

## THE STORY OF ROBERT FRANZ

*By Rachel Hildebrandt and Tim Krol*

Nineteenth-century Germany might conjure up dramatic and romantic images of the era's greatest musical compositions, such as Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, or the great art songs of Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann.

Sadly, history has quietly forgotten countless other talented musicians who worked just as hard as these greats, exhibiting true brilliance in their published works. Robert Franz (1815-1892) was one such figure. His entire family had long been involved in the salt business, and young Robert was expected to take over the family business someday. Yet Franz had no interest in doing so. In his early teens, he discovered an old spinet<sup>1</sup> in the home of a relative, and through that instrument he realized his passion for music.

Several years passed before Franz's parents began to accept the idea that their son wished to pursue music as a career. Franz's father was an avid church singer, and thus believed music-making should be confined to religious worship, not commerce. Yet when he was 20, Robert convinced his father to allow him to travel to Dessau to study organ with Friedrich Schneider, a well-known teacher at the time. Schneider's adherence to strictly conservative teaching methods frustrated Franz at every turn. He eventually withdrew from the program and returned to his family home in Halle. Interestingly, many years later, Franz wrote a letter to Schneider's son, acknowledging that under his father's tutelage he had mastered the fundamentals of composition, not to mention that it was Herr Schneider who had introduced Franz to the music of Bach and Handel, the two great composers who influenced Franz's composition over his entire career.

Upon his return to Halle after Dessau, Franz spent several years searching for employment as a musician, but with little success. This of course annoyed his family, who asserted they were right all

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<sup>1</sup> A spinet is a plucked keyboard instrument of the harpsichord family.

along about the impracticality of a full-time music career. Franz's mother seemed to be the only one who supported his musical endeavors, despite a period of over six years in which Franz failed to gain employment of any kind. To alleviate this burden, Franz devoted himself to studying the great Baroque composers, as well as the songs of Schubert, and Schumann. The latter two composers ultimately helped Franz to find his passion as a composer of art songs.

In 1843, Franz wrote a letter to the then up-and-coming Robert Schumann, expressing his great admiration and humbly requesting feedback for twelve of his own songs. Schumann was duly impressed and immediately replied, suggesting they meet in person. Schumann then used his own contacts to help Franz publish his first song collection, and a warm friendship was established between the two men, evidenced by a series of letters they exchanged over the course of several years.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of Franz's life, he had produced 50 collections, containing over 270 songs. Most of the songs were based on the lyrical poems of major contemporary poets, including Heinrich Heine, Karl Wilhelm Osterwald, Nikolaus Lenau, and Robert Burns. Franz's compositions were shaped significantly by his constant effort to be guided forward and foremost by the lyrics: "I have been for years convinced of the fact that in every genuinely lyric poem the corresponding melody lies hidden. This is not mere fancy, but is based on sure grounds."<sup>3</sup>

Franz's songs were admired by some of the greatest composers of his age, including Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, and Liszt. However, due to personality differences, Franz's relationships with these men were relatively volatile. Each of them would inevitably urge Franz to write an opera, a symphony or other larger work; Franz would flatly refuse to do so, insisting that these larger works were filled with needless fanfare and excessive drama. Yet on some occasions they held one another in high regard. For example, Franz once visited Wagner in his home and was absolutely delighted when Wagner opened up his glass bookcase to reveal that the only scores he owned were by Bach, Beethoven, and Franz himself. Despite the acclaim of his fellow composers, Franz's songs were never

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<sup>2</sup> A link to the letters between Franz and Schumann appears on the home page of FranzFound.com.

<sup>3</sup> Squire, W.B. and Franz, R. (1921). Letters of Robert Franz. *The Musical Quarterly*. 7(2), pp. 278-283.

commercially successful, and he ultimately earned his living through various positions in Halle, including city organist and conductor of the *Singakademie* and the city symphony. Several years after Franz's death, the *Singakademie* was renamed *Musikschule Robert Franz*, and remains a vital institution today, located in central Halle (Saale) on a street also renamed to honor him: *Robert Franz Ring*.

As early as 1841, when Franz was only 26, he began to have trouble with his hearing. According to Franz, his condition was exacerbated when a train entering a station suddenly emitted a very loud whistle. In 1868, at the age of 53, he was completely deaf and was forced to give up all of his professional posts in Halle. No doubt his deafness, along with the stress of having to give up the musical jobs he loved so much, led to his suffering from what many contemporaries referred to as a “nervous disorder.”

With Franz on the brink of total destitution, his good friend Liszt stepped in. Besides publishing a lengthy and laudatory essay about him, Liszt and a few other colleagues including violinist Joseph Joachim and singer Frau Helene Magnus performed several benefit concerts in England, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. They raised about 100,000 marks, which Liszt then presented to Franz as a gift. This enabled Franz and his wife Marie to live comfortably for the rest of their lives.

Franz's professional disappointment, deafness, and troubled relationships with his musical peers contributed to his bitterness later in life. As he told a visiting American once, “Most of my friends seem to be Americans. I assure you that of every six letters I receive, five are from America or England. The Germans do not seem to be aware of my existence.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Marie Hinrichs, A.K.A. Mrs. Franz**

At the age of 31, Franz was immersed in numerous choral conducting jobs, but was earning little money. He made most of his income as a church organist and private music teacher. At that time,

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<sup>4</sup> Finck, H.T. (1893). An Hour with Robert Franz. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*. XLVI (May-October), pp. 237-244.

Franz was a loyal follower of local philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs. He became lifelong friends with Hinrichs' son, Friedrich Jr., who was primarily a lawyer, but also wrote and published a set of songs based on the poetry of Klaus Groth.<sup>5</sup> When Franz embarked on a trip to Vienna in that same year, Hinrichs' younger sister Marie happened to be visiting a relative there. She and Franz met, and while their relationship began under the guise of Marie studying composition with Franz, the two had fallen in love. In 1846, with Franz's encouragement, Marie published her first (and only) opus of nine songs. Two years later, in 1848, they were married. They raised three children, two sons and a daughter, and enjoyed a seemingly happy marriage until her death in 1891. As Franz remarked to a visiting American woman as he handed her his wife's photograph, "There, take a good look at it! Such a face you will never see again!"<sup>6</sup>

### **Franz's Reception in Britain and the United States**

Franz's reception in the United States was aided by his close friendship with Otto Dresel, who immigrated in 1848 and became a noted pianist and music teacher in Boston. He helped promote a revival of interest in Bach and Handel in Boston and beyond, and also sought to popularize Franz's songs. Franz's significance in North America was still felt as late as 1903, when William Foster Apthorp published a collection of Franz's songs translated into English, *Fifty Songs by Robert Franz*. Interestingly, in 1935, Schirmer's Library of Musical Classics released another collection of Franz's songs under the title *Vocal Album: Sixty-Two Songs*, supplemented with a critical forward by H.E. Krehbiel. Both of these publications reflected a lasting interest in Franz's lyrical songs.

Franz was also warmly received in Great Britain. This may be explained in part by his song settings of various poems by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. Franz was enthusiastic about this positive development, as revealed in an 1888 letter he wrote to his friend Carl Armbruster: "What you write to me about the success of my songs in Scotland sounds to my ears like a fairy tale. For I had not

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<sup>5</sup> Franz approved of Friedrich's songs, and a selection of them will be included in Album Two of *FranzFound.com*.

