

Hans WINTERBERG

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE SEVEN NEO-IMPRESSIONIST PIECES IN TWELVE-TONE SUITE THERESIENSTADT FOUR INTERMEZZI SUITE FOR PIANO SONATA II

Brigitte Helbig

HANS WINTERBERG: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE by Michael Haas

Hans Winterberg's biography is a story of survival through deceptive camouflage. It demonstrates the angst that has continued to plague Europe since the end of the Second World War. To understand the Winterberg story, one has to delve into the history of Czechoslovakia, a country founded in 1918 out of the rubble from the fall of the House of Habsburg. Until then, Czechoslovakia had been part of Austria-Hungary, a dual monarchy that spread across south-central and eastern Europe, deep into the Balkans and as far east as the borders of present-day Russia. It was a country where dozens of languages were spoken, numerous religions practised and diverse cultures competed for dominance. With the disintegration of Austria-Hungary into various independent nation-states after its defeat in the First World War, none inherited quite as much of the multicultural muddle as the new constellation that came to be known as 'Czechoslovakia'. Its constituent regions of Moravia, Bohemia, Austrian Silesia and the formerly Hungarian Slovakia had been cobbled together to respond to the injustices of a predominantly Slavic nation subjected to the privileged entitlement of its German-speaking minority. The ethnic mixture that constituted the new nation-state of Czechoslovakia was almost as diverse as the former Habsburg Empire itself. Now, though, it was the minority German-speaking Czechs who felt themselves disadvantaged.

In October 1918, the political constituency of the Sudetenland was founded as a separate province within the northern reaches of Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that other Czech border regions were also predominantly German-speaking and commonly referred to as 'Sudetenland'; they were, however, not part of Czechoslovakia's northern 'Sudetenland province' that was to be ceded to Nazi Germany with the Munich Accord of 1938. A census in 1921 put the German-speaking

population of Czechoslovakia at approximately 23 per cent. Jews in Czechoslovakia, as former Yiddish speakers, had largely joined the German-speaking minority after the 'emancipation' constitution of December 1867, a constitution that grew out of the creation of the Dual-Monarchy of Austria-Hungary following the Habsburg defeat at Königgrätz and its ejection by Prussia from the German Confederation. The 'December Constitution' granted all the ethnic peoples living under Habsburg rule full equality and civic emancipation. Jews within the Habsburg realm were finally freed from their ghettos and shtetls and allowed to live in full equality.

In 1930 another census showed that multi-ethnic minorities were beginning to view themselves as Czech, if not linguistically, then at least culturally; and many Germanspeakers also registered their cultural affiliation as 'Czech'. Twelve years of exemplary liberal democracy, in spite of political injustices claimed by the German minority, provided a model for the rest of Europe. As other newly established nation-states fell to fascism, democracy in Czechoslovakia held firm.

A tragic and unintended consequence of that 1930 census was the 1945 post-war enforced deportation and loss of all property of all Czechs who had continued to note themselves as 'German'. This draconian measure was the result of the 143 so-called 'Benes Decrees', named after the Czech president, Edvard Benes, brought in by the government-in-exile in 1945 (and retroactively ratified in 1946) as a countermeasure to policies between 1939 and 1945 which had replaced Czechs with German speakers in the Nazi 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia'. As a German-speaking Czech Jew, Winterberg was caught in that trap, and his life exemplifies the tragedies that grew out of the new order of self-determination accorded the former constituent territories of the Habsburg realm. Born in 1901, he was the son of a Czech industrialist and came from a Jewish family that could trace its Prague roots back 300 years; the family could even claim some of the most prominent rabbis of the city to its name. By the time of the 1930 census, Winterberg had marked himself as Czech, although it seems he spoke German both at home and at his various schools. He studied with Fidelio Finke and Alexander Zemlinsky at the German Music Academy in Prague, although later he would study composition at its Czech-language equivalent with the Czech nationalist Alois Hába.

