In 1929 he attended the Proms and the Tree Choirs Festival, where his works were presented alongside compositions by Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Not only did he straight away import the idea of major choir festivals to his home country which, once realised, inspired a wave of publications of new Hungarian choral works, but he also drew inspiration from the role of music in British school education, as he reported in 1929 'The curriculum and instructions for British schools declare on the role of music in education: "By now the value of music in school life is so well recognised that it is superfluous to dwell at length upon it." What a long way we are from this!' (Kodály, p.130) He hoped to achieve a similar outcome for his home country, and from 1937 onward embarked on the comprehensive provision of suitable teaching materials for schools, including the four-volume *Bicinia Hungarica*, the *Songs for Schools*, and choral exercises underd,

## Contemporary applications of the Kodály method

However topical a restoration of national pride and consciousness might be in our time, its recovery by means of music seems to belong to history for many reasons. Globalisation has turned us into global citizens who, digitally connected, explore new ways to engage with music and often tend to favour visual arts for the shaping of societal discourse. Music again has to fight hard in order to preserve its mind-shaping place in education; see for instance the recent publication from BBC Education entitled 'Music could face extinction in secondary schools'. (BBC News, March 2017) However, academics and music practitioners identify several key areas that benefit from an application of the Kodály method. A recent publication from the United States attests to it 'an initiation of primary school children into the many aspects of music, including performing, critical thinking, listening, creativity, and becoming stewards of their national heritage'. (Houlohan and Tacka, p.2) The method has become commonplace for many instrumental teachers and 'early years' pedagogues as it facilitates access to any instrument through its holistic strategies. It is also able to address learning difficulties and physical and mental problems as academic research from across the globe demonstrates (see for instance Chiengchana and Trakarnrung 2014). One of the method's essential principles, deep learning in three steps from the *unconscious* to the *conscious* and through *re-inforcing* has been explored in pedagogical works by David Vinden, former music director of the Purcell School, now lecturer at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama; it also informs *Colourstrings*, a worldwide network of music schools and conservatoires originally set up in Finland by the Hungarian brothers Geza and Csaba Szilvay, which also operates in the S

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## Meet the committee – Amélie Saintonge

Helene Albrecht: *Amélie, you have been so kind as to offer us your time for this interview in the busiest period of the year, right in the middle of marking exam papers. Let's start from the very beginning: how did you learn about UCL Chamber Music Club and what provoked your interest in becoming a member and shortly after also a committee member?*

Amélie Saintonge: I came to UCL in 2013. After ten years of living short-term in different places, I was looking for opportunities to seriously return back to singing. Subsequently the first project I got involved with was a concert by the CMC chamber choir.

HA: *At UCL, you are holding a position as lecturer in the Physics and Astronomy Department: tell us about stages of your previous journeys. I know that you grew up in Canada...*

AS: That's right; I was born in Montreal and did a degree in Physics and Mathematics over there. I then moved to the US for five years for a PhD in Astrophysics at Cornell University. Later I moved to Switzerland for two years working at the University of Zurich, and after that to Munich for another four years which I spent at the Max Planck Institute.

HA: *Sounds like an interesting and fulfilling career path! I wonder how music fitted in during these busy years! When did you actually start any musical activities?*

AS: I started as a young child with piano lessons, being quite the average student who enjoys playing without any particular ambitions. Aged six I started singing in children's choirs which then turned into something more specific when I took private singing lessons at the age of fifteen. While building up my singing technique there have been recommendations to go for a professional career and at times it was very hard for me to decide between physics and music!

HA: *Were you able to continue with singing while doing your physics degree at Montreal?*

AS: Oh, yes; my time as an undergraduate student in Montreal turned out to





dren acquire when they learn an instrument. This might also relate to a scientist's disposition to experiments and exploration.

HA: *In this context it might be conclusive that you mentioned Bach and Brahms as your favourite composers. For me, there is something very elemental to their music, for example the organisation of time and measurement in Brahms's music. On this note we have not heard much about your scientific background. What is your area of expertise within astrophysics?*



standard repertoire – of which we do not have a *composer's* original version in any of these senses: for example, there are four eighteenth-century manuscripts of J.S. Bach's Suites for solo cello, but none of them is in Bach's own hand. (This has not prevented publishers from attaching 'Urtext' to their editions.) Indeed, for anything prior to the late sixteenth century, the likelihood of a 'composer's original' being in existence can be ruled out. *Urtext* can therefore best be thought of as implying a single source. This concept has negative as much as positive connotations – it suggests a lack of authorial additions, and arose from a laudable desire to do as the composer intended.

