**Musical mysteries: melodies lost and found**

GYÖRGY LIGETI: Concerto for violin and orchestra

ANONYMOUS: Byzantine Chant for Psalm 140 (arranged for violin and string orchestra by Patricia Kopatchinskaja)

FRANZ SCHUBERT: First movement (Allegro) from String Quartet no.14 in D minor, D. 810 – ‘Der Tod und das Mädchen’ (arranged for string orchestra by Patricia Kopatchinskaja)

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Der Tod und das Mädchen, D. 531 (arranged for string orchestra by Michy Wiancko)

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Second movement (Andante con moto) from String Quartet no.14 in D minor, D. 810, ‘Der Tod und das Mädchen’

JOHN DOWLAND: Pavane ‘Lachrimæ Antiquæ Novæ’ for string quintet from *Lachrimæ, or Seaven Teares*

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Third movement (Allegro molto) from String Quartet no.14 in D minor, D. 810, ‘Der Tod und das Mädchen’

GYÖRGY KURTÁG: Ligatura-Message to Frances-Maria (The answered unanswered question), Op. 31b

GYÖRGY KURTÁG: ‘Ruhelos’ from *Kafka-Fragmente*, Op. 24

FRANZ SCHUBERT: Fourth movement (Presto) from String Quartet no.14 in D minor, ‘Der Tod und das Mädchen’, D. 810

**Ligeti: Anxiety and Transformation of Influence**

Ligeti’s Violin Concerto stands as a truly indispensable work in its genre and a key musical work of the late twentieth century. Initially composed in 1989 and 1990, it underwent significant revision during which composer and work alike moved, so it seemed, towards a Platonic ideal, its sources lost, found, varied, and rediscovered.

During hospital convalescence, the composer engaged in intensive study of Haydn’s late quartets, which seems strongly to have influenced ensuing process of clarification. ‘From Haydn,’ he told his assistant, Louise Duchesneau, ‘you can learn how to achieve the clearest effect with the simplest means.’ When choosing ‘between a more ornate structure and a skeleton, Haydn always chooses the skeleton, never using one note more than he needs. I applied this principle of avoiding unnecessary complexity … and thought that it brought me closer to my ideal.’ Ligeti worried, however, that he had veered too close to Hungarian, especially Transylvanian, folk music, replacing the first movement entirely. He also revised and reordered the other two in an expansion to five movements that yet never reached his originally anticipated eight. The version the work’s dedicatee, Saschka Gawriloff, premiered in 1990 with Gary Bertini and the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra was always considered incomplete. Gawriloff and Ligeti employed material originally intended for movements never completed for the fifth-movement cadenza; Kopatchinskaja will play her own.

Ligeti’s interest in different systems of tuning is very much in microtonal play. With a few exceptions marked in the score, the soloist plays at concert pitch. Things are difficult enough for her already with virtuosic writing, according to the composer, born of models such as ‘Paganini, the Bach solo sonatas, Ysäye’s solo sonatas, Wieniawski, and Szymanowski’. However, the concertmaster – one of only five orchestral violins – and first viola – one of three – must play in scordatura, tuned to the seventh harmonic partial of the double bass’s first string and fifth of its third string respectively. Brass too offer natural harmonics, while use of ocarinas, slide whistles, and harmonica both subverts and expands our field of listening. ‘By combining these “out of tune” notes and harmonics with those of the normally tuned strings, Ligeti sought to ‘build a number of harmonic and non-harmonic spectra,’ such conflict between overtones resulting in a veritable voyage of harmonic exploration. The more Ligeti listened to non-Western music, the less he could allow himself to be constrained by equal temperament. ‘It almost hurts’, he said.

The opening is likewise elemental, alternating open A and D strings in lightning succession, furthering Ligeti’s desire for a ‘glassy shimmering character’. In this first movement, ‘Praeludium’, the solo line gradually distinguishes itself from an apparent multitude of other solos, emerging as a well-nigh traditional, first-among-equals virtuoso. Its magic can be tender too, though, as in the violin’s duetting with an array of tuned percussion.

Polymeters run riot, as they will too in the finale, much of whose folk material and allusion Márton Keréfky has discovered to have been reused, ‘albeit embedded in a totally new context’, from the discarded original first movement. The impression of ideas, remembered or misremembered, from earlier movements piling upon one another affords reinvented climax, never quite as we have known it. Listening to Thai, Khmer, and Laotian music afforded inspiration and example for Ligeti’s consciously seeking ‘for a new kind of way of building a melody’. So too did continuing influence from his Transylvanian heritage.

The second movement, ‘Aria, Hoquetus, Choral’ opens with a low solo, G-string adaptation of a melody from Ligeti’s *Six Bagatelles* for Wind Quintet, and thus ultimately from his still earlier *Musica ricercata* for piano, the former being a transcription of six movements of the latter. The movement seems to aspire to rootedness, be it folk- or chant-like – are the two ultimately so different? – yet to find its way thwarted, ‘continually splintering’, in Seth Brodsky’s evocative phrase, ‘into weird ironic homelessness’. Such weird irony and modal aspiration are only heightened by a quartet of woodwind pied pipers taking up their ocarinas for the chorale. High, fantastical writing in the central Intermezzo has any number of parallels in other violin concertos, yet can never be assimilated to their party. The Passacaglia makes play once more with time-honoured form, riveting in its never-quite-expected progress. Here beats the heart of the work and of Ligeti’s generative anxiety of influence.