(There the much younger composer Gideon Klein was a classmate.) In 1930 he married the non-Jewish, German-speaking composer and pianist Maria Maschat, and in 1935 their daughter, Ruth, was born. With the fall of Prague in 1939 to the Nazis, Winterberg was accorded a degree of protection through the 'privilege' of his 'mixed-race' marriage, although his daughter was excluded as a 'half-Jew', and Winterberg found himself unable to work. As the war progressed and tensions rose, the Nazis imposed the same anti-Semitic indignities on non-Jewish spouses as those suffered by Jews. They were unable to work, lost their property and were forced to live in close confines with other 'mixed-race' families in so-called 'Jew Houses'. They, too, had to wear the Yellow Star and so, over time, enforced divorce became the only means of survival, particularly where children's welfare was at stake. In some cases, such as that of the Jewish husband of Wagnerian soprano Frida Leider, Jewish spouses emigrated before divorce. In ordinary cases, a divorce led to the ability of the non-Jewish spouse to live and work as any other citizen, while condemning his or her Jewish partner to deportation and probable extermination. In December 1944 Maria and Hans accordingly divorced and, before his deportation to Theresienstadt/Terezín in January 1945, he handed all of his manuscripts to his former wife for safekeeping. Five months later he was liberated, repatriated as a Czech and allowed to return home, where he discovered that his ex-wife and daughter had been deported to Germany.

Most Czech Jews who had marked themselves as 'German-speaking' on the 1930 census had no intention of allowing themselves to be forcibly deported to Germany and chose to remain in former concentration camps, now under Czech control, until visas for another country could be obtained or until the post-war Czech government accepted their status as victims and restored their Aryanised possessions. This step could take place only if German-speaking Czech Jews took an oath of loyalty to the new Czech government. None of these conditions applied to Winterberg, who had marked himself as 'Czech' on the 1930 census. It was after his release, and the deportation of his ex-wife and daughter to Germany, that he applied for a Czech passport in order to travel to Germany and recover his manuscripts, and he arrived in Riederau in Bavaria in 1947. By then Maria Maschat had established herself as a répétiteur at Bavarian Radio and even



The 'Präludium' from Winterberg's Suite Theresienstadt, composed in confinement – it is dated '1945 II'

managed to find an editorial position at the broadcaster for Hans. With the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Winterberg was faced with a dilemma. Munich was still war-damaged, whereas Prague was relatively unscathed. If he were to declare himself to the German authorities as an anti-Communist and a 'defector', it would be barely credible, since he had never previously engaged in politics. It was most likely his affair and subsequent marriage to the young music-student Heidi Ehrengut that determined his decision to remain in Germany after 1948. In these circumstances, Winterberg was in a unique position as a Czech, German-speaking Jew attempting immigration to postwar Germany. Documentation exists that shows he mendaciously claimed to German immigration officials that he informed Czech authorities he was a German Czech whereupon he remained interned until his deportation to Germany in 1947.

In any case, his unique compositional language had already caught the attention of Munich's best orchestras, conductors and soloists, and numerous performances, broadcasts and recordings followed. Indeed, by the time of Winterberg's death in 1991, Bavarian Radio had over twenty hours of Winterberg works in its vault, including symphonies, ballets, piano concertos, tone poems and chamber music. There is correspondence between Winterberg and the Sudeten German music-historian Heinrich Simbriger, where Simbriger expresses strong doubts as to Winterberg's provenance. It's easy to assume that Winterberg's popularity was irksome to deported Sudeten German musicians who remembered him as a Czech Jew. More revealing than Winterberg's claims of being German was his musical language, which was of obvious Janáčekian provenance, and similar to that of Hans Krása and Bohuslav Martinů. Indeed, it was more his music than his strategically placed fibs that revealed Winterberg as a Czech living and working among the Sudeten Germans in Bavaria.

