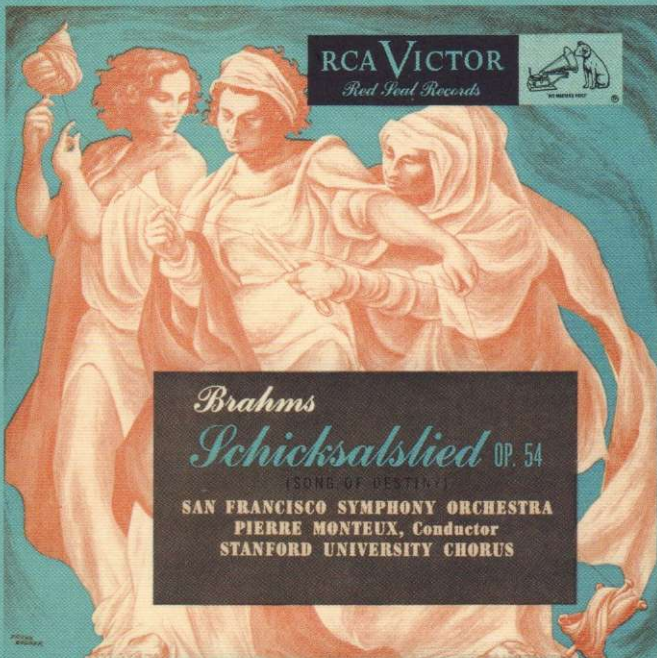


LM
149

Brahms SCHICKSALSIED. Op. 54

J. S. Bach PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR



Brahms
Schicksalslied OP. 54
(SONG OF DESTINY)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PIERRE MONTEUX, Conductor
STANFORD UNIVERSITY CHORUS

and
J. S. Bach PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR
(Transcribed by Respighi)

LONG **33 $\frac{1}{3}$** PLAY

Brahms SCHICKSALS LIED, Op. 54
Bach-Respighi PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR

Side 1

Schicksalslied, Op. 54
with Stanford University Chorus

Between 1868 and 1871, when he was in his late thirties, Johannes Brahms wrote three major works for voices and orchestra—the *Alto Rhapsody*, the *Triumphlied* and the *Schicksalslied*. Together they formed an important contribution to the body of choral literature, which their composer already had enriched a short time previously with his great *German Requiem*.

The *Schicksalslied* (*Song of Destiny*), Opus 54, here recorded by the San Francisco Symphony and the Stanford University Chorus under the baton of Pierre Monteux, is a setting for mixed chorus and orchestra of a poem by Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, German Neo-Hellenist who hoped to see something of the Greek spirit reborn in German literature. Hölderlin's *Schicksalslied*, from his major work, *Hyperion*, completed in 1799, is unrelentingly fatalistic in conception. In antique style, its verses contrast the secure, serene state of the immortal gods with the insecure, unhappy fate of humanity.

Brahms is said to have begun work on his *Schicksalslied* in the summer of 1868. His friend, Albert Dietrich, has related how late, Brahms, and some friends set out from Bremen one morning to visit the naval port at Wilhelmshaven. "On the way there," Dietrich tells us, "our friend Brahms, who was usually so lively, was quiet and grave. He described how early that morning he had found Hölderlin's poem in the bookcase and had been deeply impressed by the *Schicksalslied*. Later on, after spending a long time walking round and visiting all the points of interest, we were sitting resting by the sea, when we discovered Brahms a long way off sitting by himself on the shore writing. It was the first sketch for the *Schicksalslied*."

But it was not until three years later, in May, 1871, in Baden-Baden, that Brahms completed the *Schicksalslied* to his final satisfaction. It was first performed the following October at Karlsruhe, by the Philharmonic Society under the composer's direction.

In his musical version of Hölderlin's poem, Brahms has adhered closely to the word and the spirit of the poet's conception of eternally happy gods and fatefully doomed mortals, as far as the actual setting of the verses goes. But, manifestly, Hölderlin does not have the last word. As if unable to accept the final reality of the classic view of man's hopeless lot, the composer has added a purely orchestral postlude—music of great beauty and tenderness which seems to envision a Brahmanian heaven where man, too, may at last find peace and consolation.

