Pauline Viardot

Birth name: Pauline Michelle Ferdinande Garcia

* 18 July 1821 in Paris, Frankreich
† 18 May 1910 in Paris, Frankreich

Singer, composer, arranger, pianist, voice teacher, organist, cultural mediator, organiser, editor, folksong collector, illustrator

"With her Spanish temperament, her French upbringing and her German sympathies, she unites the characteristics of different nations within herself to such an extent that one would not wish to concede an exclusive claim to her on the part of any particular country, but to name art as the fatherland of her free choice and love. Some great artists owe the enthusiasm that they create to the reproduction of an inborn national element conferred to them in its most perfect, ideal form. Pauline Viardot is capable of comprehending each ideal and of assimilating the secret meaning of whatever she has the opportunity to research, handling and mastering its forms."


Profile

Pauline Viardot stood at odds with what is described as the necessary music-historical development in musicological representations of the 19th century, including the separation of high and popular culture, original work and adaptation, composition and improvisation as well as interpretation, or between public musical life, music in the salon and so-called domestic music-making. As an internationally active musician, she also ran counter to the political and social developments in the second half of the 19th century. These required a definite national classification from artists as well as - even on the stage - a clear gender identity from women and men.

As a singer, pianist and composer, she performed in all the important musical centres of Europe during this period. Together with Hector Berlioz, she made a decisive contribution to the Gluck renaissance and made works of Georg Friedrich Händel known in France. In addition, she was one of the most important protagonists of Giacomo Meyerbeer who, in particular, tailor-made the role of Fidès in his opera "Le Prophète" to fit her. She sang in the English premieres of Verdi’s "Macbeth" (Lady Macbeth) and "Il Trovatore" (Acuzena). She collaborated especially closely with Charles Gounod ("Sapho"), Hector Berlioz ("Les Troyens"), Jules Massenet ("Marie-Magdeleine"), Gabriel Fauré and Camille Saint-Saëns ("Samson et Dalilah"). The main focus of her concert repertoire was on arias of the 17th and 18th centuries – she was considered an expert in "Early Music" – on her own vocal transcriptions, especially of the Mazurkas of Chopin (VWV 4020-4031) and on traditional songs of various nations.

Almost concurrently with her concert debut (Brussels 1837), Robert Schumann published a composition of hers, the lied "Die Kapelle" ("The Chapel") to a text by Ludwig Uhland (Leipzig 1838), VWV 1017. This was the upbeat for an oeuvre comprising approximately 250 compositions in various genres. As a result of her profession,
the focus was on vocal works for one or several singers with piano accompaniment and on scenic works, so-called "opérettes de salon" for solo singers, choir and piano. She also composed chamber and piano works. A second important area of focus in her compositional work was adaptations of other composers' works and traditional songs of various national origins. From 1838 to 1904 her compositions and adaptations were published in several countries and languages, in Copenhagen, Warsaw, Berlin, Leipzig, Weimar, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, New York and other cities. Most of the lieder of Pauline Viardot were published in lieder collections, often in multilingual editions. A third area of focus was her activity as an editor: starting in 1861 she began the publication of a collection of 75 vocal pieces of the 17th to 19th centuries, the "École classique du chant" (VWV 6001-6071), and published the edition "50 Mélodies de Franz Schubert" (VWV 6101-6150) in 1873.

Pauline Viardot spoke fluently Spanish, French, Italian, English, German and Russian, and also composed in a number of languages and in different national styles. With the international orientation of nearly all her activities, Pauline Viardot encouraged musical exchange, especially between Germany, France, Spain and Russia. She made an essential contribution towards of Schumann's reception in France and brought works of Russian composers, previously unknown in the West, to Germany and France.

More on Profile

Cities an countries

Pauline Viardot was born in France as the third child of Spanish parents. As a child, she travelled to the USA and Mexico (1825-1827) with her parents' theatre group. After her operatic debut in 1839 in London, she was engaged at various theatres in Paris. Engagements lasting several months and extended concert tours took her to Madrid (1842), St. Petersburg and Moscow (1843-1846), Vienna (including 1843/44), Berlin (1846/47), Dresden (1847/48), London (1848-1859), Pest (1858) and Dublin (1859), amongst other cities. In 1863 she settled with her family in Baden-Baden, where she remained until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. In 1872 she returned to Paris – following a sojourn of several months in London – and lived there until her death.

