



Amalie Joachim, ca. 1870, Porträtfotografie von Ernst Milster, Berlin, Sammlung Joachim Draheim, Karlsruhe.

Amalie Joachim

Birth name: Amalie Schneeweiss

* 10 May 1839 in Marburg an der Drau (heute: Maribor, Slowenien), Österreich

† 3 February 1899 in Berlin,

Singing, vocal instruction, music publication

"Fr.[au] J.[oachim] is the most ideal artist I know. She is so accomplished that everything she sings must bear the imprint of the highest perfection, because her manner of interpretation is so individual that she always gets it right. I asked her how she does this: 'One doesn't have to read anything into it, but bring out of the work whatever is in it.' With these words, she revealed the secret of her artistic reproduction. Her performance always appears natural to the highest degree, almost naturalistic, yet there is an effort behind it of the greatest art. [...] And as a human being! A golden heart, a profound soul, the nob-

lest character connected with significant spirit, a cheerful mood and the most amiable nature. High-spirited, boisterous, but never to the point of frenzy; serious, strict, but never dry, never unpleasant; what she says is always interesting and one never notices the intention of wanting to say something important; always serenely good, full of profound sympathy for the misery of others, but also energetic and ready to help. Her character is very affectionate and noble, so that I believe that even if she were at fault, she would still be innocent. Near her, I always feel as if elevated, as if carried on a light cloud in a high, pure sphere. In her case, a human artist is an artistic human being, as all artists should be!"

(Diary entry of the Portuguese pianist and composer José Vianna da Motta of March 1890, quoted from Beatrix Borchard, "Stimme und Geige"/"Voice and Violin", Vienna 2007, p. 492)

Profile

Amalie Joachim was one of the most important lied and oratorio singers of her time, for whom numerous roles and lieder were written. She made a name for herself especially as an interpreter of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms. Up until her unexpected death in 1899 she committed herself to all contemporary developments in the area of lieder, including those of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. With her "History of the German Lied in Four Recitals" conceived together with the writer on music Heinrich Reimann (1850-1906), she conceptualised a sung history of the genre. She began in the 15th century and half of her study encompassed contemporary lied literature, not only by Brahms but also the so-called North German School of Liszt, Cornelius and Wagner. With this and other programmes frequently concentrating on individual composers or poets, she regularly appeared from 1884 onwards in numerous European cities and in the USA.

Cities and countries

Amalie Joachim hailed from Styria and already appeared on stage at the age of fourteen. Graz, Troppau, Linz, Hermannstadt (Transylvania), Vienna and Hannover were the stations of her stage career. After marrying the violinist Joseph Joachim, she lived and worked as a concert singer, first in Hannover, then in Berlin beginning in 1868 and from the summer of 1876 onwards, after separating from her husband, intermittently in Aigen near Salzburg and in Elberfeld. She repeatedly went on con-

cert tours through Germany and Austria-Hungary, Holland and Belgium, the Baltic countries and also in Finland (then still occupied by Russia), Russia itself, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA.

Biography

The alto Amalie Joachim, née Schneeweiss, hailed from Styria. Everything that we know about her childhood and youth is taken exclusively from the autobiographical notes left by her, found in the desk drawer of her youngest granddaughter Nina Joachim (see Beatrix Borcard, "Stimme und Geige"/"Voice and Violin", Vienna 2007, Appendix). Her father, an imperial civil servant and amateur violinist, died young, leaving his wife and three children destitute. According to her own account, she received her first instruction at the age of three from a cantor, then in Graz from a singing teacher named Julie von Franck. At the age of fourteen she stood on the concert stage for the first time. Her performing career led her from Troppau via Hermannstadt/Transylvania (today Romania) to the Vienna Kärntner Theatre (1854-1862). She appeared there for eight years, exclusively in minor roles. Her mother and sister became ill; she went into debt in order to be able to pay for their treatment costs and, later, for their burials.

An engagement as first alto at the Hannover court opera proved to be the chance of a lifetime. There, she became acquainted with the famous violinist Joseph Joachim. Her wedding at the castle church (10 June 1863) resembled a state occasion. The Queen of Hannover, princesses and ladies of high society were in attendance. Her farewell to the concert stage went together with her marriage. This renunciation was difficult because she had just attained the long-desired breakthrough. Since concert singing offered women new professional possibilities in the second half of the 19th century, however, possibilities that were not considered disreputable (like the profession of stage artist), she could continue to perform as far as permitted by her rapidly growing family with six children. In this genre she attained such a considerable reputation that Max Bruch, for example, conceived the alto parts in his oratorios "Odysseus" and "Achilleus" for her. The divorce of the Joachim artistic couple in 1884 after a four-year battle came close to being a public scandal. Although her husband could not prove that she had been unfaithful to him, she was the one who was publicly discredited and, as a result, hardly found any more engagements. One of the few who remained committed to her was Johannes Brahms. Besides the Duets for Alto and Ba-

