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# Instruments That Sing, With Singers as Instruments

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Solo singers who focus on opera and symphonic repertory have few opportunities to perform chamber music, the superb mezzo-soprano [Sasha Cooke](#) wrote in her introduction to the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's concert at Alice Tully Hall on Friday evening.

"The experience may be as close to being an instrumentalist as we can get," she said. Meanwhile, as the pianist Wu Han, the co-artistic director of the society, noted in a contribution to the program notes, pianists and other musicians spend considerable time trying to make their instruments "sing."

Ms. Cooke's performances in this program of love songs inspired by poetry were the highlight of the evening. For Brahms's "Zwei Gesänge" for alto, viola and piano, she was joined by the pianist Gilbert Kalish and the violist Paul Neubauer.

Brahms used the German Christmas carol "Josef lieber, Josef mein" as a viola obbligato in his setting of "Geistliches Wiegenlied" for alto and piano. Ms. Cooke's distinctive smoky timbre blended beautifully with the mellow tones of the viola; her phrasing and control were notable in this song and in "Gestillte Sehnsucht," its companion piece. She also wielded her expressive voice to fine effect in the alto solo in Schumann's "Spanische Liebeslieder" for four voices and piano, four hands.

The rich-voiced baritone Kelly Markgraf, ably accompanied by Ms. Wu, offered a characterful rendition of the "Liederbuch des Hafis," by [Viktor Ullmann](#), a composer of Jewish descent who was imprisoned at Theresienstadt and killed at Auschwitz. Ullmann set this cycle to texts by Hans Bethge, the German poet who published paraphrases of writers, including the 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz.

Mr. Markgraf offered vocally and physically compelling interpretations of the four songs, including the sardonic "Vorausbestimmung" ("Predetermination") and "Betrunden" ("Drunk").

The concert opened with a solid performance by the tenor John Bellemer and M songs by Schubert, including the turbulent "Auf der Bruck" ("On the Bruck"). M sang with greater confidence and commitment in his solo in the Schumann cycle



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[Michelle Areyzaga](#) demonstrated an appealing, expressive soprano in Berg's "Seven Early Songs," although the performance lacked an ideal intensity, partly because of Mr. Kalish's tentative playing of the accompaniment.

The six musicians joined forces for the concluding work, Brahms's "Liebeslieder Waltzer" for four voices and piano, four hands, with Ms. Cooke again the luminous standout in her solo.