

Walter Gmeindl

J.C. BACH; WAGENSEIL; HAYDN; TELEMANN;

L. MOZART: HOFFER; STAMITZ

Berlin State Orchestra

Berlin Philharmonic; Brass of the Berlin Radio-Orchestra

Yves St-Laurent YSL 78 1413

Yves St-Laurent has assembled the Polydor and Grammophon recordings, 1940-1942, of composer and conductor Walter Gmeindl (1890-1958), who had studied cello and composition at the Vienna Music Academy to become in 1915 a choral director assisting Bruno Walter at the Munich Opera. A pupil of Franz Schreker in composition, Gmeindl assumed a post at the Berlin Musikhochschule; after WW, II a roster of his own disciples included Sergiu Celibidache, Ferdinand Leitner, and Ernst Pepping. Several jazz artists learned from him, including Michael Jary and Horst Winter.

Gmeindl opens with J.C. Bach's *Sinfonia in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 2*, a favorite of Willem Mengelberg and his successor in Amsterdam, Eduard van Beinum. After a spirited *Allegro assai*, the lovely *Andante* emerges, with its fluent oboe solo and an arioso worthy of Gluck's operatic lyricism. The German Grammophon shellacs (rec. 29 March 1940) are noisy and scrappy, but the molded, melodic curve remains inflected and sensitive. The final *Presto* enjoys, as does the first movement, a *galant* verve, a bouncy zest that features a bracing string line and soft touches from the woodwinds.

Gmeindl transitions to a *Symphony in D Major* by Georg Christoph Wagenseil (1715-1777), a composer whose work transitions from a Baroque to an early Classical style. In three, terse movements, the music exhibits a formal dignity, perhaps somewhat stodgy in temperament from this performance (8 April 1940). The application of Mannheim rockets and gavotte rhythms help urge whatever buoyancy the *Allegro* offers. The minor key *Andante* projects an aura of mystery, delicately scored for winds and harpsichord continuo. Low strings and open-chord harmonies extend the somber tenor of the music, which could serve as an entr'acte in a tragic opera. The music concludes with a *Menuet*, rather militantly assertive for the period, and rife with string ornaments. The large work in this collation is Haydn's 1789 *Symphony in G Major "Oxford,"* so named for Haydn's having been granted a doctorate by Oxford University later, in 1791. Gmeindl's performance, from 1 April 1940, Grammophon, takes loving care of the three soft Gs that open the *Adagio* as it graciously unfolds to the minor before the step-wise motion to the rollicking *Allegro spiritoso*, in which winds, horns, and timpani color the athletic procession. The development exploits the monothematic content

with *galant* relish, quite striking in counterpoints. Shifts of key, color, and dynamic masses create an entertaining exercise in sonata form, whose imaginative dexterity makes us forget the influence of anything academic.

The heart of the work, the broad *Adagio cantabile*, Gmeindl and the Berlin Philharmonic mold with nuanced affection, emphasizing the music's lyric attractiveness. The individual colors, like that of the oboe, prove well highlighted. The drama occurs suddenly, a syncopated, martial impulse in minor that invests a potent swagger into the *proceedings*. The woodwinds pick up the rhythmic kernel, responded to by string polyphony before a strong restatement, just prior the major key da capo. In several respects this rendition anticipates that by Hans Rosbaud with the BPO in 1958. Again, a galant sense of pageantry infiltrates Gmeindl's *Menuetto: Allegretto*, with its bit of mirth in six measure phrases. The *Trio* sounds like music conceived for a wind band's outdoor concert, with string obbligato. The last movement, *Presto*, imitates Rossini in its mischievous speed of polyphonic inflection, as Gmeindl hustles through it, without losing the frolic that emanates from selected winds and horns. A comic sense of pomp invests this performance with an elastic discipline that makes us wonder if further example from Gmeindl's discography will appear.

Disc 1 concludes with a wind-band arrangement (by Kroebber) of a *Sarabande and Menuet in Rondo* form by Georg Philipp Telemann, recorded 7 March 1942. Easily visualized as being performed at a park pavilion, the music has a pungent, clean execution, with a startling trill's rising from the flute beyond the assertions of the brass choir.

Disc 2 begins with an extensive piece by Leopold Mozart (1719-1787), his 1760 *Divertimento militaire in D Major* in five movements, recorded with the Berlin State Orchestra, 29 March 1940. From the outset, the *Marche, Andante*, Gmeindl indulges the work's festive, janissary tenor, with snare, trumpet, and flute at center stage. The first of the two *Presto* movements offers a scurrying series of string motifs, breathless, while a march sounds its tocsin cadences. The piece acquires a hectic, antiphonal effect, two competing, insistent impulses, resolved firmly. The ensuing *Andante sempre piano* reveals a softer side to the elder Mozart, the music's sighing figures kept in intimate dynamics. The ternary *Menuet-Trio* proves a *pesant* affair, stodgy in rhythm and relatively undemanding of our ear for chromatic interest. The *Trio*, on the other hand, resorts to the snare drum and fife sonority to invoke a snappy band. The last movement *Presto* resumes the fife and drum corps, now made more massive with some impulsive string and horn interjections. A distant fox hunt, perhaps, answered by the smart fife corps? The strings, brass, and battery mix it up antiphonally, with staggered phrases that the strings urge to a resonant, final cadence.

The music of Paul Höffer (1895-1949), a pupil of Schreker and Abendroth at the Berlin Hochschule, seems eminently suited to Gmeindl's penchant for brass choir arrangements. The *Heitere Overture* (rec. 7ion. March 1942) seems cast from one affective unit, urging its way by three trumpet thumps and a flourish, snappy and militant, maybe in sympathy with Germany's aims at that time period.

Gmeindl's survey concludes with music by violinist-composer Karl Stamitz (1745-1801), a musician of German-Czech ancestry raised according to the principles of the Mannheim

School of composition. The recording of the Stamitz *Symphony in E-flat Major*, Op. 4/6 derives from the same 29 March 1940 session from Polydor as the Leopold Mozart work. The *Allegro maestoso* unfolds ominously, in sonata form that leans heavily on remnants of *galanterie*, depending on thirds, sixths, and extended pedal points to carry his melodic flow forward. A chugging string ostinato in gradual crescendo gives us a bit of conventional tension. Some trills in various choirs catch our ear but not our marvel. The long, moody *Adagio* proceeds in ternary, song form, built from interrupted phrase lengths and sighing figures, the property of the early Classical notion of "Romance." The latter half of the movement becomes more darkly chromatic, in the manner of Gluck, and we may celebrate conductor Gmeindl's capacity for homogeneity of string tone. The following *Minuetto-Trio*, by contrast, reverts to a decided heaviness of gait, a weak invocation of the *Schwartzwald* ethos. The last movement, *Prestissimo*, attempts a tour de force in the manner of virile French rondo, the brass punctuations followed by woodwind chirps. The crescendo gambit does not have the tension Rossini achieves, but the playful spirit manages to proceed crisply, aware doubtless of the rarity of the musical occasion, available to us from the adventurous Yves St-Laurent.

Gary Lemco

Walter Gmeindl Conducts

Berlin State Orchestra

J.C. BACH: *Symphony in E-flat Major*, Op. 18/2

STAMITZ: *Symphony in E-flat Major*, Op. 4/6

WAGENSEIL: *Symphony in D Major*

L. MOZART: *Divertimento militaire*

Berlin Philharmonic

HAYDN: *Symphony No. 92 in G Major "Oxford"*

Brass of the Berlin Radio

TELEMANN: *Sarabande and Menuet en rondo*

HOEFFER: *Heitere, Overture*