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can be shown by the use of brackets or italics; and accidentals suggested by the editor can be added above the notes. Ligatures need to be notated as single notes:

ply modern signatures in Baroque works whose original sources used the 'modal' style. Recently editors have tended to preserve the original signatures, even in 'performing' editions, as part of the general tendency to respect the sources.

A more important matter in Baroque music, from the performer's point of view, is the continuo. Much of this repertoire contains an accompanying part which originally consisted of a bass line (the *basso continuo*), often but not always with numbers above or below – i.e. a 'figured bass' – and the expectation was that the keyboard player would fill this out by adding chords (as indicated by the figures, where these existed). Learning to 'realise' a continuo in this way was a normal part of a keyboardist's training. Modern performing editions generally include an editorial realisation. What is essential is that the editor should make clear that this *is* a realisation – one possibility among others; a favoured way of doing this is to use a smaller typeface for the realisation (the upper stave of the keyboard part). The figures should also be included below the bass. It is vital that a continuo realisation should be distinguished from an *obbligato* keyboard part, such as J.S. Bach provided for some of his sonatas (the accompanied violin sonatas, gamba sonatas and three of the flute sonatas); in these cases the keyboard part is fully composed and is, as the term suggests, obligatory. It is equally important that keyboard players themselves should be aware of the difference!

Wrong or right notes?

Mistakes can be made in preparing a musical score or parts, by the composer, the copyist or the type-setter. Many mistakes are obvious, but not all. Two intriguing examples from the nineteenth century involve possible mistakes of omission. In the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 106 (the 'Hammerklavier') there occurs what has been called 'perhaps the single most disputed note in all of Beethoven's music' (Eric Wen, 'A Sharp Practice?', p.144). The lead-up to the recapitulation has a key-signature of five sharps, with a return to a two-flat signature at the recapitulation (bar 227). Bars 224-6 contain two-note figures of which the first note each time is A – which according to the signature is A sharp. It has been speculated, however, that Beethoven intended A natural, and that it is simply an oversight that a natural sign was not written. This is plausible – A natural makes good sense in terms of implied harmony – but by no means certain: A sharp is not out of the question, anticipating the B-flat of the recapitulation. The second example, again involving accidentals, is in bar 3 of Chopin's C minor Prelude, Op. 28 No. 20. Is the last chord (fourth beat) of this bar major or minor? The second chord of the bar has an E natural at the top (the notated natural cancelling out the flat in the key-signature); the chord of C at the end of the bar again has E on top, and since the flat is not reinstated before this note the earlier natural presumably remains in force, and so the chord is C major. This is the case in Chopin's manuscript and in the earliest editions. However, in a copy belonging to Chopin's



tions'. Chopin's constant 'tinkering' with his pieces suggests a much more flex-

and scholar Charles Rosen, that the repeat should be from the very beginning of the movement, i.e. should include the Grave bars. There are good musical reasons for this. The move from the dominant of D flat major (bars 103-104) straight to B flat minor (bar 5) is a quite unconvincing way to change key, whereas the resolution onto the octave D flats of bar 1 works well; furthermore, there is an interesting relationship between bars 101-104 and bars 3-4, which is only evident when these bars are brought into proximity. The manuscript and the first French edition do not have the repeat mark at bar 5, but the first German edition does – probably an intervention by the publishers. In the new Polish National Edition, the commentary states that the manuscript ‘separates these bars [i.e. bar 4 from bar 5] with a double bar, which GE [the first German edition] changes arbitrarily into a repeat sign. This error ... appears in the majority of later collected editions.’ (Abridged Source Commentary, p.17) One such is the ‘Paderewski’ edition, which gives the repeat sign at bar 5 with, remarkably, no indication in the commentary that there might be an alternative. Interestingly, two composers of the generation after Chopin seem to have been satisfied with a repeat from bar 1 rather than bar 5. Johannes Brahms, who in addition to his other musical accomplishments was an exemplary editor, was in charge of the relevant volume (c.1878) of the Breitkopf & Härtel collected edition of Chopin; the double bar-line between bars 4 and 5 is present in this version, but no repeat sign. Camille Saint-Saëns made an arrangement for two pianos of this sonata, published in 1907; again, there is no repeat sign at bar 5. Of course, many pianists avoid the issue by simply ignoring the exposition repeat; but for those who wish to include it, one might think that what was good enough for Brahms and Saint-Saëns should be good enough for them.

