



Heinrich Heine: "Tell me what does it mean to be human?" A literary journey through life

Narrator: Gregorij H. von Leitis

Concept and Introduction: Michael Lahr

Premiered at the Elysium Festival Bernried on May 26, 2012

The writer Heinrich Heine sat between many chairs: He was torn between his native country Germany and his adoptive home France. Born a Jew, he later converted to Protestantism, without ever having practiced either religion. And politically? On the one hand he was a friend of Karl Marx; on the other hand he adored Napoleon as the "ingenious executive director of the Weltgeist". One of Heine's biggest admirers was the Austrian Empress Elisabeth. She venerated Heine to such a degree, that she wanted to donate a Heine-statue to the city of Hamburg. But Hamburg declined the offer, and so Elisabeth erected the Heine monument in the park of her castle on the island of Korfu.

Heine was a passionate champion of the ideas which today we consider to be the foundation of any democracy: the French revolutionary trio of freedom, equality and brotherhood, and of human rights. His travelogues, his poetry collections, his novels, and his political writings attest to his cosmopolitan spirit. Time and again, his curiosity prompted him to look beyond his own horizon.

With traditional simplicity and light-footed lyricism, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), the former romantic, extolled love, especially unrequited love. As a literary "guerrilla fighter" against the powers of State, he tried again and again to tempt his contemporaries out of their Biedermeier obedience, and to win them over to his dream of a great human brotherhood. According to his own statements, Heine spent his whole life "roaming around the dance floors of philosophy, given over to all the orgies of the spirit, wooing many different systems". Heine was a pathetic failure as a businessman, and he also had to bury hopes for a professorship in Munich. But in Paris he quickly became successful as a journalist and writer. In his poetry, feature articles, essays, letters, and prose work, Heine time and again circles around the question of what it is to be human. He sings about the beauty of life, describes the misery of human existence, smiles, sometimes mildly, sometimes ironically, at his own weaknesses and those of his fellow citizens. He declares solidarity with those who suffer, who are tortured, who are banished.

Using famous and lesser known poems, diary entries and prose texts by Heinrich Heine, this literary journey through life spans a big arc, biographically as well as thematically. The program invites the audience to think about the existential questions of mankind.

Gregorij H. von Leitis, recipient of the New York Theater Club Prize, will recite Heine's texts. **Michael Lahr** provides the historic and biographical framework.

On the occasion of the program's premiere at the Elysium Festival in Bernried on May 26, the **Münchner Merkur** titled "Heine's alarming prophecy - The protestant, former Jewish atheist, was rediscovered as a political thinker". The reviewer wrote: "The Artistic Director of the Festival was in charge of the reading passages. Gregorij von Leitis put some gentle irony into his voice and was thus able to illuminate the ambiguities of Heine's and his contemporaries' poetry and thinking.[...] Michael Lahr's selection of texts confronted Heine's contempt of nationalism, war and tyranny with his rejection of poverty. Torn between these two poles, Heine wrote a text about communism, foreboding the communist dictatorships, that would allow intellectual, reflected print works to be only used as paper bags in a grocery store. When Heine's report on the greed at the Paris stock exchange was cited, one felt, as if Heine had predicted the current image of the angry citizens at the Occupy Movement."

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