ritone, Op. 28 dedicated to her, and the Two Songs for Alto, Viola and Piano, Op. 91, she gave local and world premieres of numerous other works of his. Amongst others, Amalie Joachim was committed to such controversial composers as Hugo Wolf and Richard Strauss, also including lieder by women composers such as Louise Reichardt, Clara Faisst and Clara Schumann on her programmes and performing the world premieres of the two "Wunderhornlieder" "Einsame Schildwacht" ("Lonely Sentry") and "Verlorene Mühe" ("Lost Troubles") by Gustav Mahler with orchestra (Berlin, 12 December 1892). Together with the organist and writer on music Heinrich Reimann, she developed programmes on the history of the German lied and went on tours starting in 1891 with these "historical song recitals", which took her as far afield as the USA. Amalie Joachim began teaching in 1885 at the latest; after she had worked at the Berlin Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory, amongst other institutions, she founded her own singing school in that city in which she collaborated with the respiratory therapists (at that time a novelty) Clara Schlawffhorst (1863-1945) and Hedwig Andersen (1866-1957).

More on Biography

Amalie Joachim hailed from Marburg an der Drau, Styria (today Maribor in Slovenia) and was musically encouraged from an early age. Her mother, née Linde, sang; her father, a higher imperial civil servant, was an amateur violinist and had a quartet. Her sister played the piano and her brother, the violoncello. Already from the age of three onwards, Amalie Schneeweiss – as she herself reported in her autobiographical account – received her first vocal instruction from an old cantor. The Revolution of 1848 and the confrontation between Hungary and Austria put an end to their middle-class living conditions, for the brother fought on the Hungarian side and the father, as a result, was suspended from imperial services. The early death of her father in 1851 after long years of illness definitively signified a social decline. Mother and daughter (the son had fled to the USA but was considered dead) had to earn their living by sewing. The hope of finding support from relatives in Graz, where they had moved, came to nought. But Amalie Schneeweiss, according to her own information, received singing instruction free of charge at the Municipal Conservatorium from a singer named Julie von Franck, and also gave her own first lessons. Due to the difficult familial situation, it suggested itself that Amalie Schneeweiss would have to earn money from her singing as soon as possible. She was en-

gaged for a season for the first time at the age of fourteen. Her concert career took her from Troppau (1853) to Hermannstadt/Transylvania (Sibiu/Romania, 1854), then to the Vienna Kärntner Theatre. She made her debut as Rezia in "Oberon" by Carl Maria von Weber. Her autobiographical account ends with the depiction of this debut. From 1854 to 1862 she sang under the name of Weiss (or also Weis) at the Imperial Court Opera, but only received minor roles. From the documents of the Court Opera, one can gather that her mother and sister died during her Viennese years. She had to go into debt in order to cover the costs first for treatment and then for burials. The first surviving letters to her document the relationship to the music critic and son of a well-known Jewish preacher Theodor Mannheimer. It was dissolved.

The opportunity of her lifetime came in April 1862 – she was 23 years old – with an engagement as first alto at the Royal Opera in Hannover, where she created a sensation as Orpheus (Gluck), Fidès (Meyerbeer) and Fidelio (Beethoven). But she also became acquainted with Joseph Joachim, already famous as a violinist and the Hannover concertmaster (they married in 1863). Joachim demanded that she withdraw from public performance. This demand weighed heavily, but did not mean the end of her artistic career. Rather, she received brief instruction from the renowned lied and oratorio singer Julius Stockhausen (1826-1906) in Hamburg and made a name for herself as a concert singer during the following years – often at the side of her husband as well – and went alone on tour to Holland (1865) at the beginning of her marriage. Together with her husband, she travelled that year to Paris and London, where she performed in concert with Clara Schumann and Jenny Lind, amongst others. With a growing number of children (a total of six), however, she appeared less and less frequently. Beginning in 1867 she lived in Berlin, where her husband was entrusted with the development of the first state music academy in Germany. He refused suggestions to entrust her with a singing class there. There are indications in the academy documents, however, that she taught at the academy at least from time to time. In 1872 she undertook a world tour together with Clara Schumann, with whom she also apart from that often performed.

