

Viktor Ullmann

Piano Sonatas Nos. 4, 5, 6 & 7

Maria Garzón



HÉRITAGE



'I want to dedicate this recording to Alice Herz-Sommer and Edith Krauss who survived Theresienstadt camp, thanks to music, and in memoriam Jeanne Mckintosh who was in the resistance and was tortured by the Nazis. And, of course, to Raffaello, always'.

Maria Garzón

The music of Viktor Ullmann documents one of the darkest episodes in the history of humanity, yet the emotions he expresses are diverse, embracing joy and affirmation as much as sorrow and despair. Ullmann continued the musical traditions of Mahler and Berg, and like them he often tempered even his bleakest music with a wry, sardonic humour. The result is music that, even when written in the most inhuman of conditions, upholds the values of expression and sophistication that Ullmann had inherited from the greatest masters of the Austro-German tradition.

Viktor Ullmann was born into an assimilated Jewish family in 1898. In 1918 he enrolled to study law in Vienna. Ullmann soon came into contact with Arnold Schoenberg and his circle, and the rich musical life of Vienna lured him away from his studies and into career in music. The following year he relocated to Prague, where he joined the staff of the Neues Deutsches Theater under Alexander Zemlinsky. By the early 1920s, Ullmann had established a reputation as a conductor and composer, and in the late 20s took up opera conducting posts in Aussig (now Ústí nad Labem) and Zurich.

In 1931, Ullmann was drawn to the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and abandoned music for two years to run a theosophy bookshop in Stuttgart.

When the Nazis seized power in 1933, Ullmann left Germany and returned to Prague. He resumed his musical activities, working as a pianist and conductor. He also dedicated much of his time to composition, striving to consolidate many influences into a personal and coherent style. The music of the Second Viennese School remained his primary point of stylistic focus, although his refusal to completely abandon tonality led him to find a middle ground between Schoenberg's radicalism and the lyrical Romanticism of the previous generation. Ullmann's interests in jazz and folk music also became increasingly important in his work, retaining a sense of the eclectic, even as his style became more unified.

The Piano Sonata No. 4, like the three that precede it, was written during this period in Prague, and was completed in 1941. It demonstrates Ullmann's increasingly sophisticated approach to musical form and his ability to integrate the most recent

stylistic developments, particularly those of Bartók. As in Bartók's piano works, the music here is propelled by angular, repeated rhythms, which are given added emphasis through the use of stark, unresolved dissonances. The sonata is dedicated to Alice Herz-Sommer, a Prague-based Jewish pianist whose friendship with Ullmann grew as the city's Jewish community became smaller and more isolated. Like Ullmann, Herz-Sommer was sent to the Terezín concentration camp, better known as Theresienstadt, where she continued to perform his music. Unlike him, she survived, and continued to champion his work after the war.

Ullmann was transported to Theresienstadt on 8 September 1942, and soon became a leading figure in the camp's cultural life. Music making was initially tolerated in the camp. It was later actively encouraged when the Nazis realised it could be used for propaganda purposes to give the impression that the imprisoned Jews were living "normal" lives.

Composition now came to dominate Ullmann's musical activities, and

incarceration brought a new focus to his writing. He had previously felt that his disorganised lifestyle had caused his music to lack structure, but life in the camp now imposed the necessary discipline. Ullmann wrote: "Theresienstadt was and remains for me a school that teaches structure. Previously, where one was unable to experience that weight of cruelty due to 'comfort', (this magic of civilisation), one was allowed simply to disregard it; it was easy to create the beautiful form. Here, where artistic substance has to try and endure its daily structure, where every bit of divine inspiration stands counter to its surroundings, it is here that one finds the masterclass. It is here that one understands with Schiller: 'substance must be consumed by form'."

The normality that the Nazis sought to project was, of course, an illusion, and Ullmann, like his fellow prisoners, experienced personal tragedy on a regular basis. The Piano Sonata No. 5 is dedicated to Ullmann's wife, Elisabeth, who died soon after their arrival at the camp. But even here, the composer is able to rigorously structure his intense emotions. The sonata

opens at an *Allegro con brio* pace and in a style reminiscent of Beethoven. But the music soon becomes more complex, as the tonality becomes ambiguous and shades of Mahler and Debussy begin to appear in the stylistic profile. Profound emotion eventually comes to the surface in the poignant *Andante* second movement, but Ullmann soon regains his sense of humour, continuing with a capricious *Toccata* and *Serenade*, before concluding with an energetic *Fugato*.

