

About Orpheus

We know the great singer who soothed people, animals and even the elements with his voice and lyre from the legends of classical antiquity.

However, it is not only the myths and legends of grey antiquity which tell of Orpheus – as early as 600 BC he was first mentioned in Greek literature as the highly acclaimed father of song (Ibycos, later Pindar).

In all the narrations concerning him it is always the power of song which characterizes him; his place is among the heroes.

His poems deal with the creation of the cosmos and man.

In his "state" Platon reported on books of Orpheus in which he heralded possible deliverance from the evils of the shadow existence in Hades' underworld. Anyone could achieve this by adhering to various ascetic and cleansing requirements (among others, bloodless offerings, vegetarian diet).

Teachings chiefly corresponded to those of Pythagoras and influenced Platon's spiritual teachings. Orphic mystic cults were widely spread up until the fifth century AD.

Of all the wonderful narrations about Orpheus, those about his journey into the Underworld, which he undertook out of love for his dead wife Euridyce, fascinated poets and thinkers the most.

That inherently instinctive moment of ultimate experience in the face of death, here the young lovers!

The realisation of loss and a despair which drove him into the deepest abyss of his soul. Here, in the utter darkness of pain, the decision was born to cross the threshold of death; courage, hope and inspiration grew to attempt the unthinkable in a state of vocal exaltation! And indeed, he succeeded in touching the hard hearts of the rulers of the Underworld, in moving them to a compassion unknown to them.

Although there is pre-Christian and also medieval Orpheus poetry describing a successful journey into the Underworld in which Orpheus wins back his Eurydice (for example the death lament on Bion, approx. 100 BC or the medieval hymn "Morte Christern Celebrata" from Saint Martial), most of the literary adaptations, since the famous compositions of the Romans Virgil and Ovid, revolve around Orpheus' fatal and forbidden glance when leading his wife away, which led to the second and final loss of his love and cast him into a deep despair.

In our concert we, too, take up this common version of the story, which also prevails in Baroque poetry.

In the background, however, stands the conviction that the essential element about Orpheus' journey was the defiance of death:

The penetration and reversal of an antique death experience is achieved with sounds of harmony.

In the cathartic encounter of souls with his beloved deceased, Orpheus can be considered to herald the Christian act of deliverance.

(Kyrill and Clemes of Alexandria)

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