

Wagner, Siegfried Idyll

"As I awoke my ear caught a sound, which swelled fuller and fuller; no longer could I imagine myself to be dreaming; music was sounding, and such music! When it died away, Richard came into my room with the children and offered me the score of the symphonic birthday poem. I was in tears, but so was all the rest of the household. Richard had arranged his orchestra on the staircase, and thus was our Tribschen consecrated forever.... After lunch the orchestra came into the house downstairs, and now the Idyll was heard once again, to the profound emotion of us all."

This is what Cosima Wagner wrote in her diary, on Christmas day 1870, after receiving this wonderful musical gift from her husband Richard. The Siegfried Idyll is one of Richard Wagner's very few non-operatic works: He composed it following the birth of their son Siegfried in 1869. Its original title was "Tribschen Idyll with Fidi's Birdsong and the Orange Sunrise"; "Fidi" was their pet version of the name Siegfried. It was first performed on the morning of Christmas Eve (Cosima's birthday) in the hallway of their villa at Tribschen in Lucerne, Switzerland. A small ensemble snuck silently in before dawn, set up their stands and music by the stairs, and played the gentle opening bars as dawn broke.

Wagner's opera Siegfried, which was not premiered until 1876, incorporates music from the Idyll. The Idyll also uses a German lullaby, heard in the solo oboe, "Sleep, Baby, Sleep." Wagner intended the work only for his family and friends, but, due to financial difficulties, he was forced in 1878 to publish it in a version for full orchestra. It is the only symphonic composition of Wagner's maturity. Wagner published a detailed program for the piece:

"The first ninety measures of Siegfried Idyll, in order to sing of the purity and holiness of the child's soul, use Brünhilde's theme from the opera Siegfried. The mother, near his little bed, sings the boy to sleep with a lullaby. He falls asleep, during the soft, intermittent horn notes. The Mother notices that he is asleep, but she continues to sing, though halting several times. A series of trills indicates that the boy is now deeply asleep. The mother gazes thoughtfully upon her beloved child and dreams about his future. She seems touched by a shiver as she thinks about the unknown man who will grow from this boy (arpeggios in the strings). She envisions (when the meter changes to 3/4) a handsome man in flowering youth. This is Siegfried's theme of glory, as sounded by an interplay of flutes, clarinets and oboes. A descending clarinet run expresses the mother's delight; then the strings pick up the theme. It is combined with the holy music: in the mother's soul her remembrance of the boy's childhood and of her cares joins with this vision of maturity.... Now the mother envisions the youth becoming more manly and growing in strength: he is driven to accomplish important deeds. He gains for himself a place among men. But then comes a moment of contemplation. A nameless desire captures the youth's heart as he wanders alone (forest sounds and birdsongs and the theme of love and unity from Siegfried). Passion awakens in him, and he feels for the first time soul-wearying pains. His passion grows until finally love makes him happy. The highest sound of joy signals the full happiness of his life in love. Bird songs

foretell success, and gladness is expressed along with feelings about the innocent childhood of the soul.

The mother awakens from her reverie and turns again to the slumbering child. She gives thanks for her happiness and prays for heaven to bless her son. Once again the lullaby is heard, along with the theme of holiness. Suddenly the haunting forest horns and birdsongs return. Does the boy dream of his future? No, he sleeps quietly with a happy smile.... After a final loving kiss from the mother, the future hero rests in the care of God."

Daniel, Neruda Canciones

It is wonderful to have the opportunity to present the next work on the programme, Omar Daniel's Neruda Songs, for the first time to a Hamilton audience. Omar is an old friend and colleague of mine. Born in 1960, he is a composer, educator, pianist and producer of great skill. In 1997 he won the Jules Leger prize for Chamber Music for his *Zwei Lieder nach Rilke*, a work for soprano and chamber ensemble, and in 2007 he received the K.M. Hunter Artists Award for classical music. He earned a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Toronto where he was a pupil of John Beckwith. He is a former faculty member of the University of Toronto and since 2000 has taught on the faculty at the University of Western Ontario. He is the current director of the UWO's Composition, Electroacoustic Research and Performance Facility (CEARP). Below are the translated texts from these brilliant new songs:

La Bandera (The Flag)

Stand up with me.

No one would like more than I to stay
on the pillow where your eyelids
try to shut out the world for me.
there too I would like
to let my blood sleep
surrounding your sweetness.

But stand up,
you, stand up,
but stand up with me
and let us go off together
to fight face to face
against the devil's webs,
against the system that distributes hunger,
against organized misery.

Let's go,
and you, my star, next to me,

newborn from my own clay,
you will have found the hidden spring
and in the midst of the fire you will be
next to me,
with your wild eyes,
raising my flag.

