

Dance of Death

Totentanz

14 aphoristic motets honoring the dead for the Sunday after Advent

[14 Spruchmotetten zum Totensontag]

Lübecker Totentanz (1463),
& "Cherubinisches Wandersmann" (1657)
Angelus Silesius [Johann Scheffler] (1624-1677)

Hugo Distler, op. 12, Nr. 2

First Aphorism

Restful, but not slow (Tempo I)

♩ = 69

Flute

Soprano *p*^{*)}
Leave all that you have, leave all, leave all

Alto *p*
Leave all that you have, leave all, leave

Tenor *p*
Leave all, leave all, leave

Bass *p*
Leave all that you have

**) *Flowing, delicate (Tempo II)* (♩ = 88)

5 *rit.* *mp* *freely!* *rit.*

S
... that you have to receive gifts un -

A
all that you have to receive gifts un -

T
all that you have to receive gifts un -

B
to receive gifts un - told.

*) *pp - meno p - p - mp - mf - meno f - (poco f-) f - ff*

**) Vertical dotted lines under tempo changes show exactly where the change occurs.

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Sorce: Bärenreiter Ausgabe 6483

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Tempo I Totentanz

p

S told. Re - ject the world. re - ject the world, re - ject the world,

A told. Re - ject the world, re - ject the world, re - ject the

T told. Re - ject the world, re - ject the world, re -

B Re - ject the world, re - ject the world,

12

rit.

S re - ject, re - ject the world

A world, re - ject the world

T ject the world, re - ject the world

B re - ject the world, re - ject the world

15

Tempo II freely! *mp* *rit.*

S to gain it thou - - - - sand -

A to gain it thou - - - - sand -

T to gain it thou - - - - sand -

B to gain it thou - - - - sand-fold!

*) Grace eighth-note on the beat. [Achtelvorschlag mit der Hauptnote]

More flowing than before but always calmly (♩ = 92)

rit.

19 *p* *)

S fold! In heav - en it is day.

A very softly fold!

T very softly fold!

B *mp* But dark - ness fills th'a -

Tempo I

More restful than the beginning, solemnly (♩ = 63) rit.

22

S Bless those, — bless those, bless those who reck-on this.

A *mp* — Twi-light sur - rounds us here. Bless those, bless, bless, bless those.

T *mp* — Twi-light sur - rounds us here. Bless those, bless those, — bless those.

B *mf* byss. Bless those, bless those, — bless those.

*) Possibly a solo voice.

Death:

Let's dance, let's dance, now line up, all!
Kaiser, bishop, princeling, farm hand,
rich and poor and short and tall.
Mourning is useless. Heed my command.

Blest is he who knows the time
to free himself from sin aright
and do good works, whatever kind,—
This is the day; hop to my pipe!

Thema Restful quarter-notes (♩ = 92)

Fl. *p*

Fl. *poco rit.*

Second Aphorism
Measured andante (♩ = 88)

rit.

S

A *mp*

T *mp*

B *mp*

Man, it is this world's way: all van - - - - - ish - es in

Man, it is this world's way: all van - - - - - ish - es in

Man, it is this world's way: all van - - - - - ish - es in

3 freely!

Fast (♩ = 104)

S *f*

A *f*

T *f*

B *f*

Then why will you de - ny, then why will you de - ny, de - ny,

time. Then why will you de - ny, then why will you de - ny, de -

time. Then why de - ny, then

time. The why de - ny, then

Tempo I

8

S de - ny, then why de-ny its splen-dor all sub - lime?

A ny, de - ny, then why de-ny its splen-dor all sub - lime? Man: it is

T why deny, then why de-ny its splen-dor all sub-lime? Man, it is

B why deny, then why de-ny its splen-dor all sub - lime? Man, it is

11

S rit.

A freely!

T 8

B

this world's way: all van - - - - - ish-es in

this world's way: all van - - - - - ish-es in

this world's way: all van - - - - - ish-es in

15

S *p* tenderly and expressively!

A

T 8

B

Man, it is this world's way: all van - ish - es in time.

time.

time.

time.

rit.

Emperor:

O Death, your rude, alarming call
has set my bones on edge in terror.
Kings and princes, counts and all
do bow to me and give me honor;
but shall I now be rudely greeted,
like you, O death, as slime be treated?
I am of men protector firm.
You make of me a dish of worms.

Death:

Lord emperor, you are highest here,
the first to dance and without peer.
You bear in righteousness the sword
that settles strife with just a word;
but honor and fame have made you blind.
You could not see your many sins;
thus does my call distress your mind.—
Your turn, bishop, the dance begins.

