

Zugvögel

(Migratory Birds)

Symphonic drama in four scenes about Jean Sibelius

by Mathias Husmann

For thirty years the musical world expected Jean Sibelius to write his eighth symphony, but since turning sixty two, the finish composer remained silent. For thirty years the ageing artist waited for the migratory birds to return, to symbolize the return of inspiration.

Mathias Husmann: “My opera narrates an individual’s nightmare of thirty years about fear, ageing, depression and alcohol in context of the historical nightmare of fascism, World War, holocaust and atomic bomb.”

Mathias Husmann, composer and conductor, was born in Hamburg in 1948 where he started his career as a conductor at the Staatsoper Hamburg in 1972 followed by engagements at the opera houses in Darmstadt, Mannheim, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Köln and Berlin. He was appointed chief conductor in Ulm, Magdeburg and at the Theater Vorpommern.

International tours led him to England, Scotland, Italy and regularly to Japan (NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo). His compositions include his “First Symphony” (Magdeburg 1997), the chamber opera “Vivaldi” (Ulm 2002) and the present opera “Zugvögel” (Stralsund 2009) as well as chamber music.

Synopsis:

Setting: „Ainola“, the house of the Sibelius family, 1927 – 57

First scene: 10.5.1927

Aino’s name day, a family celebration. Swans are landing on the local lake Tuusula nearby. Inspired by this “signal of the nature” as well as by a hot-tempered discussion with his brothers-in-law, Sibelius starts composing his eighth symphony that same night. Disturbed by an inexplicable, horrible vision he ceases composing.

Second scene: 24.6.1933

Janne’s name day. Aino picks roses in her garden. Her brother Eero visits, they speak about Janne’s silence, which lasts already six years. Janne approaches, he has dreamt of music. Eero reports depressing news from Germany. His casual farewell “Mach’s gut, Janne” leads to a

big monologue by Janne, during which the latter collapses. Aino asks Janne to play the music he dreamt of for her. She manages to calm him. Midsummer nights' magic.

Third scene: 30.11.1939

A storm is roaring. The Second World War has began. Before Aino leaves to visit her sister-in-law, she welcomes Santeri Levas, Sibelius' secretary since 1938. Levas plans a book ("visiting Sibelius"). He sorts the mail, interrupted by Janne, who, irritated by pushy questions and offensive remarks in the correspondence, fetches whiskey and glasses. While he makes Levas drunk, Sibelius tells him fantastic details about the symphony. Levas, who takes notes, soon cannot follow anymore. Sibelius dances the third movement on the table while conducting. Suddenly Levas notices the light of fire through the dark window: "Helsinki is burning / the first air raids" he shouts and, completely drunk, he staggers towards his car. Sibelius, standing at the window, murmurs: "Helsinki is burning – the final has began."

Interlude: 1939 – 1945

Fourth scene: 8.12.1945

Evening of Sibelius' eightieth birthday. The guests have left. Aino and her daughters tidy up the kitchen. Janne starts a monologue: "...once again being able to create / one time looking past the line / once / just one time understanding..." when unexpected guests appear through the wall: The dead of the Second World War, who want to make music for and with him. They demand his eighth symphony. When he refuses, they compose the gruesome opus of the World War using his head and his arm. At the same time they show him mercilessly what he only heard of by radio and reports. At the climax Janne has the vision of two "migratory birds" flying to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He understands. He dedicates the finished symphony to the victims of fascism and war by condemning it the same fate: be burns the score.

Epilogue, end: 20.9.1957

Janne and Aino are sitting motionlessly on the porch of Ainola. The migratory birds (choir) return. Janne addresses them. He dies.

Duration: 2.45 h