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Hans Gál – Music for Violin and Orchestra [Annette-Barbara Vogel, Kenneth Woods & Northern Sinfonia]

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Gál

Concerto for Violin and Small Orchestra, Op.39
Triptych – Three movements for orchestra, Op.100
Concertino for Violin and String Orchestra, Op.52

Annette-Barbara Vogel (violin)

Northern Sinfonia
Kenneth Woods

Recorded 7-9 and 20 & 21 September 2009 in Hall 1, The Sage Gateshead, England

CD Number
AVIE RECORDS AV 2146

Duration
70 minutes

Imagine if you will the warm-hearted and sweet lyricism of the violin concertos of Barber and Korngold economised by the neo-classical restraint evident in Stravinsky's example, and with a hint of the insinuating lines of Szymanowski No.1, yet with a variety of wholly personal and likeable ideas and moods, quite disparate if somehow belonging and, in the first movement, a cadenza that has flamboyance while remaining true to the discretion of the work as a whole. In the slow movement, Finzi and Hindemith (unlikely bedfellows, admittedly) occasionally come to mind in music that is rigorous but yielding, heartfelt and pastoral, and oh so tender; the finale (just a little too long in context) dances easily, foot-tapping on occasions, and reflecting at other times. Thus you have Hans Gál's 1932 Violin Concerto.

There is something deceptive about Hans Gál's music, the work of the long-lived (1890-1987), from Vienna to Edinburgh composer, whose output has been so well served by Avie. Gál's other violin concerto, from 1939, with string orchestra accompaniment, this time in two movements instead of three, the first elegiac and of endless melody suggestive of circumstance but not indulging it, and ultimately a pure musical statement, and a finale (linked to by a cadenza) that looks back to an earlier epoch and to the terpsichorean point of the Rigaudon that is here interspersed by poignant musings.

Moving ahead to 1970, Hans Gál reached his 'opus 100' with Triptych, a set of three movements for orchestra, the opening 'Impromptu' energetically if severely introduced, every note significant, the contrasting mellow invention sometimes suggesting Richard Strauss's late-in-life autumnal music (specifically "Capriccio"), but with an independence of thought and a timelessness of invention that is at once Mozartean yet also crisply contemporary. The central 'Lament' is sparse if tellingly personal; and the final 'Comedy' is joyous and inviting, and not without a flourish or two.

Gál's art has the enviable ability to say so much without being tempted to decorate, augment and make denser. Such transparent and highly-crafted scores are given superbly prepared performances here. I had a few reservations over Annette-Barbara Vogel's playing on the Gál violin-and-piano release, but her playing here is first-class, so too the quick-witted response of Northern Sinfonia under Kenneth Woods. Both the recording and the booklet's annotation are excellent.

Colin Anderson