Variation 1

Tempo of the theme. Primary tempo (♩ = 92)

Fl. *mf*

Fl. *p* *pp* *poco rit.*

Third Aphorism

Andante, very simply

(♩ = 80)

S *p*
If you di - rect - ly to e - ter - nal life would go, _____

A *p*
If _____ you di - rect - ly to e - ter - - nal life would

T *p*
If you di - rect - ly to e - ter - nal life would

B *p*
If you di - rect - ly to e - ter - nal life would

5

S for-sake the world, re -

A go, for - sake the world,

T go, for - sake the world, for - sake the world,

B go, for - sake the world, for - sake the world,

8

S verse, re - verse... *meno p* *rit.*

A re-verse, re-verse, and take a diff - 'rent road!

T re-verse, re-verse, and take a diff - 'rent road!

B re-verse, re-verse, and take a diff - 'rent road!

*) \langle and \rangle over rests: the following passage in the relevant part a little louder or softer.

Bishop:

O my dear lord, where can I go?
 How to escape I do not know.
 Whether to left or right I turn,
 I feel you, Death, there watching, stern.
 It matters naught my upright life?
 Naught the value of all my strife?
 And now in death to be so loathed,
 a stinking dog that's decomposed.

Death:

Better than others, you should know
 that ev'ryone to death must go!
 Your earthly office is your throne,
 as God's apostle you are known,
 while sitting with a prideful pose
 upon your horse in gilded clothes.
 Now not in pride but fear you stand.—
 Nobleman, give me your hand!

Variation 2

Fl. **Primary tempo** (♩ = 92) *poco rit.*

meno p *pp*

Fourth Aphorism

Quietly, with restrained excitement

♩ = 63

mf, but always delicately!

S
Dear sin - ner, when you think how short a time is Now, when you

A
Dear sin - ner, dear sin - ner, when you think how

T
Dear sin - ner, dear sin - ner.

B
Dear sin - ner, dear sin - ner.

4

S
think how short a time is Now, howshort is Now, dear

A
short a time is Now, how short is Now, howshort is Now, dear

T
Dear

B
Dear

rit. **Tempo I** *p*

mf but always delicately!

Totentanz

7

S
sin - ner, dear sin - ner!

A
sin - ner, when you think how short a time is Now, freely!

T
8 sin - ner, dear sin - ne,.

B
sin - ner, dear sin - ner,

10

S
p and then e - ter - ni - - - ty:

A
p and then e - ter - ni - - - ty: *meno p* no deed of

T
8 *p* and then e - ter - ni - - - ty: *meno p* no deed of

B
p and then e - ter - ni - - - ty: *meno p* no deed of

rit.

12

S
e - vil will you al - - low.

A
e - vil will you al - - low.

T
8 e - vil will you al - - low.

B
e - vil will you al - - low.

Nobleman:

Death, a word, I beg you, hold!
 And let me breathe before you scold.
 How poorly spent my time on earth;
 the thought of death did not occur;
 a life of ease, of feasts and drinking,
 mistreating servants without thinking.
 Now I must go against my will.
 Of where I am going I know but nil.

Death:

Your wealth were better put to use
 to enlist the poor to plead for you;
 but who would dare speak of want or need
 to such a lord of wealth and prestige?
 Of your splendor you were always aware,
 but for my coming you did not prepare,
 and so at this moment you're quite upset.—
 Physician, step lively, this is your set.

Variation 3

Andante, slow quarter-notes

(♩ = 69)

Fl. *p*

Fl. *poco rit.*

Fifth Aphorism

Softly flowing (♩ = 76)

rit.

S *p*

Your bod - y, your best - friend,

A *p*

Your bod - y, your best friend,

T *p*

Your bod - y, your best friend,

B

Fast, hurried ($\text{♩} = 126-132$)

poco f, *accel.*, always getting stronger

4

S
worst en - e - my as well, worst en - e - my as well. It

A
worst en - e - my as well, worst en - e - my as well. It

T
worst en - e - my as well, worst en - e - my as well. It

B
worst en - e - my as well, worst en - e - my as well, worst en - e - my

7

S
binds and holds you back, it binds and holds you back, and holds you back!

A
binds and holds you back, it binds and holds you back and holds you back!

T
binds and holds you back, it binds and holds you back, and holds you back!

B
as well. It binds, it binds, it binds, it binds and holds you back!

*) Lacking a low yet strong bass voice, the F#-G-F# may be sung an octave higher.

