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Robert Gerhard i la seva obra [Book review]

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interesting scraps do surface in the notes. Evidently a German legal scholar and latter-day Wagnerian—a certain Ernst von Pidde, in 1968—did take up Lindau's suggestion to catalogue, according to current German practice, the whole spectrum of criminal offenses, from misdemeanors to felonies, committed in the course of the *Ring* (Lindau himself offers a provisional listing of such infractions, prompted by a lawyer friend in attendance, on p. 85).

As for Lindau's own critical treatment of Wagner and his *magnum opus*, even Wagner could have had no cause of libel charges, though he would have been little disposed to appreciate the humor. The ironic and irreverent tone is never venomous, and generally balanced by an effort to do justice to Wagner's obvious talents. Theodor Fontaine's assessment of Lindau as a playwright, following the premiere of his *Tante Therese* (as cited in the introduction, p. 20), seems also to sum up his achievement as a critic here: his merit lies perhaps "less in

a fund of quick wit and inspiration," than in a solid union of "aesthetic schooling and *bon sens*."

The perspective of the first Bayreuth festival offered here supplements those represented in Robert Hartford's anthology of critiques, letters, and memoirs mainly from professional musicians or prominent social or cultural figures of the day (*Bayreuth: The Early Years* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980]), or that of Eduard Hanslick's similar series of reports to the *Neue freie Presse*, translated in Henry Pleasants's volume, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music* [New York: Knopf, 1950]. Lindau's "letters" will hardly have much to tell us about the *Ring* itself any more, but they do tell us something about how Wagner's achievement was regarded by a theatrically sophisticated, nonpartisan mind of the composer's own day.

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Robert Gerhard i la seva obra. By Joaquim Homs. Barcelona: Biblioteca de Catalunya, 1991. [246 p. ISBN 84-7845-109-9.]

The music of the Catalan composer Robert Gerhard (Valls, 1896—Cambridge, 1970) has been the object of increasing attention from both audience and critics. With several recent doctoral theses and numerous monographs and articles devoted to him (see, e.g., Jeffrey Miller, "An Analysis of Robert Gerhard's 'Libra'" [Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1987]), Gerhard is becoming one of the most highly venerated Iberian composers and perhaps the most outstanding successor of the lineage begun by Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, and Manuel de Falla. Joaquim Homs's *Robert Gerhard i la seva obra*, one of the latest contributions to the study of Gerhard's life and work, is most welcome because it manifests the solidity of a very important composer who, however, until his sixty-ninth birthday, did not see a recording entirely dedicated to his music.

Gerhard was born in the Catalan town of Valls, the son of an affluent wine exporter of Swiss origin. At the age of twelve he was sent to Switzerland to study business, but the outbreak of war in 1914 brought him

back to his hometown; he then announced to his family his intentions of becoming a composer. He studied composition with Felip Pedrell, the founder of Spanish musical nationalism and the mentor of Albéniz and Granados; he took piano lessons from Granados as well. From 1923 to 1928 he studied with Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna and Berlin. After 1939, he spent most of the rest of his professional life in Cambridge, where King's College granted him a research scholarship with no attached teaching obligations. He did teach for a short while (1960–61) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Homs, a composer in his own right, was Gerhard's student for a period of time. In the introduction, he explains how he became acquainted with the composer in 1930, shortly after Gerhard's return to Barcelona following a long sojourn abroad. Student and tutor soon became friends, and their friendship endured until Gerhard died in 1970. Homs's firsthand knowledge and colloquial style make this study very pleasant to read, but in addition it

provides much reliable information that in many cases had remained hitherto unpublished. The book is in fact the original version of a monograph published in Spanish translation in 1987, *Robert Gerhard y su obra* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo), expanded to include three appendixes containing a selection of Gerhard's writings in their original language, Catalan.

The author traces Gerhard's biography, relating the development of the composer's music to his successive relocations. There is the Vienna-Berlin period under the supervision of Schoenberg; the interval in Barcelona, where Gerhard worked with the eminent musicologist Higinio Anglès at the Biblioteca Central (now, Biblioteca Nacional de Catalunya) and where he edited several works by Antonio Soler and Domingo Tarradellas. When he moved to England, King's College procured for him a secure (though small) income, but above all he was able to have his music performed, published, and recorded.

In England, in order to increase his earnings, he wrote many film and television scores and arranged fragments of Spanish zarzuelas under the pseudonym Juan Serallonga. (Incidentally, in Vienna he supported himself teaching Spanish, but fearing his Germanic last name could damage his credibility as a native speaker, he advertised himself as Dr. Castell.) He also collaborated with BBC Radio, writing music programs addressed to the general but educated listener. England was, in brief, the center of his professional activities for more than thirty years; he became a British subject and consequently there is some ground for considering him a "British" composer.

Homs discusses individual compositions in part from an analytical point of view (see, e.g., his remarks on the Symphony, no. 1, pp. 82–85), but it is in the elicitation of his master's personal and aesthetic views—in many instances through the transcription of conversations that evoke a very vivid image of the composer—that Homs is very engaging. The discussion of Gerhard's stance concerning dodecaphonism is very enlightening. The composer mastered the dodecaphonic technique as a result of his studies with Schoenberg, but quotations from Gerhard show that his use of the

twelve-tone technique is quite *sui generis*: "From the very beginning, I have been anti-orthodox" (p. 119).

