

# Forgotten composers back on playlist

## Music

Hans Gál symphonies and other little-known works are being rediscovered, says *Anne Midgette*

**Y**ou may not have heard of Hans Gál. But the American conductor Kenneth Woods thinks you should have. Gál was a widely respected and performed composer in the 1920s, but the Nazis drove him out of Germany, and though he continued writing, teaching and composing in Scotland until his death in 1987, his reputation never quite recovered. Elegant, adeptly constructed, and unashamedly tonal, even beautiful, his music hearkens back to a bygone tradition of Viennese late romanticism that wasn't what the music world thought composers should be writing in the late 20th century. As a result, it fell into such neglect that, when his four symphonies were released on the label Avie in 2011 and 2012, they were all world premiere recordings.

"After years of the family trying to get any of this music recorded," Woods says, "two orchestras agreed within days of each other."

These days, getting little-known music recorded is a lot easier than it once was - and a lot more appealing to musicians. Now that it's easier to make a recording than to play Carnegie Hall and the standard repertoire has been recorded to death, more artists are staking out their own niches by championing and recording forgotten composers of past eras: the orchestral music of Alfredo Casella, the complete woodwind quintets of Antonín Reicha.

Making a CD has become tantamount to creating a business card. But for many of the musicians who have plunged into these unfamiliar scores and believe they've found treasure, the larger point is to make a mark on posterity. "I really believe in this music," Woods says of Gál's work. "I do believe it will enter the repertoire."

There's one hitch. Although more music is available on recordings, it sometimes seems that less of it is heard in live performance. "It's a long slog," says Joseph Horowitz, the co-founder of Washington's Post-Classical Ensemble who has long worked as a consultant, adviser and programmer. Horowitz is an adviser to the American Classics series on the record label Naxos, devoted to composers such as George Whitefield Chadwick (1854-1931) and George Templeton Strong (1856-1948). But he's the first to admit that, for all the important rediscovery work the series has done, it's barely caused a ripple in the American orchestral repertoire. Works like Chadwick's engaging Jubilee or Strong's Sintram symphony - "the only successful American symphony in the grand romantic mode", Horowitz says - simply don't get performed. "I think much more should have happened by now," Horowitz says.

James Conlon, the music director of the Los Angeles Opera and the Ravinia Festival in Chicago, is one of the bigger-name conductors to devote himself to little-known repertoire. His particular focus is the music of the so-called degenerate composers - artists who, like Gál, were proscribed by the Nazis. Conlon repeatedly performs operas and symphonic



Heard again ... Hans Gál, a respected composer in the 1920s, fell foul of the Nazis *Lotte Meitner-Graf*

works by Alexander Zemlinsky, Viktor Ullmann, Franz Schreker and others; from artists like Gál who were in the midst of flourishing careers to young talents who were just getting started, like Gideon Klein, who was 26 when he died at Auschwitz. He's established a foundation devoted to disseminating information about these artists, he makes a point of bringing the repertoire to young musicians and he's started initiatives like the concert series at Ravinia called Breaking the Silence. But even he sometimes

**'People need to hear new things. Listening to something you don't know is very different'**

has trouble getting organisations to put it on. In the case of Nazi victims like Gál, there's an extra moral imperative to help restore the work to its rightful place in the repertoire.

"I don't believe that every piece has to be a masterpiece," says Conlon. "It's not about that; it's about feeling the spirit of the time ... We have assumed through a reductionist view of history there was a single line that went through the Viennese school and ended." He calls it "a misuse of Darwinism" to assume that the works that have survived are automatically better than the ones that haven't.

In addition, a more varied musical diet is simply more enriching. "I can hear Mozart over and over, conduct it over and over," Conlon says. "I never get tired of him. Still, people need to hear new things ... There's always more out there. The act of listening to something you don't know is very different."

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