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AUDIO
RECORDING

CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN

PFITZNER · STRAUSS

ORCHESTER DER DEUTSCHEN OPER BERLIN

DIGITAL



HANS PFITZNER
(1869-1949)

PALESTRINA

- [1] Vorspiel zum I. Akt [7'31]

Prelude to Act I
Prélude du 1^{er} acte
Preludio all'atto I
Ruhig (Andante)

- [2] Vorspiel zum II. Akt [6'52]

Mit Wucht und Wildheit

- [3] Vorspiel zum III. Akt [7'58]

Langsam, sehr getragen

DAS HERZ op. 39

THE HEART · LE CŒUR

IL CUORE

- [4] Liebesmelodie [7'12]

Love Theme/Thème
d'amour/Melodia d'amore
Sehr ruhig, lieblich (Molto tranquillo, dolce)

DAS KÄTHCHEN VON

HEILBRONN op.17

- [5] Ouvertüre (op.17a) [16'30]

Overture/Ouverture
Kräftig, frisch und schnell

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864-1949)

GUNTRAM op. 25

- [6] Vorspiel zum I. Akt [11'33]

Mässig langsam

CAPRICCIO op. 85

- [7] Vorspiel (Streichsextett) [11'03]

(String Sextet/Sextuor à cordes/

Sestetto per archi)

Andante con moto

FEUERSNOT op. 50

- [8] Liebesszene

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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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*

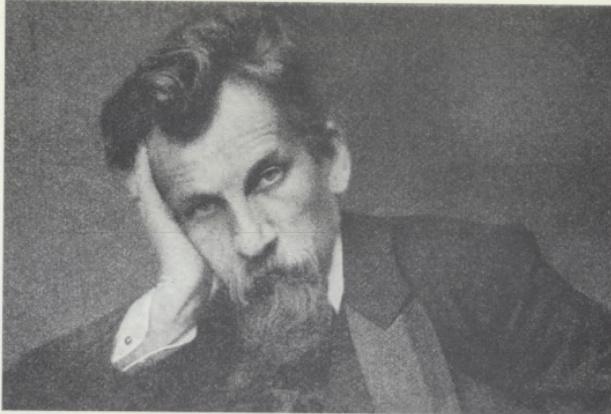
Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin
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[75'24]



HANS PFITZNER



RICHARD STRAUSS

MUSIC FOR THE THEATRE BY RICHARD STRAUSS AND HANS PFITZNER

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. *Palestrina* uses a much more varied stylistic palette, reflecting the fundamen-

tal 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-

lude to Act I, inflected by idioms taken from 15th- and 16th-century counterpoint 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 in the Prelude to Act II, where it stands out in the contrapuntal fracas suggesting the sordid reality of human affairs. The three pieces do not convey the whole of *Palestrina*, but the overall curve of the drama is accurately captured in their progress towards the muted inwardness of Act III, with the final 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 completely accomplished work but full of characteristic passages. The contrasts between its "Liebesszene" and the "Liebesmelodie" from Pfitzner's last opera, *Das Herz* (completed in 1931), more nearly correspond to the traditional view of the two composers' differing personalities. Strauss's "scene" is an orchestral reprise of Kunrad's love song, as his passion for the fickle Diemut

is rewarded after an initial humiliation. The melody in the orchestra is sustained and developed in textures as richly harmonized as anything in the composer's later works. Emblematic of a love which triumphs over humiliating ordeals reminiscent of Boccaccio, it brings comedy of a kind unique in Strauss to a typically overflowing musical climax. *Das Herz*, on the other hand, is a love story doomed in more ways than one. Though granted the unusual distinction in 1931 of a simultaneous premiere in Berlin (under Furtwängler) and Munich (under Knappertsbusch), it had a muted reception and gradually fell out of the repertory. This was largely the fault of the libretto, which tells a story of sorcery in a German dukedom around 1700. The plot hinges on Dr. Athanasius's acquisition of magic powers by offering a human heart to the demon Asmodeus. By unwittingly choosing the heart of his wife, Helge, Athanasius destroys his love; but through his repentance, his soul is reunited on an astral plane with Helge's after death. To the depiction of such a frustrated, ultimately insubstantial love, Pfitzner's "Liebesmelodie" – the prelude to the second act, representing the love of Athanasius and Helge – is ideally suited by its delicate palette of added notes, its funeral sarabande rhythm, and its transparent orchestration.

Yet this is not the only guise in which passion appears in Pfitzner's music, and the widespread notion of him as a musical ascetic receives no confirmation in his overture to Kleist's *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, the closest he came to the world of Strauss's tone poems. Composed in 1905 as part of incidental

music for a production by Max Reinhardt in Berlin, the overture concentrates on the medieval and chivalrous qualities of Kleist's play but, in Pfitzner's own description, also makes room for "the ruined ring of walls where a twittering siskin built her nest in a sweet-smelling elderbush". Käthchen's melody is one of Pfitzner's sweetest and most unaffected; an echo of its first phrase haunted Korngold when composing his famous score for the film *Captain Blood* (1935). That Kleist's play is also about sorcery and the travails of its hero, Wetter vom Strahl, emerges in a mysterious central episode with striking brass writing. The score includes direct references to events in the play: the "trombones" final minatory call has the word "Giftmischerin!" 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 burdensome 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 scales in music's favour, exhibiting the seamless 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 entirieties. *Palestrina* and *Capriccio*, however, are among the most compelling theatrical experiences that German music has provided since Wagner.

John Williamson

CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN CONDUCTS PFITZNER AND STRAUSS

From an Interview with the Conductor

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

I got to know *Palestrina* when I was a répétiteur at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. And then I came across a live recording by Furtwängler 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 then suddenly became famous after *Salomé*, 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 virtu-

ally 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.

(Translation: Stewart Spencer)

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 in 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 débüt 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 débüt with Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which he also conducted when the company visited Tokyo in October 1993. He made his Covent Garden débüt with Janáček's *Jenůfa*, 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 débuts, 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.



Recording: Berlin, Jesus-Christus-Kirche, 10/1995
Executive Producer: John Fisher
Recording Producer: Werner Mayer
Tonmeister (Balance Engineer): Gernot von Schultzendorff
Recording Engineer: Reinhard Lagemann
Publishers: Schott Musik International, Mainz (Palestrina); A. Fürstner GmbH, Mainz (Das Herz, Guntram, Feuersnot); Ries & Erler, Berlin (Käthchen); Urheberrechtsgemeinschaft Dr. Richard Strauss, Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Capriccio)
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Art Direction: Nikolaus Boddin
Photo of Pfitzner: ca. 1916, Hans Pfitzner-Gesellschaft e.V.
Photo of Strauss: Lebrecht Collection, London

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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