El Tigre (The Tiger)

I am the tiger.
I lie in wait for you among leaves
broad as ingots
of wet mineral.

The white river grows
beneath the fog. You come.

Naked you submerge.
I wait.

Then in a leap
of fire, blood, teeth,
with a claw I tear away
your bosom, your hips.

I drink your blood, I break
your limbs one by one.

And I remain watching for years in the forest
over your bones, your ashes,
motionless, far from hatred and anger,
disarmed in your death,
crossed by lianas,
motionless in the rain,
relentless sentinel
of my murderous love.

El Cóndor (The Condor)

I am the condor, I fly
over you who walk
and suddenly in a wheeling
of wind, feather, claws,
I assault you and I lift you
in a whirling cyclone
of hurricaned cold.

And to my tower of snow,
to my dark eyrie
I take you and live alone,
and you cover yourself with feathers
and you fly above the world,
motionless on the heights.

Female condor, let us pounce
upon this red prey,
let us tear life
that passes throbbing
and lift together
our wild flight.

El Desvio (The Slip)

If your foot slips again,
it will be cut off.

If your hand leads you
to another road
it will rot away.

If you take your life from me
you will die
even though you live.

You will go on dead or shade,
walking without me on the earth.

Golijov, ZZ's Dream

ZZ's Dream is a recent chamber work by another talented colleague of mine, the Boston-based Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov. It is an ethereal, airy work for small ensemble, evoking the mysticism of the poets and philosophers of Ancient China, and the heady atmosphere of those long-disappeared places and days. The title comes from the epic Zhuang Zhou and its eponymous author, who wrote the following lines, which provided this work's inspiration:

*Once upon a time, I, Zhuang Zhou,
dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither.
I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhou.
Soon I awoke, and there I was, veritably myself again.
Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly,
or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.*

Mahler, Rückert-Lieder

Gustav Mahler – who died 100 years ago, at the too-young age of 50 – was a tremendously busy man, the director of the Vienna State Opera and one of the great conductors of his day. He did the bulk of his composing in the summers, retreating to a series of alpine cottages for the stimulations of solitude, silence, and the awe-inspiring mountain scenery that so informs his symphonies. In 1901, Mahler moved into his new house at Maiernigg, where he would spend the next seven summers. He began to write songs almost the day he arrived - Of all Mahler's summer holidays, none was as productive as this. That year he finished two movements of his Fifth Symphony and seven of his greatest songs, including four settings of texts by the German romantic poet Friedrich Rückert. He had hoped to take a few days off before returning to Vienna, but he was suddenly drawn to one more Rückert poem that he had wanted to set all summer. On August 16 he finished "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen," one of his most deeply personal works.

Ich atmet' einen linden Duft!

I breathed a gentle fragrance!
In the room stood a sprig of linden,
a gift from a dear hand.
How lovely was the fragrance of linden!
How lovely is the fragrance of linden!
That twig of linden you broke off so gently!
Softly I breathe in the fragrance of linden, the gentle fragrance of love.

Liebst du um Schönheit

If you love for beauty, Oh, do not love me!
Love the sun, she has golden hair!
If you love for youth, Oh, do not love me!
Love the spring; it is young every year!
If you love for treasure, Oh, do not love me!
Love the mermaid; She has many clear pearls!
If you love for love, Oh yes, do love me!
Love me ever, I'll love you evermore!

Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder!

Look not into my songs!
My eyes I lower, as if I've been caught in an evil deed.
I can't even trust myself to watch them grow.
Your curiosity is a betrayal!
Bees, too, when they build their cells, do not let anyone observe them; even themselves.

When the rich honeycombs are brought out to the light of day, then you shall taste them before everyone else!

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen

I am lost to the world
with which I used to waste so much time,
It has heard nothing from me for so long that it may very well believe that I am dead!
It is of no consequence to me whether it thinks me dead;
I cannot deny it, for I really am dead to the world.
I am dead to the world's tumult, and I rest in a quiet realm!
I live alone in my heaven, in my love and in my song!

Um Mitternacht

At midnight
I awoke and gazed up to heaven;
No star in the entire mass
did smile down at me
at midnight.

At midnight
I projected my thoughts
out past the dark frontiers.
No thought of light
brought me comfort
at midnight.

At midnight
I attended the beating of my heart;
One single pulse of agony flared up
at midnight.

At midnight
I fought the battle, O Mankind, of your suffering;
I could not win it with my strength
at midnight.

At midnight
I surrendered my strength into your hands, Lord!
over death and life You keep watch
at midnight!