

Kvällar på Svenska Akademien

A programme of texts by

Tomas Tranströmer

Nobel Laureate in Literature

2011

With the Laureate in attendance



SVENSKA
AKADEMIEN

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Programme - The Grand Hall, December 7, 2011

Introduction

The Permanent Secretary

Memories Look at Me from *The Wild Market Square* (1983)

Music: Anna Cederberg-Orreteg

Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir

An Artist in the North from *Bells and Tracks* (1966)

Funchal from *The Truth-Barrier* (1978)

Krister Henriksson

The Light Streams In from *The Sad Gondola* (1996)

Music: Daniel Börtz

Song: Jeanette Köhn, piano: Roland Pöntinen

Vermeer from *For Living and Dead* (1989)

Kristina Adolphson

The Journey to C

The Journey / C Major from *The Half-Finished Heaven* (1962)

Music: Bo Holten

Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir

Alone from *Bells and Tracks* (1966)

Tomas Tranströmer,

Aimée Delblanc, Jasim Mohamed, Dan Shafran,

Chen Wenfen, Antolina Gutiérrez del Castro

The Sad Gondola

Music: Franz Liszt

Piano: Roland Pöntinen

The Sad Gondola II from *The Sad Gondola* (1996)

Krister Henriksson

Slow Music from *Bells and Tracks* (1966)

Music: Sven-David Sandström, premiere performance

Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir

The Blue Wind-Flowers from *The Wild Market Square* (1983)

Kristina Adolphson

November in the Former DDR from *The Sad Gondola* (1996)

Music: Georg Riedel

Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir

Schubertiana from *The Truth-Barrier* (1978)

Tomas Tranströmer

Adagio from **String Quintet in C Major**

Music: Franz Schubert

Uppsala Chamber Soloists

Participants

Peter Englund, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

Kristina Adolphson, actor

Krister Henriksson, actor

Jeanette Köhn, soprano

Roland Pöntinen, pianist

Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir

Gustaf Sjökvist, conductor

Aimée Delblanc, translator

Antolina Gutiérrez del Castro, actor

Jasim Mohamed, translator and author

Dan Shafran, director of the Romanian Cultural Institute

Chen Wenfen, author

Uppsala Chamber Soloists

Bert Lysell, violin

Klara Hellgren, violin

Susanne Magnusson, viola

Erik Wahlgren, cello

Daniel Blendulf, cello

Memories Look at Me

A June morning, too soon to wake,
too late to fall asleep again.

I must go out – the greenery is dense
with memories, they follow me with their gaze.

They can't be seen, they merge completely with
the background, true chameleons.

They are so close that I can hear them breathe
although the birdsong here is deafening.

An Artist in the North

I Edvard Grieg moved like a free man among men.
Ready with a joke, read the papers, travelled here and there.
Led the orchestra.
The concert-hall with its lamps trembling in triumph like the train-ferry
when it puts in.

I have brought myself up here to be shut in with silence.
My work-cottage is small.
The piano a tight fit like the swallow under the eaves.

For the most part the beautiful steep slopes say nothing.
There is no passageway
but sometimes a little hatch opens
and a strangely seeping light direct from trolldom.

Reduce!

And the hammer-blows in the mountain came
came
came
came one spring night into our room
disguised as beating of the heart.

The year before I die I'll send out four hymns to track down God.
But it starts here.
A song about what is near.

What is near.

The battlefield within us
where we the Bones of the Dead
fight to become living.

Funchal

The fish-restaurant on the beach, simple, a shack built by ship-wrecked people. Many turn away at the door, but not the gusts from the sea. A shadow stands in his reeking cabin frying two fish according to an old recipe from Atlantis, small explosions of garlic, oil running over the tomato slices. Every bite says that the ocean wishes us well, a humming from the deeps.

She and I look into each other. Like climbing up the wild blossoming hillsides without feeling the least tiredness. We're on the side of the animals, we're welcome, we don't get older. But over the years we've experienced so much together, we remember that, also times we were good for nothing (as when we queued up to give blood to the flourishing giant – he'd ordered transfusions), things that would've separated us if they hadn't brought us closer, and things we forgot together – but they have not forgotten us. They've become stones, dark ones and light ones. Stones in a scattered mosaic. And now it happens: the bits fly together, the mosaic is visible. It's waiting for us. It's shining from the wall in our hotel room, a design both violent and tender, perhaps a face, we haven't time to notice everything as we pull off our clothes ...