Ullmann's interest in jazz informs his Sonata No. 6, especially in the syncopation and accented offbeats that predominate in the first movement. Here again, Ullmann balances intense emotion with rigorous structure. The most emotionally charged passage is the conclusion to the first movement, but this episode forms just one section of the ingeniously integrated cyclical form. The sonata was written for pianist Edith Kraus, who played it many times at Theresienstadt, where it was well received. She continued to perform Ullmann's piano works after the war, especially in Israel, her home since 1949.

The Seventh Sonata is Ullmann's largest and most sophisticated work in the form. It is also among his most personal and autobiographical compositions. Influences and musical recollections are heard through a series of quotations and stylistic allusions, referencing Bach, Mahler, Schoenberg and even Wagner, whose *Tristan und Isolde* is recalled in the final bars. Slovakian hymns and Lutheran chorales are also added to the mix, as is a Hebrew folksong, which is given a prominent role as the basis of the last movement variations. Three of Ullmann's four children are named as dedicatees of the sonata, suggesting that the work's life-affirming mood was based on hopes for a brighter future. In fact, two of Ullmann's children, Jean and Felice, survived the war, having been sent to Britain as part of the Kindertransport programme. The composer himself was less lucky. On 16 October 1944, just a few weeks after completing the Seventh Sonata, Ullmann was taken to Auschwitz, where two days later he died in a gas chamber.

Gavin Dixon 2012

MARIA GARZÓN

Born into a medical family, Maria Garzón studied music in Spain, Austria, Germany and the UK. Her international career took off in 1984 when she was chosen by the RTVE to represent her country at the music year in Amsterdam. She has performed in many prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Barbican, and has taken part in several international festivals including Salzburg, Carthage and Thessaloniki.

She has recorded for the major radio stations (BBC, Classic FM, WDR, RAI, RTVE, NBRC) and has been instrumental in the re-discovery of the works of the Czech composer J. L. Dussek. She has recorded his piano concertos with the Neues Reinisches Kammerorchester for WDR-KOCH and has recently recorded the first complete cycle of his piano sonatas (6 CDs).

Her recording of the piano works of Elgar was made with the support of the Elgar Society in the UK and features the first ever recording of the piano version of the *Enigma Variations*. When she is not travelling she lives in the UK and Greece.

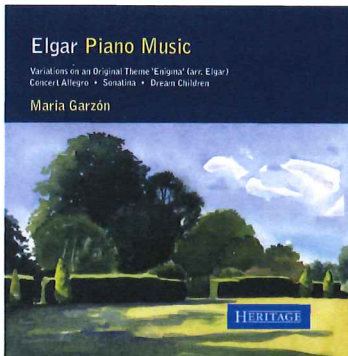
Other recordings include the piano works of Rodrigo, an album of piano variations and an album of Spanish music for piano which won the British retailers association prize for best CD of the year.



Further recordings by Maria Garzón:

Elgar Piano Music

- Variations on an original theme, 'Enigma' (arr. Elgar)
- Concert Allegro
- Sonatina
- Dream Children
- In Smyrna
- Serenade
- Presto
- Adieu
- Skizze
- Griffinesque
- Salut d'Amour



Future recordings by Maria Garzón:

The Complete Piano Sonatas of Jan Ladislav Dussek (6 CDs in two volumes)

The Piano Music of Rodrigo

The Piano Music of Spain

Viktor Ullmann

Piano Sonatas Nos. 4, 5, 6 & 7

Maria Garzón

Piano Sonata No. 4, Op. 38

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|---------------------------------|------|
| 1. <i>Allegro Vivace</i> | 8.31 |
| 2. <i>Adagio</i> | 6.23 |
| 3. <i>Finale (vivace molto)</i> | 5.12 |

Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 45 (von meiner Jugend)

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|---|------|
| 4. <i>Allegro con brio</i> | 5.26 |
| 5. <i>Andante</i> | 5.26 |
| 6. <i>Toccatina (Vivace)</i> | 0.47 |
| 7. <i>Serenade (Comodo)</i> | 3.01 |
| 8. <i>Finale Fugato (Allegro Molto)</i> | 3.13 |

Piano Sonata No. 6, Op. 49

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|----------------------------------|------|
| 9. <i>Allegro Molto</i> | 4.23 |
| 10. <i>Allegretto grazioso</i> | 3.31 |
| 11. <i>Presto, ma non troppo</i> | 2.59 |
| 12. <i>Allegro Molto</i> | 2.54 |

Piano Sonata No. 7

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| 13. <i>Allegro</i> | 3.44 |
| 14. <i>Alla marcia, ben misurato</i> | 2.59 |
| 15. <i>Adagio, ma con moto</i> | 8.55 |
| 16. <i>Scherzo</i> | 1.33 |
| 17. <i>Variationen und Fuge über
ein hebräisches Volkslied</i> | 7.22 |

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HTGCD 246

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