

SSUSA NEWSLETTER

SCHUBERT SOCIETY OF THE USA

Vol. 5, No. 2, 2007

Dear Members and Friends,

I am well along in recovering from being struck by an SUV last January 7 on Broadway, walking about one block from my apartment building. During recuperation, I had some time to think about plans for this issue, hoping to make it shorter than usual. But then I realized that I was preparing to publish a 2006 interview with American baritone Nathan Gunn from our “reporter in the field,” Lisa Hooper. I’ve added some 2007 updates at the end of the interview. Despite the lag in getting the interview to you, I think you’ll find Mr. Gunn’s thoughtful comments and perceptive observations as fresh as if he had spoken them only days ago.

This will be the second newsletter that has been distributed both as an e-mail attachment and in hard copy. By using electronic publishing we’ve been able to save substantially on printing and postage costs, which have just increased, and that helps to maintain dues at a stable level. The savings have been applied to support of a young American vocal student Brendan Sliger for his study of Schubert Lieder this summer in Graz, Austria, and for a May “Schubertiada” by young Bulgarian artists who perform under the name of *Bulgarian Concert Evenings*.

As I peruse the programs of the current and upcoming seasons of many symphony organizations, I am struck by how fewer Schubert selections are being offered. It seems to be consistent, and this is not the first year that I’ve noted this falling off of Schubert in orchestral programming. While the Unfinished is popular, the Great C Major doesn’t show up as often. Of course, there are only nine symphonies to choose from – the same as Beethoven. Schubert seems to be holding his own in the Lieder and chamber music arenas. I have no explanation for this but if you have some thoughts about this phenomenon, please feel free to share them with our readers.

In this issue, you’ll find a 25% discount offer from University of Rochester Press for SSUSA members for both volumes of Scott Messing’s *Schubert in the European Imagination*. Volume one, *The Romantic and Victorian Eras* (2006), and volume two, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (2007) comprise a much needed examination into Schubert reception and interpretation. The breadth and depth of coverage is astonishing and opens a new path into Schubert studies.

Please note the announcement in the following pages about our new Advisory Board member, Professor Dr. Manfred Wagner. I am very pleased that Prof. Wagner accepted this appointment and his presence on our Advisory Board can only add luster to our name.

Dr. Janet I. Wasserman, Founder and Executive Director
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ADVISORY BOARD NEWS

ERIK BATTAGLIA has just announced a new research center and web site dedicated to his friend and mentor, the late English musicologist Eric Sams. The *Centro Studi "Eric Sams"* has as its primary aim the development of Italian research in the field of the German Lied. The Centro Studi, as a branch of the *Scuola Superiore "Hugo Wolf,"* intends to review the current state of research in Italy, providing a bibliography of the accessible sources and promoting online publication of articles and essays. The Center's organization and projects can all be seen at <www.ericams.org/>, including the writings of Eric Sams. A welcome addition is the Deutsch catalogue, in German with Italian annotations but quite readable for the Schubertian familiar with Deutsch, at <http://www.ericams.org/sams_catalogoschubert_I.htm>. Also announced is the new Honorary Board / Comitato d'Onore which has among its members SSUSA executive director Janet Wasserman and Advisory Board member **SUSAN YOUENS**.

CHRISTOPHER H. GIBBS will be the moderator of the panel "Elgar the Man and His Worlds" at the first weekend opening of the summer 2007 Bard Music Festival *Edward Elgar and His World*. He will present the program preconcert talks for "Elgar: The Imperial Self-Portrait," and "Absolute and Program Music: English Music at the Turn of the Century." For further information, visit <www.fishercenter.bard.edu> and click on Bard Music Festival.

SUSAN KAGAN will be honored on July 27 at the opening banquet of the American Beethoven Society's second Biannual Convention at the Beethoven Center in San José, California. She will be awarded The Ira F. Brilliant Lifetime Achievement Award for Beethoven Performance and Studies. She will give the July 29 keynote lecture-recital "Ferdinand Ries, Forerunner of the Romantic Piano Sonata." While the ABS has not updated its website regarding the 2007 convention, you can still contact them at their site about this event by visiting <www.sjsu.edu/depts/beethoven/index.html>.

"Musical Meaning and Human Values: A Colloquium with Lawrence Kramer," took place May 4-5, 2007, at Fordham University/Lincoln Center. In addition to **LAWRENCE KRAMER**, among the colloquium speakers was **WALTER FRISCH**.

