Tunbridge, Laura. 2018. *Singing in the Age of Anxiety: Lieder Performances in New York and London Between the World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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In *Singing in the Age of Anxiety*, Laura Tunbridge shows how performing, discussing, and listening to German Lieder in the United States and Britain came to carry significant cultural and political meaning during the interwar period. Lieder, Tunbridge argues, helped to articulate both national and universal ideals of culture (often in conflicting ways), illuminating the tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism that marked the 1920s and 1930s. Examining a variety of formats and venues from throughout the interwar period, Tunbridge focuses on the ways in which artists and audiences used Lieder performances for self-definition, commercial gain, or political statement. Lieder were performed on steamships, in New York hotels, in international films, in exclusive London clubs, and on mass radio broadcasts. *Singing in the Age of Anxiety* recounts how each of these venues forced musicians and listeners to negotiate a web of possible interpretations of the genre based on medium, location, identity, and class. Furthermore, Tunbridge argues that these meanings shifted with the political and social winds of the period: the result of these shifts was a dramatic integration of Lieder's interwar cultural capital within the broader concerns of the age, including the possibilities of new recording technologies, the hierarchy of "high-," "middle-," and "low-brow" entertainment amid the emergence of "mass culture," and enduring racial and national prejudices. By revealing how German music was involved in these discourses, Tunbridge successfully demonstrates Lieder's importance to Anglo-Saxon conceptions of Western civilization in the early twentieth century.

The 1920s and 1930s are often referred to as an "age of anxiety," an epithet derived from W. H. Auden's 1947 poem of the same name. The poem's title has stuck in the scholarly and popular imagination as an apt descriptor for the period's cultural, social, and political tensions. Like most writers, Tunbridge uses this phrase to refer to the looming atmosphere of crisis in the 1920s and 1930s, when many anticipated a possible collapse of Western civilization. Historian Richard Overy, for example, describes the interwar period as a "morbid" age, marked by a "a strong sense of impending disaster" that colored public life and

made war seem inevitable (2009, 2). These fears were most visible in the 1930s, but also present in the 1920s, as post-war hopes for reconstruction and international cooperation were dashed by economic crisis and the hollow efforts of the League of Nations to maintain peace. These anxieties were compounded by the rapid pace of scientific and technological change, shifts which called attention to the disruptive effects of modernity and seemed to endanger what remained of pre-war culture. To many, Western civilization itself was under threat.

These were lofty worries, which at first glance might not seem to concern performances of German art song. Yet Tunbridge shows that Lieder were often used as currency in interwar debates in the United States and Britain about civilization and its future. *Singing in the Age of Anxiety* progresses through the various environments in which Lieder participated in these discussions.

The first chapter begins not in London or New York, but on a ship traveling between them shortly after the end of the First World War. Onboard, German-American contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink found fellow musicians among the other travelers and, as was the custom of the day, performed for the ship's passengers. Her choices—"an Italian aria and some English songs," as recorded by her accompanist—were neither her traditional repertoire nor in her native tongue, but rather a reflection of the fraught politics of performing in German to a multi-national audience so soon after the end of the War (16).

Similar scenes are described throughout this chapter. Tunbridge details how musicians such as Schumann-Heink, Irish-American tenor John McCormack, Englishman Louis Graveure, and African-American tenor Roland Hayes altered their use of Lieder to navigate the politics of identity such performances incurred. The choices they faced—whether to sing Lieder in German or in translation, whether or not to provide the text to the audience, or where and how to position Lieder within a program—were heavily influenced by the optics of presenting artifacts of German culture, as well as by the era's prejudices for who was "allowed" to sing Lieder authentically. Schumann-Heink, for example, played up her Germanness for comedic effect on vaudeville and Broadway shows, yet very publicly cast it aside in other venues by renouncing her German citizenship, marrying an American, and adapting concert programs to support war fund-raising (23). Graveure, whose real name was Wilfrid Douthitt, used his false Belgian stage identity to tap into the American preference for "exotic" musicians (27). Hayes, meanwhile, used his adeptness with the German repertoire and language to overcome audience prejudices against the idea of a Black man singing Lieder. His success in London, Vienna, and

eventually Berlin shocked audiences who were used to judging authenticity by nationality and race. Musicologist Kira Thurman (2019, 827) confirms Tunbridge's reading, writing that Black singers like Hayes "sang differently from the way they 'looked,' and in so doing severed the links between music and appearance" that many whites assumed were underpinned by race.

