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FIRST NIGHT

Andre Schuen review — a Tyrolean star singing despair and ecstasy

In his performance of Robert Schumann songs at London's Temple Church, the Italian singer spun beautiful legato and found the sweetest vocal timbre



Andre Schuen at Temple Church, accompanied by Julius Drake

Neil Fisher

Friday November 13 2026, 9.30pm, The Times

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The tennis champion Jannik Sinner isn't the only mega-talent from South Tyrol. The baritone Andre Schuen, who also comes from the area of Italy that straddles cultures and languages (Schuen speaks Ladin as well as Italian and German) is a compellingly charismatic singer — and actor too.

I've twice seen him in contrasting productions of *Cosi fan tutte*, where he excelled as a Guglielmo whose macho exterior ultimately crumbles when his heart is broken. That's a theme that serves him well when it comes to a Robert Schumann lieder, which Schuen performed with authority and emotional depth at Temple Church in London as part of the Temple Music series.

Schumann's Op 24 *Liederkreis* and *Dichterliebe* are both ripped-from-the-headlines material — written in the same year they chart, sometimes quite nakedly, the highs and lows of the composer's feelings of despair and ecstasy as he was finally able to marry Clara Wieck (the pair having taken her father to court). Rather cannily, Schuen and his eloquent, sometimes understated accompanist Julius Drake broke up the two cycles with one simple love song, *Du bist wie eine Blume*, written in the afterglow of Robert and Clara's wedding.

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Otherwise it was melancholy, anger and bitterness, but served up uber-stylishly. Unlike some weedier lieder types Schuen can draw on a beefy sound but can also pare it right back. In the *Liederkreis*'s *Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden* ("Lovely cradle of my sorrows") he spun a beautiful legato line and found the sweetest vocal timbre. "I never begged for love... but you drive me away." You sense we're only getting one half of the story here but Schuen's confused, wounded narrator oozed naive vulnerability. A similar sense of shock infused the dark monologues of *Dichterliebe*, *Ich grolle nicht* ("I bear no grudge") less savage than stunned.

All this was a pleasure to listen to — and perhaps that's where there's room for improvement. If Schumann is wearing his heart on his sleeve, Heinrich Heine's texts have more ambiguity, suggesting that our poetic narrator is sometimes more caustic than romantic. In the climax of *Dichterliebe* the dumped lover says he will bury his poems in ever more ridiculously deep, large and inaccessible places. Is this heartbreak, petulance — or satire? The sensitive Schuen played it straight. Other options are available.

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Andrè Schuen, Julius Drake, Temple Church review - the Lieder ideal in Schumann

The greatest baritone alongside Gerhaher works with an equally revelatory pianist

by David Nice | Friday, 13 November 2026

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Julius Drake and Andrè Schuen spellbind with Schumann in Temple Church

All images by Chris Christodoulou

Did it matter, after the revelation at the 2024 Aldeburgh Festival of Andrè Schuen and Julius Drake as simply the best Lieder partnership I'd heard, that the same Schumann/Heine sets featured in their programme for Temple Music? Not at all, even though I'd especially like to have heard again the Thomas Larcher Sebald settings we heard at Snape. There is no end to what such great musicians can find in these often strange and very quirky settings. And what a privilege to hear another baritone of infinite range conquering a difficult acoustic the night after Christian Gerhaher made every word and tone tell in the Coventry Cathedral performance of Britten's *War Requiem* (a work Schuen, too, knows. Curiously, Temple Church was also badly bombed in World War Two).

It's a personal thing, but I prefer Schuen's relaxed, seemingly effortless project of every mood and colour to Gerhaher's more mannered delivery in Lieder recitals. What a shame the older singer's Wigmore pre-eminence has rather cast the younger singer in the shade here in the UK. That's undeserved; everyone should hear what perfect song delivery sounds like, especially when another baritone I won't name who's over-promoted sounds like an amateur alongside these two.

Even on a second hearing from the same team, Schumann's sleight of hand, especially in the piano part, still took me aback throughout the Op. 24 *Liederkreis* reflecting Heine's rejection by a 16 year old cousin. The words are very far from the conventional love-poetry of the romantic era; Heine comes closer to the bizarreries of Hoffmann than the moon/nightingale hacks often preferred by composers of the time. Looking back, I see I noted before the deliberately out-of-phase ricochets between piano and baritone in the startling lyric where Heine tells his love to lay her hand on his heart, where an evil carpenter is making his coffin. Its parallel for strangeness came in one of the songs Schumann was forced to discard from *Dichterliebe*, "Mein Wagen rollet langsam" ("My carriage rolls slowly"), where will-o-the-wispy figures nod through the carriage windows. Drake had their measure, especially in one of many codas where he'd always project a cunning twist or surprise turn of phrase.