Biography

Pauline Viardot was born into a family of singers. Her parents, Manuel del Popolo Vicente Rodriguez García, also known as Manuel García père (1775-1832), and Maria-Joaquina Sitchez (1780-1854), as well as her siblings Manuel Patricio Rodriguez García (1805-1906) and Maria Felicité García – known by her stage name Maria Malibran (1808-1836) – were singers.

Pauline Viardot was originally trained as a pianist by Franz Liszt, amongst others. After the early death of her famous sister in 1836, however, she was urged by her mother to continue the family tradition and become a singer. Her mother also trained her. Already one year later she made her debut in Brussels, attracting much attention there through her unusual vocal range and musical versatility. In 1840 she married the author and Cervantes translator Louis Viardot, who usually accompanied her on extended concert tours and international engagements. Their first child, daughter Louise, born in 1841, was brought up for the most part by her grandmother and also became a singer and composer. She adopted the name Héritte-Viardot. Through her pronounced dramatic skill, Pauline Viardot influenced composers such as Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Charles Gounod, Camille Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, Jules Massenet and Richard Wagner and worked with them on the roles written for her, perhaps also participating in their composition in some cases. Alongside her stage and concert career, she was active as a vocal pedagogue, continuing to use the Garcia Method in her teaching.

In the year 1863 Pauline Viardot withdrew from the public stage and settled in Baden-Baden (1863-1870) – with her husband, her three younger children (two daughters, one son) and her friend, the Russian author Ivan Turgenev. She built a small opera house in her garden, where she performed her own stage works with her pupils for the international society of Baden-Baden. The Franco-Prussian War brought her via London back to Paris, where she continued to teach, compose and lead a large salon until her death in 1910.

More on Biography

Already as a small child, Pauline Viardot accompanied her father's vocal instruction on the piano, thus assimilating a great deal of knowledge unconsciously. She originally wanted to be a pianist and composer and receive the corresponding instruction, including two years with Franz Liszt and probably also with Anton Reicha, but her
sister’s early death and her brother’s withdrawal from the stage left her no choice in the matter. She, too, had to become a singer. Her mother became her teacher; her father had already died in 1832. Already a year later, when she was 16 years old, she made her debut in Brussels at a concert given by her brother-in-law, the Belgian violinist Charles de Bériot (on 13 December 1837), attracting much attention through her vocal range spanning three octaves and her musical versatility. Already during her first concert tour through Germany with her brother-in-law in 1838, she performed vocal compositions of her own, which she herself accompanied on the piano. She became acquainted with Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann in Leipzig and maintained a lifelong friendship with Clara Wieck. In 1838 Robert Schumann published one of her German lieder, ”Die Kapelle”, VWV 1017 to a text by Ludwig Uhland, as part of his collection of musical works from earlier and more recent times in the ”Neue Zeitschrift für Musik” published by him, and he later dedicated his Heine Lieder Cycle, Op. 24 to her. She made her operatic debut as Desdemona in Rossini’s ”Othello” first in London (9 May 1839), then in Paris (8 October 1839). She accepted her first engagement at the Théâtre Italien in Paris, where she provided ample evidence of her theatrical talent, especially in the most varied Rossini roles. Alfred de Musset, George Sand, who made her the heroine of her novel die ”Consuelo” (1842/43), and Hector Berlioz were soon to be found amongst her admirers and friends.

In 1840 she married the author Louis Viardot, who was at this time director of the Théâtre Italien. Their first daughter (Louise Pauline Marie, born in 1841), was initially raised by Pauline Viardot’s mother, Maria-Joaquina Sitchez. Louis Viardot, 21 years her senior, resigned his position and accompanied his wife on concert tours that took her through all of Europe during the ensuing years. Her most important performance venues were London, Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, and St. Petersburg, where she was engaged at the Opera from 1843 until 1846. It was there that she also made the acquaintance of the Russian author Ivan Turgenev, who fell in love with her; he lived next door to the Viardots for many years until his death in 1883. In St. Petersburg, Pauline Viardot also appeared for the first time as Norma, which became one of her most important roles. Alongside the Italian repertoire, she was also the first foreigner to sing works of Mikhail Glinka, Peter I. Tchaikovsky and Alexander Dargomyzhsky in Russian.

