

Gerard Souzay - Airs anciens d'Italie et d'Espagne (2004)

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the fact that he tended to be eclipsed by his contemporary the German baritone and art-song specialist Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Many aficionados have always preferred Souzay. The difference between the two is crudely outlined in the notion that Mr. Fischer-Dieskau specialized in intellectual, text-driven, carefully planned performances, while Mr. Souzay was more of a sensualist, reacting viscerally to the music and allowing it to carry him in new directions in a given concert.

"I think that's the reason why I shall never be really popular," he said in 1983. "The big public likes interpretations that are explanations. For me, music is crystal clear and self-explanatory. Therefore, when I am performing I only propose my feelings."

Any rivalry between the two, however, was tempered with respect. "I wish I could sing French song as well as Souzay can sing German lieder," Mr. Fischer-Dieskau once said.

Born in December 1918 as Gérard Tisserand, Mr. Souzay studied with Bernac, Claire Croiza and Vanni Marcoux at the Paris Conservatory, from 1940 to 1945. His opera career didn't begin until 1960, when he made his debut in Aix-en-Provence in Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas," but by then he was already well established as a recitalist and recording artist. Famously loyal to his accompanists, he recorded only with two, Jacqueline Bonneau, and Dalton Baldwin, who was still a student when he met Mr. Souzay. The two began a long artistic and personal association.

In later years, Mr. Souzay taught, both at the University of Texas at Austin and in master classes, and seriously took up painting. He also worked on his legacy, supervising the selection and remastering of reissues of his earlier records. His last days, Mr. Ku said, were spent selecting Beethoven songs for a CD.

"Simply, music means a lot to me and I feel very deeply what I sing," Mr. Souzay once said. "Sometimes when I sing I shiver. But it's not because I love what I am doing. It's because music moves me to the bones." ---Anne Midgette, nytimes.com

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