

Gilead Mishory

Di vayte haymat mayne (My Distant Home)

For tenor and orchestra

after poems by Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall's paintings and his visual language are an established part of our cultural vocabulary. Only a few people are aware, however, that the world-renowned Jewish artist (1887, Vitebsk – 1985, Saint-Paul-de-Vence) also wrote poems, all of them in Yiddish, his native tongue. These poems reflect his own life situation and are often closely tied to his paintings through their vivid language. Chagall was not a great literate, but perhaps for just this reason, his poems contain a special, sometimes extreme, emotional strength and authenticity that fascinate me.

In 1937, Chagall's long autobiographical poem "Di vayte haymat mayne" was published in the magazine *Tsukunft* (Future). In this "Poema", Chagall, who at that time had already lived several years in France, writes about his youth, his childhood home, his yearning for his native country and its landscape. Later, this poem was divided up into several separate poems, some of which were translated into Russian and French and published under new titles. Two of these are the texts for the first and last movements of the song cycle, which I named after the original poem.

Over the years, Chagall wrote other poems in which he talks about God and faith, love and death, and about creating artistic work. These themes become intertwined: "The Painting" connects the agony of the creative process with loss. And, while "My Tears" is clearly addressed to God, "Your Call" could be addressed to God as well as to his first wife, Bella Rosenfeld, who was his first and greatest love, the source of his inspiration. She died during their exile in the United States during World War II. Chagall dedicated his poem "Bella, on the Fourth Anniversary of her Death" to her.

Bella is often portrayed in Chagall's paintings. I have chosen two paintings that particularly attracted me during my visit to the Chagall Retrospective at the Burda Museum in Baden-Baden. Positioned at the fourth and seventh movements, they provide a break as well as an added insight into the poems in the song cycle. Both paintings were created during World War I. In "The Walk" the youthful Chagall succeeds, with a smile of a circus trainer upon his face, in performing the magical act of levitating his lover horizontally in the air using only one hand. In the background his native village can be seen/heard. In this movement, as in several other points in the song cycle, the flute is associated with the feminine role and the trombone with the masculine role. In the second painting "Above Town", the lovers, their arms entwined tightly around each other, float up over their "Shtetl" apparently in the deep of winter. This town will soon be far away and in the course of Chagall's long life will become ever more foreign and more transfigured at the same time. The expressions on the lovers' faces are melancholic and Bella is lifting her hand as if in a gesture of farewell. Far and wide, there is no sign on a fiddler playing on any roof - but yet, a twinkle of the eye - a little man excretes outside the city wall...

Whether the poet-artist's alter-ego slides into the role of the ever-wandering Jew or the suffering Christ, Chagall remains - with his worldwide fame and the dancing, levitating, smiling movement of his paintings - a man without a home, yearning for that which is lost and that which does not exist. "Nor yene land iz mayne, vos gefint sich in mayn neshome..." Only that land is mine that lies in my soul.

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Gilead Mishory, April 2007

Orchestra Jakobsplatz

Great Musical Expression

It is an eerie sound and builds a contrast to the previous piece by Ligeti based on traditional Hungarian folk dances. The first performance of Gilead Mishory's "Di vayte haymat mayne" at the Gärnterplatz-Theater is shaped by great compositional and interpretive emotional expression. Yiddish poems written by Marc Chagall form the basis of these songs for tenor and orchestra. The tenor Berthold Schmid brings them as a tormenting intuition of death - whispering, pleadingly screaming.

This composition contains great musical expression: The orchestra undergoes eruptive abrupt changes in timbre, sounding at times like a sinister nightmare figure wanly grumbling or at times in biting dissonance. Even while playing forte, there appears to be a state of fearful silence, which yet gives room more and more to an increasingly manic, percussive moment. Such musical expression is evidence of the composers extremely convincing textual interpretation and instrumental handling, which the Orchestra Jakobsplatz and the conductor Daniel Grossmann are able to match up to with high level of playing.

... grandiose impression.

Andreas Pernpeintner

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