12 **Tempo I** *p* **rit.**

S He's your best friend, and sure - - - - ly he means well!?

A He's your best friend, and sure - - - - - - - - ly he means well!?

T He's your best friend, and sure - - - - - - - - ly he means well!?

B

Physician:

I have been your adversary;
 to seek my help is customary
 for many in pain and gross ill health;
 but now, O Death, you come yourself;
 nor art nor medicine can help.
 No charge, I'll take your pulse myself..
 Would you measure all my frailty?
 What is the judgement that awaits me?

Death:

Your verdict will be right and true
 According to your works' review.
 Your earthly deeds, God knows them all:
 You risked the lives of some. Recall?
 You brought the poor and sick much aid
 for a hefty price, which they all paid,
 You flaunted well your knowledge fine, —
 Merchant, now quickly step in time!

Variation 4

Tempo as before (♩ = 69)

Fl. *p* *poco rit.*

14 *Slowing* *A little less hesitantly* *p* ($\text{♩} = 160$)

S
man of this world, that he must forfeit

A
man of this world, the rich man of this world, that he must forfeit

T
mf the rich man of this world, that

B
rich man of this world, that

19 *without slowing* *pp*

S
all his riches finally?

A
all his riches finally?

T
without slowing *pp*
he must forfeit all his riches finally?

B
pp
he must forfeit all his riches finally?

Merchant

You call, but how can I prepare?
My wealth is secure, I can declare,
my fields are all planted in barley and corn,
my wares in wagons awaiting transport.
I've traveled a hard road, as you can see—
But no one has e'er been this hard on me.
If I could just settle and clear my accounts
I'd not be so vexed when my death is announced.

Death:

Whoever pursues his business with honor,
without overcharging a single dollar,
a true accounting will receive
when time has come his life to leave.
If deceit or fraud you've ne'er composed,
then your account is rightly closed
with no more figures entered there.—
Yo! Soldier. Here. No time to spare!

Variation 5

Tempo of the theme. Calmly ($\text{♩} = 92$) *poco rit.*

Fl. *p*

Seventh Aphorism

Very fast and brightly cheerful. Rhythmically. (♩ = 108)

Soprano: *mf* Friend, com - - - - - bat won't suf - fice. You must, *poco f*

Alto: *mf* Friend, com - - - - - bat won't suf - fice. You *poco f*

Tenor: *mf* Friend, com - bat won't suf - fice. You *poco f*

Bass: *mf* Friend, com - bat wou't suf - fice. You *poco f*

Soprano: *f, emphatically!* you must, you must be, you must be vic - - - to - - -

Alto: *f, emphatically!* must, you must, you must be, you must be, you similarly

Tenor: *f, emphatically!* must, you must, you must be, you must be, you similarly

Bass: *f, emphatically!* must, you must, you must be, you must be, you similarly

12 *Slowing* *)

S
A
T
B

must be, you must be, you must be vic - - - to - rious,

must be, you must be, you must be vic - - - to - rious,

must be, you must be, you must be vic - - - to - rious,

must be, you must be, you must be vic - - - to - rious,

Solemn, restful whole-notes. (♩ = 69)

18 *p*

S
A
T
B

if you - seek e - ter - nal life, and heav'n - ly peace most

if you seek e - ter - nal life and heav'n - ly peace most

if you seek e - ter - nal life and heav'n - ly peace most

if you seek e - ter - nal life and heav'n - ly peace most

rit.

21

S
A
T
B

glo - - - rious.

*) Do not become too soft; the following passage must be still significantly softer.

Foot soldier:

I know that Death means me.
I've caused others death to see—
And now it's sharp and bitter blade
in turn against myself is laid.
Will then no one grant me grace?
Let me live, O Death, I pray,
and better far, to serve my God,
whom in my work I had forgot.

Death:

Just step right up, complaints won't help;
for you must bear your pack yourself;
No doubt, it is a heavy load.
For in your works the truth is shown,
both good and evil you have done;
by them your wages will be known.
Your judgement no man can undo.—
Sailor, now it's time for you!

Variation 6

Very fast, jolly (♩. = 138)

Fl. *poco f* *p (echo)* *poco f*

Fl. *senza rit.*

Fl. *p* *poco f* *p* *pp*

Eighth Aphorism

Tenderly, hesitating, like an old folksong (♩ = 56-58)

S *p*
The world, it is your sea, the Boat - man is God's

A *p* *)
The world, it is your sea, the Boat - man is

T *p*
The world, it is your sea, the Boat - man is God's

B *p*
The world, it is your sea, the Boat - man is God's

*) The opposing Alto part must be sung very clearly with the slightest hesitation, the accompanying parts as delicately as possible.

