

The Draw of Weinberg: Transcriptions from the Castle

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 Germany **Weinberg, Glinka, Schumann** : Julia Rebekka Adler (viola), Jascha Nemtsov (piano), Sudhaus, Toering Castle, Seefeld (near Munich) 4.12.2011 (JFL)

Weinberg: Sonata for Clarinet & Piano op.28, Sonata for Cello & Piano op.63 (both transcr. for viola)

Glinka: Viola Sonata [unfinished]

Schumann: Fairy Tale Pictures op.113

The lure of Mieczysław Weinberg—courtesy Jascha Nemtsov and Julia Rebekka Adler—drew me out for another out-of-Munich chamber music experience—this time to the old Toering Castle in Seefeld, Bavaria. The provincially-minded “Culture in the Seefeld Castle” series pales in comparison with the professional “Bosco” series in neighboring Gauting, but on this occasion hosted a pleasantly daring program titled “Dedicated to Mieczysław Weinberg”: Two sonatas (transcribed for viola from the clarinet—op.28—and cello—op.63, respectively) were alternated with Glinka’s popular, unfinished Viola Sonata and Robert Schumann’s gorgeous 1851 *Fairy Tale Pictures*, op.113.

The small, almost cube-shaped former mash-house of the Toering Castle—now a backroom of the restaurant, with a neo-rustic chandelier about twice as big as the baby grand, and a wooden crest on the wall, proudly pronouncing “Kingdom of Bavaria”—exposes the ears to all sounds made on stage very directly. Piano and viola thus communicated immediately, and with rough edges, as there is little time for the sound to come together in that slight bit of haze that can beautify sound before it begins to muddle it. But the volatile loveliness of Glinka sufficiently made it through any superficial harshness... and Weinberg’s opus 28 ex-Clarinet Sonata might even have benefited from it.

The viola transcription received its world premiere recording by Mme. Adler (see also “Through Labor and Love: Weinberg, War, and Persecution”) and it is among the most accessible of the Weinberg works. By Weinberg’s usually grim and edgy, brooding standards, it has something approaching pleasant charm. The folk-laced Allegretto is downright coy, even though the present acoustic underlined its power to disturb. It is hard to say whether the sheer volume of the viola more perturbed or positively overwhelmed the roughly two dozen attentive listeners. The concluding Adagio added—as is the case on every occasion I have heard these performers live—another level of intensity to what they have already captured on record.

If the four-movement Märchenbilder are not neglected, despite the unjustly marred reputation of all his late works*, it’s only because of Violist’s desperation for good original viola literature; Schumann ideology of the day could not deter them. The proof of the Schumann-tale is in the hearing; the work surely doesn’t have to shy away from direct comparison with his Violin Sonatas—and in terms of inspiration and determination might even best them. The last movement is a supremely touching, tender farewell; a good-night to which the husky contralto voice of the viola, in the sensitive-intense hands of Mme. Adler, is particularly well suited. Only the unlovely closing pizzicato was an unfortunate touch to these Fairy Tale Pictures.

Weinberg’s op.63 is made of sterner stuff than op.28; it is stricter, has a more compelling rhythm, and some of Weinberg’s closest-to-Shostakovich-moments. But Nemtsov-Adler showed that it can be played surprisingly lyrically, too, which is why the Tchaikovsky Nocturne encore-sweetener fit almost seamlessly.

Jens F. Laurson

* You would think that even one-time exposure to the Ghost Variations would eliminate all late-Schumann-prejudice...