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Abstract of the doctoral dissertation

„20 Songs for Children for Voice and Piano by Stefan Behr – Interpretative and Performance Aspects of a Vocal Cycle by a Forgotten Composer”

This doctoral dissertation examines Stefan Behr’s *20 Songs for Children for Voice and Piano* from a performance and interpretative perspective, with particular emphasis on the relationship between literary text and musical structure, as well as the significance of this repertoire within the context of twentieth-century Polish vocal music. The study seeks to restore scholarly and artistic attention to the work of Stefan Behr – a composer, pianist, and educator whose artistic legacy remains largely absent from contemporary concert practice and musicological discourse. The research is grounded in the conviction that children’s repertoire constitutes a fully-fledged field of artistic expression while simultaneously serving as an important element of music education and the development of aesthetic sensitivity in young audiences.

The primary aim of the dissertation is to identify the characteristic features of Behr’s musical language, to investigate the ways in which literary texts are interpreted through musical means, and to examine performance-related challenges arising from the specific nature of the vocal and piano parts. Particular attention is devoted to the relationship between word and music, the construction of musical narrative, and the role of musical illustration in works intended for children. The dissertation also has a documentary and promotional dimension, presenting the composer’s artistic profile and highlighting the artistic value of his vocal oeuvre.

The research employs an interdisciplinary methodology that combines musicological analysis with reflection on performance practice. The study incorporates formal and stylistic analysis, examination of text–music relationships, and a performance-based perspective informed by the author’s own artistic experience. The research material includes the collection published by the Music Publishing House of the Authors’ Agency (*Wydawnictwo Muzyczne Agencji Autorskiej*) in 1980, as well as archival sources gathered through extensive research conducted in, among others, the University Library in Warsaw, the Archive of Modern Records, the Archives of the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music, and the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. These archival investigations made it possible to reconstruct the composer’s biography, organise the catalogue of his works, and establish the historical and aesthetic context of his artistic activity.

The analysis demonstrates that Stefan Behr’s music is characterised by a distinct stylistic individuality and a highly conscious compositional technique. While employing relatively economical means of expression, the composer creates music of considerable colouristic richness and dramatic vitality. The piano part plays a particularly important role, functioning not merely as accompaniment but as an active participant in shaping musical narrative

through illustrative devices, textural contrasts, and harmonic solutions. Many songs feature ostinato rhythmic patterns, dissonant sonorities, quasi-cluster structures, and elements of successive polymeter. Despite the use of modern compositional techniques, Behr's music retains a high degree of communicativeness and formal clarity.

The research identified several principal stylistic categories within the collection, including illustrative, narrative, grotesque-humorous, dance-inspired, and lyrical songs. The analysis revealed that each category is based on distinct strategies of shaping the relationship between literary text and music. This stylistic diversity demonstrates both Behr's considerable compositional imagination and his ability to adapt musical language to the expressive character of poetic texts.

An integral component of the doctoral project was the preparation and recording of the complete collection *Songs for Children for Voice and Piano*. This process involved score analysis, the development of a performance concept, concert activity, and collaboration with a pianist during rehearsals and recording sessions. These practical experiences enabled the verification of analytical findings and provided an opportunity to observe audience responses to the composer's largely unknown repertoire.

The findings of the dissertation indicate that Stefan Behr's work represents a valuable and original current within twentieth-century Polish vocal music that has thus far remained on the margins of both musicological research and concert practice. The dissertation contributes to filling a significant gap in scholarship concerning the composer's activity and draws attention to the importance of children's repertoire within Polish musical culture and artistic education.