SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1401

Music of RICHARD STRAUSS Volume II

'Symphonic Poem': a term invented by Franz Liszt for 'orchestral works generally of large design but not according with any of the accepted categories of musical form, and having some reference to a programme' [Grove's *Dictionary*, 3rd Ed.]. Liszt's works in this form are generally related to specific poems, *Tasso*, *Les Préludes* and *Hamlet*, for example. For Liszt the purpose was poetic expression, not programme. Strauss, Liszt's successor in the genre, preferred the term 'Tondichtung', 'Tone Poem'. Thus *Don Juan* (*Don Giovanni*) is after a poem by Nicholas von Lenau and *Tod und Verklärung* after Alexander Ritter's depiction in verse of the last hour of a man who has attempted to live according to the highest ideals. However, after the latter Strauss tended to use the term for works not associated with poems, such as *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Ein Heldenleben*. In between, *Till Eulenspiegel* is programmatic. Its two dozen themes are set with immense cleverness in rondo form, allowing it to be heard equally as pure music or as narrative.

Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler were near contemporaries, being born in 1864 and 1860 respectively, and each respected and promoted the music of the other. That the music of Strauss was played and praised more than that of Mahler was due to the latter's uncompromising and difficult nature, and to anti-semitism. Mahler was deeply concerned how his music would be perceived. He clearly felt his symphonic movements in terms of poetic feeling and well-wishers often suggested to him that titles would make his music more accessible. Despite this, titles which he himself had initially given were frequently withdrawn for fear his music should seem to be programme music. He never used the title Tone Poem. Thus Strauss uses free form to express programme music, whereas Mahler uses the traditional structure of sonata form in a symphonic movement to carry music of a programmatic nature.

This album includes three tone poems by Strauss and orchestral pieces from three of his operas, which are in effect shorter tone poems. The works are presented in order of composition. Fortuitously the order of recording is almost the reverse.

Sir THOMAS BEECHAM (St. Helens 1879-London 1961) was born into wealth, his father owning Beecham's Pills. Thus he was able to found his own orchestra on which to practice. He went on to found three further orchestras and to become, in the eyes of many, the country's greatest conductor and the first with a world reputation, though had Hamilton Harty lived to the same age history might have granted him equal status. Beecham money enabled him to mount seasons at Covent Garden in which the greatest artists of opera and ballet performed works new to this country, but eventually the money ran out. His repertoire was wide in the period from Haydn and Mozart to Strauss and Sibelius, though he conducted

relatively little Beethoven. Though a man of refinement, enjoying the luxuries of life, when he could afford them, he could be abrupt to the point of rudeness and his witticisms, though often amusing, could also be barbed. Beecham regarded Hitler and Mussolini as buffoons, and continued to conduct in Germany, but later he realised what they stood for and ceased to go there. Before and after the war he welcomed Furtwängler and Strauss to this country.

FRITZ BUSCH (Siegen 1890-London 1951) was born in to a musical family, his brothers included Adolf, the violinist, and Hermann, the cellist, and their father was a violin maker. In 1906 he entered the Cologne Conservatoire, studying piano, harmony, counterpoint and, under Steinbach, conducting. After his début at Triers in 1908 he followed the then German pattern, gaining experience and making his way up via Riga, Aachen (where he conducted Mahler and Tovey) and Stuttgart. He was best known for Mozart and for initiating the German Verdi revival. In 1922 he moved to Dresden. There Strauss was delighted with his conducting of the premières of *Intermezzo* and *Die Ägyptische Helena*. His concerts included a wide range of contemporary works. The Busch family was racially 'pure', but the brothers were implacably and outspokenly anti-Nazi. Adolf and Hermann left as they saw what was coming; Fritz was dismissed early in 1933 and left. His time then was divided largely between Buenos Aires, Copenhagen and Glyndebourne. Busch learnt from Nikisch that persuasion was better than bullying and he leavened firmness with humour. For many years he and Adolf appeared in recitals together.