Winterberg's marriage with Heidi Ehrengut did not last; nor did a subsequent marriage to another young music-student. Only his marriage in 1968 to Luise Maria Pfeifer appears to have been reasonably happy and successful. She had been an aspiring actress from the Sudetenland Province who was force-marched to Germany in 1945 while carrying the child of an SS man. Winterberg adopted Pfeifer's son, then 23 years old and a student at Munich University, who at no point saw Winterberg as a presumed

father-figure. When Winterberg and Luise Maria died within weeks of each other in 1991, the adopted son inherited his stepfather's musical estate. In 2002 he sold it to the Sudeten German Music Institute in Regensburg for the sum of 6,000 DM. The contract of sale stipulated a block on any performances, broadcasts and information on Winterberg or his family until 1 January 2031; the Institute was forbidden to acknowledge that it even held the estate until the embargo was lifted. Winterberg's Jewishness was never to be made public and any performances that took place after 2031 required that he be noted as a 'Sudeten German composer'. Punitive fines were threatened should any of these conditions be broken.

It was only when Peter Kreitmeir, the son of Winterberg's daughter, Ruth (from his marriage with Maria Maschat), acquired a copy of the contract, and it was published on a blog in 2015, that the rights were re-allocated to Kreitmeir, Winterberg's rightful heir as his grandson, and an end was put to the embargo. The composer Daniel Asia very soon mounted a festival featuring Winterberg in Tucson, Arizona, with further recordings and performances following. The death of Winterberg's adopted son in 2018 left all rights and full control of the musical estate with Kreitmeir. Since then, interest in Winterberg has steadily grown, as it has become ever clearer that he, along with Martinů, represented some of the few remnants of Czech music that managed to survive the Nazis' murderous purge.

Winterberg's writing for piano recalls that of his compatriots Erwin Schulhoff and Bohuslav Martinů, although it is perhaps more directly expressive and wilfully dissonant, with thematic development often abrupt and jagged. Everything points to his own supreme command of the instrument, and although there seems to be no record of his appearing as a soloist, he was often cited as répétiteur and accompanist.

¹ The author of this article was also the author of the blog that published the Winterberg contract: https://forbiddenmusic.org/2015/06/10/the-ominous-case-of-the-hans-winterberg-puzzle/.

² One of the concrete results was a first album of Winterberg's chamber music, featuring two versions of the Suite for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and harpsichord (1959), the Suite for Clarinet and Piano (1944), Sonata for Cello and Piano (1951) and Wind Quintet (1957), in performances by musicians on the staff of the Fred Fox School of Music of the University of Arizona (Toccata Classics Tocc 0491).



The opening of Winterberg's Sonata II

His three piano concertos, along with the selection of works for solo piano recorded here, suggest someone who had an innate understanding of the expressive attributes of the instrument. These are quintessentially piano works; at no point does one have the feeling that they're simply keyboard concepts awaiting orchestration.

In a worklist compiled by Winterberg during his last years, he lists his First Piano Sonata as dating from 1936, though it is unclear whether it was a commission, a work intended for himself or his pianist wife, Maria Maschat, or simply something written out of an expressive impulse. His second piano sonata, which he styled *Sonata II*, was composed in 1941, and most certainly would have been the result of such an impulse; that year was one of the most difficult in Winterberg's life – although the following one was worse, with the arrest, deportation and murder of his mother. By 1941 he had been unable to work for two years, following the Nazi ban on Jews in music in 1939. It's unlikely that his *Sonata II* was a commission, since there was no chance of a work by a Jewish composer receiving a performance. His attitude to the work may have been ambivalent: the finished manuscript indicates that he struck out its designation as 'op. 22', but he did decide to copyright the piece after the War.

