CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN
PFITZNER · STRAUSS
ORCHESTER DER DEUTSCHEN OPER BERLIN
DIGITAL

Deutsche Grammophon
STEREO 449 571-2 GH

AUDIO RECORDING
HANS PFITZNER  
(1869-1949)

PALESTRINA
1. Vorspiel zum I. Akt  
   Prelude to Act I  
   Prélude du 1er acte  
   Preludio all'atto I  
   Ruhig (Andante)  
   [7'31]

2. Vorspiel zum II. Akt  
   Mit Wucht und Wildheit  
   [6'52]

3. Vorspiel zum III. Akt  
   Langsam, sehr getragen  
   [7'58]

DAS HERZ op. 39  
THE HEART • LE CŒUR  
IL CUORE
4. Liebesmelodie  
   Love Theme/Thème  
   d’amour/Melodia d’amore  
   Sehr ruhig, lieblich (Motto tranquillo, dolce)  
   [7'12]

DAS KÄTCHEN VON HEILBRONN op.17
5. Ouvertüre (op.17a)  
   Overture/Ouverture  
   Kräftig, frisch und schnell  
   [16'30]

RICHARD STRAUSS  
(1864-1949)

GUNTRAM op. 25
6. Vorspiel zum I. Akt  
   Mässig langsam  
   [11'33]

CAPRICCIO op. 85
7. Vorspiel (Streichsextett)  
   (String Sextet/Sextuor à cordes/  
   Sestetto per archi)  
   Andante con moto  
   [11'03]

FEUERSNOT op. 50
8. Liebesszene  
   Love Scene/Scène  
   d’amour/Scena d’amore  
   Langsam – Sehr ruhig – Bewegt – Sehr leidenschaftlich bewegt – Mässig  
   [6'37]

Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin  
CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN

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[75'24]

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HANS PFITZNER
(1869-1949)

PALESTRINA

1 Vorspiel zum I. Akt  [7'31]
Prelude to Act I
Prélude du 1er acte
Preludio all’atto I
Ruhig (Andante)

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Langsam, sehr getragen

DAS HERZ op. 39
THE HEART • LE CŒUR
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Love Theme/Thème
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Sehr ruhig, lieblich (Molto tranquillo, dolce)

DAS KÄTHCHEN VON
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GUNTRAM op. 25

6 Vorspiel zum I. Akt  [11'33]
Mässig langsam

CAPRICCIO op. 85

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(String Sextet/Sextuor à cordes/
Sestetto per archi)
Andante con moto

FEUERSNOT op. 50

8 Liebesszene  [6'37]
Love Scene/Scène
d’amour/Scena d’amore
Langsam – Sehr ruhig – Bewegt – Sehr
leidenschaftlich bewegt – Mässig

Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin
CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN

