

Und sie auch standen da so stier,
Als wollten sie nicht weg von mir.
Ach, meine Sonnen seid ihr nicht!
Schaut ander'n doch ins Angesicht!
Ja, neulich hatt' ich auch wohl drei;
Nun sind hinab die besten zwei.
Ging nur die dritt' erst hinterdrein!
Im Dunkel wird mir wohler sein.

Der Leiermann

Drüben hinterm Dorfe
Steht ein Leiermann
Und mit starren Fingern
Dreht er was er kann.

Barfuß auf dem Eise
Wankt er hin und her
Und sein kleiner Teller
Bleibt ihm immer leer.

Keiner mag ihn hören,
Keiner sieht ihn an,
Und die Hunde knurren
Um den alten Mann.

Und er läßt es gehen,
Alles wie es will,
Dreht, und seine Leier
Steht ihm nimmer still.

Wunderlicher Alter!
Soll ich mit dir geh'n?
Willst zu meinen Liedern
Deine Leier dreh'n?

And they stood there, too, so fixed
As if they didn't want to leave me.
Oh, you're not my suns!
Look into others' faces!
Indeed I did have three, just a while ago:
But now the best two have gone down.
If only the third would go too!
I'd be better off in the dark.

The Hurdy-Gurdy Man

Over there behind the village
Stands a hurdy-gurdy man,
And with numb fingers
He grinds away as best he can.

Barefoot on the ice
He sways back and forth,
And his little plate
Remains always empty.

No-one wants to hear him,
No-one looks at him,
And the dogs growl
Around the old man.

And he lets it go on,
Everything, just as it will;
Turns the wheel, and his hurdy-gurdy
Never stays still for a moment.

Strange old man,
Should I go with you?
Will you to my songs
Play your hurdy-gurdy?

PROGRAM NOTES

Schubert's *Winterreise*: The Non Plus Ultra of German Lieder

As Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is to the symphonic literature, as Bach's St. Matthew Passion is to choral sacred works, so is Schubert's *Winterreise* ("Winter Journey") to German lieder — or to art song in any language. From age eighteen, with the writing of *Die Erlkönig* and *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, until his tragically premature death at thirty-one, Schubert composed over 600 songs, and invented a new art form, the *lied*. No longer a solo voice with subservient piano accompaniment, Schubert's songs tend to be full-fledged duets. His last professional act in life was to correct the publisher's proofs for this extraordinary, wintery twenty-four-song cycle.

Dying slowly from syphilis over a period of years, depressed by his music not being taken to heart well enough by critics and the public, and shaken by the death of his hero Beethoven in 1827, Schubert seemed to his friend Josef von Spaun exhausted and constantly brooding. When Spaun pressed Schubert to talk about it, the composer responded, "You'll soon know, and then you'll understand. Come today to our friend Schober's. I shall sing a series of *lieder* which shall send a cold chill down your spine. ... They have gripped me more than any of my others."

That night he performed the first half of *Winterreise* for his highly supportive friends; but they couldn't hear what he was trying to play and sing. The reason: They had come too early — perhaps a century too early. This cycle, built on the seemingly simple poems of Wilhelm Müller, feels completely at home with the work of 20th century people like Samuel Beckett (who loved the cycle), Albert Camus, or even Harold Pinter. The "plot" of the twenty-four-song progression has more holes than fabric — but just enough fabric to hold it together. It is the winteriest of journeys. It begins with *Gute Nacht* ("Good Night"), with the persona telling us that the good days are over and winter has come. His girl no longer speaks of love, and her mother no longer mentions marriage. It is cold and dark, and he must journey, with no foreseeable destination, and at a harshly inhospitable time of year. This is the emotional high point of the cycle: It is all downhill from here.

Throughout the cycle, our downtrodden young man reports to us the weather, his surroundings, his memories, his dreams, some sounds, and more sights; but until the final song, the only companions we hear of are a few inhospitable dogs (#1 and #17), a solitary crow (#15), and some talkative branches (#5). We know not a time scheme for the journey, nor how nor why he gets from place to place. Somehow we understand that as the songs pass by, the more physically and emotionally arduous the journey becomes. Of the twenty-four songs, sixteen are in a minor key. The major key songs seem to promise respite; but as their hopes are dashed, as the speaker awakens from dreams, the minor reasserts itself.

