

ALISON M. GARNHAM, *HANS KELLER AND INTERNMENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EMIGRÉ MUSICIAN 1938–48* (London: Plumbago, 2011). ISBN 978-0-9556097-7-3, xi+314pp, £40.

Camps during the Second World War could mean very different experiences for musicians and composers. There were the unthinkable horrors and utter finality of the Nazi concentration camps as suffered by Pavel Haas, for example, who perished in the gas chambers at Auschwitz in 1944 after three years spent in Terezín concentration camp where he managed somehow to compose his *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry* and *Study for Strings*.¹ Then there were the miserable and often dangerous, yet survivable, conditions in prisoner-of-war camps such as those endured by Olivier Messiaen in Görlitz in 1940–41, where, famously, he wrote his *Quartet for the End of Time*.² At the far more benign end of the scale were the merely unpleasant and barely functional internment camps hastily set up by the British war cabinet in 1940 to hold non-nationals, particularly Germans, Austrians and Italians, whom they weren't quite sure what to do with at a time of national crisis and virulent anti-foreigner sentiment.

It was into this latter category of camp that the Austrian music analyst and critic, Hans Keller (1919–85) was sent at the age of 21, although there is little doubt that he would have suffered the same horrific fate as Haas, and millions like him, had he not been able to flee to London from his home city of Vienna in December 1938. This was only just in time as Keller had been detained by the Gestapo during the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, beaten severely and had suffered what he described as 'indiscriminate, enthusiastic, collective sadism' (28). He recalled this traumatic episode in his article 'Vienna, 1938', reprinted in this book,³ a short memoir which jars very effectively with the comforting domestic picture painted by Alison Garnham of Keller's prosperous upbringing in Döbling in a home rich in cultural activity. It was fortuitous that Keller's half-sister was married to an Englishman, and it was he who helped him (and indeed many other family members and friends) to escape from Vienna the following year to join her in London.

In November 1939 Keller was classified by the British authorities as 'a friendly enemy alien' (34), i.e. in the lowest C category and thus of no apparent threat to the national interest. Nonetheless, he was arrested in June 1940 and was sent, via a

¹ See Joža Karas, *Music in Terezín. 1941–1945* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1985).

² See Rebecca Rischin, *For the End of Time: The Story of the Messiaen Quartet* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

³ This was originally a broadcast on BBC Radio in 1974 and subsequently published (abridged) in *The Listener* (28 March, 1974), again in *Hans Keller, 1975 (1984 minus 9)* (London: Dobson, 1977) and reprinted in *Hans Keller, Music, Closed Societies and Football* (London: Toccata Press, 1986).

holding camp at Kempton Park racecourse, to Huyton Alien Internment Camp in the Liverpool suburbs. There, conditions were cheerless; internees were crushed into tents and unfinished houses and also exposed to the Luftwaffe raids over the city. But, after a few months there, he was transferred to Ramsey on the Isle of Man where he was billeted in a seaside boarding house in Mooragh Alien Internment Camp, finally being released on medical grounds in March 1941 after nine months in total in captivity. Garnham suggests that his release may have been partly prompted by the work of the 'Committee for the Release of Interned Alien Musicians' chaired by Vaughan Williams. This committee's work reflected the not unreasonable view of campaigners against internment that 'locking up thousands of Hitler's most bitter enemies was almost insanely counter-productive' (50). Garnham, in her clear outline of domestic policy at the time, notes that what incensed them so much was interning 'indiscriminately the same people who had just been locked up by the Nazis [which] seemed to contradict everything they thought Britain was supposed to be fighting for' (186).⁴

Life for Keller in the camps seems to have been bearable enough, and indeed improved steadily as regular food parcels from his mother arrived, in addition to packages of books and his violin. He wrote to her in both English and German depending on how much he felt he could get into the twenty-four lines allowed by the authorities. Garnham has transcribed these letters, but, as she herself admits, 'among all the repetitive detail about food and release applications, these short, censored letters contain little indication of the enormous intellectual development that was undoubtedly taking place inside Keller while he was confined alongside many distinguished minds' (191). Here she is alluding to fellow inmates such as David Josef Bach who was in Huyton at the same time and who apparently co-ordinated much of the vibrant intellectual life of the camp (68). Garnham also stresses the influence on Keller of Oskar Adler, a medical doctor and accomplished violinist, family friend and frequent visitor to their home in Vienna. Adler, a close school friend of Schoenberg (as was David Bach), led a quartet in the camp with Keller as second violinist, various viola players at different times (including Karl Haas who would later found the London Baroque Ensemble) and Otto Hüttenbach as cellist (69). The letters from the camps mention (in passing) rehearsals, concerts and the various Haydn and Mozart quartets played. On the Isle of Man, Keller was also very friendly with Peter Gellhorn, a former student of Franz Schreker and later conductor at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

⁴ See Peter Gillman & Leni Gillman, *'Collar the Lot!': How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London: Quartet Books, 1980) and David Cesarani & Tony Kushner (eds), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

