



Hans GÁL (1890-1987)

Concertante works for Violin: Violin Concerto Op 39 (1932)

[25.56]; *Triptych*: Three Movements for small orchestra Op. 100 (1970)

[25.56]; Concertino for Violin and string orchestra Op. 52 (1939) [18.11]

Annette-Barbara Vogel (violin)

Northern Sinfonia/Kenneth Woods

rec. no details supplied

AVIE AV 2146 [70.14]

It's especially interesting for me to be listening to and reviewing this disc as I have just been 'doing' Egon Wellesz who, like Gál was an émigré as a result of World War II. Gál's situation was, if anything, even worse as in March 1933, at a time when he had a role of some eminence in German musical life and also a little in Austria, he was forced out of his position on account of his Jewish background. He fled to England. After many vicissitudes he ended up working and living for the rest of his life in Edinburgh.

The Violin Concerto comes from the period 1931-2 when Gál was at his most successful in Germany. It is in many ways quite an untroubled work. Throughout it I kept pinching myself that this was not a British concerto as it seems to bear little relationship with the Austro-Germanic tradition of the late Romantics or early moderns prevalent at the time. The 'Fantasia' opening movement and the second movement marked 'Arioso' begin with a very English-sounding pastoral melody on the oboe. The only vicious and angry writing comes in the cadenzas which Gál himself wrote. The piece was written for Georg Kulenkampff and Fritz Busch and is in three movements. The finale, a Rondo, is quite lively and the brightest of the three but the opening is a Fantasia with four or five contrasting ideas. The work as a whole hangs together in a most satisfactory manner. Annette-Barbara Vogel tells us in a brief essay that recording this work and indeed the entire disc has been her dream for many years. She can be triply proud of her efforts, those of the orchestra and of Kenneth Woods who enables the orchestration to breathe with such clarity. The recording engineers must also take a bow.

It's interesting that despite all of the difficulties thrown at Gál and his family in 1934 he wrote the genial, easy-going yet masterful 'Improvisation, Variations and Finale on a Theme of Mozart' for string quartet (Meridian CDE84557 - Edinburgh Quartet). In 1939 he wrote an equally lyrical 'Concertino' which, ironically is, if anything, more virtuosic than the concerto. Its opening *Andante tranquillo* is fecund with ideas, almost Fantasia-like. Its melody on cellos is almost Korngold and even more so when the soloist takes it up. But the second subject is strident and dotted. The work is in just two movements linked by a challenging bridge-cadenza before hustling in a 'Rigaudon'. This was a melody which Gál noted down, apparently from a British Museum Manuscript dated 1716; in contrast there is a more romantic second subject. A nice touch is created by this idea melting away into another, briefer cadenza before the opening melody of the first movement returns with a sense of sadness and nostalgia. The dance tune is

suddenly re-invigorated for a final fling in the orchestral strings and then by all, leading to a light-hearted ending.

The CD places 'Triptych' between these two concertante works. It dates from around Gál's 80th year when he was experiencing a late burst of creative activity. The excellent booklet notes by Eva Gál tell us that this was the time of Third Quartet in 1969, the Fourth of 1971, the Fourth Symphony of 1973 and a Clarinet Quintet of 1977. One is therefore reminded of late-flowering composers such as Berthold Goldschmidt and Havergal Brian. The Triptych is intractably conservative for its time. Indeed in the clarinet writing of the slow, middle movement - called a 'Lament' - and in the lyrical second subject of the third movement marked 'Comedy', one may well be reminded of autumnal Brahms. There are times anywhere in the work when other composers might come to mind. My wife, who really took to this "warm-hearted old man", at one moment shouted out 'Glazunov' in the first movement (marked romantically, 'Impromptu'). There's even a hint of Elgar at one point. But this music is not shackled to any particular time and like its composer is related to no particular place. It has a serious sense of purpose without dourness. It has harmonic variety without abstruseness. It has rhythmic vitality without being overly complex. It has an immediate impact but is worthy of greater study.

The presentation is exemplary with photos and examples of Gál's neat manuscript work and wonderful performances. If from my descriptions the music seems to have an appeal then search out this CD out because if successful then I suspect more Gál might appear in the next few years.

Gary Higginson

http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2010/Oct10/Gal_AV2146.htm