



Cornet: Viktor Ullmann's Legacy from Theresienstadt

The Lay of Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke for recitation and piano
and the Piano Sonata No. 6 by Viktor Ullmann

Introductory Lecture on *Music from Theresienstadt*: **Michael Lahr**

Recitation: **Gregorij H. von Leitis**

Piano: **Dan Franklin Smith**

Premiered at the Goethe Institute New York / USA

The Austrian-Jewish composer Viktor Ullmann (1898 – 1944) was one of many artists, who were deported to the ghetto and concentration camp Theresienstadt north of Prague. Faced with degrading living conditions, hunger and pain, and fear in the face of terror and death, Ullmann did not surrender. Even under those horrible circumstances he remained defiant. His music helped him to endure the daily suffering. His art also comforted and encouraged the other inmates.

In Theresienstadt, Viktor Ullmann noted: "We did not sit moaning at the Rivers of Babylon and our will to be creative was as strong as our will to live." – Ullmann's will to be creative was admirable. During his two years in Terezin, he composed a number of songs and piano sonatas, and the chamber opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*.

The *Cornet* is the last composition that Ullmann was able to finish in Theresienstadt, before he was deported to Auschwitz on October 16, 1944, where he and his wife Elisabeth were killed two days later. His music was rescued by a friend who survived the camps. *The Lay of Love and Death of the Cornet Christoph Rilke* is based on a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke tells the haunting story of a young soldier who experiences love and death in one night. Ullmann's composition is a rare combination of recitation and piano. The music underlines the dramatic action, comments on it, illustrates it and thus intensifies the effect.

The adamant will to live, the unshakable hope, that the good will prevail, no matter how horrible the attempts are to crush it, this is the message of Ullmann's music from Theresienstadt.

Since the middle of the 1990s we have presented and performed Ullmann's music from Theresienstadt in more than 30 cities in various European countries and in the United States of America. Throughout our history, our special concern has been to unearth and present works of artists exiled and persecuted by the fascist regimes of the mid twentieth century. Among those artists are composers such as Viktor Ullmann, Ernst Krenek, and Egon Lustgarten, to name just a few. Our work as the first and at that time only organization in New York City dedicated to the rediscovery of this long neglected heritage has had trailblazing effects.

The New York-based newspaper *Aufbau* wrote: "With the project 'Music from Theresienstadt', The Lahr von Leitis Academy & Archive and its directors proved again their artistic integrity and their courage to undertake risks (...) It was remarkable to see, how Gregorij von Leitis – with high artistic taste – took back his person as a narrator in order to give pre-eminence to Rilke's text and Ullmann's music."

The *New York Times* noted: "There is something redemptive about the growing interest in discovering and reviving the works of composers whose lives were cut short by the Nazis. (...) Mr. Simmons and Mr. von Leitis gave solid, affecting performances and were effective advocates for this music."

And the Austrian daily *Die Presse* called our presentation of Ullmann's *Cornet* in Vienna "a worthwhile discovery."

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