

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1234

BERTHOLD GOLDSCHMIDT (Hamburg 1903 - London 1996)

Berthold Goldschmidt's father, a successful merchant, encouraged his interest in music by buying tickets for him for significant musical events in and around Hamburg. From 1922 to 1924 he studied composition under Franz Schreker in Berlin; the class included Jascha Horenstein and Ernst Krenek. As assistant to the celebrated conductor Erich Kleiber he participated in the world première of Berg's *Wozzeck* in December 1925. He built an enviable early reputation as composer and conductor, notably with his opera *Der gewaltige Hahnrei* produced at Mannheim in 1932, and from conducting invitations, including one from the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra.

The arrival of the Nazis stopped his career abruptly. By 1935 it was clear that he must leave. In October he travelled via Harwich to London and soon found the basement flat in Hampstead, 13^B, Belsize Lane, where he spent the rest of his life.

The BBC system of an anonymous panel to read and decide the fate of scores submitted to it came as a shock to him. None of his music was accepted until his short overture *A Comedy of Errors* was broadcast in 1946. Even this was in a European Service programme of music by German émigré composers. Eighteen months later a similar broadcast followed when the suite from his ballet *Chronica* was also broadcast to Europe. In fact, apart from commissioned incidental music to BBC dramatic productions, he did not enjoy a broadcast of his music in the United Kingdom until 1953, and his works were only very gradually considered sympathetically by the BBC Reading Panel. In following the history of the BBC's assessment of his music it is clear that we are not just witnessing the assessment of music of one musician by others, but of an unspoken, indeed unrealised, clash of cultures, in which the assumptions and expectations of the assessors, no matter how objective they tried to be, did not reflect the culture of the assessed.

Goldschmidt worked for the BBC Overseas Service from 1944 until 1947. As German Music Assistant his job would have been to select works for broadcasting to Germany, mainly from recordings, and scripting the announcements and continuity. Although his accent was a barrier to regular broadcast talks, he did begin to appear as a speaker, his earliest such commission perhaps being a talk recorded on 30 August 1949 on Bloch's then new piano concerto.

After the war an old friend, Rudolf Bing, a witness at his wedding in 1936 and by then General Manager at Glyndebourne, employed him as chorus master, and his singer wife, Karen, in minor roles. It was surely also Bing who championed him to conduct Verdi's *Macbeth* at the 1947 Edinburgh Festival when George Szell broke his contract, leaving suddenly during rehearsals. Goldschmidt was then very well received by the British press, and in 1948 when there was no opera season at Glyndebourne because of a funding crisis, an all-English cast performed Mozart's *Die Entführung*

aus dem Serail in English at Bath, with Goldschmidt conducting. After Bing went to New York Goldschmidt never appeared again at Glyndebourne in any capacity.

Gradually Goldschmidt received conducting assignments with BBC orchestras. These continued throughout the 1950s, the first half of the decade being particularly busy for him. However, he was constantly being assessed and there were various occasions when he encountered hostility. He saw a big opportunity in the ill-fated British Council opera competition for the Festival of Britain in 1951. Elsewhere I have described this as ‘a classic British funding cock-up’, and that sums it up. The competition was announced in February 1949 and a promotional pamphlet was issued. Goldschmidt had recently written incidental music to Shelley’s play *Beatrice Cenci* for the BBC Overseas Service and presumably this suggested the play to him as an operatic scenario. The composers submitted their works anonymously, being identified only by pseudonyms, thus even the organisers had no inkling with whom they were dealing until the competition had ended. Goldschmidt chose the pseudonym ‘Squirrel’.

He needed a libretto in a hurry for the competition and he turned to Martin Esslin, his colleague in the BBC European Service. His timing could not have been worse. As Esslin was very busy and about to take up a new appointment he refused. But Goldschmidt was determined to have him as collaborator and he put on the pressure as only he knew how. To clinch the matter Goldschmidt offered Esslin a 50% interest in the work. On this basis Esslin accepted and produced the libretto in time. Goldschmidt clearly viewed his labour on the commissioned work as serious and thought it might give him a new status. He would visit Box Hill in Surrey, or the gardens of nearby Polesden Lacey, where, sustained by sandwiches and thermos flask, he sketched his musical ideas, working out the various strands of the opera, and set them into full score on returning home in the evening. Describing to Sue Lawley on the BBC Radio 4 programme *Desert Island Discs* how he approached the composition of an opera, he recalled the ‘enormous interest in opera when so many of our troops had been to Italy and encountered *bel canto*. I thought it would be nice to write a *bel canto* opera’. It was clearly an opera written for an English audience, and he went on to say that *Beatrice Cenci* was ‘an English opera written to be performed in English’.