<sup>6</sup> Finck, p. 241.

believed that such an immediate effect on the public was possible.”<sup>7</sup> Considering how little true success Franz had enjoyed during his lifetime, reading the thoughts of the aging composer who had spent so long wishing for public recognition, is touching: “It is like a dream when I read about your performances and the way the public receives them.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Squire and Franz, p. 279

<sup>8</sup> Squire and Franz, p. 282

## Franz Forgotten: Why?

One can never be certain about exactly why or how a great artist can fall by the wayside and become relatively unknown despite a lifetime of brilliant output. That said, one of Franz's biggest mistakes was to refuse to write an original opera, symphony, or oratorio. In each case, when one of his more famous colleagues urged him to go beyond mere songwriting, his staunch reply was that he had no interest in the grandiosity of such art forms. Franz prided himself on his absolute devotion to songwriting, to drawing out whatever music was already present in any given great poem. Evidently Franz considered his role in the songwriting process more mystical than academic: "My personal acquaintance with the great men of the day, with Schumann, Liszt, and Mendelssohn, paved the way for self-examination and self-recognition. I began to think seriously about myself and my relation to art; the result of this thinking was the conscious holding fast by the direction in which I had struck out, the clear conviction that I could be of service to art and, what is the same thing, to the world only on this basis. As a further result of this self-examination, I promised myself to write only when I could not help it, when the exhortation from within convinced the external power of realizing it."<sup>9</sup>

The following points are collected from information gathered in a series of articles about Franz:

1. **Lack of suitability for public performance:** Some of Franz's fans, as well as critics, argued that his songs were best suited to private enjoyment in the home, not public performance. Furthermore, contemporary accounts reveal that many singers did not favor Franz's songs because they believed the songs did not satisfactorily showcase their vocal abilities. As Robert Schumann noted, "Poetic singers only can do them justice; they are best sung in solitude and in the twilight." This sentiment was echoed by others: "His songs are too intimate to produce their full effect on the general public, and moreover they require a perfection of performance in which the shares of both singer and accompanist shall be fused with a degree of sympathy that is rarely attainable."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Franz, R. and Aphthorp, W. (1903). *Fifty Songs by Robert Franz*. Boston, MA: Oliver Ditson Company, p. xiii

<sup>10</sup> Squire and Franz, p. 278

2. **Franz’s growing deafness, early retirement, and withdrawal from active social life:** While it is extraordinary to recount the number of songs Franz composed and his achievements in revitalizing the *Singakademie* in Halle over a period of relatively short years, the painful aspects that accompanied losing his hearing, and his tremendous sensitivity to all sounds, no doubt explained his deepening sense of despair, not to mention what experts characterized as a “nervous disorder.”

3. **Franz’s troubled relationships with fellow composers:** Although Franz maintained close friendships with Schumann and Liszt, his relationships with many of his other professional peers were short-lived. Even if occasionally justified, Franz’s negative commentaries frequently revealed the level of his bitterness toward them: “My songs will live longer than Mendelssohn’s. It is singular how these things are worn out by excessive use. In passing through the hands of every shoemaker and tailor some of the grime which such people have on their hands clings to them; their brilliancy is dimmed, we do not like to hear the songs anymore.”<sup>11</sup> Franz went on to criticize what he perceived as Schubert’s “melodic excesses,” and to break with Wagner over the significance of the operatic form. In other words, despite being urged by contemporaries to compose more than mere songs, Franz evidently not only ignored such urgings, but even considered them to be wrong. Franz’s criticism was not limited to living composers, as he rather insultingly compared Beethoven’s songs to “marble statues, perfect but cold and bloodless,” and stated publicly he would rather hear one of Beethoven’s most beloved songs, *Adelaide*,” played on a clarinet than sung.<sup>12</sup>

4. **Personality / Candor / Negativity:** Franz’s unvarnished candor, as reflected in this quote from a letter he wrote to Carl Armbruster, won him more enemies than friends: “Not even in their dreams does it ever occur to these foolish folk that my songs must be studied.”<sup>13</sup> Example after

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<sup>11</sup> Franz, R. and Krehbiel, H. (1907). *A Collection of Sixty-Two Songs*. New York, NY: G. Schirmer, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>12</sup> Franz and Krehbiel, p. vii.

<sup>13</sup> Squire and Franz, p. 282

example can be given about Franz's awkward shyness, especially in the presence of colleagues he admired. And yet he had a lot of strong opinions, for which he had few social filters.<sup>14</sup>

5. **Shifting taste in music:** Art songs declined in popularity after 1900, despite the efforts of great German composers like Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler.

6. **Transition in leisure time:** As the 20th century progressed, people had more choices in how to spend their leisure time. Intimate evenings spent singing songs and playing parlor games gave way to the entertainment of radio, film, and eventually television.

7. **His name:** Robert Franz's father was born Georg Christoph Knauth. Both he and his brother were in the same branch of the salt business, and thus the surname caused much confusion at the post office. In an effort to resolve this confusion, Georg Christoph changed his surname to Franz. This all took place long before Robert was born, and Georg never filed the legal documents to make the name-change official. Thirty years later, when the adult Robert Franz had published an impressive catalog of songs using the only name he had ever known, he felt the need to make it official. Franz filed the appropriate paperwork with the city in 1848, just before he married Marie Hinrichs. Unfortunately, word got out that Franz had done this, and some mean-spirited critics began spreading rumors that Franz had chosen the name as an egotistical maneuver to place his own work on a par with that of Robert Schumann and Franz Schubert.

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps if Franz were alive in the 21st century, there would be a name (or a spectrum) upon which his personality could have been diagnosed and possibly treated. In 1895, only three years after Franz's death, the hearing aid was invented by American electrical engineer Miller Reese Hutchison (1876-1944).



## ABOUT THE POETS<sup>15</sup>

POET	TRACK
<p><b>Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff</b> (1788-1857) was one of Germany's most prominent Romantic poets. Born into an aristocratic family, Eichendorff worked in various political positions over the years, and his poems often centered on the theory that humanity's greatest happiness was only attainable through the contemplation of nature's beauty.</p>	1, 38
<p><b>Christian Johann Heinrich Heine</b> (1797-1856) was known in Germany and abroad as a poet, literary critic and essayist. Outside of Germany, his reputation was primarily based on his lyric poetry, which was set to songs by various composers including Franz, Schumann, and Schubert.</p>	2, 4, 16, 20, 21, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 43
<p><b>Nikolaus Lenau</b> (1802-1850) was the pseudonym of Nikolaus Franz Niembsch Edler von Strehlenau. Although Lenau studied law and medicine, he was not inclined to either of these professions, and turned to poetry instead. Familial wealth enabled him to devote himself exclusively to writing, and he became famous for his short lyric poems. Today he is considered Austria's greatest modern lyric poet.</p>	5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 35
<p><b>Karl Wilhelm Osterwald</b> (1820-1887) led a varied career as a naturalist, poet, and school headmaster and teacher. Franz, a personal friend, set about 70 of Osterwald's love, travel, and nature poems to music, and Osterwald also wrote the lyrics for various church hymns.</p>	6, 7, 12, 17, 25, 36, 37, 41
<p><b>Eduard Mörike</b> (1804-1875) was an ordained Lutheran minister, but he was also a critically acclaimed novelist and poet. He published a collection of lyric poems and a volume of traditional songs, both of which were distinguished by their simple and natural language.</p>	9

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<sup>15</sup> These brief biographies, included here convenient reference, were compiled from *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* in July 2016.

<p><b>Emanuel von Geibel</b> (1815-1884) was successful as a playwright, poet, and translator. He wrote lyric and political poetry and was recognized as the leading German lyric poet between 1848 and 1870.</p>	11, 19, 23
<p><b>August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben</b> (1798-1874) is remembered today as the author of the lyrics for <i>Deutschlandlied</i>, the German national anthem. He was one of the most popular poets in Germany at that time. Besides his poems, which were remarkable for the way they lyrically and elegantly treated the ups and downs of contemporary life, he was also a gifted scholar of medieval Germanic literature.</p>	18
<p><b>Wolfgang Müller</b> (1794-1827) was employed as both a teacher and a librarian. He wrote political and lyrical poems, and these attracted the attention of several of the great German composers. In addition, his poems exerted an influence on Heine's creative development.</p>	44
<p><b>Siegfried Kapper</b> (1821-1879) was the literary pseudonym of Isaac Salomon Kapper, who studied medicine at Prague University and earned his Ph.D. at the University of Vienna. Kapper wrote excellent fairy tales and poems and was one of the leading figures of Czech-Jewish assimilation.</p>	24
<p><b>Mirza Schafi Vazeh</b> (1796-1852) was a bilingual poet who wrote in Azerbaijani and Persian. His poems were translated into numerous European languages, and many of them focused thematically on the joys of life and the wisdom of humanity.</p>	27
<p><b>Robert Burns</b> (1759-1796) is commonly described as the national poet of Scotland. He wrote lyric poems in both Scottish and English. Burns was a pioneer of the Romantic Movement, and his ongoing legacy was reflected in 2009, when a popular survey named him the greatest Scottish poet. Besides his own poetry, Burns also collected and revised folk songs from various regions around Scotland. The poem featured on this recording, <i>Der Sommer ist so schön</i>, is a German translation (by Heinrich Julius Hentze) of Burns' poem in Scottish, <i>Ay Waukin' O</i>.</p>	39
<p><b>Sándor Petőfi</b> (1823-1849) was a Hungarian poet of Slovak and Serbian ethnicity. Today he is viewed as Hungary's national poet and as a key figure in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. He wrote both folklore-style and epic political poems. The poem featured on this recording is Track 40, <i>Selige Nacht</i>, which was translated into German by Karl Maria</p>	40