4

S Spirit, the ship your bod - - - y, the soul

A God's Spirit, the ship, your bod - - - y, the soul

T Spirit, the ship your bod - y, the soul

B Spirit, the ship your bod - y, the soul

meno p ♩ = previous ♩

7

S is that which trav - els home.

A is that which trav - - - els home.

T is that which trav - - - els home.

B is that which trav - - - els home.

Sailor:

How can it be, my time is here?—
 How often I have seen you near,
 but when I find myself on shore
 my resolution is no more.
 My impudent and lecherous heart
 betrays my good-intentioned part.
 I have incurred for sin a debt,
 Help me, Lord, through Your own death.

Death:

Had you but looked into God's word
 before your eyes, and sin deterred,
 and closely followed in its path
 your inner stress were less at last.
 You clearly saw your end long since,
 so your regret does not convince.
 Furl the sail and let it go!—
 Come, pious man. This dance is slow!

Variation 7

Flowing, but calmly (♩ = 108)

Fl. *mf*

Fl. *meno p* *poco rit.*

Ninth Aphorism

Calmly and as evenly balanced as possible (♩ = 88)

S *p*
The bright - ly shin - - - - ing light we see, we see, we —

A *p*
The bright - ly shin - - - - ing light we see, we see,

T *p*
8 The bright - ly shin - - - - ing light we see, we see,

B *p*
The bright - ly shin - - - ing light we see, we see,

7 *calm eighth-notes* *always calmly!*

S — see while we are liv - ing, while we are liv - ing not diff - - - -

A we see while we are liv - ing not diff - - - -

T we see while we are liv - ing not diff - - - -

B we see while we are liv - ing not diff - - - -

rit. **More quietly than the beginning**
(♩ = 76)

S *rit.* *meno p*

A *meno p*

T *meno p*

B *meno p*

'rent from that one sees here view - ing
'rent from that one sees here view -

Long, gradual slowing

14 *meno p*

S ... the bright - ly shin - - - ing light.....

A diff - 'rent from that one sees here view - ing to - tal dark - - - ness.

T to - tal dark - ness, to - tal dark - - - - - ness, dark - ness

B ing, here view - ing to - tal dark - - - - - ness.

Hermit:

Death brings to me but little care.
 If only I were more prepared
 and my conscience free and clear!
 The evil one has oft appeared:
 temptations, cunning, strong and sly.
 O Lord, take all my sins away.
 I confess and regret with all my heart.
 Be gracious to me in this last hour.

Death:

You may well dance a galliard grand
 when you awake in the heavenly land.
 The work which you on earth have done
 uplifts both mind and soul as one.
 To many you seemed much too pious,
 striking them as strict, though righteous,
 but now they stand there looking sour.—
 Come, farmer, dance; this is your hour.

Variation 8

Very calm and even (♩ = 80)

poco rit.

Fl.

p espr. *triquillo*

Tenth Aphorism

Cheerfully flowing, but not too slowly (♩ = 126)

Freely! Accelerating somewhat!!

S

Friend, if you hope in heav'n to be just rose - - - - -

A

Friend, if you hope in heav'n to be just rose - - - - -

T

Friend, if you hope in heav'n to be just rose - - - - -

B

...to be just rose - - - - -

rit.

5

S

- - - bud pick - - - - - ing, then *meno p*

A

- - - bud pick - - - - - ing, then *meno p*

T

- - - bud pick - - - - - ing, then *meno p*

B

- - - bud pick - - - - - ing, then here you *meno p*

♩ remains constant but strongly accented, more spoken (♩ = 132)

9

S here you must ex - pect life's thorns a - plen - ty

A here you must ex - pect life - s thorns a - plen - ty

T here you must ex - pect life's thorns a - plen - ty

B must ex - pect, then here you must ex - pect, here, here you must ex -

13 rit.

S prick - - - - - ing.

A prick - - - - - ing.

T 8 prick - - - - - ing.

B pect life's thorns, life's thorns a - plen - ty prick - ing.

Farmer:

I know nought of dance or song.
I've given up my whole life long
to toil and labor, pain and care,
to plowing fields, no time to spare,
by day and night that in its time
there might appear a harvest fine.
I feared the costs of tithe and rent,
but never thought my life was spent.

