

Interview with Ian Bostridge

The Dark Mirror: Zender's Winterreise | PIAF 2017

“Gute Nacht”

It's very difficult to explain what's special about Winterreise because it sort of goes beyond words, which is one of the reasons it's so good, I mean it's a setting of poetry, 24 poems, and it starts out being about somebody saying that they're leaving a house because a love affair's gone wrong.

But through the course of the poems the protagonist, the voice in the poems, moves out into a snowy landscape, and it becomes much more about **identity and what is life about**. It's what 20th century philosophers would've called existential, and that's only enhanced really by the music which can express the wordless.

Winterreise is a piece that has a long and complicated history because it was written in 1828, and it was written as part of a German cultural tradition which has been very complicated and vexed over the past hundred and...you know, nearly two hundred years.

And so Winterreise has existed in all sorts of forms for all sorts of different people and I think the Zender version sort of reflects that. The sort of, sometimes the harshness, sometimes the coziness, sometimes the sort of political edge.

Hans Zender is a composer of contemporary and west avant-garde music. He's recomposed Schubert's Winterreise.

“The Post”

He's orchestrated it, but at the same time he hasn't just orchestrated it. He's put in sound effects, he's dislocated the lines, but what's really great about the piece is it's modern but at the same time it's recognizably Schubert's Winterreise. It's not a difficult avant-garde piece in that sense; it's something that any audience can get a grip on, I think, and listen to.

It feels very appropriate for the piece because it reflects both things that are in the piece, the orchestration, but also things to do with the history of the piece, so you get music of later ages, which then summons up the idea of Winterreise being performed in the 1920s, or the 1880s, or now.

Netia Jones is not any director, she's a video artist she does the whole look of the thing.

And with the Zender, she's reflected the sort of montage element that's in the music, that you hear in the music, in like the use of film.

I suppose one of the main ideas in the staging is the confrontation between youth and age. And so what Netia has done is to use the footage of a young me singing Winterreise against a much older-looking me on stage.

She's definitely dug into the piece in a really interesting way. I've seen the piece so often that it's wonderful to find new ways of doing it.