

# At Home with Nelson Mandela

After I had read the last pages of Nelson Mandela's autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom* during a holiday in Hawaii in 1995, I was so moved by the charisma and the human greatness of this man that from then on one burning wish never left me: the wish to meet him personally, to feel his strength at first hand, to be allowed to take his hand and look into his eyes.

Imaginative fantasies?

I felt that by using music as mediator between all people of this world I might have a chance of being able to transform my wish into reality. The idea of commissioning a composition dedicated to Mandela occupied me more and more. Title: *Hommage à Nelson M.* for cello and percussion. With this combination of instruments I wanted to create a musical bridge between the European music tradition and the native feeling for rhythm of the black population of South Africa.

In the composer Wilhelm Kaiser-Lindemann I found an ally; we exchanged ideas, and he began to write the composition. Our common objective: the first performance should take place in South Africa with Mandela as guest of honour.

Thanks to my friendship with Johannes Rau, who was at the time Minister-President of Northrhine-Westfalen and is now President of Germany, I was then able to deliver a letter to Mandela during his state visit to Germany in which I informed him about our idea which had been engendered by my fervent admiration for him.

Unfortunately it turned out impossible to realise our plans for a concert in South Africa. Since, however, I was determined to release the composition and its message into the world as quickly as possible, the first performance took place in December 1996 in the Tonhalle, the concert hall in Düsseldorf, before an audience which was deeply moved by the music. Then in 1997 I received an invitation to give a concert in the Nico

Theatre in Cape Town on 14th September – Heritage Day in South Africa – including *Hommage à Nelson M.*, with the president as guest of honour in the front row. My joy was indescribable, but also my disappointment when Mandela called off his attendance the day before the concert. As President he had to attend to other representational duties on this national holiday.

However, he sent his closest friend, Govan Mbeki, to my concert. The 85-year-old came backstage after the concert, obviously very moved, and invited me to visit him in Parliament the next day. What a warm-hearted encounter! Govan Mbeki, who had been imprisoned together with Mandela on Robben Island for 24 years, assured me that he would tell his friend Nelson Mandela all about the concert in detail.

I flew back to Germany, and received an invitation from President Mandela a few weeks later to visit him in his residence in Cape Town. In the most exciting moments of my life I gave a completely private concert – only five people were present – for the State President. I played parts of the composition and explained connections between his autobiography and the musical ideas resulting from it. These happy moments will stay with me all my life as a source of inspiration; to have experienced in the person of Nelson Mandela one of the great personalities of the century, a man with a brilliant intellect, iron discipline and an unyielding will free from all feelings of hate, with unshakeable faith in the goodness of every single person and an almost superhuman persistence in the pursuit of his aims. Nelson Mandela, a man of great personal modesty and humility.

**Maria Kliegel**

*Translation: Diana Loos*

## Wilhelm Kaiser-Lindemann:

### *Hommage à Nelson M.*, for solo cello and percussion, Op. 27

*Hommage à Nelson M.* was suggested by the cellist Maria Kliegel. Consideration of the charismatic personality of Nelson Mandela had made a profound impression on me. What kind of man and politician is it, I asked myself, who, illegally imprisoned for 26 years, humiliated and maltreated, once he is President and in power does not let the heads of his tormentors and political opponents roll but with his programme of national reconciliation finds his own way to come to terms with the past? Since I had no opportunity to know Nelson Mandela personally, I was only able to approach him as a composer, that is intuitively and through meditation. I have tried to express in music his circumstances and his hopes. After the first performance of the work on 16th December 1996 in Düsseldorf the ambassador of the Republic of South Africa in Germany, Mme Lindiwe Mabuza, told me that she was particularly surprised how a non-African artist had been able so to put himself into the South African situation. I am happy to try to raise in my music a monument, however modest, to Nelson Mandela.

Mandela's early years in prison were very difficult. He and his close colleagues were subjected to harsh routines, and even victimisation. Later the situation improved somewhat and he was allowed, among other things to start programmes of learning and teaching in which finally even his personal guard took part. This first

movement is characterized by numbing despair with outbursts of feeling, but also certain positive visions of the future can be perceived. The second movement, *Hunting*, is a concept derived from be-bop-jazz, in which the instruments alternate in fast tempo, in pursuit of each other. This and other jazz elements are the basis of the movement. Included, however, is something different, that is a man-hunt. An evil movement, although also calling for particularly demanding virtuosity and very rewarding for the soloist. *Metamorphosis* is certainly the most African movement. It is in 7/8 and expresses something of the African joy of living, sometimes restrained, sometimes obvious. It describes, at least subliminally, my hope for South Africa's own progress in normality and spiritual freedom. *Lullaby for Zaziwe*, the fourth movement, provides a tranquil finale, based on a lullaby from Mandela's own people. Here I have composed my wish for this country, that mothers can finally sing their lullabies in peace, without the fear that the door may be broken down and the arbitrary abuse of power by man-hunters triumph. *Zaziwe* is a grandchild of Mandela and between the two there is an obviously close emotional bond.

**W. Kaiser-Lindemann**

## Nelson Mandela's Thanks for the Dedication

The President is humbled by the great honour bestowed upon him through your dedication of a music composition to him entitled *Hommage à Nelson M.* Your kind gesture is greatly appreciated.