Kertbeny (1824-1882).	
<b>Friedrich Rückert</b> (1788-1866) led a varied professional life as a poet, translator, and professor of Oriental languages. He was said to have mastered thirty languages, and as a translator he focused on Indian and Arabian works. Over 120 of Rückert's poems were set to music by some of Europe's finest composers, including Schumann, Mahler, Strauss, and Bartók.	42

## SUPPLEMENTAL READING

The following articles include fascinating observations about Robert Franz and his world, including quotes from Franz himself and many of his colleagues. Since they were published while Franz was still alive (or shortly after his death), the writing style often seemed antiquated. The appearance of the texts themselves, which were often digitized from microfiche sources, caused many characters to become distorted, e.g., the letter “W” appeared as “VV;” “M” as “nn,” et al. Therefore, the articles have been gently edited to deliver clean, easy-to-read texts for modern readers.

The first article was published a year after Franz’s death, and tells the charming story of an American couple vacationing in Germany who, with the help of a waiter in a restaurant, find Franz’s home address and pay him an impromptu visit. Mr. Finck’s admiration for Franz is evident throughout, and he presents many compelling reasons why listeners who explore his songs will be very glad they did!

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### AN HOUR WITH ROBERT FRANZ

By *Henry T. Finck*<sup>16</sup>

In the quiet Prussian university town of Halle, where Handel was born 208 years ago, there lived until October 24, 1892, one of the greatest song composers the world has ever seen – in some respects the greatest of them all. Like Beethoven, who never heard a note of music from his thirty-second year to his death at the age of fifty-seven, Robert Franz had been deaf almost a quarter of a century. The muscles of his hands also were partly paralyzed, and it was with difficulty that he could write a note, while he ceased composing years ago. There he lived in a modest house in the large university town, seventy-seven years old, yet almost completely ignored by his countrymen.

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<sup>16</sup> Finck, H.T. (1893). An Hour with Robert Franz. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*. XLVI (May-October), pp. 237-244

The life of Robert Franz was almost as uneventful as that of his idol, Bach. As in the case of so many other great composers, his parents refused to recognize or encourage the musical talent which he showed in his childhood, and at school he was punished severely and repeatedly for yielding to his impulse to add a harmonic part to the choral melodies sung by the other children. He reached his fourteenth year before he himself or anyone else suspected that he was destined to be a musician. One day he accidentally came across an old-fashioned piano, or spinet, in the house of a relative,



and as he relates in an autobiographical sketch, this decided his fate. He now went to work, unaided, to unravel the mysteries of musical notation. His devotion finally softened the heart of his father, who bought the old piano for him, and put him under a cheap teacher. Neither this rickety instrument, however, nor his incompetent teacher satisfied him long, and he soon found himself going from church to church on Sundays to hear his favorite chorales, and perchance to get permission from a friendly organist to take his place for a few minutes.

His next step was to try his hand at composing, again unaided; the result being such that, as he remarked in later years, if any youth should come to him with similar productions he would advise him to choose anything but music for a profession. He neglected his other studies at the same time, and at twenty his father sent him to pursue his beloved art under Friedrich Schneider at Dessau. Two years

later he returned with a number of compositions for piano and for voice, to which he continued to add, although his father's fears that music would prove a profitless art for him were shown to have been well founded, for he was unable to get a position or remunerative employment. For this disappointment he found consolation in a loving study of the scores of Bach and Handel, and especially of the songs of Schubert, which made an overwhelming impression on him, and kindled an enthusiasm for that form of art that definitively decided his fate and his vocation.

One result of these studies was that he pitilessly destroyed all his own compositions, and for five years did not again venture to write anything, devoting much of his time to a study of philosophy and aesthetics at the university. It required the magic power of love to arouse his creative faculties from the torpor; and just as Schumann, in the year of his marriage, turned to song, and in that twelve-month period he wrote over a hundred of his inspired *Lieder*. Thus Franz, though in a more modest measure, came forward as a song-composer, and published a collection of twelve *Lieder*, which he dedicated to Schumann. At that time Schumann was approaching the end of his career as critic and professional discoverer of musical geniuses, and his trained eye immediately saw that here was a new light piercing the darkness of Philistinism. These songs, he declared, belonged to the noble modern style which shows what great progress the *Lied* – and the *Lied* alone – has made since the days of Beethoven. “Poetic singers can only do them justice; they are best if sung in solitude and in the twilight.” And so on for a whole page, culminating in the remark, “Were I to dwell on all the exquisite details, I should never come to an end.” Franz dedicated subsequent volumes to Mendelssohn and to Liszt, who were no more obtuse than Schumann. Mendelssohn wrote to him, “May you give us many, many more works like this, as beautiful in conception, as refined in style, and as original and euphonious.” And Liszt wrote his well-known and admirable essay, which, proportionately, did as much to establish Franz's fame as his Weimar essays on Wagner's early opera did for that exiled and unappreciated composer four decades ago.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Liszt's book on Robert Franz was published in 1872, and a facsimile is available on Amazon.com. The text appears in *Fraktur*, the typical font used in 19th-century Germany. A modern German version with side-by-side English translations is currently being prepared, and will soon be available through FranzFound.com.

But while those geniuses, with Chopin, Gade, Henselt, and others, thus recognized and appreciated a fellow-genius, the critics and the public were slow in following suit, and poor Franz shared the fate of Schubert – his *Lieder* sold for a mere song, and he had to earn his scant daily bread as organist, director of the academy of singing, and lecturer on music at the university. The trouble with his ears, which began as early as 1841, and was aggravated by the whistle of a locomotive, gradually became more and more serious, and in 1868 it reached such a point that he was obliged to give up all his duties. As the income from his songs was a mere trifle, he would have been obliged literally to starve, or become an inmate of a poorhouse, had it not been for the generosity of Liszt, Joachim, and Frau Magnus, who gave a series of concerts in Germany, England, and Austria-Hungary which yielded approximately 100,000 German marks.<sup>18</sup> With this money, Franz was able to subsist modestly but comfortably for the last twenty years of his life.

Such, in brief, is the story of Robert Franz's life. My wife and I had for many years been ardent admirers of his compositions, and in July 1891, on our way from Berlin to Bayreuth, we took the opportunity of stopping for a few hours at Halle, in order to make his acquaintance. As we walked up the handsome Leipziger-Straße to the market-place, we were confronted by the Handel statue – a sight which harmonized perfectly with our quest of the great restorer and writer of Handel's scores. It was lunch-time, and, espying a restaurant on one side of the square, we had something to eat, and then asked the waiter to bring us the city directory. Imagine yourself looking in a city directory for Mozart, or Beethoven, or Schubert, with the intention of calling on him! The name was soon found, and quite imposing did it look with all the appendages – Franz, Dr. Robert, Universitäts-Musikdirector, Königlich Bairischer Maximilian Orden für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Herzoglich Sächsisches Coburg-Gothaer Verdienstkreuz für Kunst und Wissenschaft; König-Straße 38, 1. The “Dr.” prefixed to his name recalled the fact that the University of Halle had made him an honorary doctor for his valuable services to art in editing the scores of Bach, Handel, and other old masters.

So König-Straße 38, 1 was to be our goal. It was found without any difficulty, and it was a pleasure to reflect that, thanks to the generosity of Liszt, Joachim, and Frau Magnus, we did not have to

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<sup>18</sup> In US Dollars this would have been approximately \$22,000.

search for the great song-writer in a garret, but found him occupying spacious rooms on the second floor of a large apartment house on one of the main streets, facing an open place with trees and shrubbery. We had been told in Berlin that his wife had died only three months before, so we did not know whether he would receive a visit from strangers. The parlor was furnished in the usual simple German style. The door presently opened, and in walked the immortal tone-poet, a rather large man, with a broad face, square chin, and in a certain way resembling Liszt. His forehead receded more than Liszt's, but there was much the same expression of firmness about his mouth. He was somewhat bald, but his hair was still only iron-gray, although he had passed his seventy-seventh birthday. He held out his hand with a cordial gesture and greeting, but not a cordial pressure, for (alas!) of each of his hands all but the first two fingers are paralyzed.