This work is so empty/full, so simply complex and complexly simple, that our performer tonight, Ian Bostridge, has published a book of almost 500 pages to take us on a critical journey through the songs and their contexts — aesthetic, political, and biographical. It is wonderfully well written and thoroughly engaging. I recommend it to you. Not having 500 pages here, I will take a brief look mostly at the cycle's beginning and end.

One would think that the title of the opening song, *Gute Nacht* ("Good Night") would better suit a cycle's closing song. Greeting us at the beginning, it seems to send us on our way before we have fully begun. In his beginning is his end; in his end is his beginning. Even the first two lines of the text send us backward by their end: "I came a stranger;/ I depart a stranger." And seventy-five musical minutes later, he is ready to depart with a stranger. The seven-measure piano introduction sets a tone and establishes a structure that is immediately riddled by disintegration. The left hand introduces an open fifth; and the final song will also begin with an open fifth. But in song #1, the right hand supplies the missing note to form a complete minor triad. Played together, they

somehow still sound more like separate travelers than companions. The right hand (as it will do again in the final song) supplies a downward falling melody — F*E*D*A — immediately repeating itself an octave lower, and then disintegrating first to E*D*A and then further to D*A. That last D*A leaps up an octave, only to have the next two measures descend again to the former depths. The left hand's unvarying eighth notes begin for us the walk, the tread, the trek, or the trudge that is never far removed during the journey.

Schubert wrote his two great cycles for tenor voice. We have become so accustomed in the past sixty years to listening to great baritones and basses — especially the extraordinary Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau — sing them transposed into lower keys that we can feel startled at first to hear them sung by a tenor or by a woman's voice; but tonight we have the piece in its intended register.

While each song is a masterpiece in itself, the only one that was adopted into general popularity was #5, *Der Lindenbaum* ("The Linden Tree"). For almost two centuries now it has been sung with great gusto in German beer halls, with splashing steins accentuating the heavy beat in every measure. Lost is the realization that, in the context of *Winterreise*, this song describes a momentary contemplation — and then rejection — of suicide.

19th century bridge. ground

One can always look forward to the disintegrative limp of #7, *Auf dem Flusse* ("On the Stream"); the shattered dream of #11, *Frühlingstraum* ("Dream of Spring"); the energetic major/minor of the post horses bringing no letters from the beloved in #13, *Die Post* ("The Post"); the eerie and almost predatory flight of the crow in #15, *Die Krähe*; the stormy morning of #18, *Der stürmische Morgen*; and the second invitation, to suicide of #21, *Das Wirtshaus* ("The Inn"). But all through this stunning hour and a quarter, one is drawn inexorably to its conclusion, #23 and #24.

#23, *Die Nebensonnen* ("The Phantom Suns") portrays the traveler's mind weakening. He is seeing things — three suns, where there should be only one. He tells us, "Indeed, I did have three, just a while ago: But now the best two have gone down. If only the third would go too! I'd be better off in the dark." (Is this a scene from a Fellini movie?) Critics and performers differ as to what these three suns might represent: Some suggest those two are the eyes of his beloved; some suggest the three are love, faith, and hope; but I have always taken them to be his happiness, his sanity, and his life. Trembling on the abyss (both he and we), we come to the final song, *Der Leiermann* ("The Hurdy-Gurdy Man").

If there is such a thing as perfection in a work of art, this song is one of its few manifestations. The open fifths in the left hand would have suggested all by themselves the ultimate extremity of his emptiness — a pervasive, non-resolving resolution for this lengthy and burdensome journey; but the grace notes that spoil their empty perfection add a twinge of neurosis. No matter how many times I encounter them, I always find them shocking, unnerving. Soon the right hand adds a wandering melody, which comes to rest on a note that clashes with the unmovable empty fifths of the left hand. The melody tries again, this time ceding its desires to the tonality of the left-hand drone. It has been conquered. It has no energy left with

which to fight.

But the shock comes from more than the assault on 19th century tonality: This final song introduces, for the first time in the whole 75-minute progression, another human being — not once, but twice.

One of these two newcomers is obvious: He is a hurdy-gurdy player, as poor and as solitary as our traveler, ragged, unheeded, whose droning instrument dominates the attention of the piano accompaniment. The organ grinder's music has already become our music, even before the persona asks that it become his music as well. The sight, the sound, and the concomitant pathos create just the kind of restless resting place this cycle requires.

