

96230

BRILLIANT  
CLASSICS

# MIKLÓS RÓZSA

String Quartet No.1

String Trio Op.1

# BERNARD HERRMANN

Echoes for String Quartet

## Ensemble Merian

Stefano Succi *violin I* · Olga Yukhananova *violin II*

Fred Günther *viola* · Ulrich Horn *cello*

## Miklós Rózsa 1907-1995

### Bernard Herrmann 1911-1975

#### Miklós Rózsa 1907-1995

##### String Quartet No.1 Op.22

- |                             |      |
|-----------------------------|------|
| 1. Andante con moto         | 7'47 |
| 2. Scherzo in modo ongarese | 4'18 |
| 3. Lento                    | 7'06 |
| 4. Allegro feroce           | 5'20 |

#### Miklós Rózsa

##### String Trio Op.1 (complete version)

- |                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 5. Largo - Allegro molto energico | 11'24 |
| 6. Gioioso                        | 5'51  |
| 7. Largo con dolore               | 6'52  |
| 8. Allegretto vivo                | 9'00  |

#### Bernard Herrmann 1911-1975

##### Echoes for String Quartet

- |           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| 9. Echoes | 21'52 |
|-----------|-------|

#### Ensemble Merian

Stefano Succi *violin I* · Olga Yukhananova *violin II*

Fred Günther *viola* · Ulrich Horn *cello*

**Miklós Rózsa and Bernard Herrmann** – two men who led double lives. Educated as classical composers who worked for the concert hall, only to find their greatest success and life-long careers in the medium of motion pictures – more specifically, in Hollywood. Both men composed some of the most distinguished film scores of all time: *Double Indemnity*, *Ivanhoe*, *Ben-Hur*, *King of Kings*, *El Cid* (Rózsa); *Citizen Kane*, *Vertigo*, *Psycho*, and *Taxi Driver* (Herrmann). To name just a few. Rózsa went on to win three Academy Awards for “Best Original Score”, Herrmann nabbed one for “The Devil and Daniel Webster” (aka “All That Money Can Buy”).

Not so coincidentally, “Double Life” was also the title of Rózsa's 1982 autobiography.

#### Miklós Rózsa - String Quartet No.1 Op.22

The first of the composer's two string quartets was written in September 1950. He wrote this chamber work as an “antidote” on the sea passage back from his exhausting work on the spectacular epic *Quo Vadis?* in Rome. *Quo Vadis?* marked the beginning of Rózsa's “epic phase” of his Hollywood career, and the composer was looking for a creative outlet for a more intimate artistic expression. During shooting, Rózsa had struck up a casual friendship with actor-playwright Peter Ustinov, who later won an Oscar for his role as Nero in the film. He dedicated this String Quartet to Ustinov, who promised to reciprocate by dedicating his next play to Rózsa. That never happened, but Rózsa – knowing full well what little promises counted for in Tinseltown – was philosophical about the experience.

In the first movement, the Quartet juggles two thematic ideas; the first one opening the piece with an almost yearning cello solo, the second an agitated motif, first played on the viola, only to be taken up by the remaining instruments in a fugal development. Eventually, Rózsa combines the two themes contrapuntally – a staple of the composer's style. The second movement, titled “Scherzo in modo ongarese” includes a rustic, Hungarian dance. Rózsa, like his famous compatriot Béla Bartók,

had been collecting peasant folk songs in his youth. The following slow movement also betrays Rózsa's folk music-infused inspiration; it is one of many nocturnes he wrote during his career, most notably the “Notturmo ungherese, op.28” for orchestra. Unlike the latter work, the slow movement in this piece stays quiet until its ambivalent, deceptive C Major ending. The powerful finale again introduces a dance-like theme, alternating with lyrical passages that have a distinctively nostalgic touch. The striking rhythmic complexity and occasionally brutal moments recall Rózsa's earlier work in Hollywood, his “film noir phase”.

### **Miklós Rózsa - String Trio Op.1 (complete, published version)**

Following early music training in Budapest, Miklós Rózsa underwent rigorous formal studies in Leipzig under Hermann Grabner (1886-1969), himself a student of the master of the fugue, German composer Max Reger. This period left an indelible mark on Rózsa: a lifelong fascination with fugues, even in his film scores. At the time (i.e. pre-Nazism), Leipzig had very much been the world capital of music education for decades, and many composers from abroad completed their composition studies in the city. Rózsa eventually graduated cum laude, never to forget the stringent lessons in harmony and composition he absorbed there – hence the ambivalence in much of his oeuvre that oscillates between Bartók and more traditional, Germanic technique.

