



## SERBISCHE WEISEN FOR PIANO FOR FOUR HANDS HANS GÁL (1890-1987)

### Serbische Weisen op.3 (1916)

[1] Lento-Allegretto Allegro .....	2:48
[2] Allegro giocoso .....	2:56
[3] Andantino un poco agitato- Vivace .....	4:18
[4] Allegro ma molto moderato, un poco sostenuto .....	4:11
[5] Andante molto tranquillo- Presto .....	4:15
[6] Allegro commodo- Vivacissimo .....	2:56

Foto: Oliver Borchert

### Hans Gál ,Serbische Weisen op.3 for four Hands

The composer Hans Gál was born in 1890 in Brunn am Gebirge near Vienna and received his training in the tradition of the Viennese Classical period. His proximity to the musical world of Johannes Brahms had a particularly formative influence on him; between 1926 and 1928, he edited Brahms's complete works together with his teacher Eusebius Mandyczewski, a close confidant of Brahms. This connection influenced Gál's entire oeuvre, which is characterized by formal clarity, tonality, and a deliberate distancing from the avant-garde movements of the 20th century.

Gál became an extremely successful composer in the German-speaking world and was appointed director of the conservatory in Mainz in 1929. However, with the National Socialists' rise to power in 1933, he lost his position due to his Jewish heritage and was forced to leave Germany. After a stopover in Vienna, he emigrated to Great Britain in 1938. There, he was briefly interned as an "enemy alien" in 1940, but was able to continue composing. After his release, Gál settled in Edinburgh, where he worked as a lecturer and was involved in developing the musical scene, including within the context of the Edinburgh International Festival. In exile, he continued his compositional and musicological work, though he never regained his former popularity. He died in Edinburgh in 1987 at an advanced age

Gál achieved his artistic breakthrough during World War I. Despite the difficult times, he remained productive and was awarded an Austrian State Prize for Composition in 1915. For him, the war thus represented not so much a turning point as the beginning of his recognition. Due to his poor eyesight, Gál spent most of World War I far from the front lines, primarily in an administrative unit in Belgrade, where folk music inspired him to compose his "Serbian Melodies." From a wealth of material emerged the six-part cycle in its original version for four hands.

Historical and compositional references personally remind us of Brahms' Hungarian Dances: folk themes are adapted and integrated into sophisticated art music, composed for piano four hands and only later orchestrated due to their great success, and the manner of the performance markings should also be mentioned here as an example.

The musical language, however, is entirely that of the composer Hans Gál: clear and often transparent in its texture, the work is nonetheless rooted in the late Romantic tradition, thus displaying the formal rigor typical of Gál, paired with harmonic sophistication

*Text by Friederike Haufe*



Foto: Oliver Borchert

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### **Piano Duo Friederike Haufe – Volker Ahmels**

Worldwide research and “discovery” of composers (and of their works) who were hindered by the Nazi-Regime in exercising their artistic profession, who were driven into exile or were deported and murdered in extermination camps, are some of the main topics in the lives of both these artists.

Their first meeting in 1998 in Israel, with pianist Edith Kraus gave rise to their intense preoccupation with “Ostracized Music“, until then a largely unknown theme. Edith Kraus had been the youngest student in Artur Schnabel’s Berlin Masterclass, after which she began a promising career in Prague. In 1943 she was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp, where she was one of the most prominent musicians. Right up to Edith Kraus’ death in 2013, Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels stayed in regular touch with her.

Piano duo Friederike Haufe Volker Ahmels recorded their first CD for Medien Kontor Hamburg in 2006, with Franz Schubert’s famous F minor Fantasy, Franz Liszt’s symphonic poem “Les Préludes” in the rarely played version by the composer himself, for four hands, as well as the piano waltzes for four hands “devised” by Wolfgang Rihm.

In 2012 a CD titled “Der Ochse auf dem Dach und andere Verbote” (The Ox on the Roof and further banned music) featuring works by Darius Milhaud, Hans Gál, Arnold Schönberg, Leo Smit, Erwin Schulhoff and Ernst Toch was published in Vienna by Gramola.