“Do you understand German?” was his first question, and, without waiting for an answer – for the best and saddest of reasons – he continued, “I (alas!) am absolutely deaf, and if you wish to say anything to me I must beg you to write it on one of those slates.”

Two ordinary school-slates, with moist sponges attached, lay on the piano. I wrote a few words on one of them.

“America again!” he exclaimed, after reading what I had written. “Most of my friends seem to be Americans. I do not say this as a mere polite phrase, but because it is actually true. I assure you that of every six letters I receive, five are from America or England. The Germans do not seem to be aware of my existence. You know how it is in this country. Envy and jealousy are so rampant that a man who does anything that rises above the average is in danger of being torn to pieces.<sup>19</sup> We have hundreds of musicians, each of whom has a desk full of manuscripts which he is anxious that the world should appreciate; hence each of these men regards everyone else as his natural rival and enemy, who must be belittled or ignored as much as possible. Other nations are proud of their

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<sup>19</sup> Finck adds a footnote: “I cannot vouch for the exact words used by Franz, which, moreover, were spoken in German. But as I noted down his remarks minutely, immediately after leaving him, I can, at least, vouch for the substantial accuracy of what is here recorded.”



authors and composers – look at France, England, and Italy – but the Germans ignore theirs till they are dead, and then they erect statues to their memory.”

He arose to get a copy of the London “Musical Times,” which was lying on the piano. “You have noticed, perhaps,” he said, “that my name has been bandied about a good deal lately in England apropos of the use of my edition of the *Messiah* at a music festival. It is a curious thing,” – and he laughed heartily – “but Mr. Prout has told those critics the truth. The old masters did not elaborate their scores in all the details, but filled them out at the organ during the performance. For modern purposes these missing parts have to be filled out, as far as possible, in the spirit of the old masters. Bach and Handel were my earliest masters, my friends and companions through life, and I have done my best to preserve their spirit in my additional accompaniments. Some of my ‘bold changes’ that the English critics have complained of were simply restorations of Handel’s text which Mozart had altered! You see, there are pedants in music, as in every other department of learning – men who swear by the letter and miss the spirit. I was once present at the funeral services of a very orthodox minister. His colleague, in his eulogy of the deceased, dwelt on the fact that he had believed so firmly in the letter of the Bible that if he had read therein that the city of Halle is situated in America he would have believed it.”<sup>20</sup>

“Besides,” he continued, “we must remember that Bach and Handel were human beings, who made errors like all other mortals, which their editors today must not overlook. They wrote enormous quantities of music – it would take a man forty years merely to copy what Handel or Bach wrote. Among Handel’s manuscripts in England there was found a detail which neatly showed how rapidly that composer wrote. On the top of a left-hand page of a large score, sand was found adhering to the notes, showing that before the ink had had time to dry on the first lines of that page, Handel’s pen must have reached the bottom of the next page!” He rose again, and brought us a facsimile reprint of the *Messiah* score. “Here you can see how hastily the work was done: here are a few lines canceled with the stroke of the pen, here a bar blotted out with a daub of ink, and here (this seemed to amuse him particularly) see how he has actually blotted out notes with his finger, too impatient to erase

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<sup>20</sup> Bennett, J. (1891), Mr. Prout and “The Critics.” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 32(579), pp. 267-268

them.” He closed the score, and continued: “Ah, but these were the greatest of all masters! Today music appears to be manufactured; in Mozart’s days it grew, and still more so in the days of Bach and Handel: their thoughts came spontaneously, and shaped themselves naturally, like crystals. Today we have music which has neither melody nor harmony nor rhythm. Moreover, the theater has absorbed all our musical life; all the arts contribute, but not always their best. And – to use a homely simile – it is the waiter who serves the dishes that gets all the honors, while the cook, whose skill has devised them, is unseen and uncared for. You read about that opera singer the other day – horses unhitched, drawn to hotel by enthusiasts. But the composer whom the singer used as a pedestal, who cares for him?”

He paused a moment, and I wrote on the slate, “Do you still compose songs?”

“No,” was his answer; “when a man has reached his seventy-sixth year he does not care to compose anymore.” Then he suddenly exclaimed, “But do you know my wife’s songs?” while a sort of triumphant expression came over his face.

I had not seen them, and he brought a copy from the piano – a collection of songs by Marie Hinrichs. To the eye they looked much like his own songs. As the reader doubtless knows, there is an individual appearance about each composer’s (printed) scores that makes it easy for an expert to tell at a glance the author of a piece placed before him; and as Clara Schumann’s songs resemble her husband’s, why should not those of Marie Hinrichs resemble Franz’s?



Ah, but those are songs!” he exclaimed. He placed his finger on one, and followed the melody as he hummed it. Being absolutely deaf, he could not get all the intervals of the melody correctly, but only the general drift – a point of psychologic interest, for his speaking voice was always correctly modulated, and had none of the harsh quality so common to the deaf. It was indeed uncommonly expressive, had an insinuating emotional quality, and sometimes rose to a pitch of real eloquence, especially when he was speaking of his wife. After humming the melody, he read the underlying poem by Heine to show how beautifully the two harmonized. It was most pathetic to see the deaf old master, shut out from the tone-world he had helped to create, dwelling for fifteen minutes on the songs of his wife – of his own, he seemed to have no thought – with tears repeatedly rolling down his cheeks. “Her picture is in

the other room – did you see it? No? Then I must get it.” Placing it in my wife’s hands, he exclaimed: “There, take a good look at that! Such a face you will never see again!” And we could not but reflect what an inestimable boon it must have been for the poor composer in his more than twenty years of deafness to have such a companion, whose kindness of heart is mirrored in her countenance. No wonder he worshiped her above his own works, above even his idols, Bach and Handel. “Her eyes are black,” my wife whispered; “now I know why his black-eyed song is one of his best.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This song can be heard on Album One, track 5, *Bitte*, Op. 9, No. 3

I asked him if he would kindly copy for me a few bars from one of his favorite songs. “I am very sorry,” he replied, “but my paralyzed fingers make it so difficult for me to write that I have not even sent a letter yet to my daughter, who has been absent several weeks.” Nevertheless, he sat down and copied a few bars with a pencil. I told him I intended to write an article about him for an American magazine, and asked for permission to illustrate it with his own and his wife’s portrait. “My own pictures,” he explained, after resuming his seat, “are all bad; I have never succeeded in getting a good one. My face is so completely changed by expression that when I sit down before that infernal machine I am not myself. This picture, which you will get, is the only tolerable one – note the amused expression on it. It happened in this way. All the university professors were to be photographed. I sat eleven times, and was about to give up in despair, when as a final attempt, the photographer suggested that I should sit down at the table. There was a book on it and a piece of music. The book contained Heine’s poems, and the song was that barrel-organ piece, *The Little Fisher Girl*. The contrast struck me as being so ludicrous that a smile crept over my face, and the wary photographer took this opportunity to fix it, as you see. I have another picture which is better than this, but it is taken from behind. It is a sketch of me made by a young lady.” It showed him walking in the woods, with his overcoat on, and his umbrella under his left arm. There is no grace in it, but very much character – every inch a German savant, reminding one somewhat of that well-known semi-caricature of



Beethoven by Lyser:<sup>22</sup> “See what life there is in all those lines,” he commented; “there you see a real picture, although the face is not visible. Some Berlin critics, by the way, have a theory that I do not compose my own songs, but hire a somnambulist, who dictates them to me, and that I then hypnotize him again to correct the manuscript – the cruelest cut of all! Perhaps my picture is to blame; no one in looking at it would believe that I had written those songs.” This reminded me of a little Gounod anecdote a young lady once told me. She met Gounod at a Viardot-Garcia soirée, and in a course of chat with him remarked that one would hardly suspect from his appearance that he could have written such an inspired work as “Faust.” Whereupon Gounod replied with a smile, “Il faut être Américaine pour dire cela!” (“You have to be an American to say that!”)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The famous Lyser sketch does not appear in the original Finck article, but is shown here for convenient reference.