Gerhard feared critical categorization, classification, and of course his own creative stagnation. Homs explains that, for example, in order to free his compositions from the strict dodecaphonic method, he would break a series into two hexachords or three tetrachords, allowing thus a greater malleability of the row without leaving the system altogether. Form in music, asserted Gerhard, must be understood as a verb, not as noun (p. 107). This means that there should not be any *a priori* "forms," but rather the composer must "form" music. Hence his concern with creating long single-movement compositions.

Homs reveals, in addition, that Gerhard was a man concerned with all aspects of culture. He read with equal fascination Williams James and Bertrand Russell; he also admired Franz Kafka and Albert Camus, whose *L'Étranger* and *La Peste* served as the basis of two of his compositions. Homs discusses his relationship with some of the major twentieth-century artists, including especially Schoenberg, Joan Miró, and the architect Josep Lluís Sert. Gerhard's position vis-à-vis Catalan nationalist movements is also examined. He was a proud Catalan and as a composer drew from the folklore of his native land and the poetry of its writers, while as a musicologist he edited scores of Catalan composers that had been long neglected. Moreover, he was able to write "Spanish" music connecting his output with Falla's heritage, but without falling into Andalusian folklorical clichés. As a dodecaphonist, he underscored creation over methodology; he was also open to new electronic means of composition and he even experimented with indeterminacy. In conclusion, Homs presents a picture of Gerhard as an artist and humanist and, of course, as a composer of first caliber. It can certainly be said that we know him better thanks to this new biographical study.

But a primary factor in the value of *Robert Gerhard i la seva obra* is the edition of several essays by Gerhard in the appendixes of the book. Gerhard wrote these articles in Catalan for the Barcelona journal *El Mirador* from 1929 to 1939. The dates

of this period are especially significant and deserve comment. On the one hand, when Gerhard settled in Barcelona in 1929, he had just finished his studies with Schoenberg in Vienna and Berlin and so introduced musical Modernism to Spain; more precisely, he was the first Spaniard to publicize Schoenberg's teachings. This won him many detractors, as well as some devotees. On the other, Gerhard wrote the articles prior to Francisco Franco's regime, a dictatorship that attempted to suppress all signs of Catalan culture including the writing of the language as well as Modernism in the arts. Barcelona was one of the last cities to fall to Franco, an event that prompted Gerhard and his family to leave Spain in 1939. They moved first to Paris, settling later in Cambridge, England. Gerhard's writings should thus be understood as an open advocacy of musical Modernism and also within a context of political upheavals—especially the Spanish Civil War and what one could call the "Catalan question."

With characteristic wit, Gerhard organized a selection of his essays for *El mirador* as a multimovement composition. The essays under the titles "Preludi," "Coral," "Fuga," and "Coda" are an attempt to defend new music—particularly Schoenberg's and, by extension, his own. Following Schoenberg, he criticizes the term "atonal" to refer to new music. Three essays comprise part of a controversy between Gerhard and Lluís Millet, the prominent Catalan composer who founded the Orfeó Català, one of the older and major choral ensembles of Barcelona. Millet attacked Gerhard's music in the pages of *Revista musical catalana* and called Gerhard a "pseudomusician," on grounds of the Modernist engagement of his music. Gerhard replied in *El mirador*, stating with irony and wit that he felt honored to be even considered by such an influential person.

In subsequent essays, Gerhard dismantles Millet's arguments against modern music. Millet asserted that musical Modernism has no theoretical framework; Gerhard argued that practice comes always first and that theory is a *posteriori* inference. He indicates that inspiration (not rules) guide the composer, though later theorists codify the composers' findings. Gerhard's erudition and knowledge of music history is

amazing. He argues the "pros" of modern music by citing "pretonal" composer: Gilles Binchois, Guillaume Dufay, and especially John Dunstable, whom he considers a direct precursor of modern harmony. He summons the authority of Gioseffo Zarlino, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and Higiní Anglès, and concludes with sarcasm that modern music is only the return of *L'Homme armé*, meaning that music organized around concepts other than tonal-centeredness is nothing alien to the European musical tradition.

The article "Musica da Camera: Anton Webern" aims at popularizing Webern's chamber music without being reductive. Gerhard points out the import of Webern's concise style and states that far from being music for the upper classes, Webern is an artist committed to the working class experience (he was the musical director of the Arbeiter Symphonie-Konzerte and the Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle supported his concerts). There is an interview with Schoenberg and an essay praising his musical talent (at the time Schoenberg was living in Barcelona). Some essays deal with critical questions on issues such as music and film and applied music or *Zweckmusik*. "Música i Poesia" considers the problems of text setting. A final essay, "Musa i música, avui," was originally published in the British magazine *Shell* (1962) and was translated into Catalan for the present edition. Gerhard examines the aesthetics of John Cage, Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and the sources of inspiration for contemporary composers.

In conclusion, Homs's study is a valuable contribution—without a doubt, his biography and stylistic analyses are now the obligatory introduction to the composer's output. In addition, Homs's edition of the composer's essays has consequences not only for the student of Gerhard's works, but also for all those interested in the Second Viennese School and its influence abroad. Although Gerhard wrote several essays in English when he lived in England, one only wishes that his Catalan writings would now be translated into English.

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