

Franz Schubert on stage!

- a report from my workshop -

Franz Schubert's *Winterreise* (Winter journey) has long been one of my favourite musical works. Before this marvellous song cycle from the Romantic era made the leap on to the stage of my paper theatre, however, it had undertaken a 'long' diversion by way of book art. In 2016 there emerged from my atelier a leporello (ill. 1) in paper and card, in which I combined the 24 individual pages of the song collection into a volume 7 metres in length. A pathway in pictures which – unlike Schubert's cycle – does not lead us through a snow-covered landscape, but through an urban environment with crumbling walls and hoardings covered in graffiti (ill.2). The wanderer in my *Winterreise* does not appear as a figure in the 24 images; the observer is himself the protagonist, moving through his own town.

After many years as an author and illustrator of picture books I now work as a book artist. I have been fascinated by the medium of paper theatre ever since encountering it in 1991. I am myself the enthusiastic actor, author, director, dramaturgist and spectator.

After finishing work on the book, I was logically forced to consider the question: Would *Winterreise* also provide the material for paper theatre? How could one transfer the story of the lonely wanderer – a story basically lacking in dramatic action – to the stage of a paper theatre? My wanderer was not even to appear as a character, which gave me a real handicap. 24 songs. That meant 24 stage sets with a running time of 60 minutes – supported only by Schubert's melodies.

A happy coincidence took the decision out of my hands: a radio broadcast about the celebrated Liedermacher (singer and songwriter) Hannes Wader. On his CD *An dich hab ich gedacht* he sings Schubert songs, interpreting them in an inimitable and for me surprising way which touched me immediately. 17 songs with guitar accompaniment are collected on the CD, among them 6 songs from *Winterreise*. For me things took a new

turn: my production would now become a mixed selection of 7 Schubert songs!

I quickly found a definitive dramaturgy for the selection of songs and their sequence, and also ideas for the stage sets: the 'birch forest' backdrop for the Romantic song *Ständchen* (Serenade) to start, then via *Die schöne Müllerin* (The Fair Maid of the Mill), with a slightly transformed backdrop, to the familiar *Forelle* (The Trout). Here the delightful opportunity to create the magic of an aquarium with green overlays (ill. 3). In the first song of *Winterreise*, 'Gute Nacht' (Good night), I was able to include graffiti elements (ill. 4) from my art book – a connection with modern-day reality which is important to me! For *Wasserflut* (Flood of tears) and *Frühlingstraum* (Dream of Spring) I employed in both instances shadow play effects.

Before we hear the opening chords of the hurdy-gurdy man (*Der Leiermann*) in the final scene, the answer to a question which has not yet been mooted: How did I fill the pauses between the songs, which were necessary to give me time to change the stage settings?

Now my contacts with the local folk scene were to pay off: a friend who was both a guitarist and a composer offered to compose an intro and 7 musical miniatures especially for this production and to record them in a recording studio. I was permitted to give him absolutely precise timings required for the scene changes. He produced marvellous little numbers which mirror the atmosphere of each scene and even build on Schubert's musical phrases.

After each song the transparent paper curtain falls, with the printed title of the next song. The 'Schubertiade' which my sound designer Christian put on tape in his studio has a total duration of 40 minutes.

In conclusion: *Der Leiermann* (The Hurdy-Gurdy Man)... Slowly elements of scenery on white paper move into the centre of the stage. They lead the

spectator's eye to a rising path, which disappears into the mist (ill. 5). The anonymous wanderer sets off on his final journey. Dimmed green-grey light veils the answer as to the goal of his winter journey.

It was my goal to 'stage' 7 of Schubert's songs – using only paper. There have been a series of presentations so far: in the Oldenburg main library (Landesbibliothek), the Halle-Wittenberg University, my colleagues with invited guests, and in my own atelier with a glass of white wine and ... smoked trout!

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