

The
Harold Wayne
Collection

Volume 5

Hermann Winkelmann

Bayreuth 1904

Sophie Sedlmair

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1081

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According to one major historian of the Vienna Opera there was in the 1860s a major shortage of tenors. This all too familiar refrain was the prelude to the emergence of Hermann Winkelmann (1848-1912) as perhaps the first great Heldentenor exponent of the great Wagnerian roles. Indeed looks and voice clearly combined. For Herman Klein he embodied 'both in voice and aspect the beau ideal of the knightly hero of Teutonic folklore'. The anonymous biographer of the periodical *Deutsche Bühne* went yet further - 'his tall, slender, heroic figure, his expressive body. . .all combined to give a complete theatrical illusion which, quite apart from his singing, is rounded off by his captivating acting'.

Born in Braunschweig in 1848, the son of a piano manufacturer, Winkelmann made his début as Manrico in *Il Trovatore* at Sonderhausen on November 1st, 1875. Within two years he had sung at Darmstadt and Leipzig before being snapped up by that prodigious spotter of talent, Pollini, for the Hamburg Opera. There, like so many other great singers of the time, he learnt his trade. Amongst many other operas, he appeared in the world première of Rubinstein's *Nero* partnered by Rosa Sucher with the composer on the rostrum. In 1882 the ever-enterprising Pollini took the company to London and there Winkelmann sang Tristan to Sucher's Isolde. So great an impact did he make that Klein found it hard to believe he was singing the role for the first time.

In the same year Winkelmann made his first appearance in Bayreuth, creating the role of Parsifal on July 26th. He was to repeat the role at the Festivals of 1883, 1884 and 1886. His only other Bayreuth performances were as Tannhäuser in 1891. It may seem strange that he never sang in the Ring at Bayreuth but the reason is quite simple. After the first cycles in 1876 the Ring was not produced again until 1896. Only after this did it become the centrepiece of successive Festivals. So in the years of Winkelmann's prime as Heldentenor there were no cycles at Bayreuth.

In 1884 he appeared in various North American cities with a German opera company organized by Theodore Thomas, but this was little more than a break from his major centre of activities in Vienna. He joined the company in 1883, making his first appearance as Lohengrin. He remained until 1906, his final new part being that of Matthias in *Der Evangelimann* by Kienzl.

For the early years we can follow Winkelmann's Vienna career through the frequently acerbic musical criticism of Hugo Wolf: 'in good form as Tannhäuser...his most successful role'; in *La Muette de Portici* 'wrongly parted'; in *Der Freischütz*; *Tristan und Isolde*; Marschner's *Der Vampyr*; Pylades in Gluck's *Iphigenie in Aulis*; his Florestan in *Fidelio* 'a thoroughly admirable achievement'; Handel's Saul with Lilli Lehmann; Assad in *Die Königin von Saba*, in which 'our local forces mastered the appalling demands Goldmark makes on the singers'

voices'; *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*; *Nero* in which he did 'all that was humanly possible to extract a spark of life'; Goldmark's *Merlin*; Siegmund and both Siegfrieds; *Euranthe*; Kistler's *Kunihild and Lohengrin*. Wolf also comments on one concert in which Winkelmann sang Schubert's 'Auf der Strom', 'a monotonous interpretation'.

Also in Vienna Winkelmann sang in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, *Rienzi*, *Die Meistersinger*, Massenet's *Le Cid*, *Norma*, *Otello* and Gluck's *Armide*. What is so striking is the range of repertoire - from the classical through the romantic to the great heroic tenor roles together with a variety of now mostly forgotten, but then contemporary operas. It is little wonder that by the time Mahler arrived in Vienna in 1897 he was said to be past his best. According to Henri Louis de La Grange, Mahler's major biographer, 'his voice had become undependable, his breath short and his diction often distorted the vowels' but 'he was an intelligent and cultured man and a gifted actor'.

Whilst Winkelmann was to remain with the Vienna Company more or less throughout Mahler's period of directorship, their names are not that closely linked in operatic history. Together with the baritone Theodore Reichmann, Winkelmann remained the darling of the claue, but at the end of 1898 Mahler reduced his salary.