At this stage three composers were short-listed and identified. Only then did the judges discover that they had chosen three composers not born in the United Kingdom. Two were German, the other being Karl Rankl, musical director of the Royal Opera House, with *Deirdre of the Sorrows* after J. M. Synge; the third, the Australian Arthur Benjamin, who had proposed setting Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. Feeling that they needed a winning composer with an English name they hurriedly considered the next opera on the shortlist. It turned out to be Alan Bush’s *Wat Tyler*, but Bush was a loudly-proclaimed communist. Viewed against its co-winners *Beatrice Cenci* may well have been seen as the toughest nut to crack, not least because of its gruesome plot. Indeed, at one point Sadler’s Wells actually considered the score but in the end rejected it, probably on these very grounds.

None of the operas was produced because the competition had been set-up with no provision for performing the winner or winners. Rather it had been organised in the pious hope that the winner would be taken up by Sadler’s Wells or Covent Garden. Apart from the lack of any possibility of funding from the Arts Council, their refusal may well have been due to their having not been involved from the start. Although the

commission fee of £300 was paid, none of the operas was produced. As it seemed to Goldschmidt, he had been commissioned to write an opera and he had been chosen by a procedure in which he had not been identified; it was now up to the commissioners to complete their part of the bargain. As no performance was forthcoming, conspiracy theory loomed large in his mind.

The motives of the assessment panel in choosing *Beatrice Cenci* were not known to Goldschmidt, and they may perhaps also be seen as suspect half a century later. The chairman of the judges, Stuart Wilson, explained that, “*Deirdre of the Sorrows* and *Beatrice Cenci*, by composers armed with full German training, impressed the judges with their sophisticated continental styles, harmonic and contrapuntal mastery, and engagements with psychologically complex plots. Although the judges deemed them stage worthy, they entertained doubts as to their viability with English audiences.”

This dashing of Goldschmidt’s hopes must have been severely depressing. However, his many musical friends and contacts soon arranged a piano run-through for which the Arts Council had no option but to be host at its headquarters at 4, St James’s Square. Goldschmidt invited as many influential musical figures as he could think of, though there is no record of who actually attended, other than Vaughan-Williams and Peter Crossley-Holland of the BBC. The run-through took place at 6pm on Monday, 3 July 1951, but no assessment by anyone present has been found to give us the flavour of that evening.

The initiative to broadcast extracts came from Goldschmidt himself. He first wrote about it to Eric Warr at the BBC on 4 April 1952, “As far as my opera ‘*Beatrice Cenci*’ is concerned, I wonder whether it would not be practicable to broadcast two or three excerpts from it within an orchestral programme. This is, of course, only a suggestion, but I could imagine that the BBC audience would be interested to hear some fragments from the commissioned operas.” There is nothing unusual in such a procedure; quite a number of contemporary operas became known through ‘*Bruchstücke*’ prior to stage-performances.

This suggestion was smiled on by the BBC and eventually the producer Leonard Isaacs was asked to select extracts for concert performance in consultation with the composer. In those days all important BBC concerts were given twice, thus it was scheduled for 13 and 14 April 1953. The extracts from *Beatrice Cenci* were to be in the first half conducted by Goldschmidt himself, but they did not give him the whole concert, the second half consisting of Nielsen’s then little-known First Symphony being conducted by Sir Adrian Boult.

