

Noorderkerkconcerten live online
Helena Basilova - piano
Zaterdag 25 april 2020
14.00

A Fearful Fairy Tale Toelichting NL



Waan je in een droomwereld, met mystieke sprookjes en geheimzinnige pianoklanken. Pianiste Helena Basilova speelt op dit concert werken van haar nieuwste CD: *A Fearful Fairy Tale*.

Sprookjes zijn voor jong en oud, ze vertellen ons veel levenswijsheden en waren en zijn voor veel componisten een inspiratiebron. Vandaag horen we van de hand van o.a. Medtner, Myaskovsky en Prokofiev prachtige Russische vertellingen. De titel van het album is ook de titel van het werk dat componiste Elena Firsova speciaal voor Helena Basilova schreef.. En de aanleiding om sprookjes op een CD te verzamelen? De *Fairy Tale About The Forgotten Homeland* werd ook speciaal voor Helena geschreven, door de Moskouse componist Yuri Bagri, vlak voordat ze - op haar 7e! - naar Nederland zou vertrekken. Een paar jaar later won Helena het eerste pianoconкурс waaraan ze zou meedoen... met precies dát stuk van Bagri.

Yuri Bagri: *Fairy Tale About The Forgotten Homeland* (for Helena Basilova 1990)

Nikolai Myaskovsky: *Yellowed Leaves* op. 31

- andante

- un poco sostenuto malinconico e abbandonante - andante cantabile

- molto vivace e fantastico
- molto calmo ma non troppo lento

Sergei Prokofiev: Tales from an old Grandmother op. 31 no. 1 & 2

Alexander Scriabin: Poème op. 32 no. 2

Elena Firsova: A Fearsome fairytale "Prophetic birds" (for Helena Basilova, 2018)

Nikolai Medtner

- Fairy Tale op. 9 no. 2
- Fairy Tale op. 34 no. 2
- Fairy Tale op. 26 no. 3

A F E A R F U L F A I R Y T A L E

album notes by Wouter de longh

Whole dimensions to existence are missed if one considers only what is. Aside from the unbearable pretence of proposing to know what that 'is', life is not static, nor is living or music within that. Fairy tales are stories we tell to connect these dimensions, to pierce through different ways of understanding, times, places; between different versions of ourselves; between us and the other, family and strangers; a princess and her maid; between what we think is real and what transcends that. Some lives as does some art, exemplify this multitude of realities, and the ability to connect them.

There are two words for truth in Russian: Pravda for objective truth and Ishtina for transcendental truth, that what you know but cannot explain. While Helena's previous solo albums - with music from Janacek and Scriabin - were each in their own way quite personal to her, this time she wanted more Ishtina than Pravda. She wanted a story that was not just personal for her but representative of her. And Helena's personal story is one of multitudes. Of departures and forgetting, discovery and loss, of glimmers of understanding, and feelings of coherence in oceans of confusing false certainties.

This collection of music is meant as a story in itself, each piece included for the power it has to forge a connection that needed the story to be forged. And so it was with the piece that inspired the album.

When she was seven years old, a little girl named Lenchka lived in a Moscow apartment with her grandparents - both chemists - and her mother, a pianist as well. The little girl had learned to play the piano there, much like she had learned to live and dream and feel.

What she hadn't learned yet was of lands farther away than the mystical countries in the fairy tales she used to read or listen to on LPs played in their central living room. Nor did she yet know of loss that is almost more than what is left. A loss that sheds more and in a way, makes you the loss and what is lost the loser.

Her mother came to her one night and said "Dear Lena, we are going to a land quite different from here, where you will feel you will not recognise anything or be recognised. But you will see, in time this place will grow on you and you will recognise it, and it will recognise you." A young composer by the name of **Yuri Bagri** was not so sure. He had gotten to know little Lena and feared that she would never become a story herself if she would not remember her home. So when they met, one month before she was to leave, he handed her a piece of music. '**Fairy tale about the forgotten homeland**'. "Lest you forget Russia" he said. With this music, Helena won her first piano competition when she was 10. It showed her the possibilities of expressing something new, to own the music she played and to stay connected to Russia. Until the music was lost. Until the music was found again in 2018, between the sheet music of her father's she was researching, and she decided to play it once again.

Each subsequent piece has its own story. **Yellowed Leaves** by **Myaskovsky** is like a hidden pearl that is rarely seen, shaped over time to develop a deep and mystical rhythm. The seven pieces each feel like stages one goes through, discovering something new that is both exciting and frightening in every one of them; the journey through a vast country in search of a lost piece of yourself.

A fearful fairy tale, by London based Russian composer **Elena Firsova**, was written for Helena in 2018. In search for mysticism and sound colour, she incorporates the sound of prophetic birds and menacing Russian church bells.

Prokofiev seems somehow more optimistic, energetic in any case. He is enchanted by fairy tales, they spark associations in him and subsequently in us, his audience. About Tales of an old grandmother he wrote: 'Some stories have almost faded in my memory, while others I am sure will stay with me forever'. Prokofiev's view on remembering is one of both melancholy and possibility.

Before ending the album where it began, in the snow with Bagri's Winter Dance, **Medtner's beautiful fairy tales** could not be omitted. The lyrical, ephemeral first three pieces present us with dreamy landscapes, a Russia almost too good to be true. And so it is. Fairy tale op. 20 no. 2 - subtitled 'Song or tale of the bell, but not about the bell' - is 'Minaccioso'. Menacing again. Bells again. A song that means one thing, and is about another, again.

There are no fairy tale endings. Not because everything has ended badly but because fairy tales don't end. They simply close a gateway between two realities that continue to exist in parallel. One's past, another country, different versions of the same piece, music lost and found, friends and family, in life and art. This album - of stories and a story in itself - is Helena's tribute, to fairy tales and her homeland.

Volkskrant " *In de piano klinken wonderschone resonanties, als het geheimzinnige schaduwrijk van een huiveringwekkend sprookje.* " ★★★★★☆

NRC " *Mysterieuze vergezichten met handvol fluistertonen.* " ★★★★★☆

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