WILHELM FURTWÄNGLER (Berlin 1886-Baden-Baden 1954) the son of an archaeologist and a painter, was educated privately, growing up in a culture of German humanism. Before he was seven he was playing the piano and composing. He studied composition with Beer-Waltbrunn, Rheinberger and von Schillings, and piano with Ansorge, a pupil of Liszt. His interest in Beethoven drew him to conducting. His first concert, in 1906, included Bruckner's ninth Symphony. With his unconventional and awkward technique went a quasi-hypnotic power, and he was rapidly recognized as a leading interpreter. Nevertheless, the German system required him to rise through a succession of posts until, in 1920, he succeeded Mengelberg at the Berlin Staatsoper concerts and in 1922, on the death of Nikisch, he took over the Berlin Philharmonic and Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestras and began a long association with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Between the wars he also had a distinguished international career. On the rise of National Socialism certainly he could have emigrated, but he chose to stay, believing that art and politics could be kept apart. He was wrong, but he never joined the party, he never gave the Nazi salute (even in Hitler's presence), he personally helped many Jews and he never conducted in occupied territories. As the Reich collapsed, warned that he was on the final hit list, he left for Switzerland. He was de-Nazified, but those who wish to vilify him continue to do so. He was noted for his imprecise beat. With his very subjective approach, constantly changing with the moment, he was seen as the polar opposite of Toscanini.

SERGEI KOUSSEVITZKY (Vishny-Volotchok, Tver, now Kalinin 1874-Boston 1951) took up the double bass in order to enter Moscow Conservatoire and became a noted player of the instrument. However, marriage to the daughter of a wealthy tea merchant enabled him to study conducting under Nikisch. In 1921 he left Russia and in 1924 he began a quarter of a century's association with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His strong personality was projected to achieve a singing beauty of sound. His conducting was sensual, not intellectual. For Grove [*New Dictionary*, 1980] it had, "high emotional intensity, colourful phrasing and dramatic character". He discouraged guest conductors, they might disrupt his artistic discipline, he conducted a wide range of scores and commissioned, published and performed much modern music, including *Peter Grimes*. He rarely conducted elsewhere and, atypically, he seldom conducted opera. From 1935 he taught conducting at Tanglewood, his most conspicuous pupil being Leonard Bernstein.

RICHARD STRAUSS (Munich 1864-Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1949) was the son of the first horn of the Munich Court Orchestra. As his mother was of independent means he led an untroubled childhood. At four and eight years respectively he began to study piano and violin with orchestral colleagues of his father and at six he began to compose. He was educated entirely in Munich, but not at the Conservatoire. As early as 1881 his works began to be played. In 1885 he became assistant conductor to von Bülow in Meiningen. He watched and learned, and also made his début as a pianist in Mozart's Concerto in C minor with his own cadenzas. At this time he met Ritter, husband of Wagner's niece, who filled him with ideas of Zukunftsmusik-"New ideas must search for new forms". He moved to Munich and then to Leipzig where he met Mahler and married Pauline de Ahna, daughter of a Wagner-loving general. After a year in Weimar he became répétiteur at Bayreuth. In those years he conducted the premières of his own works and came to be seen as the successor of Wagner. In 1894 von Bülow died and Strauss was invited to take over the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. He declined, feeling that he was not ready, and returned to Munich to assist the failing Hermann Levi. By 1899 he was seen as the leading German composer. He eagerly championed new and then little-known composers including Elgar, Mahler, Reger and Sibelius. He began the agitation which led to the reform of the German copyright system; doubtless in part motivated by his eagerness for money. In 1898 he began to compose operas. *Salome*, in 1905, provoked censorship on grounds of blasphemy and lewdness. The publicity paid for his villa at Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Next came *Elektra*, described by critics as cacophonous modernity, but loved by audiences, and then *Der Rosenkavalier*, for which special Rosenkavalier trains ran to Dresden. These works, of the zenith of his career, were performed by Mahler in Vienna and Beecham in London. From 1919 to 1924 he shared the Vienna State Opera with Franz Schalk, becoming as time advanced a great conductor, the flamboyant gestures of youth giving way to restrained almost minimal movements with which he achieved all that he wanted; "The audience should perspire not the conductor." Strauss' attitude to National Socialism was not entirely submissive.

