

GÁL Violin Concerto. *Triptych. Concertino for Violin and String Orchestra* • Kenneth Woods, cond; Annette-Barbara Vogel (vn); Northern Sinf • AVIE 2146 (70:14)



Gal: Violin Concerto
AUDIO CD
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As more of Gál's music reaches us on albums, I find myself increasingly of two minds. Was he in essence a remarkable example of creative renewal, still capable at 80 years of age, in the *Triptych*, of turning out vital classical works? Or was he a compositional machine, in cultural isolation from all else, the accusation that used to be hurled repeatedly at Jean Françaix? You'll find no answers on this CD, but you will find some excellent music.

The aforementioned *Triptych* consists of three movements: Impromptu, Lament, and Comedy. There's a sinfonia concertante feel to its regular placement of full orchestra next to a series of solos, mostly by winds, such as the moody clarinet solo that launches the Lament. But even that Lament really cannot break through the composer's smiling poise, and the movement is really a tranquil reflection, with an occasionally disturbed surface. As ever with this composer, we are treated to impeccable craft, and discreet counterpoint. If nothing impresses itself upon the memory to savor afterward, there is also no sense of tired imitation.

The Violin Concerto dates back to 1932. The composer's writing for violin is ecstatically lyrical as well as idiomatic, and there are memorable episodes throughout, but each of the movements seems overlong for what it seeks to say. Thematic content is placid and lacks vigor, and textures simpler than usual. Counterpoint, an expressive element in Gál's music, is sometimes pressed into barren service when his transformational method fails to yield sufficient inspiration. The whole doesn't live up to the value of the parts.

Kenneth Woods, conductor
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Far better is the gem of the album, the Concertino of 1939, compounded of equal parts rhapsody and sunny serenity. Its two movements—an Andante tranquillo that functions as an expansive opening, and a Rigaudon, marked *allegro giusto*, that provides a scintillating finale—are a perfectly balanced pair of chamber mates. The composer states his material and begins its development at once, with a clarity that had become characteristic of his work by this time. There is none of the sense of marking time that occurs in the Violin Concerto, of content stretched beyond its limit, but rather of a shimmering surface that reveals upon rehearing a myriad of attractive, subtle details.

The performances are reasonably paced, though the Violin Concerto might have been rendered a bit more appealing with less silk and more urgency. Kenneth Woods phrases with distinction, and aims for clarity in Gál's contrapuntal textures. As for Annette-Barbara Vogel, she possesses an excellent technique, plus the kind of open-hearted warmth this soaring music requires to make its case. With good sound and attractive liner notes, fans of the composer will be pleased with this album's purchase; I really don't think we've heard the last of the Concertino on records, either. Barry Brenesal