

THE ESSENTIAL

ROBERTO GERHARD

(1896–1970)

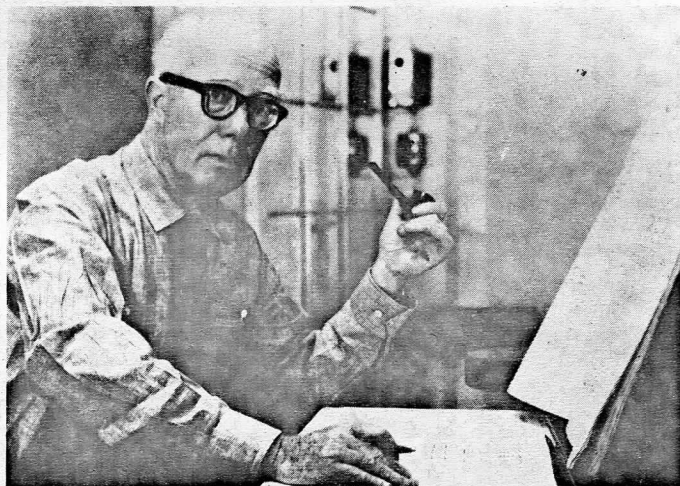
The recent death of Roberto Gerhard robbed contemporary music of one of its most vital and original composers. He had lived and worked in England for thirty years, having left his native Spain in 1938, settling, after a short spell in Paris following the defeat of the Spanish Republican Government, in Cambridge where he was offered a research scholarship at King's College at the instigation of Edward Dent. During those thirty years he lived in Cambridge, where he died, except for a spell in America, first at the University of Michigan and then at Tanglewood, in 1960, composing a large quantity of music in various forms and impressing his creative personality memorably upon English musical life.

He was born in Valls, Catalonia, on September 25, 1896. He studied piano with Granados in Barcelona in 1915–16, and composition with Felipe Pedrell, the 'father' of modern Spanish music, also in Barcelona between 1915 and 1922. He was Pedrell's last pupil, and he was inspired by many of Pedrell's ideals of founding a truly universal music on the basis of Spain's traditional and popular heritage. For Manuel de Falla, the other outstanding pupil of Pedrell, the ideal of a newly-regenerated Spanish music prevailed throughout his life; but for Gerhard it was not enough. Thus he studied for five years with Schoenberg, between 1923 and 1928, first in Vienna and then at Prussian Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin. Though Gerhard regarded himself in the latter part of his life as an English composer, with point, his innate Spanish temperament remained a potent element of his personality, and of his music, though in no narrow sense. Unlike Falla, however, Gerhard became more and more prolific as he grew older, the music of his old age increasingly remarkable for vivid originality and vital force. Falla's lifelong ambition was to free Spanish music from a narrow and constricting 'nationalism'; it was Gerhard's first ambition also. But Falla, partly from an inborn fastidiousness and partly from the nature of the task he set himself, more or less dried up in later life—or rather, he spent his last twenty years trying to complete the major work that would clinch his life's work. Gerhard, on the other hand, suffered from no such inhibitions: he continued composing until the end, making an outstanding and wholly individual contribution to contemporary music.

Maybe it was his period of study with Schoenberg that liberated Gerhard. Yet he said that he never felt really at home in the Schoenberg circle. Certainly he never became a Schoenberg imitator. Though much of his music reveals a strong influence of Schoenberg, he always used seriality in his own individual way, often mixing tonal and serial techniques side by side in the same work, and insisting on the importance of 'permutation' in 12-note composition, as well as on the harmonic basis of musical thought. It is really useless to try to put Gerhard into any category: he forged a musical style out of his own specific resources and out of the different elements in his personality. He was

Roberto Gerhard

photo: Oxford University Press



a true cosmopolitan in temperament and outlook, his music often eclectic in the best sense, especially his early music, and frequently charged with a Latin wit. His Latin background also gave him a sharp clarity of thought and precision of feeling. Whereas Schoenberg's nature was basically that of the theoretical teuton, frequently solemn, Gerhard's was full of Latin gaiety and lightness, though deeply serious, again in the best sense.

