

German 3

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Question 1

- I am very comfortable with recital planning as a pianist, so many of the concepts are familiar to me. I am quite familiar with the necessity of careful planning regarding the “difficulty” (or, in my opinion and in the case of a solo pianist, the physical exhaustion) of performing the repertoire. In my last recital, I put a great deal of thought into picking the repertoire to be thematically and structurally cohesive.
- I did know about but have never really given any thought to the number of songs sung in a recital. The text instructs us on a “standard” recital programme of five groups with four to six songs each, or a total of almost *thirty songs!* This is, to me, an unthinkable long programme: even if I were to collect, programme, and perform a collection of “songs” and their counterparts for piano, I couldn’t imagine such a long programme.
- While I disagree with such explicit structuring or templating, I do agree that it can be a great starting point.
- I think I will have to do a great deal more of song literature study to draft a recital programme I like.
- No questions for now, though I am, as evidenced by prior performances, *wholly* ignorant about and usually unprepared for encores.

Question 2

For this recital group, I have picked:

1. Im wunderschönen Monat Mai - R. Schumann Op. 48 No. 1 (2 mins)
2. Liebestreu - J. Brahms Op. 3 No. 1 (2 mins)
3. Die Mainacht - J. Brahms Op. 43 No. 2 (3-4 mins)
4. O Tod, wie bitter bist du - J. Brahms Op. 121 No 3. (4-5 mins)
5. Widmung - R. Schumann Op. 25 No. 1 (2 mins)

Total: approximately 13 to 15 minutes in length.

Both my ignorance surrounding difficulty and style in vocal literature and my personal insistence on gender-neutral voice casting in solo work inform my amateurish assertion that these songs are all to be performed by a single performer. I

selected these pieces in particular for the overall variety in character and texture, along with their general reticence on love in various forms (and the recurring month of May). Though I wanted to place *Die Mainacht* and *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai* following one another, I was too drawn to the lovely deceptive cadence outlined by the unresolved $C\sharp^7$ chord at the end of the Schumann song directly into the E-flat or “D-sharp” tonality at the beginning of *Liebestreu*. Another fun relationship is the implicit, turbulent discourse on love surrounding Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and Clara Schumann. I am yet undecided if the inclusion of a song by Clara Schumann would undermine or distract from the dialogue between Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms (or if at all, in fact, this dialogue is meaningful or interesting in any way).

Question 3

For this question, I selected the Strauss pair for two very simple and insufficient reasons:

1. I love Richard Strauss: Elektra is my favourite opera.
2. I despise Mahler: he’s not especially significant in piano literature, and I keep mixing him up with Wagner - also unimportant in piano literature - who has very good reasons to dislike, even if the Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* is among the most beautiful things I’ve ever heard.

For the version with piano accompaniment:

1. The clarity of the piano texture facilitates understanding of Strauss’ harmonic choices.
2. The voice is never drowned out by the piano.
3. A single instrumentalist can follow a vocalist in such an intimate fashion that could never be replicated by an entire ensemble. There’s a brilliant recording of Christa Ludwig and Leonard Bernstein arguing over tempo: in the end, Ludwig still has to follow the conductor, but with a more intimate piano accompaniment, a vocalist could instead lead the song in a more natural, almost conversational tempo.

For the version with orchestral accompaniment:

1. I believe Richard Strauss, unlike many others, is truly capable of touching the sublime with his orchestration. Anything of his with an orchestra involved is something substantial to listen to and appreciate.
2. Here, many inner voices and rhythms that are left out of the piano part to facilitate playing and clarify the accompaniment are given a proper treatment as beautiful additions to wind parts and horn parts (especially, in my opinion, the addition of quicker arpeggiated figures in the oboes).

3. It is quite clear that Strauss is much more familiar with an orchestral idiom than he is at the piano. The music is much more recognizable to me as Strauss, and feels more “comfortable”, compositionally.

Question 4

As Roger Vignoles notes in his insightful commentary as found on Hyperion Records,¹ the piano part of these Mahler songs reflects Mahler’s own familiarity with the orchestral idiom. Indeed, in this selection “Hans und Grethe”, the piano texture recalls the horns as depicted in the ritornello of Franz Liszt’s fifth Paganini Etude or the first theme of Alkan’s famed G Sharp Minor etude.

References

Vignoles, Roger. *notes on “Mahler: Songs”*. Accessed September 16, 2025. https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA67392.

1. Roger Vignoles, *notes on “Mahler: Songs”*, accessed September 16, 2025, https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA67392.