## Conclusion

So, to return to my original question: what edition to choose? The answer depends on who you are. The scholar may need the full information about sources that a ‘critical’ edition should provide. The performer needs less, and editorial markings for performance (fingerings, phrasing, dynamics, added accidentals in ‘early’ music, ornaments and rhythmic alteration in Baroque music) can be very useful, but it is important that they should be distinguished as being editorial – this can be done in various ways typographically. A good performing edition will show respect for the sources and provide sufficient information to enable the user to gauge the authoritativeness of its readings.

*Roger Beeson*



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## Gustave Charpentier's opera *Louise*: a footnote

The French composer Gustave Charpentier (1860-1956) is remembered mainly for his opera, *Louise*, and the heroine's aria, 'Depuis le jour'. His music owes much to Gounod, Massenet and Wagner, and he composed little before and after this story of a young Parisian working girl. But by 1900, as the American musicologists Jane Fulcher and Steven Huebner point out, his radical ideals involved him in French political life. This paper is a footnote to their views, and as Anglo-French relations were becoming important, an attempt to see Charpentier's *Louise* in a British context.

Charpentier's career as a composer was brief; *Louise*, completed by 1896 had its premiere in Paris in 1900. It is a conventional tale, similar to other late nineteenth-century operas about adventurous young girls, or, in some cases, women of easy virtue – Louise alone amongst the heroines lived to tell the tale. For example, in 1884 Jules Massenet (1842-1912) composed *Manon*, based on Abbé Prévost's popular eighteenth-century story about a girl who runs away for love. Kathleen Hoover tells us that by 1885, Massenet, Charpentier's tutor at the Paris Conservatoire, advised his pupil to find a nice girl and abandon music, for opera composers faced fierce competition. Italy's Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) became Verdi's successor in 1893 when he composed *Manon Lescaut* for Turin using Prévost's novel. He followed it with his 1896 opera *La bohème*, loosely based on Henri Murger's *Scenes of Bohemian Life*. Murger's work was also the source for another *La bohème*, by Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1858-1919), produced in Venice in 1897.

Italian opera composers were not the only rivals facing French composers. The war of 1870-1 had been a significant defeat for France, forced to cede Alsace and Lorraine in north-east France to the new German state. Charpentier from Lorraine was among the uprooted, and Paris became his home after 1870 when France had to rebuild national pride. The Third Republic looked to the Revolution of 1789 and the First Republic of 1792, when 'Marianne' first emerged to symbolise France, and represent the Republic's values of 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. French operas about feisty young girls were not meant to lower Marianne's dignity, but revealed that French composers were torn between the influences of two great musicians and national heroes: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) and Richard Wagner (1813-83). Verdi was identified with the Risorgimento, the unification of Italy; Wagner with the unification of Germany in 1871.

For Massenet the choice was simple politically and musically – he followed Verdi and in 1871 was a founder of the Société Nationale de Musique to promote French music. Wagner died in 1883 and in 1884 Massenet premiered his opera, *Manon*. The tale of another adventurous girl allowed Massenet to pay homage to Verdi, the first composer to 'liberate' opera by using a prostitute as the heroine of his 1853 *La traviata*, based on the 1848 novel by France's Alexandre Dumas fils, *La dame aux camélias*. But in the 1880s Wagner was an influence on French music and politics and there was discord among musicians in Paris; Gabriel Fauré, Massenet's successor as Professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, thought little of his work. Massenet resigned from this post in 1896 – some said because he was not made head of the Conservatoire with life tenure; and thereafter he composed independently and not always successfully.

