

About This Performance by Ulrich Hartung

This recital is a direct result of the findings in my 1992 NewYorkUniversity PhD dissertation:

Die Winterreise; An Alternative Version of the Song Cycle by Franz Schubert in the Order of the Poems by Wilhelm Müller.

While writing a performance analysis of **Winterreise** in the poet's order I realized that Müller's 24 wandering songs (Wanderlieder) actually consisted of 3 parts – Past, Present, Future – and within these divisions the pauses that naturally occurred in a standard rendition of the song cycle were not always necessary, or even welcome. With the decision to add other instruments, besides the piano, to the accompaniment arose the opportunity to bridge the pauses between songs with appropriate interludes that reflected what just passed and foreshadowed what would follow. The idea for the instruments in turn grew out of a desire to dramatize the songs in a more scenically organic, musically coherent way. With the orchestration by **Stefan Kozinski** the musical part became fully realized and within the scope of this performance some of the dramatic involvement of the players is also shown. Ultimately the players should not be bound to a music stand, but dress the stage in a manner similar to the singer while assuming a greater role in the theatricality of the song cycle.

The multimedia is designed to give the casual listener more involvement in the scenic aspects of the poems. Though care is taken not to give too literal a representation of the physical phenomena described in the poems, some literal references are unavoidable. Trees, dormant or broken, are evocations of the protagonist, and rocks and streams highlight his disposition.

Müller was rather enigmatic in his depiction of the narrative weaving through his poems. There is never a clear indication that the wanderer was actually escaping a failed relationship between a man and a woman, or what the nature of that relationship was. The reason the poems have achieved a lasting value is certainly creditable to Schubert, but their ambiguities contribute an interpretative challenge for performers and listeners that transcends time and place in a state of psychic universality. **Die Winterreise** delves into the human condition with psychological acuity. It plumbs the depths of the mind's pain and deprivation but also offers some degree of resolution and accommodation to unalterable circumstance.

Schubert reacted to the poet's metaphysical imagery in musical terms that relay his empathic understanding of these situations as physical reality, and it is on these terms that the interpretation is founded. Though care is taken to remain reasonably objective, personal identification certainly plays its part in this as it would in any performance, and my use of guitar and saxophone, as well as some interpretative elements are extensions of a subjective con/subtext.

This live video shows the last of a series of 6 performances on 6 consecutive evenings and was filmed in the Black Box Theatre of NYU on August 9th, 2014.