

Anastasia Grishutina (Piano), Esther Valentin-Fieguth (Mezzo-Soprano) **CRIME SCENES**

The album was released on 01/26/2022 on [GWK Records](#).

Here you can find the English booklet:

ESTHER VALENTIN-FIEGUTH

Mezzosoprano

The Mezzosoprano Esther Valentin-Fieguth studied at the Cologne Music University with Professors Mario Hoff and Ulrich Eisenlohr.

She received valuable impulses from Ingeborg Danz, Benjamin Appl, Graham Johnson, Brigitte Fassbaender, Thomas Quasthoff, Wolfram Rieger, Michael Gees, Ruth Ziesack, Stefan Irmer, Anne Le Bozec, Juliane Banse und Christianne Stotijn, among others.



As a Lied duo, Esther Valentin-Fieguth and Anastasia Grishutina have been supported by South-West German Radio's "SWR New Talent" program. As part of this, in 2019, they recorded their first CD, *Amors Spiel* (GWK 144), in the Hans Rosbaud Studio in Baden-Baden. The recording was part of their prize from the Dortmund Schubert Competition. *Crime Scenes* was recorded in the same studio in 2021.

In 2020 Valentin-Fieguth and Grishutina won the aBrüser Berg Music Prize and in 2019 they were awarded the Critics' prize, the Junior Jury prize and the audience prize at the 53rd IVC Lied Duo Competition in s' Hertogenbosch.

In 2018 they won the Bruno Frey Prize and at the Dortmund International Schubert Competition they were awarded the 1st prize and the audience prize.

From 2022 until 2025 Esther Valentin-Fieguth is a Debut-Artist of the Nikolaisaal in Potsdam where, as well as giving concerts, she acts as an ambassador for art song in schools.

She has received scholarships from the Lied Academy of the Heidelberger Frühling, the LIEDBasel Festival and the 2020/21 Udo Reinemann International Masterclasses.

In 2015 she and the pianist Rie Akamatsu won the 1st prize in the internal song competition of the HfMT in Cologne and also the Festival Vocalis prize.

In 2019 Esther Valentin-Fieguth sang the role of the Prophet Isaiah in the first performance of Johannes Marx's opera *König Hiskia* at the Protestant Church Congress in Dortmund. In 2017 she gave her debut as Hansel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*.

As a freelance singer Esther Valentin-Fieguth has dedicated many years to Art Song and regularly gives Lied concerts at international festivals and in well-known venues such as the Philharmonie in Cologne. She sang at the dedication of Gerhard Richter's windows in the Benedictine Abbey in Tholey, and made her debut in the Philharmonie in Essen singing Richard Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* with the Folkwang Chamber Orchestra under Johannes Klumpp.

In 2021 she appeared with the *Orchester im Treppenhaus* at their SeaSounds Festival and will be a guest at the 2022 Schubert-Fest in Dortmund.

As a member of Ensemble for Future she endeavours to use the language of music to campaign against climate change.

She has recorded Beethoven Lieder with Eric Schneider at SWR for RheinVocal. In 2019 she was a soloist in the premiere recording of cantatas by Antonio Salieri with the Heidelberger Sinfoniker under Timo Jouko Hermann (Hänssler) and in 2021, aside from recording Crime Scenes, she and Anastasia Grishutina also recorded Moritz Eggert's song cycle *Neue Dichter Lieben*. She also took part in Ulrich Eisenlohr's recording of the complete Brahms songs.

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ANASTASIA GRISHUTINA

Piano

Anastasia Grishutina studied piano and historical keyboard instruments with Slava Poprugin, Olga Fillippova and Alexei Shevchenko at the Department of Historical and Contemporary Performance Practice of the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, and solo piano with Professor Adrian Oetiker at the Munich University of Music and Performing Arts. She then went on to study Lied at the Cologne Music University with Professors Ulrich Eisenlohr and Stefan Irmer.

At masterclasses Michael Gees, Christoph Prégardien, Anne Le Bozec, Ruth Ziesak, Dirk Mommertz and Alexei Lyubimov have all given valuable new ideas.

