


Gemischter Chor with a touching Dvořák Stabat Mater

27/11/2022 by Valérie Litz

 **Switzerland** **Dvořák:** Der Gemischte Chor Zürich, Michaela Kaune (soprano), Martina Dike (mezzo soprano), Peter Sonn (tenor), Tobias Schabel (Bass), Basel Sinfonietta / Joachim Krause (conductor). Tonhalle, Zurich, 23.11.2022. (VL)



Der Gemischte Chor Zürich previously at Tonhalle Zürich © Tobias Sutter
Dvořák – Stabat Mater, Op.58

The Gemischte Chor is one of the founding choirs of the Tonhalle Zurich and was established in 1863. The choir singers are amateurs with trained voices who enjoy singing; in the concert line-up there are about 100 to 120 participants. Since 1996, the choir has been under the direction of Joachim Krause. Together with the Basel Sinfonietta, a symphonic orchestra specialising in contemporary music, and the soloists, the audience was treated to an unforgettable excursion into what is probably the best-known of the bible stories.

The Stabat Mater is a 13th-century Christian hymn to Mary, which portrays her suffering as Jesus Christ's mother during his crucifixion. It has been set to music by countless composers, but Antonín Dvořák's work is one of the most frequently performed oratorios and still stands out today for the directness of its sonority. The work is divided into ten movements: the first two movements highlight the suffering of the mother as she watches her son die on the cross. The following six movements emphasise the listener's desire to suffer, weep and mourn with

her. Finally, at the end of the work, in the last two movements, a glimpse of paradise is given.

The musicians of the Basel Sinfonietta began the first movement with a soulful and extended instrumental introduction, which was gradually joined by the choir and soloists. Especially the third movement was somewhat surprising with a motif that resembled a funeral march – the choir re-joins and accompanies the funeral procession. This was followed by a wonderful motif, a kind of exclamation by the bass soloist Tobias Schabel, to which the women's choir responded in turn. The listener can clearly feel the pain of the Stabat Mater here.

Those in the audience who – like me – were particularly looking forward to the choir were rewarded by the seventh movement: 'Virgo virginum' was performed so movingly that it gripped every listener in the hall.

We then heard a wonderful and at the same time stern and determined duet by soprano Michaela Kaune and tenor Peter Sonn, in which the sorrowful mother begs to share her son's suffering.

The second highlight of the evening for me was mezzo soprano Martina Dike, who proudly performed the aria 'Inflamatus est' with wonderful clarity. At the end of the movement, all that remained was the vague wish that it might go on for a few more bars.

If there is a finale that lives up to its name, then it is that of the Stabat Mater. The last, tenth movement captivates with the use of all voices until the choir breaks away from the *tutti* at the *fortissimo* climax and announces the prospect of paradise *a capella*. A fitting, hopeful conclusion for a piece that so comprehensibly sets the suffering of the mother of Jesus to music.

As expected, the reward was a thunderous applause – especially and primarily for the wonderful singers of the Gemischte Chor as well as the soloists.

The Gemischte Chor performs concerts twice a year at the Tonhalle and I can only encourage every concert enthusiast to attend them. I will certainly be going back and am already looking forward to the next time.

Valérie Litz