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SRCD.320
STEREO DDD

WILLIAM BUSCH (1901-1945)

Cello Concerto (1940/1) (23'27")

- 1 1st movement: *Lento – Allegro con spirito* (10'12")
- 2 2nd movement: *Allegretto (quasi andante) con dolcezza* (6'42")
- 3 3rd movement: *Molto vivace, con brio* (6'33")

Piano Concerto (1937/8) (28'18")

- 4 1st movement: *Allegro* (11'55")
 - 5 2nd movement: *Allegretto Tranquillo* (5'32")
 - 6 - 3rd movement: *Allegro non troppo* (10'51")
- (51'51")

Raphael Wallfisch, cello
Piers Lane, piano
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by
Vernon Handley

The above individual timings will normally each include two pauses. One before the beginning of each movement or work, and one after the end.

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WILLIAM BUSCH

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Cello Concerto
Piano Concerto

Raphael Wallfisch
Piers Lane



Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
VERNON HANDLEY

if it might be a fugal subject but it develops as a canon and its influence is heard as the principal fuel material of the first movement. Much of the solo part sounds like decoration but is actually derived from the main material, most of the writing being octaves or two-part with a contrapuntal weaving like the aural equivalent of a cats-cradle (similar to much of the piano writing of Alan Bush). There is more thematic material to come; as in the cello piece this Concerto develops an argument continuously with no fat on the meat. There is much dialogue in this work between soloist and orchestra, and the material is alive with augmentation and diminution of themes, easily taken in by the ear.

The middle movement, as in the cello work, has a pastoral feeling. Whereas the first movement was striving firmly and sternly in F minor, the second, *Allegretto Tranquillo*, is in A minor (until the last chord in E major) with decorative single octaves from the piano answered by pastoral woodwind, mainly oboe. The middle sections lean on siciliana rhythm, piquant and attractive.

The finale is a tight set of variations, the theme announced in simple octaves by the piano proceeding, *attacca*, from the previous movement. The theme has adjacent semitones and angular laps to it; the variations are short, cumulative and tightly thematic. Somehow an introductory triplet creeps in in the eighth of the thirty-two variations. The tonality of these variations, initially marked *Allegro non troppo*, is not clear until the penultimate bar when a chord of F major is sounded; even so the predominant flavour is that of the home key, F minor.

JOHN AMIS

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Photograph of William Busch courtesy of the composer's daughter Julia Busch

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starting at the bass note: G, C, E flat and A. This contains the all-important augmented fourth which gives a modal Lydian flavour, above all, to the opening movement of the Cello Concerto.

The Cello Concerto was composed in 1940-41 and played shortly afterwards at the Proms by the dedicatee, Florence Hooton, a lovely fresh-looking blonde English girl known as 'Girly', a fine player, married to the Canadian violinist, David Martin. The Concerto begins with the cello communing with itself in a slow arch of melody eighteen bars long with a four bar clinching coda, very much G minor, a favourite key of Busch's, no sharps or flats, just the notes of the scale with already the falling augmented fourth, from A to E flat, prominent. At the cadence the strings glide in quietly with the same arching movement, joined by a solo clarinet which makes one think momentarily of music by Gerald Finzi. The *Lento* of the opening moves to the main part of the first movement, *Allegro con spirito*, in a loping 12/8 rhythm which may give you another momentary twinge of Finzi. The material is all of a piece; there are moments of rhetoric but there are no big 'events', there is no story line, this is music about music, there are no emotional climaxes to chart. The presiding emotion is a gentle melancholy, a certain wistfulness, never a hint of sentimentality, the whole movement expressing a certain side of the nature of the solo instrument. The next movement moves to the key of B minor, and *Allegretto (quasi Andante) con dolcezza*, the mood is vaguely pastoral, quiet pastel colours, wind more to the fore than brass. The finale is marked *Molto vivace, con brio* and is brighter in colour, the G key now major, the solo instrument given moments of virtuosity; the mood changes sometimes for an episode but the movement hastens to a *Presto* coda. The orchestra, by the way, consists of double woodwind plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, side drum and cymbals and strings.

The Piano Concerto was premiered by the BBC in January 1939, composed during the previous couple of years, similar orchestration to the Cello Concerto. The solo part is clearly written by a pianist, a virtuoso part although the work is not a show-off piece. The first movement is marked *Allegro* and after a preliminary growl in octaves from the piano the violins introduce a main subject that sounds as

My first impression of William Busch the *composer* was of sinewy toughness, the piece I heard at Morley College in wartime was his Nicholas Variations for piano (1942) named after his infant son; his likeness was not mirrored in the craggy, spare music. The next music I heard of Busch's counterbalanced this first impression; songs that were gentle and tender although the music was still sinewy and avoiding rich harmony, settings with the voice and words predominant, with easy intervals for the listener to grasp the sense of the music. Some songs gobble up the words: Busch's never do. These were settings of William Blake and Thomas Campion: *Memory, Hither Come, The Echoing Green* and *Come, O Come, My Life's Delight*; music with bitter-sweet harmonies of mild dissonance with an easy flowing line, all composed in 1943.