Whatever the true date of the invention of the gramophone it would have been a little too late. No commercial recordings of Jean de Reszke have come to light. He alone seems to have excelled Winkelmann as a Wagnerian tenor. However Winkelmann, two years older, made about a dozen records for various companies. If indeed he was well past his best by the time he made his Gramophone & Typewriter records in 1905, then indeed his voice at its peak must have been a magnificent instrument. We hear a ringing and true Heldentenor but as well as the burnished metal of the voice there is also a velvety quality, particularly evident in the fine aria from *Dalibor*. Needless to say all the records are major rarities in their original form.

The earliest years of the gramophone were characterized by a spirit of adventure and a developing sense of history. The first generation of 'recordists' was not content to wait for the great to come to the studios. The story of how recording apparatus was taken to Craig-y-nos to preserve for posterity the voice of Adelina Patti has often been told, but before this the Gaisberg brothers, Fred and Will, had travelled throughout Europe, and even beyond, in search of material. This is the context for Will's visit to Bayreuth around the time of the 1904 Festival.

Wagnermania was at its height. Throughout Europe the leading opera houses produced his works, whilst a most extraordinary plethora of books and publications was devoted to all things Wagnerian. Adulatory societies were dedicated to support of the 'Master' and his cult. The theatre at Bayreuth was the shrine. After 1882 Festivals took a place at roughly two year intervals; musicians, music lovers, critics, zealots and the merely curious flocked to them. Bayreuth was presided over in quasi-imperial splendour by Wagner's widow, Cosima. There is a vivid description of the atmosphere in a book by Blanche Marchesi who, on being

received by the great lady and her chief musical adviser, Julius Kniese, was bold enough to enthuse about the recent singing in London of Milka Ternina in *Tosca*. After enquiring of Kniese "Who is Puccini?", Cosima, with "a glance which might have pierced a rock", delivered her verdict: "I am profoundly wounded, astonished and amazed that Madame Ternina lowers herself to sing the music of such an unknown man". In 1899 Ternina had sung Kundry in *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. She did not sing there again. Slezak committed a like faux pas: at his audition on The Green Hill he offered "Vesti la giubba".

Many of the world's finest singers appeared at the Festivals and invitations were highly prized. Not all of Wagner's works were held in quite the same veneration. Successive Festivals revolved round *Parsifal* and the Ring Cycle; the other works were performed much less frequently. In 1904 there were 20 evenings of opera - two Ring Cycles, seven performances of *Parsifal* and five of *Tannhäuser*.

Whilst in Bayreuth Will Gaisberg cut 51 waxes including many of leading singers in roles undertaken that year. Not all were published; those that were seem not to have been widely distributed and to have enjoyed only a very short catalogue life. Not surprisingly the records are now all exceedingly rare and this presumably accounts for the paucity of reissues. What is certain is that the series is of the greatest historic importance. We are offered enticing glimpses of the early Bayreuth style and many of the singers made few, if any, other records. This compact disc includes eight of the series.

Otto Briesemeister (1866-1910) was by profession an army doctor, making his operatic début as Manrico in *Il Trovatore* at Dessau in 1893. He sang in Aachen and Breslau, and later in Berlin and Munich. His extensive singing career seems to have been entirely inside Germany. At seven successive Festivals between 1899 and 1909 he sang Loge, his only other significant role being Melot in *Tristan und Isolde* in 1906. According to Albert von Puttkamer in his invaluable *50 Jahre in Bayreuth* he was unequalled in the role of Loge.

A photograph of Hans Breuer (1868-1929) as Mime gives visual reinforcement to Puttkamer's view that this was one of the outstanding performances on the German stage. The face is alive, the characterization complete. His professional début seems to have been at the Bayreuth Festival in 1894 in a minor role in *Lohengrin*. From 1896 to 1914 he sang Mime in all 27 complete cycles. He sang at both Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, but much more important was his long association with the Vienna Opera. He joined Gustav Mahler's ensemble in 1900, sang a wide variety of roles and subsequently became a member of the production staff. Perhaps the highlight of his career as a producer was the world première in Vienna of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* with a cast which included Lotte Lehmann and Maria Jeritza. He was still with the company when he died.