By 1900 Puccini, now internationally famous, remained politically neutral; but Charpentier had radical views, and his *Louise* is the story of a young Parisian seamstress who leaves her respectable working class family to live with her lover. Charpentier met anarchists and was a friend of the novelist and journalist, Émile

Zola, famous for his attack on the establishment over the Dreyfus affair in the late 1890s. Zola's wife and mistress were both seamstresses, but critics agree that Charpentier's *Louise* is autobiographical; he never married and his first mistress and other women friends were called Louise. But for British historians of the 1880s and '90s the name recalls Queen Victoria's handsome daughter, Princess Louise. She was a well-known patron of the arts – a reason for Charpentier to use her name at a time of growing rapprochement between France and Britain.

Married in 1871 to the heir of the Duke of Argyll, Princess Louise and her husband were the talk of London for decades as they were childless and of en

as a burly working man, looks capable of anything. Claude Monet, another of the French artists who briefly sought refuge in London in 1870, brought back the latest news, and his friend, Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-94), composed two 'British' operas discreetly satirising Edward of Wales, despoiler of French women. *Gwendoline* (1886), set in England before the Norman Conquest, was followed the next year by *Le roi malgré lui*, about a playboy king of Poland. In 1903 the British composer, Edward German, retaliated with the last Savoy opera, *The Princess of Kensington*. Princess Louise still lived at Kensington Palace but she ranked socially below the King's eldest daughter, also called Louise. The opera was not a success and nor was Charpentier's *Louise*, which may be seen as his attempt to be part of Anglo-French artistic society.

By the turn of the century, Paris led the world in art and music, if not in opera; during the 'belle époque' rich American expatriates made Paris their playground, their 'Newport on the Seine'; but ambitious French artists and musicians found it hard to build a career. As Steven Huebner points out, Charpentier was motivated by conflicting forces, ranging from anarchism to the bourgeois box office, and by expediency. Charpentier had to be discreet as the death of his friend, Zola, in 1902 was rumoured to be murder. Perhaps coincidentally, a French designer, Alexandre Charpentier (no kin of Gustave), was asked to create a medal in Zola's name.

The 'Entente Cordiale' signed on 8 April 1904 brought official Anglo-French accord and Charpentier received national honours throughout his long life, honours awarded for working for his Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson rather than for his creative musical career. Puccini's heroines captivated the world and *Louise* was the only working-girl drama; in 1902 Debussy, no friend of Charpentier or his music, created *Mélisande*, and France saw a return to a different type of romantic heroine.

*Clare Taylor, September 2016*

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## Text and translations

In autumn 2016, Sheffield University, in association with 'Music in the Round'\*, hosted a number of public events in and around Sheffield, including sessions on the theme of 'Songmakers: Music, Language and Poetry'. On 12 November I attended a session entitled 'Texts and Translations'. The session was billed as 'A morning exploring the relationship between words, language and music, with a focus on German song'. It was divided into three sections: a masterclass for two University of Sheffield music students led by baritone Roderick Williams; a discussion of the texts and translations led by poetry and song specialist Professor Helen Abbot (University of Birmingham); and some background to the origin of the poems and music in their historic context presented by Dr Seán Williams, specialist in German literature and cultural history and BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinker 2016. The singers were accompanied by Richard Longman on piano.

Having studied languages (though not German) and linguistics, including translation theories, and also music though with never much focus on Lieder, and always delighting in a childish sense that a masterclass is letting you in on secrets, I thought this would be a great way to spend a morning. This partnership of Sheffield University and 'Music in the Round' (for which Roderick Williams is currently singer-in-residence) had at its heart the intention of engaging a wider audience in classical music, although at this session, there seemed to be a more traditional audience, i.e. composed of people that were relatively knowledgeable about the subject matter, and some involved in musical education. What I felt lay behind the session could be articulated with the question: is translating a classic work 'dumbing down', 'reaching out', or a further 'creative act'? I would like to make the case for the third, whilst not discounting the second. I understand the apprehensions of some who might think the first, but believe we should interrogate them.

Focusing on song in the series was designed to remind us that the voice is usually the first instrument we meet and use, and perhaps implicitly was posing questions as to whether there are difficulties in attracting newer audiences to 'classical' songs. In an age when recorded music is a major mode of listening, it also drew me back to considering the live element as an interpersonal activity. The session was fairly informal, with the audience invited to ask questions and discuss points, which means that I was taking 'jottings' rather than 'notes' and my reflections during the event and after are rather mingled with the reporting.