ANGELA LEAR gave a Chopin Recital on May 12 at Oxford University with a program that included the Grande Polonaise Brillante, Etudes, Berceuse, Mazurkas, Nocturne, Scherzo, Impromptu, Barcarolle and 'Heroique' Polonaise at the St Hilda's College Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, Oxford University's newest and most modern music venue.

In April, The New York Times ran a series of articles looking at China's embrace of Western classical music and the number of young Chinese musicians who are rising into the upper ranks of performers. Advisory Board member and pianist **RUTH SLENCZYNSKA KERR**, now retired from the concert stage, spent many years in Taiwan and China training piano teachers and young conservatory piano students. She remarked to this editor some years ago that China would save Western music. Her prediction is coming true. The New York Times is catching up with her.

Routledge, publisher of scholarly books in music, announces the 2007 publication of *Mendelssohn Essays* by **R. LARRY TODD**. In this collection, he presents hitherto unknown and new information about Felix Mendelssohn, his family and his circle of friends. For more information, contact <www.routledge.com>.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

JOHN HORNOR hosted a May Day evening of song called *Music From Life* in which he sang selections from Buxtehude, Bach, Schubert, Wagner and Tchaikovsky. He was accompanied at the piano by Hiroko Kanagawa along with Jack's guest, cellist Yo-Yo Ma who, in addition to sharing accompanist duties with Miss Kanagawa, played Beethoven's Variations on "Bei Männern," from Mozart's The Magic Flute.

THOMAS MEGLIORANZA will be performing on two programs at the summer 2007 Bard Music Festival *Edward Elgar and His World*: "Music in the Era of Queen Victoria," and "'God Bless the Music Halls': Victorian and Edwardian Popular Song in American and Britain." For further information, visit <www.fishercenter.bard.edu> and click on Bard Music Festival.

PUBLICATIONS

Last year we noted the publication of **Scott Messing**, *Schubert in the European Imagination: Volume 1: The Romantic and Victorian Eras*. This volume is especially notable for examining in depth Schubert as he was portrayed in 19th century literature and the arts. The notes, list of journals and newspapers cited, and the selected bibliography indicate the wide range of research. The second volume, subtitled *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, has just appeared, again from University of Rochester Press, with an equally impressive scholarly coverage. Please see the special discount offer as a separate page.

David Schwarz, "Franz Schubert's 'Die Stadt' and Sublime (Dis)pleasure," is in his book *Listening Awry: Music and Alterity in German Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Nicholas Lockey (University of Victoria) presented "Schubert's Fifth Symphony: A Milestone in the Evolution of Schubert's Symphonic Openings" at the American Musicological Society-Pacific Northwest Chapter's March-April 2006 meeting.

Daniel Rieppel, pianist, musicologist, associate professor of music at Southwest Minnesota State University, and a friend of the SSUSA, writes in *Austrian Studies Newsletter* (Spring 2007, 19-20) of his Fulbright visit in 2004 and his pleasures in searching the Schubert Archive in the newly renamed Wienbibliothek im Rathaus (The Vienna Library at City Hall). The newsletter can be selected at <www.cas.umn.edu/publications/asn.html>. Prof. Rieppel notes his interview with Dr. Thomas Aigner, director of the library's music collection, and of Dr. Aigner's announcement of the soon-to-be-launched "Schubert-Online" project. The project is indeed online and waiting for you to visit at <www.schubert-online.at> and view digitized manuscripts, letters and other Schubert documents in German and English. At the "About Schubert" page,

there is a link to the Schubert Society of the USA. Congratulations and bravissimi to all who brought this treasure trove of Schubert to us.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

In his essay “What Is a Tree?” (*New York Review of Books*, February 15, 2007), Tim Flannery notes the now-classic work of D. J. Mabberley, *The Plant-Book: A Portable Dictionary of the Vascular Plants*, 2d ed., Cambridge University Press, 1997. Flannery quotes Mabberley appreciatively for his Herculean task of creating the first edition on an electric typewriter (typed with one finger) and quotes Mabberley, who records his “appreciation of the work of ... Franz Schubert (1797-1828) ... which has kept me sane during some of the more tedious episodes.”

