On Ingmar Bergman's Queen of the Night in his film version of Mozart's The Magic Flute

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Classical Inquiries

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For example:

This briefest of essays is about two arias sung by a character known as The Queen of the Night in Die Zauberflöte or The Magic Flute of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, which premiered in 1791, with German-language libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder. I focus for a moment on the music and the words of these two arias as visualized by Ingmar Bergman in his Swedish-language film version of the opera, Trollflöjten, released in 1975. The first aria can be viewed here (at 22:33), and the second aria can be viewed here (at 1:17:11).

[Essay continues here...]

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In these two arias, the Queen of the Night is experiencing a fusion of emotions, which are being sorted out by way of her singing. So also in Bergman’s film version of these two arias, the emotions of the music and the words are being sorted out visually.

The Queen feels grief, love, hate, and anger. She is grieving over the loss of her daughter, and the grief will later turn into murderous rage. The Queen’s love for her daughter Pamina is at war with her hatred for...
Sarastro, Pamina's would-be father. The Queen is enraged at Sarastro for diverting the affections of her beloved daughter. The sorting-out of the Queen's emotions, as she sings, adds up to a thing of beauty, which is comparable to the kind of beauty achieved in ancient Greek tragedy in moments when this medium delves into its own world of emotions. The idea that the beauty of the song, of music, is the all-encompassing principle of the story, even of existence, is relevant to the Greek idea of kosmos. [Nagy 1990 §16n45.]

This idea equates the beauty of song with the reality of the universe in macrocosm, and of society in microcosm. A shining example is the archetypal song of the Muses, as "quoted" by Theognis lines 15–18: 'whatever is beautiful kalon is near-and-dear philon'. [Nagy 1985 §§6–8.]

According to this song of the Muses, the music of song achieves its beauty by re-enacting the totality of human experience. Such 're-enactment' is mimēsis—in the terminology of the 4th-century philosopher Aristotle. In his analysis of Greek tragedy, whatever is re-enacted by way of the mimēsis created in drama becomes beautiful because the form of the drama is itself a thing of beauty in microcosm. So, all the sad and lovely and even repulsive things that happen in tragedy become ultimately beautiful through the overarching beauty achieved by way of mimēsis in tragic songmaking. I offer details in Nagy 2015.10.15. A comparable kind of beauty, I argue, is achieved also in Bergman’s filmmaking. The face of the Queen is visualized as alternatingly lovely and repulsive, but the overall vision is made lovely by the songmaking that blends with the filmmaking.
Bibliography


Tags: Ingmar Bergman, Mozart, The Magic Flute

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