

Guildford Philharmonic Choir und Freiburger Bachchor mit dem „War Requiem“

Brittens klingender Pazifismus

Dieses Requiem ist anders. Gemeinhin wird die Textstelle „quam olim Abraham promisi“ fugiert vertort. Auch Benjamin Britten scheint an dieser Tradition festzuhalten. Dennoch klingt im „War Requiem“ der Rückgriff auf die an Abraham und seine Nachkommen ergangene Verheißung seltsam unernt: Die Fuge hat Scherzo-Charakter.

Nochmals Abraham. Im biblischen Buch Genesis verschont er Isaak. Diesmal aber schlachtete er „seinen Sohn, und die halbe Saat Europas, einen nach dem anderen“. Wilfred Owen sieht es so, der englische Lyriker, von dem Britten im „War Requiem“ neun Gedichte mit dem üblichen lateinischen Text der Totenmesse verband. Owen hatte sich freiwillig zum Militär gemeldet. Die gnadenlose Realität des Krieges und das soldatische Sterben wurden zum Thema seiner Dichtung. Kurz vor dem Waffenstillstand 1918 fiel er 25jährig.

Britten verstand sein Requiem eher als „Wiedergutmachung“ für die Toten denn als Trost der Lebenden. Er schrieb das Werk für die Einwei-

hung der wiedererrichteten Kathedrale von Coventry, die ein Opfer deutscher Bomben geworden war. Die Uraufführung im Mai 1962 wurde zur Versöhnungsfeyer: Der englische Tenor Peter Pears und der deutsche Bariton Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sangen die Owens-Texte.

An diese solistische Konstellation erinnerte jetzt auch die Aufführung in der Freiburger Stadthalle: Der exzellente englische Tenor Ian Bostridge und der (unter anderem bei Ingeborg Most in Freiburg ausgebildete) souveräne Bariton Klaus Häger harmonierten aufs schönste. Beide erwiesen sich als kluge, feinfühlig und intensive Gestalter. Die tschechische Sopranistin Zora Jehličková stand ihnen kaum nach.

Der Oratorienchor hatte das „War Requiem“ vor vier Jahren erstmals nach Freiburg gebracht. Jetzt engagierte sich der Bachchor zusammen mit dem Philharmonic Choir aus Freiburgs englischer Partnerstadt Guildford für Brittens klingenden Pazifismus. Hans Michael Beuerle hatte seinem englischen Kollegen Neville Creed den Taktstock überlas-

sen. Der ging gekonnt und subtil zu Werke. Die offensichtlich bestens präparierte große Chorgemeinschaft wurde unter Creeds Händen zu einem im Ausdruck und Dynamik äußerst flexiblen vokalen Klangkörper mit geradezu instrumentalen Möglichkeiten. Zuverlässig fügten sich Raimund Hugs Domsingknaben von der Empore aus ins musikalische Geschehen ein. Ganz ausgezeichnet das sinfonisch besetzte Bachorchester.

Differenziert durchschritt der Dirigent die Regionen des Leisen. Herrlich ausgekostet beispielsweise die dem dissonanten Umfeld wie singuläre Offenbarungen entspringenden Dur-Momente. Creed war auch auf dem Posten, wo Forte-Werte erwünscht sind: Die beachtliche Wucht des „Dies irae“ wurde vom infernalischen Getöse des „Liberate me“ noch übertroffen. Creed formte die – auch disparaten – Stränge des Werks zur Einheit: die sakrosankte Welt der Totenmesse, die entrückte Knabenchor-Sphäre, die zeitlos aktuellen Owen-Zutaten. Das Wiegenlied der toten Soldaten geriet nicht zur Gefühlsduselei. JOHANNES ADAM

From the "Badische Zeitung" - Tuesday 16 November 1963.

BRITTEN'S RESOUNDING PACIFISM

This Requiem is something else. The passage "*quam olim Abraham promisisti*" is usually set in the form of a fugue. Benjamin Britten seems to cling to this tradition. However, the reference in the "War Requiem" to the promise made to Abraham and his descendants sounds strangely lacking in solemnity. The fugue has the character of a scherzo.

To return to Abraham. In the Book of Genesis he spares Isaac. But this time he slaughtered "his son, and half the seed of Europe one by one". That is the view of the English poet Wilfred Owen, nine of whose poems are linked by Britten with the traditional Latin text of the Requiem Mass. Owen had volunteered for the army. The pitiless reality of the war and the death of soldiers became the theme of his poetry. He fell at the age of 25, shortly before the armistice.

Britten regarded his Requiem more as an "atonement" for the dead than as a consolation for the living. He wrote the work for the consecration of the reconstructed Coventry Cathedral, which had been a victim of German bombs. The first performance in May 1962 became a ceremony of reconciliation: the English tenor Peter Pears and the German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sang Owen's texts.