The correspondence between the couple, which has survived almost in its entirety, shows that frequent stays at health resorts, such as in Meran and Norderney, went together with a growing dissatisfaction concerning her professional career. In the early 1880s, due to suspicion of infi-

delity with the Brahms publisher Fritz Simrock, there were legal disputes with her husband. They were only ended in 1884, with divorce and the distribution of the six children. The divorce of the famous artist couple was tantamount to a public scandal. Unlike Joseph Joachim, Amalie Joachim was publicly discredited and had great difficulties finding engagements; she did not withdraw, however, but fought publicly for her honour as an artist. Her attempt at a comeback in Munich in the role of Gluck's Orpheus (she was meanwhile 45), however, did not succeed, and it took years before she could build up a new existence primarily as a travelling lied singer. One of the few who unconditionally supported her was Johannes Brahms, who demonstratively performed with her and, in order to musically reconcile his two friends, composed his Two Songs, Op. 91 for Alto, Viola and Piano for Amalie and Joseph Joachim. In vain!

At first, Amalie Joachim primarily lived in the Joachims' summer house in Augen near Salzburg, and beginning in 1889 in Elberfeld, where her eldest daughter Marie was engaged as a singer from time to time. In 1894 she moved back to Berlin again, where she founded her own subscription series at the Philharmonie with lied programmes of her own design.

Together with the musicologist Heinrich Reimann, she had developed programmes on the history of the German lied with which she went on tours, beginning in 1891, which took her as far afield as Sweden and the USA. She also performed this lied cycle recital in Vienna during the International Music and Theatre Exhibition in October 1892. Her historical lied recitals attracted great attention because they included all conceivable forms of the German lied, from the simple folksong to the art songs of Max Bruch and Richard Wagner, for example. She repeatedly performed the works of many contemporary composers some of whose names have meanwhile completely disappeared from the concert hall. The core of her repertoire, however, consisted of the lieder of Schubert, Schumann and also Brahms, who at that time was not yet considered one of the classics of the lied literature. She travelled – sometimes even with a vocal quartet – all the way to Riga, in order to make the "Liebesliederwalzer" known in their vocal version, and was one of the first to perform complete Schubert and Schumann cycles, sometimes supplemented by solo piano performances and poetic declamations. Following teaching activities in Elberfeld (1890), Munich (1893), at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin (1895) and at that city's Conservatory of the West for Music and Theatre-

Academy for Opera and Drama (1898), Amalie Joachim also founded, probably in 1897 – like many unmarried women of her time – her own singing school in Berlin, at which she collaborated with the respiratory therapists (a novelty at that time) Clara Schlaffhorst and Hedwig Andersen.

A reconciliation with Joseph Joachim took place before her unexpected death on 3 February 1899. The grave of Amalie and Joseph Joachim is in the cemetery of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin-Ruhleben.

Appreciation

The life and work of Amalie Joachim can stand as an example of the importance of concert singing as an independent profession, especially for women. Her lied programmes are thoroughly comparable with the quartet programmes of her husband for their significance in the history of German concert life and the formation of vocal repertoire.

Reception

In the numerous obituaries following her death in 1899, Amalie Joachim was celebrated as the founder of modern lied singing. Reminiscences of contemporaries (see Literature) bear witness to the outstanding beauty of her voice and the stylistically formative power of her performance. In particular, the Two Songs for Alto, Viola and Piano, Op. 91 composed for her by Johannes Brahms can still today convey an idea of her art of singing and interpretation, through her unique linkage (as exemplified in Brahms's work) of baroque aria and romantic lied. After her death, Andreas Moser acknowledged her in detail in both versions of his Joseph Joachim biography from 1898 and 1908/10, as did the first Brahms biographer Max Kalbeck. The current Brahms literature is another story: despite her significance for the success of Brahms's lieder, the name of Amalie Joachim amongst Brahms interpreters is not even mentioned by Christian Martin Schmidt, for example ("Johannes Brahms und seine Zeit"/"Johannes Brahms and his Time", Laaber 1983). Only in 2005 did the first biography about the Joachim couple appear within the framework of the interpretative-historical study by Beatrix Borchard entitled "Stimme und Geige"/"Voice and Violin" (Vienna 2005).

Research

The interpretative-historical study by Beatrix Borchard "Stimme und Geige"/"Voice and Violin" (Vienna 2005) is the first detailed investigation of the career of Amalie

Joachim.

Need for Research

A large portion of the letters of Amalie Joachim, especially the letters between the couple, almost all of which are preserved in the Hamburg University and State Library or as private possessions, are unpublished. Other unpublished or only partially published letters can be found in the Brahms Institute at the Lübeck Music Academy.

There is still a need for research, in particular, in regard to the pedagogical activity of Amalie Joachim, first within the framework of singing courses in Elberfeld and München, then at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin and, finally, within the framework of her own singing school and at the Conservatory of the West. There is also a need for a classification of the importance of Amalie Joachim's activities for lied and oratorio singing in the second half of the 19th century in a history, yet to be written, of concert singing in Germany and Europe.

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