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Heinrich Kaminski & Max Reger: Works for Cello and Piano

Heinrich Kaminski | Max Reger

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While Reger is well enough known to have a whole case of hand-me-down judgements ready to despatch his music, Kaminski is completely unheard of. His exposure has been very limited which makes this CD all the more valuable. Ulrike Kienzle sketches in the details. Kaminski lived near Benediktbeuren (the home of the Carmina Burana originals) in the house of his friend Franz Marc. Marc was an expressionist painter killed in the Great War. Kaminski was a friend of Walter Braunfels (a more prominent name in the miscellaneous Entartete group). Kaminski was a pacifist and made no secret of his condemnation of Nazi policy.

The Music for Cello and Piano while studiously avoiding the word ‘Sonata’ has the 'feel' and 'contour' of a sonata. It is unrelentingly serious, devotedly tonal and threaded through and through with Bachian touches. The central 'Tanz' movement is alive with fugal material and with a Jacques Loussier-style endowed with a devotional sense. The cello is apt to sound inward and prayerful and Kaminski is happy to go with the character and grain of the instrument. The work picks up shards of Viennese waltz elements in the finale. The central movement's dance elements bear no resemblance to Weill, Stanchinsky or Kapustin. Here the dance is a religious rite - blessed as the bowed head and the murmured prayer. This is a satisfying work though the performance does sometimes make it sound strenuous and effortful. The work's style-parallels include the John Foulds Cello Sonata (1905) soon to have a new recording by the redoubtable cellist Michael Schlechtriem.

After two Brahmsian cello sonatas Reger's F major work was to strike a more individual note. It belongs to his Munich years when recently married he felt the confidence to strike out in newer directions. There are four movements: a stormy allegro con brio with Tchaikovskian drama; a playful, almost jokey, Vivacissimo, superbly carried off by Lundström and rounded off with a masterly sigh; an andante with variations and a vivacious finale in which there are Brahmsian suggestions [3.19, 5.21] as well as Slavonic tempests.

These are two intriguing German cello sonatas from composers at ease in the realms of tonality. They are performed with dedication though I wonder whether the Kaminski (possibly an awkward work to perform) might go more fluently in other hands.

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