

A Kalmus Classic Edition

Ludwig van

BEETHOVEN

AN DIE FERNE GELIEBTE

(To the Distant Beloved)

Opus 98

FOR HIGH VOICE

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BEETHOVEN'S "AN DIE FERNE GELIEBTE"

Beethoven the symphonist, Beethoven the composer of the Mass in D, the string quartets, the pianoforte sonatas and the Choral Symphony, Beethoven the supreme epic poet among all poets that ever lived who spoke in tones instead of words—this Beethoven has so filled the critical as well as the popular eye for nearly a century that his full significance in other fields has been overlooked. Historians of the lyric drama have forgotten to chronicle the fact that the climax of "Fidelio" has yet to find its peer in the operatic realm, and writers on the development of the German *Lied* have patronized him in a manner irreconcilable with respect for his genius or the story of musical evolution. The art-song had not developed a cult in Beethoven's day was not a fruitful source of revenue, as the pitiful history of Schubert, song writer *par excellence*, shows; and Beethoven was but little more able to ignore the commercial side of his profession than his spiritual son. Vulgar balladists make fortunes with a single song nowadays, but Schubert was obliged to sell his *Lieder* by the score for a few shillings. Nevertheless, Beethoven gave attention to the song form at the beginning and the climax of his career, and there is no saying but that had the way been open to him in the marvellous sunset of his life (during which he withdrew himself more and more from the larger vehicles of communication with the public and devoted himself more and more to the "intimate" agencies, the pianoforte and the string quartet), he would have opened new paths in this field as he did in others. He was scarcely eleven years old when his song "Schilderung eines Madchens" was published, and he gave setting to "Ich war bei Chloe ganz allein" within five years of his death, at a time when the completion of his Choral Symphony was occupying his attention. Some of the songs which have been cited for the purpose of depreciating his standing as a song composer were youthful productions, touching which it is suspected that they were given to the public surreptitiously. Certain it is that many songs which he had worked upon and some that he had finished were never given to the world for reasons which it is easy to surmise when recalling that wonderful gift of self-criticism which no artist that ever lived had in Beethoven's measure.

If one takes the period and its conditions into consideration, the percentage of beautiful and vital songs in the Beethoven product will alone serve to place him upon a lofty pedestal. Of his three-score and ten works in this department at least a fifth live to-day in the affection of songlovers. They are not found upon the programmes of public singers as often as the best songs of Schubert, Schumann or Brahms, but, like some of the finest inspirations of these men, they are kept "for the enjoyment of God at home," which was the mission that Goudimel set for his harmonizations of the old psalm tunes. The six songs of the cycle "An die ferne Geliebte" have never been entirely in nor wholly out of vogue so far as the patrons of the world's concert-rooms are concerned, yet I shall never be able to quarrel with a singer who shall say that their sanctity is such that he would not wear them on his sleeve "for daws to peck at." Their sentiment is at once so simple, yet profound, their emotional content so personal and precious, that I should quicker respect the taste and sensibility of an artist who kept them for "the enjoyment of God at home" than admire the skill of one who used them to exploit himself in the concert-room. Aside from their beauty, moreover, they have a historic significance which ought here to be set forth. "An die ferne Geliebte" is not only the first song-cycle, it is still the most perfect of all song-cycles, in respect of unity. There is both a spiritual and a material bond which knits the six poems into a whole, as the various parts of a Beethoven symphony are moulded into oneness. There is no such unity in the song-cycles of Schubert, who was Beethoven's first follower; and Schumann, who saw and recognized, could only pay the admiring tribute of imitation in his "Frauenliebe und -leben."

"An die ferne Geliebte" was composed in 1816, "im Monath April," as the autograph manuscript testifies. Alois Jeitteles, the author of the words, was a young man of twenty-one, who was studying medicine in Vienna at the time. He was a musical amateur, and it has been thought that he handed the poem to Beethoven in person. Sketches for the songs appear in a sketch-book owned by Eugen von Miller, of Vienna, and described by Nottebohm in his "Zweite Beethoveniana." They disclose Beethoven's habitual care in the study of declamation and descriptive effect. Thus, the first line of the first song is repeated several times in its original form before the characteristic fall,



so suggestive of the poet's longing glance in the direction of his love, is found. So, too, the detached tones of the melody to No. 3, designed to give the effect of lightness and airiness to the description of the floating clouds, is an afterthought. The tenderness and warmth of feeling which pervade the songs from beginning to end led Thayer to suspect that there was a bit of autobiography in the composition—that Beethoven's soul was still filled with the sentiment inspired by Amalie von Sebald five years before. As corroborative proof, Thayer quotes the following passage from a letter written to Ferdinand Ries in 1816: "My kind regards to your wife. I, alas! have no wife. I have met only one and her I shall probably never get." Be this as it may, it is certain that an amiable feeling found expression in the dedication of the work. It is inscribed to Prince Josef Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz, who had been one of Beethoven's most intimate friends and generous patrons, as is evidenced by the dedications of such works as the six string quartets Op. 18 and the "Eroica," C minor and "Pastoral" symphonies. Lobkowitz was one of the group of noble patrons who subscribed to an annuity fund, planned to enable the composer to work without dread of want. His subscription was 700 florins, but this was scaled down more than one-half by his trustees when the Prince found himself in financial distress some years afterward. Beethoven's anger got the better of him, and he treated his benefactor most shabbily until the Prince of his own volition had the original sum restored and the arrearages paid. This was in 1815, and Beethoven showed his gratitude in the dedication of the song-cycle.

New York, October 13, 1901.

H. E. KREHBIEL

To Furst Joseph von Lobkowitz

An die ferne Geliebte

The Poems by
A. Jeitteles

To the Distant Beloved

Original key
Composed in April, 1816

No 1. Ziemlich langsam und mit Ausdruck.
Lento ed espressivo.

Auf dem Hü - gel sitz' ich, spä - hend in das blau - e Ne - bel -
From the moun - tain wing my gaz - es Toward a far - off, a - zure

land, nach den fer - nen Trif - ten sehend, wo ich dich, Ge - lieb - te, fand.
bound, Seek - ing thro' o'er - spreading hazes Where I thee, be - lov - ed, found. *ausdrucksvoll*

Weit bin ich von dir ge - schie - den, trennend lie - gen Berg und Thal zwi -
Far from thee my way is turn - ing, Hill and val - ley lie be - tween, Part - ing

uns und un - serm Frie - den, un - serm Glück - und uns - rer Qual.
us and our fond yearning, All our joy - and all our pain.

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