

## *Pauline Viardot-García*

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*Way more than a singer and composer – cultural mediator*

**Author** Magdalene Melchers

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### **Music**

#### **Quote**

“With her Spanish nature, her French upbringing and her German sympathies, she is able to combine the idiosyncrasies of different nationalities in such a way that one would not grant any particular ground an exclusive claim to her, but would like to call Art the fatherland of her free choice and love.”

#### **Author**

This is how Franz Liszt described his former student in 1859, the singer, vocal teacher, folk song collector, pianist and organist, arranger, composer, cultural mediator, organizer, editor, illustrator:

### **Music**

#### **Speaker Prof. Beatrix Borchard**

She was from a travelling family of singers, where no one ever talked about what a girl could do and could not do. They were outside the bourgeois order, so the parents passed on to the children what they themselves were capable of – singing.

#### **Author**

For decades, the renowned professor and author Beatrix Borchard has been researching the life and career of Pauline Viardot.

#### **Speaker Prof. Beatrix Borchard**

Then they were on the road a lot. She was still very young, when they were in New York; they travelled as far as Mexico – where she also received her first lessons. Her father did things with her all the time; she was the youngest, had two much older siblings, the famous Maria Malibran and her brother Manuel Garcia, who then no longer performed. Her older sister fell off a horse and died very young. She was left alone, but she represents a whole family tradition of the singing people, travelling through Europe – travelling all the way to Mexico, bringing with them specific culture, but also picking it up.

### **Music**

#### **Quote**

I see a little flower in the book, forgotten scentless and withered –  
At this sight, wondrous thoughts fly through my mind.

## **Author**

The little flower – a poem by Alexander Pushkin – set to music by Pauline Viardot.  
One of the 'Selected Songs for Voice and Piano' – Volume 1.

## **Speaker Prof. Beatrix Borchard**

It starts off with the term songs, that raises completely false expectations. Actually, she has not written songs, but vocal pieces – and that is something entirely different. That is, the main focus of her music is the joy of singing, the joy of trying things out. There are always certain passages where you really have the feeling that now she's getting carried away – with a cascade here and another cascade there. Thus, from a vocal point of view, her compositions are very demanding; and she has composed in all kinds of languages. She composed wonderful Russian romances, Pushkin texts etc. – especially during her time in Baden-Baden. Of course, she wrote French pieces, but she also set Mörike to music.

## **Music**

## **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

My first encounter with Pauline Viardot was through music.

## **Author**

In addition to musical interpretations, the soprano Miriam Alexandra devotes herself scientifically to an artist who knows how to emphasize national contours and at the same time widens perspectives and listening angles.

## **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

I used to sing her songs during my studies, and they were so diverse that I couldn't imagine that they were written by the same person. At that time, those were Mörike settings and, if I remember correctly, also Tuscan songs. In the scores, it only said that the pieces were by P. Viardot. And so I got totally curious, and I really wanted to know who was behind this exciting music.

## **Music**

## **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

People always assume that if you don't know the name, the music can't be that good.

## **Speaker Eric Schneider**

I had already heard of the name before, but in a completely different context.

## **Author**

Prof. Eric Schneider teaches a Lied class at the Berlin University of the Arts and is a sought-after Lied accompanist – of Christine Schäfer, Matthias Goerne and Miriam Alexandra. According to him, Pauline Viardot played no role during his studies or when working with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

## **Speaker Eric Schneider**

It is embarrassing that I thought she had translated the texts to the Chopin Mazurkas available in song versions. That was my first encounter, many years ago, when I was still utterly unaware.

## **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

When I started my thesis, Pauline Viardot wasn't even mentioned in any Wikipedia article, and to 99.9 % of the people I talked to about my work, I had to explain who Pauline Viardot was in the first place. I always felt a bit like her lawyer in the present. It's not that bad any longer; for me, my work is a search for clues, finding sources, visiting libraries and archives, looking at the sources, trying to classify what I've seen, trying to understand more, to establish more contexts, etc. I was eager to learn more about the character behind the songs.

## **Music**

## **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

Pauline Viardot wrote international music in the best sense. As an opera singer, she travelled and toured a great deal and therefore spoke many languages, in which she also composed. She was also interested in various musical styles as well as in performance methods. From all these influences, she drew inspiration for her own work.

## **Speaker Eric Schneider**

I truly got to know all the songs I've recorded now through Miriam Alexandra, who also researched very meticulously and poked around in libraries in St. Petersburg; she was granted a special permit and was very dedicated.

## **Music**

## **Speaker Eric Schneider**

I can only add quite redundantly ... The piano accompaniment is very important and to be added very independently, something that is not yet the case with Beethoven and even with Mozart's songs, but is in Hayden's mature songs and continues via Schubert and then of course in the Romantic period, Schumann and Brahms up to Hugo Wolff. The piano part is sometimes an accompanying part, sometimes a counterpoint to the vocals, at times enriching and at other times completely independent. Just as the great composers did in the 19th century, so did Pauline Viardot use the piano. With her, too, one recognizes this healthy maturing process, that at the beginning, where she perhaps rightly did not yet dare to do so much, the accompaniments were still really kept simple and without many accents; at the end, she was completely free and simply wrote great songs, which may also be considered totally independent music on the piano.

## **Music**

## **Speaker Prof. Beatrix Borchard**

What always fascinated me so much was that she had Russian translations made of Mörike texts, which she then set to music in Russian, so that people in Russia would get to know Mörike, i.e. this is truly a composed cultural transfer, that this woman achieved at that time. With an unbelievable liveliness, a huge stylistic variety, a huge variety of styles, it serves the most diverse forms, so to speak, but in the foreground is definitely always the voice and also the joy of performing. You realize that this is a person standing on stage, she doesn't sing in a quiet chamber by candlelight, there needs to be an audience, seducing the audience with the voice and that fascinates me very much – especially in comparison to the German traditions.

## Music

### **Speaker Miriam Alexandra**

The edition is very special to me. I have decided to edit the songs according to fair copies of Pauline Viardot. Originally, I had planned to do it from the first printings, which would have been a very simple and quick task. But then in the course of time, new material has become available and other sources have opened up, so that I have decided to reconsider the whole thing.

### **Speaker Prof. Beatrix Borchard**

Basically, what this composing style also represents, i.e. particularly this stylistic blend, etc., is contrary to a certain German tradition, and that is very difficult, given that one is so socialized by German music academies, to have this freedom to sing these things that way.

## Music

→ **Discover the edition [“Pauline Viardot-García | Selected Songs”](#)**