

Goerne's Mahler: Cruelty of Beauty

REVIEW The German baritone, together with the Pittsburgh Orchestra under Manfred Honeck, provided a moving, often harrowing insight into the sonorous soul worlds of the "Wunderhornlieder"

by Wilhelm Sinkovicz

Matthias Goerne is one of the most exciting singer-actors of our time. After Berg's *Wozzeck* in Salzburg, he sang Mahler's "Wunderhornlieder" and did not require a scenery, all he needed was the podium of the Grafenegg Auditorium to confirm the characterisation chosen at the outset: when he recited the ostensibly naive, in truth profound and often cryptic lyrics, the listener becomes a spectator.

Along with many a humorous aperçu, he gets to hear unearthly voices from the otherworld, he hears how marching soldiers, heroic epics on their lips, are marching towards death - and the incredibility of the martial sounds resonates not only in Goerne's voice, but also in the Pittsburgh Orchestra's playing, led by Manfred Honeck in full consciousness of Mahler's ambiguities.

Glaring colour effects, sudden dynamic irruptions belie bold trumpet signals and snappy drum rhythms. Goerne's relentlessly clear diction lets the audience understand every syllable, and the versatility of his articulation and intonation also reveals the cynicisms: Mahler has learned from Wagner how one can sing the opposite of what is meant, and Goerne lets his audience unequivocally feel the truth, lets them suffer. Or dream along, as the case may be. It is impossible to imagine a more pleading, yet deeply faithful rendering of the "Urlicht [Primordial Light]".

Lyrical qualities in rhythmic furor

The technical mastery of this singer, who knows how to mix the registers seamlessly, is paired with the most natural empathy. Even the Grafenegg audience, so fond of applauding, soon forgot to clap between the songs.

After a spirited and animated, albeit also a little noisily performed suite from Antonín Dvořák's "Rusalka", the guests from Pittsburgh had mastered the acoustics of the Grafenegg venue in the Mahler.

Beethoven's Seventh at last, energetic and (up to the meticulous observance of all repetitions and the pizzicato conclusion of the Allegretto) distinctly oriented towards the interpretation of Manfred Honeck's obvious role model, Carlos Kleiber, - became a fine example of a transparent performance that did not underplay the lyrical qualities of this "apotheosis of the dance"; by an orchestra that never denies its American origin (especially in the brass sound).

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