

The Brook's Lullaby by Zary Fekete

I like the moment I open my violin case. It feels like I am bringing something awake. I like knowing that during the night the darkness gave the wood time to gently rest and that the light hitting it now is slowly awakening the molecules in its surface and allowing it to breathe. I like knowing that the strings will need to be tightened slightly because they have just barely moved out of tune during the last 12 hours. When I tighten the strings there is a tiny creak and leftover resin from the day before is released into the surrounding air. The resin is so light that it hangs in the air for a moment, like a little universe of particles. I like where I stand each morning in the library entrance, just the right location for the morning sunshine to shine in and to give my violin a kind of shimmering quality.

I have been volunteering to play violin here in the Roseville Public Library for the last six months, and tomorrow will be my last day. Yesterday someone else complained...the third complaint this week. They all said I was playing too loudly. I had been playing a Schubert lieder...Der Jager. In the song the poet berates a hunter for stalking a helpless deer. Admittedly there is a moment in the song when the poet *does* get pretty angry.

I can't complain. The library staff have been very accommodating. They largely left me alone ever since I asked them six months ago if I could play during the morning hours. The director of the library was particularly keen on providing a variety of culture to the community.

"What will you play?" he asked.

“Schubert mostly,” I said.

“Oh, Schubert!” he said. “Do you like him?”

This was a tricky question. The library director seemed very nice, but he probably didn't know very much about Schubert. He was probably only expecting that our meeting would last a couple of minutes. Can I compress into a couple of minutes how I feel about Schubert...how he has helped me through the past months? Do I have time to tell him that I have transcribed most of Schubert's lieder, usually meant for solo piano and voice, so that I could play them on the violin? Should I tell him that I specifically decided not to do that with Mahler's lieder-cycle, “Kindertotenlieder”, which Mahler wrote after the death of his children? Does the director have time for me to tell him that one of the ways I have been able to get through the last few months of my life is to play, in order, through Schubert's various lieder song cycles, because the tremendous aching beauty of the melodies and the deep haunting textures and excess of the poetic words are the only companions I've lived with in my apartment this past year?

He probably didn't have that much time. So, instead, I said, “Yes, I like Schubert very much.”

I played these songs in the library entrance for ambiance...as a gift to the patrons...but it was mostly for me. It felt like therapy.

It was interesting to watch people respond. They often smiled in my direction when they entered the library, but few made eye contact. Maybe they didn't want to interrupt my playing. Maybe they felt like if they really looked at me that they would owe me a moment to stop and listen. Maybe they remembered what happened last year and they felt sad for me. The headlines in the papers came pretty thick and heavy 12 months ago, but now they have slowed down to a trickle.

There is still the occasional piece about legislation that the other parents and I have been hoping will pass...but people's attention spans are short these days. I can't expect them to pay attention forever.

The most difficult moments are when parents bring their kids to the library for story hour. Every kid who passes by looks too familiar. I keep recognizing the same eye color, the same hair style, the same t-shirts that she used to wear. She was wearing one when she left for school last year.

After yesterday's complaint the library director finally called me into his office. I could tell that he didn't know what to say. I didn't want him to fish around for words, so I made it easy on him. I said, "One more day?" He smiled and nodded.

When I got home I purposefully didn't look into her bedroom. It's sort of a cliché, I know, but I've kept the bedroom pretty much the same way that she left it. I haven't even picked up the clothes from the floor.

That night I stared up at the dark ceiling and mentally ticked through the songs I have played during the last weeks:

-I first played all of Winterreise...Winter Journey. This was an easy place to start because Schubert specifically wrote these songs to his lost love. He was writing about an impetuous youthful lover, but I found plenty in there that matched my parental feelings just fine.

Particularly in Die Wetterfahne where the poet describes the switching back and forth of a weathervane in the wintery wind...like a worried mother.

-Next I moved on to Die Schone Mullerin...The Pretty Miller Girl. In these songs a young miller apprentice had fallen in love with the maiden who worked in the mill. I returned to one of the songs in this cycle repeatedly, a song called "The Brook's Lullaby." Even though it was just me playing, with no singer to accompany me, I would play through the melody and hear the words in my head, "Rest well, close your eyes, you weary one, you are at home." The words were as much for myself as for her. As I stared up at the ceiling I heard the melody in my head again... and I pictured her closing her eyes in her bedroom at night.

I turned over on my pillow many times, for many hours. Finally, I fell asleep.

The next morning in the library, I lifted the violin from the case again. I tightened the strings. I watched the resin dance in the air. I began to play.

It was Friday, and not many people came in. The morning hours drifted by. I played whichever of Schubert's songs came to mind, with no focus on theme or cycle. It actually felt refreshing to not care about form.

Then, before noon, just as I was finishing, I noticed someone standing off to the side, listening. I turned. It was Clare. One of her classmates who had been with her last year on the day it happened.

She stepped forward with a small smile and handed me a folded piece of paper. She left. I opened the paper. In pencil she had written the last lines of "The Brook's Lullaby". My eyes blurred as I read,

"Good night, good night,

Until all awaken.

And the sky above, how vast it is.”