Since 2019 she has been teaching Lied at the Cologne Music University, and since 2021 at the Hanover University of Music, Theatre and Media.

In 2018 Anastasia Grishutina and Esther Valentin-Fieguth won the first prize and the audience prize at that year's International Schubert Competition in Dortmund, where Grishutina was also awarded a special prize for the best Lied pianist. The same year, the duo also won the Bruno-Frey Music Prize.

In 2019 at the 53rd IVC LiedDuo Competition in s'-Hertogenbosch, the duo was awarded the Critics' prize, the Junior Jury prize and the audience prize. The duo also won the 2021 Brüser Berg Music Prize.

Since 2019 the Duo Valentin-Fieguth and Grishutina has been part of the SWR2 New Talent program which supports them with studio productions, live recordings, contact with promoters, and professional advice.

Anastasia Grishutina received a scholarship to the 2019 LIEDBasel Festival where she was given the opportunity to expand her skills under the guidance of Graham Johnson and Benjamin Appl. She was also selected to take part in the 2020/21 Udo Reinemann International Masterclass, a series of Masterclasses with Juliane Banse, Peter Gisbertsen, Anne Sofie von Otter, Hartmut Höll and Juliane Stotijn.

At the Brigitte Kempen Competition in Aachen in 2016 Anastasia Grishutina won the prize for the best Lied pianist and in 2017, she and the baritone Woongsu Kim won the second prize in the International Student Lied Duo Competition in Groningen.

Among the festivals where Anastasia Grishutina has performed are the Piano Festival at the Brucknerhaus in Linz, the Peter de Grote Festival, the Antiqua Musica Nova Festival in Groningen, The Schubert-Fest in Dortmund and Im Zentrum Lied in Cologne.

In 2018 Grishutina and Valentin-Fieguth made a studio recording of selected French and German Lieder, and also recorded their first CD, *Amors Spiel* as a co-production by the Dortmund Schubert Competition and SWR2 on GWK Records (GWK 144).

In 2020 came another recording, this time Richard Strauss' *Acht Gedichte* from *Letzte Blätter Op.10* and Edvard Grieg's *Six songs Op.48* and Gosta Nystroem's *Sångers vid havet*, as well as selected Russian Songs. In 2021, aside from recording them in their second CD production, *Crime Scenes*, SWR2 radio also recorded Valentin-Fieguth and Grishutina in the concert programme *Souvenirs de Printemps* with works by Brahms, Chausson, Mendelssohn and Schumann, and with the baritone Konstantin Paganetti in Moritz Eggert's song cycle *Neue Dichter Lieben*.

Anastasia Grishutina is particularly interested in performing Russian Lied repertoire, with the goal of making it more accessible to a wider audience.

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CRIME SCENES

Susanne Schulte (GWK Records) was in conversation with Esther Valentin-Fieguth and Anastasia Grishutina.

What gave you the idea for the Crime Scenes Theme?

EVF: The subject of crime is currently in fashion, but violence and crime aren't normally subject to fashion. There has always been crime and the stories associated with it. We are telling crime stories through the medium of our art form, of songs, most of which are not from the 21st Century. They are nevertheless still very relevant. For example, what happens in *Ballade vom Heideknaben* still happens today in front of our eyes even though we don't always see it. For this reason it's important to keep on telling these stories. Of course they also have an aesthetic value, which people enjoy, but they also get our attention and provoke thought.

AG: And the music makes a story or a scene all the more gripping, exciting. Even if it's an old story, or perhaps even because it's an old story. We hope that listeners will hear in this recording that we have constantly been asking ourselves: Why did somebody rape, kill or murder.

EVF: Most of the songs are focused on the perpetrators.

The criminal is usually the more interesting character for us. But we also present some songs which show the perspective of the victim, and some which aren't so clear-cut in that respect.

You present many different kinds of crime: Abuse and rape, but also "sweet crime" and blasphemy. Murder through passion or love, crimes against nature, suicide, war as a crime, the holocaust. We can't discuss every song here, but we can highlight a few.