“*Schubert, Schubert and Schubert*” was for years a popular three-day music festival in the Washington, DC area, with programs of mostly Schubert and occasionally Brahms and other Romantic favorites. Founded in 1982, *SS&S* went on hiatus and is now back as of March 16, 17 and 18, 2007. Their web site is not completely up to date but you can try them at <www.stompingground.com/schubert>. Their tickets are incredibly affordable so anyone can easily attend all the three days of Schubert music.

Bulgarian Concert Evenings in New York is a group of young Bulgarian performers – vocal and instrumental artists – living, working and studying in New York and elsewhere in the USA. All have Bulgarian and American conservatory training; some completed their studies and launched their careers while others among them are still in conservatory. Together they performed a series of programs throughout the season, which included a wonderful May 9 “Schubertiada” at the Bulgarian Consulate General in New York. The evening of Schubert consisted of eight songs from Schwanengesang and Winterreise -- **Krassen Karagiozov**, baritone; Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano (D574) -- **Georgy Valtchev**, violin; and Sonata in A Minor for Arpeggione and Piano (D821) -- **Diliana Momtchilova**, cello. All were accompanied by **Lora Tchekoratova**, piano. The Schubert Society of the USA was happy to be a sponsor of the group. Visit their new blog at <<http://bceny.blog-city.com/>> for information about the performers and their programs.

INTERVIEW: NATHAN GUNN

By Lisa Hooper, June 19, 2006

Though still comparatively new to the opera scene, many are already familiar with the name Nathan Gunn and the sound of his rich baritone voice. He has performed internationally and throughout the United States, successfully debuting in December 2005 at the Metropolitan Opera in Tobias Picker's adaptation of Theodor Dreiser's 1925 *An American Tragedy*. Those who have heard Nathan Gunn in performance can hardly doubt that our conversation was any less scintillating.

LH: To start off with, why don't you tell us about some of the projects that you're currently working on.

NG: The two projects I'm doing this summer are really interesting. One of them is a brand new opera written specifically for television; the music is by Jonathan Dove. I'm not sure what it will be titled for TV, but the score itself is called *Buzz on the Moon*. It's all about the first lunar landing by the Apollo 11 mission. The music is great. Jonathan Dove is a fantastic composer.

So I'm working on that, and it's an interesting concept where you have two stories running parallel. One story is the working side of astronaut Buzz Aldrin's life, going on this mission and when he lands. Then the other side, what happens afterwards, is his personal life with his wife. He had a really rough marital relationship, like a lot of the astronauts. She describes him as a man-machine. When he walks on the moon, he has this epiphany -- an incredible feeling of love towards humanity and his wife. The feeling burns out. When he gets home he can't find a reason to do anything because what else do you do if you're a thrill seeker and you've been blasted up to the moon? So, that's really fun.

Then the other project: I've just signed off with Sony Records so we're going to start recording soon. We're putting together our very first album. We're gathering things that we want to do. It's funny, when I was talking to the senior vice president of A & R -- I want him to be the producer of it -- we were describing some of the songs the way I want to record them as opposed to the way classical music tends to be recorded these days. He said, "Well, what it sounds like is you want to do contemporary art song" and I said, "Yes, that's exactly what I want to do!" I find most of the American composers are composers that I consider the Schuberts of the day. I want to record the songs in a way that is more familiar to modern ears.

LH: How do make them more familiar to modern ears?

NG: A lot of classical recordings now are done in such a way that sometimes you have to turn the volume up and down. You can't really listen to it very well in your car and you can't listen to it walking down the street. Basically, it matters how the recording is engineered. Sometimes you have to take away a little bit that you normally use in a big recital hall with big volume differences. In other words, to make it reasonable and enjoyable and to use other musical skills for the songs to make sense. We're going to play with it and see what we come up with.

LH: To bring the conversation around to Schubert, when did you actually get to Schubert in your career?

NG: John Wustman. [Editor: John Wustman is the dean of American Lieder teachers and accompanists.] He introduced me to the bulk of the Schubert Lieder that I have sung. There were hundreds of songs, and I think Schubert was incredibly musical. Everything about Schubert is music; his whole life is musical, he lives and breathes music. He's not pretentious or sophisticated at all. He gets it, and Schubert was, by worldly standards, an unsuccessful man. But the music he wrote was so descriptive of human experience. The way it was presented, with friends over to the house one evening and they sing songs together and Schubert plays them. The point was to communicate whatever was in the poem and Schubert somehow got what was in the poem. He was able to add that wonderful personal touch to it to make it so expressive.

