

# OPERA NEWS

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## RECORDINGS - Recital

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### SCHUBERT: *WINTERREISE*

□ R. Braun; Maule, piano. Texts and translations. CBC Records MVCD 1171



Reviewing a new *Winterreise* seems a rather existential enterprise, as most listeners interested in lieder or Schubert will already own their favorite sets of his stunning final song cycle, set to Wilhelm Müller texts. There have been more than one hundred recorded versions, made by singers of all five main voice types (with a countertenor reading doubtless nigh), accompanied variously by piano, fortepiano and guitar. This legacy includes some wonderful traversals, notably multiple readings by Hans Hotter, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Matthias Goerne, plus cycles by Peter Anders, Peter Schreier, Brigitte Fassbänder and Christoph Prégardien. Recent acclaimed issues have featured Goerne and Alfred Brendel (Decca 467 092-2) and Dietrich Henschel and Irwin Gage (Teldec 8573 82273 2).

The January 2005 recording by Canadian baritone and Russell Braun and pianist Carolyn Maule goes up against this formidable competition, as well an estimable *Winterreise* by Braun's late father, Victor, a distinguished Met Onegin and Golaud. Braun *fil's* effort emerges with considerable credit — perhaps not "historic," but a mellifluous, musical and strongly felt interpretation that should please followers of Braun's growing career and would be a fittingly straightforward introduction for those uninitiated into *Winterreise's* unique ethos.

Raised in Germany, Braun is at home in Schubert's idiom. Though busy on international opera stages — Met appearances so far include Dr. Falke, Mercutio and Rossini's Figaro — he has also given frequent recitals, some with tenor Michael Schade. His finely honed instrument is placed higher than his father's, with an almost tenorish ease on top, but the substantial low notes audible in "Gefror'ne Tränen" (for one) show that he, too, may eventually sing roles such as Golaud. Judging by the highest standards (in this particular instance Fischer-Dieskau and Goerne), some of Braun's experiments with head voice can sound a little papery and thin. Not unattractive in themselves, they fit naturally into an admirably wide dynamic palette.

Braun's unpretentiously moving singing is supported with articulate sensitivity and fine, clear tone by pianist Maule, his wife. Tempos in the bleak, slow songs can get a bit distended; in fact, at 79:12, this reading clocks in faster than only a *very* few of those hundred-plus versions, notably those by Kurt Moll, Thomas Quasthoff and Jon Vickers. This pleasing CD makes one eager to hear Braun and Maule perform *Winterreise* live. □

DAVID SHENGOLD