



RECOMMENDED

Lotte Schöne (soprano)

The Complete Lotte Schöne

rec. 1921-1950

MARSTON 55002-2 [5 CDs: 349:05]

A friend introduced me to the lyric soprano Lotte Schöne a few years ago. I came into possession of a 2 LP 80th Birthday Tribute on Syd Gray's Rubini label (GV 16). This delightful compilation was later supplemented by a Preiser LP (LV 6). What attracted me to the singer was the captivating charm, purity, extensive range and flexibility of the voice, whether it be in operatic arias, light operetta or lieder.

Apparently, throughout her career she chose her parts with care, never taking on roles which would impose strain. Marston are to be lauded for

publishing this 5-CD set of the complete extant recordings. Gathered together for the first time are her acoustics and electricals made for Vox, Odeon, and the Gramophone Company, including six unpublished sides set down by Odeon before its conversion from the acoustic to the electrical process, and four unpublished sides of Hugo Wolf songs, made by the Gramophone Company in 1934. Added to this are a welcome cache of private family recordings, and some German and French songs for French and German Radio, dating from as late as 1948 and 1950.

She was born in Vienna in 1891 and began her vocal studies at the age of 14, initially with Johannes Ress, then later with Luise Ress and Maria Brossement. It was as a bridesmaid in *Der Freischütz* that she made her stage debut in 1912. Five years later she was offered a contract by Vienna's Court Opera. When the Nazi's came to power Schöne, as a Jew, relocated to Paris



and was employed at the Opéra Comique. Tours followed in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. During the German occupation of France, she took refuge in the French alps until the end of the war when her career resumed. Her last performance at the Städtische Oper, Berlin took place in 1948. She retired in 1953 and taught for the remainder of her life. She died in Bobigny, where she lived with her son and his young family, in 1977.

The earliest inscriptions are the highly prized acoustics made for Vox and Odeon in Berlin between 1921 and 1926. All are rarities. Much of Marston's source material is well-preserved and the voice emerges with crystalline purity. On May 5 1924 Schöne recorded, amongst other things, the aria *Mein Herr Marquis* from Johann Strauss Jnr's *Die Fledermaus*. This captivating performance sums up for me all that I admire in this artist. There's abundant joy and elation in the voice, which is light, agile and flexible. Rubato is tasteful and expressive, with great care taken not to over-gild the lily. Trills are crisp, clear and adroitly negotiated, to say nothing of the infectious musical laughter. Felix Günther, heading an unnamed studio orchestra, is acutely sensitive to every vocal nuance and inflection. The self-same abandon resides in *Una voce poco fa* from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, recorded at that session. Her vocal range and acrobatic skill can be savoured to effect in Rubinstein's *Carneval (Valse caprice)* arranged by Maria Brossement. The nimble glides into the far reaches are breathtaking and the intonation is immaculate. There are more scintillating fireworks in Sir Julius Benedict's *Il carnevale di Venezia*, recorded electrically for Vox in April 1927, – a veritable showstopper, audacious and ambitious.

The electrical recordings, HMVs and Electrolas, were made between 1927 and 1931, and some even made it onto the prestigious red label. The two *Rigoletto* duets with tenor Joseph Hislop and baritone Herbert Janssen date from June and November 1927 respectively. Both are a delight, with Janssen's voice better captured than Hislop's. Piero Coppola and Fritz Zweig provide sympathetic support in each case. *Tu che di gel sei cinta* from Puccini's *Turandot* is given a moving and convincing rendition, with such underlying melancholy. *Un bel di vedremo* from *Madama Butterfly* is quite overwhelming in its potency. In lighter vein is a beguiling traversal of *Nun eilt herbei* from Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, fun-loving and enhanced by instinctively judged rubato.

Her approach to lieder is one of genteel refinement and charm. Her Schumann particularly benefits from this approach. On 3 May 1926, with Hermann Weigert at the piano, she set down Schumann's *Der Nussbaum* (No. 3 Myrten, Op. 25) and *Mondnacht* (No. 5 Liederkreis, Op. 39) into which she instils deep feeling and emotion. We have two versions of Brahms' lovely *Wie Melodien zieht es mir*, Op. 105, No. 1. The first is from the May 1926 acoustic session, the second was made electrically a year later with an unidentified pianist. Interpretively very similar, the later version is in better sound. Selections from Schumann's *Liederkreis* and *Myrten* can be heard in radio broadcasts from Paris in 1948. These late inscriptions are a joy to hear and thank goodness they exist. There's no denying the voice doesn't quite match up to that of twenty years earlier. There's some tremulousness and strain in top notes, much evident in *Du bist wie eine Blume*, but still there's much to relish.

Mystery surrounds the unpublished Wolf songs, recorded with an unidentified pianist on 14 September 1934 in Vienna. Later, Schöne had no recollection of them, but it's possible they were

earmarked for HMV's Hugo Wolf Society project. The very same songs were recorded by Ria Ginster; maybe this artist was considered more acceptable to the German market, suggests André Tubeuf. Notwithstanding, Schöne's idiomatic readings and intelligent approach prove that she was a very fine Wolf singer. The set includes several sides, designated as 'Private Recordings', whose dates are unknown. Schöne's son preserved these 'home' endeavours on 78 rpm lacquer discs, so allowances have to be made for their audio status. They're a welcome addition to the discography and the two Viennese bon-bons *Wine, Women and Song* and the *Annen-Polka* find the singer firmly in her comfort zone and are absolutely charming.

This is an excellent tribute to a wonderful artist and highly individualistic voice, and deserves a prominent place on the shelves of collectors of the refined art of singing. Such care and attention have been lavished on this outstanding production. The booklet notes, which run to forty-seven pages and overflow with photographs, are exemplary, and we must thank André Tubeuf and Michael Aspinall for their learned contributions. The full matrix details and recording dates further add to the appeal. I'm amazed by how fine-sounding the transfers are, with the voice nicely focussed in the soundscape, especially the early acoustics, which sound bright, clear and fresh.

Stephen Greenbank