Premiere recording devoted to the vibrant and engaging music of Mathilde von Kralik: a pioneering Romantic-era composer whose music is ripe for rediscovery

The newest in Delos' series presenting worthy music of unjustly neglected composers, heard here in splendid performances by tenor Donald George and pianist Lucy Mauro

DE 3424 (DDD)
UPC: 0 13491 34242 9
Price Code: A
Total Playing Time: 49:41

“Music as if from a volcano! Mathilde Kralik von Meyrswnalden must indeed have had a volcanic temperament … whoever heard it won't forget it anytime soon.”
–Petra Diederichs; Rheinische Post, July 3, 2007

Given such enthusiastic critical response to Austrian composer Mathilde von Kralik (1857-1944), as well as the excellence of the works recorded here, it would indeed seem that a reassessment of her reputation and restoration of her music to modern performers' repertoires is long overdue.

A noble heritage

Born into a highly cultured and musically accomplished upper-class family, she took on the “official” full name of Mathilde Aloisia Kralik von Meyrswalden after the Austrian Emperor elevated her father, a wealthy Bohemian industrialist, to the minor nobility as Wilhelm Kralik Ritter von Meyrswalden. Louise, her mother, provided her early piano training; and the entire family made music at home together. After moving to Vienna in 1870, Mathilde's parents saw to it that their precocious daughter studied with the very finest musical pedagogues – including private counterpoint lessons with Anton Bruckner, who was later one of her professors after she was admitted to the Vienna Conservatory in 1876. While there, she became a part of the musical circle that included Gustav Mahler.

Artistic success in a male-dominated world

After completing her formal studies there with great distinction in just two years, Mathilde and her older brother and champion, Richard – a noted poet, philosopher and cultural historian – soon rose to the forefront of Vienna's artistic life. She was particularly close to Richard, as reflected in the fact that 17 of this album’s 26 selections are settings of his poetry. Despite being trapped in an era of pervasive, male-dominated artistic chau-
vinism, Mathilde soon established her reputation as a pianist and composer of particular ability. The siblings’ regular musical and literary “salons” consistently attracted the city’s intelligentsia and artistic elite. Even Eduard Hanslick, the notoriously vicious Viennese critic, found Mathilde to be “…a genuine, original talent which … holds great promise for the future.”

While she composed in multiple genres, she was best known during her lifetime for her smaller-scale works like Lieder, piano and chamber music, and sacred choral pieces. Her larger-scale works were seldom heard, one exception being her fairy-tale opera, \textit{Blume und Weiβblume}: one of her three works in that genre (an aria from it is included in this program). She remained musically active throughout her long life, though her deeply romantic style went out of fashion as the twentieth century unfolded.

The Music:

Romantic to the core

While the Kralik family’s deep Roman Catholic faith was one of the predominant overall themes of both Mathilde’s and Richard’s work, the 25 art songs (and single aria) heard here are not overtly religious in nature or purpose, though there are several instances of distinctly spiritual mood and symbolism. Instead, they are unabashedly, even intensely romantic in nature, encompassing a wide range of classic themes and symbols: romantic love (of course), the elusive “blaue Blume” (blue flower), the isolated “wanderer,” and the manifold beauties of nature and its creatures. Her music – with its stimulating blend of sophistication and passion – is the perfect vehicle for her brother’s heady, yet heartfelt verses. A touching aside: the “Maja songs” in the track listings come from three volumes of love poems inspired by Maja Flattich, who became Richard’s wife. In fact, “Komm mit Mir,” the title song, was Richard’s actual musical marriage proposal to Maja.

The remaining poets whose verses are set here – and the corresponding music – are fairly similar in nature, with like-toned romantic moods, themes and devices. The work of two other excellent male poets is represented: that of Edmund Schwab and the more famous Ludwig Uhland. It’s hardly surprising that Mathilde – ever seeking opportunities to showcase the work of others of her gender – chose to set the verses of accomplished women poets as well. Three of them are represented in this album: Irene Zoepf, Adrienne Sarold (both obscure) and the better-known Enrica Handel.

