



Faded Voices – Forgotten Sounds: Ways to Approach Unknown Repertoire

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If one seriously thinks about integrating the numerous forgotten or little-remembered art songs of past years into the current concert and teaching repertoire, then it probably will not be enough to just track down compositions and provide access to the sheet music. Very often it is the lack of sound recordings and interrupted performance traditions that make potential interested parties hesitate to deal with unknown repertoire. Especially the rich Austrian song production of the interwar period is strongly affected by these interruptions in tradition, as a frighteningly high number of composers and their performers became victims of national socialism. But if one wants to open up this repertoire artistically nonetheless, from a vocal/pedagogical point of view we are basically always confronted with the same three opening questions:

- For which type of voice is the composition suitable?
- What technical and musical skills should the singer have?
- How do you arrive at a stylistically adequate performance and a successful interpretation?

As a first step the compositions themselves provide us with answers to these questions, as their analysis from a vocal pedagogical point of view can allow for a detailed and extremely helpful description of the vocal and musical requirements. If one also undertakes a change of perspective and takes into account the important role of singers as promoters of vocal repertoire of their time, further valuable information can be gained to clarify questions regarding casting and interpretation. The creation of corresponding “vocal profiles”¹—i.e., the reconstruction of the individual vocal characteristics of those singers who had presented this repertoire in its time of origin—is an important tool in this process. Last but not least, the discourse analysis of contemporary reviews and statements about the respective singers can establish a connection with the aesthetics of their time and allow for conclusions to be drawn about a stylistically adequate interpretation. This approach, which combines vocal pedagogical and musicological methods, may be somewhat more complex than the usual study of new repertoire, but it is no less enriching—on the contrary.

Before diving into the Austrian interwar period and carrying out the above-described approach using the example of the mezzo-soprano Marianne Mislav-Kapper and selected compositions by Franz Mittler, I would like to briefly discuss the concept of the vocal profile and its further development in the sense of a vocal requirement profile.

The term vocal profile and the associated methodical approach has its origin in historical musicology and is used as a means to provide information about certain singers of whom no

sound recordings exist by taking a close look at their repertoire and thus deduce their “specific vocal physiognomy.”² According to Thomas Seedorf, this vocal profile is “determined by a variety of different criteria,” which he describes as follows:

These peculiarities include, among other things, the overall vocal range and the tessitura (the central tonal range of a singer), the preference for specific singing styles (such as *parlando* or *cantilena*), the preferences for certain figurations in melismatic passages, but also for certain vowels and vocal consonant connections and, last but not least, vocal endurance.³

Thus, if the vocal characteristics of certain artists can be reconstructed on the basis of a specific repertoire, one can assume that the derivation of a vocal profile from a composition can give indications as to the ideal vocal cast for future performances. From a vocal/pedagogical perspective, conclusions can be drawn from each sheet music as to how a singing voice should be designed in principle and what skills the singers would already have to master in order to be able to perform and interpret a composition appropriately. Based on these considerations, the concept of a vocal profile was further developed by the author for its application in the vocal pedagogical context as a vocal requirement profile along with the following parameters:

- musical implementation / conversion of the text
- articulation
- length of composition
- basic tempo
- phrase length
- tessitura and its core area
- peak notes and how they are reached
- edge notes in the low range and their embedding in the instrumental part
- dynamic range
- rhythmic design
- musical language
- relation of vocal and instrumental part⁴

These factors do not only provide information about the required musical and vocal skills, but also allow an assignment to voice genre, *Fach* and training level and can thus serve as an aid in casting questions. In addition, these vocal requirement profiles could also provide clues as to why some compositions were sung and reviewed particularly frequently both at the time of their creation as well as over the years, and why some were less so.

But now back to Marianne Mislav-Kapper (1900–1978). Who was she, what role did she play in the Austrian musical life of the interwar period, and why can the examination of her artistic

activity and the creation of her vocal profile be so revealing for the interpretation of Austrian art songs of this period?

Marianne Mislap-Kapper was one of those many artists who had to leave Austria in 1938 and not least because of this, the sources regarding her biography are still very poor at the moment. However, through the reappraisal of the Viennese concert life of 1928 and on the basis of still random research in the archive database of the *Wiener Konzerthaus* for the years 1925 to 1937 as well as through findings in the daily press, an artistic profile could already be reconstructed, which makes one sit up and take notice in connection with contemporary Austrian song repertoire of the interwar period.⁵

Marianne Mislap-Kapper was born on October 3, 1900, as the second daughter to Ida and Edmund Kapper, an authorized signatory of the Wiener Bankverein.⁶ When her musical education began and how it was designed is still unclear at the moment, but it is proven that she received private singing lessons from Henny (Henriette) Dima, a formerly well-known opera singer.⁷ The start of her activity as a concert singer is already indicated as early as 1921, the first Viennese reviews of her performances can be found not until 1925 though. Looking at the repertoire sung by Marianne Mislap-Kapper, she seems to have played a special role both in Austria itself as well as in other European countries as a promotor of contemporary Austrian concert songs and thus often helped young composers such as Erich Zeisl, Hugo Kauder or Trude Kandl to their first successes.

