

HUGO WOLF (1860-1903)

Mausfallen-Sprüchlein - The Mouser's Magic Verses



This is one of the earliest published songs by Hugo Wolf (1860-1903). It was written on 18th June 1882, as we know, because Wolf was always helpful in dating his manuscripts. Although the poem is by Eduard Mörike, it is just a whimsical piece and does not form part of the great collection of songs to Mörike texts which Wolf was to produce in a fit of inspiration during 1888 and which confirmed him as one of the greatest and most original of songwriters.

The poem is spoken by a child who has just walked three times round a mousetrap, and is a piece of light-hearted mumbo-jumbo which is supposed to entice mice to enter the trap and lose their tails – or worse!

Wolf's music reflects the child's perspective, with much of the piano part written entirely in the treble clef (at a high pitch). At one point the pianist's left hand crosses over his right hand when moonlight is mentioned. The cheeky little pattern of notes which opens the song and occurs throughout shows us that the whole thing is not to be taken too seriously. The music manages to suggest both childhood innocence and mischief, with overtones of fairies and troublesome elves.

Remember that almost the entire song is to be sung extremely quietly, so as not to break the spell. It is marked 'very delicately' and when moonlight is mentioned, Wolf asks the pianist to play *ppp* (as quietly as possible) and then fade away. The only loud passages are at the mention of the mice losing their tails – 'watch your tails take no chances' (but this lasts for only a bar) and towards the end when the child imagines the whole family, including the cat, dancing with delight when the mice have been caught

*Kleine Gäste, kleines Haus.
Liebe Mäusin oder Maus,
Stelle dich nur kecklich ein
Heute Nacht bei Mondenschein!
Mach aber die Tür fein hinter dir zu,
Hörst du?
Dabei hüte dein Schwänzchen!
Nach Tische singen wir,
Nach Tische springen wir
Und machen ein Tänzchen:
Witt witt!
Meine alte Katze tanzt wahrscheinlich mit.*

Edouard Mörike (1804-1875)