SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1241

OTTO KLEMPERER

Otto Klemperer was born at Breslau in 1885 of musical parents, but probably he saw Hamburg, to which the family moved when he was four, as his home. He entered the Hoch Conservatory at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1901 to study piano with Kwast, moving with him to the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory at Berlin the following year. In 1905 he conducted the off-stage band in Mahler's second symphony, thus meeting Mahler and being much influenced by him. Later he admired Toscanini, but regarded Mahler "as a hundred times greater". He became a répétiteur at an opera house, making a precipitous début with Offenbach's Orphée aux Enfers in 1906 when the conductor walked out. In 1907, on Mahler's recommendation, he became conductor of Prague's Deutsche Oper. He then held a succession of appointments. At Hamburg in 1910 his casts included Caruso (they got on well together) and Elisabeth Schumann. Then he moved to Barmen, 1913, Strasburg, 1914, Cologne, 1917 and Wiesbaden, 1924. In 1924 he conducted in Moscow and Leningrad; in 1927 in New York. Thus when he was appointed director of Berlin's Staatsoper in 1927 he was a conductor of wide knowledge and experience mainly, though not exclusively, of opera. The public wanted traditional works traditionally performed, Klemperer wanted Hindemith, Schönberg, Weill, Stravinsky. Klemperer's *Der Fliegende Holländer* was in contemporary dress, the Dutchman without a beard. Police were needed in the auditorium to control the brownshirts. Unsurprisingly, in 1933 Klemperer was one of the first to leave.

Fortunately the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra was in need of a conductor. Thus began the second part of Klemperer's career, which turned out to be very largely on the concert platform. In Los Angeles he went for lessons with Schoenberg, also a fish out of water. "What did you study?" he was asked, "Bach motets." was the reply.

Life was not easy for Klemperer. He was Jewish (although he had become a Catholic) and deeply German. At 48 years of age he had to leave his cultural home. He was welcomed in America, but was never comfortable there. He was subject to severe bouts of depressive illnesses and he was also prone to accidents. He was an avid reader; on one occasion, smoking whilst reading in bed, he caused a fire which nearly killed him. And his scathing shafts of satirical wit did not endear him to their recipients.

Thus, with a brain tumour followed by meningitis, which left him partially paralysed, he had to leave the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra in 1939. He did not have another regular position until he went to the Budapest Opera in 1947.

Klemperer first conducted in London in 1929; in 1951 he returned for what turned out to be the most settled and successful years of his stormy life. In Germany he had revelled in the avant garde and the Neue Sachlichkeit, and his unconventional staging of traditional operas shocked; now, ever increasingly decrepit, he enjoyed being revered as the grand old man handing down the Austrian and German classics in awe-inspiring, granite-like performances resting on a deep

intellectually-based grasp of music. When he heard that Bruno Walter had died he is reputed to have remarked, "Now I have no competition." Many agreed.

Klemperer retired in 1972 and died in 1973.

He was of the generation which made records, but did not see in the recording studio a passport to fame. His records are in two main groups:

- 1) With the Staatsoper orchestra in Berlin, from 1924? to 1931.
- 2) With Philharmonia and New Philharmonia Orchestras in London.

From about 1937 onwards various broadcasts have survived and there were also recordings with the Pro Musica Orchestra in 1946.

Other recordings of Klemperer, together with further information, are on Symposium Compact Discs 1042 and 1204.

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