With the opening song, *Heidenröslein*, you are immediately in the middle of things. Today we often think everything is worse than it used to be, but it seems to me that in the past crimes were treated with more discretion and often related from the viewpoint of the perpetrator, and as such weren't always even considered crimes.

As a child I learned *Heidenröslein* as a harmless folk song in the popular version by Heinrich Werner. Then at the age of fourteen I began to consider what is actually going on in this pretty song by one of Germany's most popular poets, and that the rose is actually a metaphor.

EVF; That is the terrible thing about it: In Goethe and Schubert, coercion is seen differently, as a "sweet crime", so to speak. "The little rose resisted and pricked, / No cry of pain helped her, / She had simply to endure it." It was simply accepted like that, perhaps with even a wink.

AG: The perpetrator's perspective. Also in the musical sense. Luckily nowadays we take a different view of sexual abuse.

What about Schubert's *Der Zwerg*? Can we understand this song metaphorically? Is it about a Person of Restricted Growth or is it about the opposition of Dwarf and King as two types of men, about dwarfishness and power?

EVF: Yes, it's about the balance of power, and status. That happened then and it happens now. But of course it's about a morbid passion.

AG: I think the figure of the Queen throws up many questions. And in this song a lot of questions remain unanswered so there's a great potential for using your imagination. We think the Queen and the Dwarf had a very special relationship. Why does she say "Truly I die gladly"?

EVF. And from her, a very essential statement: "May you suffer no pain from my death!" Had she asked the Dwarf to put an end to her because of an intolerable situation? We have performed this song umpteen times and every time I'm not sure what to think. But it's clear that they have a great and honest sentiment for each other.

AG: And it's a very extreme situation, to have to kill someone you love.

What kind of love is it when you think, if I can't have you then I have to kill you?

EVF: Or rather, "If we can't have each other, then I have to kill you".

AG: Exactly, and if she had said to him "OK, now we have no other options".

But the text doesn't say that.

AG: That's right, but the text doesn't say a lot of things. It also doesn't tell us why she married the King, or what happened earlier. Perhaps she was pressured by society into marrying him. It also isn't clear if she had had a relationship with the Dwarf which had had to be kept secret. It doesn't say that they had ever been a couple.

It's possible that the Dwarf was simply the most important person for her, but without her having been in love with him.

But the Dwarf wanted a relationship, even if there hadn't been one.

EVF: There can be no doubt of that.

But perhaps he's the only person whom she trusts with her life and her death. Someone like that is hard to find. Someone to whom you can say, I know we have such an incredible connection to each other that you'll kill me if that's what it comes to. Perhaps she asked him to end the whole situation for them both.

AG: Or she believes in fate and consults the stars. But the stars tell her she must die. Then the Dwarf would be nothing but a puppet.

The Queen identifies with the aggressor, her murderer, who when it's over, ends up also looking like a victim. Have we now overcome the underlying image of women? In Pfitzner's *Müde*, on a text by Liliencron, the male perspective is once again dominant. The Squire, "with

tassels on his hat and much havoring" seems to be a lightheaded rake. He sees the girl lying on the stone with her bodice undone. But it remains unclear whether the two of them, meeting by chance, had consensual sex, whether she was a Lady of Easy Virtue, or whether it was another case of "Me Too".

AG: An erotic scene like "Pretty Margaret" lying like that on a stone with an open blouse, also referred to as a "pretty child".

That's the standard male point of view of that time. The woman is a child, and subordinate to the man.

EVF: The balance of power is plain to see. The fact that the woman is shocked at the sight of the Squire, that she cries out and wants to run away isn't considered a "no" by the man, by the lyrical narrator, or by the music.

AG: What happens only *seems* unclear.

Liliencron interrupts the scene suggestively, as if he were talking with his pals. The rest you can guess...

But for me the question is what does the woman think? Does she consider this sort of thing normal? Or even desirable?

EVF: But even if you say perhaps it wasn't all right for her, we can't know, because the story isn't told from her perspective.

