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The Flight to Egypt

Libretto for Valentin Ruckebier

CrossOpera-Project (Modena-Linz-Novı Sad 2018-2020)

Dramatis Personae

Mother

Father

The Child's Voice

A doctor

His assistant

A nurse

Soprano

Bass

Alto

Baritone

Tenor

Mezzosoprano

Place:

A hospital.

Time:

Today.

A Room without windows, chairs, a table, a water cooler with plastic cups. An artificial palmtree. Medical equipment. Mural with the picture of a desert (videostill/beamer). Neonlights. A double leaf door left. A smaller door to the right leads to a storage room. Out of this storage room the nurse enters, obviously agitated.

NURSE *for herself*

As if he
has seen my innermost
My innermost. *Closes the door to the store room*

In the room there are the parents, the doctor and his assistant; the assistant logs. As soon as the nurse leaves the room, the mother rushes to the closed small door and presses her ear at it.

DOCTOR *to the Father*

Ok -
once again:
Why did you flee?

FATHER

Once again, and listen,
listen to it:
For me unknown
reasons
the emperor or
- if you prefer -
the government of my country
decided,
that all new born and all children
up to their second birthday
are to be killed...

MOTHER *never turning away from the door*

It is fine, fine, he is calm
And smiles and he's looking at me.

DOCTOR *to the Father*

Absurd, no one
will ever believe you.

ASSISTENT *to the Mother*

Looking at you? -
Through the closed door...?

MOTHER

Yes, I do know.

DOCTOR *to the Father*

No one will ever believe you:
Killing all those children!
Allow me an advice:
You may tell this to a doctor
maybe you speculate on a hospitalization
but the story you have to tell the authorities must be

more plausible,
if you understand, what I mean.

FATHER
Plausible. I understand.
More plausible.

Out of the storage room one hears a noise for the first time, maybe a human voice or a tone. (These human noises, screams, singing, etc. are to be articulated by the alto off stage). For a moment everyone is looking at the closed door, under which now a strong light shimmers. - Then the mother starts to hum very quietly, maybe a lullaby or a children's song, as if she would communicate with the child beyond the door. The sounds soothe.

MOTHER *hums*

DOCTOR *clears his throat, a bit embarrassed*
Well then. - And
What next:

FATHER
In that peticular night...

DOCTOR
Which night?

FATHER *still unflustered*
After we have heard about
the new law...

The doctor laughs. - The mother interrupts her humming.

FATHER *unflustered*
A man came into our house...

DOCTOR
A man?

FATHER *evasive, undetermined*
Someone...

DOCTOR
In your house? *stretched*
Someone?

FATHER
Yes, I, got a fright
in the middle oft he night, he
stood simply
there, beside me -:
Someone
stood beside me, beside
our bed, in which we
slept, the three of us.

MOTHER
The three of us.

ASSISTENT
Just like that?

MOTHER
Just like that,
the three of us.

FATHER
Someone.

The nurse enters the room and brings some fruit.

DOCTOR *indignant to the nurse*
You are disturbing.

NURSE
Please.

MOTHER
Thanks.

NURSE *with a shy view at the door, presenting grapes.*
And for
the - child.

Again a sound is heard from the storage room. The nurse sits on the floor nearby the door.

NURSE *some kind of murmuring singsong, permuting*

MOTHER *dividing a fruit, presenting it to her husband*
An apple, beloved, truth.

FATHER
Thanks, wife.

ASSISTENT *looking through his documents*
So:
You are
not the father?

FATHER
Not the father.

ASSISTENT
In any case..

FATHER
In any case

ASSISTENT
You said so
as you came to our hospital
what you did
voluntary

FATHER

Not the father
In any case

MOTHER
Voluntary.

FATHER
Yes, but what's the point?

ASSISTENT
And your wife, *interrupts himself*

MOTHER
Voluntary.

FATHER
In any case.

ASSISTENT
She is your wife, isn't she?

FATHER
In any case.

MOTHER
Voluntary.

ASSISTENT
But do you know
who
is the father?

A child's laughter is heard from the storage room.

FATHER
I do think, that this
is irrelevant.

MOTHER
Who
is the father.

DOCTOR
Leave it to us
to determine what
is irrelevant,
and what is not.

FATHER
Ok. *crosses his arms*

A longer moment of silence, in which the litany-like humming of the nurse can be heard.

MOTHER *to the doctor*
You are right, it is
naturally
not irrelevant.

FATHER *imitating her cynically and pronouncing the word „naturally“ expressively*
Naturally not.

MOTHER *ignoring him*
But my dear husband
meant, it is
irrelevant for our
story

The litany of the nurse ends.

ASSISTENT *quietly, to himself*
Admirable.

A moment of embarrassing silence.

DOCTOR *giving in, to the father*
What happened then...
Then, in that night?

FATHER *reacting to the gestural asking of the wife, hesitant*
A
stranger stood beside
our bed, me alone
did awake, he said
to me, the three of us
should flee immediately. He said *chanting*:
„Take the wife and the child, and walk on a secluded street to Egypt!”

Silence

DOCTOR *with his professional scepticism*
And what kind of
“stranger” was he?

FATHER
I don't know.
Just strange. He did not
Speak our tongue, and yet
I could understand.

DOCTOR
And he?