Garnham points out, therefore, that there was in fact quite a positive side to internment for Keller personally: it was relatively brief, he had his uncle with him most of the time, full support from outside—‘there cannot have been many internees who were better provided for’ (127–8)—and, most notably, ‘his insatiable intellectual hunger eagerly absorbed all the opportunities that his many talented and distinguished fellow internees were able to give him’ (189). She cites Daniel Snowman who noted that ‘many of the leading figures in post-war British musical life spent time in internment’, including Hans Gál, Egon Wellesz, Franz Reizenstein and ‘three-quarters of what was to become the Amadeus Quartet’ (75).⁵ In fact life in the camps was culturally rich enough to prompt the pianist Paul Hamburger, someone who often accompanied Keller in concerts on the Isle of Man and remained a close colleague of his throughout his life, to state later that he was really rather reluctant himself to leave the camp, surrounded as he was by ‘so many artists from my homeland’ (165). One thinks of Hans Waldemar Rosen, the future conductor of the Raidió Éireann Singers who came to Ireland from Germany via prisoner-of-war camps in England and Wales, where he organized many music ensembles and concerts. Garnham quotes Andrew Marr’s assertion that ‘for a short period of time, one of the great centres of European intellectual life was the Isle of Man’ (108), a fascinating cultural spin-off of World War II.

On his release Keller took the LRAM in violin whilst immersing himself in psychoanalytic theory. Garnham perhaps overstates how Keller ‘burst on the London musical scene only a few years after his release from internment’ (172), more as a string ensemble coach than a violinist (although he did play in various orchestras and quartets). He was also active as a writer on both psychoanalysis and, from 1945, having been profoundly moved by a performance of *Peter Grimes*, music. His essay ‘Three Psychoanalytic Notes on *Peter Grimes*’ (written the following year but published posthumously) not only combined both interests but also sparked a series of publications by him on the music of Britten over the next six years. By 1948 and the end of the ten-year period covered by this book—the main title seems somewhat overdrawn given that he spent ‘only’ nine months in captivity—Keller was writing for *The Music Review* and other periodicals and publications, and this had become his main source of income. His notoriously outspoken style ensured that he became noticed in scholarly and critical circles, although he did himself and his arguments no favours by his often over-enthusiastic and even belligerent attempts to improve what he (and others) perceived to be ‘shoddy critical standards’ at the time (276).

⁵ Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés: The Cultural Impact in Britain of Refugees from Nazism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), 107.

1949 finds Keller writing to Schoenberg, who rather self-servingly egged on his polemical stance, and he also began a three-year co-editorship of the influential journal, *Music Survey*, together with Donald Mitchell. Garnham includes an edited transcript of a 2001 interview with Mitchell by Christopher Wintle in which early meetings with Keller and fellow-contributors to *Music Survey* such as Erwin Stein, Robert Simpson and Paul Hamburger are recalled. Mitchell quips that Keller taught him ‘how to be usefully and legitimately impolite’ (271), but more trenchantly stresses that the editors’ ‘ambition was to establish a musical criticism and a musical musicology’ (271). This aspiration was repeated again at the other end of Keller’s career in his final book (on the Haydn string quartets) with his exhortation to ‘*think* music’ rather than thinking *about* music, which is, according to Keller, apparently the sorry preserve of musicologists and critics.⁶

This is the latest publication from the Hans Keller Archive, established in 1995 in the Cambridge University Library, dedicated to preserving Keller’s musical estate and publishing his writings (under the general editorship of Wintle, also the series editor for this book).⁷ Commendable as it is, one cannot, however, but sense a faint hagiographical feeling about the whole Keller project which assumes that everything about Keller must be widely disseminated. And Garnham is clearly a disciple, introducing Keller as ‘the most brilliant and original music critic of his day’ (vii). She herself worked in the Archive and in 2003 published *Hans Keller and the BBC* which contains a useful chapter documenting the emergence of his wordless Functional Analysis, which postdates the span of this latest book by around ten years.⁸

Overall, *Hans Keller and Internment* presents a detailed and considered account of life for a musical emigré in the uncertain early days of the war. It is very well-produced, includes many photos and illustrations, and references are adequately covered in the comprehensive endnotes rather than in a bibliography. Four early pieces by Keller from 1946–51 are reprinted: on ‘Britten and Mozart’ (published in *Music and Letters* in 1948), ‘Così fan tutte’ (*The Music Review*, 1948), ‘On Musical Understanding’ (*Music Survey*, 1949) and ‘Schoenberg and the Men of the Press’ (*Music Survey*, 1951). This last one (254–61) exemplifies well what Keller himself recognized as his ‘almost

⁶ Hans Keller, *The Great Haydn Quartets: Their Interpretation* (London: Dent, 1986), 15.

⁷ The Hans Keller Archive editorial office and website is hosted by the Music Department at King’s College, London: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/music/research/proj/keller/index.aspx> (accessed 23 April 2012).

⁸ A. M. Garnham, *Hans Keller and the BBC: The Musical Conscience of British Broadcasting, 1959–79* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

suicidal attacks on the work of many of his fellow critics' (273). Not for nothing was a 1986 Channel 4 documentary on his life called *The Keller Instinct*.⁹

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⁹ See the full text of an interview with Keller in 1985, parts of which were used for the Channel 4 documentary, in 'Hans Keller in Interview with Anton Weinberg', *Tempo*, 195 (January, 1996), 6–12.