

From "Words and Music" by Rick Jones
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Composer Resurrected



CD Review

Gal Symphony No. 4. Schumann Symphony No. 2
Orchestra of the Swan, Kenneth Woods
Avie Records

When two record companies simultaneously show interest in the same unknown composer, a reviewer might almost talk of a trend. This is the case with composer Hans Gal who died in Edinburgh in 1987 three years short of his hundredth birthday. He'd lived in Vienna until 1938 when the German invasion sent him into exile.

A defiant spirit courses through this Brahmsian fourth symphony, composed in 1975. The first movement's theme has a raised 'Lydian' fourth, resembling the Simpsons' signature. It's a sinfonia concertante with solo parts for violin, cello, flute and clarinet. Played here by the excellent Orchestra of the Swan under Kenneth Woods (see left) it casts the twentieth century in a new light, one of obstinate cheerfulness and determined optimism, a refusal to be bowed by contemporary events, which may in the end be more useful to mankind than the pain of defeat.

The finale, Buffoneria, plays up to this clownish refusal to be gloomy in an irrepressibly jaunty rondo. The work is not without sadness: the slow movement is a melancholy dialogue on loss between violin and cello, the flute and clarinet now silent, having been active as the tragicomic figures of Harlequin and Columbine in the wistfully capricious scherzo.

Schumann's C major symphony shares the Gal's combative spirit, as it was written in the 1840s when the composer was battling depression. In his own words it represents the 'power of resistance of spirit'. Woods conducts it with profound romantic feeling, the repeated statements never repetitive, the conscious striving never self-conscious.

It may yet prove to be a landmark, pipping, as it does, the other Gal disc by a fortnight.

Kenneth Woods, conductor
www.kennethwoods.net