In any case I think Pfitzner wrote the song without this question mark. The music says that she complied willingly and had some fun.

With *Stille Oeynfassung* from Moritz Eggert's cycle *Neue Dichter Lieben*, you decisively contrast the traditional role of women in society and poetry with a modern viewpoint.

EVF: In *Stille Oeynfassung*, based on a text by Brigitte Kempker, the lyrical narrator is a woman. A confident and self-determined woman who doesn't want "simply to endure" a man doing with her as he pleases.

AG: Here we have a very clear contrast, both in text and music, to *Heidenröslein* and to the ambiguous romantic image of love and its setting in nature. The stinging nettles put in contrast with the little rose, so to speak. It also contrasts with Schumann's *Herzeleid*. In *Stille Oeynfassung* there could be seen to be an allusion to the drowning of Ophelia.

EVF: But in fact, in this text Birgit Kempker deals with her own experience of having been raped by a schoolmate. Because the rapist could be identified from the poem, he sued the poet and she was obliged by the court to edit the text to protect his identity.

We find this really terrible and sincerely hope that today such an outcome would no longer be possible.

But something different is possible, and was even in the past. The author of *Die verschwiegene Nachtigall* is a man, Walther von der Vogelweide, as is the composer, but the

lyrical narrator is a young noblewoman. The background here is the mediaeval concept of *Minne*, "Courtly Love". The loved one is a "Sublime Woman".

EVF: Yes, it's an exception. We do have real "sweet crimes".

AG: *Findlay* is another one. *Müde* isn't so unequivocal.

EVF: We need a few lighter moments of contrast in the programme in order for the dark parts to appear really dark, but also because the world isn't all dismal; There are also grey and light areas. In any case a completely gloomy programme wouldn't reflect us as a duo.

Returning once more to the gloomy, in *Löwenbraut* the "rosy maiden" is passive, as was indeed expected of her. The Lion's Bride (a title given from the perspective of the Lion, who loved her, grew up with her, the daughter of his keeper, and was unnaturally close to her), is "courted". What *she* wants is irrelevant. She is obedient and bows to her fate. "But I must follow, they compelled me, / The stranger into an unknown land." And in the end the lion and the woman are both dead, both victims. Why does the lion kill the woman whom he loves?

EVF: I think it's because in the end he's a wild animal and he sees red because of the "confused outcry". The lion is a victim. He kills someone he loves, not willfully but because he's an animal, a wild animal in panic who doesn't let the woman out of the cage because he wants to protect her. That he kills her is of course the worst thing that can happen. He lies down next to her afterwards to grieve for her. He is suffering. Does he know that he will be shot? That would certainly be a deliverance for him. The "stranger" has created an extremely stressful situation for him. The lion shreds his "mistress" and then lies down next to her in "sorrow and pain" and it's suddenly no matter what happens around him.

Could it be that the lion is a metaphor and that the proceedings represent a crime of passion?

EVF: For me that's taking it a bit far. I think he really is an animal, a lion. Nevertheless it is a crime of passion because animals are capable of passion. "Anger" as it says in the text. But can an animal really commit a crime? The girl and the lion have a special relationship, a kind of love between animal and human. To me it's plain that he's an animal who was caged and trained. And then something unexpected happens, and all the animal's training is gone. It's the same with my dog. If he sees a rabbit it doesn't matter how much I call him off, he simply has to follow his hunting instinct. Then we are no longer in control and terrible things could happen. We know that.

In *Endangered*, a text by Akua Lezly Hope set to music by Brechtje Nelleke van Dijk, we find a related constellation of human being and wild animal. It's based on a true occurrence which provided for news headlines and caused some anger worldwide.

EVF: In the zoo in Cincinnati a three-year-old found his way into the gorilla enclosure and was grabbed by a silverback gorilla who dragged him around for ten minutes. The gorilla was shot dead by a marksman in order to save the boy. The imprisoned ape didn't become aggressive, didn't hurt the boy, but nevertheless we felt we had to shoot it. Because we knew that we were keeping him in what was for him an alien environment, and were afraid that his nature would break through.