LH: In your time with Wustman you performed *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* for the Schubert 200th birth anniversary. What was it like working with him when you're working on these pieces? Any epiphanies?

NG: *Die schöne Müllerin* is one of those things where you can always tell when the music is brilliant because you can always come back to it and learn something else. The first time I did it I had a certain kind of understanding of it. I was 21 or 22 years old. A metaphor used over and over again: it is like an onion -- you peel a layer and you've got this incredible, beautiful thing there. Then as you come back the next year and peel away the next layer you think, "Oh, that's what he meant!" It changes with your life, with your personal experiences. The way Wustman worked was we'd get together and make music! We wouldn't really talk about it like we're talking about it now. We would talk through music.

That in itself, I suppose, is a lesson because you can talk these things to death until you actually put some flesh on the music. What you see on the page is a really a rough draft of what is actually there. It's like looking at the blueprint of a house. You can say that's your house but actually it's not your house until you live in it, and that's what music is. This is something else that I learned vicariously through John Wustman.

Winterreise is a little trickier because it's so depressing from the very first song. You're just like, "Oh man! I have 23 more of these. This is the first one and where do you go from here?" I had trouble with that one at the beginning. I was living in New York at the time and met Thomas Allen for the first time. I just love his singing, love his musicality. So, I had coffee with him and I didn't know what to say at the time because I'm a big admirer. I wrote him a letter saying I'm working on *Winterreise* and I love what you've done with this particular cycle. How do you go on from here, considering what happens to the character who describes the journey? Thomas Allen gave me a visual image to pursue while working on it that I thought worked beautifully for *Winterreise*. Allen used it when he first started, which was to imagine standing in six inches of snow. Then every step you take, with hopefulness, you slide slightly farther down. And the next step is the same way and you sink even farther down. No matter how hard you try, you're always hoping you'll move onto higher ground but it never happens. That was enough to get me to understand what world the poet was trying to get to.

LH: So it becomes an interesting story of hope and no hope at the same time.

NG: Yes. Both at the same time. And it's beautiful, yet cold.

LH: That is one of the great things about Schubert; there is so much there but it's hard to actually fit.

NG: It's like Shakespeare. When you hear it you think, "That's exactly right! But, how do you do that? What is it exactly?" It's just wonderful in that you can't reproduce it, it has to be created.

LH: Perhaps one of the other reasons that makes Schubert so great, and we have a lot of great Lied composers who haven't quite gotten the same amount of attention as Schubert, is the way Schubert treats the poem. It becomes personalized on an intimate level, which, in talking to my students, is what they need to be able to appreciate a song. They need to generalize it and then relate it to their own personal lives. I think that is what you're describing here, trying to create a personal relationship with it.

NG: Everybody has had an experience at one time or another where they had an unrequited love. So it's completely in your head. The thing is, we're always talking about these experiences and what they mean. Even if you know exactly what's going on it starts to change a little bit in your head about what exactly is happening here. In *Die schöne Müllerin*, is the brook the young man's friend or is it not? When you're young you see it for what it is and you kind of accept it as just an experience. As I get older, I think this is very strange. Does the miller's daughter have any idea that the young man even exists? Has he fabricated this? Have I ever witnessed a relationship like this? In my work I sing to thousands of people who feel as if they know me and yet I don't know them at all. There's this imbalance in the relationship and I think maybe that's part of this cycle. As you said, what's wonderful about Schubert, what I love about him, is that he's not pretentious. He is obviously profound and sometimes chose cerebral poetry like Schiller's or like Goethe's who hated his music. Mayrhofer was a good poet. Schubert would set poems that others would set as sentimental drivel but when Schubert does it he really grabs the human element there and turns it into something incredibly beautiful. Lucky to have him.

LH: Is there one particular song by Schubert that you keep coming back to?

NG: They're all so beautiful. There are a couple. The one that I think is very simple and that I think is also viable to perform is *Nachtviolen*. I think it's beautiful; a simple, strophic three-verse song that maybe I've sung it at times in settings that are very meaningful. One of the happiest songs that everyone knows is, of course, *Die Taubenpost*. I just love that, because so many people just don't get it.