In the context of this, I gradually realised that 'translation' for either a concert or a performance was far more than the technical job of finding English words to use for the original ones. It is a process of transmuting the work as received from editors, teachers, tradition of performance, into one the performer can make speak to the audience in question. The particularity of every performance brought to mind something read many years ago in *After Babel* by George Steiner, a classic work on the significance of cultural identities in the processes of translation. The introduction to the 1992 edition of this book states that it postulates 'Translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in every act of communication' (p. xii).

Later in this book, the connection with the work of musicians and other performers is also explicitly made: ' "Interpretation" as that which gives language life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription, is what I am concerned with. The French word *interprète* concentrates all the relevant values. An actor is *interprète* of Racine; a pianist gives *une interprétation* of a Beethoven sonata. As it does not include the world of the actor, and includes that of the musician only by analogy, the English term interpreter is less strong. But it is congruent with French when reaching out in another direction. *Interprète/interpreter* are commonly used to mean translator.' (Steiner 1992, p. 28)

In the masterclass, Roddy Williams certainly underlined the role of the performer as an active interpreter, even in chamber work. Having sung Schubert's *Winterreise* himself both in German and English within the Sheffield 'Songmakers' series, he was aware of this cycle as a journey. When performing the English translation by Jeremy Sams, he had taken the opportunity of another 'in the round' space to use the space as a visual demonstration of that. He talked about the dangers at certain points in the music of forgetting which language he was meant to be performing in and asked whether any of the audience had experienced something similar. One or two had felt that hearing the music in English for them had meant that they related the work to English classic poems.

At the outset of the class the two music students (both English native speakers) were asked about their approach to singing Lieder. We were also surveyed, through a quick show of hands, about our levels of German, and challenged by this introduction. Roddy Williams asked us to consider the performer's perspective in regard to the audience – are the audience members all staring at the page with the words and translation throughout? It was a bit of a wake-up call that when that singer is singing of by heart the performer sits English tilt p\_

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own comfort zone and move not only into the body of the audience through the aisle, but to address a part of their song directly to an individual member of the audience!

A Lieder recital is not an opera – but a ‘story’ or at least ‘character’ element is present in a song and song cycles have a common theme if not a journey on the scale of *Winterreise*. How is that conveyed? What expectations can the singers have of their audience when they are singing in foreign languages, and what help can they give? What expectations do the audiences have of the concert? I admit that as someone who has scarcely ever held a conversation in German, just saying ‘song’ instead of ‘Lied’ instantly modifies my response. Even using the expression ‘art song’ can suggest it’s less accessible for the listener, rather than just referring to the skills of the composer and musicians. Essentially, the ‘art’ in ‘art song’ is to bring the text to life, not to subordinate it, by the addition of the music – although usually with both a melody for the words and an accompanying instrumental part (accompanying in the sense of sharing the journey, not a secondary part). Roddy Williams took the singers through this by encouraging them to focus on: 1) some aspect of mood or experience expressed in the poem that spoke to their own experience and 2) some words (e.g. what ‘adjectives’ appear here) and practise projecting them to the audience. They were asked to sing, and the audience to identify what could be those keys from the performance. For many listeners this is what happens when we enjoy music: focus on a point and see the rest of it from that viewpoint, not always with full attention to the whole – although, of course, it can depend on the type of piece as well as our mood on the day. I related this to the passage that, ‘the degree of re-creative immediacy varies. It is most radically life-giving in the case of musical performance. Every musical realisation is a new *poiesis*. It differs from all other performances of the same composition. Its ontological relationship to the original score and to all previous renditions is twofold: it is at the same time reproductive and innovatory.’ (Steiner, p.27)

Even within the timeframe of this workshop, each time we heard the music our attention was drawn to something new. The discussions between the singers, panel and other audience members contributed to this. It was a joint project, given that the singers were given a question we all heard and then their performance answered it, leading us to listen differently.

The audience at any performance bring with them not only their interest in a given concert and the ‘programme notes’ either written or otherwise, but the issues personal and collective around them. How can we use such ‘distractions’ to take us into thinking about why the music is still saying something to us?