Overall, the artist was probably very cosmopolitan from a musical point of view and dealt with a broad spectrum of contemporary art song repertoire. In 1928, for example, she integrated compositions by Joseph Achron, Béla Bartók, Manuel de Falla, Paul Hindemith, Alexander Krein, Joan Manén, Sergei Prokofiev, Ottorino Respighi and Pancho Vladigerov into the programmes of her recitals at the Wiener Konzerthaus. In the same year, the artist also performed songs by living Austrian composers such as Alfons Blümel, Carl Lafite, Franz Mittler, Fritz Egon Pamer, Paul A. Pisk, Leopold Welleba and Othmar Wetschy. Marianne Mislap-Kapper was also a welcome singer at the Musiksalon Doblinger, where she was responsible for numerous premieres and world premieres. In addition, the artist appeared regularly both on the Austrian radio as well as in rather unusual places such as the Burggartenbühne or in an evening organized by the Association for the Promotion of Jewish Music. At the latter concert she presented, among other things, arrangements of Jewish folk songs for voice and piano by Wilhelm Grosz.⁸ Furthermore Marianne Mislap-Kapper regularly performed songs by female composers of her time such as Trude Kandl, Frieda Kern, Lio Hans, and Lise Maria Mayer. However, she seemed to have had a special affinity for the work of Fritz Egon Pamer and Franz Mittler, whose songs she regularly included in her programs for years.

The artistic partnership with Franz Mittler, who seems to have been her preferred accompanist, was longstanding and intense. It has not yet been possible to determine exactly when this

partnership had begun, but this must have been between 1921, the year of Franz Mittler's return from studies in Cologne and a brief engagement as a conductor in Gera to Vienna and 1925, the year of their first documented joint concert in the *Wiener Konzerthaus*. Between February 1925 and May 1937, Marianne Mislap-Kapper and Franz Mittler organized at least nineteen recitals at this venue alone, dedicating them mainly to contemporary Austrian song repertoire and thus helping about fifty living composers to gain a foothold in Viennese concert life.

What this close artistic connection meant for Franz Mittler's own compositions would be worth a closer examination. At this point it is only certain that his *Fünf Zigeunerlieder* seem to have been particularly suitable for the singer's voice.⁹ Not only that Franz Mittler entrusted these compositions to her for the premiere at the beginning of 1928, but that he also cast Marianne Mislap-Kapper for the orchestral version of these songs in at least one documented concert in the summer of the same year, speaks for his appreciation of the artist.¹⁰ This long-standing artistic connection was abruptly ended in March 1938, when Adolf Hitler's seizure of power drove both artists to emigration due to their Jewish origins, Franz Mittler via stopovers to the USA and Marianne Mislap-Kapper to Great Britain.¹¹ One of their last joint performances took place on 10 January 1938 on Radio Wien; *Aus neuem Liedschaffen* was the title of a thirty-minute program, which can also be understood as the artistic motto of Marianne Mislap-Kapper.¹²

Marianne Mislap-Kapper's appearances in concerts and broadcasts were regularly and often extensively discussed in the daily press. Consistently, the artist was spoken of as a mezzo-soprano and her voice was described as sonorous, beautiful and sweet, noble, dark, deeply lyrical and especially powerful in the middle range.¹³ Her vocal skills such as good breathing and "a voice that is balanced and exemplary across the entire vocal range" were especially pointed out.¹⁴ With regard to articulation, lyrical compositions seem to have suited her better than overly moving ones,¹⁵ although it was also noted that her expressive mezzo-soprano was refined "in declamation [as well as in] phrasing."¹⁶ While reference has repeatedly been made to the artist's sophisticated piano-singing culture, there are no references to dramatic tone, although Franz Mittler's *Fünf Zigeunerlieder*¹⁷ demand quite dramatic impetus in some parts. Overall, Marianne Mislap-Kapper's vocal characteristics are mirrored in this cycle and it becomes quite obvious why Franz Mittler appreciated them being performed by this artist.

