

## CD Review by Huntley Dent

Anyone who isn't a specialty collector is likely to find the headnote for this review bewildering, if not impenetrable. However, the satisfactions of this recital from Chicago-born tenor Ian Koziara become greater the longer you listen, and from the very first song there is enjoyment for any lover of the intimate art of Lieder. Decades ago Decca's groundbreaking series devoted to *Entartete Musik*, the "degenerate music" banned by the Nazis, brought to light the tragic stories of composers destroyed in the maw of anti-Semitism and war. Before then, I didn't even know the names of Franz Schreker and Viktor Ullmann, and it was thrilling to discover Zemlinsky's masterpiece, the *Lyric Symphony*.

With time the discography of many banned composers, including Korngold and Hindemith, would expand to include their major works and much else, but one can still agree with the subtitle of Koziara's recital: Many beautiful songs even by well-known composers in the Nazi era, remain *unsung*. Sometimes with neglected composers the road to boredom is paved with good intentions, but that isn't the case here. Every song is tonal and melodically appealing. Especially in early opus numbers, the influence of Brahms and Mahler is more noticeable than any modern trends. Only the *Drei Lieder*, op. 37 of Viktor Ullmann shows evidence in its unsettled harmony of the revolution instigated by Schoenberg, with whom Ullmann had studied in Vienna.

Tragically, these songs, along with his closely related three *Hölderlin-Lieder*, were composed in the environs of the Theresienstadt concentration camp, the "ideal" Jewish ghetto established by the SS to prove to the world that Jews were being treated humanely. Ullmann wrote 20 pieces while imprisoned there from 1942 to 1944, when like all the artists, writers, and musicians in Theresienstadt, he was exterminated in Auschwitz. These facts make the rollicking high spirits of "Schnitterlied" (Harvester's Song) hard to hear except through the filter of tragedy. The restful mood of "Säerspruch" (Sower's Message) unintentionally becomes overlaid with mournful elegy.

This is a good place to point out that Koziara, a veteran Wagnerian, approaches these songs with a strong dramatic tenor, secure tone, and a pleasing timbre. This is Lieder singing on the operatic side, conveyed with passion yet never beyond the limits of art song. Pianist Bradley Moore is in full sympathy with the singer's approach; he plays with personality and confident musicianship.

One is struck reading the excellent program notes by how strangely fate dealt with four talented composers deprived of a settled existence in turbulent times. Schreker and Zemlinsky fell into obscurity and unpopularity after years of major achievement, but the saddest outcome befell the precocious Czech composer-conductor Vítězslava Kaprálová, who was born in Brno in 1915, the daughter of a composer and singer. She counted Martinů among her composition teachers and among conducting mentors Charles Munch and Václav Talich. In 1937 she became the first woman to conduct the Czech Philharmonic, and her considerable body of music was much admired before she died in Nazi-occupied France in 1940 at the age of 25—the case is clouded by the possibility that typhoid fever was misdiagnosed as tuberculosis.

Kaprálová was only 17 when she wrote the two songs of op. 4, titled “Jitro” (Morning) and “Osiřelý” (Orphaned). With unexpected authority they plunge us into a mature late-Romantic idiom that is seamlessly woven into the styles of Strauss, Korngold, and Zemlinsky. I don’t necessarily hear more advanced harmony in her op. 10 songs, which set texts by the Czech Nobel laureate in literature, Jaroslav Seifert, but this is because Kaprálová was so well established in her Romanticism and still young. Passing dissonances are ensconced in the chromaticism of Wagner’s *Wesendonck-Lieder*, not the Second Viennese School. In the last song, “Jarní pout” (Spring Fair), the sprightly folk rhythms echo Bartók and her teacher Martinů. Tenderness and yearning are also well within Kaprálová’s reach.

Since they are better known, I will offer only a thumbnail sketch of the songs by Schreker and Zemlinsky. Like Ullmann, both were Austrian, and Zemlinsky, being born in 1871, had enjoyed a rich career as composer and conductor before he fled Germany in 1927. Of the same generation, born in 1878, Schreker won major acclaim in opera before the abrupt collapse of his fortunes beginning in 1924—he and Zemlinsky suffered the same neglected fate when their late-Romantic style became outdated and was swept away by the tide of Modernism. Schreker was forced to resign his academic post in Berlin with the rise of anti-Semitism—he died of a stroke three months later in 1934.

In retrospect the dense but vague style that late Romanticism developed into, with half-lights dominating over melody, makes it hard to distinguish one of Zemlinsky’s songs from another. I respond with interest before my attention wanders. Schreker fares much better here. The program notes offer an apt explanation for that. “A Straussian gift for lyrical outpouring springs instantly to mind in many of Schreker’s more than 40 songs, the majority of which date from the closing years of the 19th century. Among the five glorious songs that make up Schreker’s op. 4, a special joy is ‘Unendliche Liebe,’ with text by Tolstoy. The singer exults that the earth’s boundaries cannot restrict his love, which is as wide as the sea.”

The mood of exultancy suits Koziara’s dramatic tenor perfectly—we are in the terrain of young Siegfried—so it was wise to place these early Schreker songs at the top of the program. Koziara’s range includes tenderness and quiet reflection as well. It’s a pleasure to find an American Lieder singer of such dedication and musical gifts. **Huntley Dent**