It is impossible to sum up so various and gifted a man and composer in a few words, and we are not going to try. In recent years his music has been much performed and greatly admired. Some of it has also been recorded, though not nearly enough. He wrote operas, ballet, chamber music, orchestral music including four symphonies, various vocal and instrumental works, all of a positive and often startling originality. We badly need recordings of his Harpsichord Concerto (1956), the string quartets, *Epithalamium*, the Fourth symphony, *Leo*, and the entertaining 'Flamenco' for orchestra. Yet what we do have gives a good idea of the range and sheer creative resource of this remarkable man. Some of us believe that he was one of the truly great composers of our time, and not only of our particular time. Further observations on his music can best be made in covering the available recordings. The list is in chronological order.

1. Wind Quintet (1926)

London Wind Quintet—Argo © ZRG5326 (Seiber / Fricker / Arnold). (ARR: Feb '63) [45: B]

This is the first work in which Gerhard used a serial technique, though not 12-tone. It was no doubt influenced by Schoenberg's great Quintet, but it is really quite different. Gerhard's is much lighter textured, gayer, more 'plastic' and coloured; and more important, strongly harmonic, with freer instrumental writing. It suggests unmistakably the way Gerhard's music is going to develop. The performance and recording are good; and the works with which it is coupled make an excellent wind concert.

2. Don Quixote—Ballet (1904) (p: Keith Prowse)

BBC Symphony Orch. / Dorati—HMV © ASD613 (Symphony No. 1). (ARR: Feb '65—MR) [45: A/B]

Whoever believes, or believed in 1940, that serial music, even if as here not based on twelve different tones, must be turgid and 'neurotic' must change their ideas. *Don Quixote* is sheer delight; full of Spanish flavour and inflexions, inevitably recalling Falla; light in touch and vivid in impact. The

present suite was made from the original ballet in 1957, and consists of four numbers—Introduction; Dance of the muleteers; Golden Age; Cave of Montesinos. Fine performance and recording.

3. Symphony No. 1 (1952) (p: Mills)

BBC Symphony Orch. / Dorati—HMV © ASD613 (Don Quixote). (ARR: Feb '65—MR) [45: A/B]

Gerhard's aim in this work was to investigate the possibility of 'evolving a large scale work as a continuous train of musical invention that would progress much as a poem progresses. . . . In other words, I discarded the traditional symphonic frame-work, with its exposition, themes, development and recapitulation.' Thus the symphony is essentially non-thematic (though not non-melodic: Gerhard draws a distinction between the two). The musical evolution tends to be carried through the textures, and there is no formal or melodic repetition. Yet it is not at all formless: indeed, the basic form is one of the symphony's major characteristics. Much of the music is of surpassing beauty, and the outer movements are full of the creative vitality that informs all Gerhard's music. With the coupling of *Don Quixote* this disc is perhaps the best 'introduction' to Gerhard. It was one of the first issue in the 'Music Today' series sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

4. 'Collages'—Symphony No. 3 (1960)

BBC Symphony Orch. / Prausnitz—HMV © ASD 2427 (Maxwell Davies: Revelation and Fall). (ARR: Nov '68—MH) [50: A]

Written for 'electronic tape and orchestra' *Collages* was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and recorded with its co-operation. The combination of orchestra and electronic tape was, according to Gerhard, 'a gamble, a real adventure into the unknown', seen as an attempt to find a harmony between the opposed spheres of the imagination and the machine. As in all Gerhard's music, the imagination is fantastic and penetrating. The work is in seven sections played continuously, spanning a single 'day', dawn to night, differentiated by tempo, mood, and texture. The opening and primary idea originated on a jet flight, when Gerhard saw above the 'rolling carpet of cloud' the sunrise—like the 'blast of 10,000 trumpets'. The symphony opens with a blaze of unison trumpets followed by the sound from the tape. A remarkable, compelling, vividly gripping work; fresh in vision and marvellously executed. The 'gamble' came off!