AG: Even though the gorilla didn't hurt the child, only pulled him around like one of his own young. The animal psychologists said he only wanted to protect the boy. He was the leader of the gorillas in the zoo. Western Lowland Gorillas, an endangered species.

EVF: It's pretty crazy. First of all comes the identification of the lyrical narrator combined with an accusation against the parents and a parent's fear for their child. From this perspective, it's the child who is *endangered*. And the "I" of the poem says: "I would have shot that gorilla too, if it was my child." Of course. But then the situation is turned around, and the criticism starts. This situation could only occur because we humans had taken away the gorillas' natural habitat and stuck a few examples in a zoo so that the race doesn't completely die out.

AG: The animals really are endangered. That's why the child could fall in there in the first place. The gorilla had to die because of us humans. That's the crime in this piece. The crime of humans against nature. We are killing nature in a "death dance". An arbitrary dance of power and caprice. We do with nature as we please. What results is a "death dance of human caprice".

You have recorded Schubert's *The Trout*. Schubert set Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart's poem of the same name to music, but omitting the fourth verse in which the trout becomes a metaphor for a seduced girl. The trout really is a metaphor, but for something other than the poem implies. The liberal poet and journalist used language to conceal his meaning.

AG. Yes, this song isn't about fish but it also isn't about men and women as one might think. You need to know that Schubart's poem had an autobiographical background which Schubert probably knew. Schubart wrote the poem during his time as a political prisoner in the Hohenasperg Fortress. He himself is the "capricious trout". The story symbolises his own fate. In order to hide this, he added the fourth verse.

Schubert didn't set the fourth verse to music, as if he had known about the hidden meaning. Schubart resolves the metaphor semi-harmlessly. He warns unsuspecting girls about "seducers with a fishing rod". But in Schubert's song the third verse is unmistakably the end. The completed A-B-A form precludes any continuation.

AG: After having publicly criticised the clergy and the nobility, Schubart was expelled from Württemberg and a few years later, in Augsburg, founded the widely-read journal, *Teutsche Chronik* in which he was regularly disrespectful about the Jesuits, and about absolutist rulers and their despotic reigns. By means of trickery (in the text: the stream guilefully made cloudy), the Duke lured Schubart back to Württemberg where he was immediately arrested and locked up for ten years without a trial. During this time (1783) *Die Forelle* appeared in the *Schwäbische Musen-Almanach* – with four verses. But I think that anyone interested in understanding Schubart would have seen through the political metaphor.

You also have songs which are about war. To what extent is war a crime scene for you?

Schumann's "Soldat" kills because he is commanded to do so as part of a firing squad, and now believes he has killed his friend or lover.

In Viktor Ullman's song *Der müde Soldat*, is the soldier a victim or a perpetrator, or both? Is he a criminal?

AG: Viktor Ullmann wrote this song in 1943 in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. In 1944 he was transported to Auschwitz where he was killed in the gas chambers. Did he try to take the perspective of a soldier for this "Chinese song"? Perhaps that of a camp guard? "I am spiked by a thousand knives, / and tired... tired of all the death"?

EVF: Against whom is war a crime? In our songs about war it feels like a crime to the protagonists. War in itself, what they are made to do, but also what is done to them by war. Very few of them actually want to kill anyone, but they all have to, or else they themselves will be shot. And for me that is the crime of war. Against these particular participants.

AG: War is a crime in any case.

EVF: But the crime is mainly committed in the place where war arises: On the political level. Of course there are soldiers who gladly go to war. But the war crimes take place further up the chain of command, with those who aren't on the front line and don't have to kill with their own hands or else be killed.

AG: That's what I find so true about Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*. The people who plan wars shouldn't forget that nobody ever wins a war. The only true General and victor in a war is Death himself. He says: "The battle is over! I have conquered all! / You all kneel before me soldiers! / Life divided you, I have reconciled you! / Arise with one accord, ye dead men, for a parade!"

