

Faithfulness of Expression – Expression of Faithfulness to the Original

On that January morning in 2014 the cold was chilling. I escaped to the interior of the Basel radio station where I was expected to talk as guest during the recording of a program about Schubert, *a journey through the "Winterreisen"*.

Over a hot cup of coffee the friendly radio editor granted me an overview of what awaited me. It was intended, among other things, to investigate the question if, according to contemporary sources the disturbing effect of the *24 ghastly Lieder* (Schubert) was still understandable today. Arrangements by living composers such as Hans Zender or Mathias Rüegg were supposed to demonstrate how they could sound today.

Did I hear right? Rüegg? The Rüegg of the Vienna Art Orchestra ?

The editor nodded and savoured the moment of my surprise with relish. She handed me the cover of a CD recording named *gone too far. LIA PALE*, written in large letters above the portrait of a young woman who seemed to have fallen out of time, a hard contrast of black and white. The interplay of a penetrating look, focusing on the camera lens and a left hand in a protective move to the neck carried a fascinating explosiveness. *Caught in the act*, said this body language, *gone too far*. I suddenly became the accomplice of this enigmatic figure. *Gone too far*; without question or exclamation mark, a sober statement. An ensemble of images and words opened up for me that conveyed certainty: *the end justifies the means*.

The purpose of any kind of artistic representation of the *Winterreise*, this milestone of occidental cultural creation is unquestionably one of making human existential pain audible in all its manifestations. On the way home I put the record on, curious, but with the skepticism of the classical musician who is sworn in to faithfulness to and inviolability of the Urtext. But already after the first measures of *Gute Nacht – You Will Not Hear Leaving* a spell seized me from which I could not escape until the last song. In the twelve fully composed adaptations of selected *Winterreise* songs, I encountered a colour palette which carries in itself and transcends all of the composing achievements of the 20th century based on the European tonal system. It is the overall view of a wholly independent personal musical aesthetic with individual *grooves*, for which every attempt of classification falls short. No Schubert is "jazzed-up" here, but instead permeated with jazz. The compositional commandment to leave the original formally, melodically and harmonically untouched, sets natural boundaries to the wealth of individual ideas and banishes the not insignificant danger of overloading.

There is also a faithfulness to the original as regards content, I thought to myself, *the faithfulness of expression*. And the thought delighted me in a miraculous way.

Was this "*half Winterreise*" to some extent the vanguard of what we now hold in our hands with *Winter Journey 3.0*? Or was it a question addressed to the audience: *Gone too far*?

When asked about this, Julia Pallanch (Lia Pale's name in life) relates that in no way was she aware of what she had agreed to get into and that for mathias rüegg (who wishes to have his name written in lowercase) it was probably the same. He had just given his farewell performance with his Vienna Art Orchestra, which meant a huge break in his life. He filled the vacuum that was created by practicing the piano and giving lectures at the University of Music in Vienna where she sat in his class one day. Their cooperation started with her desire transformed into action to have an audition with him. It so happened that mathias had just written music for the New York *Big Apple Circus* including arrangements of the songs *Lindenbaum* and *Einsamkeit* from the *Winterreise*. To convey an impression of the arrangements to the director overseas, he asked Julia to sing them via Skype for him.

It is well known that there is no turning back for Schubert and Müller's wanderer after he himself has disappeared on soft feet into the wintry night. And thus Julia and mathias too begin their now five-year joint winter journey. Julia remembers very well how lost she felt during the first steps with this opus magnum. *"mathias and I were beginners in dealing with the overwhelming material. Our different life stories played no role at all. We met artistically at a point where we were blank sheets, so to speak."* mathias on the other hand calls the project not without a gallows humour "his last and her first chance". All artistic decisions have been made since then by both of them while playing and rehearsing together.

gone too far – covered with hymnal praises from the media and prizes – is therefore rather an interim destination than a trial balloon. It is also her debut as a singer and his firstling as "playing arranger" – and it reinforced both of them in their will to tirelessly move on.

With *Winter Journey 3.0* an artistic joint project reaches its completion that could just as well carry the title *gone even further*.