Death:

And when your toilsome life I view,
I reckon God will honor you.
The fields that you have planted here,
as those in heaven, are well prepared.
God will repay you for it all
when soon you come into His hall.
Therefore, do not be perplexed.—
Sweet maid, I reckon you are next.

Variation 9

Tempo as before (♩ = 80)

Fl. *p espr.* *poco rit.* *poco rit.*

Eleventh Aphorism

Strict quarter-notes, but not too fast. Like a signal call (♩ = 112)

S *poco f*
Up, up, up, up, up, up, up, up!

A *poco f*
Up, up, up, up, up up, up, up, up, up, up, up, the

T *poco f*
Up, the

B *poco f*
Up, the

6
S *mp*, delicately
We can't go in and see, go

A *mp*, delicately
bride-groom comes! We can't go in and see, go

T *poco f*
bride-groom comes, the bride-groom comes, up, up, up, up, the bride-groom comes,

B *mp*, delicately
bride-groom comes! We can't go in and

*) The *mp* in Soprano and Alto enter suddenly and excitedly; the Tenors' "signal call" continues unaffected, at the same level as at the beginning; only the Bass must become softer and softer on the held F#.

rit. **Somewhat faster and lighter than at the beginning, distinctly** (♩ = 132)

S in and see, if in a mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's time, a

A in and see, if in a mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's time, a

T the bride-groom comes, if in a mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's

B see, if in a mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's

Calm and floating quarter-notes (♩ = 108)

S mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's time we can - not read - - - y - be.

A mo-ment's time, a mo-ment's time we can - not read - - - y be.

T time, a mo-ment's time we can - not read - - - y be.

B time, a mo-ment's time we can - not read - - - y be.

Maiden:

Could I just refuse your offer,
 be young and pretty a little longer?
 I'm just beginning to taste life's pleasures.
 Who could contrive these doleful measures?
 Fie! You sneak behind my back
 to catch me in your net, alack!
 Oh, let me taste earth's joys and happiness!
 When old I'll dine on pious wretchedness.

Death:

To go about as a thief at night
 I'd much prefer, and is my right.
 When you are young, change course in time!
 The lusts of man deceive the mind.
 No one has here a lasting place;
 all soon tire of the world's embrace.
 You'll dance to my tune! You'll see you can!—
 Leave your couch, and dance, old man!

Variation 10

A lively dance. Fast eight-notes (♩ = 168)

Fl. *f*

Fl. *senza rit.*

Twelfth Aphorism

Quite simply, without dragging (♩ = 76)

S *meno p*,
Man, if your time on earth has

A *meno p*,
Man, if your time on earth has

T *mp, espressively*
Man, if your time on earth has come to seem too long

B *meno p*,
Man, if your time on earth has

4 *rit.* **Tempo I**
S come to seem too long, then turn your *pp*

A come to seem too long, then turn your *pp*

T *meno p*
then turn your heart to God, th'e - ter - nal

B *pp*
come to seem too long, then turn your

7 *rit.*

S heart to God, th'e - ter - nal Now, your song.

A heart to God, th'e - ter - nal Now, your song.

T Now, your song.

B heart to God, th'e - ter - nal Now, your song.

Old Man:

O Death, how long for you I've waited!
 My painful journey can hardly be stated.
 Could you not find me, a poor old man?
 Is punishment for my sins your plan?
 Illness is truly heavy to bear;
 and how the world fares I do not care.
 I pray God will forgive my faults,
 that I may enter heaven's vaults.

Death:

Come, old man, and take my hand
 and enter now another land.
 You'll soon forget your earthly sorrow,
 sitting at God's feet tomorrow.
 The songs of angels you shall hear,
 sweet and melodious to your ear;
 All strife will fade around God's table.—
 Follow me, child in the cradle.

Variation 11

Slow and heavy quarter-notes ($\text{♩} = 60$)

Fl. *mp* *mf* *p*

Fl. *poco rit.*

Thirteenth Aphorism

Tempo and character as before

S *p* The soul, which on earth here is small - er than small, *very calmly!*

A *p* The soul, which on earth here is small - er than small,

T *p* The soul, which on earth here is small - er than small,

B *meno p* Ah,

S *rit.* *Tempo I* *meno p* will be in hea - ven quite the fair - est

A *meno p* will be in heav - en quite the fair - est

T *meno p* will be in heav - en quite the fair - est

B *pp* Ah,

8 *calmly and tenderly!* *rit.*

S an - - gel of all.

A an - - gel of all.

T an - - - - gel of all.