Harold Rosenthal in his *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* comments that Theodore Bertram (1869-1907) was better liked at Bayreuth than in London. Certainly Puttkamer considered him to be one of the greatest singers of the time, commenting on the majesty of his singing and the sheer beauty of his voice. Born into an operatic family, Bertram made his début at Ulm in 1889. He soon

sang at Hamburg, Berlin and Munich, where he was a member of the company until 1899 when he went to the United States of America singing in Boston, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. He had first appeared in Bayreuth in 1892 in a small role in *Die Meistersinger*, but it was only in the 1901 Festival that he took on the major roles of Wotan and the Dutchman, succeeding the great van Rooy and gaining a major triumph. Whilst at Hamburg at the beginning of his career Bertram had sung under the direction of Gustav Mahler who was to bring him to Vienna in 1901. His 'trumpet like' voice made an immediate impression, although one critic thought his performance of the Dutchman over realistic. Mahler's own high opinion of the artist is confirmed in a letter to Richard Strauss, "He has capital high notes (up to F - even G), just as good as the low range, and is a fine boisterous actor". Theodor Bertram was himself the son of two singers and in 1897 he married the soprano Fanny Moran-Olden who died in 1905. He then married the singer Lotte Wetterling, but further tragedy struck with her death in a shipwreck in February 1907. Shortly before, Bertram had been singing in a special season of German opera at Covent Garden. These must have been his last performances since he seems to have suffered a complete mental breakdown and he took his own life later that year in a hotel in Bayreuth. He was only 38 and at the height of his powers.

Like Otto Briesemeister, Alfred von Bary (1873-1926) first entered the medical profession. He had qualified as a neurologist and gained a post in the medical department of the University of Leipzig before even starting his singing career. His voice was discovered by Nikisch and he made his *début* at Dresden as Lohengrin in 1903. He remained with the Dresden company until 1912, singing a great number of roles with Abendroth, Siems and other famous artists. So considerable was his initial success at Dresden and such was the shortage of tenors for the major Wagnerian roles, that in the year following he appeared at Bayreuth as both Siegmund and Parsifal. He continued there until 1914 taking on the roles of Siegfried, Lohengrin and Tristan. Puttkamer felt his interpretation of the latter to be a model. He described the singer as a powerful Heldentenor with beautiful high notes and the ability to modulate his voice. It is this latter quality which makes a particular impact when listening to these, his only two recordings. Von Bary moved to the Munich Opera in 1912 and remained with that company until his retirement in 1918.

The role of the wood bird is one of the shortest in all Wagner's works; so short that it is contained almost complete on a ten inch record by Emilie Gleiss (1863-1923). In the early days of Bayreuth the role attracted some great names. Its first exponent and indeed creator was the peerless Lilli Lehmann; amongst her successors were Emmy Destinn, Frieda Hempel and Emilie Gleiss. Her *début* was in 1890 in Berlin, but the bulk of her career was spent in Dessau where her husband, Oskar Feuge sang as a tenor for some twenty five years.

The voice of Clarence Whitehill (1871-1932) is likely to be better known than others in the series and for this reason this excerpt from *Tannhäuser* may be the greatest revelation. The leading American critics Aldrich and Henderson both wrote about vocal problems which plagued Whitehill throughout a long and generally distinguished career. Conceivably this accounts for the disappointing

impression made by many of his recordings from the 1920s; his début had been as early as 1898 and he sang extensively in heavy Wagnerian repertoire. In fact his records made before the first world war are vastly superior: the 1904 disc demonstrates a smooth legato, a majestic style and a voice of distinction much out of the ordinary. Whitehill's début was as Donner in *Die Götterdämmerung* in Brussels in October 1898. After appearing at the Opéra-Comique in Paris he went back to the United States to sing at the Metropolitan Opera, New York in a season organized by the Savage-Grau English Opera Company. On returning to Europe he sang extensively in Germany, Holland and France before the first of many Covent Garden appearances in 1905. He subsequently participated in the 'English' Ring of 1908 as well as in various international seasons. From 1904 to 1909 Cologne was the major centre for his activities. In one season he sang as many as nineteen different roles. At the end of 1909 he returned as "a prophet in his own land", joining the Metropolitan Opera and remaining a member of that company until 1932, giving some 381 performances of 26 operas. His appearances at Bayreuth in 1904 as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* were followed by engagements at the Festivals of 1908 and 1909 at both of which he sang Amfortas in *Parsifal* which many considered his finest role.

