

BORIS BLACHER

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The German composer, Boris Blacher, was born on 19 January 1903 when his parents were living in Niuzhuang, China, a Russian port. He studied music in Irkutsk(Siberia). In 1919, he came to live in Harbin, also in China and, after completing his school education, went to Berlin to study architecture and mathematics. In 1924, he devoted himself to music and studied composition with Friedrich Koch (1862- 1927), a cellist who had studied with Robert Hausmann. Koch was kappellmeister at Baden Baden and composed a String Trio, Op 9, Forest Idyll, 3 Fantasy pieces for piano trio, Op 20, Violin Sonata, Op 47 and two symphonies.

Blacher's career was severely damaged by his interest in National Socialism otherwise known as Nazism. It is inconceivable now to think of anyone supporting Hitler and his hatred of Jews. The composer was accused of writing degenerate music. He was sacked from the Dresden Conservatory. It was after the death of Hitler that Blacher's career was re established. He became the President of the Academy of Arts in Berlin and became director (1953-1970) and gained an excellent reputation as the finest influential musician of his time. Among his many pupils were Riemann, Yun, Ishii, Klebe, Burt, von Einem and Aho.

He married the pianist Gerty Herzog in 1975. They had four children including the actress Tatjana and the international violinist, Kolja.

He died in Berlin on 30 January 1975. He was 72.

His works include :

String Quartet no 1 1930

String Trio 1931

Divertimento for wind 1936

Concertante music for orchestra 1937

Symphony 1938

String Quartet no 2 1940

Paganini Variations 1947

Piano Concerto no 1 1947

Der Grofinguisitor, oratorio 1947

Violin Concerto 1948

Piano Concerto no 2, 1952

Studies in Pianissimo 1953

Viola Concerto 1954

Orchestral Fantasy 1956

Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird, voice and string quartet 1957

Clementi Variations 1961

Konzertstucke for wind quintet and strings 1963

Cello Concerto 1964

Collage for orchestra 1968

Piano Trio 1970

24 Preludes for piano 1974

Poem for large orchestra 1974

Music for Cleveland for orchestra

Apreslude for tenor and piano

Clarinet Concerto

Rondo for piano and orchestra

String Quartet no 3

There are two further quartets noted

His operas are

Habemeajaja chamber opera premiered 1987 composed in 1929

Furstin Tarakanova 1940

Romeo and Juliet chamber opera 1943

Die Nachtschwalbe 1948

Preufsisches Marchen ballet opera 1952

Abstract Opera no 1, experimental opera 1955

Rosamunde Floris 1960, surrealist

Zwischentale 1964

Ariadne

20,000 Taler 1969

Wonne Prinzessin 1973

Blacher wrote the librettos for von Einem's operas Danton's Tod and Der Prezess.

The ballets are

Hamlet 1949

Lysistrate 1950, a 12 note work

Der Mohr von Venedig 1955

Tristan 1965

Blacher developed into being a highly original composer. He did not labour in a rut.

His early works are amazing. The Concertante Music is a glorious orchestral work and is superbly written and ends with a telling soaring theme on high violins which is not only beautiful but inspiring. The Symphony of 1938 is melodious and will also appeal to everyone and yet people who do not know these works are missing out on exceptional pieces. The Paganini Variations did much to enhance his career and are very popular where they are known and, furthermore, they are original. Both the piano concertos have a fresh voice and the second is in variable meters that is to say the time signature is constantly changing. The originality of the piece adds to its fascination.

To go back a few years the Violin Concerto of 1948 is stunningly well written and a real winner but, again, comparatively few know it. This is a gross injustice. It is truly a lovely work.

The Cello Concerto is a real cello concerto showing all that a cello can do. It is virtuosic and flawlessly written. It shows up conventional cello concertos and those concertos that meander in a dull way with turgid orchestra and display the tired aspects of the instrument or demonstrate pomposity.

One could write about other works with equal and deserved praise but I trust I have said enough.

(687)