When lyricism is allowed to flourish, Schuen's line was perfect; the core tone is oaky bass baritone with no technical problems anywhere in the register. The epitome of his nuanced art could be summed up just as tellingly in the contrasts of the miniscule "Anfangs wollt ich fast verzagen" ("At first I almost lost heart") as in the chilling, longer ballad of "Es leuchtet meine Liebe" ("The gleam of my love"), spine-tingling.

Letting us off the hook at the end of the first half was the relatively simple perfection of "Du bist we eine Blume" ("You are like a flower"), favourite of Schumann's beloved Clara, but we were back on the rack for *Dichterliebe* (A Poet's Love) - a familiar cycle where the originality of delivery made me question whether I knew it at all. "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai" ("In the wondrous month of May") was as much a hypnotic dream as the more troubling number about sleep images close to nightmare, soporifically coloured with the contrast of waking. By contrast, Drake made epic the vision of Cologne Cathedral reflected in the Rhine, a song where cinematically the poet zooms in on the picture of the Virgin within so like his beloved - but reality has the last word.

As, thankfully, it does not in the last song, where the ineffable piano episode brought the expected consolation For the briefest, most heroic of encores after Heine's essentially bleak world, we had the first of the three *Tragödie* songs, "Entflieh mit mir und sei mein Weib" ("Flee with me and be my wife"), more pertinent to Schumann and Clara than Heine and his Amelie. Proof in its heroism, if any were needed, that Schuen can run the gamut. So let's go overboard again, as I did the previous night with Gerhaher, and state that here is the only other baritone who's a worthy successor to Fischer-Dieskau. We need to see and hear much more of Schuen in London.

> *"Let's go overboard, as I did the previous night with Gerhaher, and state that here's the only other worthy successor to Fischer-Dieskau"*

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Friday, 13 November 2026

Casting a spell: baritone Andrè Schuen & pianist Julius Drake in Schumann's Heine settings at Temple Church for Temple Music

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Andrè Schuen, Julius Drake - Temple Music at Temple Church [Photo: Chris Christodoulou]

A Poet's Love - Schumann: *Liederkreis* Op. 24, *Dichterliebe* Op. 48; Andrè Schuen, Julius Drake; Temple Music at Temple Church

A focus on Schumann's Heine settings with two of his 1840 song cycles in performances that brought out the songs' lyric beauty alongside a focus on text and meaning.

We first saw baritone Andrè Schuen back in 2016 when he gave an all-Schubert recital at Oxford Lieder Festival [see my review] and there have been other more recent sightings including at the 2024 Aldeburgh Festival [see Tony's review]. Then we caught him as Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in Christoph Loy's powerful production at the Salzburg Festival this year [see my review]. So it was a great pleasure to be able to encounter him again in recital for Temple Music.

Andrè Schuen and pianist Julius Drake have been performing their Schumann/Heine programme in Europe and the stopped at Temple Church on 12 November 2026 to give us a treat. Their programme, *A Poet's Love* featured Schumann's two Heine cycles, *Liederkreis Op. 24* and *Dichterliebe op. 48* along with the four songs that Schumann cut from *Dichterliebe* but published later.



Andrè Schuen, Julius Drake - Temple Music at Temple Church [Photo: Chris Christodoulou]

We began with the *Liederkreis*, a sequence of nine songs setting poems from Heine's *Junge Leiden* (Young Sorrows) section of his *Buch der Lieder* (1827). Heine's poems, often referring to his own emotional turmoil, seem to have struck a chord with Schumann who was writing the songs whilst fighting his future father-in-law in court. There can be a bitter edge to Heine's poetry, and many of those in Schumann's *Liederkreis* were written after Heine was bitterly rejected by his cousin with whom he was in love. The cycle has no narrative, but then Schumann's cycles tend not to; instead we have a progression of lyrics exploring unrequited love.

Singing from memory, Andrè Schuen cut a poised figure on stage. his performance throughout the evening focusing on the story and words. Temple Church is not an ideal space for a lieder recital, but Schuen had no problems conveying word and meaning. His performances were not operatic, but there was an emotional directness in manner as he really inhabited text and story.