He accepted office under the New Order, and, apparently without a qualm, replaced conductors who would no longer visit Germany (Toscanini) or were no longer allowed to conduct there (Walter). But he insisted on the name of his Jewish librettist, Stefan Zweig, appearing with his own outside the opera house. He succeeded in protecting his Jewish daughter-in-law and her children, but could not save her mother. Amongst his last compositions were *Metamorphosen*, imbued with the chaos of 1945, and *Vier letzte Lieder*, with their sublime autumnal strains.

ARTURO TOSCANINI (Parma, Italy 1867-New York 1957) was born in to considerable poverty, the son of a tailor who had fought with Garibaldi. His musical gifts were so obvious that at nine he was sent to the local Conservatoire. He studied cello, piano and composition, graduating in 1885 with highest marks. He went with an opera company to South America as a cellist and assistant chorus master. The conductor was so unsatisfactory that the audience shouted at him to go. Colleagues who knew that Toscanini had conducted student orchestras called for him to take over. Thus, at nineteen he stood on the podium, closed the score and conducted *Aïda*. Actually, all his life he conducted without scores, being too short sighted to use them. On returning to Italy, again as a cellist, he was in the première of *Otello* in 1887. He developed rapidly into a powerful conductor dedicated to performing music as the composer wrote it and unable to compromise with mediocrity. He was entrusted with the premières of *I Pagliacci* and *La Bohème*, he brought Wagner, Strauss and Debussy to Italy, and he developed Italy's symphonic repertoire. In 1898 he became artistic director of La Scala and despite all his subsequent quarrels and wars La Scala remained his musical home. Singers, even of minor parts, had to know the entire work, audiences had to behave, encores were outlawed. He left in a fit of temper. From 1908 to 1915 he imposed his ideals over star-studded casts at the Metropolitan Opera. Again he left in a fit of temper. After the Great War he was given virtually absolute power to reorganise La Scala. He started by recruiting an orchestra which he took on tour as a means of training it. At first he approved of Mussolini, but by 1929, and with another operatic row, he left Italy for an orchestral post in New York. In 1930 and 1931 he conducted at Bayreuth, but in 1933, with the change of government, he refused to return. In 1936 and 1938 he conducted in Palestine and Egypt without fee to show support for Jewish musicians who had left Germany. In 1927 took over the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. In 1936 he intended to retire, but in 1937 the National Broadcasting Company formed an orchestra especially for him and he conducted it until 1954. Toscanini had seemingly inexhaustible energy, an astonishing memory and he was a workaholic. His ruthless insistence on excellence made him many enemies, but none denied his achievements. His repertoire was huge, though in later years, as with Klemperer, he restricted himself to relatively few works.

Track 1 A theme from this work was used prominently in the *World at War* series.

Track 2 The work was played in concerts on 9 & 10 January 1942. The recording was approved by Toscanini musically, but withheld by Victor. Over the years there were many rumours and conjectures, often conflicting, about noisy and damaged surfaces, and attempts to improve the sound. This transfer is from an original set of test pressings in pristine condition. Despite some disparaging remarks pencilled on five of the six labels, all sides play excellently on modern equipment.

071300-1 Not fit to use/Gritty last 1”
071301- Not fit to use/Gritty last ¾”
071302-1 Not fit to use/thumps near start/pimple rolled
071303-1 Not fit to use/Gritty last 1”/scratch
071304-1
071305-1 use 1A if better/swishy at start

Track 4 Probably issued only in America.
Tracks 6 & 7 This record, issued in Germany only very briefly and pressed only in the very poor material available there at the time, is extremely rare.

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