The performance was not preserved by the BBC, but was recorded off-air by Goldschmidt and it is that which we issue here. He played the recording to his friend, BBC producer Leonard Isaacs, who wrote a lengthy minute about it, “I heard a playback the other evening privately of a tape recording of the excerpts from the above opera given in the Third Programme . . . under the composer’s direction. The casting had not been faultless, in particular Arnold Matters is far too ‘good’ a man to be able to be convincing as a revoltingly cruel villain and Jean Grayston’s voice is far too weak and spreading for the part of Lucrezia, but I was very considerably impressed with the sound of the music. It had dignity and here and there nobility and the composer’s use of the orchestra was sometimes really imaginative and always

completely professional. A good deal of the vocal writing is stylised - in the composer's intention it concentrates more on dignity of vocal line rather than immediate characterisation - therefore the question of casting is one of extreme importance for the characterisation has to come through vocal quality.

With this in mind I must admit to having some doubts as to whether we were right in recommending to C.T.P. that he should not sponsor the whole work. It is that sort of music which is pretty ineffective on the piano. I do not know whether any reports exist on the above broadcasts (13 and 14 May 1953) but I remain under the impression that we ought perhaps to think again about the whole work."

Isaacs left soon after to become Principal of the Winnipeg Conservatory. Goldschmidt thus lost an important friend and the opera was forgotten until 1988. After many frustrations, in 1959 Goldschmidt, in despair, stopped composing. Over the previous decade and a half his unsatisfactory relationship with the BBC found him very few performances, but many invitations to conduct. As in so many things, Goldschmidt does not seem to have been successful in judging when a change of climate had occurred. In fact he stopped writing in the very year that William Glock became BBC Director of Music marking a new artistic climate at the BBC.

Although not represented here, Berthold Goldschmidt's contribution to Deryck Cooke's work on Mahler's tenth symphony probably gave him a higher profile at the time than any performances of his own music. Robert Simpson introduced Cooke to Berthold who now provided expert criticism and 'active imaginative assistance'. Berthold remembered Deryck Cooke as 'a marvellous person'. Berthold remembered 'I was enormously elated to collaborate . . . on a very important subject . . . 90% of the work was Deryck's, I mainly assisted and advised him with the orchestration'.

Cooke found that, with Berthold Goldschmidt's assistance he had drawn up far more of the draft in full score than he had originally thought possible. The resulting programme was broadcast with Goldschmidt conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra on the BBC Third programme on 19 December 1960. This had a remarkable success but owing to Anna Mahler's opposition to trying to complete a performing version, it looked as if it would be taken no further. In 1964 she changed her view and the first performance of the full-length score was conducted by Berthold at that year's season of promenade concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, on 13 August 1964. These all survive. One particularly remembers Berthold coming on to acknowledge the repeated calls at the end by not bowing but by brandishing the score above his head. It would be over thirty years before he appeared at the Proms again.

Goldschmidt's 70th and 75th birthdays in 1973 and 1978 were marked by the BBC with performances of chamber works, but otherwise there was nothing after 1968. Then in 1983 Bernard Keffe presented *Der gewaltige Hahnrei*, completely unknown at the time, with his students from Trinity College of Music, and this began an at first imperceptible growth in interest and performances. Goldschmidt returned to composition with the Clarinet Quartet of 1983 for Gervase de Peyer (first played at the University of Pasadena in April 1985) and when he visited the New York and Yale in

November 1983 he was treated like a glorious survivor. Other performances and commissions followed.

In the United Kingdom the turning point appears to have come with *Beatrice Cenci*, performed at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall on Saturday 16 April 1988. It was the high point of *Émigrés - A Weekend Experience* directed by Odaline de la Martinez. Not only was it broadcast, but the associated television biopic *The Lost Composer* presented him to a wider audience as an engaging and humane person. One cannot forget the figure of the composer emerging on the platform and, having discarded his stick, reaching up and grasping the rail, hauling himself onto the podium to acknowledge the applause. Yet even this event seemed at the time to be followed by silence. It was Simon Rattle's performance of *Ciaconna Sinfonica* at Berlin the year before which really put him back on the map, though even then it was 1993 before the work appeared at the Proms. The first time I visited Berthold Goldschmidt he played me a tape recording of this work and left the tape running for the whole of the applause, which he clearly wanted me to hear. I have since discovered that several other visitors at that time had much the same experience.

