

CRQ Editions: Winter 2016-2017

The Winter release schedule for CRQ Editions has a pronounced Viennese air about it. Following on from the enormous popularity of the first New Year's Day concert conducted by Clemens Krauss to be broadcast, in 1940-1941, issued last January, we are releasing what was sadly to be this great conductor's last New Year's Day concert, for 1953-1954, before his untimely death a few months later. Taken from a rare broadcast from Radio Vienna, this is a fitting tribute to both a great musician and a great tradition.

Another conductor with a very close relationship with Vienna was Carlos Kleiber, who conducted there regularly throughout his active career. We have gathered together five recordings made in concert between 1967 and 1993 which when taken together fully demonstrate his unique mastery as a conductor, in repertoire some of which, for instance Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, he did not tackle elsewhere.

The Viennese born pianist Friedrich Wührer spent much of his career in Vienna and became closely associated with the piano music of the romantic era. In response to several requests from collectors, we are reissuing his rare recording of the Brahms Second Piano Concerto, following on from our successful earlier release of him playing the same composer's First Concerto. Coupled with this are Mendelssohn's Second Piano Concerto, another rare recording with Rudolf Moralt at the helm, and the two Tchaikovsky Concertos, Nos 1 and 2, with Heinrich Hollreiser conducting. Wührer's virtuosity and pianistic flamboyance in these are breath-taking.

Another conductor with a major Viennese heritage was Bruno Walter, who worked there professionally from as early as 1901, as Mahler's assistant, and was especially active there during the 1930s when many of his recordings with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra were made. Volume Two in our survey of these recordings contains all the HMV recordings of works by Beethoven and Brahms that Walter conducted at this time. They stand as a remarkable testimony to Walter's great musicianship and skill as a conductor.

The soprano Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, although not Austrian born herself, maintained close connections with the Austrian capital from her debut there in 1942 onwards. Our latest uncovering of rare recordings from her extensive career includes a complete account of a performance of three songs by Pfitzner given for Vienna Radio in 1944, balanced by a set of operetta excerpts performed in Hollywood in 1963, with Willy Boskovsky conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which completely put her commercial recordings of this repertoire in the shade. In between come many highlights from her career not accessible elsewhere, such as her *Luonnotar* from Helsinki in 1955, and her *Marschallin* at Covent Garden in 1959 with Solti making his historic debut with the Opera Company there.

Balancing this Austrian bias are a number of releases of great interest with an emphasis on composers. Not least is our release devoted to early interpreters of the music of Janáček, which features the recording of his *Capriccio* in which the piano soloist is Otakar Hollmann who commissioned this piece from Janáček. Alongside this we have the conducting of Břetislav Bakala who was the first major orchestral interpreter of Janáček's music. His accounts of the two opera preludes will open your ears!

Another major composer of the twentieth century, Igor Stravinsky, may be heard conducting his hieratic opera Oedipus Rex in a gripping concert performance from the Royal Festival Hall in 1959. This recording featured the work's librettist, the great French writer Jean Cocteau as the Narrator. The presence of these two major figures in European cultural life of the last century generates a palpable frisson.

At the opposite end of the modernist spectrum from Janáček and Stravinsky stands our third featured composer, Sir Arthur Bliss. Our tribute to him takes the form of the republication on CD for the first time of LP recordings which he made during the 1950s and 1960s of largely popular and public music. He leads all these performances with a thrilling and confident sense of swagger. The programme includes two works by Bliss himself, which receive authoritative performances.

Our principal operatic release this quarter is a reissue of the excellent MRF LP set preserving the BBC broadcast of Ambroise Thomas's opera 'Hamlet' from the 1980 Buxton Festival. This production has attained almost mythic status, as it featured a rare but essential excursion by Thomas Allen into the world of French opera, here singing the title role. His interpretation is exceptionally fine, as is his mastery of the French language, and it remains a mystery as to why he was not invited to sing this repertoire in larger opera houses. He is supported by a fine cast led by Christine Barbaux as Ophelia and Josephine Veasey as Gertrude, both excellent. A set not to be missed, with excellent stereo sound.

To conclude we go slightly off our normal artists and repertoire track with the reissue from the original Decca stereo LPs of two albums featuring the charismatic British singer Georgia Brown and devoted to the songs of Kurt Weill and George Gershwin. Brown never really received the fame that her impassioned singing justified. As can be heard here, ably supported by Ian Fraser's fine conducting and arrangements and Decca's magnificent early stereo engineering, she really delivers the goods – another New Year's treat!