Musical dynamism and delicacy

Even in some of the remarkable songs heard here, the listener will agree with the above-excerpted review describing Mathilde’s music as “volcanic.” We hear many instances of bold sound, energetic drive and stormy dramatic intensity. Yet – often even in the same song – she shifts almost seamlessly into contrasting delicacy, lyricism, tender emotion, playful whimsy, or intuitive inwardness. Her inexhaustible gift for gorgeous melody and ingenious harmony is immediately apparent. She cultivates a lush richness in many of her songs that recalls the opulent styles of composers like Mahler and Richard Strauss, while maintaining a strong degree of originality. Her beautifully crafted piano accompaniments confirm her ability to illuminate and amplify her chosen texts with skill, sensitivity and almost Schubertian levels of spontaneity and impressionistic tone-painting – and their frequently virtuosic demands stand as firm evidence of Mathilde’s own considerable keyboard prowess.
The Artists:

Donald George has performed at La Scala, the Paris Opera Bastille and Théâtre du Châtelet, Royal Opera of Brussels, and the State Operas of Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna, the Festivals of Salzburg, Santa Fe, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Buenos Aires, Blossom USA and Perth. He has sung with Leonard Bernstein, Kurt Masur, Yehudi Menuhin, Jeffry Tate, Vladimir Jurowski, Simone Young and recorded Mendelssohn’s Elijah, Verdi’s Requiem, and Rossini’s Aureliano in Palmira and Le Nozze di Teti e Peleo (the world premiere recording). His recording of Schubert’s Die Schöne Müllerin was described as “An absolute must.” (Music Mosaic). Reviews of Donald George speak of his “pleasing tenor sound, vocally reliable in all challenges” (Verdi Requiem-Metropolitan Opera News); “A success for La Scala all possess a superb technique, and are consummate actors…including Donald George” (Peter Grimes-Corriere della Sera); and “Donald George provides Candide with a supple, beautiful toned lyricism – His Lament is one of the highlights of the performance” (Münchner Merkur – Munich, Germany). Reviews of Love is Everywhere: Selected Songs of Margaret Ruthven Lang, Volume I from Delos, selected as 2011 Recording of the Year (MusicWeb International) include “George sings beautifully and easily… impressive is his exceptionally clear diction” (Journal of Singing).

Lucy Mauro frequently performs, conducts master classes, workshops and other presentations with tenor Donald George throughout the US and abroad with recent tours of colleges and universities, Shenyang Conservatory in China, the Asolo Song Festival in Italy, TOPOpera in Austria, national, state and regional professional music conferences and have also been featured on Song of America, Thomas Hampson’s national radio program. Reviews of their CDs include “his singing is fresh and beautiful...her playing is as crystalline and telling as his singing” (Stephanie Blythe), her “delicate touch and flawless technique give us a luminous sound of great beauty” (MusicWeb International) and “Mauro is the perfect partner, whether called upon for thundering power or the tenderest whisper” (Journal of Singing). She and Donald George have published articles in Classical Singer, American Music Teacher and Die Tonkunst, among others and are also the co-directors of the Bavarian Summer Voice and Piano Collaborative Workshop for emerging professionals. Other performances for her include the Colorado Music Festival, Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress and for the French Piano Institute in Paris reunion. Ms. Mauro is the co-editor of several piano ensemble books for Alfred Publishing, Essential Two-Piano Repertoire, Essential Keyboard Trios, and Essential Keyboard Duets, Vols. 4 and 5.

Their website is www.duodrama.net
Track Listings:

1  Komm mit mir! • Come with me! (2:30)
2  Hundertausend Liederkeime • One hundred thousand seeds of songs (:55)
3  Silbernebel • Silver Mist (3:20)
4  Flieder • Lilacs (1:59)
5  Veilchen • Violets (1:28)
6  Himmelschlüssel • Keys of Heaven (1:38)
7  Abends • Evenings (2:48)
8  Götter, Helden und Minne • Gods, Heroes and Courtly Love (2:11)
9  Ein neuer Frühling • A New Spring (1:32)
10  Spriesse, Seele! • Spring forth, Soul! (1:32)
11  Mein ganzes Sein • My Entire Being (1:37)
12  Und wieder blüht der helle Hag • And Again Blooms the Bright Meadow (1:30)
13  Übermut • High Spirits (:57)
14  Im Prater • At the Prater (1:49)
15  Zauberrunen • Magic Runes (1:36)
16  Lache, Kind! • Laugh, Child! (:58)
17  Du bist mein • You are mine (1:50)
18  Ich bin nur ich • I am only me (1:57)
19  Sage, Sonne, wo sie nun ist • Tell me sun, where she is now (:46)
20  Fragezeichen • Question Mark (2:19)
21  Ein Traum • A Dream (1:54)
22  Im Grünen • In the Woods (1:32)
23  Lied des Gefangenen • Song of the Prisoner (1:40)
24  Nacht ist’s • It is Night (2:40)
25  Singet leiser o Cicaden! • Sing softly, O Cicadas! (1:55)
26  Arie des Rekared aus der Oper „Blume und Weissblume“ • Aria of Rekared from the Opera Flower and White Flower (4:44)