

Brahms ALTO RHAPSODY, Op. 53
Mahler KINDERTOTENLIEDER

Side 1—ALTO RHAPSODY

with Fritz Reiner conducting
RCA Victor Symphony OrchestraRobert Shaw Chorale of Men's Voices
Robert Shaw, Conductor

Loneliness has always been a favorite subject with creative artists. But few have put it into words and music as dramatically as Goethe in his poem, *Herrn in Winter*, and Brahms in the musical setting he made for that poem, the *Alto Rhapsody*. In his verses, Goethe described the bleak mountain journey of a solitary wanderer, mourning his faithless love in the exaggerated fashion of the young German romantics of the 1800's. Brahms decided to set the middle three stanzas. When he read them, he was (evidently) struck by the mood of the poem for himself. During the summer of 1869 he became attached to a young daughter of Clara Schumann's. She probably thought of him as mother's friend, and had no idea that the announcement of her engagement to another man would affect him. But it did, and in the pain of losing what he had never possessed he composed the *Alto Rhapsody*. Clara Schumann wrote of it, in her diary, "A few days ago, Johannes showed me a wonderful work for contralto, male voice chorus, and orchestra. He called it my bridal song. It is long since I received so profound an impression; it shook me by the deeply felt grief of its words and music."

Brahms was then in his thirty-sixth year. He had composed the *Deutsches Requiem*, and was about to complete the *Schicksalslied* and the *Trübsalpsalm*. These magnificent texts, with the *Alto Rhapsody*, all produced midway in his career, mark the high point of his choral writing.

In the *Alto Rhapsody* he portrays the agonies of loneliness with a violence possible only to one who has suffered them. The poet asks "Alter abstehe, wehr! Was? Was man apart ist sich!" His trail is in the underbrush, behind him the branches of the trees spring together, the forest stands behind him as he passes, and solitude engulfs him. After an introductory melody in the strings, the solo voice urgently puts the poet's question to music: "Ist es dir? To a chorale setting of the poem, the voice, now thrillingly passionate, goes on to the second stanza. "Ach, wer hätte ich Schmeicheln und Trösten können! Die, die mich allein kann alleir angestrichen von dem toten Mann hat become a poison?" The music is somber in color, with unusual intervals and rare, challenging rhythms. But it is consistently comforting, and in the third stanza there is a gleam of comforting hope as the solo voice, in a soaring melody above the chorus, begins, "Ich darf denken. Pessim!—Yes!—Yes!"

(Is there, in your Pessim, a tone that he can hear?) It goes on, to beg the Almight, "Tröste mich, setz' dich hier!" (Then lift up my heart!) The voice chimes, and orchestra joins in an overwhelming plea, and the *Rhapsody* comes to an end. The last stanza, with its glorious orchestral interludes, concludes the recording.

In the *Alto Rhapsody*, Marian Anderson employs her rare gift as an outstanding interpretation of Brahms' setting of Goethe's poem, with the close cooperation of the RCA Orchestra conducted by Fritz Reiner, and the Men's Chorus from the Robert Shaw Chorus conducted by Robert Shaw.

Side 2—KINDERTOTENLIEDER

with San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

Pierre Monteux, Conductor

Those who fall under the spell of Brahms' *Alto Rhapsody* will find a similar melancholy pleasure in Goethe's *Kindersterben*, a cycle of five poems, the last of which is a child. It was written shortly after the birth of Mahler's first child, Maria Anna. Even so happy an event was clouded with foreboding

Marian Anderson
Contralto

for Mahler, who was a man with a singular capacity for unhappiness, real or imagined.

Reading in his study, he came upon a set of poems written by Friedrich Rückert in memory of the two children taken from him by scarlet fever. In Mahler, the poems evoked an agonized sympathy with the poet's loss, followed by the dream thought, "What if I too should lose my child?" That torturing imaginary grief had to be poured into music, and so, in 1892, he composed the *Kindersterben*. A few years later, his little Maria, and his younger sister died, as had Rückert's children, of scarlet fever. "Perhaps I have written the *Kindersterben* to me to tempt Fate," murmured the composer.

Band 1: NUN WILL DIE SONN' SO HELL AUSGEHEN!
(Once More the Sun Would Gift the Morn')

The first song, "Nun will die Sonne" as he called it, may be paraphrased as follows: "Now the sun will rise again in all its splendor, as though no tragedy had occurred during the night. Am I then the only one to whom misfortune has come? The sun shines on us all alike." The voice is heard in a sad, quiet melody, which is taken over by the orchestra as a still note of pain reads the air, then the plaintive, questioning song begins anew, accompanied by dark harmonies in the orchestra. The sun is about to rise. The child will not be there to greet it. "Why, O Why," asks the father. The Glockenspiel (chimes) sounds a double stroke, a mournful reminder of loss which is repeated again and again. It dies away gently as the line "Hail, joyful light of all the world!" goes to the sun, which pierces the darkness of the night and the father's grief with its message of hope and renewal.

Band 2: NUN SEH' ICH WOLLE, WARUM SO
DUNKLE FLAMMEN

(Ah, Now I Know Why Oft I Caught You Gazing)

The opening line of the second song in the cycle is "Nun seh' ich wol, warum so dunkle Flammen."—"Now I know why your eyes shone with so dark a flame. . . . Their light came from the source of all light. And now your eyes are transformed into flames, lit from above with a new light. There is a strong reminder of *Tristan und Isolde* in the opening melody and its accompanying harmonies. Brames and words make its music in evidence, blended in large Wagnerian sequences. This song has less simplicity than the first, more philosophic depth, and great pain.