B

Child:

O Death, to me this makes no sense;
cannot walk but now must dance?
How think you now to raise your cry,
before I live that I should die,
before arriving, to be departing,
to take away a life just starting?
How heartsick is my mother's weeping!
O give me back to this world's keeping!

Death:

God knows why I'm sent my pipe to play,
and why a sinless one I call today,
why good and evil both abide,
why some have long, some shorter lives.
I pipe some to torment, some to peace,
some to God's hall of eternal grace.
I pipe aloud that all may hear.
Who will now turn, their God to fear?

Variation 12

Primary tempo ($\text{♩} = 92$)

Fl. *p*

Fl. 3 X *meno p*

Fl. 22 *senza rit.* *pp* *senza rit.*

Fourteenth Aphorism

Heavy, forward-striding quarter-notes ($\text{♩} = 72$)

mp

S The soul, since _____ it is born to e - ter - ni - ty, can nev - er find true

mp

A The soul, _____ since it is born to e - ter - ni - ty, can nev -

p

T The soul, _____ since it is born to e - ter - ni - ty, can nev -

p

B The soul _____ since it is born to e - ter - ni - ty, can nev -

rit.

S rest, find true rest _____ in life's _____ ab - surd - i - ty. _____

A - er find true rest, _____ nev - er find true rest in life's ab - surd - i - ty, _____

T - er find true rest, _____ nev - er find true rest in life's ab - surd - i - ty, _____

B - er find true rest, _____ nev - er find true rest in life's ab - surd - i - ty, _____

mf **Significantly faster** (♩ = 120) **...tempo and dynamic gradually increasing**

mf

S
nev-er find true rest in life's ab - - - surd - i -

A
nev-er find true rest in life's ab -

T
nev-er find true rest, nev - er

B
nev-er find true

15

S
ty, nev - er find true rest, nev - er find true rest, nev - er find true

A
- - surd - i - ty, nev - er find true rest, nev - er find true

T
find true rest, nev - er find true rest, nev - er find true rest,

B
rest, nev - er find true rest, find true rest,

In the previous tempo
but quite softly and shadowy

31

rit. *meno p*

S world so dear, this world so dear, and full-y give your-selves to

A world so dear, this world so dear, and full-y give your-selves to

T world so dear, this world so dear, and full-y give your-selves to

B world so dear, this world so dear, and full-y give your-selves to

35

rit. *pp*

S that which dis - ap - pears.

A that which dis - ap - pears.

T that which dis - ap - pears.

B that which dis - ap - pears.

Nachwort (zum Totentanz)

---zum Totentanz:

Die Sprechverse sind eine Nachbildung der alten niederdeutschen Strophen des Lübecker Totentanzes. Der heutiger Besucher der Totentanzkapelle in der Lübecker St. Marienkirche sieht an ihrer Stelle unter der bekannten Bildfolge eine Ersatzdichtung im Barockgeschmack, die von einer Übermalung um 1700 stammt. Nur aus Bruchstücken, die an verschiedenen Orten auf uns gekommen sind, lassen sich etwa 36 der 50 ursprünglichen Strophen von 1463 wieder zusammenfügen. Da manche Gestalten der langen Reihe, vom Zeitenwandel abgeblaßt, nicht mehr zum Herzen der Gegenwartsmenschen sprechen, waren Streichungen und manche Umgestaltungen und Ergänzungen unvermeidbar; doch wurde versucht, alle Verse auf Grund alter Zeilen und aus ihrem Geiste zu gestalten, auch in Wortwahl und Sprachtakt das Niederdeutsche durchklingen zu lassen.

Johannes Klöcking

---zu den Spruchversen:

Die Worte entstammen dem „Cherubinischen Wandersmann“ des Angelus Silesius.

Was die Vertonung anlangt, so mag der Kundige unschwer in Textwahl, Anlage, Länge und Anzahl der Sätze, in Stimmlage, -umfang und -zahl, vielleicht darüber hinaus auch in der Wort- und Sinngestaltung das mächtige Vorbild der Leonhard Lechnerschen „Sprüche von Leben und Tod“ erkennen, die, nach den Worten Friedrich Blumes, den genialsten Totentanz darstellen, den die Musikgeschichte kennt.

Die Aufführungsmöglichkeiten sind die mannigfaltigsten; der eigentliche Totentanz kann gespielt sowohl als auch vorgelesen werden, was vor allem bei Aufführung in streng gottesdienstlichem Rahmen das Gegebene ist; es sind außerdem Totentanz wie Chorsprüche jeweils für sich allein darstellbar; es gehören stets zusammen Spruch und nachfolgender Dialog; eine Umstellung in der Anordnung der Sprüche und Szenen untereinander kann nicht gestattet werden, wohl aber eine größere oder geringere Auswahl. Ebenso ist Transposition in keinem Fall gutzuheißen, die meist tiefe Stimmlage entspricht (auch in der Wahl der Tonarten) dem Charakter der Vorlage.

