

# Translations and Program Notes for the Brahms and Mahler songs

## Texts for Johannes Brahms' *Zwei Gesänge*

- 1 *In goldnen Abendschein getauchet, wie feierlich die Wälder stehn!*  
*In leise Stimmen der Vöglein hauchet des Abendwindes leises Wehn.*  
*Was lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein? Sie lispeln die Welt in Schlummer ein.*
- Ihr Wünsche, die ihr stets euch reget im Herzen sonder Rast und Ruh!*  
*Du Sehnen, das die Brust bewegt, wann ruhest du, wann schlummerst du?*  
*Beim Lispeln der Winde, der Vögelein, ihr sehnenenden Wünsche, wann schlaft ihr ein?*
- Ach, wenn nicht mehr in goldne Fernen mein Geist auf Traumgefieder eilt,*  
*Nicht mehr an ewig fernen Sternen mit sehnedem Blick mein Auge weilt;*  
*Dann lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein mit meinem Sehnen mein Leben ein.*
- In the golden glow of evening, how majestically the woods appear!  
In the quiet voices of birds rustles the gentle breeze of the evening.  
What do the breezes whisper, the birds? They whisper the world to sleep.
- You desires that constantly arise in the heart without rest or peace!  
You longing, which moves the breast, when will you rest, when will you sleep?  
With the whispering of the winds, of the birds, you yearning desires, when will you go to sleep?
- Ah, when no longer into the golden distance my spirit rushes on the wings of dreams,  
No longer on eternally faraway stars with a yearning gaze my eyes linger;  
Then the winds and the birds will whisper, with my yearning, my life to its close.
- Friedrich Rückert
- 2 *Die ihr schwebet um diese Palmen in Nacht und Wind,*  
*Ihr heiligen Engel, stillt die Wipfel! Es schlummert mein Kind.*
- Ihr Palmen von Bethlehem im Windesbrausen, wie mögt ihr heute so zornig sausen!*  
*O rauscht nicht also! schweiget, neiget euch leis und lind;*  
*Stillet die Wipfel! Es schlummert mein Kind.*
- Der Himmelsknabe duldet Beschwerde; ach, wie so müd er ward vom Leid der Erde.*  
*Ach, nun im Schlaf ihm leise gesänftigt die Qual zerrinnt.*  
*Stillet die Wipfel! Es schlummert mein Kind!*
- Grimmige Kälte sauset hernieder; womit nur deck ich des Kindleins Gleider!*  
*O all ihr Engel, die ihr geflügelt wandelt im Wind,*  
*Stillet die Wipfel! Es schlummert mein Kind.*
- You who soar around these palm trees in the night and wind,  
You holy angels, calm the treetops! My child is sleeping.
- You palm trees of Bethlehem in the uproar of the wind, why must you rattle so angrily today?  
Oh, don't blow so! be quiet, bend down softly and gently;  
Calm the treetops! My child is sleeping.
- The child of heaven endured hardships; ah, how tired he was of the sorrow of the earth.  
Ah, only comforted by sleep does the torment melt away.  
Calm the treetops! My child is sleeping!
- Terrible chills blow down on us; how can I cover the child's limbs?  
Oh, all you angels who fly about in the wind,  
Calm the treetops! My child is sleeping.

-Emanuel Geibel after Lope de Vega

In the winter of 1833-1834, the German poet Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866) and his family suffered the death of three-year-old Luise from scarlet fever. Just sixteen days later, five-year-old Ernst followed his sister in death to the same disease. Over the ensuing six months, Rückert poured his sorrow and disbelief into 461 poems he called "Kindertotenlieder." The poems remained unpublished until after his own death.

The Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) selected five of Rückert's poems to set as symphonic songs written between 1901 and 1904. He conducted the premiere performance of the work in Vienna in 1905. Mahler is said to have been inspired to write this work, in part, because he experienced the deaths of eight of his thirteen siblings, including his favorite brother, also named Ernst.

Sadly, Mahler's own daughter, Maria, succumbed to the same disease as Rückert's two children in 1907 at the age of five. Although Mahler said he had imagined the pain of losing a child of his own as he composed his *Kindertotenlieder*, he believed that, after the death of Maria, he would not have been able to write the songs.

On August 6, 2004 my son, Simon Craig Vodosek, died of a childhood cancer called neuroblastoma. He was seven years old, having lived with his illness since he was four and a half. Although he received extensive treatment, Simon's illness proved as lethal as the scarlet fever of Rückert's and Mahler's time.

The very next day, a fortuitous meeting occurred. A neighbor came by to offer to run errands for the family. It turned out that she was a pianist with a strong interest in German Lieder, just like me. Within weeks, Elizabeth Ballantyne and I were enjoying sessions of reading music together. At some point, we decided to look at Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*.

The result of that curiosity is this evening's performance of Mahler's settings of his selections from Rückert's poems. I have found it helpful and important to explore my grief through singing. Since my son's death, I have relied on writing to help me comprehend my sorrow and the enormous changes in my life. I find a kindred spirit in Friedrich Rückert, who also turned to writing to help him grasp the horror of the death of one beloved child followed so closely by another.

Mahler's music and Rückert's words offer a means of understanding some of the terrain of parental bereavement. *Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehen* expresses exhaustion and disbelief at the sun's audacity to rise so soon, so relentlessly in spite of tragedy. *Nun seh' ich wohl warum so dunkle Flammen* describes the sparkle in a child's eyes, the intensity of which seemed to foretell the child's untimely death. *Wenn dein Müttlerlein* observes domestic life as it continues after the child's death. The author, both charmed and distressed, finds himself expecting to see his little daughter still following her mother about the house.

