

# Mp3 Martin Dillon, Tenor - The Songs Of Robert Kahn, Volume 1



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Tenor Martin Dillon recalls: "I remember being stunned by the beauty and lyricism of this music -- the songs were so beautiful that I had to learn more about this composer whose name was so unfamiliar to me." 30 MP3 Songs CLASSICAL: Traditional, EASY LISTENING: Love Songs Details: Operatic tenor

Martin Dillon first heard the music of Robert Kahn while performing in a magnificent castle on Lake Starnberg in Tutzing, Germany. "I remember being stunned by the beauty and lyricism of the music," recalls Dillon, "the songs were so beautiful that I had to learn more about this composer whose name was so unfamiliar to me." Dillon returned to Munich where he befriended fellow concert singer David Greiner, the great-grandson of Kahn. Through Greiner, Dillon learned about the poignant story of a gifted composer whose works were banned by the Nazi's in 1938. "Robert Kahn was one of seven children born to a wealthy German Jewish family from Mannheim," recalls Dillon. The Kahn family was much involved in the arts in Mannheim where Robert began his early training on piano and as a student of composition. He met violinist Joseph Joachim in Berlin while studying at the Royal Academy of Music during the early to mid 1880s. Their friendship proved beneficial to Kahn later on, especially by Joachim's performances of Kahn's works for violin. A major influence on Kahn's impressionable youth was Johannes Brahms, who he learned about while attending meetings devoted solely to the study of Brahms's music at the home of Theodor Sohler, a reputable music publisher and dealer in Mannheim. In 1886, Brahms traveled to Mannheim to conduct a performance of his Fourth Symphony. It was on this special occasion the twenty-one year old first met Brahms. Kahn describes their encounter as an embarrassing moment where he accidentally spilled champagne on Brahms during a toast in his honor. Nevertheless, a friendship developed and Kahn followed Brahms to Vienna where he had much contact with him over a period of

four months (March to July) in 1887. Kahn recorded his memories of Brahms in a posthumous essay entitled, "Recollections of Johannes Brahms."<sup>1</sup> Although Kahn mentions little, if any, direct stylistic influence of Brahms on his own music, he does recall an episode where Brahms was critical of "one very passionate song" he wrote: "There you really got carried away-but it's all empty phrases."<sup>2</sup> According to Kahn this criticism helped him to avoid being "carried away" from that moment forward. Oddly, Kahn reports that while in his company, Brahms rarely talked at length about music or musicians. The Lieder of Robert Kahn are characteristic of mainstream Romantic Lied composition that emerged in the mid- to late-nineteenth century Germany and Austria. The tradition is manifest in the works of seminal composers including Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Johannes Brahms. Known for his predilection for smaller forms, Kahn's output consists mainly of Lieder, chamber music, and choral works. The larger forms include the *Konzertstucke* for piano and orchestra op. 74 (1920) and the *Serenade* (1890). The better known chamber works include the Piano Quartets opp. 30 (1899) and 41 (1904), the Violin Sonata op. 50 (1907), and the String Quartet op. 60 (1914). Kahn also wrote a number of successful choral works including *Mahomets Gesang* op. 24 (1896). Dillon, a professional singer whose career as an operatic tenor has included over forty starring roles in European and American opera houses, including six appearances at Carnegie Hall, could not allow the Kahn legacy to continue its life in relative obscurity. Dillon's passionate commitment to resurrecting the music is now beginning to bear fruit. This past February, "Jungbrunnen," *The Songs of Robert Kahn* was released on compact disc by Ganymede records. For Dillon, the project has been a labor of intense love and emotion as he and Kahn's great-grandson, David, sifted through the late composer's body of work. Included in *The Songs of Robert Kahn* are thirty Lieder and the world premiere recording of "Jungbrunnen," a song cycle for tenor, violin, cello and piano. German-Jewish poet Paul Heyse and winner of the Noble Prize for Literature in 1910 wrote the text of the song cycle. The Lieder in the recording spans a wide range in years. The earliest song in the set is "Obdach der Liebe" op. 6 no. 5, composed in 1886. The oldest is "Abendlied," op. 68 no.1, composed in 1920. The majority of the songs are through-composed with the exception of "Wie trag ich doch im Sinne," "Obdach der Liebe," and "Erhalte Gott, mir dies Gefuhl," which are all written in strophic form. The songs attest to Kahn's mastery of the piano by making the piano accompaniment an equal partner in the interpretive process. The melodies exhibit a wondrous lyricism and remarkable coherency. Martin Dillon brings this premiere collection of Kahn songs to life from the depths of relative obscurity for the first time. He is the only

musician in the United States performing Kahn's music. Dillon's superlative and masterful voice is a perfect match to the lyricism of Kahn's melodies and contrapuntal textures. "Although I am not Jewish, I have witnessed some of the pain of the survivors of the Holocaust through my connection with the Kahn family," said Dillon, "it is a great honor to sing this unforgettable music." Robert's brother, Otto Kahn, traveled abroad and eventually carved out a career path that helped establish the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Robert's career as a composer did not fare as well. Already a well-established and widely-published composer in Germany, Robert was convinced by close friend Albert Einstein to leave the country in 1939 to escape Nazi persecution. Once Robert and his wife Katherina fled to England, his music and popularity essentially disappeared from German culture. Leaving his beloved homeland had a devastating affect on Kahn. Robert Kahn died in Biddenden, Kent in 1951. Fortunately, interest in the composer's work in Germany has flourished over the past several years. Kahn's chamber works are of the highest quality, and continue to grow in popularity. The collection of songs on the "Jungbrunnen" release will undoubtedly encourage further interest in Kahn's music particularly with regard to the influences of Brahms and his contemporaries. The author of these program notes is Joseph C. Schivado.

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