These new recordings from 2025, presented here, follow directly on from those earlier works. Gramola previously produced Hans Gál’s “Marionettes” with the piano duo Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels. With this latest recording of the “Serbian Melodies,” their complete four-hand works are now available in their interpretation. This is also the case with Arnold Schoenberg, whose early “6 Pieces” were released on this CD at the time. His “Fragment of the Phantasia” now completes this composer’s four-hand oeuvre. In “Secrets of Fragments,” it is juxtaposed with the ballet fragment “La Danse de la Sorcière” from “Le Jardin du Paradis” by Alexandre Tansman. Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels have included this work in their concert repertoire since 2007.

As from 2016 the piano duo began promoting the publication and the renewed performance of works by Hamburg born composer Ingolf Dahl, who had been forced to emigrate to Los Angeles because of his Jewish roots. They found Dahl’s piano manuscripts for four hands amongst his estate at the USC archives. In 2017 Medien Kontor Hamburg in cooperation with the Centre for Ostracized Music at the Rostock Academy of Music and Theatre published these works as a scientific first edition of Dahl’s complete piano music for four hands. The première of Dahl’s “Four Intervals” can be heard played by Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels on the CD called “Ingolf Dahl Intervals” that was published by the same cooperation.

Since 2014, the four-hand piano piece by Dutch composer Dick Kattenburg has been part of their concert repertoire. They have performed it on multiple occasions in Hamburg and Amsterdam, as well as in Los Angeles and Vienna, and recorded it in 2021 for Donemus Amsterdam. At the International Festival of Forbidden Music in Schwerin, they performed the world premiere of the 1938 “Overture for Two Pianos, Op. 3 No. 1,” which is heard for the first time on this CD and was nominated for the Opus Klassik award in 2022 as the “world premiere recording.” At the same time, Donemus Amsterdam released a new edition of all the scores for this instrumentation, edited by Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels.

They met at a young age whilst studying the piano with Bernard Wambach. Internationally renowned for his interpretations of contemporary music, this later professor at the Folkwang Arts Academy in Essen, inspired a deep and lasting interest in 20th Century music in both young pianists.

In 1996 they joined forces to form a piano duo for their first international appearance in Israel and the autonomous Palestinian territories. In both parts of Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv and Haifa, as well as in Bethlehem and Ramallah they gave performances of piano works for four hands of the classic and romantic periods. Later they also included works for two pianos in their repertoire, such as Mozart’s complete opus for this combination and Bach’s piano concerto in C major BWV 1061, that they performed at the Schwerin Theatre with the Chamber Orchestra of the Mecklenburgische Staatskapelle. They appeared at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, at the Musiksommer Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, at the International Piano Duo Festival Bad Herrenalb, several times at the Klavierfest Ammersee as well as the “Tons Voisins” Festival in Albi. Concert tours furthermore took them to France (Paris, Marseille), Austria (Vienna), Denmark (Odense), Spain (Tenerife), Poland (Pila), to the Czech Republic (Prague and Terezin), the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and on a regular basis to the USA (several times to both Los Angeles and Philadelphia, but also to Cleveland, San Diego and Washington). In 2018 Volker Ahmels was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit by Germany’s President, for his contribution to the cause of ostracized music as Managing Director of the “Zentrum Verfemte Musik” at the Rostock Academy of Music and Theatre as well as Festival Director of the International Competition and Festival for Ostracized Music Schwerin.

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Recording date: 2025-08-09/10.

Location: Klangmanufaktur Hamburg

Instrument: Steinway and Sons D grand piano from 1925 completely refurbished by Klangmanufaktur Hamburg, belonging to the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra known as “the blue grand piano”

Recording manager: Johannes Richter

Recording Studio: Die Tonspur Schwerin

**PARTNERS: (THANKS TO)**

**Hans-Kauffmann-Stiftung, Hamburg**



*Steinway-Flügel aus der*  
**KLANGMANUFAKTUR**