

*Johannes Brahms: “Neue Liebeslieder Walzer” – Introduction & Translations
Rehearsal Information for Napa Valley Chorale 2006*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Neue Liebesliederwalzer, Op. 65

Excerpt from “Program Notes” by Ahmed Ismail, MIT Chamber Chorus, April 12, 2003; see:
<http://web.mit.edu/21m.405/www/History/Spring2003.shtml#ProgramNotes>

Brahms wrote the *Neue Liebesliederwalzer* (“New Love-song Waltzes”) between 1869 and 1874. The texts are from an eclectic collection of love-poems from many lands, including Turkey, Poland, Latvia, and Sicily, translated into German by Georg Friedrich Daumer. The text of the last song “*Zum Schluß*” (“In conclusion”) is by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Like the *Liebeslieder* songs of 1868, the *Neue Liebeslieder* are written for a vocal quartet and four-hand piano duo. Unlike the earlier piece, however, the ensemble numbers are separated by two groups of songs for the individual members of the quartet. And while the work is intended for six performers, it loses little when performed by soloists and chorus, so long as it is performed in the spirit of chamber music.

Unlike the ensemble numbers, the solo songs depict a dizzying array of characters – bass as enraptured paramour, alto as jilted lover, tenor as Lothario, and soprano as a woman repeatedly unlucky in love. In addition, the piano accompaniment of the *Neue Liebeslieder* are just as important as the vocal lines to the overall fabric of the piece. The two pianists, playing a single piano with four hands must work as if they were a single pianist, even when the two parts seem to be in direct opposition to one another. Fortunately, throughout most of the work, each of the pianists play one “hand”; only in No. 13, a tender duet for soprano and alto voices, do the two pianists have to “cross over.”

The seven quartets are naturally the main attraction of the work. Rather than being constrained by the limited resources, we find an amazing

example of the economy of small means. The score brims with brilliant choral effects: the craggy shores of the first song, depicted by harsh cries of “*zertrümmert*” (wrecked); octave leaps on “*Well auf Well*” representing “wave upon wave” in No. 7; the half-sung, half-whispered sighs “*Weiche Gräser im Revier*” of No. 8, over which the sopranos and tenors have a soaring line; and the hushed references to the gloomy shade of the dark forest in No. 12, to name but a few.

Brahms ends the cycle “*Zum Schluß*” (“In conclusion”), turning his attentions away from the lovers and addressing himself to the Muses which have inspired countless artists, musicians, and poets. The changes run much deeper, though, than just the “audience”: the meter broadens from the standard 3/4 to a more expansive 9/8, and the vocal writing becomes truly contrapuntal for the only time in the cycle, climaxing in an *a cappella* transition from C major to F major. Perhaps the most significant change is the poet: for this last song, Brahms turns to the words of Goethe. Of Brahms's hundreds of vocal works, only a handful set texts by the doyen of German poetry – indeed, Brahms was always reluctant to set the great poet's works, feeling there was usually nothing he could add! However, those rare cases where he felt differently produced some of his greatest work, notably the *Alto Rhapsody*. Here, just as in the *Rhapsody*, words and music unite to offer us the hope of consolation and peace which the despairing lovers Daumer depicts will never achieve.

For pronunciation listen to <http://www.musicanet.org/son/pronde/op65.htm>

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<p>1. Verzicht, o Herz, auf Rettung, dich wagend in der Liebe Meer! Denn tausend Nachen schwimmen zertrümmert am Gestad umher!</p>	<p>1. Relinquish, o heart, the hope of rescue as you venture out into the sea of love! For a thousand boats float wrecked about its shores!</p>
<p>2. Finstere Schatten der Nacht, Wogen- und Wirbelgefahr! Sind wohl, die da gelind rasten auf sicherem Lande, euch zu begreifen im Stande? Das ist der nur allein, welcher auf wilder See stürmischer Öde treibt, Meilen entfernt vom Strande.</p>	<p>2. Dark shades of night, dangers of waves and whirlpools! Are those who rest there so mildly on firm ground capable of comprehending you? No: only one who is tossed about on the wild sea's stormy desolation, miles from the shore.</p>
<p>3. An jeder Hand die Finger hatt' ich bedeckt mit Ringen, die mir geschenkt mein Bruder in seinem Liebessinn. Und einen nach dem andern gab ich dem schönen, aber unwürdigen Jüngling hin.</p>	<p>3. On each hand were my fingers bedecked with rings that my brother had bestowed on me with love. And one after another did I give to that handsome but unworthy lad.</p>
<p>4. Ihr schwarzen Augen, ihr dürft nur winken; Paläste fallen und Städte sinken. Wie sollte steh'n in solchem Strauß mein Herz, von Karten das schwache Haus?</p>	<p>4. You black eyes, you need only beckon, and palaces fall and cities sink. How should then my heart withstand such strife, inside its weak house of cards?</p>
<p>5. Wahre, wahre deinen Sohn, Nachbarin, vor Wehe, weil ich ihn mit schwarzem Aug' zu bezaubern gehe.</p> <p>O wie brennt das Auge mir, das zu Zünden fordert! Flammet ihm die Seele nicht -- deine Hütte lodert.</p>	<p>5. Protect, protect your son, my neighbor, from woe; for I go with my black eyes to enchant him.</p> <p>O how my eyes burn to inflame his passion! If his soul will not ignite, your hut will catch fire.</p>
<p>6. Rosen steckt mir an die Mutter, weil ich gar so trübe bin. Sie hat recht, die Rose sinket, so wie ich, entblättert hin.</p>	<p>6. Mother gave me roses because I am so troubled. She is right: roses droop just as I do, wilting away.</p>