LH: The Seidl setting?

NG: Yes. It just completely and constantly repeats itself.

I don't really know much about the Rosamunde story, but there's a song that we've been doing in recitals recently that's called *Romanze aus Rosamunde*. It's a poignantly beautiful song about love and how the lovers have been drawn apart in life. One is obviously dead. There's this longing to be together and it's obviously not going to happen for a while. There are so many. I'm trying to think of one I don't like actually. I even like some of the simpler ones like *Der Müller und der Bach* and songs like that.

LH: Why?

NG: Why? I suppose because they're just better than most other songs. Schumann I think writes beautiful music. I really love his music but it's not quite my sensibility. Schubert's music is more wed to the words. With Schumann you can get rid of the words and it could still be gorgeous. I think that's why Schubert for me is just so important because you couldn't have the music without the text, and that makes sense to me.

LH: That's quite true, a lot of it would not make sense otherwise, but going back to *Die Taubenpost*, and how it's tacked on to...

NG: To the *Schwanengesang* cycle? I've never done that as a cycle, I don't really know why.

LH: Just because you haven't felt like it or ...?

NG: I like putting together songs. Maybe this is another result of John Wustman. I just put together the songs that I like, that tell a story within a story with text that is similar and has a nice beginning, middle, end. If it's spring I might do a lot of songs about flowers and sacrifice and renewal, and then if it's fall I'll do fall-like songs – there are so many.

LH: So you're creating your own cycle.

NG: Yes. Although at the same time I don't separate the songs from *Müllerin* or *Winterreise*. I think those really have to be done together. I see them as stanzas of one big song rather than just a lot of songs.

LH: I imagine you need one to explain the other.

NG: Yes. You can do it, obviously, but it's hard. If you've seen the whole picture or you've had the whole meal, it's hard to have only a part of it. It's like taking arias out of operas, it doesn't really make sense. I don't like that.

LH: Have you ever taken a look at Schubert's operas that failed horribly?

NG: Not really, I just read a little bit about them. What I find interesting is that it seems to me that the people who were great at writing operas like Mozart didn't write very good songs. I don't really like Mozart songs; and Benjamin Britten, a master opera writer -- his songs are OK. It seems to work in the

opposite direction too; you have a great song writer who is not so good at writing opera. Schubert was great at writing songs and symphonies but his operas are kind of lame. But that's OK. Schubert's operas I've read about and I've seen excerpts, but I figure I owe the man some privacy.

LH: It seems a lot of what you've been working on lately has been American music, which is obviously in English. Do you have any thoughts about singing Schubert in English? Would there be any value in that?

NG: I've thought about it. I think there would probably be a huge value in it. When I work on music, I really think the point in all of it is communicating, and if the language is an impediment to that, then change it. I've worked with a lot of composers and they're really not wed to a lot of what they do. If it doesn't work then they don't do it because the point of it is to communicate, a sort of talk.

It would have to be the right setting. Like what I was talking about to you earlier with the recording I'm working on now. I'm really trying to create a recording that would bring people into the world of -- I don't like saying classical because not all the work I do is classical, very little of it is actually -- classically good music is a good way to put. Classical music takes thought and work and skill. I feel that under the right circumstance I wouldn't have a problem with singing Schubert songs in English if it were a good translation. I think - and this tradition is sort of lost - I think it's a big compliment to take a tune from one of those great composers and use it to create a different version of it. I don't have a problem with someone taking one of those songs and adapting it to guitar or using it as a jazz tune, or whatever. I think it's a huge compliment; it doesn't destroy what is already there.

LH: As you're saying all this I'm thinking back to the things that Heine said. He didn't really respond specifically to Schubert's songs but when he heard them being sung in Paris he was apparently distressed by the translations they were using. They were awful, he said the words were nowhere near the original and they became quite lame. He said that he was actually quite relieved to know they didn't use his name; they used the pseudonym of the Frenchman who translated them. He was relieved that his name was not associated with them.

NG: Well, that's the problem with translation. The good thing is that you can actually translate German into English pretty well. Translating from French is a bit tricky, like translating Italian into English. I always think of singing "amore, amore;" can you imagine "love love love love?" It just doesn't work like the Italian does.

LH: That's one of the strange things that strikes me, that a lot of operas sound great in their native language but in translation they come out sounding a bit corny.