The tensions in the role of interpreting for Anglophones were in some way illustrated at this point in time by events in the world. There were questions in the air of the relationship with European culture following the referendum – how would it be affected by a political decision – is there more to cultural relations than

political opportunities? Maybe we could rely on the Anglophone world – but the result of their elections, too, created uncertainty.

The performers also expose themselves to the intimate experience of a cham-



us in our own tongue. But if our edition uses a translation from the early twentieth century the English sounds dated and the effect can be felt more viscerally.

George Steiner writes about the way that our own language changes over time: 'Any thorough reading of a text out of the past of one's own language and literature is a manifold act of interpretation. In the great majority of cases this act is hardly performed or even consciously recognised' (Steiner, p.18).

If we read Chaucer or Shakespeare we are well aware of this sense that the language is distant in time; as we get closer to our own time, we sometimes don't consciously think of it but unconsciously reject the 'old-fashioned' words as not speaking to us. In the same way, we can fail to realise that distances we perceive as being from Schubert (or rather Müller), are failures of translations.

The nineteenth century in Germany, when *Winterreise* and many other poems used in Lieder were written, was a period when society was changing. Across Europe Romanticism was emerging in all art forms. The poets used the language in specific ways, using key words to evoke certain feelings and link them to parallels in nature, in a way that was quite *sui generis*. At the same time, there was wider circulation of periodicals that included versions of poetry with some set to music, for a class who now had leisure time to enjoy such activities. Across the German lands this meant that there was a 'market' for these kinds of work. In wider Europe, the urban middle class was also becoming more widespread, and the strata of society who were interested in these works in the nineteenth century had some exposure to the language, and did sing in German. Sadly, the early part of the twentieth century brought conflict and a predominance of singing in English, with many translations reflecting the style of that era, not our own! It could appear stilted.

Then we moved to have a closer look at more technical questions and translations. As a singer and language teacher, Professor Abbot was well qualified to comment on difficulties of practising the craft of singing in different languages.

I am all too well aware of the challenges of translating poetry into another language. Some say it can't be done. Some just acknowledge the compromises that need to be made and get on with doing what they can. Before you even begin translating a song into English, however, it pays to remember that what you are considering, the created song, has already undergone a type of translation – the act of setting the words to music.

'The composer who sets a text to music is engaged in the same sequence of intuitive and technical motions which obtain in translation proper ... The test of critical intelligence, of psychological responsiveness to which the composer submits himself when choosing and setting his lyric, is at all points concordant with that of the translator. In both cases we ask: has he understood the argument, the emotional tone, the formal particularities, the historical conventions, the potential

ambiguities in the original? Has he found a medium in which to represent fully and to elucidate these elements?' (Steiner, p.438).

To conclude, this session brought to mind how many 'translations' any work of music goes through from conception to performance. A singer who is also a songwriter and sets their own words has more autonomy over the creation and performance of the work – constrained only by their ability and range on their 'instrument'. On the other hand, in works such as the Lieder there can be a sequence of years of thoughtful working at play. First, the poet wrote, influenced by his own social milieu, 'translating' thoughts and emotions into words that will resonate, at this point, not envisaging the work being set to music. The composer finds the text, picks up something in the poem that they want to express in their own medium, decorating the words with the addition of music – written for both singer and instrumentalist(s). The performers take this forward from the page to the audience, deciding whether the original language or a new one will help them most in this endeavour. The audience, receiving the presentation, meet it in the midst of their own experiences that day, and sift it through their personal and cultural heritage and try to catch a glimpse of the whole journey of the piece to that particular performance.

The membership of a Chamber Music Club such as ours, with members from all over the world, offers the opportunity to interact with organisers and performers (often the same) in particular concerts and to discuss the works. We can be exposed to music we would never otherwise have discovered because we are led to it, and to become more open to it, through the introduction from those who are colleagues and friends. There is a limit to how many languages we are likely to learn, so there is a place for translated works, which can be creative in themselves as well as providing a useful stepping stone towards appreciating a performance in the original language.

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## References

Steiner, George, *After Babel: Aspects of language and translation*, Second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

\* 'Music in the Round' <[http://www.musicintheround.co.uk/who\\_we\\_are.php](http://www.musicintheround.co.uk/who_we_are.php)>