<sup>23</sup> Pauline Viardot-Garcia (1821-1910) was a French mezzo-soprano and a truly cosmopolitan artist. Her support and friendship inspired such figures as Hector Berlioz, Johannes Brahms, César Franck, Jules Massenet, Giacomo Meyerbeer, and Camille Saint-Saëns to write major works for her. Other close friends included Frédéric Chopin, Gustave Corot, Gustave Doré, Heinrich Heine, Franz Liszt, George Sand, and Clara Schumann. (Source: *Wikipedia*, *The Free Encyclopedia*, June 2017)



Fearing that we might fatigue our entertaining host, we now rose to leave. His last words were a request to greet certain of his American friends cordially. He directed the maid to accompany us to the photographer, and on the way we learned from her some interesting particulars regarding her master's habits and daily doings. She said that he was still quite robust, and took a four-hour walk every day when the weather permitted, his hours being from 3 to 7 p.m., and his favorite haunts the woods. One of his eccentricities, she said, was the habit of stopping to crush every cherrystone he saw on the sidewalks. For this she could give no reason except that, being unable to converse with anyone during his walks, he sought diversion in that way. It reminds one of Dr. Johnson's habit of touching every picket of a fence as he passed, and even stepping back if he accidentally missed one. Franz always retired at nine, got up at ten, and often read

in bed. Sometimes he played a few bars on the piano; but with the use of only a few fingers on each hand, and no ears to guide them, the result was usually not as pleasant as it might have been. His daughter, as already stated, was away on a visit, and he had a son who was a professor at Leipzig. He was always pleased, the maid said, when visitors called on him; but they were few and far between. Strange people, these Germans, thus to neglect their men of genius during their lifetime. Now that Robert Franz is dead a monument will no doubt be erected to him on the marketplace at Halle, facing the Handel statue; critics and antiquarians will spend days and weeks in searching old newspapers and letters for the tiniest bits of information regarding his habits, his appearance, his work, and his opinions; while as long as he lived among them, a very treasure-house of information and aesthetic suggestion, no one even took the trouble to ring his doorbell! The plain truth is that

the Germans, as a nation, do not even yet realize what a great genius Robert Franz was, although other men of genius – Liszt especially, and Schumann – told them all about it several decades ago. In Liszt’s admirable brochure on Franz there is a passage which Americans will always read with pride, for it points out the fact that it was in America that Robert Franz’s genius was first recognized generally, and his songs frequently heard in concert halls, thanks largely to the missionary work of Mr. Otto Dresel in Boston.<sup>24</sup>

This is something to be grateful for, but it is not a tithe of what is due to Franz. It must be said that in no branch of music are there so many gems of the purest water unknown to the public at large as in that of the *Lied*, or lyric song, from Schubert to the present day. When Schubert died, only two or three of his six hundred songs were generally known, and to the present day many of his most inspired *Lieder* are utterly unknown to the public. As regards Franz, I have often been amazed to find even enthusiastic amateurs, who know almost every opera and piano piece by heart, utterly ignorant of his immortal songs. After I had made them procure the collections published in the Peters and Breitkopf-Härtel editions, their amazement at their oversight was soon as great as mine had been, and was equaled only by their ardent gratitude. They wondered with considerable indignation why the great vocalists of the day had been so remiss in making them acquainted with these songs. The answer to this is very simple: the singers ignore the Franz songs because they do not consider them “grateful” (*dankbar*, as the Germans would say); that is, because they were not written mainly with a view to showing off the singer’s best notes, but were inspired by purely musical motives. What annoys the singers especially is that in these songs the voice so often dies away in the last few bars of the piano part, instead of soaring up to a few final high loud notes, which are so provocative of cheap applause. But these singers forget one thing: they forget that while the applause of the illiterate in music can always be cheaply bought with a loud, high note, a trill, or a run up and down the scale, musical people, who after all are occasionally seen at concerts, are only disgusted by such claptrap, and would have more respect for singers if they remembered that the interpreter is of less importance

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<sup>24</sup> While no statue was ever erected in the Halle (Saale) market place, Franz’s beloved *Singakademie* was renamed in the early 1900s to *Musikschule Robert Franz*, and the street on which the school is located was also renamed *Robert Franz Ring*, which runs a lengthy north-to-south span through the center of Halle.

than the creator. What these musical people want to hear is a Franz or other song honestly sung, and the poem to which it is wedded distinctly declaimed. It might surprise those singers to find what a great “effect” they could produce by allowing the poet and the composer to speak directly to the audience, keeping their vocal egotism and vanity entirely in the background.

It is, no doubt, true that lyric songs, like lyric poems, are better suited for home enjoyment than for a public place. In a concert hall it is the dramatic songs, like Schubert’s *Erlkönig* or Schumann’s *Die beiden Grenadiere*, that are most applauded; but in Franz’s songs there is little of the dramatic element. They are usually true lyrics – expressions of moods and personal feelings which only a hearer of poetic temperament can fully appreciate. Dramatic moods are easily imposed on a large audience by acting or reciting stirring events, but lyric moods are as subtle and evanescent as the fragrance of a violet, and only an artist of rare magnetism can impose them on a multitude. Such singers are not abundant at present; hence Franz’s lyrics will not, perhaps, be in great vogue in our concert halls for some time to come. But for the home circle, nothing is better suited than these songs; familiarity with them invariably leads to enthusiastic admiration. Lovers of lyric poetry will especially relish them. It would be hardly an exaggeration to say that those who know well the poetic style and physiognomy of Heine, Göthe, Burns, Mirza Schaffy, Lenau, Eichendorff and Osterwald well could often tell from the color and atmosphere of a Franz song (without having heard the words) to what poet it belongs, so wonderfully does he individualize in his style, as Liszt has shown in his masterful analysis. And, even more than Schubert, Franz has proved by his clinging, tender melodies that Wagner was right in describing the union of poetry and music as a marriage in which music is the feminine element. Only two other composers – Chopin and Schubert – have shown such a refined and tender feminine spirit in their music as Franz.

In the home circle, Franz’s songs are a source of endless delight, even to those who cannot sing; for it is one of their most striking peculiarities that the vocal and the piano parts are so closely interwoven that it is easy to play both parts together, and thus make a complete “song without words;” indeed, in not a few cases, the “accompaniment” contains the whole of the vocal melody, so that the voice part need not even be played along. This is one of the points in which Franz resembles Wagner, of many parts of whose operas the same might be said. So, far from being a



shortcoming, as some have maintained, this is the very perfection of musico-poetic art; for in this last and highest development of modern music the voice is no longer the only bearer of the melody, but every harmonic part of the accompaniment is a melody. Such accompaniments are termed polyphonic, or many-melodied, and with these the chief function of the voice becomes the distinct melodious declamation and interpretation of the poetry. Franz is as conscientious as Wagner in never sacrificing the poet to the musician. In Wagner's operas the singer is primarily an actor representing the dramatic poet, and in Franz's songs he represents the lyric poet, toward whom is his first duty, while the orchestra or the piano represents the claims of the musician. It was not a mere accident, but a common artistic instinct, that made Franz, in 1850, an enthusiastic convert to Wagnerism, after hearing *Lohengrin*, and that led Wagner to keep Franz's songs side by side with Bach, constantly on his piano during the period in which he was composing his Nibelung Trilogy in Switzerland.

Many of Franz's songs, as I have just said, are beautiful if played on the piano alone, unaltered or with slight changes. Liszt, besides providing for Franz financially, and pleading his cause eloquently in a brochure (which should be translated into English),<sup>25</sup> also translated a number of Franz's best songs into the most elegant pianistic idiom, and in some instances even improved on Franz in a justifiable way, as in the wonderful *Das ist ein Brausen und Heulen*, where the introductory bars have a more realistic stormy effect than the original version. But however delightful these songs may be as simple piano pieces, to get their full beauty the vocal part must be added. Without the voice they will charm; with the voice they will move to tears. Read one of the poems alone, play the music alone, and then perform them both together; and you will realize that poetry and music combined are a greater emotional power than either of them alone. Rubinstein has recently proclaimed that pure instrumental music is superior to music united with poetry; but I think most of my readers will agree with Wagner on this point, and feel with Schumann when he wrote to a friend in 1840: "I can hardly tell you how delightful it is to write for the voice as compared with instrumental composition, and what a stir and tumult I feel within me when I sit down to it."

