

HISTORIC  
PERFORMANCES



# Edith Mathis

Mozart | Bartók | Brahms | Schumann | Strauss

Selected Lieder  
Karl Engel

## Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756–1791)

Das Veilchen K. 476 2:47  
 Als Luise die Briefe ihres ungetreuen Liebhabers verbrannte K. 520 1:41  
 Abendempfindung an Laura K. 523 4:45  
 Dans un bois solitaire K. 308 (295b) 2:54  
 Der Zauberer K. 472 2:48

## Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Village Scenes. Slovak Folksongs, Sz. 78

Heuernte 1:33  
 Bei der Braut 1:57  
 Hochzeit 3:30  
 Wiegenlied 5:03  
 Burschentanz 2:47

## Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Five Songs from 42 Deutsche Volkslieder, WoO 33

Erlaube mir, feins Mädchen 1:15  
 In stiller Nacht 3:12  
 Wie komm' ich denn zur Tür herein? 2:19  
 Da unten im Tale 2:29  
 Feinsliebchen, du sollst 4:14

recorded live at LUCERNE FESTIVAL  
 (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)

Previously unreleased

## Robert Schumann (1810–1897)

Nine Songs from Myrthen, Op. 25

Widmung 2:11  
 Der Nussbaum 3:27  
 Jemand 1:36  
 Lied der Braut I («Mutter, Mutter, glaube nicht») 2:01  
 Lied der Braut II («Lass mich ihm am Busen hängen») 1:34  
 Lied der Suleika («Wie mit innigstem Behagen») 2:48  
 Im Westen 1:16  
 Was will die einsame Thräne 2:59  
 Hauptmanns Weib 1:55

## Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Schlechtes Wetter, Op. 69 No. 5 2:29  
 Die Nacht, Op. 10 No. 3 2:55  
 Ach, Lieb, ich muss nun scheiden, Op. 21 No. 3 2:08  
 Meinem Kinde, Op. 37 No. 3 2:19  
 Hat gesagt – bleibt's nicht dabei, Op. 36 No. 3 2:31

encore announcement: Edith Mathis 0:10

## Hugo Wolf (1860–1903)

Auch kleine Dinge können uns entzücken  
 from the Italienisches Liederbuch 2:42

**Edith Mathis** soprano  
**Karl Engel** piano



**The voice of music**  
**The soprano Edith Mathis**

According to an artist feature of the soprano Edith Mathis, published by the music magazine *Fono Forum* in 1968, an engagement at the New York Met was a “Pour le Mérite” for a singer. It was not out of an affected sense of modesty that Edith Mathis commented during the interview for the article that she had been “hesitant about going to America for a long time”. The glamour of the glory road to stardom had been suspect to her from an early age, she explained, adding: “If I wreck my voice out of ambition, shouting my way through an opera, then I can’t sing any more *St Matthew Passions*.” The native Lucerne artist consistently remained in the “safe area” of her voice, the lyrical soprano *Fach*, whose repertoire she exploited comprehensively. She regularly performed the passions of Johann Sebastian Bach and Haydn’s *Creation*, cantatas by Bach, Stradella and Telemann, masses and sacred music by Mozart as well as the soprano solos in Mahler’s Second and Eighth Symphonies. She also sang the lyrical roles of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber and Strauss, and finally an extensive *Lied* repertoire, focusing on Mozart, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms. Apart from the stage works of Mozart and Haydn, she omitted Italian operas – both the baroque *opera seria* and romantic *belcanto* operas. This decision was based on emotional rather than voice-related reasoning.