Sonata II is a fairly compact work in three short movements, the first $\boxed{1}$ being Agitato (with $\boxed{1}=104$) and in three distinctive sections. The opening in 2_4 quickly converts to 3_4 and then back again, with repeated, unexpected changes in metre often calculated to destabilise. The main rhythmic motif – three beats each consisting of three semiquavers with a semiquaver rest – is the underlay for thematic material that consists of syncopated dotted crotchets that keep crossing the bar-lines. The motif soon morphs into two semiquavers and a quaver while never losing the sense of forward momentum. Tension erupts in a passage of three-against-two with metric changes between 8_8 and 2_4 before a meno mosso leads to the middle, tranquillo section – where Janáček's musical language comes to mind with its repeated motifs and melodic fragments. The final section is an energetic return to the mood of the opening, although it is not an exact recapitulation. Its final chord is a cluster of D flats in the bass, with G, A, D flat and E flat in the treble. The second movement, Andante sostenuto $\boxed{2}$, starts out as a chromatic nocturne before a semi-impressionistic poco più animato appears unexpectedly, building

up and becoming ever more sinister and dark, with a sense of instability brought about by changes from $_4^2$ to $_4^3$, and finally ending in equal quavers ascending in two austere voices before returning to end on a single E octave in the bass. The *Molto vivace* third movement $\boxed{3}$ is the longest and at the same time the most fragmentary, with half a dozen ideas spinning out within the first minute, all cross-rhythmic changes in metre and syncopated articulations, with an underlay of instability through kaleidoscopic changes in mood and dynamic. A heavy $_4^2$ section continues to intersperse with manic $_4^8$ toccata-like passages, almost as if juxtaposing fearful apprehension and resignation. Only in the last quarter of the movement does the $_4^2$ tempo pick up, continuously becoming denser until it too returns to the scatter-shot of the $_4^8$ coda, suddenly seeping away into nothing more than octave Ds, unexpectedly, as if by stealth.

The Four Intermezzi, Op. 2, which date from 1929, are dedicated to Maria ('Mimi') Maschat, Winterberg's future wife, and were no doubt intended for her to perform – she married him the following year. Maschat was a well-regarded pianist in Prague, having years earlier established her career as a child prodigy. The works themselves suggest the aesthetics of twelve-tone composition without strict adherence to the formal rules of dodecaphony. Winterberg would have been well aware of Schoenberg's school and, like Webern, chose here to condense his material, with the third intermezzo [6] being the sparsest of the four – and the score instructs that it should be played pianissimo, with the damper pedal applied throughout. The serial aesthetic that implied, but did not adhere to, twelve-tone dogma was clearly an element that appealed to Winterberg's tendency to fragment motivic and melodic structures; the second of the four [5] comes closest in its imitation of, if not fidelity to, twelve-tone composition. Only the last of these otherwise short vignettes [7] offers a degree of extraversion, with the first three representing more reflective moods.

The Suite Theresienstadt from 1945 is the only work Winterberg is known to have composed during his internment. It's short and consists of three mood-pieces. Given the late and disastrous stage of the war for the Germans, one can assume the work would not have been performed at one of the ghetto events. It's hard not to imagine these short movements as reflective of camp life. Winterberg was relatively fortunate

to have been deported to the camp in January 1945. The deadly deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, and to slave labour and death, resulting in the murder of the composers Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas, Hans Krása and Gideon Klein, had taken place three months earlier, in October 1944. Even if the opening 'Präludium' of the Suite Theresienstadt, with its constant shifting between ²/₄ and ³/₄, along with its threeagainst-two cross-rhythms [8], suggests the first movement of the Second Sonata, it's far more ephemeral in its expression, compressed to such a point that it cannot overstay its deliberately short duration. The second-movement 'Intermezzo' [9] is plodding and depressive, and it's easy to look for its provenance in the ennui of imprisonment: although his internment lasted only five months, living with summary deportations to the gas chambers must have made it feel like an eternity. The third movement, a 'Postludium' [10], consists largely of nervous triplets and can be understood as representing the mental fragmentation plaguing the prisoner who does not know from one day to the next if survival is possible or, in the circumstances, even desirable. Its ending is expressed in the repeated pounding of an A seventh and bass-held F, giving the conclusion a dissonant lack of resolution.