Ilse Weber's *Ich Wandre durch Theresienstadt* is for me the trickiest piece on this recording, both musically and content-wise. Ilse Weber, a Czechoslovakian, German-speaking Jewish author was murdered, like Viktor Ullmann, in Auschwitz in 1944. She was 41 years old. She wrote her poem in the Theresienstadt concentration camp for her son Hanuš whom she had "put on a train in Prague before the war broke out in the hope of seeing him again some day" (N. Lebrecht: *Das Geschenk einer Tochter*. Frankfurter Rundschau, 27.11.2007). Perhaps that explains the simplicity of the song, since both the text and the melody are conventionally romantic. When it is performed today, it's easy for it to sound kitschy and sentimental. But in your version it is unsophisticated in the best sense of the word, so that it's really captivating.

EVF: It really isn't easy to interpret. It's actually like a folk song and ought to sound like one. In interpreting such a song, you're always treading a thin line. You mustn't overload it. Above all, it's difficult when you learn the background of the song. On the day she arrived in Auschwitz, Ilse Weber voluntarily accompanied sick children, among them her son Tomáš into the gas chamber. A prisoner charged with the job of carrying away the dead, who knew her from Theresienstadt, had the following conversation with her that day: She asked, "Is it true that we can have a shower after the journey?" I didn't want to lie, so I answered: "No, that isn't a shower, it's a gas chamber, and I'll give you some advice. I've often heard you singing in the sick room. Go into the chamber as fast as you can, sit down on the floor with the children and start singing. Sing whatever you always sang with them. That way you'll breathe the gas in quicker. Otherwise you'll be trampled to death by the others when panic breaks out." Ilse's reaction was strange. She laughed absently, hugged one of the children and said: "So we aren't going to have a shower -"

That story is written in Ulrike Migdal's book about Ilse Weber. *Wann wohl das Leid ein Ende hat. Briefe und Gedichte aus Theresienstadt* (Munich, 2008)

AG: I have to say that we have only used the original vocal part. I wrote the accompaniment myself. The various accompaniments we found weren't so convincing, and we weren't sure if they were really by Ilse Weber.

And these questions remain: When will the suffering have an end? When will we be free again?

EVF: The album ends quite deliberately with a question mark. The listeners may then want to look for answers themselves.

AG: Questions without answers.

You've compiled your album very thoroughly, as we have discussed for the beginning and the end. And it's definitely no coincidence that Michael Gees' *Mondlied eines Mädchens* is exactly in the middle. The text was written by Franz Werfel and dedicated to his sister Hanna. The song is unusual in the context of your programme.

EVF: It's the only song in which no active crime takes place. It's in the middle of the CD because the girl suffers so much under the evil and crime which is happening around her. And she has a feeling that she has to rescue everything. The song is written from her perspective. Michael says that we would nowadays probably describe her as a highly sensitive person. We want to point out that there are people who can't cope with crime. I would say that most of us can cope. We know about crimes and read terrible stories. But nevertheless we continue to live normally. We just hope that nothing will happen to us or else we suppress the danger. But some people just can't do that, and they break down, without a crime ever having been committed against them.

AG: The girl also reminds Michael of Cassandra, the tragic Greek seer who predicted disasters such as the Trojan War, but was never believed.

EVF: The girl wants to save everyone, but she can't. The world with its suffering and coldness is an unbearable burden. At the end we are left with an image of helplessness. "I cover up with my pillows, / The freezing worlds."

Do you cover up the freezing worlds with your CD? Or is it more the case that an artist can change the perception of a situation, that perhaps this song can help distract someone from a certain situation. The girl could raise herself above her suffering and helplessness, her status as a victim, not with pillows, but with a song. Writing a text or a song is a form of action, albeit symbolic action, if "only" as consolation, a diversion for emotional fortification. Ilse Weber and Viktor Ullmann probably managed to do that for themselves and for others... I must admit that *Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt* moves me deeply. But it is you who have to perform the piece. In other words, at that moment you are immersed in the piece but simultaneously keep some distance. If you yield to it, the performance will fall flat. How do you do that?