At dusk we go out. The cape's enormous dark blue paw lies sprawled in the sea. We step into the human whirlpool, pushed around in a friendly way, soft controls, everyone chattering in that foreign language. "No man is an island." We become stronger through them, but also through ourselves. Through that within us which the other can't see. Which can meet only itself. The innermost paradox, the garage flower, the ventilator to the good darkness. A drink that bubbles in empty glasses. A loudspeaker that sends out silence. A pathway that grows over again behind each step. A book that can be read only in the dark.

The Light Streams In

Outside the window, the long beast of spring
the transparent dragon of sunlight
rushes past like an endless
suburban train – we never got a glimpse of its head.

The shoreline villas shuffle sideways
they are proud as crabs.
The sun makes the statues blink.

The raging sea of fire out in the space
is transformed to a caress.
The countdown has begun.

Vermeer

No protected world...Just behind the wall the noise begins,
the inn is there
with laughter and bickering, rows of teeth, tears, the din of bells
and the insane brother-in-law, the death-bringer we all must
tremble for.

The big explosion and the tramp of rescue arriving late
the boats preening themselves on the straits, the money creeping
down in the wrong man's pocket
demands stacked on demands
gaping red flowerheads sweating premonitions of war.

In from there and right through the wall into the clear studio
into the second that's allowed to live for centuries.
Pictures that call themselves "The Music Lesson"
or "Woman in Blue Reading a Letter" –
she's in her eighth month, two hearts kicking inside her.
On the wall behind is a wrinkled map of Terra Incognita.

Breathe calmly...An unknown blue material is nailed to the chairs.
The gold studs flew in with incredible speed
and stopped abruptly
as if they had never been other than stillness.

Ears sing, from depth or height.
It's the pressure from the other side of the wall.
It makes each fact float
and steadies the brush.

It hurts to go through walls, it makes you ill
but is necessary
The world is one. But walls...
And the wall is part of yourself –
we know or we don't know but it's true for us all
except for small children. No walls for them.

The clear sky has leant against the wall.

It's like a prayer to the emptiness.

And the emptiness turns its face to us
and whispers

"I am not empty, I am open."

The Journey

In the underground station.
A crowding among placards
in a staring dead light.

The train came and collected
faces and portfolios.

Darkness next. We sat
in the carriages like statues,
hauled through the caverns.
Restraint, dreams, restraint.

In stations under sea-level
they sold the news of the dark.
People in motion sadly
silently under the clock-dials.

The train carried
outer garments and souls.

Glances in all directions
on the journey through the mountain.
Still no change.

But nearer the surface a murmuring
of bees began – freedom.
We stepped out of the earth.

The land beat its wings
once and became still
under us, widespread and green.

Ears of corn blew in
over the platforms.

Terminus – I
followed on, further.

How many were with me? Four,
five, hardly more.

Houses, roads, skies,
blue inlets, mountains
opened their windows.

C Major

When he came down to the street after the rendezvous
the air was swirling with snow.

Winter had come
while they lay together.

The night shone white.

He walked quickly with joy.

The whole town was downhill.

The smiles passing by –
everyone was smiling behind turned-up collars.

It was free!

And all the question-marks began singing of God's being.

So he thought.

A music broke out
and walked in the swirling snow
with long steps.

Everything on the way towards the note C.

A trembling compass directed at C.

One hour higher than the torments.

It was easy!

Behind turned-up collars everyone was smiling.

Alone

I

One evening in February I came near to dying here.
The car skidded sideways on the ice, out
on the wrong side of the road. The approaching cars –
their lights – closed in.

My name, my girls, my job
broke free and were left silently behind
further and further away. I was anonymous
like a boy in a playground surrounded by enemies.

The approaching traffic had huge lights.
They shone on me while I pulled at the wheel
in a transparent terror that floated like egg white.
The seconds grew – there was space in them –
they grew as big as hospital buildings.

You could almost pause
and breathe out for a while
before being crushed.

Then something caught: a helping grain of sand
or a wonderful gust of wind. The car broke free
and scuttled smartly right over the road.
A post shot up and cracked – a sharp clang – it
flew away in the darkness.

Then – stillness. I sat back in my seat-belt
and saw someone coming through the whirling snow
to see what had become of me.

II

I have been walking for a long time
on the frozen Östergötland fields.
I have not seen a single person.

In other parts of the world
there are people who are born, live and die
in a perpetual crowd.

To be always visible – to live
in a swarm of eyes –
a special expression must develop.
Face coated with clay.

