

## 1. In Memoriam:

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, German soprano dies.



Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, one of the great sopranos of the last century, died on August 3, 2006, in her home in Schruns, Austria, at age 90. Schwarzkopf, who retired from singing in 1979, lived a relatively quiet life in Zumikon, Switzerland, before moving to Austria three years ago. Her repertoire consisted of works ranging from all eras of music including oratorio, opera, large choral works with orchestra, and lieder and was especially noted for Mozart, Strauss, Schubert and Wolf. Schwarzkopf's extraordinary beauty and unique silvery timbre to her voice made her a legend. Yet, many felt as though her detailed study resulted in interpretations that were artificial and mannered

Schwarzkopf was born Olga Maria Elisabeth Fredericke Schwarzkopf on December 9, 1915, in Jarocin near Poland that was part of the Prussian Empire. Her father, Frederick, was a classics instructor while her mother, Elisabeth Frohling, took charge over her only child's education. Schwarzkopf studied a wide range of subjects including voice, piano, guitar, organ and viola. The family moved several times due to Mr. Schwarzkopf's teaching career and in 1933 settled in Berlin, the year Hitler came into power. These years begin the political controversy associated with Schwarzkopf, since she applied for membership in the Nazi party when she was 20 years old.

Schwarzkopf at first denied allegations of her party affiliation, yet when evidence surfaced that she became an important member of the student organization, Schwarzkopf said it was "akin to joining a union." Her explanation did not satisfy many of her detractors especially after she first denied such allegations, further placing a suspicion on her credibility. Schwarzkopf's political activity could be one explanation why she was not often cast at the Metropolitan Opera, and was not a favored artist of Rudolf Bing, an Austrian-Jew himself. Nevertheless, she was hailed in other US cities such as San Francisco, and those worldwide as being one of the great singers of the twentieth century.

Schwarzkopf's career was largely shaped by two individuals, one of whom was Maria Ivogün, the great coloratura soprano with whom she studied. Ivogün rescued her from a teacher in Berlin who believed that Schwarzkopf was a contralto, coached her pupil in the high soprano repertoire, and introduced her to lieder, a genre with which Schwarzkopf was to be associated throughout most of her career. The other influence was Walter Legge, the British music critic, administrator and producer at EMI records. Legge first heard Schwarzkopf in an audition in 1946, and found his match in a young singer who in the pursuit of perfection demonstrated a capacity for unrelenting study. A unique professional and personal partnership formed and Schwarzkopf and Legge were married in 1953.

Legge selected repertoire that suited Schwarzkopf's voice and supervised her recording sessions,

insuring that her voice was recorded at its best. He also arranged her collaboration with some of the great conductors and musicians of the twentieth century. These associations resulted in interpretations that are still considered definitive: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Furtwangler, Bach's St. Matthew Passion with Klemperer, Beethoven's Missa Solemnis with Karajan, Verdi's Requiem with Giulini, and Strauss' Four Last Songs with Szell to name a few. What emerged was one of the most prolific recording artists of the time whose fame was, in fact, increased through this industry. Her recordings still sell in great number today.

#### Collaborated with Great Pianists

Aside from Gerald Moore, Schwarzkopf's regular collaborative pianist, she was partnered with some of the greatest pianists who were known as soloists. These included Walter Gieseking, Edwin Fischer, Aldo Ciccolini, Alfred Brendel, Sviatoslav Richter, and Glenn Gould, a "luxury of pianists" as Walter Legge stated. Particularly noteworthy are recordings of Schubert's Songs with Edwin Fischer and Mozart's Songs with Walter Gieseking. In one of her last interviews this year Schwarzkopf recalled that Gieseking "never used pedal once; that was something unheard of -- and it was perfect. Pianists use the pedal to make it seem legato, but Gieseking didn't. He didn't touch the pedal at all -- he just played, and it sounded legato." Beautiful legato singing is also the hallmark of Schwarzkopf's singing; therefore, it is no surprise that this collection is still considered a classic. This collection of Mozart also includes the young Alfred Brendel in the concert aria *Ch'io mi scordi di te* for soprano, piano and orchestra. Working with Glenn Gould was something of a different matter altogether and their partnership was limited. Gould's eccentricities did not coincide well with Legge's philosophy on interpretation since Gould improvised and included interpolations in Strauss' score. Legge disapproved of improvisation and believed that every detail needed to be meticulously prepared before recording or performing a work.

Schwarzkopf also championed the music of Hugo Wolf, whose lieder she became acquainted with through the tutelage of Legge, an advocate of his music. Wolf's songs were not often performed during the time Schwarzkopf was singing since they were overshadowed by more accessible lieder and because of their difficulty. Schwarzkopf's renditions of the *Italienisches Liederbuch* and the *Spanisches Liederbuch* with her compatriot Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is still considered definitive. In fact, Artur Schnabel said that he came to love lieder through Schwarzkopf's singing.

Following Legge's death in 1979, Schwarzkopf never sang in public but gave master classes and accepted a few private pupils at her home in Zumikon, Switzerland. As a teacher she was as demanding as her own mentor, but as a colleague very supportive, encouraging and professional. She also attended musical performances and even walked out on some she considered offensive and not adhering to the composer's intentions. Schwarzkopf believed that modern stage directors are tampering with the authenticity of a composer's intentions, stating, "No one would ever think of going into the Louvre and spraying graffiti over the Mona Lisa yet conductors and stage directors are spraying graffiti over musical masterworks."

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf will be remembered as a unique presence on the concert stage in the twentieth century. Her radiant beauty, unique vocal timbre, plus intelligent and penetrating interpretations will set standards for singers for many years. When asked about her membership

with the Nazi party, she claimed she did it as others did simply to work and quoted the first line of Tosca's famous aria, "Vissi d'arte", which means, I lived for art.

Listening excerpts (in Windows Media Player format):

**[Wehmet \(Franz Schubert\) with Edwin Fischer](#)**

**[Die Kleine Spinnerin \(Mozart\) with Walter Geiseking](#)**

**[Ch'io mi scored di te? \(Mozart\) with Alfred Brendel and the London Symphony Orchestra \(Szell\)](#)**