

TRUTH & CREATIVITY ~ LEGACY & INHERITANCE

Andrew Robert Munn, bass & Nathaniel Raskin, piano

Second Proposed Program for the 2020 Naumburg International Vocal Competition

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897), *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121

Denn es gehet dem Menschen wie dem Vieh
Ich wandte mich, und sahe an alles die Unrecht

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975), from *Suite on Poems of Michelangelo*, Op. 145

Truth
Wrath
Creativity

HANNS EISLER (1898-1962), from *Berlin Verses: Second Strophes for the Hollywooder Liederbuch*

The mother & the son
To my little radio
In the willows
Spring
Easter Sunday
The cherry thief
Pantry 2020
As I fled
Escape
Memorial plaque for 4,000 drowned soldiers
Epitaph for one who fell in the Battle of Flanders
I read of battles
Proverb

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH, from *Suite on Poems of Michelangelo*, Op. 145

Morte
Dante
Immortalità

Sung in Italian, as reconstructed by Gerald Finley

HANNS EISLER, *An die Nachgeborenen*

Wirklich, ich lebe in finsternen Zeiten!
In die Städte kam ich zu der Zeit der Unordnung
Ihr, die ihr auftauchen werdet aus der Flut

JOHANNES BRAHMS, *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121

O tod, wie bitter bist du
Wenn ich mit Menschen und mit Engelszungen redete

PROGRAM NOTE & INTRODUCTION TO BERLIN VERSES

The music and poetry of “Truth & Creativity ~ Legacy & Inheritance” explores the intertwining and, at times, conflicting claims of truth and creativity, and the works of artists who offer their works to future generations or look to the past and mold the works of past generations to the perceived needs of the present. Brahms' *Vier ernste Gesänge*, and its secular use of Biblical texts on the ultimate equality of all life and the centrality of love to transform injustice, frames a musical and poetic journey through the works of Hanns Eisler and Dmitiri Shostakovich. The program pivots from Brahms' meditation on injustice "Ich wandte mich" to three selections from Shostakovich's Suite on Poems by Michelangelo (in Russian) in which Michelangelo and Shostakovich interrogate their relationships to truth (Truth) and the work of crafting a meaningful piece of art (Creativity) in the midst of injustice (Wrath). I then program, or unveil, *Berlin Verses*: my English adaptations and "second strophes" for Eisler's *Hollywooder Liederbuch*. *Berlin Verses* present my work as both an interpretive and a creative artist, seeking to articulate new poetic-political truths that emerge from my immersion in tradition.

Hanns Eisler composed the songs that make up the *Hollywooder Liederbuch* while living in Los Angeles in exile from Germany during the second world war. Los Angeles was a haven for German artists and intellectuals who fled the Third Reich as it quashed out the forward-looking and diverse cultural milieu of Germany's Weimar Republic years. There, Eisler was in the company of his old teacher Arnold Schoenberg, novelist Thomas Mann, critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno, and his friend and collaborator from Berlin, Bertolt Brecht. While in exile, Eisler earned his living by writing film music for Hollywood. His lieder compositions were of a more private nature, a “diary” as Eisler called it, that he shared only with his circle of friends. Of the forty-seven songs that make up the collection, twenty-eight are on poems that Brecht wrote during his flight from Germany and exile in Los Angeles. Brecht's poetry is supplemented by Hölderlin fragments, Eduard Mörike's translations of Anakreon, words from Blaise Pascal, Johann von Goethe's *Schatzgräber*, Biblical verse, and Eisler's own words. In sum, the work can be read as a musical-poetic reflection of opposition to the fascism that had overrun their homeland, their sense of alienation from American capitalism, and knowledge that even in the darkest hours, there is resistance in beauty.

I first encountered the *Hollywooder Liederbuch* while a student at the Bard Graduate Vocal Arts Program. My years at Bard were a time of intense musical and vocal study and of personal transformation, as I sought to reconcile, or to put in fertile tension, my relationship to our ecological and political moment and my devotion to an archaic art form intimately and materially intertwined with the conservative power of the church, state, and capital. Encountering Eisler's songs was an answer, a clarification, example, and a gift from artists who had navigated this tension in far more perilous times than I. As I read the poems and hummed Eisler's melodies, I sensed that not only was it a work rooted in its historical moment, but a living document imbued with the hopes, fears, confessions, outburst, and memories of the artists and revolutionaries that created it. I had found role models, artists with whom I share both a craft and a lineage of ideals. I knew I wanted to bring their spirits to bare on the present.

In *Berlin Verses*, I am creating a continuation of their work. In doing so, I am employing methods similar to Eisler and Brecht's. When setting poetry to music, Eisler would alter the material to fit the idea he wished to express in his songs. For Brecht, the question “is it politically useful” outweighed other questions of aesthetics. As I translate the poetry, I am guided by the same question from my inherently contemporary perspective. I do not aim for contemporary idiomatic language, but rather to articulate the contemporary manifestations of the ideas and forces that shaped the contents of Eisler's songs. I tether myself to the textual and musical stress of Eisler's lieder and the symbolic, emotional, and political fields and structures of Brecht's poetry. In some cases, this yields a relatively faithful translation, as in “An den kleinen Radioapparat,” and in others, as in “Der Sohn II,” it maintains the poetic and ideological structure of the poem but fills it with new imagery. This is to say that my texts are neither faithful translation nor entirely new creations. They are offered as second strophes for Eisler's lieder, written as an apprentice's act of solidarity and continuation of Eisler's, and Brecht's, artistic and political project.

In *Truth & Creativity ~ Legacy & Inheritance*, I have programmed thirteen of Eisler's songs, originally composed to Brecht's poems in the *Steffin Collection*, written during his flight from Germany to Scandinavia, and subsequently to the United States. From the safety of Scandinavia, Brecht's poems express the unsettling disconnect between the beauty of the Nordic landscapes and the bounty of nature and the horrors brewing in the early days of the Second World War.

The program continues with Shostakovich's settings of Michelangelo's *Death*, *Dante*, and *Immortality*. In a new iteration, the texts echo the generation-spanning relationship between artists that I posit in *Berlin Verses*. as Michelangelo looks back to Dante in his ode to the great poet, and considers his legacy in *Morte* and *Immortalita*. Michelangelo's thoughts are brought to us through the prism of Shostakovich's own musical reflections on mortality and legacy near the end of his life. I offer these three Shostakovich settings in Gerald Finley's reconstruction of the original Italian. In a program of Biblical verse that has traveled from Hebrew to Latin to German, sonnets recrafted from Italian to Russian, and my own English poetry to German music, we hear Michelangelo's ideas in his own words, and in this moment of linguistic purity consider the mutability of language in the transmitting ideas and creative works. We continue in the original language, and return to Eisler and Brecht, for Eisler's setting of Brecht's three part poem *An die Nachgeborenen* (To those not yet born), a poem, and set of songs addressed to us as the inheritors of the ongoing project of making a more just world. The recital closes with Brahms' secular use of Saint Paul's charge to make belief, love, and charity foremost in life.