She rarely performed in Paris. Due to the republican convictions of Louis Viardot and his declared opposition to Louis Napoléon, Pauline Viardot was also repeatedly confronted with hostilities. Nonetheless, the performance of Meyerbeer’s ”Le Prophète” (16 April 1849) with Pauline Viardot’s premiere in the role of Fidès was a unique triumph. Meyerbeer commented as follows on the then 28-year-old singer: ” ... I owe a large portion of the effect to Viardot who, as a singer and actress, elevated herself to a tragic height such as I have never before seen in the theatre.” (Letter from G. Meyerbeer to his mother Amalie Beer, undated, according to Becker written on 16 April 1849, in: Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefe und Tagbücher, Bd. 4, ed. Heinz Becker, Berlin 1970, pp. 486-487). Pauline Viardot sang the role of Fidès over 200 times in French, German and English on all the major European stages. She also supervised the English rehearsals herself. Alongside this figure, it was above all Gluck’s Orphée to whom she lent dramatic veracity with her acting skill. Berlioz worked together with her on the French version of the role for tenor and the Italian version for castrato, thereby recovering the forgotten opera for the stage (18 November 1859). Bellini’s Norma, Beethoven’s Fidelio, Gluck’s Alceste and Verdi’s Acuzena (”II Trovatore”) as well as Lady Macbeth were further milestones in the career of this singer-actress, even though she was unable to help the opera ”Macbeth” achieve a breakthrough. Then, in 1863, at the age 42, she withdrew from the stage and left France for political reasons. She moved to Baden-Baden with her husband, her three younger children (Claudie, born in 1852, Marianne, born in 1854 and Paul, born in 1857) and Ivan Turgenev. There she taught pupils from all over the world, even having a small opera house built in her garden where she gave concerts with her pupils and children, also performing her own stage works before the international society of Baden-Baden. Ivan Turgenev wrote the libretti. One of the pieces, ”Le dernier sorcier” (1869), was also publicly performed in an instrumental version in Weimar (1869), Riga and Karlsruhe (1870). In addition, Pauline Viardot performed together with Clara Schumann as a duo pianist, presented chamber music and gave private organ concerts. The world premiere of the ”Alto Rhapsody” by Johannes Brahms (3 March 1870, Jena) also took place during the Baden-Baden period. Brahms had become acquainted with her through Clara Schumann. The Franco-Prussian War and the fall of Napoléon III brought Pauline Viardot via London (private performance of ”Le dernier sorcier” on 11 February 1871) back to Paris, where, until her death at the age of 89, she continued...
to teach and compose new works, including so-called salon operettas, i.e. the "opérette de salon en trois tableaux" "Cendrillon" (1904), and pantomimes such as "Au Japon". Pauline Viardot led an important music salon in Montmartre on Rue de Douai until the deaths of her husband and Turgenev in 1883, thereafter on Boulevard St. Germain.

Appreciation

Even when one takes into account the fact that practising musicians were internationally active as a matter of course - not only in the 19th century - the musical multilingualism of Pauline Viardot is striking, both as a singer and as a composer. The internationally orientated activities of Viardot are all the more remarkable for having taken place during a period of national demarcations, a time in which each country endeavoured to develop its own national style, usually highlighting it as a boundary with respect to other countries. Both in her manner of living and in her activities, Pauline Viardot rejected tendencies towards polarisation and aesthetic battles: in her salon, the bust of Rossini stood next to that of Beethoven – both composers representing, in the second half of the 19th century, musical cultures that were considered opposed to each other from the German point of view.

Her compositions are the expression of a conception of music as an art of relationships on the most widely differing levels - a conception that has largely fallen through the "cracks" of music historiography and is therefore all the more interesting for us today.

More on Appreciation

See also: http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Viardot/

Reception

Not only did the singing and interpretative style of Pauline Viardot live on through her daughter, Louise Héritte-Viardot, and her numerous pupils, but also a portion of her compositions for solo voice and especially her adaptations of Chopin's Mazurkas. Up until the 1920s, individual pieces were found on concert programmes. The stage works of Pauline Viardot, written for a private audience, were nonetheless given several public performances in Weimar, Riga and Karlsruhe until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. In addition, the novel "Consuelo" by George Sand can also be classified as a document of the composer's reception, for its heroine was modelled on Pauline Viardot and accentuated the political dimension of her work as a singer.

Today there are two internationally renowned singers - Marilyn Horne and Cecilia Bartoli - who above all are committed to the works of Pauline Viardot. Since 1999 one can also observe a growth of interest in Germany in Pauline Viardot's work. A Viardot project was carried out at the Academy of the Arts (today: University of the Arts) in Berlin, directed by the present author, during the course of which portions of the Baden-Baden operetta "The Last Magician" were performed for the first time in over 100 years. This production was also shown at the Baden-Baden Municipal Theatre during the same year. In 1999 the City of Baden-Baden also organised an exhibition on Pauline Viardot's work in Baden-Baden and Karlsruhe. In 2003 "Cendrillon" was staged again in Zurich, Basle, Mainz and Berlin, in Hamburg in 2010, at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 2013 and in Baden-Baden on the occasion of the Easter Festival that same year, mostly within the framework of experimental studio stage productions. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of her death in 2010, "The Last Magician" was also performed again in Pourrières, France. In the year 2000 a recording of "Cendrillon" under the direction of Nicholas Kok was released. A portion of the lieder of Pauline Viardot has been recorded a number of times. A selection of her compositions is accessible in modern editions, but a great deal remains unpublished as before and/or must be considered lost.

