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Berlin Dom - Guest engagement/Opera

A JOURNEY RICH IN SOUND INTO THE WORLDWIDE WISH-WEB

German-Spanish loneliness: Anna Thalbach breathes lustful fantasy in Ricardo Llorca's monodrama "Las Horas vacias" in the Berlin Cathedral

It is Friday in the apartment of the solitary lady. And just as every Friday evening she has a date to chat on her computer. She is looking forward to it, because this contact is her reward for a grueling work week. The starting point of Ricardo Llorca's new opera is a virtual one. No one will meet up, children won't be sacrificed and no temple will be destroyed. Yet the German concert premiere presented by the Julius-Stern Institute on this past Friday evening divulged suspenseful and touching truths.

Under the baton of Matias Oliviera Pinto the 40-member choir Agrupacion Coral Benidorm and the Julius-Stern chamber orchestra become ambassadors of the inner life of this fantasy-filled lady, whose stage persona is divided into singing and speaking role. The latter is brought to life by Anna Thalbach and her multilayered interpretation is certainly partly guided by a libretto, which goes back and forth between dreamscape and day to day reality.

She hates her surroundings and thinks of her childhood days and tells her 'chatromeo' anything that comes to her mind in sometimes imploring and often flirtatious manner. After awhile one has to question the existence of her counterpart and therefore the desperation and loneliness of the protagonist reaches tragic dimension.

This chamber opera for choir, chamber orchestra, piano, soprano and speaking role combines traditional composition techniques - musical references to folk dance elements and baroque opera - with bi-tonal harmonies and polyrhythmic passages. The lady's mood is reflected in each sequence of the composition. That way one is able to make out a variation of Juan del Encina's poem "Pues que Jamas Olvidaros" ("Since my heart can never forget you") from the 16th century, which develops into a leitmotif of the work.

The aria El Amor Callado ("Silent Love") encompasses a quasi gregorian chant to implore the love and attention of the phantom lover. Not always is the only nineteen-year-old soprano Laila Salome Fisher up to the difficult task, but one is encouraged to hope that her clear voice will soon gain the necessary strength to carry this tour de force. Vocalise is a contrapuntal collage of spoken and sung lyrics in addition to four string instruments, which all play different melodies.

Rich and manifold are the means that Llorca employs. To use as many different styles within one work could be seen as a weakness, but he shows such extraordinary instinct in the choice of his references and engages them to his advantage and actually propels the action of his libretto. In addition, the listener is enabled to follow the complex compositional structures through the seemingly familiar historic sources.

At the end of the opera, the lady is still by herself to the sounds of probably the most popular dance of the Spanish renaissance, the chaconne. A 2/4 measure follows the 6/8, but no one is around to dance with her. "Until next Friday," Thalbach's voice whispers in the final scene across the auditorium. An enthusiastic international audience, which fills the benches in the Berlin Cathedral, thinks as I do: If only we could take her word for it and listen to this opera every week.