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Viktor ULLMANN



Císař z Atlantidy aneb Odepření smrti / The Emperor of Atlantis, or the Denial of Death / Viktor ULLMANN (1898 - 1944)

The third completed opera by Viktor Ullmann (born on January 1, 1898 in Český Těšín, killed on October 18, 1944 in Auschwitz [Oswiecim]), was written in an environment and under conditions where the link "man - art" acquired absurd dimensions. On September 8, 1942, Viktor Ullmann was deported to the concentration camp Terezín. Here, in the course of the next two years, on the borderline of life and death, he participated, as a composer, organizer, publicist and performer in the making of a singular cultural phenomenon. The paradox situation of the "free town", donated by the Führer to the Jews, to "protect" them from the hostilities of the fighting society, was a perverse mask, behind which the project of the so-called "final solution" was hidden, involving a complete extermination of one nation.

Ullmann's The Emperor of Atlantis, op. 49 from 1943 had not been performed in Terezín, after all. The work had long awaited its performance. In 1975 it was first produced in the arrangement and instrumentation of the conductor Kerry Woodward, considerably remote from the authorial version. It was only since 1989 that the efforts to return to the original version started. Two finales have been preserved, differing in the interpretation of ideas, two versions of the so called *Abschiedsarie* of the Emperor [26,30] before the final anthem. The date of the manuscript of the opera (nowadays kept in the archives of the seat of Anthroposophic Society in Dornach near Basel in Switzerland) records the completion of the opera on November 18, 1943, the Emperor's air is dated January 13, 1944, and was therefore added later.

Synopsis of the opera

The Emperor of Atlantis wants to rule over the whole world. His contact with the world, in which he started a universal war, is realized only through reports mediated by loudspeakers. Death cannot stand the general slaughter and refuses to serve the Emperor. The report sent to the Emperor sounds like this, "A strange disease has broken out: people cannot die!" The Emperor realizes that without Death's support he will lose his own power. Love springs up among people, they want to resist their dictator. The Emperor is forced to leave his isolation. Death offers to renew his service, but only under one condition: the Emperor will be the first to die.

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