

N. SKALKOTTAS

TEN SKETCHES FOR STRINGS

Z. KODÁLY

DANCES FROM GALANTA



PHILIPS



Side 1:

SKALKOTTAS (1904-1949)

Ten Sketches for Strings

1. Sinfonia (Allegro giusto - Agitato); 2. Concerto (Vivace); 3. Pasacaglia (Moderato molto); 4. Suita (Allegro moderato); 5. Concertino (Allegretto con grazia); 6. Serenata (Andantino); 7. Ragtime (Tempo di Ragtime); 8. Notturno (Espressivo molto); 9. Capriccio (Vivacissimo; ritmato); 10. Rondo (Presto).

The Netherlands Chamber Orchestra

Szymon Goldberg

2: KODÁLY (born 1882)

Dances from Galanta

Wiener Symphoniker Rudolf Moralt

"I declare that I am willing to be an enthusiastic follower of the musicians of the future, provided however that their music be not a system or a theory, but music." It is interesting to speculate on how Verdi, who made the above declaration back in 1868, would have responded to the music of Schönberg, which was to start winning enthusiastic followers not so many years later. Perhaps, given time, he would have got around to appreciating the system employed by the twelve-note composers, but on the whole it seems more likely that he would have preferred the works of composers who, though obviously inspired by the twelve-note system, were not slaves to it. In particular, it seems possible that he would have found the music of his fellow-countryman Dallapiccola to his taste, and that it may be that he would also have lent an ear to the music of a composer who worked in a Mediterranean land which lay further to the east.

Nikos Skalkottas was a Greek composer who spent five of his formative years studying composition in the master class of Schönberg in the High School for Music in Berlin, and for a time it seemed that he was going to be an all-out slave to the principles laid down by the famous Austrian. But on his return to Athens in 1933 he gradually began to free himself from his musical strait-jacket and evolve a style of his own. Although most of his works continued to be written in the twelve-note idiom, he also made use of popular Greek elements, which gave his music a special flavour and personality.

Grove's Dictionary describes him as having been one of the most gifted composers of the younger generation of the Greek school; and particularly praises his 36 Greek Dances for orchestra. His output, quite a large one, includes concertos for a variety of solo instruments and orchestra, two ballets, a symphony for wind instruments, chamber music, and lengthy collections of those short characteristic pieces to which twelve-note composers seem always to be addicted.

The present work was initially composed under the title "Ten Sketches for String Quartet" around 1940. Later, the composer added a double bass part and indicated that the work was also playable as suite for string orchestra. In this orchestral version the double bass part doubles the cello part;

and, by mixing solos with tutti, Skalkottas was able to add some new light and shade to the music. The first performance was given by the Athens State Orchestra under Walter Goehr on 6 November 1952, three years after the composer's death. The sketches are all very short, and, although they possess considerable astringency, the impression they make is agreeable and exciting — as in the opening movement, a *sinfonia* which, within 28 bars, manages to pile up quite a head of intensity. Present-day and eighteenth century form patterns are intermingled in the course of the work, the sketches ranging all the way from Bach to ragtime.

Although the music of Skalkottas would surely have posed Verdi some difficulties, that of Kodály he might have been able to take in his stride — even in 1868. Born a year after Bartók, Kodály grew to share with the latter composer an immense interest in the folk-music of Hungary, and their research together produced a number of valuable handbooks on the subject and a detailed collection of several thousand folk melodies. Both composers were greatly influenced by folk-music in writing

their own works, which sometimes employ actual folk-tunes and sometimes original melodies written in the style of folk-tunes. Those who are attuned to Hungarian music as it is set down in the works of Liszt will find the spare, clean lines of a Kodály or Bartók sort of refreshing, and the almost increasing harshness of the latter's music to be, indeed, astonishing. Kodály's music, however, has always tended to be mellower and gentler than Bartók's, and the *Galanta Dances* presented on this record in no way assault the ear. Galánta, a small town where Kodály spent some of his boyhood years, lies between Budapest and Vienna and has been a centre of gypsy life. In 1800 a set of "Hungarian dances after several gipsies from Galantha" was published in Vienna, and it was on these dances that Kodály chose to base his suite, composed in 1933 for the eightieth anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, a celebration which was to take place the following year. The music is full of life and colour, it is very easy to follow, and is orchestrated with festive brilliance, the woodwind having a particularly virtuosous part to play.

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