No such ambivalence is evident in his 1927 String Trio, a student work. With only fleeting indications of the composer's later style, it is firmly rooted in German late Romanticism. Rózsa himself was a violist by training and performed in the March 1928 premiere. The piece so impressed Grabner that he took it to Thomaskantor Karl Straube, who secured its publication as “op.1” with the prestigious publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, home of many of Rózsa's published scores over decades to come. In later years, Rózsa revised and shortened the work, and he re-titled it “Trio-Sereande, op.1a”. The present recording re-establishes the published, unexpurgated score.

As in the String Quartet No.1, the first movement alternates two contrasting thematic ideas: one agitated, one lyrical. The latter theme is introduced by the cello, and you can perceive a certain “Heimweh” [home sickness] in its mildly Hungarian tinge. The second movement, denoted “Gioioso”, again features a peasant dance at its center – contrasted with a lyrical middle section first introduced on the viola. There are distinct nostalgic, even lugubrious moments in the following “Largo con dolore”, whose shifting harmonies evoke uncertainty and melancholy. All's well that ends well though: The bright, crystal-clear classicism of the finale with its German “Gemütlichkeit” [coziness] brings the String Trio to a reassuring, playful end. In contrast to the more personal String Quartet No.1 there is no feeling of uneasiness, conflict and emotional turmoil here. With the exception of the slow movement, the Trio is a sunny, confident piece that only hints at Rózsa's mature style.

### **Bernard Herrmann – Echoes (for String Quartet)**

Bernard Herrmann studied composition with Percy Grainger and Philip James at New York University, with further studies at Juilliard. During the 1930s he was a member of the prestigious “League of Composers” around Aaron Copland – a society founded to “produce the highest quality performances of new music, to champion American composers.” Prior to his film music career, Herrmann's first and only Symphony and his cantata “Moby Dick” were performed to considerable acclaim in New York.

The 1965 “Echoes”, Herrmann's only string quartet, was his first “pure” concert work in 22 years, following the short berceuse “For the Fallen” of 1943. 1965 marked a watershed in Herrmann's life and career: his second wife, screenwriter Lucille Anderson, had just left him, causing the composer much emotional distress – professionally, the rejection of his score for Alfred Hitchcock's “Torn Curtain” pretty much ended his career in Hollywood for the time being. It marked the end of the most distinguished director-composer collaboration in the history of film: The Trouble with Harry, The Man Who Knew Too Much, The Wrong Man, Vertigo,

North by Northwest and Psycho all stand as classics in film scoring, the last-named triumvirate in particular. Emotionally drained and depressed by a musical landscape in Hollywood that no longer favored classic, traditional symphonic scores, “Echoes” reflects all these existential problems in its grey-ish, muted, vulnerable style.

Cast in a single movement with ten identifiable sections, “Echoes” echoes [sic!] several of the Herrmann's stylistic obsessions, like the Valse triste and the fandango, prominently featured in many of the composer's film scores. Somber, even distraught almost throughout, the listener can almost feel Herrmann's emotional pain – undercut only intermittently by warmer, more nostalgic moments. The “Prelude” introduces an *idée fixe* that is repeated several times in this work, with only minor development/variation. The intermittent fandango rhythm is an obvious reference to “Carlotta's Portrait” in Vertigo, while other, colder, suspense-like sections recall Psycho. It is only in the finale that jagged, propulsive rhythms enter the scene, but only for a brief moment, before “Echoes” ends on a tortured, depressive, deceptively calm note.

© Thomas Müthing

### About the recording

To ensure maximum fluidity and evoke the feeling of a “live” performance, I decided to record these works – with the exception of the 22' minute “Echoes” – in complete takes of each individual movement; rather than tinkering with separate sections or even individual inflections. Considerable care and time was lavished on pre-recording rehearsals.

The “ensemble merian” was established for the purpose of this and possible future recordings. Comprised of seasoned players from Frankfurt's two full-time symphony orchestras, the hr-Sinfonieorchester and the Frankfurt Opern- und Museumsorchester, “ensemble merian” is devoted to the recording of neglected classical works by composers more closely associated with motion pictures.

Recording: Bethlehem-Kirche, Frankfurt Ginheim, Germany  
Producer and balance engineer: Thomas Müthing  
Microphones: Neumann KM 184 (A-B), Microtech Gefell M930 (x4)  
Interfaces: RME Fireface 400, RME Octamic  
Recording Software: Reaper  
© & © 2021 Brilliant Classics