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David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse. A Guide for Singers.*

New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Cloth, 122 pp., \$25.00. ISBN 0195177169. www.oup.com/us

For enthusiasts of French song, three volumes are indispensable in the study of the *mélodie*: *The Interpretation of French Song* by Pierre Bernac (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), *A French Song Companion* by Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and *Singing in French* by Thomas Grubb (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979). A worthy addition to this cadre is *Understanding French Verse* by David Hunter. Hunter, a graduate of Oxford, is a specialist in nineteenth and twentieth century French poetry; he is a singer by avocation, with a penchant for *mélodie*. In this volume, he concisely outlines the basics of French versifi-

cation to singers, accompanists, and anyone who is interested in the art form. Understanding French verse, he contends, is important because the formal structure of the poem gives strong messages regarding its interpretation. The construction of the verse underlines the poet's intent. Moreover, since the composers of *mélodie* were highly literate, the implicit meaning of the poetic structure often influenced the song setting.

Hunter's elucidation of the rudiments of French verse begins with a comparison of meter in French and English poetry. In English, stressed syllables within a word remain constant, regardless of the word's place in a phrase. English poetry consists of words in a set pattern of repeated units (such as the recurring unstressed and stressed syllables in the iambic meter). In contrast, the stress for each syllable in French is determined by its place in the phrase. Poetic meter does not rely upon stress, but upon the number of syllables in each line. The common French meters are *vers composes* (composed of nine or more syllables per line), *vers simple* (with eight or fewer syllables per line), and *vers impairs* (characterized by an odd number of syllables). The most famous French meter is the *alexandrine*, consisting of twelve syllables divided evenly around a caesura. Hunter cites prevailing interpretations of the use of specific meters: for instance, the balanced *alexandrine* promotes a certain comprehension of the world as symmetrical, while the use of *vers impairs* (as in Paul Verlaine's "Mandoline") lends an air of instability.

Hunter proceeds from this foundation to an explanation of stanzas, and the fixed forms (sonnet, rondel,

villanelle, and ballade) of traditional French poetry. Rhyme—which was, until the end of the nineteenth century, the essential feature of French lyric poetry—is classified according to its degree and gender. In 1886, however, the supremacy of rhyme was challenged with the publication of the first *vers libre*, or free verse. *Vers libre* introduced an element of unpredictability to poetry; moreover, as Hunter points out, it gave greater latitude to the reader in regard to the interpretation of the poem. But, cautions the author, *vers libre* is still French verse, and it must be studied within the context of its traditions.

These essential characteristics of French poetry certainly are described in other volumes. What distinguishes Hunter's book, however, is that the poetic analysis constantly is related to the song repertoire. Excerpts from almost one hundred songs are interspersed throughout the text. Verses set by composers ranging from Berlioz and Bizet to Leguerney and Lutoslawski are used as examples. Hunter demonstrates that scansion is a means to comprehend the message of a poem and its musical setting.

The first appendix contains paradigms for versification. Hunter provides analysis of four complete poems, and through it, offers insight into the interpretation of their musical settings. His scansion of Paul Verlaine's "En Sourdine," for instance, will lead even the most seasoned performer of *mélodie* to revisit this song with a fresh perspective.

The second appendix is comprised of an alphabetical listing of all of the poems and songs discussed in the guide, as well as the poet, and the composer(s) of the major musical settings. In the third and final appen-

dix, Hunter summarizes the time line of French verse in a brief, two-page chart that chronicles the key developments in versification, and correlates the events with the major French poets. A glossary of technical terms, and suggestions for further reading, complete the supplementary material.

Understanding French Verse is a valuable contribution to the literature. In a straightforward and organized manner, Hunter explains the formal structure of French poetry. For those with only a nodding acquaintance with the *mélodie*, the book is a guide to developing an understanding of the genre. For those who already love and perform the *mélodie*, Hunter's volume will engender a deeper understanding of the repertoire. *Understanding French Verse* is required reading for devotees of French song.

Cheri Montgomery, *English Lyric Diction Workbook, Italian Lyric Diction Workbook, German Lyric Diction Workbook, French Lyric Diction Workbook*. Nashville, TN: S.T.M. Publishers, 2004. Student Edition, Instructor's Manual, and Answer Key available for each. English and Italian workbooks, \$25.00, Instructor's Manual, \$30.00; German and French workbooks, \$35.00, Instructor's Manual, \$40.00. www.studenttextmfg.com

The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has become standard in the study of diction for singing. Almost every lyric diction textbook relies upon this uniform set of symbols. Not all textbooks, however, provide worksheets. Cheri Montgomery fills the gap with this set of diction workbooks. In her preface to each

book, she emphasizes that the series is not intended to replace standard diction texts; instead, the workbooks offer an avenue for students to apply textbook rules for pronunciation and transcription. Each workbook begins with an IPA pronunciation listing of the sounds that occur in the language. Charts classifying the vowels and consonants, in regard to both quality and articulation, are included in the introductory chapter as well. For each of the topics—ranging from specific vowels to diphthongs—there are enunciation exercises, rules for transcription, and several worksheets. Reviews and practice quizzes are interspersed among the chapters, and a summarizing “Review of Rules” appears at the end of each workbook.

The English workbook is designed to serve as an introduction to the International Phonetic Alphabet through the use of words that occur frequently in the English art song literature. Similarly, the French, German, and Italian workbooks provide a graded method of phonetic transcription using words drawn from art songs in those particular languages. All of the words or phrases used in exercises are translated into English. In this way, the workbooks not only facilitate correct pronunciation, but comprehension as well.

The workbooks correspond to the commonly used textbooks. The English workbook is based on the rules outlined in *The Singer's Manual of English Diction* by Madeleine Marshall (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1953). The bibliography for the Italian workbook cites *Singer's Italian* by Evelina Colorni (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1970), and that of the French and German workbooks refer to *The Singer's Manual of German and French Diction* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1970), *German for Singers* by

William Odom and Benno Scholoum (Belmont, CA: Thomas Learning, 1997), and *Singing in French* by Thomas Grubb.

Montgomery tailors the format of each book to the special considerations of the language. The English workbook has units devoted to diphthongs and triphthongs, while the French workbook provides exercises in elision and liaison. The lyrics for the standard twenty-four songs and arias, as well as fourteen additional texts, are included for transcription practice in the Italian workbook. The German text includes twenty lieder texts for the same purpose. The German text also contains exercises in identifying and transcribing common prefixes and suffixes, inflectional endings, and compound words.

Three resources are available for each language: a student workbook, an answer key, and a correlated instructor's manual. The publisher also offers a class packet of a dozen answer keys at a substantially reduced price. These could be used for alternate lesson plans, such as student grading or board work. The French and German workbooks are priced slightly higher because they are considerably longer than the English and Italian workbooks.

The workbooks are an indispensable resource for diction classes. The series offers a consistent source of exercises that use words from the song repertoire, and the review of rules is a handy guide for reference. Both teachers and students alike will appreciate the clarity and the thoroughness of this series.

Clayne Robison, *Beautiful Singing: Not Just for the Chosen* [DVD]. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Broadcasting, 2004. \$19.95. ISBN