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Schade's operatic gusts lifts songs

JOHN TERAUDS

The two very different worlds of art song and opera collided in the most delicious way last night at the University of Toronto's Walter Hall.

Like the time when chocolate met peanut butter, local-boy-made-international-star tenor Michael Schade found new depth and breadth of meaning when he combined his operatic prowess with the drawing-room pleasures of German *Lieder*.

The Aldeburgh Connection has for years matched its art-song programs with the best-available singing talent this city has to offer.

It closed its season in spectacular fashion by inviting Schade to sing a 60-minute package of German songs drawn from the poetry of Joseph von Eichendorff, who lived from 1788 to 1857.

Eichendorff's celebrations of love, nature and homeland — along with their opposites of heartbreak, loneliness and longing — were typical expressions of the Romantic ethos. They, in turn, inspired several 19th-century composers to write *Lieder*, a popular form of entertainment at upper-middle-class and aristocratic soirées.

Beautifully accompanied on the piano by Aldeburgh Connection co-artistic director Stephen Ralls, Schade sang Robert Schumann's 12-song *Liederkreis* cycle, four songs each by Felix Mendelssohn and Johannes Brahms, and five songs by Hugo Wolf.

All were nicely chosen for contrasting moods.

Schade would find the central message in each *Lied* and then tailor his interpretation to it. While these songs are usually sung with drawing-room restraint, the tenor often let loose with operatic gusts of emotion. This is not the usual way one hears this music performed, and the melodies lost fluidity with this dramatic play, but the result was often riveting. The most emotionally charged was Brahms' *Von Strande* (From the Shore). Schade breathtakingly bent the song's melancholy into an urgent wail of unalloyed grief.

Now in his early 40s, Schade has become one of the world's most sought-after Mozart opera tenors, and has a loyal following in Europe. His full, clear and flexible voice has tremendous dynamic range — although his low notes were not in the best of shape last night.

This is an artist nearing the peak of his powers.

Acknowledging a standing ovation at the end, Schade said, "It's good to be home."

It was an emotion clearly seconded by the audience.