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West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021

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presents

Bantry and Beyond

Festival Echoes

20. Youth's Magic Horn

Filmed at the Wiesengrund Studio, Berlin

Caroline Melzer [soprano]

Cédric Pescia [piano]

Mahler

Selection from Des Knaben Wunderhorn

5 Rückert Lieder

Gustav Mahler [1860-1911]

from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* [c.1887-1898]

Rheinlegendenchen

Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?

Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt

Verlorne Muh

Ich ging mit Lust durch einen Grünen Wald

Nicht wiedersehen

Lied Verfolgten im Turm

Wo die Schönen Trompeten blasen

Mahler grew up under the spell of the German folk songs collected in 'Des Knaben Wunderhorn'. In these songs dead soldiers answer the roll-call, St Anthony preaches to fishes, a magic ring journeys from the Rhine to the King's table, nightingales sing to lovers, deserted lovers die of broken hearts, songs arrive on the wings of three geese (two grey and one white) and all the while the trumpet summons young men to a soldier's death. They alternate between a childlike fairy-tale delicacy and a grimly ironic commentary on the realities of war and power. Above all else these songs capture the heart with their sheer beauty. At a rehearsal of the Eighth Symphony, a child from the Boy's Chorus approached the composer: 'Mr Mahler, the song is beautiful'.

Francis Humphrys

Gustav Mahler [1860-1911]

Five Rückert Songs [1901-1902]

1. *Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder!*

2. *Ich atmet' einen linden Duft*

3. *Um Mitternacht*

4. *Liebst du um Schönheit*

5. *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*

Friedrich Rückert [1788-1866] was born near Coburg, Germany, and became a distinguished linguist and poet. He was Professor of Oriental Languages at Erlangen and then in Berlin, retiring in 1848. He wrote a Persian grammar and provided many translations from Eastern literature which became standard German texts. However, it was the book of his own love lyrics, *Liebesfrühling* [1823], which provided him with a far wider audience and a lasting reputation; among other composers Schubert set four of these poems, Schumann twenty-one and Richard Strauss six. In the summer of 1901, by which time he had finished his Fourth Symphony, Mahler decided to set some of Rückert's poems. Like Berlioz *Nuits d'été* they were originally composed with piano accompaniment, he orchestrated five of them and they were first performed as a group in Vienna in 1905.

The first song *Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder!* seems to look forward to the great symphonic poem *Das Lied von der Erde* with its restless, surging energy as the poet asks that his beloved should not look at his work in progress, like the bees one should wait for the

completed honeycomb. This is followed by the serene *Ich atmet' einen linden Duft* as the poet rhapsodises on the perfume from a branch of a lime tree placed in his room. The pensive mood remains for *Um Mitternacht* as Rückert tussles with dark nocturnal thoughts: *Oh Lord, you keep watch over life and death at midnight*. Mahler dedicated the fourth song, *Liebst du um Schönheit*, to his wife, Alma. She later recounted that she had been playing a lot of Wagner during her first pregnancy in 1903 and that he wrote this charming little love song and slipped the manuscript into her score of *Die Walküre* but she did not open it for days so he had to reveal it to her; she *was overwhelmed with joy and (they) played it over twenty times that day!* In the final song, *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, the poet tells how he has abandoned the world in order to find solace in solitude and song; Mahler creates a magical rhapsody akin to his symphonies.

Ian Fox.

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