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<sup>25</sup> An English translation of Liszt's "brochure" is in preparation and will be available through FranzFound.com.

A whole number of this magazine, and scores of illustrations in musical type, would be required to point out all the peculiarities and evidences of original genius in Franz's songs. Considerations of space permit me to dwell on only two of their principal characteristics: namely, their relations to the German chorale and the German folk song. It is to the melodious folk song which they hear at home from their infancy, and to the superb harmonic chorales which they hear constantly in church - and formerly played by trombones on church towers thrice daily - that the Germans owe the fact that they have become the most musical of nations. The chorale and the *Volkslied* are the basis of what is most German in music, from Bach to Franz; and in no other composer are these two elements more conspicuous than in the last-named. The chorale was Franz's first love. His earliest recollection is of hearing, as a child of three years, Luther's famous chorale, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A Mighty Fortress is Our God), blown by trombones on a church tower. His father was also fond of chorales, and often had them sung in his house. Later in life, Robert learned to love and worship the grandest chorales ever written, those of Bach, which he himself pronounced the most potent of the forces which molded his style. A collection of Bach's chorales is published by Breitkopf and Härtel. I know of nothing else in music so well calculated to develop a taste for the higher harmonic side of music in young minds than the daily playing of them. Many of Franz's best songs might be simply defined as melodious chorales in modern harmonic garb, in which romantic love and religious devotion are exquisitely blended. Among the best of these are *O danke nicht für diese Lieder*,<sup>26</sup> *Schemen erloschener Lieder* and *Leise zieht durch mein Gemüth*. In the melodies of these songs, the same varied harmonies are latent as in the old chorales, and Franz has enriched them with all the exquisite modulations of the modern German schools, which prove that harmony and modulation have even a greater emotional power than melody itself. And besides mingling the major and minor modes in that delightful brotherly fashion which Schubert first taught the world, Franz has enriched modern music by reviving the medieval church modes in his harmonies, which adds still greater variety to the emotional tints, and points out one of the paths in which the music of the future will develop.

But the most remarkable thing about Franz's songs is that while thus embodying all that is best and most artistic and advanced in modern music, they have at the same time many of the characteristics

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<sup>26</sup> "O danke nicht für diese Lieder" is the first line of *Widmung*, Op. 14, No. 1, and can be heard on Album One, track 44.

of the simplest and most primitive form of genuine music – namely, the folk song. Some of his songs, like *Mei Mutter mag mi net* and *Lieber Schatz sei wieder gut mir*,<sup>27</sup> might have originated among the people, so far as the melody and tone are concerned; and very many of his other songs have the charming naïveté, simplicity and spontaneity of the folk song. Here then, we have a most remarkable phenomenon. Folk songs, as everybody knows, spring up among the people like proverbs, one man originating them, another improving on them, until, like pebbles in the bed of a brook, they have become smoothed and polished to perfection. Such songs, we are inclined to think, were made only in the good old times; but here we have had among us a genius who not only originated the scores of them, but with his own hand polished them until they surpassed in brilliancy the oldest of the song-pebbles.

Franz has written no fewer than 267 pieces, and among them are fewer imperfect or uninteresting ones than among the collections of any other songwriter, thanks to his habit of self-criticism. The other day I went through the first volume of the Peters Edition of these *Lieder* with a pencil, marking those I considered especially good. When I got through, I found I had marked all but two or three in a collection of forty! The second volume has not so many of the best, while the third and fourth have perhaps even more. Many good ones not included in these volumes are contained in the Breitkopf-Härtel issue. These five volumes embrace about one half of the Franz songs. The other half are not yet printed in an English edition. When they are, it is to be hoped that they will be supplied with less villainous English translations than many of the poems in the above collection. A good poetic and musical translation of the Franz songs is a task worthy of one of our greatest lyric poets – a task which would add many a leaf to his laurels – for these are the lyric songs of the future.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “*Lieber Schatz sei wieder gut mir*” is the first line of *In dem Dornbusch*, Op. 26, No. 2, and can be heard on Album One, track 41.

<sup>28</sup> The practice of adding English underlays to songs written in other languages is considered obsolete by most experts today. Franz’s meticulous approach in setting German poems to music— using specific melodies, rhythms, and tempi – creates an awkward and nearly impossible task for anyone who attempts to replace the German with English. In an effort to make the English words fit under the notes, the translator is eventually forced to make compromises in the essential meaning of the poem. This perhaps explains Finck’s use of the word “villainous” to describe the English translations he had thus far encountered.



## FOUR GREAT SONG-COMPOSERS: SCHUBERT, SCHUMANN, FRANZ, LISZT

By George T. Ferris<sup>29</sup>

Among the contemporary masters of the musical lyric, the two most shining names are those of Robert Franz and Franz Liszt, both of marked individuality, and, though indirectly molded by the influence of Schubert and Schumann, creative minds of a striking type. The circumstances of the two composers have been in the most picturesque contrast. Franz has led a quiet, serene life, almost dull in its monotony, in a small German town, and Franz Liszt has been the idolized favorite of Europe, on whom sovereigns have showered diamonds and orders, fair women their most brilliant smiles, and the haughtiest circles lavish proffers of friendship.

The same art-impulse, however, has been strikingly characteristic of both men as song-composers, or, perhaps, to express it more accurately, the same art-limitation. Their musical inspiration is directly dependent on the poetic strength of the *Lied*. Either one of these composers would be utterly at a loss to treat a poem which lacked beauty and force. With but little command over absolute music, that flow of melody which pours from some natures like a perennial spring, the poetry of word is necessary to evoke poetry of tone. In other respects, the two musicians differ as widely mentally as they do in external surroundings.

Robert Franz, like Schumann, was embarrassed in his youth by the bitter opposition of his family to his adoption of music, and, like the great apostle of romantic music, his steady perseverance wore it out. He made himself a severe student of the great masters, and rapidly acquired a deep knowledge of the mysteries of harmony and counterpoint. There are no songs with such intricate and difficult accompaniments, though always vital to the lyrical motive, as those of Robert Franz. For a long time, even after he felt himself fully equipped, Franz refrained from artistic production, waiting until the

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<sup>29</sup> Ferris, G. (1876). Four Great Song Composers: Schubert, Schumann, Franz, Liszt. *Appleton's Journal*, 1(2), pp. 109-114

processes of fermenting and clarifying should end, in the meantime promising he would yet have a word to say for himself. With him, as with many other men of genius, the blow which broke the seal of inspiration was an affair of the heart. He loved a beautiful and accomplished woman, but loved unfortunately. The catastrophe ripened him into artistic maturity, and the very first effort of his lyric power was marked by surprising symmetry and fullness of power. He wrote to give overflow to his deep feelings, and the song came from his heart of hearts. Robert Schumann, the generous critic, gave this first work an enthusiastic welcome, and the young composer leaped into reputation at a bound. Of the four hundred or more songs written by Robert Franz, there are perhaps fifty which rank as masterpieces.

His life has passed devoid of incident, though rich in spiritual incident and passion, as his *Lieder* unmistakably show. Though the instrumental setting of this composer's songs is so elaborate and beautiful oftentimes, we frequently find him at his best in treating words full of the simplicity and naiveté of the old *Volkslied*. One of the most striking features of Franz as a composer is found in the delicate light and shade, introduced into the songs by the simplest means, which none but a man of genius would think of; for it is the great artist who attains his ends through the simplest effects. We get the idea of one never carried away by his genius, or delivering passionate utterances from the Delphic tripod, but the master of all his powers, the conscious and skillful ruler of his own inspirations. If the sense of spontaneous freshness is sometimes lost, perhaps there is a gain in breadth and finish. If Schubert has unequaled melody and dramatic force, Schumann drastic and pointed intensity, Robert Franz deserves the palm for the finish and symmetry of his work.

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## ROBERT FRANZ AND HIS SONGS

By Henry Edward Krehbiel<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Krehbiel, H. E. (1907). *A Collection of Sixty-Two Songs with Piano Accompaniment*. New York: G. Schirmer, pp. i-viii

In introducing to the public this collection of songs composed by Robert Franz, it seems to me that I can do no better service, either to the songs or the public, than to point out some of the essential features of the composer's art, and present a picture of him in his attitude towards the music of his day and ours.

