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RECITAL MAJOR PROJECT

„O Fortuna!“

Music MA: Choral Conducting Pathway
Thursday 22 March 2018

Composer	Title	Duration	Key
<i>Johannes Brahms</i> (1833-1897)	Warum ist das Licht gegeben op. 74, no. 1 – I.	5,5	Dm
<i>Ēriks Ešenvalds</i> (*1977)	Stars for tuned glasses and mixed choir	5	„D“
<i>György Orbán</i> (*1947)	Daemon irrepit callidus	1,5	G
<i>Heinrich Lang</i> (1858-1919)	Der Friede Gottes op. 27	3	G
<i>Thomas Weelkes</i> (1575 -1623)	When David heard	4,5	Cm
<i>Herbert Howells</i> (1892-1983)	Requiem aeternam V. from <i>Requiem</i>	3,5	D/A
<i>Johannes Brahms</i> (1833-1897)	Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin op. 74, no. 1 – IV.	1,5	Dm

PROGRAMME NOTES

'O Fortuna!' - Fate, fortune and their questionability

This evening's recital, entitled 'O FORTUNA', deals with big strokes of fate in human life. The question 'why' from Brahms' motet opens the seven-part program and runs like a golden thread through the evening, which in turn will end with the final chorale from the same motet.

For the realization of a diversified and exciting concert programme around the theme of fate, I quickly came up with the idea to limit the number of pieces to seven. The number seven had already become a sign of wholeness and abundance in the antiquity and is still today an inconceivable number which appears in heavenly and earthly contexts: *The seven colours of the rainbow, seven days of creation, seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer*, but also the *seven rich and the seven dry years in Pharaoh's dream*.

Among the seven great vocal motets¹ of Johannes Brahms, the motet performed today clearly plays a special role as a 'masterpiece'. Brahms himself described the motet ***Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen***, composed in 1878, as 'a small treatise on the great "why"'.² The *small treatise* is today considered a milestone in motet composition technique and the overall structure shows great similarities to the role model of Bach in movement I and IV (fugue and chorale). For the main theme Brahms uses material from his *Missa Canonica*.³ From the question 'why' Brahms develops in a unique way the famous perpetual canon which seems to spiral up in the circle of fifths into hopelessness and again leads to the question 'why'. It is breath-taking how Brahms manages to hold out a perfect canon of incipient voices over 16 bars. Comparable to the *German Requiem*, the four-part motet offers insights into his religious ideas, raises questions of theodicy and shows his sense for the choice of biblical writings.

The lyrical ego in Sara Teasdale's poem ***Stars***, while not answering the question of 'why', leads into a stunningly beautiful depiction of nature that lets an incomprehensible transcendental peek into our mind. On a completely different level, we are witnessing human destiny through the connection of heaven and earth: 'I know I am honored to be witness of so much majesty'. The poem from 1920 is set into music by the Latvian Ēriks Ešēnavals for choir with an exceptional 'orchestral' accompaniment, consisting of tuned wine glasses.

After searching for fate in the 'heaven full of stars', the following *daemonic* setting by the Romanian composer György Orbán shows us the dangers of the devilish temptation in a vivid and impressive way. ***Daemon Irrepsit Callidus*** is the best-known choral work by Orban, who is also a professor of theory and composition at the Liszt Academy of Music. Minor second intervals, augmented chords, and chromatic scales represent the artifice the devil uses to deceive and seduce the honorable heart. The text is taken from an anonymous medieval Goliardic text⁴.

¹ *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her* (op. 29, 1), *Schaffe in mir Gott ein rein Herze* (op. 29, 2), *Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen* (op. 74, 1), *O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf* (op. 74, 2), *Ich aber bin Elend* (op. 110, 1), *Ach arme Welt* (op. 110, 2), *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein* (op. 110, 3). The *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* (op. 109) are not included here as they have been published under a specific title.

² Michael Heinemann: *Zwei Motetten für gemischten Chor a cappella op. 74*. Found at: Wolfgang Sandberger (ed): *Brahms-Handbuch*. Metzler, Weimar 2009, 309.

³ The main theme of *Warum ist das Licht gegeben* is made of the music from *Agnus Dei*.

⁴ Anonymi Hungari affectus in Jesum super omnia amabilem

As a musical contrast, the romantic motet by the German Heinrich Lang is intended to reinforce the basic message of *Daemon irrepit callidus*. However great the devil's temptation, **Der Friede Gottes** (The peace of God) will be stronger. Heinrich Lang was organist, choirmaster and composer and worked at the Stiftskirche Stuttgart. His simple motet, which resembles the sound of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's compositional style, is today largely unknown and deserves to be discovered.

The question 'why', which was raised at the beginning, is also encountered in the following two pieces which deal with one of life's worst strokes of fate, the loss of one's own child.