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In their lifetimes, Strauss and Pfitzner were widely regarded as rivals. As far as worldly success is concerned, it is unquestionably Strauss who has worn the laurels, though Pfitzner’s advocates regularly contrasted their master’s idealism with Strauss’s “superficial” gloss. But comparison of Strauss’s first opera, *Guntram* (completed in 1893; première in Weimar, 10 May 1894, under the composer’s baton), and Pfitzner’s masterpiece, *Palestrina* (completed in 1915; première in Munich, 12 June 1917, with Bruno Walter conducting), shows that Strauss could on occasion approach the kind of loftiness associated with his younger rival. The plots of both works involve renunciation, the central concept of Schopenhauer’s philosophy that Wagner had already drawn into music drama. Set in 13th-century Germany, *Guntram* portrays a league loosely modelled on the Grail Knights of *Parsifal*. The eponymous hero offends against its code in killing the villainous Duke Robert, but he refuses to submit to its verdict. For some critics, this represented a turning from Schopenhauer to the individualistic creeds of Nietzsche and Max Stirner; but whether this affected Strauss’s music is doubtful, as the score of *Guntram* is largely homogenous in its post-Wagnerian style. Strauss’s biographer Norman Del Mar has likened the *Guntram* Prelude to a three-movement suite, but the three act-preludes of *Palestrina* conform still more closely to this description. Though the third is the most Wagnerian in its consistency of mood, the others attempt to capture a similar unity in spite of one departure from Wagner’s norm: the Prestonal antitheses in Pfitzner’s conception. The Schopenhauerian heart of *Palestrina* is the notion that art remains untouched by the blood and confusion of human existence. This opposition between the worlds of art and life is reflected in the contrast between the outer acts, which deal with the “legend” (as Pfitzner termed it) of Palestrina as saviour of church music, and the central act, which satirizes the assemblies of the great and good in the Council of Trent. Unlike the later Wagner, who tended to confine his act-preludes to a single music-dramatic idea, Strauss constructs the Prelude to *Guntram* in a discursive way, portraying the hero’s love for the heroine Freihild, the league, and *Guntram’s* chivalrous character in three progressively faster sections. Although two of the themes were to reappear in *Ein Heldenleben* five years later, the brilliant surface of the tone poems here is replaced by a harmonic and rhythmic solidity reminiscent of the opera’s Wagnerian models. Strauss’s biographer Norman Del Mar has likened the *Guntram* Prelude to a three-movement suite, but the three act-preludes of *Palestrina* conform still more closely to this description. Though the third is the most Wagnerian in its consistency of mood, the others attempt to capture a similar unity in spite of one departure from Wagner’s norm: the Pre-
lute to Act I, inflected by idiomstaken from 15th- and 16th-century counterpart and scored in the palest of flute and viola tones, seems at first to be entirely permeated by music relating to the hero and the nature of musical inspiration, but it gradually draws the alien theme of the Council into its motivic web. This only assumes its true marmoreal grandeur its prelude incorporating the music of Palestrina's wrongful imprisonment on Cardinal Borromeo's misguided orders. Whereas in Guntram Strauss moves in a music-dramatic "world" having a tangential relationship to his later works, Palestrina turns the Wagnerian tradition in directions capable of responding to quite different impulses. At its liveliest, in the Act II Prelude, Pfitzner's style is as histrionic and colourful as his rival's. Strauss's true nature as an opera composer is more tellingly revealed in Feuersnot (completed in 1901 and first performed in Dresden on 21 November of that year; Ernst von Schuch conducting), not a composer's relative merits in their stage careers writing instrumental music in abstract forms. In the case of Pfitzner, this development was prompted as much by a sense of burden-including the words: the trombones' final minatory call has the word "Giftschmier!" written over the notes, a reminder of the poisoning temptress Kunigunde. After lives devoted in large measure to the theatre, both Strauss and Pfitzner ended their careers writing instrumental music in abstract forms. In the case of Pfitzner, this development was prompted as much by a sense of burden-some duty as by inspiration. For Strauss, the transitional work from the world of the stage to that of the Oboe Concerto and Metamorphosen was Capriccio, with its debate on the primacy of words and music in musical drama. The outcome of the discussion is uncertain at the end of the opera, but the String Sextet which forms Capriccio's prelude has already loaded the scale in music's favour, exhibiting the same less construction and textures which are the hallmarks of Strauss's last music. To Pfitzner's friends and admirers, his stage works were a rather special form of "absolute music"; thus for Strauss's last opera to have generated one of his most widely-performed pieces of absolute instrumental music suggests fate making a last joke at Pfitzner's expense. The issue of the two composers' relative merits in their stage works, however, hinges less on such abstract considerations than on their theatrical viability. Guntram, Feuersnot and Das Herz live on at least as much in these instrumental excerpts as in their flawed though intriguing entities. Palestrina and Capriccio, however, are among the most compelling theatrical experiences that German music has provided since Wagner. 

John Williamson
What prompted you to choose this repertoire for your first recording with Deutsche Grammophon?

I got to know Palestrina when I was a repetiteur at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. And then I came across a live recording by Furtwangler of the opera's three preludes. I was so impressed by it that I chose Palestrina to be the first work I conducted as general music director in Nuremberg. And when the possibility of a recording with Deutsche Grammophon came up and I discussed the repertoire with them, we consciously combined two composers - Pfitzner and Strauss - who were almost exact contemporaries, and chose pieces reflecting my current work.

Specifically, what would you say these pieces have in common?

In the case of Pfitzner, we selected pieces that are not especially well known, but which simultaneously throw light on aspects of the past and future. Pfitzner was at once a very modern and a very backward-looking composer. I regard this programme, therefore, as a document in which I've tried to draw attention to what the Late Romantic orchestra produced at a particular time in Germany. A comparison between Strauss and Pfitzner also makes sense in that they later became virtual opposites. Also keep in mind that, after writing Der arme Heinrich, Pfitzner was more famous as an opera composer than Strauss. When Strauss suddenly became famous after Salome, his success influenced relations between the two composers. Yet another factor in selecting this programme has been that a number of these pieces were previously not available in recordings.

What can you say about the other pieces by Pfitzner?

The overture to Das Käthchen von Heilbronn is an extraordinary example of Pfitzner's mordant and forced humour. Initially, one thinks of it as a heroic work. It then turns out to be a melancholic, almost sinister piece. The overture I consider to be a highly effective and altogether wonderful piece. The love theme is a real gem. If you didn’t know it was by Pfitzner, you would probably think it was by Puccini - albeit with a few unexpected notes thrown in. As for the Strauss pieces, they are all works that are virtually never heard, even though they are outstanding examples of the young Strauss's style.