Franz's life story is neither large nor romantic, and one would find better expression of him in a review of his artistic strivings, rather than the plain and simple incidents which made up his career. It was, moreover, his strong desire to be known only through his artistic creations. It is most noteworthy that there is little record of a biography. His private life was quiet, serene and uneventful, though burdened with the great affliction of deafness. He took no part in current polemics touching art, though his career compassed a period in which controversy was particularly angry and vociferous. He called himself a radical, but his radicalism was not that of his many contemporaries who thought, or professed to think, that progress demanded the destruction of the achievements of the past. In those achievements he recognized principles of artistic truth and beauty which to him seemed immutable and which, for that reason, should serve forever to vitalize all the manifestations that mark real artistic progress. He was, in fact, at once purist and radical, classicist and romanticist, reactionary and revolutionist. He believed that there was new wine in the music of his day, and that new wine should have new bottles; but he believed also that some old wine was good and that old bottles were suited to its preservation. He did not stand in the market-place proclaiming his wine, his bottles or himself.

One circumstance regarding Franz's name led to misunderstandings and undeserved wicked reprobation from his critics: the family name of the composer was not Franz, but Knauth. Christoph Knauth, his father, was part of a large family near Halle, where the composer was born on June 28, 1815. For centuries the family was involved in all aspects of the salt business. They thus enjoyed certain privileges, preserved certain peculiarities of dress and behavior, intermarried and developed traits which, to a degree, segregated them from the rest of the people of Halle. Christoph Knauth belonged to the mercantile branch of the family, and so did his brother. This caused confusion at the post office, and thus a mutual understanding was reached to change Christoph's family name to Franz. Robert never answered to another surname, but it was not until he had reached manhood

that he took legal steps to officially acquire the name. When this fact became known after the composer had become famous enough to stir up critical enmity, there were malevolent gossips who insinuated, when they did not flatly say, that Robert Franz had egotistically compounded his name out of the Christian names of Schumann and Schubert.

Despite his indifference to that contemporary notoriety which is so often looked upon as fame, Franz knew a historian named Dr. Wilhelm Waldmann, who cultivated an intimate correspondence with him for ten years for the express purpose of noting down his utterances on subjects pertaining to his art, and preserving them for posterity. Franz knew the purpose and met his friend's questionings with entire candor. From Dr. Waldmann's little book entitled, *Robert Franz: Gespräche aus zehn Jahren*, it is possible to acquire accurate knowledge of the composer's mental and moral attitude toward most of the artistic problems of his day.<sup>31</sup> As has been said, Franz was not given to polemics: "Give heed to my songs; in them you will find written down the manner of man I was."

When Franz spoke, it was as if the facts in each case were not open to discussion. He was a reflective composer who did not always correctly value the charm of spontaneous and rhapsodic utterance in others. Beethoven's songs he compared to marble statues, "perfect in form but cold and bloodless." Franz was also known for saying that one of Beethoven's most famous songs, *Adelaide*, should have been played on a clarinet, not sung by a voice. He conceded warmth of feeling to Schubert, but thought him too predominantly a melodist. Schubert's melodies, he said, frequently go beyond the limits incited by the text, a single motive growing into a dramatic scene not at all called for by the poem. Franz found another cause of weakness in Schubert's art in his accompaniments, which, he said, were melody-accompaniments and nothing more.

When it came to Mendelssohn and Schumann, Franz admired Mendelssohn not only for his individual genius, but also because of the admiration which he felt in common with him for J. S.

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<sup>31</sup> A *Fraktur* facsimile of this book (the standard font used in late-19<sup>th</sup> century Germany) can easily be found online. A modern German version with side-by-side English translations is currently being prepared, and will soon be available through FranzFound.com.



Bach. It was Mendelssohn's organ playing that made him ponder on the possible vocal effects of Bach's cantatas. He confessed that Mendelssohn's influence had been very potent for the purification of the popular taste in music; yet he believed that Mendelssohn had given him his approval only so long as he saw in him a disciple, a follower of his style; and he did not hesitate to say that it was due to the musical life of which he and Schumann were the inspiration that appreciation of his songs was long withheld in Leipzig. Franz told Waldmann, "Mendelssohn said there was no melody in my songs, and that remained a dogma a long time in Leipzig, almost until now. So long as Schleinitz was alive, perhaps not a note of mine was sung in the Gewandhaus. One thing dates back to Mendelssohn and Schumann which did not exist before them: the activity of the cliques. They led Mendelssohn and Schumann to compose things and do things which they never would have been guilty of, of their own volition. Therefore, they were accepted and lauded by their partisans."

Franz first met Mendelssohn at the house of a mutual acquaintance in Halle. He describes the incident to Waldmann, his faithful chronicler: "I showed him my Op. 1 (Twelve Songs). He was pleased, and played on the pianoforte first his own melody *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges* and the melodies of Nos. 1 and 3 of my Op. 1, woven into a fantasia, wonderfully. Yes, he was a great artist. My Op. 1 (not Op. 2), and Op. 3 even more, have in them something that looks as if I intended to follow in his footsteps, and thus far he was in agreement with me; but from Op. 4 on, he let me drop. It was all over when he found that I did not intend to carry his train. Schumann went with me as far as Op. 11; then he saw that I was not traveling his road, and wanted to know nothing more of me. My songs will live longer than Mendelssohn's. It is singular how these things are worn out by excessive use. In passing through the hands of every shoemaker and tailor, some of the grime which such people have on their hands clings to them; their brilliancy is dimmed, and we do not like to hear the songs anymore." Yet he admired in Mendelssohn's music the very element which he ranked highest in his own style, as exemplified in clarity of form. "You know that I value Liszt very highly," he remarked to Waldmann, "but that has nothing to do with his compositions; and neither he nor I will ever compose a *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture." He stoutly resented the charge that he was an imitator of Schubert and Schumann. They being his predecessors, he admitted that he had studied their achievements and tried to emulate them in their excellences, while also trying to avoid

their errors. “I shall take good care not to copy the mystical and paradoxical things in Schumann,” said he, and he faulted Schubert severely for his lack of discrimination in the choice of poetical texts. He held that, though correct declamation was an essential thing in songwriting, Schumann had brought it too much into the foreground, to the forgetting of the purely musical element, to which he himself clung. “One must have a clear conception of the words, then rhythm and declamation will follow of their own accord.”

Franz called himself a radical in music. “As regards my attitude towards the music of today, I am not only progressive but radical, wholly radical. This does not mean that I should like either to change or eliminate a single note either of Bach’s or Handel’s. No; but I am radical in relation to the music of today.” In view of such an attitude, and the fact that Liszt and Wagner were among the earliest admirers of his songs, it is not strange that the champions of the nineteenth century hailed Franz as one of themselves and insisted on making of him one of Wagner’s camp followers. They were helped in this not a little by the circumstance that criticism of Robert Franz and his songs came chiefly from the ranks of what Franz and his friends always dubbed the Mendelssohn and Schumann clique. It is not easy to cite exactly the extreme radicalism professed by Franz himself; still less the great bond of union between his songs and the music of Wagner, the great musical dramatist of the nineteenth century. Franz himself seems to have been unable to go further than to point out the intimate relationship which exists between the words and music in his songs and Wagner’s dramas. However, it may have appeared to the heated minds of the controversialists that this is nothing novel. In principle, Wagner was not a whit in advance of the inventors of the monodic art form, out of which grew the Italian opera three hundred years ago. Quite as much as he, they declared that melodies adapted to the words of a drama should grow out of the words, be united to them, as Weber once said, in a kind of “angelic wedlock.” It is a great charm in Franz’s songs that the melodies seem to rise from the poems like an exhalation, but there have been such melodies ever since the art of music outgrew its period of sterile formalism. There were such, indeed, before the artistic song had been invented. Franz’s romanticism was rooted in the old German folk song, and this was as truly an emanation of emotionalism, and the eloquence inseparable from natural poetic expression, as the most finished of the products of Franz’s highly sophisticated muse. Franz was proud of Wagner’s fondness for his songs, and more than flattered when, on a visit he made to Zurich, the revolutionary

refugee opened his bookcase to show his visitor that, save the scores of Bach and Beethoven, his songs constituted the entire musical library possessed by the dramatic master.