The murmuring rises and falls
while they divide up among themselves
the sky, the shadows, the sand grains.

I must be alone
ten minutes in the morning
and ten minutes in the evening.
– Without a programme.

Everyone is queuing at everyone's door.

Many.

One.

The Sad Gondola

I

Two old men, father-in-law and son-in-law, Liszt and Wagner,
are staying by the Grand Canal

together with the restless woman who married King Midas
the man who transforms everything he touches into Wagner.

The green chill of the sea forces its way up through the palace
floors.

Wagner is marked, the well-known Mr Punch profile is wearier
than before

the face a white flag.

The gondola is heavily laden with their lives, two returns and one
single.

II

One of the palace windows flies open and the people inside
grimace in the sudden draught.

Outside on the water the garbage gondola appears, paddled by
two one-oared bandits.

Liszt has written down some chords that are so heavy they ought
to be sent

to the mineralogical institute in Padua for analysis.

Meteorites!

too heavy to rest, they can only sink and sink through the
future right down

to the years of the brownshirts.

The gondola is heavily laden with the crouching stones of the
future.

III

Peep-holes, opening on 1990.

March 25. Anxiety over Lithuania.

Dreamt that I visited a large hospital.

No staff. Everyone a patient.

In the same dream a new-born girl

who spoke in complete sentences.

IV

Beside his son-in-law, who is a man of the age, Liszt is a moth-eaten Grand Seigneur.

It's a disguise.

The deep that tries on and rejects different masks has picked out this one for him.

The deep that wants to step in, to visit the humans, without showing its face.

V

Abbé Liszt is accustomed to carrying his own suitcase through slush and sunshine

and when the time comes to die no one will meet him at the station.

A warm breeze of highly-gifted brandy carries him off in the middle of some task.

He is never free of tasks.

Two thousand letters per year!

The schoolboy writing out the wrongly-spelt word a hundred times before he can go home.

The gondola is heavily laden with life, it is simple and black.

VI

1990 again.

Dreamt that I drove 200 kilometres for nothing.

Then everything grew large. Sparrows

big as hens sang deafeningly.

Dreamt that I drew piano keys

on the kitchen table. I played on them, silently.

The neighbours came in to listen.

VII

The keyboard which has kept silent through the whole of *Parsifal*

(but it has listened) is at last allowed to say something.

Sighs...sospiri...

When Liszt plays this evening he holds down the sea-pedal

so that the green power of the sea rises through the floor and

merges with the stonework of the building.

Good evening, beautiful deep!

The gondola is heavily laden with life, it is simple and black.

VIII

Dreamt that I was to start school but came late.

Everyone in the room was wearing a white mask.

Impossible to tell who the teacher was.

Slow Music

The building is closed. The sun crowds in through the windows
and warms up the surfaces of desks
that are strong enough to take the load of human fate.

We are outside, today, on the long wide slope.
Many have dark clothes. You can stand in the sun with your eyes shut
and feel yourself being slowly blown forward.

I come down to the water too seldom. But here I am now,
among large stones with peaceful backs.
Stones which slowly migrated backwards up out of the waves.

The Blue Wind-Flowers

To be spell-bound – nothing's easier. It's one of the oldest tricks of the soil and springtime: the blue wind-flowers. They are in a way unexpected. They shoot up out of the brown rustle of last year in overlooked places where one's gaze never pauses. They glimmer and float, yes, float, and that comes from their colour. That sharp violet-blue now weighs nothing. Here is ecstasy, but low-voiced. "Career" – irrelevant! "Power" and "publicity" – ridiculous! They must have laid on a great reception up in Nineveh, with pompe and "Trompe up!". Raising the rafters. And above all those brows the crowning crystal chandeliers hung like glass vultures. Instead of such an over-decorated and strident cul-de-sac, the wind-flowers open a secret passage to the real celebration, which is quiet as death.

November in the Former DDR

The almighty cyclop's-eye clouded over
and the grass shook itself in the coal dust.

Beaten black and blue by the night's dreams
we board the train
that stops at every station
and lays eggs.

Almost silent.
The clang of the church bells' buckets
fetching water.
And someone's inexorable cough
scolding everything and everyone.

A stone idol moves its lips:
it's the city.
Ruled by iron-hard misunderstandings
among kiosk attendants butchers
metal-workers naval officers
iron-hard misunderstandings, academics!

How sore my eyes are!
They've been reading by the faint glimmer of the glow-worm
lamps.

