

Musical Treasure Chest #45

I had a difficult time for this Treasure Chest determining what I wanted to write about. I am still euphoric about our CD release party at Caffè Lena last Friday—allow me to brag a bit: We had over 200 views live from all over the United States and even Canada on Youtube, wonderful commentary in the chat and many CD orders. (The video is available on this link, as is the tip jar, hint, hint:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-q_JzcEasNo&list=PL-mgsQ0HWcE1Wtd1AKUSo3l8UWYsoeVII&index=9).

And, of course, you can order CDs from our [website](#). They will also be in the gift shop at Hyde Hall when it reopens to the public in the spring. Making the CD was a very special and restorative time for Musicians of Ma'alwyck. Given the bleakness caused by COVID and the great sadness of Petia's passing, having a week together to focus just on creating music in such a resplendent setting was a tremendous gift. And, I think all three of us (Norm, Sten and I) look back on those summer days as a precious treasure. The release party made me ponder the year and realize that the date coincided almost directly with our Viennese Ball (held on February 29, 2020). No one could have predicted that the door was about to shut and lock completely on life in so many ways; instead we enjoyed a celebratory evening of great success, unaware that we were poised on the edge of a precipice.

What musical piece could possibly accompany this reflective I take? The piece that immediately popped into my mind is the magical and moving ***Metamorphosen of Richard Strauss***. The great German composer of huge orchestral tone poems (*Death and Transfiguration*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, etc), also wrote smaller-scale works, and this piece is scored for 23 solo string players. It was written at the very end of World War II, as Germany was barraged by Allied bombs. Important, iconic musical sites were destroyed, the Vienna Opera House on 13 March 1945 among other venues, and Strauss was profoundly affected by this. Strauss wrote in his diary a few days after finishing *Metamorphosen*, "The most terrible period of human history is at an end, the twelve-year reign of bestiality, ignorance and anti-culture under the greatest criminals, during which Germany's 2,000 years of cultural evolution met its doom. "

The piece includes musical quotations of the funeral march from the second movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, as well as references to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony and Bach's G Minor solo violin sonata. The score also has the words "IN MEMORIAM!" written near the end of the piece, where the Beethoven *Eroica* funeral march theme is restated. Much speculation has been devoted as to the significance of these words. Perhaps they refer to the annihilation of German culture during the war, or perhaps like Beethoven, who dedicated *Eroica* "to the memory of a great man," referring to Napoleon and Beethoven's complete disillusionment with him, Strauss is indicating his disgust with Hitler. Strauss's intent has never been confirmed.

The single movement work unfolds in one inexorable musical trajectory: beautiful, tragic, dark, and ultimately, deeply moving and unforgettable. Here is a performance with the Staatskapelle Dresden led by Herbert Blomstedt. For those of you who read music, you can follow along in the orchestral score.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdtblzUqkic>