

04. Jägerchor (Der Freischütz)

Carl Maria von Weber
(1786-1826)

arr. Friedrich Gumpert & William Melton

Weber, Carl Maria Friedrich Ernst von

(born 18 December 1786 in Eutin/Oldenburg; died 5 June 1826 in London)

Weber's father Franz Anton, a former military officer, was a town musician in Eutin at the time of his son's birth. A musical career seemed preordained—Carl Maria's mother was a dramatic singer and his first cousin was Constanze Mozart (née Weber). His father soon joined a travelling theatre troupe as musical director, and Carl Maria was raised with an intimate knowledge of the technical possibilities of the stage. The young man also managed to collect a musical education: in Salzburg he studied counterpoint with Michael Haydn, in Munich voice with Giovanni Valesi and composition with Johann Kalcher, and he would finally complete his studies with the Abbé Vogler in Vienna. Weber refined his abilities as a pianist and held a succession of *Kapellmeister* posts in Breslau, Prague and Dresden.

Parallel to his conducting career Weber composed a succession of operas beginning with *Das Waldmädchen* (1800) that culminated on 18 June 1821, when *Der Freischütz* was premiered at the new *Schauspielhaus* in Berlin. It was a colossal success: the potent mixture of romanticism and folk elements quickly became a part of the national consciousness and effectively ushered in the era of German musical Romanticism. Weber celebrated another triumph with *Euryanthe* (Vienna, 1823) before his tuberculosis became apparent. He died in London at the age of 39, worn by the exertion of finishing his last opera, *Oberon*, before its Covent Garden debut.

The hunting chorus was a subgenre that Weber often included in his operas from *Silvana* (1810) through *Euryanthe* (1823). His prominent and differentiated use of the horn as a solo instrument from the athletic *Concertino*, Op. 45 (1806, revised 1815) to the lyrical *Oberon* also became a trademark, one that would influence the next generation including Schumann and

Wagner. Weber also had a personal connection to the horn in the form of his early friend and Silesian provincial court hornist C. Dautrevaux, later in the Munich virtuoso Sebastian Rauch, and finally in the excellent horn sections of his Prague and Dresden orchestras. *Der Freischütz* offers rich examples of Weber's treatment of the instrument, and Friedrich Kind's libretto presented the opportunity for two hunting choruses (Nos. 2 & 15). According to Weber's diary, he finished the D major *Jägerchor*, No. 15 ('Was gleicht wohl auf Erden dem Jägervergnügen') on 24 February 1820. It has since proven extremely popular, and in the following decades was often reissued for male chorus and also arranged for mixed chorus, multiple arrangements for piano, piano four-hands, violin and piano, woodwind *Harmonie*, brass quartet, zither, military band—in fact, the authoritative Hofmeister Catalogue chronicled a whopping 770 entries for medleys or fantasies on *Freischütz* melodies before the close of the nineteenth century. Among these is Leipzig Gewandhaus solo hornist Friedrich Gumpert's transcription of the *Jägerchor* as No. 18 of his *Ausgewählte Horn-Quartette*, Vol. 2 (Leipzig: Carl Merseburger, 1877).

Text by William Melton