Austrian composer. He wrote more than 250 lieder (songs), including the Mörike-Lieder/Mörike Songs (1888) and the two-volume Italienisches Liederbuch/Italian Songbook (1892, 1896).

Wolf brought a new concentration and tragic eloquence to the art of lieder, seeking to enhance the dramatic and emotional potential of the poetry he set by establishing an equal partnership between singer and pianist. Among his other works are the opera Der Corregidor/The Magistrate (1895) and orchestral works, such as Italian Serenade (1892).

His father, a leather merchant, encouraged his early gifts by teaching him piano and violin. He entered the Vienna Conservatory in 1875, but left it the following year, preferring to pick up his own instruction where he could. From 1877, his father having incurred great financial losses, he was obliged to earn his own living by teaching. He often lived in great poverty, but was befriended by various musical families; the conductors Franz Schalk and Felix Mottl took a professional interest in him. In 1881 he was engaged as second conductor at Salzburg under Carl Muck, but was found to be temperamentally so unfitted for the post that the engagement was terminated within three months. He was music critic for the Vienna Salonblatt 1884–87, but here again he offended many people by his irascibility and intolerance (which saw no fault in Wagner and no good in Brahms). Meanwhile his masterful song settings of Möricke and Eichendorff won him wide recognition. However, he had contracted syphilis, and in 1897 became insane. He was sent to a sanatorium. Discharged as cured in 1898, he had a relapse after becoming involved in a quarrel with Mahler at the Vienna Opera, and was taken to an asylum in a hopeless condition at the end of the year, remaining there until his death.

Works

Dramatic  the operas Der Corregidor (1896) and Manuel Venegas (unfinished); incidental music to Ibsen's The Feast at Solhaug (1891).

Songs   48 early songs, 53 songs to words by Mörike (1888); 20 to words by Eichendorff (1880–88), 51 to words by Goethe (1888–89), Italienisches Liederbuch (46 songs, 1892, 1896), Spanisches Liederbuch (44 songs, 1889–90), 31 songs to words by various poets, including six by G Keller and three sonnets by Michelangelo (1897); six part songs.

Orchestral  symphonic poem Penthesilea (after Kleist, 1883).

Chamber  Italian Serenade for string quartet in D minor (1880).

Other vocal  Christnacht for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra, Elfenlied from Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream for soprano, chorus, and orchestra (1890), Der Feuerreiter and Dem Vaterland for chorus and orchestra.

quotations

Wolf, Hugo (Filipp Jakob)

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