

**Die Windsbraut Op. 38** for “No young god could feel greater happiness than I do now. Had I but and immense load to carry - what joy to cast it aside as you approach, you my only true love and eternal darling” Oskar Kokoschka to Alma Mahler

Alma Mahler is remembered as a muse for many great figures of her time, including her husbands, Gustav Mahler, Walter Gropius and Franz Werfel, although she was also a gifted composer and pianist in her own right. Even her composition teacher, Zemlinsky was under her spell, but Mahler eventually prevented Alma from continuing lessons with him, either because he felt one composer was enough for one family, or out of jealousy. Another heart that was conquered by this fascinating femme-fatale was Kokoschka's, with whom she had a brief, turbulent, love-hate relationship and a love-letter exchange even up until her death. Among his 100 artworks inspired by her, it was *Die Windsbraut*, which Kokoschka considered as proof of his love for Alma. This orchestral piece is a depiction of this painting and the tempestuous and passionate love they shared.

Kokoschka first met Alma at a dinner party following Mahler's death and told his friend: “How beautiful she was, and how seductive she looked beneath her mourning veil! She enchanted me! ...after dinner, she took me by the arm and drew me into an adjoining room, where she sat down and played *Liebestod* on the piano for me...I was dazzled by her...After that evening, we were inseparable.” In fact, the initial title of the *Die Windsbraut* painting was *Tristan and Isolde*.

In one of his last letters he expressed his wish for their love to be depicted by a poet, “...with a sixth sense for language, its structure, its rhythm and its intonation - one that knows the whole range of our emotions from tenderness to the most lascivious sensuality...so that we can tell the world, what we two did with each other and against each other, and can pass on the living meaning of our love to those that come after us.”

I found it fascinating to take up this challenge through music. At the opening, I tried to imitate the rustle of the wind, howling up into a tumultuous storm, where the violins begin the passionate main-theme, full of big leaps to signify the restless and exasperated feelings, while the winds and brass play the part of the dramatic whirlwind of the waves. The main theme is then played by the violas and cellos, before crashing into a “Crazed”, trill-filled tutti of the orchestra and a triumphant union of their love, with tremolos in the strings and the horns fanfaring the main theme in unison.

Then we enter the eye of the storm, where in the painting, Alma and Oskar are peacefully lying together. The trombone solo, supported by a brass chorale, opens Oskar's love (2nd subject) theme, answered by Alma in the strings, after-which they sail through a jungle with the development of the theme in various wind solos, and a paradisaal garden full of flutes and celeste. Various other ethereal orchestral colours attempt to capture the Bengali-light, which Oskar himself described about his painting, and duets in the trumpets, horns and clarinets, the return of the main theme in the first violins, mystical bell-like sounds and a duet between the solo first violin and harp, bring us back to the opening material.

Eery trills build up back into an outburst of the storm, only this time the love-theme is played by the strings and brass, while the winds play the main-theme, reaching the culmination of the piece, before settling down into a reminiscent coda, looking back at all they had lived through.