(continued next page)

5. **Concerto for Orchestra** (1965) (p: O.U.P.)
BBC Symphony Orch. | Del Mar—Argo ⓈZRG553
(Rawsthorne: Symphony 3). (ARR: Mar '68—BJ)
 [50: A]

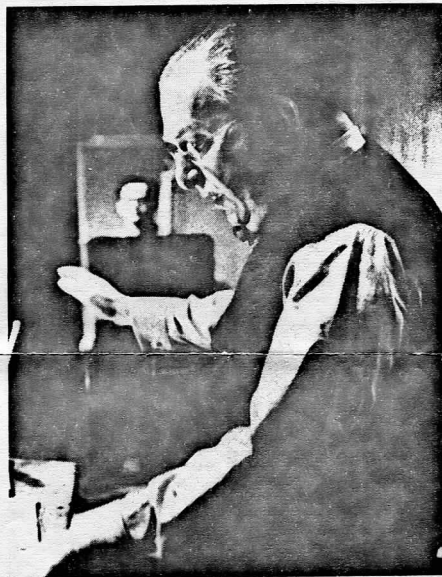
The Concerto for Orchestra was commissioned for the 1965 Cheltenham Festival. It proved both one of the most thrilling works of modern music and a major landmark in Gerhard's own development, even though he was nearly 70 when he wrote it. Again cast in a single movement, contrasting 'three types of continuity' which relate to our sense of historical time. The first part is 'characterised by a high rate of eventuation', the third by 'the magic sense of *uneventfulness*', the middle section having 'constellation-like patterns' in which the pulse is the creative force. But all that, though the composer's

own description, is as nothing compared to the tremendous creative and inventive impact of the whole. We detected at the time of review certain influences of Eastern music; and indeed, that refers not only to this work but to several by Gerhard, though it may be as much, in the actual composition, unconscious as conscious. Gerhard's use of chordal clusters at the points of climax is also potent. The Concerto calls for astonishing orchestral virtuosity, and gets it. The initial impression may be one of exotic colour and dynamic juxtapositions; but familiarity reveals a remarkable depth and power of both musical thought and structural logic, with innumerable subtle inner relationships, all adding up to a true masterpiece of modern music. □

THE GREAT INTERPRETERS:

FRITZ REINER

photo: RCA



Fritz Reiner was one of the conductors of the older school that came directly out of the nineteenth century who, though he recorded quite prolifically, especially during his nine years in Chicago, was perhaps never given quite his due by English criticism. During a long and active career he held many conducting appointments, first in Europe and then in America, beginning in his native Budapest and ending in Chicago. He spent eight years in Dresden, where he was much influenced by Arthur Nikisch, and also learnt a great deal from the examples of Karl Muck and Gustav Mahler. In Dresden, too, he became a close friend and associate of Richard Strauss. In his student days he had studied the piano with Bela Bartók at the Budapest Academy, and graduated with his playing of Liszt's Sonata and Beethoven's last. He has a particular leaning towards the music of Mozart, Brahms, Strauss, Mahler, and Bartók; but his musical sympathies were unusually wide, his gift for conducting music of widely different types outstanding. Like Klemperer, who he succeeded at Pittsburg in 1933, he would probably wished to have been known not as a specialist but as one who 'conducts competently in all styles.'

Reiner was a virtuoso conductor in the sense that he applied his immense talents to achieving flawless technical results and through them interpretative insight, rather than the other way round. Not that his performances were in any sense displays of orchestral technique only; but for Reiner penetration to the heart of the music tended to come first through technical perfection so far as he could realise it—and his immense grasp of every aspect of conducting enabled him to do just that, not in one or two fields only, but in virtually all fields and departments.

He was a hard task-master, a martinet on the rostrum, one of the old-style orchestral 'dictators'. It may have been uncomfortable at times; but it usually paid off: especially in America, where he lived and worked except for occasional visits to Europe after he took over at Cincinnati in 1922, every orchestra he had charge of showed a marked and immediate rise in standards. In Cincinnati, in Pittsburg, and above all in Chicago, this was so. He left Pittsburg in 1948 to go to the Metropolitan Opera, until 1953 when he took charge of the Chicago Symphony, thus returning to the opera house where, like most Continental conductors, he had learnt

much of his craft and gained much of his experience.