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<p>7. Vom Gebirge Well auf Well kommen Regengüsse, und ich gäbe dir so gern hunderttausend Küsse.</p>	<p>7. From the mountains, wave upon wave, come gushing rain; and I would gladly give you a hundred thousand kisses.</p>
<p>8. Weiche Gräser im Revier, schöne, stille Plätzchen! O, wie linde ruht es hier sich mit einem Schätzchen!</p>	<p>8. Soft grass in my favorite haunts, fair, quiet spots! O how pleasant it is to linger here with one's darling!</p>
<p>9. Nagen am Herzen fühl ich ein Gift mir. Kann sich ein Mädchen, ohne zu fröhnen zärtlichem Hang, fassen ein ganzes wonneberaubtes Leben entlang?</p>	<p>9. I feel a poison gnawing at my heart. Is it possible for a maiden not to give in to her tender inclinations and live her entire life robbed of bliss?</p>
<p>10. Ich kose süß mit der und der und werde still und kranke, denn ewig, ewig kehrt zu dir, o Nonna, mein Gedanke!</p>	<p>10. I sweetly fondle this girl and that, and grow quiet and sick at heart, for always, always, toward you my thoughts turn, o Nonna!</p>
<p>11. Alles, alles in den Wind sagst du mir, du Schmeichler! Alle samt verloren sind deine Müh'n, du Heuchler!</p> <p>Einem andern Fang' zu lieb stelle deine Falle! Denn du bist ein loser Dieb, denn du bist um alle!</p>	<p>11. All, all is lost to the wind of what you say to me, you flatterer! Altogether, all your efforts are lost, you pretender!</p> <p>Be so good as to set your trap for another! For you are a loose thief, for you have been with them all!</p>
<p>12. Schwarzer Wald, dein Schatten ist so düster! Armes Herz, dein Leiden ist so drückend! Was dir einzig wert, es steht vor Augen; ewig untersagt ist Huldvereinung.</p>	<p>12. Dark forest, your shade is so gloomy! Poor heart, your sorrow presses so heavily! The only thing valuable to you is standing before your eyes; eternally forbidden is that union with love.</p>

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<p>13. Nein, Geliebter, setze dich mir so nahe nicht! Starre nicht so brünstiglich mir ins Angesicht!</p> <p>Wie es auch im Busen brennt, dämpfe deinen Trieb, daß es nicht die Welt erkennt, wie wir uns so lieb.</p>	<p>13. No, my love, don't sit so near me! Do not stare so ardently at my face!</p> <p>However much your heart may burn, suppress your urges, so that the world will not see how much we love each other.</p>
<p>14. Flammenauge, dunkles Haar, Knabe wonnig und verwogen, Kummer ist durch dich hinein in mein armes Herz gezogen!</p> <p>Kann in Eis der Sonne Brand, sich in Nacht der Tag verkehren? Kann die heisse Menschenbrust atmen ohne Glutbegehren?</p> <p>Ist die Flur so voller Licht, daß die Blum' im Dunkel stehe? Ist die Welt so voller Lust, daß das Herz in Qual vergehe?</p>	<p>14. Flaming eyes, dark hair, sweet and audacious boy, because of you my poor heart toils with sorrow!</p> <p>Can the sun's fire make ice, or turn day into night? Can the ardent breast of a man breathe without glowing desire?</p> <p>Is the field so full of light that the flowers stand in darkness? Is the world so full of joy that the heart is abandoned to torment?</p>
<p>15. Nun, ihr Musen, genug! Vergebens strebt ihr zu schildern, wie sich Jammer und Glück wechseln in liebender Brust. Heilen könnet die Wunden ihr nicht, die Amor geschlagen, aber Linderung kommt einzig, ihr Guten, von euch.</p>	<p>15. Now, you Muses, enough! In vain you strive to describe how misery and happiness alternate in a loving breast. You cannot heal the wounds that Amor has caused, but solace can come only from you, Kindly Ones.</p>

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