NG: Have you ever listened to Cecilia Bartoli's recording of Schubert Lieder translated into Italian? It's fantastic. I think the translations are good. She sings it so musically and so passionately, it's really wonderful stuff. But, Schubert did write several Italian songs.

LH: So tell us about some of your American folk songs.

NG: There was a review that for some reason has stuck in my mind because the reviewer was talking about a recital where I put on Schubert Lieder at the beginning and American folk song in the second half. The tricky thing about folk songs is that there usually aren't very good arrangements of them. Luckily, my wife has started composing a little bit but also arranging some of these songs, and she's really good at it. It makes sense because she's been playing art songs for so long. She's always wanted to do this and figured if nobody else is going to do this then I may as well. But this reviewer said I would sing an art song like a folk song and a folk song like an art song. I thought to myself 'maybe that's what it's all about'. Maybe it's got to have essentially that. We call it a folk song because it came from the earth, it always existed with us, it moves from community to community and has to exist.

Basically, I try to find folk songs that have the kind of timeless quality in the message that the songs somehow explain.

There's a set of three: *Four Wandering Strangers*, *Tenting Tonight* and *Bound for the Promised Land*. Have you ever heard of *Tenting Tonight*? It was written during the Civil War by someone nobody knows. It's really poignant because it talks about how these soldiers who are fighting each other could be brothers, and they simply wanted peace. What's great about it is that it's not a song about pacifism; it's about the truth that war exists and the truth that we all want peace. It's one of these things that you resign yourself to the truth but it's also how we deal with it when it does occur. It's a wonderful song; it can only come out of something like a Civil War where you're fighting the people you love but you have to do it. Where there's no bitterness and no vitriol. It's uniting because even though we were brothers before we were fighting, now we've become even more so through a common experience. So, although it is kind of heavy, I try to find folk songs like that. Or, to give you another example, we just put on *Git Along Little Dogie*. Originally it's an old Celtic song about the Christ child. The song is basically about a fatherless child. Because Christ was born of a virgin he has no father, except a father in heaven. As it moved into the Americas and out West, it was changed into a cowboy song because a 'dogie' [pronounced doughgee, with a hard 'g'] is a motherless calf. Isn't that neat? So I like doing things that have these little stories to them.

And not just folk songs. Composers right now have fascinating things they're writing. Some of the more heady poetry and religious content poetry by Frank Ferko is terrific. I love his music. I do a lot of Gene Scheer's music. He's an Upper West Side composer who writes his own words and his own tunes, beautiful tunes that you think you must have heard before but are completely original. Another composer I like who is absolutely brilliant -- and I listen to his music and my first thought is that of a Schubert of today -- gorgeous songs -- is Ben Moore. Ben Moore writes wonderful things. So I'm really enjoying receiving all of this music from people and finding the ones that I like and singing them now. There are many people doing that, they're trying to use as many venues, whether they're outdoor venues or recital hall venues or recording studios, to get it out there.

LH: What do you have to do to be a composer today and survive?

NG: I think it's very difficult to be a composer. Jonathan Dove writes music like this too, it's just great stuff. People go about it in different ways. Tobias Picker, whom I know very well and is also a very skilled composer, just wrote *An American Tragedy* which debuted at the Met. I think in his situation something happens that it's very old-school: one particular person wants to sponsor his compositions and help have them performed.

I think to be a composer; all you have to do is write. I don't know much about Ben Moore, I'm only just getting to know him. Gene Scheer I know very well. He always quotes - and I think it's very true- "If you build it, they will come" from the baseball movie *Field of Dreams*. And I think so much good is received out of writing beautiful music and being honest about it. Most of these composers just want to survive. I think a lot of them have other jobs; they might perform or teach. Then on the side they write music. I think it's not much different than it used to be. A few of them end up getting into movies, some into theatre. It's a very difficult business.

You can definitely tell which composers play the piano and which don't. They all use Finale and programs [Editor's Note: music notation software for computers] to write it out so you could read it, but sometimes the realization is just awkward.

LH: What would you have to do to be a modern-day Schubert?

NG: Well, the music is not the same. Nobody's like Schubert, as far as I know. I don't know what kind of personality it takes.

LH: Not necessarily in the mass of compositions, but is there a certain quality in the music?

