

Frederick Delius - Samuel Barber: Violin Concerto (1963)

Written by bluesever

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Barber - Concerto for Violin & Orchestra 1. *Allegro moderato* 2. *Andante* 3. *Presto in moto perpetuo*
Delius - Violin Concerto 4. *Violin concerto - With moderate tempo - maestoso - allegretto*
Robert Gerle - violin Vienna State Opera Orchestra Robert Zeller - conductor rec Mozart Hall, Vienna in June 1963

Although he is largely forgotten today, violinist Robert Gerle made several LPs for Westminster in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the concertos that he recorded for that label, other than the two reissued here, include those by Vivaldi, Vieuxtemps, Hindemith, and Weill. There also was a set of Beethoven sonatas in which he was partnered by his second wife, Marilyn Neeley. Very little of his discography has been reissued on CD, so this release will be welcomed by violin junkies, particularly because I think this Delius and Barber coupling (originally Westminster WST17045) was his most popular album. The Barber originally was on the first side, and the Delius on the second. Here, the order has been reversed, which makes sense to me, because Delius's concerto ends gently, and Barber's ends with a tart flash of virtuosity.

Gerle was born in 1924 to Hungarian parents, and he received his musical training in that country, although his country of birth was Italy, in a region now under the control of Croatia. The most famous Gerle anecdote concerns his near-execution in the latter days of World War Two. He had escaped from a labor camp outside of Budapest and was hiding out with two dozen other Jews when he was discovered by Russian troops, who were convinced that Gerle was a sniper. As they marched him and his fellows out to be shot, Gerle took his violin with him. A Russian soldier noticed this and asked him to play something by Tchaikovsky. Gerle obliged, and acting on the logic that someone who played the violin couldn't possibly be a sniper, the Russians set Gerle and the other men free.

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Gerle arrived in the United States in 1950. In addition to concertizing, he held a variety of teaching positions in the New York and Baltimore areas, and he also wrote two books on violin technique. He died in 2005 after struggling with Parkinson's disease.

In 1958, New York Times music critic Harold C. Schonberg reviewed Gerle's Town Hall concert and wrote that the violinist's intonation was "flawless." You can judge for yourself on this CD-R. To my ears, this is indeed beautiful violin playing – "sweet" is the word that comes to mind, actually. I think Gerle (and conductor Zeller) could have done more to give direction to Delius's Violin Concerto, which is, even under the best of conditions (Yehudi Menuhin with conductor Meredith Davies, for example), a rather distended work. Gerle makes many a gorgeous sound here, but the concerto's totality is not realized. Barber's concerto is a much stronger work, and here Gerle seems to be in his element, from the long, singing lines in the first two movements to the mad dash of the third. Unfortunately, the Vienna State Opera Orchestra sounds more under-rehearsed here than in the Delius, so this is almost exclusively Gerle's show. Despite my reservations, I was pleased to make his acquaintance!

No miracles have been achieved with the sound, which is adequate. Some low-level noise betrays the LP origins, particularly in the Delius. This is a limited edition release, so don't delay if you're interested. ReDiscovery (www.rediscovery.us) is asking \$12 for it – that includes shipping costs – which is \$3 cheaper than most of the CD-R releases. I am guessing the relatively shortness of the program was a factor. --- Raymond Tuttle, classical.net

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