**Byzantine Chant: To the source?**

A chant-like, even ‘mediæval’ quality has been remarked on in Ligeti’s second movement. We now move closer to the elusive (illusory?) source, nonetheless mediated. Travel through musical history and you will find any number of instrumental works or movements based on song melodies. Such tended to be the practice in the writing of Byzantine chant. A text, in this case that of Psalm 140, ‘Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man’, would be set to a traditional melody and subsequently shaped – or not – to requirements of the verse. This tradition’s characteristic ‘four-element syllable-count cadence’ – four final syllables of a line, regardless of word accent, tied to four fixed, stylised cadential elements – has suggested to scholars an earlier psalmody than its Gregorian counterpart. To indulge in wild anachronism, is this also an early anticipation of modern clashes between words and music, given a further twist by arrangement for instruments alone?

**Touched by Death**

Schubert set Matthias Claudius’s *Der Tod und das Mädchen* in February 1817, two years after Claudius’s death. Here death approaches in instrumental sombre D minor. The Maiden vocally resists, bidding him not to touch her. He has his way, though, also vocally; he is not fierce and will have her sleep in his arms. The song closes with a foreshortened reprise of the introduction, albeit in an equally sombre yet peaceable D major. The manuscript might not have survived, having been cut into pieces by Schubert’s half-brother Anton, the Benedictine Father Hermann, yet was eventually reassembled. (It had in any case been published.) Ludwig Wittgenstein would muse on its fate more than a century later:

Recall that after Schubert’s death his brother cut some of Schubert’s scores into small pieces and gave such pieces, consisting of a few bars, to his favourite pupils. This act, as a sign of piety, is *just as* understandable to us as the different one of keeping the scores untouched, accessible to no one. And if Schubert’s brother had burned the scores, that too would be understandable as a sign of piety.

Showing the dead respect takes many forms.

**Touched by Life**

If the song is one of Schubert’s most celebrated, so too is the March 1824 string quartet taking its nickname and the theme of its second movement from it, touched by life rather than death. It stands as tall in its genre as Ligeti’s concerto in its. Resist undue romanticisation as we might, it is difficult not to think at least in partial relation to Schubert’s own coming appointment with the grim reaper. This was, however, the very time his friend Franz von Schober reported Schubert believed new medication had cured him. Either way, an artwork should not be reduced to biography, however tragic.

Tragedy is nevertheless present, vehemently so in the first movement, its second thematic group sweetly lyrical yet undoubtedly in the shadow of a furious D minor daemon not so very different from that which had captivated Mozart. The number of *fortissimo* and still more *sforzando* markings might visually suggest a score by Beethoven, although the triplet writing could not be more characteristic of Schubert: both in itself and for the particular variety of propulsion it offers. Such prospects of peace as there are, for instance a shift to D major during the recapitulation, find themselves swiftly, even brutally undercut. The uncertainty of where the coda will lead till it breathes its last offers an apt summation of tensions and overall tragedy in the movement as a whole.

We move to G minor for the *Andante con moto* theme and variations, five of them. Neither the first violin’s flights of fancy in the first variation nor the cello’s rapt lyricism in the second can forestall the pent-up fury unleashed in the third. If the penultimate variation, as might be expected, shifts to the tonic major and the final variation concludes likewise, this is as resigned, even exhausted a close as that to the original song. Only in the third movement trio, that Schubert can present a (relatively) sustained vision of major mode utopia. Sandwiched as it is, however, between the rhythmic insistence and almost bewildering syncopations of the scherzo itself, we know that it is too late. Is it fanciful to consider the rondo finale a *Totentanz*, a dance of death? Hardly, for this Romantic tarantella leaves us in no doubt as to the work’s ultimate destination, fury once more and now decisively winning out over resignation. Having the coda open in D major only prepares the way for the final nail in the coffin. Neither hope nor forgiveness is to be had; nor is it sought.

**Old Tears New**

John Dowland’s 1604 *Lachrimae or seaven teares figured in seaven passionate pavans* takes as its theme and first pavan Dowland’s existing song and lute solo, *Lachrimae antiquae* (‘Old Tears’). We hear here its immediate successor variation, ‘Lachrimae antiquae novae’ (‘Old Tears New’), its melodic melancholy and harmonic intensity both related to and a development – to borrow from the Viennese Classical future – of its thematic model. What Thomas Morley in his influential 1597 *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* had held necessary for expression of ‘a lamentable passion’ may be heard immediately: ‘motions proceeding by halfe notes. Flat thirds, and flat sixths, which of their nature are sweet’; semitones or ‘accidentall motions’ that will ‘fitly express the passions of griefe, weeping, sighes, sorrowes, sobs, and suchlike’. And yet, Dowland noted in his dedication to Anne of Denmark that tears differ in cause and effect. ‘No doubt pleasant are the teares which Musicke weeps, neither are teares shed always in sorrow but sometime in joy and gladnesse.’ Music mirrors yet relieves man’s fallen condition.

**Kurtág’s re-enchantment**

Two short pieces by György Kurtág ask further questions ‘answered’ and ‘unanswered’, perhaps even unanswerable in the case of *Ligatura-Message to Frances-Maria*, written in 1989, the year Ligeti began his Violin Concerto; and, in the excerpt from his *Kafka-Fragmente*, to continue the restless (‘Ruhelos’) Schubertian wandering that is our fallen lot. Solo strings and celesta in the former suggest re-enchantment of the traditional quartet, in a slow processional offering neither comfort nor discomfort but something beyond, magically or materially, even a foundational melody yet to be found. The latter piece’s whispered confidences and sudden eruption from intimate theatre into something finely balanced between cruelty and the absurd likewise seem beyond our ken, stretch our ears as we may. Like Ligeti’s Haydn. Kurtág never uses ‘one note more than he needs’. Musical mysteries endure.