NG: Definitely a certain quality, it's not about quantity at all. I'm talking about good and bad. A lot of people write songs that won't last. Once again, just using Ben Moore as an example, how he thinks and how he feels the music and the words are all one. It's so intertwined, so woven together that separating those would be just kind of ugly. There's a John Wustman quote and it's not meant to be mean. My wife is a pianist. She was going to her lesson and she was going to do some songs by Samuel Barber, I think it was. She asked if she could listen to a recording of Barber singing or playing them, and Wustman said, "Why, he just wrote them; he doesn't know how they go." In way that's true. Composer friends of mine say to me, "You know, I had this certain thing in my head and then you sang it. This thought just came out and I didn't mean that but it's pretty good." I think that happens a lot.

That's one of the things I love about music, especially songs. Singing is one of the purest ways of making music. There are few people together -- a composer, you, an accompanist, maybe you've got a violin. It's a good metaphor for how human beings interact. It doesn't work alone, without the person to play it you can't hear anything, without the person to sing it there are no words, without a human being to write it there would be nothing there. It's a wonderful intermingling of human spirit and when it's right, you can tell. I don't know why you can tell, but you can.

One thing about Schubert: I think it's great for singing students to start by singing songs by Schubert rather than arias. Mozart too, I think, is one of the most difficult composers to sing because it starts showing all of your flaws, it's really exposed. Schubert is also the same way. It's so right, it's so true, so exposed that when you're learning to sing it's an excellent tool because you have to invest yourself emotionally but you also have to be very skilled technically to be able to sing it. You have to understand all the words and you can also transpose it into whatever key suits you best at the time, which is also wonderful.

LH: Is there a song or group of songs where your understanding and your approach have changed?

NG: Definitely. *Die schöne Müllerin* changes all the time. Every time I sing the cycle things start to change while I'm thinking about it. It's funny; *Die schöne Müllerin* is definitely my favorite song cycle, no doubt about that. I find it so sad, so touching at the end. After all, the miller kills himself. A lot of the imagery, what I was talking about before, the blue and the green and white, all of that I think finally makes a little more sense to me than when I was first doing it. Especially when you listen to that song cycle the very first time. You may have a brief translation while listening if you don't know the words; reading along with the text is really complicated. It's hard to understand what in the world is going on. I think it's one of those things, like in other aspects of life, that simply by repeating it you begin to understand it. How Schubert seems to understand it so well on a first reading and so meaningfully is unbelievable. Maybe that's what makes a composer so great, or a performer so great, is just that. Someone once said that when you're doing it right it's sort of like sticking your finger up in

the music of the spheres. It's not you; you're just tapping into that thing that is everywhere and goes through everything.

LH: If Schubert were to come back today, would he be like one of your American folk song writers?

NG: If he were American. Yes, probably. I don't know if he'd just use a piano but he probably would.

LH: Do you think he'd be able to create the same appeal, to capture whatever it is that allows him to create an experience that people can relate to?

NG: There's a quote from the Thomas Mann story *Death in Venice* where he says that beauty is the one element of the sublime that you can both observe and endure. I think that's what makes Schubert's music so incredible, why it's so beautiful, because we as human beings recognize beauty. It's part of music, that one element of the sublime in life, that true goodness that we can understand. Virtue we don't really get, that's something a little harder to understand. All those elements of goodness, other than beauty, are tricky, and I think in Schubert, it's indefinable. I'm sure he'd write the same way; it would be the same soul and although he'd have different circumstances it would still be same. More so than Mozart, he'd be writing movies and trying out all sorts of gadgets. Beethoven would probably be a heavy metal composer. They were human beings, they all had musical genius but they lived in the world.

And that is where we left the conversation. In Nathan Gunn we discover a wealth of musical understanding and energy that we can never tire of. It is with great anticipation that we await the outcome of his latest projects, and, perhaps the chance to hear his performance of some Schubert Lieder.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To update the interview: on December 26, 2006, the one-hour-long opera *Man On the Moon* had its world television premiere with Nathan Gunn as Buzz Aldrin on the UK's Channel 4. Nathan Gunn's Sony CD will be released later in 2007. Other interesting news about Nathan Gunn is his appointment as tenured professor of voice at the University of Illinois School of Music in Urbana, starting in August 2007. You can see his schedule and commentary at his website <www.nathangunn.com/>.