

# German songs to rekindle lost sentiments in restless metro

## Baritone Brings Ashore Melodies Of Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn

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In the age of easy sex, online streaming, and e-wallets, songs about nature and wonder, love and longing, and elves and spirits don't seem like an exciting evening gig. But a wise psychologist might suggest conferring with fragile sentiments as a prescription to continue being human in our digital times. Of course, if you love Western classical music, self-prescription is all you need. Because today, the great German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's last private pupil will perform Lieder at the NCPA.

For the uninitiated, Lieder is a German song tradition that blossomed in the 19th century as a fusion of poetry and music. The word is plural

for Lied, which is German for song. In Lieder, the works of canonical poets like Goethe and Heine are set to music by great composers like Schubert and Schumann. It is an art form of Romanticism, the European thought movement characterised by feeling and imagination more than, and sometimes in exclusion of, values like reason and logic—the characteristics of the preceding era of Enlightenment.

"Some of the emotions found in the texts of Lieder can no longer be related to. The world has changed. But the feelings conveyed through the music of Lieder are forever relevant," baritone Benjamin Appl tells **TOI**. Distinguishing between Lieder and opera, he says, "I always use the image



**DELICATELY TEUTONIC:** Benjamin Appl and pianist Simon Lepper

of a painter. Lieder is like a painting done with a fine brush; a miniature. Opera is like a huge painting done with a big brush. Vocally, they make the same demands, but while opera with its costumes and its elaborate stage settings is like magic, Lieder is more about your own interpretation of

your own feelings and emotions. It is almost like meditation therapy."

In Lieder, usually one singer performs to piano accompaniment. Appl's accompanist today will be Simon Lepper from England, described by a critic as a pianist especially sensitive to words, to the voice.

Appl calls studying privately with Fischer-Dieskau, who died four years ago, one of his "biggest privileges". "I first met him at a public masterclass. Afterwards he offered to work with me privately. I would visit him three to four days in a row at a time. I studied with him for three and a half years. He was my mentor."

About his journey into music, Appl, winner of this year's prestigious Gramophone Young Artist of the Year award, says, "I grew up in a musical family. My oldest brother joined the school choir, followed by my second brother. At 10, I too joined the choir. That was my first contact with classical music."

He says he left the choir at 18 and didn't know what to do in life. He worked in a bank for some time and also studied business administration. "One and a half years into it, I thought why not

study singing at a conservatoire? So I applied and did a post-graduation."

The Appl-Lepper performance, titled Liederabend (evening of Lieder), marks the end of the inaugural day of a poetry festival by the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, which will be on till Sunday. The festival arises from the project Poets Translating Poets, started in 2014 to create a platform for poets from South Asia and Germany to translate each other's works.

It is but natural that the art form of Lieder developed in Germany, proverbially known as 'Das Land der Dichter und Denker' (The land of poets and thinkers). Not many realise that it has a parallel in India—Rabindra Sangeet, Tagore's poems set to his own music. Indeed, Satyajit Ray, India's last renaissance man, compared both traditions. His comment is a topic in itself, best left for another day.