The recording not only documents an age, then, it also features a largely neglected repertoire.

Yes, we wanted to combine these two aspects. Also, this music shows off the abilities of a great orchestra, the orchestra of the Deutsche Oper, Berlin. I also chose this orchestra because it is so familiar with this music. The musicians play a lot of Strauss and we have often performed Pfitzner (Palestrina), too. Above all, I chose them because I have a marvellous relationship with them.

This is your first recording for Deutsche Grammophon and will no doubt function as a calling card for you for some time to come. What would you like to say with this calling card?

Above all, I want to do something for Pfitzner and say to audiences: just listen to how good this music is.

CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN was born in Berlin in 1959 into a family of music enthusiasts. He received his first piano lessons at the age of five, later studying the instrument at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik with Helmut Roloff. In addition to private lessons in conducting and composition, he also studied the viola with Giusto Cappone at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's Herbert von Karajan Foundation and received numerous awards both as pianist and violist. After graduating, he worked as a répétiteur at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin and at the same time was Karajan's assistant. Following positions at Gelsenkirchen, Karlsruhe and Hanover, he was appointed principal conductor of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf in 1985. Three years later he became general music director in Nuremberg. After numerous appearances at all the important Italian opera houses, in 1993 he was appointed principal guest conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna. He has conducted the complete cycle of Beethoven Symphonies in Rome with the Orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia and made his Japanese début with this orchestra in 1993. In American opera houses Thielemann has conducted a new production of Elektra in San Francisco and Der Rosenkavalier and Arabella at the Metropolitan in New York (the latter now released on video by Deutsche Grammophon). At the Deutsche Oper, Berlin, he made his début with Wagner's Lohengrin, which he also conducted when the company visited Tokyo in October 1993. He made his Covent Garden début with Janáček's Janůfa, returning there to conduct Elektra. His concert activities have included engagements with
leading orchestras in the USA (Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minnesota) as well as the Israel Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Berlin Philharmonic and numerous other major orchestras.

Christian Thielemann’s first recordings for Deutsche Grammophon document crucial aspects of his artistic ambitions: Richard Strauss has been featured in a number of his important opera house debuts, while Pfitzner is a composer whose works he actively champions. The Classical and Romantic composers, who form the basis of his repertoire, are represented by the recording of Beethoven’s Fifth and Seventh Symphonies and the forthcoming release of two Beethoven cantatas and of music by Schumann: the Second Symphony, Manfred Overture and the Konzertstück for four horns.
4D AUDIO RECORDING

is an overall concept in sound recording developed by the Recording Centre of Deutsche Grammophon. Its aim is to achieve a completely natural sound quality through the use of the most advanced technology available. It allows the Tonmeister (Balance Engineer) a highly sophisticated control of all phases of the recording process and offers the artist ideal conditions for the realization of his or her musical intentions.

Deutsche Grammophon's fully digital mobile classical recording system comprises significant new developments in four technical dimensions:

1. The remote-controlled microphone pre-amplifier augments the analogue signal from the microphone with a minimum of noise and distortion. The newly developed remote-control function allows the pre-amplifier to be installed in the immediate vicinity of the microphone - as close as possible to the musical event - thus eliminating the unavoidable transmission interference previously experienced.

2. The 23-bit digital-floating analogue-digital converter combines two 20-bit analogue-digital converters. One is driven with an 18 dB higher gain - equivalent to 3 bit - so that the digitally controlled addition process with the two converters yields a final output resolution of 23 bit.

3. The Stagebox principle/Digital network

Because pre-amplifier and converter system are mounted in a single physical unit (Stagebox), the long analogue pathway between microphone and studio - a potential source of interference - is eliminated. It has been replaced by a galvanically-separated digital network, which ensures interference-free transmission and offers audio-data transport of up to 24-bit word-length per channel.

4. The all-digital mixing process allows for an exceptionally precise mixdown. It employs the Yamaha DMC 1000 mixing console, equipped with control software incorporating the experience of Deutsche Grammophon's Tonmeister. It helps to achieve the spatial depth characteristic of 4D Audio Recording by allowing the exact synchronization of all microphone signals. Authentic Bit Imaging, our requantizing procedure, allows this mixdown to be transferred optimally to CD.
HANS PFITZNER
Palestrina Preludes I - II - III
Das Herz Love Theme
Das Käthchen von Heilbronn Overture
RICHARD STRAUSS
Guntram Prelude I
Capriccio Prelude • Feuersnot Love Scene
Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin
Christian Thielemann