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Hans Gál – Symphony no 3, Schumann – Symphony no 3 *Orchestra of the Swan/Kenneth Woods*(Avie)

Avie continue their Hans Gál symphony revival with another disc pairing his music with an established Austro-German work. Born in Austria in 1890, Gál enjoyed a successful compositional and academic career in Germany before fleeing to Britain in 1939, eventually obtaining a post at Edinburgh University. His Third Symphony was completed in 1952 and has lain dormant for 55 years. Hopelessly anachronistic, it glances wistfully back at the world which Gál had left behind; the music of an exotic émigré marooned in rainy post-war Edinburgh.

Gál's impassioned, well-crafted late romanticism is readily accessible and quietly moving - there's a lot to enjoy here. He's good at subtle transitions – the way that the delicious opening melody segues into the first movement's more agitated fast section, and its brilliant, ghostly close. Only the Finale left me baffled, with a stentorian opening quickly yielding to a triumphant ending which feels a little too easily achieved. It's nicely played by Stratford-upon-Avon's Orchestra of the Swan under Kenneth Woods, who are up against stiffer, famous-name competition in Schumann's Rhenish Symphony.

In this brilliant, exuberant work, Woods takes full advantage of his orchestra's modest size, choosing swift speeds and enjoying well-articulated string playing. The Scherzo has an appealing village band feel, and Wood's trombones in the stark contrapuntal fourth movement are faultless. The same material's major key reprise in the last movement is a great moment, prefiguring the brassy chorales heard at the end of Brahms's First and Mahler's Fifth. It's a good performance. Gál may be a hard sell, but his listener-friendly, bittersweet music deserves an outing, and the Schumann symphony is an attractive bonus.

By Graham Rickson