

KARL WEIGL (1881-1949)

FIVE SONGS FOR SOPRANO AND STRING QUARTET, Op. 40 (1934)

Patricia Brooks, soprano

THREE SONGS FOR ALTO AND STRING QUARTET (1936)

Betty Allen, mezzo-soprano

STRING QUARTET NO. 5 in G, Op. 31 (1933)

The Iowa String Quartet: Allen Ohmes, John Ferrell, William Preucil, Charles Wendt

The music of KARL WEIGL, although it could never be described as being radical in style, has suffered a neglect almost as long and undeserved as that suffered by Gustav Mahler. Recently, however, Weigl has been revived and received with an enthusiasm which, in some quarters might almost be called spectacular, and there is hope, that, like Mahler he may be “re-discovered.”

The STRING QUARTET NO. 5 in G major, Op. 31, which had the sub-title “In Light Mood,” is marked by a lyrical flow and melodious invention which can be most satisfying. This differentiates it somewhat from some of his later chamber music or orchestra works which tend to be more serious, at times even portentous in tone and mood. After first hearing this quartet in 1968 Winthrop Sargeant wrote in *The New Yorker*, “The Weigl Quartet was a delight, written by a supreme craftsman . . . My conclusion is that he was a figure of major importance.” After its first performance by the Busch Quartet in Vienna in 1934 it was described as “masterly in form and technique, beautiful in harmony and one of the composer's most mature works . . . a true affirmation of life.” It is in four movements, with the traditional scherzo and larghetto separating the more rigorously formed corner movements.

KARL WEIGL was born toward the end of the century in Vienna, remaining there during the long afternoon of that city's glory, and into its agony at the start of World War II. He studied piano and composition at the Vienna Academy and privately with Alexander V. Zemlinsky, and after receiving his doctorate at the University of Vienna in 1904, was appointed to an enviable position as Mahler's assistant coach at the Vienna Imperial Opera. It was Mahler himself who believed in the young man's music and was instrumental in getting some of his early compositions performed. Weigl had already written a large number of works, including the first of his six symphonies, when he won the coveted "Beethoven Prize" from the Society of Friends of Music for the third of his eight string quartets. Later he also was awarded the "Prize of the City of Vienna" for his symphonic cantata, "World Festival."

When World War II darkened Europe, Karl Weigl, his wife, Vally, and their son migrated to New York, where they became U.S. citizens, and the composer, already 57, started building a new career. He devoted himself to compositions on the grandest scale, expressing in them what was felt to be the "pain and anguish of a whole nation." He also wrote a quantity of chamber music, which, perhaps, was closest to his heart, and which was also accepted by leading figures as examples of the great Viennese tradition. Nevertheless, when he died in 1949, he had still not recovered the aura of eminence that had been his in Europe. His legacy was an impressive quantity of music, six symphonies, four concerti, two overtures, eight string quartets and over 130 songs.

The song cycles on this record are recorded for the first time. The earlier one, for soprano, was premiered by the great Elisabeth Schumann in Vienna, and sung by her in London, where the songs were acclaimed as "powerfully expressive, masterly shaped . . ." The contralto cycle has never been performed.

THE IOWA STRING QUARTET is composed of members of the faculty of the important music school of the University of Iowa. They have already played themselves into the forefront of the chamber music field, in both traditional and contemporary styles, with their particularly true and harmonious performances. Attestation to their prestige is the fact that they play a set of Stradivarius instruments once owned by Paganini, on loan from Washington's Corcoran Gallery.

PATRICIA BROOKS is one of the most versatile of American sopranos. Starting out early, she took up piano at age six, won the WQXR award at 10, switched to dancing at 15, and studied with Martha Graham until an injury made her veer towards drama and a promising stage career. It was during this period that lessons in vocal technique led to the discovery of her beautiful singing voice and turned her back to music. She has been a leading soprano at the New York City Opera since 1963, where her performance in LA TRAVIATA led Winthrop Sargeant to call her “the greatest Violetta I have ever heard.” BETTY ALLEN's big mezzo-soprano voice has been showered by the musical press with a remarkable variety of superlatives, from “magnificent” to “sheer thrill” to the “greatest mezzo since Malibran.” She has appeared repeatedly with the world's leading orchestras and opera companies, winning the highest praise for her acting as well as her singing and musicianship. Betty Allen also appears in PRAISES AND PRAYERS (CRI 207), a composition especially composed for her by Virgil Thomson.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)