Als künstlerisches Gestaltprinzip ergab sich, ganz aus dem Wesen der gedrunghenen Spruchdichtung heraus, größtmögliche Mannigfaltigkeit in der Erfindung unter bewußtem Verzicht auf ausgesprochene Durchführungsarbeit, daher die scharfen Kontraste, die präzise Formung des augenblicklichen Stimmungsgehaltes, die gedrängte, aphoristische Kürze. Nur wenige der kleinen Sätze begnügen sich mit der Durchführung nur eines beherrschenden Satzmotivs; besonders typisch für diese Art Gestaltung etwa ein Satz wie der fünfte Spruch, den ich „Frau Welte“ zu überschreiben geneigt wäre nach der bekannten Statue an der St. Sebalduskirche zu Nürnberg—eine nackte Frauengestalt von blühender Schönheit: so scheint Frau Welte dem Beschauer entgegenzutreten; ihr Rücken aber ist von Schlangen und Würmen zerrissen, ein Bild der Vergänglichkeit. Wie anders wäre sonst darstellbar jener gespenstische Reigen, jene „Passacaglia“ im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes, zu deren phantastisch bunten, unabsehbaren „Veränderungen“ immer der gleiche „Ostinato“ den Takt schlägt: „Heiß und frisch, wohlmechtig, gesund, schön und prächtig; Morgen verdorben, tot und gestorben“?

Hugo Distler, 1933

---zu den Flötenvariationen

Am letzten Sonntag des Kirchenjahres, dem 25. November 1934, führte der im Jahre 1958 verstorbene Komponist Bruno Stürmer in der Lutherkirche zu Kassel mit dem Zulaufischen Madrigalchor Distlers *Totentanz* auf, wobei die Gestalten durch Laienspieler unter der Leitung von Karl Magersuppe dargestellt wurden. „Die Kostüme stellte das Kasseler Staatstheater nach Entwürfen der Staatlichen Handwerkschule“ (so der Wortlauf auf der Programm). Für diese Aufführung ist von Hugo Distler—vermutlich auf Grund einer Bitte von Bruno Stürmer und Karl Magersuppe hin—eine „Flötenstimme“ geschrieben worden, deren einzelne Teile jeweils als Überleitung zu den aufeinanderfolgenden Aufrufen der verschiedenen Gestalten durch den Tod erklingen sollten. Distler hat diese (vermutliche) Bitte in Gestalt einer schlichten Variationssuite für Flöte solo über „*Es ist ein Schnitter heißt der Tod*“ erfüllt. Nach der Kasseler Aufführung hat später Dr. Friedrich Struve Distlers *Totentanz* in dieser Weise noch einmal in der gotischen Stadtkirche von Homberg (Bez. Kassel) mit einer Chorgemeinschaft aufgeführt. Aber darüber hinaus ist die „Flötenstimme“ verborgen geblieben. Karl Magersuppe aber, der seit Jahrzehnten sein weltbekanntes Marionettentheater „*Holzköpfe*“ in dem reizvollen alten Marstall des Schlosses von Steinau bei Schlüchtern, dem Jugendparadies der Gebrüder Grimm, betreibt, hat das Autograph über all die Jahre hinweg sorgsam bewahrt. Als dann im Herbst 1976 LKMD Walter Opp mit der Osthessischen Kantorei Distlers *Totentanz* einstudierte und Karl Magersuppe nun auch hier die Laienspieler betreute, kam die unbekannte Komposition zum Vorschein und fand bei der Schlüchterner Aufführung Verwendung. Das kleine schlichte Werk erfüllt nicht nur gliedernde Funktion, sondern verstärkt in seiner—fast möchte man sagen—Anspruchslosigkeit die meditative Seite des *Totentanzes*. Dieses ohnehin bedeutende Werk Hugo Distlers erhält durch die „Flötenstimme“, die sich mit der immer wiederkehrenden Mahnung an den „Schnitter Tod“ wie ein roter Faden durch die Komposition zieht, noch größere innere Geschlossenheit.