Winterberg's 1955 Suite für Klavier presents a very different world. In the list of works that he compiled himself, he removed all opus numbers, leaving only the title of each work and its date of composition. The five individual piano pieces of this Suite alternate surrealism with parody. The opening movement, a flowing 'Vorspiel' that recalls Bach's C major Prelude from Book 1 of the '48' [1], ends in a pentatonic cluster repeated in triplets with a diminuendo that fades into nothing. The following Passacaglia [12] is twelvetone in its opening bass figure, but maintains merely the rhythmic passacaglia character while varying the actual notes in a manner that suggests a persiflage of serialism and then ends with arpeggiated whole tones. The third movement, 'Marsch' [13], is surrealist, with a middle section implying daydreams with arpeggiated configurations that briefly recall the opening movement, before the reality of the march crashes through, even louder and more insistent than before. The fourth movement, 'Bucolica' [14], is impressionistic surrealism, with broken octaves in the right hand. With its spooky bitonal colouring, it's anything but bucolic and feels both seductive and threatening at the same time. It,

too, ends with a sequence of whole tones evaporating into mist. The last work, a 'Toccata' [15], is a parody of Hindemithian New Objectivity. It starts with insistent, angular note-punching, meant to come across as both awkward and gawky. As so often with Winterberg, abrupt metric changes destabilise the rhythm before seemingly pointless passagework in the right hand ends with a moment of relaxed tension – and then the coda bursts forth in chromatic cascades of notes in both hands, and the piece ends in a loud resolution cluster from B flat to E flat and A flat in the bass and F sharp to B flat and E flat in the treble.

In July 2018 the Schoenberg scholar Gerold Gruber sent Peter Kreitmeir an analytical note on Winterberg's highly pianistic *7 Neo-Impressionistic Pieces in Twelve-Tone*, composed in 1973:

There is no indication that Winterberg used the twelve-tone method in this composition. It appears to be based on the use of the chromatic scale with diverse variations. In other words, he resorts to each tone being of equal hierarchic value in the manner of Schönberg's tone-rows. Nor does Winterberg appear to use alternative twelve-tone techniques such as the one developed by Joseph Matthias Hauer. For example, on the very first page, we have a row of eleven tones with a missing F. Indeed, when the F makes its appearance, it's as a transitional tone and goes against the principles of note-equality. On the following page, we have only ten notes in the row with both F and C♯ missing. The C♯ does appear in a more prominent place later but only as a transposition or modulation. So yes, these are twelve-tone in the sense that chromatically each tone is present, but they are not twelve-tone in the meaning understood by Schoenberg and Hauer.³

In any case, in the first piece, noted as *Sehr schnell und leicht fliessend* ('Very fast and gently flowing') 16, the emphasis is definitely on the 'neo-impressionistic' element in the title. Winterberg departs from his favourite time-signature of 6 in favour of 16. The second movement, far longer, is entitled *Malinconia* 17, which, after opening with earcatching C flat octaves over four bars, moves forward with flowing semiquavers that carry on throughout the entire work. As the title suggests, it looks inward, remaining

³ E-mail from Gerold Gruber to Peter Kreitmeir, dated 23 July 2018.