Tunbridge argues that performing Lieder towards the end of the War was fraught with political and social consequences. On the one hand, singers faced an audience who made assumptions about authenticity and ability based on race, ethnicity, and nationality—a challenge that made it difficult for African-American artists like Hayes, for example, to gain acceptance as a "serious" performer of German art song on either side of the Atlantic. On the other hand, that these singers were able to perform Lieder at all after the War shows the enduring appeal of German music to Anglophone audiences. Tunbridge emphasizes that wartime animosity only temporarily lessened American reverence for Teutonic culture.

The changing practices of Lieder performance after the War were affected not only by cultural politics, but also by technology and new practices of listening. In Chapter 2, Tunbridge investigates the ways in which gramophone records, radio broadcasts, and sound film encouraged new attitudes towards art song during the interwar period. The second chapter, therefore, is about the technology itself: how that technology influenced performance practices, modes of listening, and perceptions of repertoire; and how the music appreciation movement underpinned the elements described above. This approach produces one of the most eloquent and informative arguments in Tunbridge's book. New listening technologies, she suggests, shaped the performance of Lieder because they made that repertoire accessible to mass audiences at a time when a new class of listeners—the "middlebrow"—became a visible demographic. Although it fascinated many cultural commentators during the 1920s, the "middlebrow" label was loosely defined and awkwardly applied: in 1926, *The Times* described "middlebrow" listeners as those "who have heard orchestral and other serious music on the wireless and have begun to find it interesting and entertaining," an audience from whom "musical converts are to be made" (66). The satirical *Punch,* meanwhile, described them as "hoping that someday they will get used to the stuff they ought to like" (66).

The idea of the "middlebrow" listener appeared as access to all kinds of music grew exponentially in the 1920s. Tunbridge notes that gramophone records became more reliable and affordable, radio broadcasting grew nationally and internationally, and films introduced sound. Here, too, the general anxiety of

the period left its mark: countless commentators worried that live performances would be rendered obsolete and that music would become a "passive, rather than participatory, activity" (43). Tunbridge argues that the nascent music appreciation movement sought to head off these concerns by articulating the pedagogical value of repertoires like art song. Record and broadcast executives responded by ensuring that significant Lieder composers, singers, and repertoires were commercially visible and viable. To commentators like the *Times*, Lieder could be a suitable bridge between mere entertainment and higher art music listeners "ought to like."

To this end, Lieder appeared frequently on the radio and in films—new mediums considered to be more "democratic" than recordings or live performances (65). These formats gave mass audiences an element of control at home that they could never exercise in the concert hall: one could switch radio stations or change gramophone records at any time. Tunbridge also describes how film and radio added an international element to the culture of Lieder consumption. As radio networks expanded, broadcasts were increasingly shared between countries, removing some of the ability to tell where a singer was from. Singers and Lieder also regularly appeared in multi-language films – productions distributed across international markets that often relied on the cachet of classical singers. John McCormack earned $500,000 for singing in English, French, German, and Italian in the 1929 *Song o' My Heart*; Louis Graveure performed Schubert's "Ständchen" in 1934's *Ich sehne mich nach dir*; and Schumann-Heink included Lieder on short concert films in 1926 and 1927. Tunbridge argues that Lieder even provided inspiration for onscreen characters: in the 1934 film *Blossom Time,* Austrian tenor Richard Tauber actually appears as Schubert himself, stepping in to perform his own songs at a benefit concert when the original singer loses his voice. The result is so moving that Schubert's lover later agrees to marry him (as "Ständchen" plays in the background). Incredibly, this was not the first film to take the composer as its subject: the 1933 film *Leise flehen meine Lieder* was released in German, Spanish, French, Italian, and English versions.

