

ZaterdagMatinee Saturday 24 April 2021 - 14u15
Het Koninklijk Concertgebouw, Amsterdam - Grand Hall

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko, conductor
Markus Eiche, baritone
Andrew Staples, tenor
Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano
Petra Botma-Zijlstra, horn

Alfred Momotenko-Levitsky (1970) - Earth's prayers (world premiere)

Alphons Diepenbrock (1862-1921) - Im grossen Schweigen

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) - Serenade voor tenor, hoorn en strijkers
Prologue
Pastoral
Nocturne
Elegy
Dirge
Hymn
Sonnet
Epilogue

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) - Lieder des fahrenden Gesellen
Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht
Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld
Ich hab' ein glühend Messer
Zwei blauen Augen

Solace and transformation

Reflections of the human mind on the relationship to nature, mortality, valediction and loss are of all times. Yet there are times when reflections can suddenly take on a different meaning. It happened to the composer Alfred Momotenko-Levitsky. He began *Earth's Prayer*, his companion piece to Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* that is having its world premiere today, as a 'cry for help from the earth' in relation to the environmental crisis, but it ultimately became a personal reflection on the current global crisis in which farewell, distance, the value of art and culture, and connection being central. In the wake of this, Diepenbrock's *Im grossen Schweigen*, Britten's *Serenade* and Mahler's *Lieder des fahrenden Gesellen* also take on new meaning.

Alfred Momotenko-Levitsky - Earth's Prayers

In 2017, the Russian-Dutch composer Alfred Momotenko-Levitsky wrote an impressive companion piece for mixed-choir to Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, commissioned by NTR ZaterdagMatinee with title *Na Strastnoy*. For this season, the composer was invited to write a commentary on Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. That started as a reflection on the state of the earth and the escalating

environmental crisis, but it became more and more a personal reflection on the present time, crisis and the state of the world. "I wondered what I can add this time with Mahler's subject matter in mind," says the composer. "I don't intend to surpass Mahler, but I can deepen his work with my companion piece and make it relevant to this time."

Although *Das Lied von der Erde* is no longer scheduled for today due to corona-restrictions, that is exactly what Momotenko-Levitsky did in *Earth's Prayers*. And that is also perceptible without the actual sound of *Das Lied von der Erde*. "*Earth's Prayers* must have own significance even without *Das Lied von der Erde*," said the composer. "As Stravinsky said, that good ballet music should be able to stand on its own."

Despite this, Momotenko-Levinsky's starting point was a thorough study of *Das Lied von der Erde*. "When you have a Mount Everest-like work on the table, you start with an analysis. So I noticed more and more details that helped me to understand the work at a deep level. "

For Momotenko-Levitsky, *Das Lied von der Erde* is about farewell, a theme that also affects the music-notes in many ways. That is why the composer used some elements from *Das Lied von der Erde* as a personal starting point. For example, the melody of the chorus "*Dunkel ist das leben, ist der Tod*" from *Das Trinklied von Jammer der Erde* becomes a Leitmotif from the beginning that is often repeated at the beginning as "a rain of tears", according to the composer.

Yet it not stays as valley of tears, nor as a sorrow-work. Because of the influence of this time and some personal tragic occurrences Momotenko-Levinsky also discovered some degree of consolation in *Das Lied von der Erde*. And that increasingly became the main theme of his own *Earth's Prayers*. For example, a seemingly inconspicuous harp and marimba motif, derived from *Der Einsame im Herbst*, increasingly functions as a nurturing, a consolation embrace that gives the work an unprecedented tenderness. "*Earth's Prayers* is for anyone in need of solace, especially in these days. For the government, art and the artists may be at the bottom of the ladder, but art is of great importance for the general well-being of people and the solidarity of society. I hope to emphasize that with this work."

In this sense, *Earth's Prayers* is "poetry for the soul." And the prayer from the title? "It is not tied to any religion, but whether it is a prayer of the Earth or of the earthly person, I like to leave it to the personal interpretation of the listener."

The original program folder (in Dutch) as a straight link:

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