**Chapter 12**

**Vocal Music for the Recital Hall and Salon**

A great deal of vocal music has been written for performance in the salon or recital hall in each of the time periods of musical history. We call vocal music that was written for more than one voice, chamber music and that written for one voice, solo song.

The most important and popular form of vocal chamber music when written, and now, is the madrigal. It is usually a four to six voice short song that is written for amateurs to sing as after dinner entertainment. Its popularity in the Renaissance cannot be overstated—people of any social status were expected to be able to read music and participate in the singing of madrigals in homes. Usually the madrigal was unaccompanied, but when available, an instrument might play one of the parts or double the voices on each of the parts. The madrigal is a mixture of imitative polyphony and homophony. A light-hearted version of the madrigal is the ballett, which always has a “fa la la” chorus in it. The ballett was particularly popular in England in the court of Queen Elizabeth I. Its dancelike character makes it lighter in character than the madrigal.

Most composers of the Renaissance wrote madrigals and the list of important ones might include Luca Marenzio, Carlo Gesauldo, William Byrd, Thomas Morley, and Thomas Weelkes. As you might note from those names, the madrigal was most important in Italy and England during the Renaissance. The composer who represents the zenith of madrigal writing was Claudio Monteverdi who lived from 1567 to 1643. He served as a sort-of bridge figure between the Renaissance period and the Baroque. Monteverdi worked at the court at Mantua and at the important St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice. He was especially well-known for his madrigals and as an early composer of operas.

Solo vocal music usually refers to song, called in Western music art song. Song is perhaps the oldest form of musical expression known to mankind. Songs, whether notated or passed from generation to generation aurally, have been in existence as long as we have been able to speak and think in intelligent patterns. Today, most of these works are performed in the recital hall.

A song can be for solo voice or for many voices. Most have a simple accompaniment of one piano or guitarlike instrument. And, some songs have no accompaniment at all—this kind of vocal music is called *a cappella*. The words *a cappella* literally mean for the chapel, and this term has come to mean unaccompanied because for a period of time, the Catholic church did not allow instruments to be performed in the church.

Perhaps the most popular form of vocal music, especially during the Romantic era is the art song, or using the German word, lied. A lied is a song for solo voice that has piano accompaniment. The text is usually a poem that captures a particular mood. Since the song is short, each has one mood. Art songs, when grouped together, are called song cycles. These song cycles usually are made up of songs that share a common theme or are based on poems by the same author. Art songs were the popular songs of their day. Most art songs are strophic, meaning that they have multiple verses of words to be sung to the same music.

There was a huge amount of poetry written in Germany during the Romantic era and two composers of the early period that are particularly well-known for song are Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann.

Schubert lived from 1797 to 1828, was not very successful in his time, extremely shy, but was very prolific. He is the best-known art song composer of the time, having written about 700 songs. He wrote other works as well and is especially well known for his sonatas, string chamber music, and symphonies. Schubert is usually credited with two innovations in song writing. Most songs at the time were written in strophic form, but Schubert began writing through-composed songs, meaning that for each verse there was new music. He is also one of the earliest song composers to group his works into song cycles.

The other best-known art song composer of the early Romantic period was Robert Schuman. He was originally a concert pianist but was injured and turned to composing. He lived from 1810 to 1856 and was married to the most famous female musician of the time, Clara Schumann. She appears to have been his equal as a composer having written a number of miniature piano works and art songs. Robert wrote art song and small works for piano as well as a number of symphonies, chamber pieces, and an opera.

Composers in the Romantic era also used a compositional technique called word painting in their songs. They used the music that accompanied a particular word to highlight that word. For example, the word “sigh” might be set to a descending scale to give the impression of a physical sigh.

Art song continues to the current day. In the early part of the 20th century American composer Charles Ives wrote many such works. Ives was an insurance salesman and amateur musician who lived from 1894 to 1954. He came to be recognized as the first great American composer and was awarded the 1947 Pulitzer Prize for music for his Third Symphony. He used folk and popular melodies in his songs as quotations and his music is nationalistic.

One of the things that contributed to the success of the art song was the immense popularity of the piano. Just about any home middle class or above owned one by the middle of the Romantic era. Young girls of any social stature at all were forced to learn to play the piano and to sing. Any gentlemen of the period would be able to quote poetry and sing the songs of Schubert and Schumann and many would be able to play the piano. The piano simply was the focus of entertainment in the home at the time, much like the television has become today. The art song was a very popular form of afternoon or after-dinner entertainment in the living rooms (salons) of the time.