

Gerhard, Roberto (1896-1970) : His Writings

Although Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970) never authored a monograph himself, holding semi-regular reviewer posts at the beginning of his career, he left a significant corpus of writings in the form of contributions to newspapers, journals and magazines, as well as extensive correspondence. His broadcasts for the BBC on musical topics between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s can also be regarded as intimately connected to his writings: together, they offer further insight into how Gerhard's thoughts on his own work, on musical modernism and on national tradition developed through his studies in Berlin and Vienna under Arnold Schoenberg (1923-1928), his early career in pre-Civil War Barcelona (1928-1936), his political involvement in favour of the Spanish Second Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and, finally, his exile in Cambridge (1940-1970), where he went from writing incidental music for the BBC and ballet and theatre companies to receiving worldwide recognition as a serialist composer and pioneer of electroacoustic music from the mid-1950s.

Even though Gerhard's education under Schoenberg is most commonly cited and remembered, the former was equally proud of having studied musicology and composition in his early twenties with Felip Pedrell (1841-1922), regarded as the father of modern Spanish musicology, and a pioneer of Spanish and Catalan musical nationalism. These formative experiences likely determined what would become the two dominant themes in Gerhard's writings throughout his life: first, musical modernism, particularly as advanced by the Second Viennese School and its successors, concerning not only twelve-tone technique in itself, but also the changing relationships between the composer and society; second, the musical past of Spain and Catalonia, and the role it should play in contemporary music.

A fluent and expressive writer in five languages (Catalan, Spanish, German, French and English), Gerhard secured his first writing engagements in the early 1930s Barcelona, in the cultural journals *Mirador* and *Revista de Catalunya*; in these, he discussed the latest concerts and premieres, but also reflected and opined on the direction that Catalan music should take. At the same time, Gerhard worked as a musicologist at the *Biblioteca de Catalunya*, specializing in editions of eighteenth-century Spanish and Catalan music. His main contribution in this field, Domènec Terradellas' opera *La Merope*, could not be published until 1951 because of the Spanish Civil War. In the prologue -likely written while already in exile- Gerhard surprisingly (given that the edition was published under Francoism) did not hesitate to contextualize Terradellas as a Catalan (rather than Spanish or Hispanic) composer, speaking of Catalan music in clearly national terms.

In exile in Cambridge, Gerhard did not hold a regular post as a reviewer; as time moved on, he published the occasional article in contemporary music reviews and magazines. However, many of his reflections on the aforementioned themes -often

coloured by the changing political situation in Spain and Europe, as well as his own initially dispiriting experience of exile- were reflected in his correspondence, including with his former teacher Arnold Schoenberg, prominent names of Catalan cultural figures in exile, such as Pau Casals and Josep Trueta, and his only composition student, Barcelona-based Joaquim Homs. In his correspondence, Gerhard writes extensively and passionately about how he saw his own work and practice in the context of the both musical modernism and the Spanish/Catalan musical tradition, while several of his public interventions -particularly at the BBC- are intended for general audiences, rather than for specialists.

Two compilations of Gerhard's writings have been published: *Gerhard on Music: Selected Writings* (Ashgate, 2000), edited by Meirion Bowen, which includes a selection of press articles and transcriptions and notes of lectures and radio programmes; and his correspondence with Arnold Schoenberg, edited by Paloma Ortiz de Urbina (*Arnold Schoenberg und Roberto Gerhard: Briefwechsel*, New York, Peter Lang, 2019). The rest of Gerhard's writings are scattered across a number of archives. The most significant include: the Institut d'Estudis Vallencs, in Gerhard's native town of Valls (Catalonia), comprising documents from Gerhard's childhood to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939); the Fons Roberto Gerhard at the Biblioteca de Catalunya (Barcelona), comprising a smaller amount of documents pertaining particularly to Gerhard's stay in Barcelona and his work at the Biblioteca itself (1929-1939), and the Gerhard Archive at Cambridge University's Music Library.

Eva MOREDA RODRIGUEZ
13/06/2019

For further information :

- Adkins, Monty et Russ, Michael (eds.), *The Roberto Gerhard Research Companion*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014.
- Sánchez de Andrés, Leticia, *Pasión, desarraigo y literatura: el compositor Robert Gerhard*, Madrid, Fundación Scherzo, 2014.

To quote this article: Eva MOREDA RODRIGUEZ, "Gerhard, Roberto (1896-1970) : His Writings", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 06/02/2020, <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/person/45607>.