The concert performances and song recitals which Edith Mathis gave at LUCERNE FESTIVAL between 1965 and 2001 demonstrate that her focus was not an extensive career, to sing everywhere and not really to be known and familiar anywhere: she was a household name in Vienna, Berlin and Munich, but also at the festivals of Salzburg, Edinburgh and her home city of Lucerne. Here, she was introduced in 1965 as part of a “Mozart Serenade” conducted by Paul Sacher at the city’s Lion Monument, singing two Mozart concert arias: *Misera, dove son! ... Ah! Non son’ io che parlo*, Fulvia’s resigned aria in Metastasio’s *Ezio*, and *Alcandro, lo confesso ... Non sò d’onde viene*, a brilliant coloratura gift to Aloisia Weber with which the love-struck composer had paid tribute to the singer’s virtuosity. Edith Mathis’ first song recital followed on 3 September 1975, alongside the sought-after Swiss song accompanist Karl Engel (who also partnered Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Hermann Prey and Brigitte Fassbaender). In





the years that followed, she appeared in Lucerne either as a song interpreter, presenting selected works from Hugo Wolf's *Spanish* and *Italian Songbooks* alongside Peter Schreier, or programmes featuring works by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Strauss or Schoeck. On the other hand, she took part in performances of Frank Martin's *Maria-Tryptichon*, Mahler's Fourth Symphony, Fauré's *Messe de Requiem*, Othmar Schoeck's opera *Massimilia Doni* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by Bohuslav Martinů. In 2018, shortly after her eightieth birthday, Edith Mathis returned once again for an evening of Schumann and Heine, given together with her student, the baritone Rafael Fingerlos: in between the songs, she recited Heinrich Heine's verses. She thus not only appeared at the festival as a star guest, but also put herself at its service.

Edith Mathis had decided at an early age that she would like to become a singer, thanks to the influence of – as she explained in a conversation with Peter Hagmann – records and radio broadcasts featuring Renata Tebaldi and Maria Callas. After studying with Elisabeth Bosshart at the Lucerne Conservatoire she made her debut in 1956 in that city's theatre as Second Boy in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Thanks to good reviews she was invited to the Zurich Opera House to sing Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*. "Cherubino d'amore", as Basilio refers to him in the opera with a mixture of venom and wonder, would remain one of her most successful roles for many years, with which she introduced herself in Hamburg in 1960, at the Vienna State Opera in 1962, at Glyndebourne in 1963 and as part of a guest performance in Tokyo given by the Deutsche Oper Berlin. In 1964 she performed the page's part in the German-language recording of *Figaro* under Otmar Suitner, and four years later in a recording with Karl Böhm, who was probably the most important mentor in her career. This recording reveals one of her most notable qualities: the ability to blend her voice with that of her partner – in this case with the soprano of Gundula Janowitz in the letter duet where exchanging clothes stands not only for a change of roles but also identities. In this context, it should also be mentioned that the style of Mozart performance, as coined by Böhm, which included eschewing appoggiaturas, is nowadays largely considered anachronistic. The same is true of the heavy, velvety Bach sound in the recordings made by Karl Richter, in which Edith Mathis also featured.

In 1959, as a result of a recommendation by the legendary singers' agent Robert Schulz, she was engaged by Wolfgang Sawallisch at the Cologne Opera House for four seasons





as a lyrical soubrette (note the specific nature of the engagement!). After that, she was signed up by the Deutsche Oper Berlin and also gave guest performances in Hamburg, Frankfurt and Munich. In 1970 she appeared as Pamina at the Metropolitan Opera New York and as Susanna at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. At the Salzburg Festival, her performances as Cherubino and Marzelline, as Ninetta in *La finta semplice* and as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* remain unforgettable. In 1964 she appeared in Hamburg – then under the aegis of Rolf Liebermann who presented a paradise of premieres – singing Gottfried von Einem's farce *Der Zerrissene*, based on a play by Johann Nepomuk Nestroy; in 1965 she appeared in Berlin in the premiere of Hans Werner Henze's *Der junge Lord*, singing the role of Luise. Three years later, once again in Hamburg, she performed the part of Emily in Gian Carlo Menotti's science fiction opera *Help, Help, the Globolinks!* and in 1985 she appeared as the queen in Heinrich Sutermeister's *Le roi Bérenger*, based on Eugène Ionesco's *Le Roi se meurt*, a *chef d'œuvre* of the Theatre of the Absurd. Edith Mathis fulfilled both the artistic duty as a singer to serve the living, as well as observing the duties that every singer has towards their voice – and which all too often are overlooked. “Always sing with the voice that you have”, the Canadian tenor Léopold Simoneau urged, “and not with the voice that you would like to have.” This enabled her career to last for over four decades.

