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Post-Classical Ensemble

Gustav Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" ("The Song of the Earth") presents a curious combination of late romantic German sensibility in its music and Chinese poetry of the 8th century in the original source of its texts. Its final segment, "Der Abschied" ("The Farewell"), is particularly notable; it describes two friends saying goodbye, perhaps forever, and many admirers have considered it a farewell to life by Mahler, who was suffering from heart disease and nearing death when he composed it.

No single performance can explore all the dimensions of "Der Abschied," but the interpretation by the Post-Classical Ensemble, Wednesday night at the Austrian Embassy, came brilliantly close. The ensemble, directed by Angel Gil-Ordoñez with a precise sense of idiom and style, used the chamber music reduction by Arnold Schoenberg, which requires only 13 players and preserves all the music's subtly varied colors. Mezzo-soprano Delores Ziegler sang the text, with a haunting treatment of the final words, "ewig . . . ewig" ("forever . . . forever") that lingered in memory long after the music had faded to silence.

That ended the program. What came before it was equally fascinating. First a solo on the *erhu*, a two-stringed fiddle, by Wang Guowei, an extraordinary performer; then an exotically evocative piece, "Moonlit River in Spring," played on Chinese instruments by four members of the Music From China ensemble.

In a brief introduction, Joseph Horowitz, the artistic director of the Post-Classical Ensemble, said that crossing boundaries is what this group is about and may be a key to the future of classical music. This program showed exactly what he meant.

-- Joseph McLellan