

## Music Views and Reviews by Kathy Wolfe

### Dorothy Maynor's voice from heaven

*"Dorothy Maynor, Soprano and Arped Sandor, Piano," Historic Performance from the Library of Congress, December 18, 1940, CLC-1*

*"Elly Ameling Sings Schubert at Tanglewood," Omega Records OCD 1001*

I first heard the Dec. 18, 1940 Library of Congress concert by soprano Dorothy Maynor broadcast on public radio in 1989. I tuned in my car radio as she began the first aria—Handel's "O Sleep why dost thou leave me" from "Semele." Without knowing who was singing, I nearly drove off the road listening to the sheer beauty of the voice, the restraint of the pianissimo, and the phrasing of the opening trill.

Now you can hear this quality and more on the Library of Congress's newly released compact disc of this concert, from the Library's "Historic Performances" series. More highlights include equally exquisite versions of Schubert's "Ave Maria" (entirely triple pianissimo) and Schumann's "Du bist wie eine Blume." Pianist Arped Sandor is an artist as well.

There are only eight classical selections on this disc, the rest of which are Romantic French arias and American songs and spirituals, so the finicky are forewarned.

It is recorded, however, that after she sang of her final encore, the spiritual "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord," whose three verses were sung a capella, the audience sat in stunned silence for a full minute before bursting into applause, which, as the Library's jacket notes, is the "ultimate tribute" to any artist.

### Dream of love

The concert was given as part of a week-long celebration in 1940 of the 75th anniversary of the proclamation of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by President Lincoln in 1865, which ended slavery in the United States. Others in the series included the African-American tenor Roland Hayes, and the Budapest String Quartet—who played classical string quartets by Brahms's collaborator Antonin Dvorak on black spiritual themes, and quartets by black composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

One could say very simply of Dorothy Maynor, and it is high praise, that she recreated in the soprano range that greatness of voice which belonged to her immediate predecessor, the famous mezzo-soprano Marian Anderson.

More important, Dorothy Maynor was a teacher, who knew how to sing such beautiful bel canto in the old Italian school. Dorothy Maynor's dream of love, was that she would teach generations of black youths to sing in that highest of traditions. Like all intellectuals in history, Maynor knew that the sciences of bel canto and of classical composition belong, just like electricity and other scientific inventions, to the entire human race.

She had always planned to be a teacher, and on her retirement in 1963, Dorothy Maynor founded the Harlem School of the Arts, helped by other New York musicians, to teach these arts in the heart of the ghetto. Lessons when the school began were 50¢, and scholarships plentiful.

"What I dream of is to change the image held by the children," she said. "We have made them believe that everything beautiful is outside the community. I want them to make beauty in this community!"

"You know, the music lover was

really the first astronaut. Through music, we can raise ourselves above the cares of this world. It provides wings upon which we soar, and we become better human beings because of it."

### Ameling's poetry

Soprano Elly Ameling has been one of the best accesses most Americans have had during the past generation to German Lieder (poetic songs). Omega Record Classics' compact disc of a live Schubertiade at Tanglewood in 1987 shows that her mastery only increases with the years.

Ameling has been one of the only contemporary singers of Schubert and other Lieder, whose recordings have been readily available, to combine the three essential elements of poetic understanding, musical grace, and vocal beauty. Tenor Peter Schreier, the only singer to have nearly issued a complete Beethoven Lieder, comes second, for fine poetry and musicality, but he does not sing in the Italian school.

The most prominent Lieder singer (according to the idiots at recording companies), Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, has a gorgeous voice, but as he deteriorated musically through his collaboration with the automaton pianist Gerald Moore, his poetic understanding evaporated. Elizabeth Schwartzkopf suffered much the same fate, and moved on to opera.

Ameling, however, stuck to Lieder, insisting on fine pianists such as Rudolf Jansen, heard here, and Geoffrey Parsons, with whom she could bring out the poetic dialogue. Compromising nothing and insisting on a bel canto voice quality, she learned how to use the Italian sound to shape a German phrase in a way that makes the German, if possible, even more rich. That is not easy.