NEW BOOK / CULTURAL HISTORY

She captivated Søren Kierkegaard – now she steps into the spotlight herself

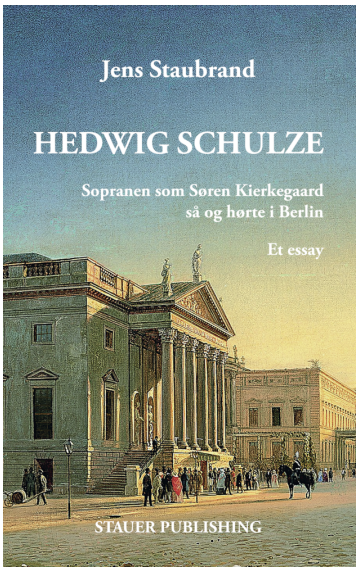
An opera singer in Berlin reminded Søren Kierkegaard of the woman he had left behind

One December evening in 1841, Søren Kierkegaard experienced something unusual at the Berlin Opera: On stage stood a young soprano who resembled his former fiancée Regine Olsen so closely that he was deeply moved. Now a new book by Jens Staubrand tells the story of the almost forgotten opera singer Hedwig Schulze, her remarkable career and her all too early death.

Søren Kierkegaard had travelled to Berlin shortly after his dramatic break with Regine Olsen. There, in December 1841, he attended Mozart's opera Don Giovanni at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden. The role of the abandoned Donna Elvira was sung by the soprano Hedwig Schulze, who was just 26 years old.

The encounter made a strong impression on the Danish philosopher. In a letter to his friend Emil Boesen, he related that the singer bore a striking resemblance to his former fiancée. In a note from Berlin, he described her appearance, clothing and performance, and wrote: “I really had to exert a little force upon myself to dispel this impression.”

Seeing a woman who reminded him of Regine Olsen, precisely in the role of a seduced and abandoned woman, made the experience particularly unpleasant for Kierkegaard.



A famous philosopher – and an almost forgotten singer

But who exactly was the young woman who made such a strong impression on Søren Kierkegaard?

This question is the starting point for author Jens Staubrand's new book Hedwig Schulze – The Soprano Whom Søren Kierkegaard Saw and Heard in Berlin.

Drawing on Kierkegaard's letters and extensive research into contemporary German newspapers, music journals and historical sources, Staubrand paints a portrait of a singer who was a well-known figure in the opera world of Berlin and Breslau in her own time.

Hedwig Schulze made her debut in 1839 at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden as the Countess in Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro and was greeted with thunderous applause. She subsequently sang a wide range of demanding roles in operas by Mozart, Weber, Bellini, Gluck and Beethoven, among others.

She was praised for her powerful soprano voice, her musicality and her stage presence. Her career showed great promise.

A promising career came to a tragic end

In 1843, Hedwig Schulze left Berlin and continued her career at the opera house in Breslau, where she once again delighted audiences and critics. But behind her success, the young singer was struggling with declining health.

That same year, she was forced to leave the stage. She suffered from a chest disease, probably tuberculosis, and died in Berlin on 15 July 1845, at the age of just 30.

Hedwig Schulze's life was short, and her name gradually faded from music history. Søren Kierkegaard's remarks about her, however, have survived.

A new perspective on Kierkegaard and the world of music

With his book, Jens Staubrand shifts attention from the famous philosopher to the woman who briefly entered his life and awakened memories of his lost love.

The book connects a personal and emotionally charged moment in Kierkegaard's life with a portrait of European opera culture in the 1840s. At the same time, it documents how a talented singer could captivate her contemporaries and yet almost disappear from the memory of later generations.

According to the author, Hedwig Schulze – The Soprano Whom Søren Kierkegaard Saw and Heard in Berlin is the first book about Hedwig Schulze. It is the story of a woman who was remembered by one of Denmark's greatest thinkers – but who deserves to be remembered for much more than her resemblance to Regine Olsen.

FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK

BOOK IN DANISH

Title	Hedwig Schulze – The Soprano Whom Søren Kierkegaard Saw and Heard in Berlin
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BOOK DESCRIPTION

One December evening in 1841, Søren Kierkegaard saw the young soprano Hedwig Schulze on the opera stage in Berlin. She resembled his former fiancée Regine Olsen so closely that the experience affected him deeply. Drawing on Kierkegaard's letters and contemporary German sources, Jens Staubrand tells the story of the singer, her career on the opera stages of Berlin and Breslau, and her early death at the age of just 30. The book sheds new light on an unusual encounter between philosophy, music and love – and gives an almost forgotten female artist a story of her own.