

Piotr Beczala – Heart’s Delight – The Songs of Richard Tauber (2013)

Written by bluesever

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01. Lehár: *Das Land des Lächelns-Sung In English - Act 2-You Are My Heart's Delight* 02. Siczynski: *Wien, du Stadt meiner Träume-Arranged By Paul Bateman* 03. Lehár: *The Merry Widow (Die lustige Witwe) - Act 2-Lippen schweigen* 04. Kálmán: *Gräfin Mariza-Operetta In 3 Acts - Act 1-Komm Zigany* 05. Lehár: *Paganini - Act 2-Girls Were Made To Love And Kiss* 06. Kálmán: *Gräfin Mariza-Operetta In 3 Acts - Act 1-Wenn es Abend wird-Grüß mir mein Wien* 07. Tauber: *Der Singende Traum-Arranged By Paul Bateman-Du bist die Welt für mich* 08. Stolz: *Das Lied ist aus* 09. Lehár: *Giuditta - Act 1-Freunde, das Leben ist lebenswert* 10. Stolz: *O mia bella Napoli* 11. Stolz: *Ob blond, ob braun, ich liebe alle Frau'n* 12. Ralph: *Ich küsse Ihre Hand Madam-Arranged By Paul Bateman* 13. Romberg: *The Student Prince-Arranged By Paul Bateman-Overhead The Moon Is Beaming* 14. Stolz: *Ich liebe Dich* 15. C. Böhm: *Still wie die Nacht, Op.326, No.27-Arranged By Paul Bateman* 16. Lehár: *Das Land des Lächelns - Act 2-Dein ist mein ganzes Herz* 17. Stolz: *Brunetki, blondynki* Personnel: Piotr Beczala, Tenor Anna Netrebko, soprano Daniela Fally, vocals Avi Avital, mandoline Berlin Comedian Harmonists Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Lukasz Borowicz, conductor

It is mostly operetta enthusiasts who remember the name of the monocle-wearing Austrian tenor Richard Tauber today, and that's why this release by Polish tenor Piotr Beczala is welcome. Tauber was an enormously popular figure in many countries, singing in many languages, from the 1910s through the end of his life, unhappily exiled from his native Austria due to Jewish ancestry, after World War II. It's not clear whether Tauber's languages included Polish, but the program here involves German, English, and Italian. Beczala's German is excellent; his English is slightly accented, but probably less so than Tauber's own, and there are no distractions to impede the enjoyment of Tauber's biggest hit, *You Are My Heart's Delight*, from Franz Lehár's *The Land of Smiles*. That and a few other similar numbers set the pattern for operetta and later film musical composers who tried to tailor their big numbers to Tauber's strengths. The composers here range from the well known (Lehár) to the moderately known (Emmerich Kálmán) to the all-but-forgotten (Rudolf Siczynski and several of the film film composers), but all the music seems of a piece, and in a style consistent enough to be familiar. That style straddled the divide between operetta and popular song; it is extravagantly romantic, almost strangely so from a modern perspective, filled with the rhythms of the waltz and other

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popular dances, but exploding often enough into the upper tenor register to give the singer some star quality. Beczala, something of a connoisseur's tenor up to this point, handles the high Bs nicely, and there is just a sense of fun about the whole thing that puts across something of what Tauber must have been like. You get an aural whiff of Tauber himself in track 7, *Du bist die Welt für mich* (You are the world to me), which he also composed; this could have had an odd necro-duet feel, but it is tastefully handled, with the Tauber excerpt, recorded in 1934, coming in at the end as a sort of memory. An enjoyable major-label debut for operetta lovers. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

Pop singers have sometimes used technology to perform duets with the voice of an iconic performer from the past, but the practice is generally untried in classical-music recording. Yet here, in the halfway house of operetta, tenor Piotr Beczala actually sings one song along with the voice of Richard Tauber (1891–1948). It's hard to see the point — a tribute to Tauber? to Beczala? — of this exercise in chutzpah. It invites comparisons that don't favor the younger artist.

Oddly, though, he holds up well — not by winning any competition with Tauber but by making it irrelevant. Beczala brings strengths of his own to the late tenor's repertoire and shows confidence in it. While he also has technical liabilities, they seem to become less troubling as the program proceeds.

In the first selections, including the title song, a smooth, hearty manner can't quite compensate for tightness in Beczala's top register and a prominent bleat — actually more of a break in the transition to head tone — that mars some phrases. Beczala's accent in both English and German presents something of a barrier to Viennese style.

To get other bad news out of the way, there's a setback in the third selection, where Beczala is joined by a rather distant Anna Netrebko in "Lippen schweigen," the signature waltz from *Die Lustige Witwe*. From this abbreviated, halting effort — in which the soprano sounds unsteady and the two voices not well in sync — you would not suspect that this is the pivotal

romantic-seduction number from the work and a perennial crowd-pleaser.

Thereafter, it's easy to be won over by Beczala's flexible legato, especially at softer volume in his attractive middle range, and by a palpable sincerity with the words. A high point is reached with Emmerich Kálmán's "Wenn es Abend wird," from *Gräfin Mariza*, in which the tenor's timbre waxes and wanes gracefully and lingers gently on key nostalgic phrases of yet another salute to the city on the Danube.

By the time Beczala reaches the next number — the "duet" with a 1934 Tauber recording of the singer's own composition "Du bist die Welt für mich" — this listener had warmed enough to Beczala to find the tenors' pairing astonishingly acceptable. Not all of the faithful will agree, no doubt, but in this case the younger tenor adopts a pleasant, non-confrontational style, engineering is expert, and the combination has a certain charm. Wisely, the brief experiment is not repeated.

The final half of the program finds Beczala's upper range in firmer shape, in such familiar heart-on-sleeve numbers as Lehár's "Freunde, das Leben ist lebenswert," Romberg's "Overhead the Moon Is Beaming," from *The Student Prince*, which gets a broad, urgent delivery, and, with more insinuating, pointed tone, Erwin's "Ich küsse Ihre Hand Madam." After some less distinguished material by Robert Stolz and a change of pace with a lied by one Carl Böhm, Beczala seems almost to gain heft as well as assurance in his finale, Lehár's "Dein ist mein ganzes Herz," the catchy Tauberlied from *Das Land des Lächelns*.

Lukasz Borowicz conducts with taste and plenty of rubato, leaving sentimentality to the voice and some of the busy, slick arrangements, several of which are by Paul Bateman. Duncan Riddell's violin solos and the voices of the Berlin Comedian Harmonists lend atmosphere.
---David J. Baker, operanews.com

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