Wilhelm Müller's poems stand at the beginning of the process of creating the songs. Julia has translated them into English in a language that she was able to sing them in. *"The translations are the foundation stone of my interpretation, yes, they are already part of my interpretation."* Each language is to a certain extent tied to its own rhythmic structure. The English language offers her the greatest expressive freedom, it feels most natural for her. The collaboration with mathias is not easy for her to describe, on the one hand because it is so intense, on the other hand because it has changed a lot over the years, during and probably because of the *Winterreise*. The songs demanded everything from her. All the time one reaches one's limits, which requires a lot of patience, perseverance and tolerance – towards yourself and the other. The *Winterreise* has made them become a community of destiny – almost as if they had made a pact. All arrangements are by mathias. He knows the characteristics of her voice into the last detail, anticipates all the phrasing and articulation peculiarities. *"Every phrase he gives me is tailor-made."* At the same time their aesthetic ideals are largely congruent.

As Julia talks, I worry about her alias. Lia Pale seems hard to grasp, withdrawn, lost in reverie. Her photos too constantly reveal new dazzling facets. She's – like Müller's lyrical self – a perfect projection screen. Robert Schumann's alter egos were called Florestan and Eusebius. Maybe Lia Pale is more than just a stage name? Is she Julia's alter ego, her lyric self, the *Winterreisende*?

"Crazy, but it's probably just as you said. Lia Pale is the winter traveler, because she has arisen through our winter journey. She was suddenly there and marched off." Lia could do everything that Julia could not. This led to internal conflicts to the limit of tearing oneself apart. She realized that Lia Pale is basically a cipher for that part of herself that sings, makes music, appears on stage. When she sang she became estranged from herself, was neither woman nor man – or was both – felt free, could be everything.

Is Lia Pale therefore not a specifically female winter traveler? *"Today maybe more than earlier,"* explains Julia, because the *Winterreise*, as melodramatic as it may sound, has changed herself and her life. Artistic processes of creation require the constant letting go of oneself before the results leak out. In her case that was so exhausting that at some point she was not sure if she would have enough strength for the completion of the journey. So Julia decided to do it just like Lia and she marched off – in the truest sense of the word. In the spring of 2016 she set out on a 34 day long winter pilgrimage, on her own. *"I wanted to experience everything that Lia sings, with my own body. Each of the songs has become to a great extent for me too – Julia – a reality in life. Today I AM Lia Pale, because it was Julia Pallanch who through her pilgrimage mustered the strength for the final stages and as such became one with her alter ego."*

While listening to the cycle – the 12 "old" songs from *gone too far* have partially been rearranged and newly recorded, but all have been re-sung – what attracts one's attention is that the voice of the protagonist has changed a lot. It seems to sit deeper, it leaves everything carefree and young girlish behind, in favor of an even richer, darker expressive palette. *A Darker Shade of Pale* springs to my

mind (referring to Procol Harum's *A Whiter Shade of Pale*). The arrangements seem to be more economical, tighter, the instrumental solos more ambiguous. In the first verse of *Gute Nacht* and in the last song, *Leiermann*, Lia Pale – unlike in *gone too far* – sings in German. She makes no secret of her Austrian idiom, it is the language of Schubert. Through this she achieves a cathartic effect: the barefooted lyre man in the snow is sung, so to speak, in a "barefoot" manner, in the mother-tongue.

I ask Julia one last question: "Imagine meeting Franz Schubert today in the streets of Vienna. How would you explain your music to him which – admirably – has remained so much his own in terms of melody, harmony and form? What kind of reaction would you expect from him?"

"Maybe I would not be able to say a word and would stand in front of him with a crimson head, maybe I would sing and dance for him, say thank you and apologize at the same time. And invite him then to a glass of wine." She knows from contemporary sources that he loved dancing and dance music and that he also played it himself and improvised upon it. She hopes therefore – and rightly so it seems to me – that he would enjoy the rhythmizations and harmonious defamiliarizations of his original. She would try to make it clear to him that it was their highest goal to keep the tragedy, the weight, the depth, the pain, the despair and resignation in the songs, yet to express them with the means of today's here and now, to the best of her and mathias rüegg's ability. Generally she hopes that he – like Gershwin – might enjoy the fact that his work has developed such a life of its own far beyond its own time and that every generation might discover it for itself, always new and different.

Oliver Schnyder

(Translation: Julian Schoenfeld)