*Oft' denk ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen* offers insight into feelings of disbelief about a death. The author assures himself that the children have only gone for a walk and will be returning soon. As the realization sinks in, he admits that they have gone on a walk to "yonder heights," and he will not see them again until he joins them there. *In diesem Wetter* evokes a storm of guilt and remorse as the author desperately clings to the illusion that the deaths could somehow have been prevented. As the storm abates, a peaceful image emerges of the children now resting as if in their own home, safe from storms, sheltered by the hand of God.

## Texts for Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* from poems by Friedrich Rückert

- 1 *Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn,  
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht gescheh'n.*
- Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein,  
Die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein.*
- Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,  
Mußt sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken.*
- Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt,  
Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt!*
- Now the sun intends to rise so bright  
As if no tragedy occurred in the night.
- The tragedy happened to me alone,  
The sun, it shines universally.
- You need not lock up the night inside yourself,  
You must immerse it in the eternal light.
- A tiny lamp went out in my household,  
Greetings to the joyous light of the world!
- 2 *Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen  
Ihr sprühtet mir in manchem Augenblicke,  
O Augen, gleichsam um voll in einem Blicke  
Zu drängen eure ganze Macht zusammen.  
Doch abnt' ich nicht, weil Nebel mich umschwammen,  
Gewoben vom verblendenden Gesckicke,  
Daß sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr schicke  
Dorthin, von wannen alle Strahlen stammen.  
Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten sagen:  
Wir möchten nah dir bleiben gerne,  
Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal abgeschlagen.  
Sieh uns nur an, denn bald sind wir dir ferne!  
Was dir nur Augen sind in diesen Tagen,  
In künft'gen Nächten sind es dir nur Sterne.*
- Now I see clearly why such dark flames  
Sparkled forth from you at times,  
Oh eyes, as if in one glance  
To concentrate your full power.  
Yet I had no idea, because mists surrounded me,  
Woven by deceptive fortune,  
That the ray of light was already headed back  
To the place where all rays originate.  
You wanted to tell me with your brilliance:  
We want to stay near you dearly,  
But that is denied us by fate.  
Look at us, because soon we will be far from you!  
What seem now to you to be eyes  
In future nights will appear to you only as stars.
- 3 *Wenn dein Mütterlein  
Tritt zur Tür herein,  
Und den Kopf ich drehe,  
Ihr entgegen sehe,  
Fällt auf ihr Gesicht  
Erst der Blick mir nicht,  
Sondern auf die Stelle  
Näher nach der Schwelle,  
Dort wo würde dein  
Lieb Gesichtchen sein,  
Wenn du freudenbelle  
Trätest mit herein  
Wie sonst, mein Töchterlein.*
- When your dear mother  
Walks in through the door,  
And I turn my head,  
To look at her,  
Upon her face at first  
My gaze does not fall,  
Rather at the place,  
Just past the threshold,  
There where would be  
Your sweet little face,  
Bright with joy,  
If you were to come in,  
As usual, my little girl.
- Wenn dein Mütterlein  
Tritt zur Tür herein,  
Mit der Kerze Schimmer,  
Ist es mir als immer,  
Kämst du mit herein,  
Huschtest hinterdrein  
Als wie sonst ins Zimmer.  
O du, des Vaters Zelle  
Zu schnelle  
Erlosch'ner Freudenschein!*
- When your dear mother  
Walks in through the door,  
With the glowing candle,  
It feels to me as always,  
That you would come,  
Flitting along behind her  
Just as usual into the room.  
Oh you, from your  
father's world  
Too quickly  
Extinguished light of  
joy!

4 *Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen,  
Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen,  
Der Tag ist schön, o sei nicht bang,  
Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.*

*Jawohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen,  
Und werden jetzt wieder nach Hause gelangen,  
O sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schön,  
Sie machen den Gang zu jenen Höb'n!*

*Sie sind uns nur voraus gegangen,  
Und werden nicht wieder nach Hause verlangen;  
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höbn  
Im Sonnenschein, der Tag ist schön!*

5 *In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus;  
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,  
Ich dürfte dazu nichts sagen.*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,  
Ich fürchtete, sie erkrankten,  
Das sind nun eitle Gedanken.*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus.  
Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen,  
Das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.*

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Sie ruhn als wie in der Mutter Haus,  
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,  
Von Gottes Hand bedeckt.*

Often I think they have merely gone out,  
Soon they will be coming home,  
The day is beautiful, oh do not worry,  
They are only taking a long walk.

Yes, indeed, they have merely gone out,  
And will now be returning home,  
Oh do not worry, it's a beautiful day,  
They are on their way to yonder heights.

They have simply gone on ahead of us,  
And they will no longer yearn to come home;  
We will catch up with them on yonder heights  
In sunshine, the day is beautiful!

In this weather, in this bluster,  
I would never have sent the children out;  
Someone must have carried them out,  
I was not allowed to say anything about it.

In this weather, in this tumult,  
I would never have let the children out,  
I would have feared they would get sick,  
Those are now idle thoughts.

In this weather, in this gruesomeness,  
I never would have let the children out.  
I would have worried they would die tomorrow,  
Now that does not matter.

In this weather, in this bluster,  
They are resting as if in their mother's house,  
Not frightened by any storm,  
Sheltered by the hand of God.