

Die Winterreise

Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Version for voice & hurdy-gurdy

Nataša Mirković, voice

Matthias Loibner, hurdy-gurdy

Sacrilege! A monument of bourgeois concert-hall culture is demolished! Where art connoisseurs normally contemplate the depths of their own souls to dark, romantic sounds, there now remains no room for sentimentality. For the Winterreise ("Winter Journey") in the version by Nataša Mirković and Matthias Loibner is a skeleton. It leads the text and the music back to the essence, to an attitude that oscillates between laconism and pathos, and was already conceived in this ambivalence by Schubert. Man as the plaything of the emotions, as sufferer of fate and simultaneously as its sovereign – a Romantic topos that is often enjoyed with pianobeclouded melancholy. This Winterreise doesn't give him a chance. It is bold and direct, present, and at the same time fragile, an approach to the poetry that could hardly be more honest.

Ralf Dombrowski

(linernotes from "Winterreise", Raumklang, RK 3003, raumklang.de)

Over there beyond the village

*»Strange old man, shall I go with you?
Will you play your hurdy-gurdy to my songs?«
(from "the hurdy-gurdy man", last verse of the Winterreise)*

The combination of Schubert's Winterreise and the hurdy-gurdy came about quite naturally through the "Hurdy-Gurdy Man," who in the last song of the cycle is usually understood as an allegory for insanity, death, or torpor.

The constant flight of the lyrical self from the inner turmoil to a yearning (for death and love), whose real insatiableness becomes perceptible in Schubert's setting, has from the very beginning fascinated me in the texts of Wilhelm Müller.

As a "hurdy-gurdy man," I was from the outset destined to fail in the challenge of interpreting the numerous, above all harmonic, nuances of this musical foreboding. So the end of the Winterreise becomes the point of departure, and in this way pushes the dissatisfaction and loneliness into the foreground of this version for voice and hurdy-gurdy.

*»If only the third would also set,
I will feel better in the dark.«
from "The False Suns"*

Matthias Loibner

*»Why then do I avoid the highways
where the other travelers go ...«*

from "The Sign Post"

Who saw flowers in winter

The disappointment and the wish to hold fulfillment firmly in both hands – this image of inner turmoil manifests itself in Müller's words and in Schubert's setting from 1827, the year of Müller's death. In an unparalleled spiritual kinship, both immersed their yearning in their respective art in order to say one thing in two ways. A unison of emotions flows in every line and in every musical phrase.

Graz stage director Ernst M. Binder's idea awakened in me an enthusiasm and an irresistible magical urge to embark on this journey through this winter of the emotions. And already after a few of Müller's words and several of Schubert's tones, the need arose to tell of these emotions, fragile and naked and freed of unnecessary decoration in order to serve the listener, by means of the voice, as a mirror, and to let him/her share in the intimate communication between Müller and Schubert, which uniquely shines from the depths through the whole cycle.

*»My heart sees in the heavens its own image
painted – It's nothing but the winter, the winter
cold and wild!«*

from "The Stormy Morning"

Nataša Mirković

The Hurdy-Gurdy in Schubert's Time

*"St. Brigitta's Church patronal feast day, Vienna, 5 July 1807: ... Here one saw peasants dance in a circle under the trees to the music of bagpipes; there a hurdy-gurdy player played something for a group of merry people sitting on the green grass and sang a schmaltzy song to it.... There people are dancing landler, German, Hungarian, and Bohemian [dances] to flutes, fiddles, hurdy-gurdy, shawms, and bagpipes; here a father may again be concerned about money."*¹

In Vienna in Schubert's time, the hurdy-gurdy was a part of a suburban dance and everyday culture that was already developing away from it musically.

While at the end of the eighteenth century it was still possible in Vienna to quote the "Leyer" in courtly dance music,² the suburban dance music now also took over the "modern" compositional style, moving away from the rural-inspired music of the "Linz fiddlers" to the classically trained "Vienna waltzes": *"In the village there were dances where one [musician] played Strauss's German [dances] on the bagpipes for the threshers, and another Lanner's waltzes on the hurdy-gurdy."*³

When the Biedermeier painter Michael Nader depicts hurdy-gurdy players, one sees that he must have known that which he painted from what he had himself seen, but at the same time he was already painting nostalgically, looking backward. As late as 1912, Eduard Kremser⁴ documented two melodies *"played on the hurdy-gurdy by Anna Ecker"* and *"played on the hurdy-gurdy: called 'Die bladen Buam' "* and wrote by way of explanation: *"The Leier- or Leirer-dance was played on the hurdygurdy, an instrument strung with one string.... The accompaniment was performed on a harp or guitar. At the beginning of the 1860s, one could still hear this instrument, most played by Savoyards, in the courtyards of Viennese houses."*

Already from these few sources it becomes clear that the hurdy-gurdy was used in various manners: as dance-music instrument, for song accompaniment, and, like the violin or accordion today, for assistance in begging. Müller's "Hurdy-Gurdy Man" could thus have been such an aged, destitute, *"Lyrant"*⁵ – this being the designation for itinerant, rural musicians – just as well as one of the "Savoyards" who, driven by hunger from the barren alpine valleys, used the instrument largely to accompany their begging, and to whom Goethe and Beethoven erected a romantic monument with *"Marmotte"*.⁶

Simon Wascher

1 Roth, Gottfried: Vom Baderlehrling zum Wundarzt. Carl Rabl, ein Mediziner im Biedermeier. Oberösterreichischer Landesverlag, Linz 1971

2 Eybler, Joseph von: 12 Deutsche, Nr. 8, Kauer, Ferdinand: XII Deutsche-Laendlerische mit Caracteurs, Nr. 3, Wranitzky, Paul: 12 Deutsche, Mozart, Wolfgang Amadé: KV 602 Nr. 3

3 Briefe des Hans Jörgel an seinen Vetter in Kakran. Wien 1836, Heft 4/1, nach: Gstrein, R., Landlageiger und Wiener Walzer. In: Historical Studies on Folk and Traditional Music. Copenhagen 1997

4 Kremser, Eduard: Wiener Lieder und Tänze. Erster Band, Hrg. Eduard Kremser, Gerlach & Wiedling, Wien 1912 - 1925

5 Salmen, Walter: Mozart in der Tanzkultur seiner Zeit, Hrg. Walter Salmen, Edition Helbig, Innsbruck 1990, s.52

6 composition by Ludwig van Beethovens (op. 52, 7) after lyrics by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (from "Jahrmarktsfest auf Plundersweilern").