

HANS GAL

1890 – 1987



Memorial Concert

Sunday, 10 January 1988

Reid Concert Hall, University of Edinburgh

A TRIBUTE

With the death of Hans Gal we have taken leave of a musician whose life spanned the whole of the century. A man of learning and wit – a scholar whose writings are widely read and enjoyed – a conductor remembered with affection – a pianist whose singular ear for counterpoint informed every performance and an important composer whose greatest works have been known and performed in Europe and are only now beginning to be appreciated in the country which became his adopted home. Above all those of us who have had the honour of knowing Hans and Hanna will feel that we have lost a trusted and much loved friend. For those of us who were fortunate enough to have been taught by him the event of his death has been a clear reminder of the vital contribution he made to our own lives.

When I first came to Edinburgh Hans was still teaching, still lavishing a fierce attention on the simplest of our strict counterpoint exercises, the paper held close while he sang over the parts "dim ... dim ... dim ...". The sharpness of his sarcasm and his impatience with anything shoddy were balanced by a great kindness and courtesy towards beginners. We knew he loved us but those who came from non-musical backgrounds realised only gradually what an enormous privilege it was to work with such a man. In later years when he was writing for the "National Zeitung" of Basle I often went to concerts with Hans. He was a stimulating often alarming companion, making pointed remarks, always highly relevant and interesting, sometimes acid. On one occasion we were sitting a few seats away from the Director of the Edinburgh Festival in the Usher Hall, and in the moment of silence after a long symphony came Hans' voice, not loud, but quite clear "...incomparable rubbish". Hans loved what was beautiful and well crafted with what he called a controlled texture; to him it was completely irrelevant whether the work was popular or not. Another unfortunate Festival Director was approached annually by Hans promoting the cause of 'Carmen'. "You know why it is so popular" he would say, "...because it is so GOOD!" He had a great capacity for enjoying himself. We heard a famous cellist not so long ago and were surrounded by glum faces during the 'pops' at the end of the programme – "Ah well!" said Hans "only a snob does not enjoy such music".

Recently Hans told us that he had "a little less vitality", but it was evident right to the end that the frailties of age in no way diminished his extraordinary mental powers. We were constantly reminded of the breadth of his learning and interest in History and Literature. He read in many languages and reminded me just before he died that his favourite authors in English were Gibbon and Sir Walter Scott. Four days before his death he was musing on what he called "the greatest adventure", the story of Hannibal taking elephants across the Alps, "You see" said Hans, with just a flash of enthusiasm reminiscent of that with which he tackled our counterpoint exercises, "you see he didn't know what he would meet on the other side..."

Carolyn Coxon

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano Op.84 (1964)

Allegro moderato
Andantino
Adagio – Allegro con spirito
Allegro con spirito

This sonata was published in 1965 and shows the composer still able to maintain his genial manner within a sophisticated chromatic, contrapuntally intricate idiom thoroughly rooted in traditional tonality.

The first movement of this B flat major work is in sonata form with a second subject characterised by a combination of lilting 6/4 rhythm with the basic common time of the movement.

The intermezzo-like Andantino in E flat major with a central section in C flat has something of the character of a slow dance.

Momentarily striking a graver note, the finale begins with an Adagio introduction. The main movement Allegro con spirito follows in the major key. However, the Adagio recurs within the central episode of the movement, whose various 'motifs' have interesting interrelationships.

L.C.

Philip Greene – *clarinet*
Leon Coates – *piano*

Three Songs to R M Rilke Op.31 (1928)

Advent
Adagio
St Nepomuk

Margaret Aronson – *soprano*
Carolyn Coxon – *mezzo soprano*
Katrine Townhill – *contralto*
David Kimbell – *piano*

Advent

Es treibt der Wind im Winterwalde
die Flockenherde wie ein Hirt
und manche Tanne ahnt, wie balde
sie fromm und lichterheilig wird,
und lauscht hinaus. Den weißen Wegen
streckt sie die Zweige hin, bereit,
und wehrt dem Wind und wächst entgegen
der einen Nacht der Herrlichkeit.

The wind drives in the winter forest
the flake-flocks like a shepherd,
and many a fir-tree knows how soon
it will be devout and lit up holy,
and listens. To the white paths
it stretches out its branches in readiness
and braves the wind and grows towards
that single night of splendour.

Adagio

Der Abend ist mein Buch. Ihm prangen
die Deckel pupurn in Damast;
ich löse seine goldnen Spangen
mit kühlen Händen, ohne Hast.
Und lese seine erste Seite,
beglückt durch den vertrauten Ton, –
und lese leiser seine zweite,
und seine dritte träum ich schon.

The evening is my book. Its covers
make a purple show of damask;
I undo its golden clasps
with cool hands, without haste.
And read its first page,
contented by familiar sounds, –
and quietly read its second,
and am soon dreaming its third.

Sankt Nepomuk / Saint Nepomuk

Große Heilige und kleine
feiert jegliche Gemeinde;
hölzern und von Steine feine,
große Heilige und kleine.
Heilige Annen und Kathrinen,
die im Trauma erschienen ihnen,
baun sie sich und dienen ihnen,
heiligen Annen und Kathrinen.
Wenzel laß ich auch noch gelten,
weil sie selten ihn bestellten;
denn zu viele gelten selten –
nun, Sankt Wenzel laß ich gelten.
Aber diese Nepomuken!
Von des Torgangs Luken gucken
und auf allen Brücken spuken
lauter, lauter Nepomuken!