He took over in Chicago at a difficult time. After the death of Frederick Stock in 1942, a succession of conductors had been appointed; but the stability and continuity of Stock's 38 years conductorship proved elusive. Reiner changed all that. His sheer expertise restored the orchestra's quality and versatility; and his programme planning restored the city's faith in its musical well-being and full support for it. Reiner's breadth of musical sympathies and range of ability combined to please both the conservatives and the 'progressives'. Always a champion of contemporary music, Reiner remained unflinching in his promotion of it; yet at the same time he revealed a deep love for and understanding of the established classics, conducting both with unflinching skill and devotion.

If Reiner was particularly associated with the music of Strauss, Bartók and Mahler, his performances of Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and many others had always the stamp of quality upon them. But it was not always an obvious quality: he brought an often revealing freshness and clarity to scores either bogged down by over-familiarity or submerged by spurious 'metaphysics'. He had a perhaps surprising affinity with French music, notably Debussy and Ravel, but Bizet also; and a less sur-

prising identification with Russian music. His comprehensive technique and infallible craftsmanship enabled him to make real music out of orchestral 'warhorses'—the kind of scores too often thought to be and made to sound merely tawdry and 'spectacular', in the wrong sense.

His performances of the standard classics were often deceptively 'objective': he sought not for easy emotional or 'spiritual' effects, but for the essence of the music as set down by the composer in the score. His version of Beethoven's *Eroica*, for example, may have sounded unexceptional at first hearing, especially after the larded 'heroics' often foisted onto it. But beneath the surface the workings of a strong, assured musical mind can be felt at work. His performances of such music were seldom obviously 'great', in the Furtwängler or Klemperer sense; yet Reiner's way threw light upon masterpieces too, from another angle. His Mahler has often been under-rated. He knew and understood Mahler from the inside; but he brought to Mahler's music a coolness, one might say, a detachment perhaps, that may at first 'throw' those accustomed to the 'neurotic', wildly 'subjective' view. One does not need to reject or despise other approaches to feel the strength and insight of Reiner's. In *Das Lied*, for instance, it is more than legitimate to feel that Reiner's comparatively 'cool' approach is very much in keeping with the spirit of the Chinese poems Mahler elected to set. His version of the Fourth symphony received a largely hostile reception; but longer familiarity suggests that Reiner's view of the music, though less immediately winning, had qualities of its own which is very much 'echt'. If Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer are usually accepted as the 'poles' of Mahler interpretation, Reiner did not so much split the difference as see Mahler from another and wholly legitimate viewpoint.

Reiner died in 1963, aged 74. His active career spanned a large and momentous period in the history of music. As one of the leading orchestral interpreters of that period, he added something individual and valuable to it. The recordings he left, as always, are his permanent legacy and must now suffice.

RECOMMENDED RECORDS

The full list of Reiner's recordings is impressive, the range wide—Bach to Stravinsky at least. Not all that much survives at present; but RCA have restored a number on the Victrola label, and there will be more to follow.

1. **BARTOK**: Concerto for Orchestra—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1110 [43: B]
2. **BARTOK**: Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste □ Hungarian Sketches—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1160 [45: B]
3. **BRAHMS**: Piano Concerto No. 2 (Gilels)—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1026 [47: B]
4. **MAHLER**: *Das Lied von der Erde* (R. Lewis / M. Forrester)—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS6200 [45: B C]
5. **MAHLER**: Symphony No. 4—To be announced
6. **PROKOFIEV**: Lieutenant Kije / **STRAVINSKY**: Chant du Rossignol—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1290 [45: B]
7. **RACHMANINOV**: Isle of the Dead / **LISZT**: Totentanz (Janis)—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1205 [47/44: B]
8. **ROSSINI**: Overtures—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS 1079 [48: B]
9. **R. STRAUSS**: Also Sprach Zarathustra □ Don Juan—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1265 [43: B] □ Symphonía Domestica—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS 1104 [43: B] □ Ein Heldenleben—RCA 'Victrola' ⓈVICS1042 [45: B]
10. **TCHAIKOVSKY**: Violin Concerto (Heifetz)—RCA ⓈSB2002 [48: B/C]

All: Chicago Symphony Orchestra □