List of Works

A current catalogue of works of Pauline Viardot has been compiled since 2007 by Christin Heitmann within the framework of the DFG research project "Places and Paths of European Cultural Mediation through Music: The Singer and Composer Pauline Viardot" at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Hamburg. It has been freely accessible since July 2012 on the internet as an online databank: Christin Heitmann: Pauline Viardot. Systematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis (VWV), http://www.pauline-viardot.de/Werkverzeichnis.htm

2013.  
http://dspace.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/48502

Repetoire

There is no collection of concert programmes of Pauline Viardot in existence, either for her operatic or concert repertoire. At present, it is only possible to reconstruct outlines of both. Her concert repertoire included, amongst other works, lieder and arias of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Vincenzo Bellini, Charles August de Bériot, Hector Berlioz, Johannes Brahms, Fabio Campana, Gaetano Donizetti, Mikhail Glinka, Christoph Willibald Gluck, Carl Heinrich Graun, Georg Friedrich Händel, Jean Baptiste de Lully, Benedetto Marcello, Jules Massenet, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Claudio Monteverdi, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Gioacchino Rossini, Franz Schubert, Clara and Robert Schumann, Alessandro Stradella, Peter I. Tchaikovsky, Giuseppe Verdi, Richard Wagner and Carl Maria von Weber as well as her own compositions and adaptations.

Her best-known operatic appearances included roles in operas of Vincenzo Bellini (Amina in "La Sonnambula", Norma in "Norma", amongst others), Christoph Willibald Gluck (Orphée in "Orphée et Eurydice", Alceste in "Alceste", amongst others), Giacomo Meyerbeer (including Fidès in "Le Prophète", Valentine in "Les Huguenots"), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Donna Anna and Zerlina in "Don Giovanni", amongst others) and Gioacchino Rossini (including Desdemona in "Othello", Rosina in "Il Barbiere di Siviglia", Ninetta in "La gazza ladra").

More on Repertoire

More information at: http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Viardot/

Research

In 1977 the "Association des Amis d'Ivan Tourguéniev, Pauline Viardot et Maria Malibran (A.T.V.M.)" was founded; this association set up a museum and research centre at the former summer residence of Ivan Turgenev in 1983. Their results are regularly published in the Cahiers Ivan Tourguéniev, Pauline Viardot, Maria Malibran.

Since April 2007 a research project has been dedicated to the singer and composer Pauline Viardot with particular reference to cultural exchange. This research project was sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) until 2011 and is located at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Hamburg. The director is Prof. Dr. Beatrix Borchard. A multi-volume series of writings on Pauline Viardot has been planned; the first volume was published in the spring of 2012 and a catalogue of works accessible online can be found under http://www.pauline-viardot.de .

A new biography of Pauline Viardot by the present author will be published in 2014 as part of the series "Europäische Komponistinnen" (European Women Composers) edited by Melanie Unseld and Annette Kreutziger-Herr.

Need for Research

There is a great need for research with regard to all areas of Pauline Viardot's artistic activity. Her compositions, once again, deserve special mention (of the stage works written in Baden-Baden, only the score of "Le dernier Sorcier"/"The Last Magician" is known) as well as her role as a cultural mediator. Since Pauline Viardot corresponded extensively with numerous musicians, thousands of her letters are located in the most varied public and private archives and, like her concert and operatic repertoire, await processing and appraisal. Nor has her participation in the composition of various scores, by Meyerbeer, Gounod, Massenet and Saint-Saëns, for example, been investigated so far.

Authority control

Virtual International Authority File (VIAF):
http://viaf.org/viaf/73929645

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (GND):
http://d-nb.info/gnd/118804375

Library of Congress (LCCN):
http://lccn.loc.gov/n50019659

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Beatrix Borchard, Der lexikalische Artikel wurde im August 2013 vollständig überarbeitet.

Editing status

Editorial staff: Regina Back
First edit 26/05/2004
Last edit 25/04/2018

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