Many saints both great and small
now are praised by one and all;
stone and wooden, fine ones all
are these saints both great and small.
Holy Anna and Catherine,
they have seen them in a dream,
now they build them and esteem
Holy Anna and Catherine.
Wenceslas is all right, too,
for he rarely gets his due;
as, indeed, do all too few –
Yes, Saint Wenceslas will do.
But these dreadful Nepomuks!
Peeping out of all the nooks,
haunting like so many spooks,
loads and loads of Nepomuks!

Translations by Anthony Fox

String Quartet No.2 in A minor Op.35 (1929)

Preludio
Toccata
Canzone
Intermezzo Capriccioso leading to Rondo

The second quartet dates from 1929 and the composer has said that "the Quartet and Trio have always been the essence of my idea of chamber music: pure three-part and four-part writing, exploring the unlimited space of polyphony." The first performance was given in Vienna in 1930 and the Rosé and the Kolisch quartets performed it frequently during the years before the war. In more recent years the German Stross Quartet have taken it into their repertoire and the Edinburgh Quartet have also given performances. The style is, I think, above all lyrical – the music sings all the time – and the overall layout owes much to classical tradition. The prelude is in a concise sonata-form and the opening idea, a widely-arched melody with chromatic accompanying counterpoint, is characteristically searching and expressive.

The toccata is a brilliant and masterly piece of string writing – a kind of perpetuum mobile with two distinct and contrasting ideas which are developed contrapuntally and eventually combined.

The lyrical quality of Gal's music is nowhere more apparent than in the canzone, which is an outpouring of continuous melody. The tune begins on the viola, and the sharp fourths and constant modal collisions ("false relations" as the textbooks call them) impart a remarkable intensity of feeling.

It is typical of the composer to follow this with a fast light-hearted scherzo and trio (the intermezzo) which leads without a break into the finale. This rondo contains some of the essence of Gal's musical thought. It is, as he describes it, a "quiet idyllic movement with lively interludes". Here we have a gentle and tender piece, sometimes capricious and energetic, but its quiet peroration says "yes" to life, and is perhaps a true expression of a life-long attitude.

K.L.

The Edinburgh Quartet

Miles Baster – *violin*
Peter Markham – *violin*
Michael Beeston – *viola*
Mark Bailey – *cello*

INTERVAL

Trio for Piano, Violin and Violoncello Op.49b (1948)

Moderato e tranquillo
Pastorale (andantino)
March burlesque (allegretto)

This Trio was written in 1948, alongside a companion Trio Op.49a, as part of a series published in Vienna under the title *Hausmusik* (domestic music). Both works are intended to make only modest demands on the players' technique but at the same time to offer the experience of chamber-music style in the fullest sense, that is, a style "based on an ensemble of independent individuals whose function as leading, counterpointing, accompanying parts is changing perpetually."

(HANS GAL)

These works reflect the composers lifelong interest and active participation in practical music making, and this particular Trio was, incidentally, the last piece he actually played, less than a week before his death.

E.F.G.

Edna Arthur – *violin*
Simon Fox – *violoncello*
Eva Fox-Gal – *piano*

from 24 Preludes for Piano Op.83 (1960)

Nos. 14, 3, 6, 20, 14, 15, 21

A happy Faust? Liszt gives to the first theme of his Faust Symphony a series of descending intervals – G - B - E flat – F sharp - B flat - D, and so on; he quickly outlines for the listener Faust's world-weariness and pessimism. Hans Gal takes the same starting-point, B - E flat - G, then C - E - A flat, and rises with the greatest optimism and good humour through the majors and minors of each of these keys. The second book of Preludes simply goes on to complete the same scheme.

When Hans Gal published the 24 Preludes in 1965, a total survey of the major and minor keys was already 243 years old, going back to the date of Bach's first book of the '48'. In any such set variety is the touchstone, and it is only a composer with a true feeling for the keyboard who can offer such stimulation through his invention of new keyboard ideas. These seven examples have been chosen to make a group of pieces which show the maximum variety of mood and style, and at the same time a selection of keys which are linked through the traditional relationships of keys. The last one is printed with the right hand in C major, but the left hand with a key signature of F sharp major. However, the resulting sound is of F sharp with decorations, not of bitonality.

C.K.

Colin Kingsley – *piano*

'Heurigen' Trio. Variations on a Viennese Folk Song Op.9 (1914)

This work was written in 1914 and first performed by a trio including the composer at the piano with the violinist Rudolph Kolisch, leader of the Kolisch Quartet and brother-in-law of Schoenberg. The word 'Heurigen' in the title refers to Austrian new wine which is imbibed in numerous Viennese inns with musical accompaniment by ensembles playing popular folk melodies such as the one Gal uses for this set of variations, which is cunningly constructed in its overall key schemes. The uninhibited charm of the work seems to belong to a world unaffected by the dire events which were to engulf it in the year of its premiere.

L.C.

Miles Baster – *violin*
Mark Bailey – *violoncello*
Colin Kingsley – *piano*

Printed by the University of Edinburgh