

## The very model of a vocal recital

Adrienne Pieczonka (Soprano), Brian Zeger (Piano)

Toronto: Koerner Hall 05/07/2011 -

**Franz Schubert:** *Ganymed – Das Rosenband – Die Forelle – Du liebst mich nicht – Verklärung – Gretchen am Spinnrade*

**Richard Strauss:** *Traum durch die Dämmerung – Das Rosenband – Die Nacht – Ruhe meine Seele – Mein Auge – Wie sollten wir geheim sie halten – Du meines Herzens Krönelein – Morgen! – Wir beide wollen springen – Zueignung*

**Richard Wagner:** *Wesendonck-Lieder*

While Adrienne Pieczonka is back in the city performing with the Canadian Opera Company in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, she has made time in her busy schedule for this rich program of German lieder - and in the ideal hall for such an event. The focus was on core songs from the genre (always great to hear, especially when a singer is at her peak), leavened with a few lesser-known items.

Song recitals often start out rather cautiously with “easy” or warmup pieces. Not so this time. Ms. Pieczonka achieved full lift-off with Schubert’s “Ganymed” and never looked back. She expressed a variety of vocal moods, such as in the despairing “Du liebst mich nicht” (You do not love me), without overdoing it. “Gretchen am Spinnrade” started off hollow-toned and its dramatic structure was grippingly articulated.

She adopted a generally more womanly and aware mode for the Richard Strauss songs, starting right with an intimate, rather insinuating, approach to “Traum durch die Dämmerung” (Dream through twilight). In “Ruhe, meine Seele” (Rest, My Soul) she gave compelling utterance to the song’s second stanza. This was followed by the near-operatic “Mein Auge” (My Eye), then the ebullient “Wie sollten wir geheim die Halten” (How Should We Keep it Secret).

The second half began with Wagner’s *Wesendonck-Lieder*. Here again she adroitly captured the right tone and mood of each number. These songs of course are directly linked with *Tristan und Isolde*. It seems a shame that Isolde is not in Ms. Pieczonka’s *fach* – at least not yet. She has ventured the role of the Empress in Strauss’s *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, a role that approaches the amplitude of Isolde. Perhaps in time...



Adrienne Pieczonka (Courtesy of the Royal Conservatory of Music)

Four more Strauss songs ended the formal program. The rapturous “Morgen!” (Tomorrow) finally gave accompanist Brian Zeger a few moments in the spotlight with his wonderful playing in the song’s introduction and postlude. Ms. Pieczonka’s mode of expression for this piece was one of artless directness. Immediately following was a giddy trifle “Wir beide wollen springen” (We both feel like skipping). The program’s final song was the epic “Zueignung” (Dedication) which she dedicated to her wife, Laura – and sang most movingly.

We were then treated to four encores, starting with Schubert’s “An die Musik”. She then recounted that she had attended Barbara Cook’s concert at Koerner Hall earlier this year and how Ms. Cook had ended her performance – without the microphone – with Leonard Bernstein’s “Somewhere” from *West Side Story*. She then proceeded to sing it very lovingly. Then a jaunty Irish air “I have a bonnet trimmed with blue”, and then Ernest Charles’s “When I have sung my songs”.

(Fashion note: she wore two gowns, both very nice.)

Some months ago I attended a master class Adrienne Pieczonka gave at the Royal Conservatory when she stressed to the students the joy they must feel and impart when singing. She certainly fulfilled this aim in this recital.

Michael Johnson