The new mediums of radio, film, and records altered but did not displace traditional venues for Lieder performance in the interwar period. Chapter 3 shows how Lieder concerts catered to the social and intellectual aspirations of various groups in New York and London and how these performances highlighted continuing tensions between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. First, Tunbridge transports the reader up and down Manhattan, visiting the various societies and halls where Lieder was performed. "Another story of the city

emerges," Tunbridge writes, "when we look a little more closely at spaces associated with classical music" (93). Social and musical groups of all types supported Lieder performances: some, like the Deutscher Liederkranz der Stadt New York, kept an overt national identity, while others, like the Beethoven Society, sought a wider membership. Lieder recitals and society concerts appeared mainly in semi-public spaces throughout the city, from smaller purpose-built halls like the Town Hall to the grand Hippodrome, which could seat 5,200.

As the city's elite moved uptown, away from commercial life, Lieder performances proliferated in more private environments. "Musicales"—professional concerts primarily hosted and attended by upper-class Protestant white women—presented Lieder in hotel ballrooms and concert halls as a luxury commodity. Attending these performances "signaled participation in a kind of moderately cosmopolitan civilization," Tunbridge writes, because the artists "were a mixture of native and foreign," singing a predominantly European repertoire with some American music (103). Events like the Bagby Musical Mornings attracted elite audiences (with ticket prices to match) and frequently featured Lieder. Concerts of this type also facilitated social exposure for women who eased into the public sphere through the new hotel restaurants and ballrooms springing up around New York. These events (and their attendees) represented a new flavor of public luxury that benefited from Lieder's cultural capital.

The venues, attendees, and customs described in this chapter enabled live performances of Lieder to flourish in the radio age. These occasions, often precariously "poised between public and private worlds" by their social or economic barriers, nevertheless emphasized the value and function of live performances in tandem with recordings. Tunbridge argues this combination of live and private consumption helped to change the appreciation of Lieder and the status of the genre for the rest of the century (94). But she also asserts that these deluxe performances illuminate Lieder's role in defining upper-class socialization in interwar New York. The "hotel civilization" that emerged in the city during this time, she writes, "confirmed and perpetuated the association between classical music and wealthy high society" in opposition to the spread of mass culture (115). In turn, she links Joseph Horowitz's claim of an intensifying interwar cultural elitism to the continued influence of a "genteel tradition" on Lieder performance, in which art was considered ornamental and removed from everyday life (94). We can easily locate such a tradition at the turn of the century, Tunbridge acknowledges, but it is typically said to have ended with the First

World War; instead, she argues it was reconstituted within the ambitions of middlebrow culture in the interwar period.

Tunbridge also argues in Chapter 3 that, in contrast to Manhattan concert life, performance societies and entertainment media in London worked hand in hand to broaden audiences for Lieder. Perhaps the most significant group was the London Lieder Club (LLC), established in February 1933. Buoyed by rising interest in the Lieder of Hugo Wolf in the 1920s, the LLC combined the hotel luxury of the New York musicales with a strong continental presence. The LLC's unabashed emphasis on German music and musicians in a time of rising international tensions generated significant publicity. Its singers, almost exclusively foreign, were scrutinized as part of what the *Daily Mail* called a "German Invasion" of British culture in the early 1930s (121).

Yet Tunbridge argues the LLC ultimately strengthened cultural ties between Britain and Germany. She points to the work of the Anglo-German Club, which opened in 1931 and shared many members with the LLC, and to the 50,000 Germans who visited Britain as tourists every year in the early 1930s. In tandem with the Hugo Wolf Society, the LLC also grew the number of dedicated Lieder recitals and recordings made in London as well as the number of Lieder performances on the radio. This proliferation, Tunbridge claims, changed the appreciation of Lieder in England beyond an immediate circle of privileged audiences.

Chapter 4 examines American and British attitudes towards German music and musicians from the 1930s until just after the Second World War. It explores how Lieder were understood by critics and audiences as a German cultural product within the nationalistic context of pre- and postwar tensions, and how that identity influenced consumption and reception. In this chapter, many earlier themes reappear: changing performance practices, which continued to evolve in the face of new models and standards derived from recording technologies; the constant push and pull between cosmopolitanism and xenophobia; and widening divisions between the "brows," especially as economic depression limited opportunities for artists to perform across genres or venues. Tunbridge contends that these changes (and those described in earlier chapters) offer us an "alternative route" into the history of music making in the 1930s (132). This chapter delivers on her assertion by showing us how musicians, repertoires, and performances were affected by the era's politics and anxieties.

