



The RIAS Second Viennese School Project

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GRAMOPHONE

Pushing the boundaries

Two valuable collections of trailblazing European modernism

The claim that a particular performance carries historical weight doesn't necessarily guarantee its interpretative significance. However, Audite's four-disc set devoted to The RIAS Second Viennese School Project, which is centred around German Radio tapes dating from between 1949 and 1965, relates a voyage of musical discovery that becomes all the more affecting when you consider that it features creative exiles who only a few years earlier had been deemed local degenerates. Everywhere throughout this wonderful collection you sense unprecedented levels of musical involvement, whether from Irmen Burmester performing Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire in 1949 (often switching from Sprechstimme declamation to sensitive singing) or Peter Stadlen playing the Piano Concerto under Winfried Zillig during the same year.

Among the more unexpected treasures are performances of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony and, especially memorable, three movements from the Suite in the Old Style, both under Ferenc Fricsay, while Suzanne Danco haunts the 15 songs that make up The Book of the Hanging Gardens with musical intelligence and a clear, expressive tone that emerges as less shrill than on other commercial recordings.

Eduard Steuermann (a Humperdinck and Schoenberg pupil) offers supremely natural renditions of the Piano Pieces Opp 11, 19 and 23 – he could as well have been playing Brahms – and among the chamber performances featured are Berg's Lyric Suite, where the Vegh Quartet focus the score's every shifting shade, and a performance of Schoenberg's String Trio by Erich Röhn, Ernst Doberitz and Arthur Troester that sounds as if the players are staking their very lives on maximum communication. Two very different performances of Schoenberg's Phantasy for violin and piano find Tibor Varga sporting a fast vibrato in 1951, with Ernst Krenek a considerate duo partner, and a more cerebral Rudolf Kolisch partnered by Alan Willman in 1953.

As to Webern, Arthur Rother builds a delicately voiced but powerful account of the Passacaglia (1965) and from four years earlier Bruno Maderna attends to the Op 10 pieces with something resembling a watchmaker's care over detail. Both performances feature the Berlin Radio Symphony. Other items are performed by the soprano Evelyn Lear, Magda László (in Berg's Seven Early Songs), the husband-and-wife team of violinist Andre Gertler and pianist Diane Anderson, the clarinetist Heinrich Geuser, the Bastiaan Quartet and the RIAS Chamber Choir. The

mono broadcast recordings have been very smoothly transferred, there's an excellent booklet and I would call this set both historically important and musically rewarding. [...]

