

Anton Stingl – Selection of Works for Solo Guitar – Andreas Stevens

You are one of the few living composers who not only writes pieces that can be played on the guitar but that illustrate the essence of the instrument with each work.

Luise Walker (September 23, 1936)

Anton Stingl, born on January 25, 1908 in Constanza, Germany, belonged to the generation of guitarists whose instrumental abilities were self-taught with the assistance of the method *"Moderner Lehrgang des künstlerischen Gitarrespiels"* (Contemporary course of artistic guitar playing) by Heinrich Albert (1870–1950). In 1925, Stingl began seriously considering the possibility of dedicating his life to the guitar. At that time in Germany there were no opportunities for an academic education in the instrument, as opposed to Austria where Jacob Ortner was professor of guitar at the Academy of Fine Arts. As a result, Stingl went to Vienna to study with Ortner where he obtained the title of Concert Artist in 1928. The following year Ortner published Stingl's first

composition for solo guitar, *Etude*, as a supplement in his "*Oesterreichische Gitarre Zeitschrift*" (Austrian Guitar Magazine). Stingl completed his theory education in Freiburg between 1930 and 1933 with Hans Gal, Julius Weismann, Erich Doflein and Friedrich Wilhelm Lothar.

The compositions recorded here show a composer who creates music for his instrument, music that clearly reflects its involvement with and understanding of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, popular music, and the leading musical trends of his time. The music of Bach influenced Stingl all his life: "*I intensely studied the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, whose works the greatest musicians have learned and which means so much, especially for our times.*" In 1951 he published a complete edition of Bach's Works for lute and in 1956 he followed up with 20 pieces from *The Notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach*. Between 1981 and 1983 Stingl arranged Bach chorales and inventions for two guitars.

In the same manner, the popular song is an influence of Stingl's music. We can find in his catalog numerous compositions where popular songs are used for variations, quotations, or improvisations. He often uses well-known themes from German children songs, for example in the *Sonatina, Op. 15a* — in the main theme of the second movement

and in the Rondo the fourth movement. As Stingl once explained, "*My work is always based upon the popular song.*"

In the same manner he arranged popular songs for voice and guitar, and the choice of songs was not limited to German. Inspired by his collaboration with the Ukrainian singer Oksana Sowiak from the end of the 1960s, he wrote songs in Ukrainian, Polish, and Yiddish, works in which the guitar and voice share equal roles.

Anton Stingl often participated in the premiere of works by his peers, as he did in the 1955 work by Pierre Boulez *Le Marteau San Maitre* (*The hammer without a master*), which would not have been accomplished without his participation. Other guitarists of this period declined to participate in this performance. In the words of Julian Bream, "*I felt rather sad that I didn't play for the first performance of Le marteau sans maitre by Pierre Boulez. It wasn't because I didn't want to do it – I wanted very much to do it. But I knew that rhythm was so complicated that we would have spent half of the rehearsal time trying to get Julian Bream to play rhythmically with other instruments.*"¹

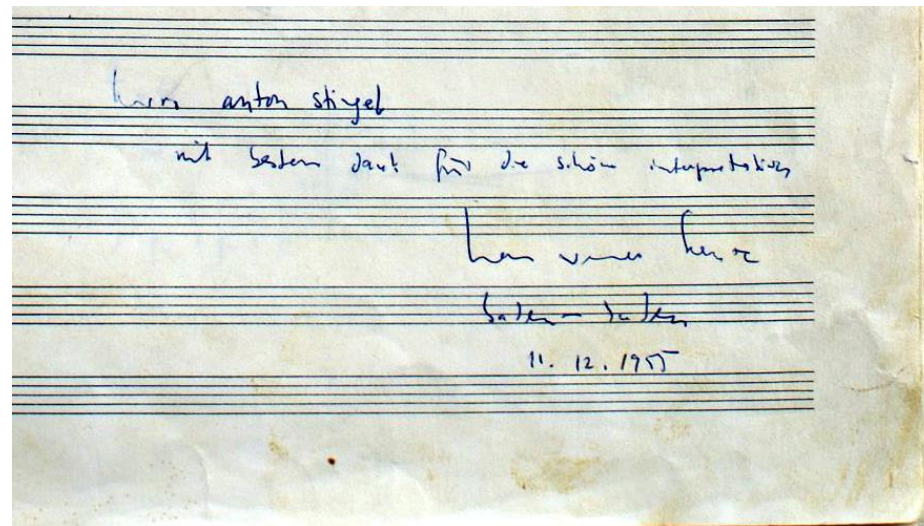
¹ Catching Up with Julian Bream. The Legendary Master Looks Back. In: Classical Guitar Magazine, December 2014.

