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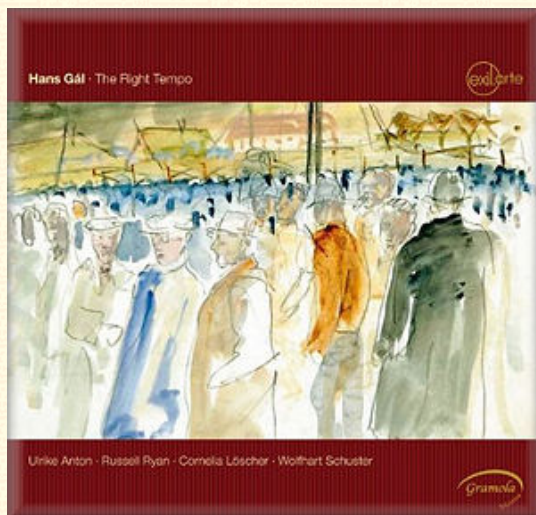


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REVIEW



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Hans GÁL (1890-1987)

The Right Tempo - Chamber works

Three Intermezzos for flute and piano op. 103 (1974) [14.30]

Three Sketches for piano Op. 7 (1910-11) [8.15]

Sonata for Two Violins and Piano Op. 96 (1942) [24.53]

Huyton Suite for flute and two violins Op. 92 (1940) [19.05]

♦ Ulrike Anton (flute), Russell Ryan (piano), Cornelia Löscher (violin), Wolfhart Schuster (violin)

rec. 8-10 January 2010, Franz-Liszt-Saal, University of Vienna

♦ **GRAMOLA 98896** [67.11]

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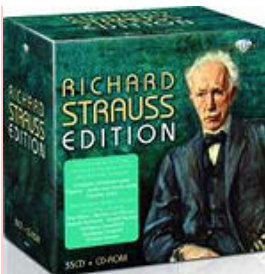
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Hans Gál was born to Jewish parents on the outskirts of Vienna but it should be remembered that although he spent half of his life in Scotland he is from the Schumann/Brahms/Reger tradition. Of late, what with his four quartets and his concertos, he has finally, now that fashion and style are not such a concern, been receiving his due. At the start of the war he had to leave behind all that he knew and flee to England. As an 'alien' he was incarcerated near Liverpool, then was moved to the Isle of Man and, eventually having been freed, lived in Edinburgh.

An internment camp does not sound especially appetizing yet the *Huyton Suite* is a happy and charming piece of light music which is the last work on this extraordinary CD. It brings it to a close on a cheerful note.

Huyton was where Gál was interred when he first arrived in Britain. The suite is scored for the unusual combination of flute and two violins because those were the instruments to hand. Movement one is an *Alla Marcia*, the second a scurrying *Capriccio*, the third a delightful set of *Variations* on a folk-like theme (in an Eastern European sense) which if someone had told me that it was by Dvorák I wouldn't have been shocked. Its finale is full of bugle calls and is charmingly entitled *Fanfaronata*, ending in a light and perfect cadence. Beautifully written, it is obviously a joy to play.

In fairness the *Three Sketches*, played elegantly by Russell Ryan, do exactly what they say on the packet. The middle one, which is longer than the outer, faster movements put together is more fully developed. It possesses several interesting chord juxtapositions but on the whole is in the late Germanic Romantic style. This is not surprising for a young man aged just 20 and who had learned piano with Richard Robert in Vienna - who had also taught Serkin and Clara Haskil. Nevertheless it must be mentioned that it wasn't long before Gál was to win Austria's inaugural state prize for his First Symphony - as a musician he was developing quickly.

It seems extraordinary however that when Gál was young Johann Strauss was at his height. When he died James MacMillan, also a Scot, was putting the finishing touches on his 'The Confession of Isabel Gowdie'. This is intriguingly apposite because Gál was responsible for critical editions of the works of Johann Strauss father and son during the First World War. When you hear the *Three Intermezzos* for flute and piano, which opens the CD, a work dating from over 60 years after the Sketches, you realize that Gál never really altered a jot of his musical language to cater for contemporary taste. Alongside the second Viennese school the first could still flourish happily into the 1970s and beyond. The Intermezzi may also remind you of the lighter Brahms. It should be remembered that Gál

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Beethoven Symphonies
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spent much of his life whilst teaching at the University in Vienna editing the complete Brahms edition. Indeed the scores are still available as is his remarkable book on orchestral score reading published by UE - sadly I have lost my copy. The emphasis in these Intermezzos is on melody and sheer musical delight; forget the style and language. And if any 'big noise' from one of the examination boards is reading this then here is a work (published by Schott) which would serve excellently for advanced flute examination purposes. It would be hard to find it played any better than by Ulrike Anton whose warm, rich tone, especially in the lower register, is glorious and her sensitive accompanist, Russell Ryan.

The *Sonata for Two Violins* is the most substantial work here and an impressive piece. It seems to be a little uncertain as to when and where it was first performed but Michael Haas in his outstanding booklet essay (full of archival photos of the composer) thinks that it was in Edinburgh in 1942. You will notice that having been so prolific before this date, Gál's creative activities became substantially reduced by work in the Edinburgh University Music Department but also by a general realization that his style seemed to have little place in post-war Britain. Indeed the third movement is a wistful, melancholic *Valse Elégiaque* (remember the Strauss connection) and the fourth, which he calls *Ragtime*, are movements of sheer nostalgia; the 1920s, Gál's happiest time - or even earlier decades - are evoked. The opening movement is marked *Tranquillo* although it has its passionate climaxes. The interweaving of the Violins is wonderfully conceived with counterpoint twisting and turning. The second movement is a very brief and light *Scherzino*, which plays incessantly with a single rhythm.

Hans Gál has been regarded as a dinosaur and one who lived somewhat out of his time. He was a composer of considerable interest in pre-War Austria and a successful one. When the new Europe took hold his music was regarded as an anachronism. If you know some of the other, large-scale works then you will need no persuasion to buy this beautifully documented, superbly played and sympathetically recorded disc. If you are new to this composer then you might prefer to start with the Violin Concerto (*Avie 2146* or *Gramola 98921*) which should give you a more rounded idea of Gál's individuality and considerable flair.

Gary Higginson



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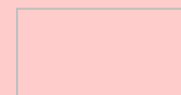
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