

BADEN-BADEN CAFÉ OF EUROPE: CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the fourth Café of Europe, during which we have heard a passionate debate on the current place of music in a town such as Baden-Baden, which has a long tradition in this regard, I was particularly taken aback by the fact that the main issue focused on the place of so-called 'classical' music, and young people's interest in it these days.

Naturally, I think back to the clash and encounter of the ages which was provided for us by the actors of the City of Baden-Baden Theatre and by those from neighbouring Alsace and the Théâtre du Marché aux Grains. Great musicians from the past who lived in Baden-Baden, and who can still be seen and the significant places of whose lives can be visited: Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, themselves in contact with the music of all Europe, both characters in the interactive novel *At the Sources of Europe*, Book-Men and Women, who carry with them the texts of past visitors: Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Mark Twain; texts which help us to understand better the living nature of thermal heritage in a contemporary setting.

I can easily imagine that Clara, the character from the interactive novel and the youngest one of them all, would ask me an obvious question: 'How will we manage to get people my age interested in heritage and in the people who frequented the thermal towns?' And I would love to answer her, musician as she is, with this: 'through music festivals, of course.' The Francofolies in Spa attracts hundreds of thousands of people, not to mention the jazz in Mont-Dore or the wonderful Sziget Festival which takes in Budapest every August!

However, after listening intently to Professor Peter Steinbach's introduction on the historical dimension of the spa towns' prestigious musical past, and to the moving reading of letters exchanged between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, I would like even more to say to her: 'Clara Schumann is our contemporary'. She is a woman of today, passionate, accomplished; she is a composer, interpreter, a mother of a large family, the loving partner of a wonderful husband whom she often accompanies like a child, almost driving him until madness takes the great artist. A woman who works incessantly, between organising daily life, organising concerts, composing, meeting with intellectuals, and yet musical history has not given her enough justice.

And to a great extent, all these friendly ghosts that we will meet in the thermal towns and that we will often be presented with a certain nostalgia and a certain formality, were young once, passionate and inventive. Valery Larbaud devoted his life to falling in love, or to seduction, at least. Cesare Pavese committed suicide in the name of love. These are eternal sentiments which were played out in what now appear to us to be film sets, but which in fact were and have remained places of inspiration and utopias.

We must thank the speakers, actors and in particular Professor Bernd Glemser, who made Johannes Brahms's music shine. All have helped us take together an active journey through time. Historian Marie Louise Gräffin von Plessen who, when preparing the exhibition on historic interpretation for Weimar, European Capital of Culture in 1999, in my eyes best defined this coming and going of time: 'The informative principle of the journey through

time can be considered as a sort of partition. It is an intangible “cabinet of curiosities”, without picture rail or display case, or sort of encyclopaedia that can be enriched as desired by other places and other eras. The visitor following this route of places of memory through the streets and parks of Weimar leaves the present behind in order to better understand it... In a space of references, unrelated phenomena meet in the places and time remembered by the spectator. The journey through time unites space and time like an historic and cultural model, destroying traditional concepts such as chronology. The simultaneous evocation of various eras brings about parallel worlds. Through the concentration of dates and facts, the traveller of history perceives the passage of time.’

We will continue this marvellous journey in Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom in the months to come, with other visitors from the past who have become our contemporaries.

Thank you all.

Michel Thomas-Penette