San Francisco
Symphony Orchestra

Pierre Monteux
Conductor

The work opens with an orchestral introduction (*Slow and yearning, E-flat major*), leading to the first choral section, in which the voices tell us of the celestial existence of the immortals:

Ihr wandelt drohen im Licht
Auf weichen Boden, selige Götter.
Glanzend Gotteslufte
rühren Euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstler
himmels heilige Saiten.

Schicksallos wie der schlafende Säugling
Atmet die Himmelsluft.
Keusch bewahrt in der
scheider Knappe
Blühet ewig, ewig
Blonder Getraide.
Und die seligen Augen
blitzen in stiller,
Ewiger Klarheit.

Far in you region of
light,
Where pleasures fail not,
Wander the spirits hither,
Breathed on by airs of
glory,
Bright and divine, like a
harp
When a master hand
wakes it from silence.

Free from care, like a
baby that is sleeping,
Are they in heaven that
dwell:
Pure and lowly as half-
opened blossoms
In those fields of light
they ever bloom:
In bliss their eyes still
gazing
On light eternal.

The voices end softly and, after a brief orchestral interlude, we are brought precipitantly to earth, as the singers darkly and passionately intone man's fate (*Adagio, C minor*):

Doch uns ist gegeben auf
keiner Stätte zu
ruhn.
Es schwinden, es fallen
die leidenden
Menschen
Blindlings, blindlings von
einer Stunde zur
andern.
Wie Wasser von Klippe
zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrhundert uns Ungewisse
hinab.

But man may not linger,
And nowhere finds he re-
pose:
We stay not, but wander,
We grief-laden mortals,
Blindly, blindly, from one
sad hour to another.
Like water from cliff down
cliff driven,
Blindly at last do we
pass away.

This stanza of the poem is repeated, the music growing even more vehement and tempestuous than before. Finally, in weariness and resignation, the human voices cease. Flutes and violins tenderly recommence the celestial theme of the introduction. The orchestra speaks alone (*Adagio, C major*), in this final, deeply affecting section of the work. According to Florence May, a pupil and biographer of Brahms, the composer regarded this orchestral postlude as the most important part of the composition, bringing as it does "a message of consolation, hope, faith and courage" to those depressed by Hölderlin's pessimistic view of life.

Notes by ROBERT A. HAGUE

Side 2
Passacaglia and Fugue
in C Minor

Although Bach's great *Passacaglia and Fugue* is one of the most famous organ classics, it was not originally written for that instrument. It was composed for the double-manual harpsichord and re-written for organ, presumably during the latter part of Bach's stay in Weimar (1708-17). Albert Schweitzer has commented of the work, "Its polyphonic structure is so thoroughly suited to the organ that we can hardly understand nowadays how anyone could have ventured to play it on a stringed instrument."

The term *passacaglia*, Spanish in origin, means *pace along the street*, and was originally given to an old Spanish street dance. Its chief characteristic was the reiteration of a "ground" or bass theme, over which a rich musical tapestry was woven. In the *chaconne*, the theme may move upward from the basses in the course of the variations which follow. Actually, in Bach's *Passacaglia*, the theme occurs away from its position in the basses on two occasions, a fact that has resulted in much controversy as to terminology. There are those who insist upon referring to this work as a *chaconne* rather than a *passacaglia*.

Ottorino Respighi made his orchestral transcription of the *Passacaglia and Fugue* at the request of Arturo Toscanini. As such, it was first performed on April 16, 1903, by the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. The Italian composer, who called his version an *interpretation orchestrale*, had no intention of re-creating an organ effect. It is purely an orchestral composition.

Mr. Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony may also be heard in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 8*, in F, Op. 93 (LM-43); Franck's *Symphony in D minor* (LM-1065), and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (LM-1121).

BRAHMS—SCHICKSALS LIED, Op. 54
BACH-RESPIGHI—PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR

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