

MAHLER`S WINTER JOURNEY

“What I learned from Death”

A young female Mahler fan, dressed as her idol, gets into her car, starts the engine, and listens to her favorite CD. “Die Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen” (“Songs of a Wayfarer”) leave the noise of the vehicle and the gray everyday behind and trigger a flood of increasingly intense images, which become synchronized with the music.

A snow-covered church door springs open – Death, dressed as the groom, appears at the “Fröhlichen Hochzeit” (“Joyous Wedding-Day”) in the first song. The unhappy “wayfarer” is merely a guest at this terrible marriage of his own bride. The consoling female Death accompanies the miserable man into the “Dunkle Kämmerlein” (“Dark Little Room”), where bitter memories are recalled.

It was an unhappy love story with Johanna Richter, a young singer in Kassel. We owe the “Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen” to the failure of Gustav Mahler’s relationship and with it, insight into this tangled inner life.

On the first of January, 1885, the composer writes to his friend Löhr: “I have written a cycle of songs which are all dedicated to her.” The cycle, consisting of four songs, holds similarities to Franz Schubert’s works “Die schöne Müllerin” (“The Lovely Maid of the Mill”) and “Winterreise” (“Winter Journey”).

125 years after completion of the four-part work, young students from Linz send their Mahler-figure on a last winter journey – the “Fahrt der Gesellin” (“Journey of a Female Wayfarer”) through the wan world of Mahler and its lethal ending are the subject matter of this visualization on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his death.



“I walked across the fields this morning; dew still hung on every blade of grass.”

Gustav Mahler

Good spirits enable a short, seemingly untroubled, but threatened “pink” flashback – sand is trickling through an hourglass – to happier times at summery lakes. This supposed idyll is suddenly destroyed by an evil guest, and his ravaging entourage – the merciless assistant – an executor of ominous “Kindertotenlieder” (“Songs on the Death of Children”) ...

“As a stranger I arrived, as a stranger I shall leave” – with these words the “Winterreise” (“Winter Journey”) begins, one of the most famous song cycles of the Romantic Period. In the course of the work, the listener becomes more and more the companion of the wayfarer, the central figure of the Winter Journey. After a love affair, already ended before the first song begins, he decides to renounce love and the feeling of security and sets out into the winter night without any goal or hope. This is also shown in the fourth song of the “Gesellenlieder” (“Wayfarer songs”) and in the film: *“I went out into the quiet night ...”*

Gustav Mahler’s “Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen“ (“Songs of a Wayfarer”) are clearly influenced by the “Winterreise” (“Winter Journey”) and the “Lindenbaum” (“The Linden Tree”) (the fourth song in Mahler’s cycle) in both its textual intention as well as composition details.

Under the linden tree another escape into the paradise of a more beautiful world is possible – the cold of winter and death, however, only briefly give way to this oasis of a last moment of happiness, and it tragically dissolves into the plumes of smoke of an irreversible reality of this last journey. The engine runs on – the CD and life are ended. Snowflakes silently fall in front of the closed garage door ...

Translation: Dr. Andreas J. Kemf



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