

"MAY HEAVEN'S FIRE RAIN DOWN ON YOUR HEAD ..."
(SONNET 136)



AT THE OCCASION OF THE 700TH ANNIVERSARY
OF FRANCESCO PETRARCA (1304 – 1374)

PORTRAITS OF A MODERN SOUL

PETRARCA'S "CANZONIERE"
IN SETTINGS FOR BARITONE AND FORTEPIANO

Martin Bruns, baritone
Christoph Hammer, fortepiano

AS AN INTRODUCTION

Franz Liszt
(1811 – 1886)

- Oh! Quand je dors (Victor Hugo), 1841-42

DURING THE LIFETIME OF MADONNA LAURA:

LONGING & HAPPINESS

James Hook
(1746 – 1827)

- May Morning

Johann Reichardt
(1752 – 1814)

- Più volte già del bel sembiante umano (170)

- Klavierstück über eine Petrarchische Ode (129)

PRIDE & DEVOTION

Johann Franz Xaver Sterkel
(1750 – 1817)

- Sennuccio! l'vò che sappi, in qual maniera trattato sono (112)

Moritz Hauptmann
(1792 – 1868)

- Come 'l candido pie per l'erba fresca (165)

Friedrich Curschmann
(1805 – 1841)

- Or che 'l ciel, e la terra, e 'l vento tace (164)

CONFUSION & ANXIETY

Franz Liszt

Tre Sonetti del Petrarca

- Benedetto sia il giorno, e'l mese, e l'anno (61)

- Pace non trovo, et non ò da far guerra (134)

- l' vidi in terra angelici costumi (156)

* * * **INTERMISSION** * * *

SELF-PITY & DEFIANCE

Jacopo Peri
(1561 – 1633)

- Tutto 'l dí piango; et poi la notte (216)

Franz Schubert
(1797 – 1828)

- Allein, nachdenklich, wie gelähmt vom Krampfe (35)
- Nunmehr, da Himmel, Erde schweigt und Winde (164)

AFTER THE DEATH OF MADONNA LAURA:

HOPE & TRANSFIGURATION

John Field
(1782 – 1837)

- Levommi il mio pensier in parte ov'era (302)

Peter Cornelius
(1824 – 1874)

Drei Marienlieder (366)

1. Vergine bella
2. Vergine santa
3. Vergine saggia

REMEMBRANCE

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco
(1895 – 1968)

Petrarca-Chopin: Tre Madrigali

1. Non al suo amante più Diana piacque (52)
2. Perch'al viso d'amor portava insegna (54)
3. Nova angeletta sovra l'ale accorta (106)

PORTRAITS OF A MODERN SPIRIT

PETRARCA'S "CANZONIERE"
IN SETTINGS FROM THE BAROQUE TO THE PRESENT

Few among us will be familiar with the "Canzoniere" by Francesco Petrarca (1304 – 1374), even though the volume presents one of the most famous and most influential poetry collections of all times. It contains 366 poems, mostly sonnets, which were written by Petrarca during a span of almost 50 years - albeit not, as common at the time, in Latin, but rather in the colloquial Italian language. There are hundreds of translations and transcriptions in almost every language of the world, but also new and original works simply inspired by Petrarch's style, language and, of course, by the content of the work.

Since the early Renaissance period composers have set to music poems from the "Canzoniere" in innumerable madrigals and polyphonic vocal pieces. The so-called Petrarchism, which had become a fashionable movement amongst writers in the 16th century is clearly reflected in the music of that period: not only in regard to the plot, but very much in terms of expressing the individual's perspective towards life and the world. After about 1600 Petrarca seemed less attractive for some 150 years until the late 18th century, when the period's renewed interest in the middle-ages led to a true 'Petrarca revival' (e.g. new translations into various languages).

Until today Petrarca's poetry is being set to music. We note that in the 20th century the previously common piano accompaniment was frequently being replaced by small chamber groups of various combinations. Beyond that there are also several purely instrumental settings which are inspired by the sonnets (e.g. Reichardt, Liszt, Hahn).

This program is devoted to settings for solo voice and piano which – in comparison to the many polyphonic settings of Petrarca's poetry for choir or ensembles – are hardly present on the concert stages. It focuses around the romantic compositions of the 19th century. Nevertheless, it also looks further back and includes one of the first ever settings of Petrarca for solo voice and basso continuo which was written in Italy just after 1600.

Human torment and joy, longing and fear, anger as well as transfiguration, wit and abhorrence - all of these make the "Canzoniere" meaningful and yet entertaining, make it profound and yet full of vivid charm. It is a masterpiece about our human existence, which is as valid now as it was in the 14th century. But most of all, it is accessible also to modern ears and minds in its self-critical perspective, in its intensity of expression, of pity and irony, and the wonderfully imaginative language.

They are descriptions of the human soul – 'Seelenbilder', images of a soul, as the great historian Jacob Burckhardt called them -, which we can sympathize with today and which remind us of ourselves.

Not all compositions have been set in the original Italian. Some of them use a German or French translation - which adds a further dimension.

The immediate neighborhood of settings from varying periods stresses two aspects: for one, it places the main importance on the words; for the other, it highlights the similarities and the differences of every composer's reception of Petrarca's poetry.

Today, audiences will probably only be acquainted with the three settings by Franz Liszt. Beyond the rarely performed Petrarca sonnets by Schubert and the hardly popular ones by Friedrich Reichardt, this program brings to attention rarities by 19th century masters like Moritz Hauptmann, John Field and Peter Cornelius. Some of these works have probably never been performed in modern days.

The program begins with a famous composition by Franz Liszt on a poem by Victor Hugo about Petrarca and Laura. It takes us from Italy through France to Germany and reminds us that, centuries after Petrarca's own time, his work continues to inspire minds from all over Europe and beyond.

Martin Bruns, 2003