EVF: On the stage, you always need to keep a certain distance otherwise you'd go crazy after every Lied concert. And a programme that constantly jumps from the dramatic to the humorous and back again wouldn't work at all without us keeping some distance from what we're performing. It's not

me who should be in tears, but the listeners. Of course we've engaged with the material very differently, the content, text and music and considered the technical side of it. How do we play together? What should we do at this place or that? It becomes automatic, but you still have it in your head, which helps to maintain a distance.

AG: Fyodor Chaliapin, the great Russian bass wrote in his autobiography about one of his most famous roles, Boris Godunov, the Tsar who has a child murdered in order to gain the throne and consequently goes mad and dies: "I am completely Boris, I am crazy, I die". But at the same time he is looking at his shoes and thinking that he hasn't polished them well enough. So you give everything but still stay in control. It's not really possible to explain how to do that, though there are certain techniques an artist can learn. But for it to be good, there probably has to be something inexplicable about it, a secret.

Anastasia, what is your role in the interpretation of Lied? What effect does the music have on a song text?

AG: That's a difficult question. For me the text and music, the piano and voice parts are inseparable. As an accompanist you can't just take the piano part and somehow practice it. You have to study the text which can often be many-layered. And Esther and I have to develop the same understanding together for the text, the music, and their relationship to one another. It's like in love... you can't just say, "That's your role, I do it like this, and you do it like that." No, both parties must hear and feel each other.

For that reason, the word "accompaniment" is actually wrong. Aren't the piano and voice parts equal?

AG: Creation. Song Creation would be a good expression.

EVF: It's a shame that the word accompaniment has developed negative connotations. It's because it used to be the case that the singer would stand in front and whoever was sitting at the piano was apparently unimportant. In reality though, it's a very nice thing to accompany someone on their way. My generation and also the one before it tries to arrange the relationship of pianist and singer as equal to one another. It isn't unimportant who sits at the piano. In fact we accompany each other mutually.

AG: We make chamber music together, That's why there's an International LiedDuo Competition in Dortmund which has exactly that goal. Like in a string quartet or a trio, you have to have the same tone, the same breathing, the same intention.

Anastasia, you have specialised in Lied. Why don't you prefer to play piano sonatas?

AG: When I play with other musicians, it gives me more opportunity to let the music speak through me. I have an indescribable feeling of it not being me making the music, but that the music is making me. I felt this suddenly for the first time when I was 17 and stood on stage with a fantastic singer. And I was so excited by this sensation that I developed a great enthusiasm for chamber music.

Then in Germany it was pretty much by chance that brought me to Lied accompaniment, or perhaps fate. After finishing with solo piano, I needed to choose a new course of study. So I thought, why not Lied? I happened to get to know a singer from the Munich opera chorus. I had had a phone call from the Munich Bach Choir asking if I could accompany rehearsals for the St. John Passion. At three days' notice! Well I had learned sight-reading in Russia, so I said "no problem!" I didn't play terribly well to be honest. Three days isn't enough for all the arias, choruses and recitatives, but well... I asked the alto soloist, who sang very well, if she would come with me to the entrance examinations for the Lied class in Cologne. With her help I passed the exam and got into the class of Ulrich Eisenlohr, a brilliant teacher. And suddenly I had outstanding singers at my side. Was it coincidence? The stars? I don't know, perhaps it was the Hand of God. And now I teach in Hanover and Cologne and have a wonderful duo partner. I find it very important to keep working together over a long time. That's the only way you can get really deeply into the music.

How did you two find each other?

EVF: Through the Cologne Music University. Anastasia wanted to take part in a hammerklavier masterclass and one singer after another suddenly cancelled on her. Then she asked me. We hit it off immediately without much discussion. Since then we just haven't stopped making music together.

AG: Another happy coincidence! I knew immediately from our first project of Wolf's *Feuerreiter*, Eisler's *Hölderlin-Fragmente* and Schubert's *Geistertanz* that Esther is the right partner for me.