Anton Stingl performed this piece approximately 30 times and had the opportunity to travel to the principal European cities and participate in recordings that received critical acclaim.

In the same year, Stingl worked in the production *Il sesto canto* (The sixth song) by German writer Ernst Schnabel with the radio *Südwest-funk*, where Hans Werner Henze composed small guitar interludes. This work is considered the first attempt in Henze's extensive catalog for the guitar. Henze would later use these motives in the Three Tentos of his *Kammermusik 1958*. Anton Stingl was the first guitarist with whom Hans Werner Henze collaborated. Henze originally had another guitarist in mind, singer/guitarist Fausto Cigliano, but Cigliano was unable to solve the technical difficulties. Henze, recalling the participation of Stingl in the premiere of *Marteau*, wrote: "*Yesterday Dr. Faust, an excellent singer, was here and said that my music was not playable. This unfortunate incident is not so tragic as I remembered an instrumentalist from Freiburg who participated in the premier of Boulez's Le Marteau sans Maître in the Baden-Baden music festival.*"²

² In: Concertino 4/2013, p. 149.

Henze thanked Stingl with the following dedication, "*Enormously thankful for the beautiful performance (11/12/1955),*" and gave him a copy of the score as a gift.



Anton Stingl did a revision of his compositions from time to time. His *Prelude and Tango, op. 9* (1933) was revised in 1992 and his *Variations, op. 16* (1936) was revised for Joachim Bohnert in 1987. He wrote his *Improvisation, op. 40*, in 1956 and revised it in 1987. This work was created after attending three concerts of Andrés Segovia in

Basel and Lucerne. Deeply moved, he recounted his experiences in the *Verbandszeitschrift der Gitarristischen Vereinigung* (guitar society magazine) of Munich, relating his state of impressionable excitement by these events. Stingl originally dedicated *Improvisation, op. 40* to Segovia. Segovia also owned manuscript copies of opuses 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17 which Stingl had sent him. The revision of his op. 40 is dedicated to his student Ilse Breitruck.

The most important performer of his works was Luise Walker, who played the *Variations, op. 16* in some of her concerts (Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Cologne, and Milan). This virtuoso wrote to Stingl, "*The Variations are technically very difficult, aside from the music. Can you really play the guitar so good ???*" (February 15, 1939). Unfortunately, Luise Walker did not record any of the Stingl's works. In the 64th Wiesbaden Music Festival (Tonkünstlerfest) of 1934 Stingl performed his *Trio op. 8 for violin, viola and guitar*. There was unanimous approval by the press reviews for this performance.

Anton Stingl recorded the *Sonatina op. 15a* on his solo LPs of 1961 and 1985. Apparently this piece, composed in January of 1936, had a special relevance for the composer and because of this it appears first on this recording.

The final piece of this CD is a harmonics study, composed and dedicated in 1989 to Werner Fischer, his life-long student. He suggested the revision of the *Sonata, op. 17* of 1936 so that he could perform it in 1994. This study, based on a text of Ecclesiastes 1, has the subtitle of "*Windhauch, Windhauch, alles ist Windhauch*" (Breath of wind, breath of wind, everything is a breath of wind).

Anton Stingl died in Freiburg on April 6, 2000 at the age of ninety-two. Stingl, who was never consumed by the need for fame, opted to live life near his family. Despite the fact that his works are published by the most important publishers, he did not come to be counted with the renowned guitarists who performed those works: "*There were always others who took the initiative. I never had the need to be in the spotlight.*"

Without a doubt, his music gives him the status that he never wanted as a person.

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(English translation by Charles Postlewate)