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Schumann, Gal

*** (four stars)

“Rhenish” Symphony No. 3 (Schumann)
Symphony No. 3 (Gál)

Orchestra of the Swan/Kenneth Woods
Orchestral Avie AV2230

The Music: Schumann’s free-flowing melodic depiction of the River Rhine was- for his Edinburgh-based biographer and devotee Hans Gál—his “most outstanding achievement in symphonic style.” Gál’s own Third Symphony of 1952 is a real discovery: confident, rich music in the late Romantic idiom that has bags of souls and the residue of a genuine expressive thirst.

The Performance: It’s an obvious yet inspired decision to combine these two “Thirds” on disc, so it would be churlish to pit OOTS’s Schumann against some of the finest and noticeably more nuanced muscular and searing recordings around. That said, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with their Rhenish, which is well-paced with a particularly effective Scherzo and some very stylish string playing. It’s adventuring through the Gál, though, that brings the best from Woods and his musicians. A sense of excitement quickly creeps into the throbbing pregnancy of the first movement and the players have you hooked thereafter—blossoming as an ensemble and as individuals through the works well-upholstered and contented richness.

The Verdict: Gál is truly worth rediscovering ; Woods’s recording project for Avie has intrigued and delighted me and I’m only left wanting more. If you like late Romantic orchestral music with a Viennese accent, don’t hesitate.

Want More? A no-brainer: Kenneth Woods’s stunning Avie recording of Gál’s music for violin and orchestra with Annette-Barbara Vogel. (AV 2146)

Andrew Mellor