Three of the five pieces are laid out in a slow, sustained tempo with predominantly lyrical passages and remain in the lower dynamic range from piano to mezzo forte. Nevertheless, there are at least short, more dramatic passages in all of the pieces, which require a rapid dynamic change to forte and thus a flexible voice. The fact that Marianne Mislap-Kapper was attributed a particularly melodious and powerful middle range should also have been very favourable for these pieces. The tessitura of all songs can essentially be indicated by D4–F#5 and is therefore ideally suited for a mezzo-soprano. This tonal core area is only occasionally exceeded in particularly emotional moments up to A5, and this only in single notes. Since the vocal part is often ascending from the lower to the middle range and is also embedded in a dense instrumental

part, the singer's voice has to definitely carry in the lower ranges and the mastery of transitions between registers is required as well—all qualities and skills that Marianne Mislap-Kapper presumably possessed.

However, the artist did not only captivate her audience with her sophisticated vocal technique and her expressive, cultivated and fine phrasing, but also with her spirited, thoughtful, and profiling interpretation. Her performance was always perceived as tasteful, her interpretation as understanding and her musicality as extraordinary.¹⁸ Marianne Mislap-Kapper therefore seemed to have fulfilled not only her audiences' expectations but also the leading critics' ideas of the way art songs should be performed. At that time, a very clear distinction was made between vocal technical skills (i.e., the art of singing) and artistic design (i.e., the art of interpretation). The mastery of both arts as well as their skilful combination were regarded as unconditional prerequisites in order to be considered a "Künstler des Liedgesangs"¹⁹ and to be able to succeed in this artistic field. In addition, it was repeatedly emphasized that when performing not only the poets' and composers' emotional worlds but also those of the singers should be brought to life.²⁰

The ideas of a perfectly formed vocal art or technique hardly differed from today's choice of words: good breathing and the associated legato ability as well as freedom, mobility and suppleness of the voice were regarded as basic requirements. Furthermore the mastery of transitions between registers, a balanced blending of registers with the thus resulting radiance and carrying capacity and last but not least dynamic flexibility were asked for. In addition, general musical knowledge, knowledge of phrasing, rhythmic precision and intonation accuracy as well as a clear and smooth articulation were required. That the critics attributed great importance to the singers' ability to sing piano was definitely striking. The mastery of a floating piano, "the art of half tones"²¹ seemed to distinguish singers who integrated these moments into their performance as this was probably understood as a clearly contrasting element to the much more dramatic singing on the opera stage.²² Sensitivity, "finest characterization"²³ and "great soulful declamation"²⁴ was appreciated in all artists as well as intelligence, feeling, and noble interpretation. The more clearly the singers' intellectual involvement with the chosen repertoire was expressed in their performance, the more positively this was evaluated. Every singers' declared and highest artistic goal should therefore be to do justice to the songs' musical, emotional and intellectual content as well as to the composers' intentions.²⁵

In conclusion, when dealing with unknown repertoire, for which neither sound recordings nor performance traditions can be used as role models, the extension of the research to contemporary music-cultural action can provide valuable information on casting and interpretation. Apart from the vocal/pedagogical information contained in the compositions themselves, both the reconstruction of the vocal characteristics of the composers' favorite singers as well as an analysis of their reception in the daily press and music literature are valuable tools for an approach to unknown repertoire and thus for a fulfilling and stylistically adequate performance.

¹ A detailed description of this concept can be found in Brandenburg, Daniel Brandenburg and Seedorf, eds., *Per ben vestir la virtuosa: Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern* (Schliengen, 2011), 8.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. The German original reads as follows: “Zu diesen Eigenheiten gehören unter anderem der Gesamtambitus und die Tessitura (der zentrale Tonbereich eines Sängers), die Bevorzugung spezifischer Gesangstile (etwa Parlando oder Kantilene), die Vorlieben für bestimmte Figurationen in melismatischen Passagen, aber auch für bestimmte Vokale und Vokal-Konsonantenverbindungen und nicht zuletzt stimmliche Ausdauer.” English translation by Judith Kopecky.

⁴ Judith Kopecky, “Wien 1928: Das zeitgenössische österreichische Konzertlied der Zwischenkriegszeit. Stellenwert. Bedeutung. Kulturelle Funktion,” dissertation, Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien, 2021), 174.

⁵ Ibid., 148–151.

⁶ Erich H. Müller, *Deutsches Musiker Lexikon*, Dresden 1929, Sp. 941; https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00005361 (accessed July 31, 2022); and Marianne Caroline Ehrenfest-Egger (Kapper) (1900–1978)—Genealogy (geni.com) (accessed July 28, 2022).

