

Wunschkonzert / e-mail, 11-4-94 [edited]

... no, I never saw the film in Germany during the war. My friends and I, at age 13/14 firmly committed to the war effort, would have walked out of "corny" stuff like that with a haughty sneer. We preferred action movies like **Stukas** or Durchhaltefilme like **Kolberg** or heroic sacrifices. We even detested group effort fantasies like **Junge Adler** because the steady diet of "Einordnungsparolen" (DDR propaganda, later, preferred the term "einreihen") made us sick.

What would have appealed to us then was the idea of solidarity demonstrated in numerous individual cases; the absolute reliability, loyalty and faithfulness of everyone on the **Heimatfront**. That was important because our parents / grandparents remembered, and we were told, that it was the Heimatfront that collapsed first during **W.W.I.** And what better cliché than the waiting woman, **Penelope, Lili Marleen**, here **Inge**, to create an aura of stability. Add to that the support staff from gynecologist to seamstress, and the men at the front are reassured that all's well at home and they can fight in peace. Still, there would have been too little fighting for us, and falling in the drink, brought down by ship based Flak, was downright embarrassing.

Adults probably saw it differently, cherished the absence of strident propaganda and enjoyed the company of men and women with warm hearts and cool heads who enjoy music from **Mozart** to **Schnulzen**.

The music. Some numbers are identified, from **Beethoven** to the **Fehrbelliner Reitermarsch (Badenweiler?** the movie calls it the Grand Elector's, I could never remember all the titles of then popular marching tunes) to the **Olympia-Fanfaren**.

And there is the "Wenn das Schifferklavier an Bord ertoent, dann sind die Matrosen so still, weil ein jeder nach seiner Heimat sich sehnt, die er gern einmal wiedersehen will" (we sang schtüll/wüll weils so schoen doof klingt) that is quite un-war-like and evokes a schooner dead in the water during a Flaute. Ahoi rhymes on treu.

Marika Roekk sings "In einer Nacht im Mai." She was a superb imitator of a child's singing voice and a great antidote to **Zarah Leander** of "Ich weiss, es wirrd einmal ein Wunndrr geschaehn, und dann waerden alle Maerchen wahr" which we heard with increasing frequency as the Endsieg became increasingly unlikely. We called her, ungraciously, "das singende Pferd." At thirteen, fourteen we were too young to realize that the emotional impact of her song was not due to the improbable "Wunder" but to the stubbornly proclaimed faith, against all odds, "ich weiss, dass wir uns wiedersehn." There were others that were important morale boosters, kitsch most of them, but that expressed a genuine sentiment. From Schnulzen like "Zum Abschied reich ich dir Haende, und sag ganz leis Auf Wiedersehn," to "Tapfere kleine Soldatenfrau," to the almost unbearably austere "Zum Abschied sag ich leise Servus." And then there was the incomparable and ubiquitous Lili Marleen.

Three steife Maenner (**Heinz Ruchmann** among them) sing the "Klabautermann." "Das kann doch einen Seemann nicht erschuettern, keine Angst, keine Angst, Rosmarie. Und wenn die ganze Erde bebt, und die Welt sich aus den Angeln hebt .." That's the Ritter-Tod-und-Teufel mentality, expressed here by somewhat lower life forms, that stretches from Luther ("Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel waer...") to **Don Giovanni's** First Act Finale ("Se cadesse ancora il mondo") to Hans Baumann (?) "Wir werden weiter marschieren, wenn alles in Scherben faellt, denn heute (ge)hoert uns Deutschland, und morgen die ganze Welt".

Eugen Jochum conducts the Overture to **Mozart's Figaro**. We just took the German Language House to a performance at the Met. It lasted an exhilarating four hours (**James Levine** conducting). Jochum could do it in twoandahalf. **Toscanini** was just as fast. But this Mozart in Fast Forward was probably sound lab acceleration.

The next number was new to me but I found the last line "Dumm sein hat sich bewaehrt" (or something like it) most fitting. It reiterates, in an inoffensive non-wehrkraftzersetzen fashion, the principal rule by which a common soldier must live: never volunteer. It also follows on the heels of Mozart's **Figaro** which has an aria in it to the same effect (almost never sung), **Don Basilio's** "In quegli anni" (Act IV) exhorting the advantages of covering yourself with an ass's skin, "col manto d'asino". (**Mutter Courage's** song "Einst im Lenze meiner jungen Jahre..." and the character **Schweyk** belongs here, too.)

This is followed (aptly) by one of many examples of what is called **The Laughing Saxophone** (or clarinet, or whatever could produce this goat like laughter). Eerily done with human voices, incidentally, in **Visconti's** Death

in Venice and, of course, in **Verdi's** Un Ballo in Maschera, Act II.

The **Bavarian "folk tune"** remains a mystery. I never heard it (neither did Waltraut) nor could I make out the text of the refrain.

"Schlafe mein Prinzchen, schlaf ein" is a popular cradle song and is still sung by children's choirs from the **Bielefelder Kinderchor** to the **Regensburger Domspatzen** to the **Wiener Saengerknaben**.

"Gute Nacht, Mutter" is a role reversal of "Schlafe mein Prinzchen." Popular then, but I don't recall hearing it since. There was a similar one: "Wenn ich gross bin, liebe Mutter, will ich alles fuer dich tun.." That it is the mother of a fallen soldier who requests the song, and listens to it with her son's photograph in full view, is nothing short of subversive.

The same is true of the ending melody which is that of an earlier patriotic song: "Dir woll'n wir treu ergeben sein, getreu bis in den Tod. Dir woll'n wir unser Leben weih'n, dir, der Flagge Schwarz-Weiss-Rot." Of course here the "treue Ergebenheit" applies to our two very ordinary, unremarkable and decent lovers. [*]

Really well-crafted Propaganda films like **Wunschkonzert**, **Jud Suess** and **Friedrich Schiller**, had a lot of subversive stuff in them, unterschwellig and camouflaged to be sure, but a source of delight and consolation for those who could recognize it. **Gruendgens'** war-time staging of **Don Carlos** and the **Berliner Staatsoper's** sixties' **Fidelio**, continued after '61 with an unchanged Buehnenbild depicting a prison WALL, are other such examples.

Well, I went on longer than I thought I would or should. It's your fault, and I thank you for it. ...

Be well

[*]

[Incidentally, this is NOT the **Englandlied**, nor is it part of it, although the refrain was often played as a kind of post-lude to it, its musical character is quite different. It comes from the repertoire of the **Kaiserliche Kriegsmarine**, text by Robert Linderer/ Melodie - Richard Thiele. The Englandlied itself is by Hermann Loens who was killed in action in September of 1914, and predates both World Wars. The melody is by Herms Niel, 1939.].