

FELIX MENDELSSOHN [Felix Jakob Ludwig Mendelssohn-Bartholdy] (1809-1847)

AUF FLÜGELN DES GESÄNGEN (On the Wings of Songs) Op. 34

Felix Mendelssohn, the grandson of the celebrated Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, was baptized into the Lutheran church. From an early age he showed extraordinary talent as a composer (*Octet; A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Concert-goers are familiar with his four symphonies, overtures and concertos and church-goers with his oratorios, *Elijah* and *St. Paul*. Pianists revel in his *Songs Without Words* – a completely new genre created by him. Less well known are his works for secular chorus and his solo songs. Although his reputation diminished after his death, recent studies have led to a new appreciation of his influence on contemporary and later composers, his astonishing tonal colorations and his intimations of Impressionism. Tonight's program begins with "Auf Flügeln des Gesängen" from Mendelssohn's set of *Six Songs (1836), to a text by Heinrich Heine*.

The piece was composed around the time of his engagement to Cécile Charlotte Sophia Jenrenaud, who became his dearly beloved wife. It was intended not for the concert hall but for an intimate circle of family and friends in a parlor or drawing room setting. It is strophic in form, like many of Schubert's songs, with a hint of erotic romance in the emphasis on certain words, notably at the end, "seligen Traum" (blissful dream).

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

SELECTIONS FROM AUS DES RAMLERS LYRISCHER BLUMENLESE (From Ramler's Lyrical Flower Harvest) H. XXV

Haydn's works developed and exemplified what we know as "Classical" music, particularly his string quartets, sonatas and symphonies. Less well known is his vocal music: oratorios, Masses, operas, songs, etc. in great abundance. Tonight we hear some of his choral works from a collection that he composed toward the latter part of his life. The texts were chosen by him from one of Karl Wilhelm Ramler's anthologies of well-known German poets of that time and were specifically stated by him to be his own choice rather than a publisher's or a patron's specification. Rather they were "from the heart" of an elderly, experienced composer. We do not know why Haydn selected these texts from the 52+ others he might have chosen. What we hear is that these texts expressed the skill he had acquired in a lifetime of composing as well as a humorous and humble perspective he had acquired in a lifetime of living with his fellow human beings of all stations in life.

It is useless to listen to these songs without noting the translations; otherwise you will miss Haydn's personal response to the individual words and meaning of the text.

Die Beredsamkeit – listen for what Haydn does with the word "stumm" (mute) and for his playful appreciation of the lines "Wir ermahnen ... hören" (we admonish, quarrel, instruct, no one wants the other to hear.).

Die Warnung – The texture, like a slithering, scuttling scorpion, begins contrapuntally, settling securely on the word "Stein" (stone). The word "dunkel" (dark) is set in the minor mode, a form of musical illustration.

Die Harmonie in der Ehe – The "he's" are always answered by the "she's", always joining in full harmony, "O wunderbare harmonie!"

Aud dem Dankliede zu Gott – This is set as a Bach chorale, in full homage and faith.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL [GEORG FRIEDERICH HÄNDEL] (1685-1759)

CANTATA: O NUMI ETERNI (LA LUCREZIA) Händels Werke (HG) 51/32 (1709)

Who hasn't heard all or some of Handel's *Messiah*? Many are familiar with his instrumental works, *Water Music*, and *Fire Music*. The composer, born in Germany and later emigrated to England, was prolific in all musical genres: operas, oratorios, instrumental works, church works, chamber works, choral works. His works for vocal soloists reflect his experience and unerring focus on the qualities and capabilities of the particular singer for whom the work was intended. During Handel's sojourn in Italy, and while he was a household musician for Francesco Ruspoli in Rome (and elsewhere in Italy), Handel

composed a number of dramatic vocal works, among them the cantata, *Lucrezia*, famous to this day as a vocal and instrumental masterpiece expressing deeply charged and changing emotions.

This solo cantata presents an operatic scene – a soliloquy – in which the protagonist, Lucrezia, reflects on her situation (she has been seduced and abandoned by the Roman, Tarquinius – a story well-known to the listeners of Handel's time.) No one who follows Lucrezia's thoughts and emotions in recitatives, arias, and arioso, can fail to be moved by her rage, pathos, pleas, determination, sense of abandonment and her final decision, to enact her own revenge.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1759-1791)

The template for all child prodigies, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart developed quickly into a composer of great technical facility and even greater imagination. The final work of his tragically short life, „Requiem“, a setting of the Latin Mass for the dead, was commissioned under murky circumstances. Although we know now that a servant of Count Walsegg initiated the contract and appeared once more to ensure that Mozart was fulfilling the contract, we know that Mozart was not aware of the identity of the mysterious patron, and, although having just completed some of the most creative works of his life (*The Magic Flute*, the *Clarinet Concerto*), and being in increasingly feeble health, he began to succumb to delusions about his failing health and an almost superstitious dread about the commission. Nevertheless, he continued to work on the score until hours before his death, gathering friends to sing the parts and instructing his pupil, Franz Süssmayr, as to how to complete the work. The final work contains not only Süssmayr's orchestrations and completions, but also contributions from three other composers – all working within the substantive outline that Mozart managed to complete.

For the listener, who is hearing the work in concert form and not as part of a memorial religious service as Mozart had thought, one approach is to notice the variety of scorings for each set of verses – solo, chorus, solo+ chorus, quartet, etc. Another is to notice some traditional approaches to the text, e.g., “Tuba mirum” (the trumpet shall sound), with the appearance of the trumpet, as well as “quam olim Abrahae .. et semini ejus” (to Abraham's seed forever) by a contrapuntal setting that imitates a multitude. A final appreciation is due to Mozart himself, the inveterate dramatist and opera composer, who cannot resist any of the dramatic opportunities in the text or in the equivalent of an operatic scene conclusion beginning with a few of the protagonists and then all of them on stage.

- Barbara A. Renton, *Domus Musicae Slavicae*