

SCHOECK: Variation Sonata for Violin and Piano; Violin Sonata in D Major; Violin Sonata in E Major – Ursula Bagdasarjanz, violin/ Gisela Schoeck, p. – Gallo

Volume two of the survey of Othmar Schoeck's violin works enjoys the artful collaboration of two well matched musicians, including violinist Bagdasarjanz and the composer's daughter at the keyboard.

SCHOECK: Variation Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 22; Violin Sonata in D Major, Op. 16; Violin Sonata in E Major, Op. 46 – Ursula Bagdasarjanz, violin/ Gisela Schoeck, piano – Gallo CD-1249, 49:45 [Distr. by Albany] ****:

Swiss-Romanian violinist Ursula Bagdasarjanz (b. 1934) claims Aida Stucki and Max Rostal as her prime pedagogical influences, and both of these artists were themselves highly influenced by the violin method of Carl Flesch. Bagdasarjanz and Gisela Schoeck, daughter of the composer Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957), have collaborated much to proselytize the composer's work, and these 1961 documents from Swiss Radio attest to the singular success of their music-making.

The Op. 22 Variationsonate of 1905 reveals a darkly passionate and romantic character, a cross between the Brahms ethos and something more austere we might associate with Delius or Stanford. The piece presents an elongated theme and four variants and epilogue. A clean, ringing cantabile invests this music, and Bagdasarjanz's tone, warm and sharply etched, makes a patrician sound for this under-performed work. At times, the relatively conservative cast of the variations, given a syntax that does not venture into anything of the Second Viennese School, almost suggests late Schumann or restrained Reger. The second variation – marked *Rasch und leicht* – makes a case for the virtuosity of which violinist Bagdasarjanz was capable. We do inhabit some fascinating harmonic motion in the fourth variation. The piece concludes with a frisky fast epilogue in sweet long lines and alternating pizzicati. The slightly off-kilter harmony once more aligns itself to British composers like Ireland or someone like Josef Suk. Brilliant playing, too, from Gisela Schoeck, for whom her father's carnal and tricky metrics pose no problems.

The Violin Sonata in D Major (1909) emanates a singularly sweet melancholy, and once more we might first be tempted to attribute the music to Arnold Bax or pre-WW I neo-Classicists. Each of the three movements plays at about the same length of time, five minutes. The piano part in the first movement *Nicht zu langsam* achieves a furor that becomes quite thick texturally, again in a mode that seems influenced by Schumann and more ironic temperaments, like Reger and Richard Strauss. A warm tone and burnished luster from Bagdasarjanz sell this infrequent music so we wonder why other recitalists do not program it regularly. The second movement, *Ruhig*, generates a paradoxically serene yet disturbed universe, whimsical and wistful at once. A passionate middle section, a nod perhaps to Schumann, verges on obsession. The final movement, *Allegro con spirito*, relents from the 'German' seriousness of expression to a more busy virtuosity, fleet and folkish, a bit like adventurous Grieg. The tricky metrics find deft realization by the two partners, and the middle section – as per expectation in Schoeck – waxes passionate.

The 1931 Violin Sonata in E Major poses a more severe cast in its opening movement than we heard in the first two works. The melodic line seems more academic and less inspired by the spirit of song. Angular and introspective, the first movement *Tranquillo – Andante con moto* reminds me of Szymanowski but without any identifiably "ethnic" character. There are jazzy elements in the keyboard part, but they remain elusively transient. The second movement, with its *Scherzo – Rasch und leicht* designation – perhaps betrays Schoeck's divided nature, Italian lightness and German heaviness of spirit mixed together. Academic and clever rather than melodically inspired, the music sounds "serviceable" and virtuosic in the manner of Hindemith. If we call such quirky figures "expressionistic," what shall we say of the last movement, *Breit – Kraeftig bewegt*, that proceeds *attaca*, from the second movement? The melodic line breaks up amidst double stops and "dry" accompanied chords, *parlando* and semi-recitative, a moment of *cadenza*, than a raspy impulse in gypsy style. Such protean and mercurial energy, all in bravura realization, testify to a definite power of expression in Schoeck, even if its exact nature escapes easy categories.

Gary Lemco