FATHER
Disappeared – just as he came

DOCTOR *annoyed*
But how did he
come?

FATHER
I don't know, I slept

DOCTOR
And how did he...?

FATHER
...disappeared as if
I was sleeping again.

DOCTOR
And then?

FATHER
And then we started off at once. -
In the same night. At once. -
It was chilly, windy and moonless.
Covenient for paths in the offside. -
As we left the village
Outside in the open country
Suddenly... *stops as if he tries to remember*
Three other children
Came towards me

ASSISTENT
Other
children?

FATHER *nods*
Three boys with me...

MOTHER
And with me a girl.

ASSISTENT/DOCTOR *confused, spoken or shouted*
Did you know those?
Who are they now?

FATHER/MOTHER
No,
we do not know anything
we don't know anything.

MOTHER
And then...

FATHER
... after a long and
exhausting walk...

MOTHER
...we stopped for a rest; -
I took
the child *points at the door*
My child on my lap
and the other
children sat
around me and...

Terrifying screams, hissing, noise from furniture and glass being broken.

MOTHER
Screamed these children, who
were with us
screamed and
out of a cave came
many
dragons.

DOCTOR *to the nurse*
Hurry! Nurse, hurry up,
a remedy!

ASSISTENT
Dragons?

DOCTOR
Quick, a syringe, she's hallucinating.

FATHER *rising, loud and clear*
No.
No! That is
What it was
really.

The noise and the screams in the storage room die away.

MOTHER
There my child
Dismounts of my lap
And took position on his feet
Right in front of the dragons.

FATHER *enthusiastic, proud*
He stood for the first time.

MOTHER
But the dragons fell down before him
paying homage to him

NURSE *giving the syringe*
Here you are!

MOTHER
And after this
homage they left.

DOCTOR *signals his refusal*

NURSE
Praise the lord
You dragons of the earth
Dragons and all abysses.

Silence. After a while smooth breathing and sounds are to be heard from the storage room.

MOTHER
In the same way
Lions payed homage
And panthers
Joined us
Into the desert.

Short musical interlude „Lions and panthers in the desert“. -

In the meantime the doctor and the assistant prepare syrniges andstraightjackets. The father recognises these actions and screams but does not want or cannot escape without the child. He is overwhelmed and fixed. The nurse starts her litany again.

MOTHER *with a changed voice/unisono with the alto from off stage*
They do not hurry
To harm you,
but they come
to honour.

Silence

ASSISTENT
And the children,
The children you spoke about
Where are they?

MOTHER
Lions
Panthers
In the desert

FATHER
Where are they...

MOTHER
In the desert

Change of light: the mural of the desert turns into a film

FATHER
Where

MOTHER
Where

Filmstop. - Freeze. - The ceiling fan turns on by itself.

MOTHER.
They rest and have a rest

FATHER
Lions and
Panthers

Like sits exhausted at the artificial palmtree
I would like
To rest
In the shadow -
rest. In the shadow
of this palmtree,
I, in the shadow, I am
so tired, me, so tired.
Hungry, too and
thirsty.

and
children
and
I and I

Again the mural becomes alive - desertfilm.- From the storage room one hears sounds again and words in an unknown language: they palmtreeboes down or falls, the mother starts to eat it's leaves and fruitrs. The doctor and the nurse remain in freeze. Stop of the video.

DOCTOR/ASSISTENT *to each other with increasing anxoiusness, whispering*
We should
Send for help, help, we
must separate them
from each other and examine them
more meticulous.
They are...
It...

MOTHER *asking loud and clear*
Why are your hearts
now filled with fear?

Change of light

FATHER *as if he has been interrupted, continues promptly*
The unbearable heat
forced us to take the path nearby the sea.
But it was,
as if we've lost our
sense of time
by the sun, the lightness and the heat,
because nobody of us
can remember
anymore,
so we did the hike,
- which normally takes thirty days -
on that one single day.

ASSISTENT *writing*
So
yesterday, when
You at night...

DOCTOR
Thirty
days
are one day...

DOCTOR *brooding*
Dehydrogenated, that terrible
child and he's
not his father...

ASSISTENT
...arrived.

MOTHER
No, the day before yesterday.
We arrived, went into
a kind of church,
it was chilly inside

FATHER
„Capitol“ called the
people that place...

MOTHER
Chilly and
dark. But when...

FATHER
We went inside...

From the storage room sound terrible shoutings and noise, as if the child is having a raving madness.

MOTHER/FATHER
All the pictures and sculptures
destroyed themselves...

ASSISTENT *commenting in an asking manner*
It was an attack, an air raid

DOCTOR *having a guess*
Or not air,
but earth, an earthquake

NURSE
Destroyed...

MOTHER/FATHER
All pictures.

NURSE
Destroyed.

The noise from the storage room dies away.

MOTHER
And someone came
Out of the dust,
the clouds,
a soldier or a
priest, and they
wanted to take
my son, so
we did flee
again...

FATHER
...until we
found this place.

Heavy noise from outside: - air raid, shock waves or earthquake

DOCTOR, ASSISTENT, NURSE *in panic*
Where does this
Swaying and shaking
In our land/country
Come from?

Noise and detonations increrase.

The door to the storage room opens. From there the brightest light.

Silence.

Black.