The present performance in the Civic Hall in Freiburg was also a reminder of that constellation of soloists. The excellent English tenor Ian Bostridge and the supreme baritone Klaus Häger (whose training included classes with Ingeborg Most in Freiburg) harmonised in the most beautiful way. Both proved themselves intelligent, sensitive, and powerful creative artists. The Czech soprano, Zora Jehlickova, only fell short of them by the narrowest of margins.

Four years ago, the Oratorio Choir had brought the "War Requiem" to Freiburg for the first time. On this occasion the Bach Choir became involved, together with the Philharmonic Choir from Freiburg's partner town of Guildford, in Britten's resounding pacifism. Hans Michael Beuerle had entrusted the conductor's baton to his English colleague, Neville Creed. He set about his task in a masterly and subtle way. The large choral group, which had clearly been very well prepared, were united under Creed's craftsmanship to become an extremely flexible body of vocal sound which almost had the potential of musical instruments. Raimund Hug's cathedral choirboys fitted reliably into the musical event. The Bach Orchestra was quite outstanding in its symphonic role.

The conductor made his way with distinction through the soft passages. In a glorious way, he made the most, for example, of the moments in the major key which flow forth like unique revelations in discordant surroundings. Creed was also on the mark when loud climaxes were desired. The remarkable force of the "*Dies Irae*" was even surpassed by the infernal roaring of the "*Libera me*". Creed wove the diverse threads of the work into a single unit; the sacred world of the Requiem Mass, the rapturous world of the boys' choir, and the timelessly topical relevance of Owen's poetry. The lullaby of the dead soldiers did not lapse into mawkish sentimentality.

JOHANNES ADAM.

Review of the Performance of Britten's War Requiem

Freiburg 14th Nov. 93 Stadthalle (Translation for private use only)

Badische Zeitung Tuesday 16th Nov. 93 Reviewer: Johannes Adam

G u i l d f o r d P h i l h a r m o n i c C h o i r and

F r e i b u r g B a c h c h o i r singing War Requiem

Britten's Resounding Pacifism

This Requiem is different. Generally the text of "Quam olim Abrahae promisisti" is composed as a fugue. Benjamin Britten also seems to cling to this tradition. But in the War Requiem the flashback to the promise given to Abraham and his descendants does not sound serious in a strange way: The fugue is similar to a scherzo.

Once more Abraham: In the biblical Book of Genesis he spares Isaac. But this time he "slaughtered his son and half the seed of Europe one by one" This is the view of the British poet Wilfred Owen, 9 poems of whom Britten combined with the usual text of the Latin Mass for the Dead in the War Requiem.

Owen had volunteered for the military service. The merciless reality of war and the death of soldiers became the subject of his poems. Shortly before the armistice of 1918 he was killed at the age of 25.

Britten meant his requiem to be more a "reparation" for the dead than a consolation of the living. He wrote the work for the consecration of the reconstructed Cathedral of Coventry, which had been a victim of German bombs. The first performance in May 1962 became a celebration of reconciliation: The British solo-tenor Peter Pears and the German solo-baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sang Owen's parts.

This year's performance in the Freiburg Civic Hall reminded of this constellation of soloists: The outstanding British tenor Ian Bostridge and the brilliant German baritone Klaus Häger (who once was partly the student of Ingeborg Most , Freiburg), harmonized beautifully with each other.

Both proved to be intelligent, sensitive and intense interpreters. The Czech soprano soloist Zora Jehličková was hardly inferior to them.

The "Oratorienchor" had introduced the War Requiem to Freiburg four years ago. Now the Bachchor together with the Philharmonic Choir from Freiburg's British twin-town Guildford committed themselves to Britten's resounding pacifism. Hans Michael Beuerle had left the baton to his British colleague Neville Creed, who worked in a competent and subtle way.

The large choir-ensemble ,which was obviously very well prepared, became a vocal instrument of utmost flexibility in dynamics and expression with almost the possibilities of a musical instrument under Creed's hands. From the galery Raimund Hug's Boys' Choir were reliable partners of the musical event. Excellent the Big Bach Orchestra!

The conductor distinguished very well within the scale of the low voice:wonderfully tasted to the full e.g. the Major(chord) moments springing from the dissonant surroundings like singular revelations.

Creed was also on the alert where forte-values are desirable: the considerable impact of the "Dies Irae" was even surpassed by the pandemonium of the "Libera Me".

Creed formed a unity of the -sometimes even disparate - cords of the work:The sacrosanct world of the Mass for the Dead,the remote sphere of the Boys' Choir,the timeless-topical additions by Owen.The lullaby of the dead soldiers was free of sentimentalism.