Walter Blankenburg

Composer's Notes and Epilogue

Totentanz:

The spoken verses are a reconstruction of the old, Low-German "*Lübecker Totentanz*" [Dance of Death]. A present-day visitor to the "Dance-of-Death Chapel" at St. Mary's Church in Lübeck would find that the verses formerly written below the well-known sequence of images were painted over around 1700 and replaced with a poem in baroque style. It was possible to reconstruct only about 36 of the original 50 strophes from 1463, based on bits and pieces of the original, collected from various sources.

Since some of the characters in the long series are anachronistic and no longer meaningful to contemporary people, deletions and some rearrangements and additions were unavoidable. Nonetheless, the reconstruction of the entire body of verses is grounded in archaic poetry and the spirit of that poetry, so that the Low German resonates clearly, including in word choice and rhythm of language.

[The *Lübecker Totentanz* met its own end in the firestorm caused by Allied bombing on the night of March 28–29, 1942. –Ed.]

The Proverbs:

The words are taken from the "Cherubic Pilgrim" of Angelus Silesius.

As far as the musical setting is concerned, it is not difficult for the connoisseur to recognize in the choice of text the structure, the length and number of movements, the pitch, range, and number of voices, and perhaps as well in the arrangement of words and meaning, the compelling archetype of Leonhard Lechner's "Proverbs of Life and Death," which, in the words of Friedrich Blume, represents the most ingenious dance of death in the history of music.

The possibilities for performance are many. The dance of death itself [that is, the dialogue] may be acted out or read aloud, the latter being a given for performance in a church-service. The choral proverbs and the dance-of-death-texts may be performed separately as well. Each proverb and the following dialog always belong together; shuffling their order is inappropriate, but employing a greater or lesser number of them is fine. Transposition is likewise to be avoided. The generally low tessitura befits the character of the subject matter, as does the choice of keys.

As an artistic design principle, the essence of the sturdy poetry dictated the greatest possible diversity of conception, with a conscious avoidance of pronounced development—hence the sharp contrasts, the precise shaping of the momentary mood, and the condensed, aphoristic brevity. Only a few of these brief settings are satisfactorily realized by a single, principal motive; notably typical of this type of design would be the Fifth Maxim, which I was moved to title "Lady Earth" after the well-known statue in the Church of St. Sebaldus in Nuremberg, a beautiful, naked female form in full bloom. Or so she appears when facing the viewer. Her back, however, has been gnawed away by snakes and worms in a representation of transience. How otherwise could that ghostly round-dance be represented, that "Passacaglia" in the truest sense of the word, to whose fantastically colored, unpredictable "transformations," the same "ostinato" beat is always heard: [as Lechner wrote,] "hot and fresh, strong, healthy, beautiful, glorious; tomorrow decaying, dead, and lifeless"?

Hugo Distler, 1933

Tr., Dr. Gordon Paine

The Variations for Flute:

On November 25, 1934, the last Sunday of the church year, composer Bruno Stürmer (d. 1958) produced a performance of Distler's Totentanz in Kassel's Luther Church. The Zulauf Madrigalchoir was complemented by amateur actors who took on the spoken roles under the direction of Karl Magersuppe. As stated in the program, "The costumes of the Kassel State Theater were based on designs from the State Trade School." For this performance, Hugo Distler, presumably at the request of Stürmer and Magersuppe, had written a "flute part" whose individual episodes provided a series of transitions between the repeated summons of the various characters by Death. Distler fulfilled this (presumed) request in the form of a suite of variations for solo flute on the tune "Es ist ein Schnitter heißt der Tod" (It is the Grim Reaper). Later, after the performance in Kassel, Dr. Friedrich Struve performed Distler's Totentanz in the same way with a community chorus in the Gothic town church of Homberg (district of Kassel). In the interim, however, the written flute part had apparently disappeared. It turned out that Karl Magersuppe (who for decades had run his world-famous "Holzköpfe" marionette theater in the charming old royal stables of the castle at Steinau bei Schlüchtern, the children's paradise of the Brothers Grimm) had carefully preserved the autograph for all those years. Thus it was that in the Fall of 1976, when State Church-Music Director Walter Opp prepared Distler's Totentanz with the East-Hessian Kantorei and Magersuppe repeated his role of directing the amateur actors, the unknown composition came to light and was heard in the Schlüchtern performance. The simple little flute variations not only serve a structural function, but also with their—one might say—unpretentiousness, underscore the meditative side of Totentanz. This work of Hugo Distler, already significant on its own, achieves a greater inner unity thanks to the "flute part," which like a thread running through the composition, always returns with the admonition to the Grim Reaper.

Walter Blankenburg

Tr., Dr. Gordon Paine