Sophie Sedlmair (1857-1939) had a most unusual career. She began, as did Flagstad, in operetta and ended as a dramatic soprano singing some of the heaviest roles in the repertoire. Her first career in operetta began in Leipzig in the 1879-80 season, after which she sang in various German cities and in Amsterdam. She also appeared in the United States. It was after a further period of study that she re-emerged as a dramatic soprano making her a second début at Danzig in the role of Leonora in *Fidelio*. There followed appearances in Leipzig, Berlin (the Krolloper) and Breslau, but there is little or no information as to her roles. However, in 1896 she gave an extensive series of performances at the important Budapest Opera, appearing in four of Wagner's works: *Tannhäuser*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* as well as *Les Huguenots*, *Don Giovanni* and *Fidelio*.

Whilst still in Budapest, early in 1897, she seems first to have come into contact with Gustav Mahler when he conducted the Philharmonic Orchestra and the soprano sang two arias from *Fidelio*, though which of Leonora's or Marzelline's pieces she sang is unclear. If the information is correct it might suggest that she was harping back to her days as a light soprano since Leonora only has one aria proper. By the time of this concert Sedlmair had been signed up by the Vienna Opera where she remained for ten years, and of course Mahler himself would follow her. During 1897 Sedlmair also appeared at Covent Garden in *Tristan und Isolde*. According to Robert Hitchens in *The Musician* she was better in the second act than in the first and she 'sang often beautifully with fine feeling and knowledge'. He felt she had an excellent voice but he did not like her attack on the high notes. At a later performance her singing of the lengthy duet with Jean de Reszke came in for special praise.

Throughout Mahler's years in Vienna she sang reasonably extensively. In her memoirs Natalie Bauer-Lechner, an early confidant of Mahler, praises her 'magical tenderness' as Sieglinde. Interestingly, Sedlmair had already sung the *Walküre*

Brünnhilde at Vienna when, according to Bauer-Lechner, she 'confessed that she owed him (Mahler) her entire performance; she could read every note and every syllable from his expression'. It is actually much less clear that Mahler had quite as exalted an opinion of Sedlmair; but he clearly valued her versatility, even if, on one interpretation, it reflected a basic ambiguity about the nature of her voice.

Sedlmair stayed with the Vienna Opera until 1907 after which her career seems to have simply petered out. She made very few records, mostly for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1903-4. They reveal an apparently well-trained and well schooled voice - beautiful and exciting - and they suggest a singer at the mid-point of her career. Needless to say none of them is common in original form and most are exceedingly rare.

Leo Slezak (1873-1946) was without question one of the great tenors of the century. As with other singers on this disc his name is indelibly linked with Vienna and Mahler. Following his début at Brno in 1896, he sang in both Berlin and London before joining Mahler's Vienna company in 1901. He remained a member of that company until 1934, taking part in over 900 performances in a wide range of roles. He was a prolific recording artist, making discs for the Zonophone and Berliner companies in 1901 and continuing into the 1930s - a total of at least 375 sides. His early recordings, amongst which are these duets with Sedlmair, are amongst the rarest. Slezak was also the author of several volumes of autobiography and operatic gossip. Some are illustrated with his own drawings and caricatures, and all are amusing. He appeared in films as late as 1943.

The career of Erik Schmedes (1868-1931) intersects those of Slezak and Winkelmann. After his début as a baritone in 1891 and a lengthy stay at Nuremberg, the tenor potential of the voice was spotted by Pollini. He made his second début as tenor in Dresden in 1897 and joined the Vienna company the following year, remaining there until his retirement in 1924. He also appeared in New York, Berlin, Munich and Paris. Here is another prolific recording artist, despite which most of his titles are extremely scarce.

Stanley Henig ©1990

Harold Wayne writes:

Not only is the 1904 Bayreuth series of the greatest importance but virtually every one in the set is a rarity.