The surviving recordings of Berthold Goldschmidt (who made no commercial recordings) conducting a variety of orchestras, reveal a mainstream German conductor of the generation after Klemperer and Kleiber. His rehearsal technique was criticised as boring by some BBC orchestras, but he was immensely thorough. His surviving BBC repertoire is fairly wide. It includes Moeran's *Sinfonietta*, the classical repertoire especially Mozart, but above all Mahler. He left us the very striking 1959 (broadcast January 1960) BBC revival of Mahler's Third Symphony, and the Sixth with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1962, when he espoused the view of playing the slow movement second. Goldschmidt conducted Deryck Cooke's completion of the Tenth Symphony, not only from the 1964 Proms but also from the Berlin Festival (Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra) that year and from Munich in 1965 (Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra). Perhaps Goldschmidt's most striking achievement as a conductor was the BBC's production of Nielsen's opera *Saul and David* which he took on at short notice and with which he achieved a notable success.

GOLDSCHMIDT: COMEDY OF ERRORS OVERTURE

This ebullient short overture dates from Goldschmidt's student years in Berlin with Franz Schreker. An early version was played at his parents' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1925. Subsequently heard across Germany, at first with the title *Overture to a Comic Opera*, it was very well received, but it was never played here until he conducted it himself after the Second World War.

JOSEPH HAYDN: SYMPHONY NO 96 IN D 'THE MIRACLE'

- I *Adagio - Allegro*
- II *Andante*
- III MENUETTO: *Allegretto*
- IV FINALE: *Vivace assai*

The *Miracle* Symphony was the first of Haydn's 'London' symphonies written for Johann Salomon. It was first heard at the Hanover Square Rooms on 11 March 1791. Haydn presided at the harpsichord and it was a sensation. The title refers to an

incident at one of these concerts. The audience crowded forward to see Haydn. While they were out of their seats a chandelier fell onto the empty chairs, thus avoiding what might have been terrible injuries. The hearty minuet with its Ländler trio given to solo oboe reminds us of a producer from BBC Scotland who, after one Goldschmidt performance wrote, 'He is a wise old bird: obviously a very experienced musician . . . [though] his view of minuets differs from my taste.' The remainder of the concert, it probably does not survive, included Rawsthorne's First Piano Concerto and the first English performance of Malipiero's First Symphony.

GOLDSCHMIDT: BEATRICE CENCI – EXCERPTS

The plot, after Shelley's play, is a grim one, set in 1599. It tells of the murder of the tyrant Francesco Cenci by his second wife Lucrezia after her husband, who has oppressed all his children, blocks his daughter's appeal to the Pope to marry and has raped her. Her step-daughter Beatrice loyally praises him in public, but makes off to avoid his attentions. Lucrezia drugs her husband and the murderers she has paid strangle him. Lucrezia and Beatrice are arrested on suspicion of murder. The Pope refuses to intercede and they are condemned. The BBC announcer sets the scene in the style of period.

Here we have the Prelude to Act I evoking the turbulent times, and then setting the scene on a terrace by the garden at the Cenci Palace near Rome. Lucrezia and Beatrice discuss their problems with Beatrice's predatory father and are joined by her young brother Bernardo (sung by a soprano).

The second extract takes us to the Banquet scene, the second scene in Act I. Count Cenci's aria & Lucrezia's Song setting Shelley's poem 'Unfathomable Sea'. The Prelude to Act 2 is set in the Hall of the Cenci Palace the following evening. Lucrezia sits reading and is joined by a distraught Beatrice. They plan to kill Cenci. From this act we hear the scene in which Cenci threatens his daughter Beatrice's life because she will not accede to his demands and Lucrezia drugs Cenci's wine. Afterwards they hear the murderers offstage and the act ends with Beatrice's song 'Dear mother, There as here Our innocence is as an armed heel . . . '.

The last extract is the prison scene from Act 3, opening with an orchestral Nocturne as the moonlight shines through the barred window. Lucrezia and Beatrice sleep and Bernardo paces up and down. Cardinal Camillo enters with the news that the Pope has refused their appeal for clemency. At the end Beatrice sings a heart-felt lullaby to her step-mother 'My dearest lady, put your gentle head Upon my lap and try to sleep awhile.' The scene and these extracts end with the ensuing orchestral interlude which heralds the gathering crowd for the day of their execution.

LEWIS FOREMAN

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