Weber, Carl Maria Von Essay, Research Paper

Weber, Carl Maria von

(1786 – 1826)

Carl Maria von Weber, a cousin of Mozart’s wife Constanze, was trained as a musician from his childhood, the son of a versatile musician who had founded his own travelling theatre company. He made a favourable impression as a pianist and then as a music director, notably in the opera-houses of Prague and Dresden. Here he introduced various reforms and was a pioneer of the craft of conducting without the use of violin or keyboard instrument. As a composer he won a lasting reputation with the first important Romantic German opera, Der Freisch?tz.

Operas

The opera Der Freisch?tz (The Marksman), first staged in Berlin in 1821, blends many of the ingredients typical of German Romanticism, simple peasant virtues mingling with the magic and latent evil of the forest, where the hero’s magic bullets are forged at midnight. The grand heroic-Romantic opera Euryanthe is better known for its overture as is the opera Oberon, written for London in 1826.

Orchestral Music

Weber’s two concertos and the concertino for clarinet were written for the clarinettist Heinrich Baermann. Weber also wrote two piano concertos and a Konzertst?ck for piano and orchestra for his own use, as well as a useful Horn Concertino and Bassoon Concerto. His Aufforderung zum Tanze (Invitation to the Dance) is well known in an orchestral version of a work originally written for piano. Recommended Recordings

Clarinet Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 / Concertino

Naxos 8.550378

Invitation to the Dance

Naxos 8.550081

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2

Polonaise brillante, Op. 72

Konzertst?ck, Op. 79

Naxos 8.550959

Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2

Dances and Marches from Die Drei Pintos, Turandot & Silvana

Naxos 8.550928

Chamber Music

Weber’s chamber music includes a Clarinet Quintet and a Grand Duo Concertant for clarinet and piano, successors to the concertos and concertino for Baermann. Recommended Recording

Grand Duo Concertant Op. 48

Quintet Op. 34 / Variations Op. Posth & Op. 33

Naxos 8.553122

Piano Music

Aufforderung zum Tanz (Invitation to the Dance) is a charming programme piece following the progress of an invitation to dance, as a young man escorts his partner to the dance-floor and engages in polite conversation. Weber’s other piano compositions include four sonatas for the instrument. Recommended Recordings

Piano Works Vol. 1

Sonata, Op. 24 / Variations Opp. 2 & 40

Invitation to the Dance, Op. 65

Naxos 8.550988

Piano Works Vol. 2

Sonata, Op. 39 / Variations Opp. 6 & 55 Grande Polonaise, Op. 21

Naxos 8.550989

Piano Works Vol. 3

Sonata, Op. 49 / Variations, Opp. 5, 7, 9 Momento capriccioso, Op. 12

Naxos 8.550990

Piano Works Vol. 4

Sonata, Op. 70 / Variations, Op. 28 Les Adieux, Op. 81 / Rondo brillante Polacca brillante

Naxos 8.553006

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)

Introduction

(born Eutin, ?18 November 1786; died London, 5 June 1826).

He studied in Salzburg (with Michael Haydn), Munich (J.N. Kalcher) and Vienna (Abb? Vogler), becoming Kapellmeister at Breslau (1804) and working for a time at W?rttemberg (1806) and Stuttgart (1807). With help from Franz Danzi, intellectual stimulation from his friends G?nsbacher, Meyerbeer, Gottfried Weber and Alexander von Dusch and the encouragement of concert and operatic successes in Munich (especially Abu Hassan), Prague and Berlin, he settled down as opera director in Prague (1813-16). There he systematically reorganized the theatre’s operations and built up the nucleus of a German company, concentrating on works, mostly French, that offered an example for the development of a German operatic tradition. But his searching reforms (extending to scenery, lighting, orchestral seating, rehearsal schedules and salaries) led to resentment. Not until his appointment as Royal Saxon Kapellmeister at Dresden (1817) and the unprecedented triumph of Der Freisch?tz (1821) in Berlin and throughout Germany did his championship of a true German opera win popular support. Official opposition continued, both from the Italian opera establishment in Dresden and from Spontini in Berlin; Weber answered critics with the grand heroic opera Euryanthe (1823, Vienna). His rapidly deteriorating health and his concem to provide for his family induced him to accept the invitation to write an English opera for London; he produced Oberon at Covent Garden in April 1826. Despite an enthusiastic English reception and every care for his health, this last joumey hastened his decline; he died from tuberculosis, at 39.

Weber’s Romantic leanings can be seen in the novel emotional flavour of his music and its relevance to emergent German nationalism, his delicate receptivity to nature and to literary and pictorial impressions, his parallel activities as critic, virtuoso pianist and Kapellmeister, his dedication to the evolution of a new kind of opera uniting all the arts and above all his wish to communicate feeling. His role as a father-figure of musical Romanticism was acknowledged by those who succeeded him in the movement, from Berlioz and Wagner to Debussy and Mahler. His melodic and harmonic style is rooted in classical principles, but as he matured he experimented with chromaticism (the diminished 7th chord was a particular favourite). He also was among the subtlest of orchestrators, writing for unusual but dramatically apt and vivid instrumental combinations (clarinet and hom, muted and unmuted strings etc). All his most successful music, including the songs and concertos, is to some degree dramatically inspired.

Weber won his widest audience with Freisch?tz, outwardly a Singspiel celebrating German folklore and country life, using an idiom touched by German folksong. Through his skilful use of motifs and his careful harmonic, visual and instrumental designs notably for the Wolf’s Glen scene, the outstanding example in music of the early Romantic treatment of the sinister and the supernatural – he gave this work a new creative status. Euryanthe, despite a weak libretto, makes a further advance in the unity of harmonic and formal structures, moving towards continuous, freely composed opera. In Oberon Weber reverted to separate numbers to suit English taste, yet the work retains his characteristically subtle motivic handling and depiction of both natural and supernatural elements. Of his other works, some of the German songs, the colouristic Konzertst?ck for piano and orchestra, the dramatic clarinet and bassoon concertos and the virtuoso Grand duo concertant for clarinet and piano deserve special mention.

Bibliography

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