'Morgens steh' ich auf und frage' began with a light, fluent piano and Schuen's dark, focused voice. The second song was all vivid vigour with warm and depth to his timbre. 'Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen' was quiet and concentrated, with some real magic in the third verse when time seemed suspended. 'Lieb' Liebchen' seemed quite light-hearted at first, but Schuen brought a real twist to the words. 'Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden' moved from lyric beauty to something more intense, and wonderfully expansive. The fierce vigour of 'Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann' gave way to real bitterness in the second half. Quiet and intimate at first, 'Berg und Burgen schaun herunter' was all about lyricism which we came to realise was deceptive. Drake's piano began 'Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen' in a dark and sober manner, complementing the serious tone of Schuen's voice. Then 'Mit Myrten und Rosen' began with a lovely spring to the rhythms, developing vigour later on, though Schumann does not quite leave us with a resolution. You feel the poet's suffering will go on.

The poems from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* (which was written later in 1840 after *Liederkreis*) all come from the *Lyrisches Intermezzo* section of Heine's *Buch der Lieder*. Heine's original has a verse Prologue and 65 poems which tell the story of a knight who is in love with a fairy who visits him nightly (!) Schumann's selection of poems extracts the emotional narrative from any sense of story telling. In Schumann's original he set 20 poems but he eventually reduced them to 16, reusing the other songs in later works.

To finish the first half of the programme Schuen and Drake performed the four cut *Dichterliebe* songs, along with 'Du bist wie eine Blume' from *Myrthen*. We began this group with *Dein Angesicht* Op. 127 No.2 (Your face so lovely and fair), an example of slowly unfolding lyric beauty, yet the words counted too. *Lehn' deine Wang* Op. 127 No. 4 (Rest your cheek against my cheek) was vivid and intense, then *Es leuchtet meine Liebe*, Op. 127 No. 3 (The gleam of my love) was urgent and flowing with a vigorous piano part. Finally in the ex-*Dichterliebe* group, *Mein Wagen rollet langsam*, Op. 142 No. 4 (My carriage rolls slowly) was finely thoughtful with a long, expressive postlude. The first half concluded with 'Du bist wie eine Blume' (You are like a flower) from *Myrthen* (also setting Heine) where the interior quality of Schuen's performance brought out the song's beauty.

Apart from his late poems there is often a bitter or sarcastic quality to Heine's verse. Whilst Schumann's settings in *Liederkreis* Op. 24 seem to chime in with Heine's attitudes, in *Dichterliebe* you sense a mellowing and though the poems deal with unrequited love, Schumann melds this with what might be terms poetic romance. There is less immediacy in the emotional turmoil, also Schumann uses the piano postludes (many of which are substantial) to modulate the mood of the text somewhat. Schuen's was a mellow, thoughtful performance with the poetry given with a great deal of poise, almost as if the poet was recollecting.

'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' was nicely flowing, the interior quality developing into something more expansive. This latter quality continued into 'Aus meinen Tränen sprießen' which was also rather confiding. 'Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne' was vivid and fast, then 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' had a wonderful poetic feel to it, leading to sadness (rather than bitterness).

'Ich will meine Seele tauchen' felt rather well-balanced, as if the poet was thoughtful and on top of his emotions. But 'Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome' gave the opposite impression as it began strongly, almost fierce with powerful moments. That was the interesting thing about Schuen's performances, he was often confiding and intimate, never histrionic, but he did not shy away from the big moments, filling the church admirably. 'Ich grolle nicht' offers scope for anger, and here the powerful delivery led to some real bitterness. The opening of 'Und wüßten's die Blumen, die kleinen' was light and urgent, but the final lines were bitter indeed - 'My pain is known to one alone; For she it was who broke, Broke my heart in two.'

'Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen' featured a lightly dancing piano though there was surprising strength to Schuen's voice. The suggestion the poet was not coping well, which led to the bleak 'Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen' with Schuen's performance very interior and a bleak piano postlude. 'Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen' began insouciantly, but this poet could not keep this up and the song ended in real bitterness. 'Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen' was thoughtful with a lovely postlude.

'Ich hab' im Traum geweinet' was haunted with a powerful conclusion, then 'Allnächtlich im Traume' was remarkably graceful. The vigour of 'Aus alten Märchen winkt es' developed into a real swagger but the postlude was delicate and eventually evaporated, suggesting the line 'Ah! I often see that land of joys in dreams: then comes the morning sun, and it vanishes like smoke'. The final song, 'Die alten, bösen Lieder' was strong and uncompromising, yet with a touching postlude.

We had an encore, something suitably vigorous: Schumann's 'Entflieh' mit mir und sei mein Weib' from *Tragödie* Op.64 No.3 (also words by Heine).



Andrè Schuen, Julius Drake - Temple Music at Temple Church [Photo: Chris Christodoulou]