⁷ Kutsch, Karl; Riemens, Leo (Hg.), *Großes Sängerlexikon* 4. und erweiterte Auflage (München 2004), 1173.

⁸ Josef Heller in *Der Tag* (December 23, 1928): 10.

⁹ In English: *Five Gypsy Songs*.

¹⁰ In the *Neue Wiener Journal* on September 9, 1928, in the section “Stage and Art” one could read the following unnamed short review: “Aus Bad Ischl wird uns berichtet: Das letzte Symphoniekonzert des Ischler Kurorchesters brachte als Novität *Drei Zigeunerlieder* von Franz Mittler, der seine, von reicher Melodie und Temperament erfüllten Gesänge selbst dirigierte. Der Komponist und seine ausgezeichnete Interpretin holten sich einen großen Erfolg.“ English translation: “From Bad Ischl we are told: The last symphony concert of the Ischl Kurorchester brought as a novelty *Drei Zigeunerlieder* by Franz Mittler, who conducted his songs, filled with rich melody and temperament. The composer and his excellent interpreter achieved great success.”

¹¹ See review in *London Information of the Austrian Socialists in Great Britain*, vol 18 (1942), 6.

¹² Could be translated as “about new songs.”

¹³ Josef Heller in *Der Tag* (February 15, 1926): 3.

¹⁴ M.v.G. in *Wiener Salonblatt* (May 25, 1930): 19.

¹⁵ Josef Heller in *Der Tag* (February 15, 1926): 3.

¹⁶ O.R. in *Reichspost* (January 5, 1928): 9.

¹⁷ This cycle consists of the following five songs, of which numbers I, II, and V. were premiered by Marianne Mislap-Kapper at the Wiener Konzerthaus in January 1928:

- I. Kann dir keine Rosen bringen (Not a Rosebud)
- II. An der Marosch (At the Danube)
- III. Was zucken die braunen Geigen (The Twisted Heart)
- IV. Irgendwo (Buried deep)
- V. Der letzte Tanz (The Last Dance)

¹⁸ Elsa Bienenfeld in *Neues Wiener Journal* (December 20, 1928): 13; Josef Heller in *Der Tag* (January 27, 1928): 6; Hedwig Kanner in *Der Morgen* (December 17, 1928): 9; O.R. in *Reichspost* (April 4, 1928): 9; *ibid.* (June 20, 1928): 10.

¹⁹ The German soprano Lula Mysz-Gmeiner, for example, was described as such in a review by Elsa Bienenfeld in *Neues Wiener Journal* (March 6, 1928): 11.

²⁰ Franziska Martienssen, *Stimme und Gestaltung. Die Grundprobleme des Liedesangs* (Frankfurt, 1927), 13.

²¹ O.R. in *Reichspost* (January 31, 1928), 4–5.

²² In her memoirs, Berta Zuckerkandl quotes the soprano Lotte Lehmann, who felt the contrast between song and opera singing similarly. “Wenn die Lehmann einen ihrer Liederabende gab, war sie in ihrem eigentlichen Element. Oft gestand sie: ‘Ich entferne mich immer mehr von der Bühne. Der Widerstand gegen die ganze Opernsingerei wächst in mir. Es ist soviel Schminke nötig. Aber das Lied ist der wahrhaftigste Spiegel des Gemüts. Es verlangt auch technisch das Höchste vom Sänger. In der Oper kann man notfalls schwindeln, beim Lied niemals. Da muß die Kunst des Atmens, der Intonierung, der Diktion vollkommen sein. Ich glaube, ich werde in ein paar Jahren so weit sein, daß sich mein größter Wunsch erfüllt: mich ganz dem Lied zu widmen.’” English translation: “When Lehmann gave one of her recitals, she was in her real element. She often confessed: ‘I am moving away from the stage more and more. The resistance to the whole opera singing is growing in me. So much make-up is needed. But the song is the truest mirror of the mind. But the song is the truest mirror of the mind. It also technically demands the highest from the singer. In the opera you can cheat if necessary, in the song never. The art of breathing, of intonation, of diction must be perfect. I think in a few years I will be ready to fulfill my greatest wish: to devote myself entirely to the song.’” Bertha Zuckerkandl, *Österreich intim. Erinnerungen 1892–1942* (Wien, 1981), 156.

²³ Elsa Bienenfeld in *Neues Wiener Journal* (March 7, 1928).

²⁴ Josef Reitler in *Neue Freie Presse* (December 24, 1928).

²⁵ For a more comprehensive presentation, see Kopecky, “Wien 1928,” 232–37.