In the 1940s Paul Wilhelm of Dresden, an authority in the field, in his correspondence with Bauer stated that no copy of the recording of the legendary Gulbranson had been reported. Her 1904 Bayreuth *Walküre* had no number in *Historical Records* and even when Bennett's German Catalogue was published as late as 1967 no information was made available.

Whitehill 2-42921 was 'N.I.B.' (not in Bauer) and exists in very few copies indeed. Almost as rare are the Feuge, Förstel, Rains, von Scheidt, Briesemeister,

Breuer and Matray records. I have seen several examples of the von Bary, 'Liebeslied', but much, much scarcer is his 'Siegmond heiss ich'.

The only concerted piece of the Bayreuth series is very interesting as it represents the solitary known recording of Josephine von Artner. I have located two copies of this.

Those titles which are not included on this compact disc due to lack of space will be in a supplementary volume of the Harold Wayne Collection.

Most of the above discs came into my possession via the collections of Herr Grundheber of Munich, Roland Teuchler of Vienna and Otto Müller of Milan. The Bertram was a chance purchase from a James Crawley list of 1969.

The majority of the Sedlmair records I discovered in Vienna. One more major rarity of hers awaits recording space. This is the virtually unknown 'Ich liebe dich', in a mint copy. All of her 78s are inordinately rare, except the two duets with Schmedes, of which the *Lohengrin* is more likely to be found.

Examples of Winkelmann are hard to locate, but of the 1905 G & Ts the double sided *Tannhäuser/Die Meistersinger* is the easiest. The 7" and 12" titles are much more scarce. Most of them originated in Germany and Austria.

Symposium Records is extremely grateful to Professor Stanley Henig for the above article and to Dr. Paul Lewis for much help and advice in this production.

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- k.k. Kammersänger Hermann Winkelmann, Ehrenmitglied der k.k. Hofoper Wien
1. Pastorale aus "Prophet" 6845a 2-42332
 2. Preislied aus "Meistersinger" 6769b 3-42465
 3. Arie aus "Dalibor" 6770b 3-42299
 4. Lied an die Venus aus "Tannhäuser" 6771b 3-42370
 5. Ständchen a. "Troubadour" 6772b 3-42417
 6. Höchstes Vertrauen aus "Lohengrin" 479c 042110
- Dr. Otto Briesemeister
7. Erzählung Loges aus "Rheingold" 1116e 2-42920
- Hans Breuer, Hofopernsänger
8. Mime - Erzählung aus "Rheingold" 1130e 2-42922
- Theodor Bertram, Kammersänger
9. Wotans Einzug in Walhall, aus "Rheingold" 1097e 2-42917
- Dr. Alfred von Bary
10. Liebeslied aus "Walküre" 1136e 2-42925
 11. Siegmund heiss ich und Siegmund hin
aus "Walküre" 1137e 2-42926
- Hans Breuer, Hofopernsänger
12. Als zullendes Kind zog ich dich auf
aus "Siegfried" 1131e 2-42923
- Emilie Feuge, Hofopernsängerin
13. Sang des Waldvogels a. "Siegfried" 1114e 43575
- Clarence Whitehill
14. Wohl wusst' ich hier sie ins gebet zu finden
aus "Tannhäuser" 1124e 2-42921
- Sophie Sedlmair, k.k. Kammersängerin Wien
15. Walkürenruf a.d. Oper "Walküre" 897z 43499
 16. Ha! weisst du, was er mir ist?
aus Waltrautenscene "Götterdämmerung" 895z 43451
 17. Dich, teure Halle a. "Tannhäuser" 32Hp 043025
 18. Duett Elizabeth a. "Tannhäuser" w. Leo Slezak 913z 44268
 19. Furbitte der Elisabeth a. "Tannhäuser", Finale II 31Hp 043004
 20. Sentaballade aus "Der fliegende Holländer" 34Hp 043000
 21. Einsam in truben Tagen a. "Lohengrin" 57Hp 043009
 22. Duett aus Lohengrin, II. Akt w. Erik Schmedes 56Hp 044023
 23. O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe
Zwiegesang a. "Tristan und Isolde" w. Erik Schmedes 55Hp 044039
 24. Schlussduett aus Aida w. Leo Slezak 63Hp 044033

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