The other intrusive newcomer at the beginning of *Der Leiermann* is quite hidden. There is no one new to see but rather a new voice to hear. For twenty-three poems, the traveler has served as our narrator; but for the first four of the five stanzas of *Der Leiermann*, we are listening to a new voice, a faceless, omniscient narrative voice, which relates the scene for us and changes our relationship to it. There is a new numbness here. This narrator, separate from the action, gives us a new sense of distance, a new perspective from which to survey the scene. Our hero is no longer capable of sane description; someone else has to help us finish the journey. This narrator holds forth for four of the five stanzas.

The final stanza re-introduces the traveler's voice, transformed, and therefore becomes yet another new voice — the voice of the mind-weakened, the numb, the dazed:

Strange old man, should I go with you?
Will you play your hurdy-gurdy to my songs?

The final stanza invokes a pathetic response that leaves everything and everyone undone, exhausted. The last sung note crescendos and decrescendos, fading into despair, as the right hand of the piano part makes its final foray upwards, fails for the final time, and — after what seemed an endless wait — joins the empty fifth of the left hand and falls silent. We do not hear an answer to the question from the hurdy-gurdy man. The two characters are left on stage much like Vladimir and Estragon at the end of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
 They do not move.

Schubert originally wrote this song in B Minor, changing the key in the final proofs to A Minor. Song #1 had established D Minor as our tonal home. It made some theoretical sense to end the cycle in the key of A Minor, the dominant key for D Minor — suggesting an urgency to return to the home of D Minor, cycling the cycle back on itself. But not quite — not simply because it has been so very long that we heard that first song with its tonic chord, but because through the emotional exhaustion of all that has happened since we were first bid "Good Night," he and we

have lost our way. There is no longer left to him a dominant sense of going home. There is no home.

Modern performers tend to favor singing the last song in Schubert's original choice, B Minor — a key harshly disconnected from the original D Minor; much further afield, much stranger. Coming off the end of song #23, this harsh new key produces a disconnective shock, grotesque. The modern performers who opt for this dissonance have been tutored by Beckett, Modernism, and Postmodernism to feel oddly comfortable in the presence of the discomfoting.

I add one more word, as yet unmentioned: Beauty. Throughout the cold, the rain, the wind, the snow, the barren landscape, there is a piercing beauty through all of this extraordinary work. One feels changed for having listened to it whole, uninterrupted. As Alfred Einstein has put it, "*Winterreise* is one of the works of that second naivety, that blend of the greatest simplicity with deep penetration, which is only to be found created by great masters at the end of their journey."

— *George Gopen*

IAN BOSTRIDGE, CBE

Ian Bostridge has appeared at the Salzburg, Edinburgh, Munich, Vienna, Schwarzenberg, and Aldeburgh festivals, and had residencies at the Konzerthaus Vienna, Carnegie Hall New York, Het Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Barbican, Luxembourg Philharmonie, and at Wigmore Hall. In opera he has performed the roles of Tamino, Jupiter (*Semele*), and Aschenbach (*Death in Venice*) at English National Opera; Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), and Caliban (*The Tempest*) for the Royal Opera; Don Ottavio in Vienna; and Tom Rakewell (*The Rake's Progress*) in Munich.

Recent engagements include a tour of Asia with guitarist Xuefei Yang, and the Evangelist in a staged St. Matthew Passion for Hamburg State Opera. Highlights of the 2016/17 season include his operatic debut at La Scala as Peter Quint ('The Turn of the Screw'); an American recital tour of Schubert's *Winterreise* with Thomas Adès; a staged Schubert project with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra; performances of Zender's *Winterreise* in Taipei, Perth and for Musikkollegium Winterthur; and Britten's *Curlew River* in Hamburg and Madrid.

Ian Bostridge's many recordings have won all the major international record prizes and have been nominated for fourteen GRAMMY Awards. He was awarded a CBE in the 2004 New Year's Honours. In 2016 he was awarded the The Pol Roger Duff Cooper Prize for non-fiction writing for his latest book, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*.

THOMAS ADÈS

Thomas Adès was born in London in 1971. His compositions include three operas; the most recent, *The Exterminating Angel*, recently premiered at the Salzburg