November offers caramels of granite.
Unpredictable!
Like world history
laughing at the wrong place.

But we hear the clang
of the church bells' buckets fetching water
every Wednesday
– is it Wednesday? –
so much for our Sundays!

Schubertiana

1

In the evening darkness in a place outside New York, an outlook point
where one single glance will encompass the homes of eight
million people.

The giant city over there is a long shimmering drift, a spiral galaxy
seen from the side.

Within the galaxy coffee-cups are pushed across the counter, the
shop-windows beg from passers-by, a flurry of shoes that leave
no prints.

The climbing fire escapes, the lift doors that glide shut, behind doors
with police locks a perpetual seethe of voices.

Slouched bodies doze in subway coaches, the hurtling catacombs.

I know too – without statistics – that right now Schubert is being played
in some room over there and that for someone the notes are
more real than all the rest.

2

The endless expanses of the human brain are crumpled to the size
of a fist.

In April the swallow returns to last year's nest under the guttering of
this very barn in this very parish.

She flies from Transvaal, passes the equator, flies for six weeks over
two continents, makes for precisely this vanishing dot in the
land-mass.

And the man who catches the signals from a whole life in a few ordinary
chords for five strings,

who makes a river flow through the eye of a needle,

is a stout young gentleman from Vienna known to his friends as 'The
Mushroom', who slept with his glasses on

and stood at his writing desk punctually of a morning.

And then the wonderful centipedes of his manuscript were set in
motion.

3

The string quintet is playing. I walk home through warm forests with
the ground springy under me,

curl up like an embryo, fall asleep, roll weightless into the future,
suddenly feel that the plants have thoughts.

4

So much we have to trust, simply to live through our daily day without
sinking through the earth!

Trust the piled snow clinging to the mountain slope above the village.

Trust the promises of silence and the smile of understanding, trust
that the accident telegram isn't for us and that the sudden
axe-blow from within won't come.

Trust the axles that carry us on the highway in the middle of the three
hundred times life-size bee-swarm of steel.

But none of that is really worth our confidence.

The five strings say we can trust something else. And they keep us
company part of the way there.

As when the time-switch clicks off in the stairwell and the fingers –
trustingly – follow the blind handrail that finds its way in the
darkness.

5

We squeeze together at the piano and play with four hands in F minor,
two coachmen on the same coach, it looks a little ridiculous.

The hands seem to be moving resonant weights to and fro, as if we
were tampering with the counterweights
in an effort to disturb the great scale arm's terrible balance: joy and
suffering weighing exactly the same.

Annie said, 'This music is so heroic,' and she's right.

But those whose eyes enviously follow men of action, who secretly
despise themselves for not being murderers,

don't recognise themselves here,

and the many who buy and sell people and believe that everyone can
be bought, don't recognise themselves here.

Not their music. The long melody that remains itself in all its
transformations, sometimes glittering and pliant, sometimes
rugged and strong, snail-track and steel wire.

The perpetual humming that follows us – now –

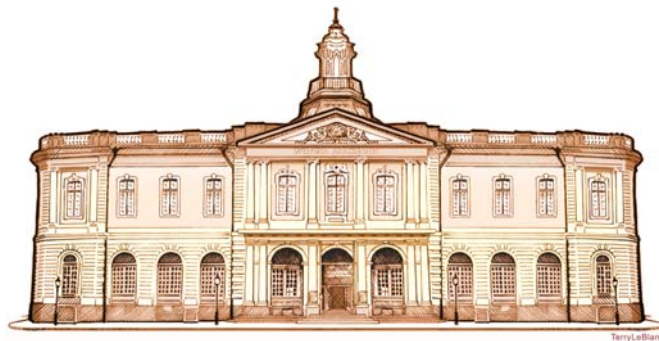
up

the depths.

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The premises of the Swedish Academy are in the Exchange (Börshuset), in Stortorget in the Old Town in Stockholm. The building was erected between 1767 and 1778. The ground floor was intended for the Stockholm Stock Exchange and the upper floor for the burgesses of Stockholm. From the 1860s the Grand Hall served as the council chamber for the City aldermen.

It is in the Grand Hall that the Academy has always held its Annual Grand Ceremony, but finding premises for the daily work and the weekly meetings has at times caused problems. Not until 1914 was a solution found. A donation made it possible for the Academy to acquire the right to use the upper floor of the Exchange (including the Grand Hall) and its attic in perpetuity. It did not finally move in, however, until 1921, when Stockholm's new Town Hall had been completed.