Edith Mathis was fortunate to be starting out at a time when the operas of Haydn and the young Mozart were recorded on disc. Following the lyrical roles that she sang in her youth, she later also took on some of the central female roles, befitting her own age: these included the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Agathe in *Der Freischütz* and Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. In 1979 she was awarded the honorific title of “Bavarian Chamber Singer”, from 1991 she taught a singing class in Vienna and in 2001 she retired from the stage. Equally fortunate was the fact that, both on stage and in the recording studio, she was able to work alongside conductors such as Karl Böhm, Leonard Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan, Carlos Kleiber as well as Rafael Kubelík (from 1953 a fellow Lucerne citizen), with whom she recorded Mahler's Second and Eighth Symphonies.

The French dramatist Ernest Legouvé, a friend of Marcel Proust, distinguished between voices – as had Stendhal before him – by likening them to different metals: gold, silver and brass. The first sounds brilliant, the second graceful and the third loud and powerful.



Grace: Edith Mathis' voice is a gift to those who love the lyrical and soft side of music; the beauty of her singing is a sensuous manifestation of the spiritual. It is not a dramatic, nor an affectedly exalted voice, but an introverted one with both a silvery high and an unusually sonorous low register, always well-rounded, never becoming breathy, even when she goes below middle C, as happens in Susanna's *rose aria*. Her forte (with apologies for the pun) is her piano which radiates from within. Herbert von Karajan once advised "*piano, piano, but sing it fortissimo*", and Edith Mathis completely corresponded with this paradox, for instance in Pamina's G minor aria *Ach, ich fühl's, es ist verschwunden*, when she sings the phrase "*meinem Herzen mehr zurück*", rising to a top B flat with slow coloratura, or, as included in this programme, she produces an oscillating *chiaroscuro* effect in Strauss' *Die Nacht*. As a *Lied* performer – this becomes clear in her Lucerne recital of 3 September 1975 – she did not subscribe to "interventionist" interpretation, placing text nuance into the foreground, even if she performs a piece such as Mozart's *Der Zauberer* with a subtle and bewitching sense of linguistic fun. In her recording of Wolf's *Italian Songbook* (alongside Peter Schreier) she also eschews any mannered affectation of detail. Edith Mathis' great achievements include her Schumann interpretations with Christoph Eschenbach. She managed to free the Chamisso cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben* – which nowadays is criticised for being anachronistic or anti-emancipatory and which she herself declared as being disconcerting – of its undertone of female subordination.

In contrast to recordings dedicated to one theme or one composer, a song recital such as this documents the entire range of a singer's art, based on vocal colours and dynamic shades. We experience the great naturalness (resulting from the highest artistry) of her Mozart, as well as the elaborately crafted folk-like tone in the *Village Scenes* by Béla Bartók and the *German Folk Songs* of Johannes Brahms. We hear the heartfelt and pensive lyricism in Schumann's *Myrthen* songs (a gift to his wife, Clara, on their wedding anniversary). And finally, there is the (superficial) gloss in selected Strauss songs. Edith Mathis deserved her "*Pour le Mérite*" for remaining the voice of music at all times.

Jürgen Kesting  
Translation: Viola Scheffel



# LUCERNE FESTIVAL

recording: live recording at LUCERNE FESTIVAL (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)



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recording location: Kunsthaus, Lucerne

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p. 3: Edith Mathis' debut at LUCERNE FESTIVAL, with Paul Sacher and the Collegium Musicum Zurich, 1965 / Paul Weber | p. 4: Edith Mathis, Lucerne 1975 / Felix Scheidegger | p. 5: Hans Rudolf Meyer, President of the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, awards Edith Mathis the Art and Culture Prize of the City of Lucerne, 1978 / Ruedi Hopfner | p. 7: Edith Mathis and Karl Engel, Lucerne 1975 / Herbert Borner | p. 8: Edith Mathis gives a masterclass, Lucerne 1990 / Priska Ketterer

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