Then I got to know his piano works from the twenties: a Gigue of 1923, a Pastorale of 1933 and *Theme, Variations and Fugue*; in this latter piece I found a passage of ten bars or so that I thought was familiar, so I looked up Alan Bush's *Prelude and Fugue* for piano - their harmony was almost identical, so I looked at the respective dates and found that both pieces were composed the same year, 1928. Later I discovered that not only were they great friends (William was Alan's best man) but that, although William was only a year younger than Alan (1900 and 1901 are their birthdates), he was a pupil of Alan's, moreover that both were at some time pupils of John Ireland. Curiously enough, although Alan's later music often recalls Ireland, William's never does. I later heard several times William's Piano Quartet played by the London Belgian Piano Quartet, the pianist being the excellent Marcel Gazelle. Finally, (Busch's output was slender and he died in 1945 at the age of forty-three), I heard the Cello Concerto whose premiere was given at the Proms by its dedicatee, Florence Hooton, and the Piano Concerto of 1939 which I heard for the first time on this Lyrita CD. All of Busch's music comes obviously from the same composing brain, with never a superfluous note whether the mood be striving or tender, it is all disciplined and honed, yet there is no feeling of intellectual contrivance.

My first impression of William Busch the *man* was of a gentle person with a dark sallow face, with features that seemed flat or indented, his cheeks were hollow and even his nose was flat as if it had been broken and stayed maimed. He was at Morley College to hear Tom Bromley play the 'Nicholas' variations. Alan Bush was there too, both guests of Michael Tippett. Bush and Busch wore identical hats, those black homburgerish felt jobs that artists wore in the thirties. But whereas Alan's features showed his forceful personality, so William's were the opposite. Complementing his shyness and reserve, he was self-effacing to a fault. Getting to know him, I found him intelligent and kind, altogether (difficult to say without seeming to gush) adorable and sweet-natured.

William was born in London of naturalised German parents on 25 June 1901, and he lived with them, his brother Richard and Sister Vera. The father was 'in gold and diamonds', a hard, severe man by all accounts and William's sweet nature seemed to be a reaction to his dominant father. However, they supported William in his desire to be a pianist and composer. Perhaps because of the 1914 war his first studies were in America but then when he was twenty he went to Berlin where he had piano lessons with Wilhelm Backhaus and Egon Petri. Returned to London he continued to study piano, now with Mabel Lander, and composition with Alan, with Ireland and with Bernard van Dieren. He gave his first recital at the Grotrian Hall in 1927 and the same year his opus 1, some pieces for wind instruments, was performed. It was not until the middle of the thirties that he began to give up the piano in order to concentrate on composition; this was partly because he suffered badly from nerves. Indeed, when his friend Howard Ferguson heard that William was to play the solo part in the premiere of his Piano Concerto (for the BBC, Sir Adrian Boult at the baton), he suggested to their mutual friend, Gerald Finzi, that they should buy William a pair of waterproof trousers.

Although William's parents indulged him, he was never happy living under the same roof as his father. Eventually, in his late thirties he met the right girl, Sheila Taylor; she was not a musician, but intelligent, sympathetic, a beautiful English rose, gentle like William, blonde and a good cook. The parents bought them a handsome house in a road called Linden Lea in Hampstead Garden Suburb, with a large attic studio where William had his books, music, grand piano and desk. This

idyll was interrupted by the 1939 war, when the couple were evacuated, taking a house at Woolacombe on the North Devon coast. The pair were joined by their first child, Nicholas, later in life to grace the London Philharmonic Orchestra for many years as its distinguished first horn and sometime chairman.

In Devon Busch composed his Cello Concerto, three pieces for violin and piano (of which Olive Zorian gave the first performance with myself at the piano) which were a kind of prelude to the composition of a Violin Concerto, alas! not completed, and more than a score of songs (some recorded by Janet Baker, some by Peter Pears). The birth of a daughter, Julia, coincided with a severe blizzard. Returning home after a visit to see his wife and new born child at an Ilfracombe nursing home, William took a chill and retired to bed. Alone in the house, domestically unused to fending for himself and unable to summon help as the telephone lines were down, William quickly got worse, suffered a brain haemorrhage and was found dead days later.

The 1980 *Grove* (article by Hugh Ottaway) says of Busch: "a distinctive minor composer. In his lifetime his music was considered economical to the point of starkness, but there is an expressive blending of an English lyricism with continental influences", and there I fade the quotation out for he concludes his sentence with "notably that of Stravinsky", because, as you will hear on this CD, that is palpably untrue. Continental influence, yes, but not Stravinsky; in fact I think Busch was more influenced by the continental influences on his great friend, mentor and sometime teacher Alan Bush. As with Bush, Busch wastes no notes, economical yes, but not stark and above all with none of the expansive 'juicy' harmonies with extra notes, such as are found in John Ireland or Peter Warlock. Busch's music contains no 'commiserating sevenths' no pile-up of thirds, no self-indulgences; as a matter of fact he sticks mainly to the notes of the scale he is in, not many sharps or flats. There is melody in abundance, the impression is more of fourths than thirds, plenty of sixths in the Cello Concerto (they sound well on the solo instrument), sevenths are usually minor rather than spiky major (though the Piano Concerto is spikier and with plenty of ninths, too - but then Busch conceives of the cello piece as more melodic, the Piano Concerto has more decorative flamboyance). In the Cello Concerto the typical chord and texture consists of,

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