Band 3: WENN DEIN MÜTTERLEIN

(When Thy Mother Dears)

"Wenn dein Mütterlein" opens the third song. It alludes to a touching moment, when the father, seeing the mother entering the room, fancies incredulously, for a moment, that he sees the child in her side. "When your mother enters the door, I turn my head, not toward her, but toward the place on the threshold where I used to see your dear little face as you came dancing in from your play, Oh my little daughter!" After a well introduction by the woodwinds, the voice enters, singing about the mother's entrance, a high-pitched note, as if attracted as the sense of loss wells up, then the delicate melody returns, and the song ends quietly, on a note of resignation.

Band 4: OFT DENK' ICH, SIE SIND
NUN AUSGEANGEN!

(I Think Oft, They're Only Gone a Journey)

"Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen," presents another of the dead imaginings with which the father beguiles his grief. "I often think they have only gone out on a while," he says. "They must be back soon. It's a nice day. There's nothing to worry about. They've been gone so long because they decided to take a longer walk than usual." Each stanza begins "Oft denk' ich, . . ." "I often think." The violence and burns open with an unburied, untroubled smile. The music, quiet, tender, and meditative, conveys a sense of sadness, but does not shrink before it, as anguish.

Band 5: IN DIESEM WETTER!
(In Such a Tempest!)

"In diesem Wetter," the fifth and last of the cycle, is dramatic. A storm is raging. The father thinks frantically "I never allowed the children to go out of the house in such a storm. Yet there have come! In this weather!" His fear begins "Oft denk' ich, . . ." the music mounts at each repetition of the exclamation. The *Kindersterben* again sounds its kind, bringing the bitter realization that not only are the children out in such a storm, but that they will not return. Over the sweet sound of cellos and violas, the voice now sings a cradle song. "They rest there, in the storm, as though they were in their mother's home," it says. Like a cool hand on his forehead heat, it dissipates the father's anxiety, bringing sleep, hope, and a measure of peace.

The man who composed this eloquent music, Gustav Mahler, was born in Kalitz, Czechoslovakia, in July, 1860. At the age of four, he played by ear, on the accordion, the military marches heard in his neighborhood. His father, a small tradesman, then determined to have his musical talent developed at whatever sacrifice. Gustav was sent to the Conservatory of Vienna, where he was a student known for his fine piano playing, for the fact that he walked in his sleep, and as a solitary sensitive sear after truth and beauty. His teacher, Anton Bruckner, and his father, who was a musician, encouraged his musical talent and his creative development. He became a conductor, and rose rapidly, to find himself eventually the director of the Imperial Opera in Vienna. Much criticism, although he greatly improved the production of modern opera, he had many detractors, who envied him and intrigued against him until they had deprived him of his post, his health, and such self-confidence as he possessed. He went to New York, conducted the Metropolitan Opera, and later the Philadelphia Orchestra. Although successful, he was perpetually unhappy. During a concert, in 1910, he collapsed on the platform. He was taken back to Vienna to die, and three his last breaths there on May 18, 1911.

Mahler is best known as a composer of symphonies. He wrote ten, of great weight, length, and austerity. A newspaper critic who described them the *King of the Symphonies of our time*, which has an augmented orchestra, two mixed choruses, a horn's chorus, and eight soloists, wrote wryly, "Mahler was convinced that no symphony would be finished by a great artist."

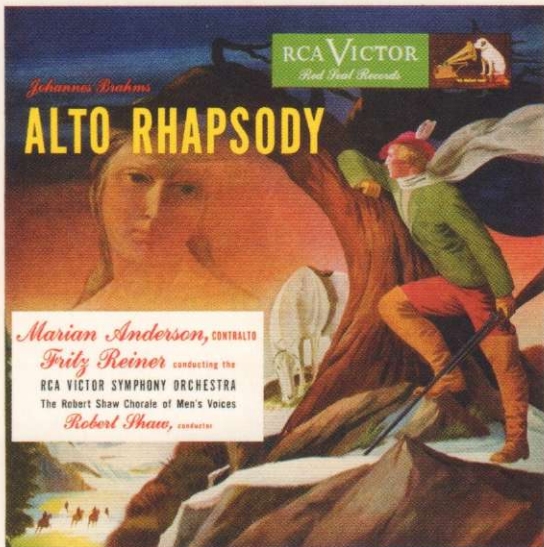
The *Kindersterben* can be interpreted only by a great artist, who has either himself suffered, or is gifted with the extraordinary sensibility of a Mahler. Such an artist is Marian Anderson. She sings the latter, masculine music penned by Mahler with the understanding and intelligence it demands, and with a soul richness that penetrates to his heart. All the poetry in Rückert's lyrics is unfolded as she sings them in the original German. The San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, under the inspiring leadership of Pierre Monteux, does full justice to the somber orchestral score.

Mahler said that there should be no applause when the *Kindersterben* is sung, and concert audiences always have respected his wish.

Notes by HELEN L. KAUFMAN

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Johannes Brahms

ALTO RHAPSODY

Marian Anderson, CONTRALTO

Fritz Reiner conducting the
RCA VICTOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Robert Shaw Chorale of Men's Voices

Robert Shaw, conductor

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and MAHLER

KINDERTOTENLIEDER

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA; PIERRE MONTEUX, Conductor

LONG



PLAY