The effects of economic depression in the early 1930s and its associated political turmoil greatly impacted the musical world. Tunbridge first recounts how Elena Gerhardt, Elisabeth Schumann, and Lotte Lehmann navigated that

flux, as song recitals went out of fashion and many artists feared losing work entirely. Grim job prospects also revived long-standing fears about radio and the gramophone supplanting live performances. Foreign musicians were increasingly subject to xenophobia and protectionism, even as refugees from Central Europe arrived in the United States and Britain in increasing numbers (135). Economic deprivation tested the strength of music's cosmopolitan networks as these refugee artists arrived: Schumann's biographer Gerd Puritz, writing in 1993, believed "the small-scale, subtle art form" of the Lied, born in the culture of Europe, did not fit the "huge, fast-moving New World" of the United States (Puritz 1993, 231).

Yet Tunbridge contends that there was a place for Lieder in these difficult years, in ways that often intertwined with the political issues that threatened musical culture. Marion Anderson's performance of Schubert's "Ave Maria" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in April 1939 shows how Lieder participated in political and racial dialogues while retaining its cultural cachet. Anderson was prevented from performing at Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution, upholding a ban on nonwhite artists. The public outcry caught the attention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who worked for the singer to appear instead at the Memorial (146). In a typically varied program, Anderson performed the "Ave Maria" in between a Donizetti aria and four spirituals to a crowd of 75,000 people. "Nation's Capital Gets Lesson in Tolerance," newsreels reported (147). Tunbridge sees Anderson's performance of Schubert as a mark of Lieder's continuing cultural cachet, meant to assert her validity as a musician in spite of racist oppression. At the same time, Anderson's inclusion of Lieder in this pathbreaking concert reveals what many saw as the genre's "universal" appeal as War approached.

The above idea of Lieder's universality—its supranational cultural relevance—defined the genre's increasingly complex role in interwar culture, and it is towards this tension that Tunbridge's focus is aimed. While the genre could never be unmoored from its association with the German language, in the 1930s it became more strongly linked to the notion that Western society was universal. To many, Lieder became a symbol of the very civilization threatened by inevitable war with Germany. This was a dramatic reversal of attitudes commonly held less than two decades earlier. While German music was suppressed, and even vilified during the First World War, no such prejudice appears during the anxious prewar years or during the Second World War itself. Lieder were sung regularly, including performances of complete song cycles: Myra Hess's daily concerts at the National Gallery in wartime London regularly featured Lieder; Elena Gerhardt performed German songs to an enraptured audience of British soldiers

at Salisbury in September 1944. Such cosmopolitan programming was meant to contrast what Tunbridge calls the "open-minded pluralism" of the Allies against Nazi prejudice (155). She quotes the American composer Deems Taylor, who argued that "our kind of civilization is at stake…let us not think of [music] as the private property of any man or any country" (155). Hess felt her concerts had a role to play in "reconstituting our permanent values in the shattered world of today" (156).

In all aspects, *Singing in the Age of Anxiety* is an impressive, highly effective work of scholarship. Tunbridge's focus on places and audiences—rather than composers and works—evinces Lieder's broader social role in interwar England and America, moving beyond the art form's music-stylistic history. There is plenty here for scholars of middlebrow culture, cosmopolitanism, or American and British history in the early twentieth century. The transatlantic comparison is insightful, though one occasionally wishes for some German perspective as a counterweight. Tunbridge does make ample use of reactions to Roland Hayes's visits or accounts of German émigré musicians, for example, but an account of Lieder's role in interwar German nationalism might have further strengthened the comparative framework of the book as a whole. Yet this clearly fell beyond the scope of Tunbridge's book and its omission does not lessen the efficacy of her argument.

Tunbridge hopes that her book will encourage readers to reflect on their own values and their own world. She positions her monograph as a window into the ways that Western societies thought about the importance of art and culture in the early twentieth century, patterns which are "key to evaluating what might be meant by civilization today" (12). In that sense, learning how interwar musicians and listeners engaged with the threads of their civilization can cause us to think more deeply about our own. The lesson is clear: music can be politicized, co-opted, and weaponized by whole audiences and groups (even towards whole audiences and groups) and not just by governments. Yet, as *Singing in the Age of Anxiety* demonstrates, music can also be a binding, aspirational force, capable of mediating between worries and hopes in uncertain times.

References

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