Discoverability of Forgotten Repertoire: Lieder by Carl Gottlieb Reissiger in an American Woman's Bound Music Collection

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Owner-bound volumes of 19th-century vocal music collected by talented amateurs are a hidden treasure of important, out-of-print repertoire. While individual items of sheet music in library holdings have often been catalogued or indexed in online consortia, the contents of bound volumes in archives and special collections are not often thoroughly described. They exist in a gray area of cataloging/indexing practice.

Examination of the bound sheet music of influential American writer and reformer Julia Ward Howe (1819-1909; author of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”) reveals her high level of interest in the Lieder of Dresden composer and conductor Carl Gottlieb Reissiger (1798-1859) during her coming-of-age years. Several sets comprising a total of 52 of Reissiger’s songs appear in her collection, greatly outnumbering European art song by other composers. Most are not held by USA WorldCat libraries, nor digitized in the open-access International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP/Petrucci), Sheet Music Consortium, or other online venues.

This body of work provides a window into the musical style of this prominent German musician, and offers material for several recital-length performances or recordings of his resurrected repertoire. Contents of similar collector-bound musical volumes owned by significant persons, wherever they exist, should be made more discoverable to scholars, performers, and record producers; these will also be valuable for biographers and historians.

Using Julia Ward Howe’s bound volumes as an impetus, George Mason University Libraries has begun scanning and uploading their previously unrepresented 19th-century musical rarities to IMSLP/Petrucci, facilitating their discovery and access. Poetic texts have been added to the LiederNet Archive. These are new activities for our relatively young university with rapidly growing research collections. Additionally, we are developing prototypes in various schemes (HTML, XML, MEI, Omeka) for online thematic indexes to the contents of each of Howe’s volumes, to be linked to the associated WorldCat records.

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Screenshot of detail from the enhanced WorldCat record for one of the JW Howe music albums, showing itemization of each song. Scores for C.G. Reissiger’s op. 23 and op. 69 Lieder have been contributed to IMSLP. Several more unrepresented works by this composer, as well as those by three other composers in this album, will be uploaded in the coming months. Poetic texts will be contributed to LiederNet Archive.

Screenshot of a prototyped thematic index entry to the contents of this volume, showing specific details of C.G. Reissiger’s op. 23 Lieder. After the schema and markup language are decided, this index to the entire volume will be completed in the coming months and linked to the WorldCat record above. The incipits shown here are from scans of the score, but those in the final version will be newly engraved in Sibelius.