

**Small Tales, tall tales** *A Grimm Sequence (after stories by the Brothers Grimm)*

The comic, anecdotal, grotesque and irrational are all exemplified in the **Nursery and Household Tales** (1812–15) collected by the Brothers Grimm, and it is from this source that the texts for **Small Tales, tall tales** come. The texts are presented in the manner of a story-telling competition, with one tale, or the tale's teller, attempting to out-do the previous one in some way.

This manner of story-telling is drawn from the German 'gathering of fools' or *narrentreffen* (a tradition that has varied roots in many European countries). It is often a platform for the telling of tales, some moral, some nonsensical; processions, singing, dancing and general merriment all form a part of the occasion.

The shape of **Small Tales, tall tales** is modelled after such an event, lending a further dramatic impetus to the work. The sections are as follows:

A *Kleine Ouverture* introduces instrumentally the musical nature and emotional extremes of the tales that follow. Be it whimsical, bizarre or dark, this sound-world radiates out to the following six stories and *Envoi*.

*The story of Schlauraffenland* (Tenor and Baritone)

a nonsense land (of 'milk and honey') where anything can happen. Here the idea of a story-telling competition reveals itself for the first time.

*The Ungrateful Son* (Baritone)

a moral tale

*Knöst and His Three Sons* (Tenor)

a nonsense tale with moral

*The Singing Bone* (Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, Tenor)

the darkest, most involved of the stories

*Beneath Stairs* (All voices)

another nonsense text set for the four voices

*The Golden Key* (Soprano)

an enigmatic tale which is followed, without a break, by

*Envoi (Abschied)* (All voices)

a short farewell as the overture opening returns briefly to complete the work.

In adapting and setting these texts, I discovered a hidden darkness within the tales, where even nonsensical stories may hide a brutal core. Such tales lead the listener, *Hansel and Gretel-like*, to the deepest part of the fairy tale wood, where archetype and folk-history merge, and where much is found in the telling of a good tale.