Thomas Weelkes, organist at Chichester Cathedral, published two remarkable *sacred madrigals* in 1622, *O Jonathan* and *When David heard*. Assigning the exact genus of **When David Heard** is not easy, as the piece 'was intended for domestic rather than church use'⁵ and may have been composed to mark the death of Prince Henry who died unexpectedly at the age of 18. Weelkes transforms the straightforward biblical lament from King David over the death of his son into a thrilling musical drama by using all kinds of madrigalism; especially the use of *false relations* (use of B and B^b in the same bar).

For the memorial of his son in 1935, Herbert Howells composed his masterpiece *Hymnus Paradisi* which shows numerous connections to the a capella **Requiem**, composed three years earlier. Howells compiles the texts of his Requiem according to personal consideration and does not refer to the traditional liturgical patterns of the *requiem* mass. Movement V develops from a single unison *d* in an almost inaudible dynamic **ppp** and in slow tempo. The gradual development of polyphony leads to a melody in locrian mode, through which Howells' aim is to create a spherically floating sound and an almost visionary atmosphere. The climax of the piece is reached by the words *eternal light*, which flows into the luminous A major and is marked with the - so far - loudest dynamics **ff ma espressivo**. In the end of this piece, the supplicant is satisfied with the certainty of eternal rest and the music concludes in a conciliatory and gentle D major. Howells wrote so much of himself into this piece that he kept it from being done in public until about 1980.

'O Fortuna!' - The music of this evening revolved around fate, fortune and their questionability. Ultimately, the initial question of why must remain as open as the question of the righteousness of God (theodicy). Martin Luther's chorale, which led us from the initial incomprehension to redemptive familiarity, is supposed to be a summarising commentary on the music of the past 30 minutes:

In peace and joy I now depart, according to God's will.

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WORD COUNT: 1077

⁵ Anthony Greening (ed.), *When David heard*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, 11.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Johannes Brahms

Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen

op. 74, no. 1 – I. | Job 3:20-23

Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen, und das Leben den betrübten Herzen? Die des Todes warten und kommt nicht, und grüben ihn wohl aus dem Verborgenen; Die sich fast freuen und sind fröhlich, daß sie das Grab bekommen. Und dem Manne, deß Weg verborgen ist, und Gott vor ihm denselben bedeckt.

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly and are glad, when they can find the grave. Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?

Ēriks Ešenvalds

Stars

Poem by Sara Teasdale

*Alone in the night on a dark hill,
with pines around me spicy and still
and heaven, a heaven full of stars over my head,
white and topaz and misty red;
Myriads with beating hearts of fire
the eons cannot vex or tire;
The dome of heaven like a great hill
and myriads with beating hearts of fire,
heaven full of stars,
I know I am honored to be witness of so much majesty*

György Orbán

Daemon irrepit callidus

Anonymous medieval Goliardic text

*Caro venatur sensibus
Sensus adharet dapibus
Inescatur impinguat dilatatur
Quidquid amabile caro dat
Cor Jesu minus aestimat*

The Demon sneaks expertly. Tempting the honorable heart: He sets forth trickery amidst praise, song and dance. However amiably the Demon acts, It is still worth less than the heart of Jesus.

*Daemon irrepit callidus
Allicit cor honoribus
Daemon ponit fraudes inter laudes, saltus,
cantus
Quidquid amabile daemon dat
Cor Jesu minus aestimat*

The Flesh is tempted by sensuality; Gluttony clings to our senses; It overgrows, it encroaches, it stretches. However appealing the Flesh is, It is still worth less than the heart of Jesus.

*Adde mundorum milia
Mille millena gaudia:
Cordis aestum non explebunt non
arcebunt
Quidquid amabile Totum dat
Cor Jesu minus aestimat*

Though the Universe may confer
Thousands upon thousands of praises,
They neither fulfill nor put out the desire
of the heart. However appealing the
whole Universe is, It is still worth less
than the heart of Jesus.

Heinrich Lang
Der Friede Gottes
Philippians 4:7

*Der Friede Gottes, welcher höher ist als
alle Vernunft, bewahre eure Herzen und
Sinne, in Christo Jesu zum ewigen Leben.
Amen.*

And the peace of God, which is deeper
than all knowledge, will keep your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Thomas Weelkes
When David heard
2 Samuel 18:33

*When David heard that Absalom was slain
He went up into his chamber over the gate and wept,
and thus he said: my son, my son, O Absalom my son,
would God I had died for thee!*

Herbert Howells
Requiem aeternam
from *Requiem*, V. movement

*Requiem aeternam dona eis.
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Requiem aeternam dona eis,
Domine.*

Rest eternal grant unto them.
And may light perpetual shine upon
them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O
Lord.

Johannes Brahms
Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin
op. 74, no. 1 – IV. | Martin Luther

*Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin,
In Gottes Willen,
Getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn,
Sanft und stille.
Wie Gott mir verheißen hat,
Der Tod ist mir Schlaf geworden.*

In peace and joy I now depart,
According to God's will,
Comforted are my soul and heart,
Calm and still.
As God has promised me,
Death has become a sleep to me.