When the controversy about the “Music of the Future” began to rage, Franz strongly resented being considered to be among the Wagnerites; so strongly, indeed, that there was no continuing friendship between the two men. “There should be an end to the comparisons between myself and Wagner,” he said to Waldmann; “we are diametrically opposed to one another. There is no significance in the fact that we approach each other in principle as regards the reproduction of the text in music.” At another time: “Look at Schubert’s song *Die Rose*. There you’ll find the Lohengrin motive *Mein lieber Schwan* very plainly. My son called my attention to the fact that in my song *Wiedersehen*, Op. 51, there is a recitative passage which is the fate motif from *Die Walküre*. But this Op. 51 was composed by me in 1844. So long did it lie in my writing desk; not a soul saw it, nor did Wagner; yet it’s the motif. Now somebody will come and say I copied Wagner. Why should we not once have hit upon the same thing? I have said to you before that words and music are merged in each other in my songs, the music growing out of the text, so to speak. That, too, is Wagner’s principle. There is another reason for our differing forms: if we were to treat the same subject, my work would not look like his. It rests on this: Wagner is highly gifted naturally as poet, painter, musician. No side of him was specially favored in his education, and hence he was drawn in different directions. To this must be added his years of life as conductor in small theatres and association with bad music until his talent made its own channel. He has tremendous willpower. In his writings he is too comprehensive, proving again that he is not led by music alone, but fascinated also by other subjects. Wagner was an honest, open, straightforward character. He proclaimed his wants, made no concealment, and you must not misunderstand me: I never quarreled with him. He wanted an army of followers, and because I could not persuade myself to join it, it was all over with me. We never had anything to do with each other afterwards.”

Wagner was in all things a dramatist; Franz in all things a lyricist. The view which Wagner took of songs was one with which Franz could have no sympathy. “When I was with Wagner in Munich, he sang and played a few of my songs. But how did he sing them? He declaimed them, with extravagant

pathos, dramatically. ‘You must write operas,’ he called out to me; but whoever has looked a little deeply into my songs knows that the dramatic element in them is nil; and it ought to be so.”

No doubt it was the unbridled dramatic tendency of composers, except those of insipid love-songs, which made Franz believe that the lyrical feeling had died out of music, and that his songs alone were keeping alive the refulgent spark which had glowed in Schubert and Schumann. He thought the bombastic style of dramatic utterance had killed the feeling for which he had to hark back to Handel and Bach. The former was his particular model in the treatment of the voice. Handel, if anybody, he said, understood the *bel canto* of the Italians, and it was because he had taken his vocal style as a model that baritone and pedagogue Manuel García said that of all German songs, Franz's were best adapted to the singing voice.

Bach was Franz's model not only for the instrumental part, but for much else. From Bach, he learned the value of symmetry, of orderly, logical, and organic development. This latter principle was so dear to him that he was willing to sacrifice what he considered of prime importance in song composition: correct and truthful declamation when the verse structure compelled a compromise for the sake of the music. “Note this about my songs,” said he to Waldmann: “every single one has an introduction, a middle, and then a point (climax). Many composers set the words as they stand, and make shipwreck at the close because the words there often demand something entirely different from what has been prefaced. My songs already disclose in the beginning, that is, in the first part, where they are to come out; the conclusion is prepared. Note that in Bach, Beethoven, and my songs, you will always find that a certain motive forms the basis of the composition. In this motive, however, the position of every note is important. The motive must be capable of development, so that something can be built upon it. The foundation of a song is generally a motive which corresponds in character with the contents of the text. Out of this, the entire song develops itself. Of course such a motive must have a content; it must be musical so that something can be made of it.”

Pursuing the methods of Bach, which were enforced upon Franz by the strict, old-fashioned training he underwent at Dessau, he naturally conceived a love for rugged harmonic sequences, and acquired a mastery of the art of expressive dissonance which is characteristic of him. He may have also learned

from Bach the use of delineative devices, which appear in his songs. In some cases, the device is purely external, a frank imitation of nature; in others the pictorial suggestion is symbolical, calling for an exercise of the imagination. All close students of Bach must know how plastic all manner of delineative devices were in his hands, and how readily they lent themselves there to his strict constructive methods. Franz, too, knew the value of these devices. By his own confession he wanted his singers to hear the song of birds in *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*, and to feel the movement of water in *Auf dem Meere*. In *Umsonst*, he conceived the reiterated tone of A-natural as the primal tone of all nature, echoing here a notion like that of the Chinese musical philosophy, which sets forth F-natural as the musical symbol of the universe.<sup>32</sup>

Franz refused to allow his songs to be judged by the merit or demerit of individual details in each. He wanted not only that a song should be judged as a whole, but also that the students of them should study them all in order to penetrate into the spirit of his settings. “One ought not to seize upon details in my songs, and subject them to examination. You would not consider a statue beautiful because of the peculiar beauty of a leg or an arm, but because the whole is beautiful. My songs, too, must be considered as wholes.” In this spirit he responded to a critic: “A book on rhythm has recently appeared, but I do not want to read it. I hear, however, that he is after me with sharp criticism again, and cites the song *Aus meinen grossen Schmerzen*.<sup>33</sup> He italicized the word ‘Aus,’ and faulted me for having accentuated it, though I could do nothing else. ‘Out of my great Sorrows I make the little songs.’ It is all a matter of course. If I had accentuated ‘meinen,’ it would have been fundamentally wrong, for the antithesis lies in ‘great’ and ‘little’ and these alone were the words to receive stress. After all, the accentuation of single words is a side-issue. It is seldom that a musical phrase can be reformed, for the sake of a significance, without destruction. Musical content is the principal thing, not the accent on this or the other word. Look at Bach. All his music is symbolical. If you come across the word heaven, you may be sure that the tones will ascend on high; if he speaks of death, they will as surely go down. In his great *Mass in B minor* such things pepper the pages. In

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<sup>32</sup> All three of these songs can be heard on Album One, tracks 2, 28 and 12 respectively. Note that Heine named several of his poems *Auf dem Meere*. Franz set two of them to music: Op. 25, No. 6; and Op. 5, No. 3 - the latter of which appears on Album One.

<sup>33</sup> *Aus meinen grossen Schmerzen*, Op. 5, No. 1, can be heard on Album One, track 26.

the *Crucifixus* there is a constant reiteration of a single figure, as if one saw the cross building up before one. In one of his cantatas the words tell of big and little fishes; the violins above imitate the little tail movements, the basses below the big. Such things are found everywhere in Bach. *Umsonst* is one of the best of my songs. The recurring A-natural indicates that the whole world is tuned to A. A is the first tone in the scale, not C. One does not know whether to weep or be jubilant in this song.”

On one occasion Dr. Waldmann asked Franz if he ever felt himself moved to compose duets. Franz answered: “No; if a duet is to give expression to something that it ought to express, that is, agreement of feeling touching a situation by two individuals, it must not be a mere caterwauling; it can be written only in the old style of Bach and Handel, who wrote the most beautiful duets in existence. Here there is not merely a companionable movement of the voices in sixths and thirds, as in Schumann, and particularly in Mendelssohn; each voice has complete freedom of movement, complete independence and individuality. But it would be risky to apply this old form in our day. I have never felt myself impelled to write duets.”

A tenor who sang *Mädchen mit dem rothen Mündchen* in Vienna achieved but little success. Franz’s response: “That *Mädchen mit dem rothen Mündchen* did not please does not surprise me at all. There is in general no understanding of the concise forms. Unless there is a sharply defined, prominent melody in a song it is not for the public; they do not grasp harmonic treatment even if the melody occasionally participates in the harmony. One of my best songs is *Die Lotosblume*. These first songs are more fantastic in spirit than the later ones; afterward nature asserts herself; the birds sing, forest and mountain and valley, the sea, the brook, Spring; everything is there. The entire content of the song must be studied. I composed feelings, not words. Wagner is to blame for all this. Whenever a word with a changed meaning occurs, there is a change, too, in the music. I always strove to reproduce the text as musically as I comprehended it. In *Auf dem Meere*, feel the rocking motion of the sea. Compare the songs *Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome*, which both Schumann and I composed. In

Schumann's, the declamatory element comes too much into the foreground; he painted pointed arches and columns. But that is not the chief thing; it is the picture of the Virgin."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> These songs can be heard on Album One, tracks 4, 12, 21, 22 & 23 (there are two settings of *Die Lotosblume*), and 28.