

NJRO

Report of February 14, 2010

We opened our rehearsal with a reading of Franz Schubert's *Zauberharfe*. Franz Schubert (1797-1828) was far and away and beyond all argument the greatest composer of German art songs who ever lived. But what he really wanted to be was the greatest composer of German operas who ever lived and he never stopped trying to compose operas. A curious byway of Schubert's operatic fixation was his melodrama *Die Zauberharfe*, D. 644. Written in two weeks in 1820, the work was premiered in August of that year, suffered at the hands of uncomprehending critics, ran for eight performances, and disappeared from the repertoire. Schubert later re-used the overture from *Die Zauberharfe* as the overture to *Rosamunde* in 1823. The remainder of Schubert's music from *Die Zauberharfe* remained unplayed until long after Schubert's death. Although a critical failure, the composition of the music from *Die Zauberharfe* was extremely important in Schubert's development because in it, he had to put aside the lyricism of his songs and concentrate instead on creating orchestral music that could stand more or less on its own without his glorious melodies. That he succeeded in this led the way to his more symphonic B minor and C major symphonies. ~ James Leonard, *All Music Guide*

Georges Bizet's *Symphony No. 1*, composed in 1855 when he was 17, was our next reading. The wikipedia account surprised me. The work seems to have escaped detection until it was unearthed from the Paris Conservatory archives in 1933, performed in 1935 in Basel Switzerland, and then recorded the following year by the London Philharmonic. There is no mention of the work in Bizet's letters, and it was unknown to his earlier biographers. It was an assignment during his studies at the Paris Conservatory, where he studied under Charles Gounod. Present day listeners to the work would notice an unmistakable similarity to Schubert's characteristic repetitions of themes, shifting gears into a different key. But wait! Not so! Schubert's music was little known in France at the time. Anyhow, I noticed some themes reminiscent of his opera *Carmen* in the last movement.

We stopped for homemade Valentine's Day treats, courtesy of Laura (shortbread), Luba (brownies) and my husband Al (cheesecake), and whoever made the great cupcakes! Thank you!



Luba enjoying Al's cheesecake



Laura and Ellen