as placid as a forest pond, except for irregular two-bar sequences of three-againstfour, creating Winterberg's typical sense of foreboding. The third piece, Sehr bewegt ('Agitated') 18, could have been translated merely as 'Quick', were its basis not also presenting the destabilising clash of three-against-four throughout, except for brief passages of two-against-three and a syncopated leading voice emerging from triplets over even quavers in the bass. The agitation enjoys a brief respite with a calmer middle section before returning to the polyrhythms of the opening. The fourth movement, Vivacissimo [19], is a kaleidoscopic whirlpool of chromaticism, fragmentary melodic ideas, polyrhythms and occasional whole-tone cascades. The fifth, Impetuoso 20, is another kaleidoscopic piece, restless and unpredictable with syncopated leading voices that disappear as soon as they catch the listener's ear. It's a swirl of fragrant smoke, ending in enigmatic rolled bitonal chords. Like the third movement, the penultimate one, Molto movimento [21], is also ternary in form. Longer than its companions, it offers a rapid barcarole figure in the left hand with an unsettling bitonal treble. The middle section is seductive and quiet before the return to tempo primo and, if anything, an even faster and more destabilising recapitulation, before it ends with the pounding of syncopated octaves in the bass and dissonant chords in the treble. The final toccata [22] is far in mood from the parody toccata that ends the 1955 Suite. This one brings difficult piano-writing, based on octaves and thick chords in both hands, played rapidly with polyrhythms and demanding double stops in thirds. The pianist is offered little respite, though a semi-lyrical middle passage suggests as much, before returning to maniacal pounding octaves. As with all of the movements, chromaticism and polyrhythms are the defining characteristics. These seven pieces are without doubt the most pianistic and the most difficult in Winterberg's piano output. Though written in Munich, they share their Janáčekian provenance with the music of Schulhoff, Haas and Martinů - all long dead when these 7 Neo-Impressionistic Pieces were composed. Even so, their energy and sense of the surreal were quintessentially Czech, offering a bridge to Europe that reached towards Paris rather than Berlin or Vienna

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Brigitte Helbig began to study the piano in Munich, at the age of four. In addition to numerous prizes at Jugend Musiziert competitions, she received the Cultural Promotion Award of the city of Landsberg am Lech in 2010. From 2011 to 2018 she studied at the Munich Academy of Music with Sylvia Hewig-Tröscher and Markus Bellheim. She also expanded her studies with periods abroad: in Paris, at the Conservatoire Nationale Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris with Florent Boffard, and with Johannes Marian at the Universität der Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. Courses with Amit Dolberg, Peter Feuchtwanger, Pavel Gililov, Nicolas Hodges, Franz Massinger, Ian Pace, Majella Stockhausen and Michael Wessel brought further important stimuli. The composers with whom she has worked include Mark Andre, Michael Jarrell, Thomas Larcher and Steve Reich. With the



groups Ensemble Platypus, Ensemble Wiener Collage, Ensemble BlauerReiter, ensemble hartmann21 and Risonanze Erranti, she has played concerts in Germany and Austria, as well as at such festivals as Musica Viva in Munich and Crossroads in Salzburg. In addition to her performances of important works for solo piano and chamber music from the twentieth and 21st centuries by such figures as Boulez, Dusapin, Furrer and Stockhausen, Brigitte Helbig also enjoys a lively exchange with composers of her own generation and has given many works their first performances. Since 2017, she has partnered the flautist Iva Kovač in a duo, working with young composers to enrich the repertoire for flute and piano.



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HANS WINTERBERG Piano Music, Volume One

Sonata II (1941) I Agitato I Andante sostenuto I Molto vivace	16:29 6:07 3:17 7:05	Seven Neo-Impressionist Pieces in Twelve-Tone (1973) No. 1 Sehr schnell und leicht fliessend	21:13 1:55
Four Intermezzi (1929) 4 No. 1 Breit No. 2 Leicht, flüchtig No. 3 Sehr langsam, verträumt No. 4 Wild, heftig	6:33 1:52 1:13 1:43 1:45	No. 2 Malinconia, molto moderato No. 3 Sehr bewegt No. 4 Vivacissimo No. 5 Impetuoso No. 6 Molto movimento	3:51 3:50 1:50 1:51 5:10
Suite Theresienstadt (1945)* 8 Präludium 9 II Intermezzo 10 III Postludium	7:51 1:33 4:48 1:30	2 No. 7 Molto vivace, alla toccata	2:46
Suite for Piano (1955) I Vorspiel I I Passacaglia I III Marsch I IV Bucolica V Toccata	11:10 1:36 2:15 2:37 2:19 2:23		
		TT	63:21

Brigitte Helbig, piano

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