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'ANYTHING BUT CONVENTIONAL':
FAITH AND FOLK IDIOMS IN DVOŘÁK'S BIBLICAL SONGS

By

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century considerable ambiguities arose regarding sacred and secular categories in music. Although such ambiguities have often been discussed in relation to the mass, this study uses the genre of the lied – in particular, Dvořák’s *Biblical Songs* – as a means of examining the interaction between these categories. The problems inherent in the idea of ‘sacred lieder’ are discussed, including case studies of Schubert’s ‘Die Allmacht’ and Wolf’s ‘Nun wandle, Maria’ from the *Spanisches Liederbuch*. The *Biblical Songs* are located within Dvořák’s biography, to show the great extent to which they were a reflection of his personal situation. In-depth analysis of the music and texts of the songs, both individually and as a cycle, reveals that they are representative of a point of interaction between secular lieder for concert performance, and devotional lieder for a domestic context. A comparison with Brahms and his *Four Serious Songs* reveals two very different responses to biblical texts: whereas Brahms’s solution places emphasis on secular love, Dvořák’s songs show a progression from doubt and confusion about God through to faith and rejoicing. Furthermore, whereas the *Four Serious Songs* demonstrate a highly individualistic solution to the pessimism expressed earlier in the cycle, Dvořák’s use of folk idioms at key locations in the *Biblical Songs* places emphasis on communality and tradition. However, the cycle also reveals a more complex expression of faith than is often assumed of Dvořák.
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