


'Refuge in Music'Documentary and ^aConcert*A film by Dorothee Binding and Benedict Mirow***Anne Sofie von Otter** *mez* **Christian Gerhaher** *bar***Daniel Hope** *vn* **Bengt Forsberg** *pf* **Bebe Risensfors***acco/db/gtr/perc* **Gert Heidenreich** *narr*DG ©  073 5077GH (58' + ^a106' • NTSC • 16:9 •^aDTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)^aRecorded live at the Bavarian Academy of

Fine Arts, March 20, 2012



Awareness of the Terezín composers over the last 25 years reaches a culmination in this documentary DVD

companion to the 2007 DG Terezín/Theresienstadt CD featuring Anne Sofie von Otter, Daniel Hope, Christian Gerhaher and Bengt Forsberg (10/07). The documentary was shot largely at the former Nazi concentration camp and the concert in Munich, both taking the experience of the previous CD to a rather different level. Terezín was more a work ghetto than a death camp, and its classical composers, who represent an important confluence of Janáček and Schoenberg, have received much attention elsewhere. Here, they're heard alongside seldom-heard cabaret songs, often composed in the sardonic manner of early Kurt Weill, by Karel Berman and Robert Dauber, giving a much more direct picture of what inmates were thinking and feeling, especially when sung by Gerhaher in the Terezín courtyard with accordion.

Camp survivors are interviewed, including the guitarist Coco Schumann, who returns to where he was once imprisoned, and the Czech pianist Alice Herz-Sommer (whose death was reported days before this issue of *Gramophone* went to press), who was to Terezín what Dame Myra Hess was to the London Blitz, playing several concerts a day. Written accounts go even deeper, most remarkably those of the late Ilse Weber, a poet who pre-emptively sent her own son to safety in Stockholm and, once in Terezín, often sang her self-authored lullaby to displaced children and even volunteered to go with them to Auschwitz (children were disposed of early because they were less useful) so they could all die together.

Even those who have closely followed the rising Terezín awareness might be startled to find that conditions were even worse than previously described. It's as if this music couldn't truly be presented in its proper context until the public, increasingly well informed about the war, was able to

take it. In fact, much of this music was known before its 1990s rediscovery but the special commitment of post-war musicians was necessary to get it out there. Von Otter, for one, was motivated by the memory of her Swedish diplomat father, who attempted to call attention to the concentration camp atrocities during the war, was greeted with indifference by his superiors and, for the rest of his life, regretted not having done more.

The film isn't a monumental guilt trip; ultimately, it's about having a life beyond one of history's greatest tragedies. Some Holocaust survivors are burdened with untreated post-traumatic stress disorder and loss of observational perspective. Not Schumann and Herz-Sommer. By the end of the film, we know why they can face the past and find joy in the present.

How important is the music itself? We won't know that for a while. As Hope puts it, the music doesn't need its back-story to be valid, but the story is there and always will be. In the Munich concert, everyone is at their best. If Von Otter has been somewhat chilly in the past, she isn't here. But the cost of performing this music is much more evident (everyone is on the verge of tears at various points) than on the 2008 CD. And if this DVD doesn't get many repeat viewings in my household, it's because there's not a moment that's not deeply burnt into my memory.

David Patrick Stearns



GRAMOPHONE
Editor's choice