

Caladium Duo

Lin He, violin · Daniel Cassin, cello

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Heinrich Anton Hoffmann (1770-1842)

Duo in F major for violin and cello, Op. 5 No. 1

There is a famous story about how the young Robert Schumann, still divided between following a career in law or music, once travelled to Frankfurt to hear the celebrated violinist Niccolò Paganini give a concert. So impressed was Schumann by Paganini's virtuosity, he soon wrote home to inform his mother that, despite her objections, he would be returning to Leipzig to continue his musical studies. This decisive concert in April 1830 was one of twelve which Paganini gave with the Frankfurt orchestra where Heinrich Anton Hoffmann, the composer whose music begins tonight's program, was then concertmaster. Hoffmann's music remains little-heard today, yet his string duos offer rewarding experiences for musicians and listeners willing to seek them out. They number fifteen works total, including six duos for two violins (Op. 4) and nine for violin and cello (Opp. 5, 6, and 10). These duos form the central part of his relatively small output, a body which also contains two violin concerti, a double concerto, and several string quartets among other works.

Hoffmann was born in Mainz and likely received violin lessons from Georg Anton Kreußer who was then concertmaster to the Archbishop of Mainz. Hoffmann's father also worked at court, and Hoffmann himself would later join the court orchestra. In 1790, Hoffmann travelled to Frankfurt where he met and played alongside Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at the coronation of Leopold II as Holy Roman Emperor, an occasion he would recount fondly throughout his life. By 1799, he was in Frankfurt permanently where he joined the theatre orchestra. He became this ensemble's concertmaster in 1811, a position he retained until his retirement in 1835. During his tenure, he developed a friendship with the composer and violinist Louis Spohr who was for several years musical director of the Frankfurt opera. The two would often give string quartet performances together. Surrounded by such eminent musicians – towering figures like Mozart, Spohr, and Paganini – it is not surprising that Hoffmann's compositions, though few, have sparked some interest of their own.

In style and technique, the duos of Hoffmann resemble not Paganini but the earlier French manner of Pierre Rode, in whose compositions virtuosity was mediated by an appeal to charm and taste. Hoffmann's Duo in F major, Op. 5 No. 1 is in two fast movements, contrary to the usual four-movement scheme of the era's symphonies and quartets but not uncommon for smaller works. The first movement is marked *Allegro* and follows sonata form. Its first theme is initially somewhat deceptive in regards to its key, suggesting the relative of D minor at its very opening and later featuring some chromaticism. Both here and in the second movement marked *Finale. Allegro moderato*, the violin takes the more melodic role in comparison to the cello which sometimes does little more than provide harmonic grounding. The cello has its moments too, however. Like the first movement, the second movement also follows sonata form. The Opus 5 Duos were probably published around 1820.



Cover of the Score to Hoffmann's
Six Duos for violin and cello, Op. 5

Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942)

Duo for violin and cello

For nearly half a century, the once well-known name of Erwin Schulhoff went largely forgotten as his music remained virtually unheard. Schulhoff, the Czech composer who in the 1920s and early 1930s was regarded as a leader among the European avant-garde, died in a German concentration camp in 1942. His compositional output then had to wait until the 1980s before witnessing even the first signs of its rehabilitation. That process continues to this day, as Schulhoff's compositions are slowly making more appearances on record and on concert programs like this one.

Erwin Schulhoff was born in Prague and, at a young age, already displayed impressive proficiency at the piano. On the personal recommendation of Antonín Dvořák, it was decided that Schulhoff would pursue a career in music. He began at the Prague Conservatory in 1904 after which followed additional studies in Vienna, Leipzig, and Cologne. His earliest compositions date from the first decade of the twentieth century with his first models including the German masters (Schumann, Brahms, Reger), various innovators (Strauss, Debussy, Scriabin), and, of course, the music of his homeland as summed up in the work of Dvořák. Four years of rigorous military service, however, had a profound impact on his musical style: when World War I broke out in 1914, he was almost immediately conscripted into the Austrian army.



Erwin Schulhoff

After the war, his interests would turn, on the one hand, to the expressionism of the Second Viennese School – he notably began a correspondence with Alban Berg – and, on the other, the absurdism of the Dadaists who he encountered while in Berlin. Dadaism was an artistic movement which few composers of his age attempted to translate into music. For Schulhoff though, his Dadaist aesthetic included the parody of seemingly elitist music; collage rivaling the eclecticism of later generations; the inclusion of sirens and other noisemakers; and the integration of various nonsensical elements from irrational time signatures to the copious use of exclamation points! The Dadaist painter George Grosz, perhaps most significantly, also introduced him to American jazz at this time: even after some of the other Dadaist influences had begun to recede by the early 1920s, his interest in jazz remained, spawning foxtrots and rags aside movements in traditional forms.

By 1925, when we encounter Schulhoff through his Duo for violin and cello, his avant-gardism had fused with his classical upbringing, allowing him to create cohesive multi-movement works albeit not lacking in experimental charge. After years abroad, he was back in Prague where a new admiration for the compositions of his countryman Leoš Janáček would encourage him

to rediscover folk music. Czech musical traditions were certainly of inspiration, but he also looked to other Slavonic traditions, gypsy music, and even the folklore of Native American cultures. His last years would witness yet another change of direction, toward the Socialist Realism of Stalinist Russia – a society he longed to join in response to the impending rise of German fascism and the discrimination he had already begun to face due to his Jewish heritage. His death in the Wülzburg concentration camp was the result of tuberculosis.

The violin opens the Duo's first movement, marked *Moderato*, with a pentatonic melody which Schulhoff gradually expands chromatically. The cello often imitates his partner's line at a slight delay, echoing his gestures if not reciting them note-for-note. Their mood is sorrowful with fluid transitions into faster, more aggressive music according to a rondo scheme. The second movement is titled *Zingaresca* and paced *Allegro giocoso*. This scherzo, as its title implies, offers an evocation of gypsy music. The cello launches the movement with cutting rhythmic figures which will often return to propel the drama. The violin soon joins, presenting a melody suggestive of the gypsy fiddling tradition in both its gestures and its harmonies. On occasion, their roles are reversed as the cello becomes the melodic voice and the violin takes an accompaniment role. Throughout the movement, quick *pizzicati*, *glissandi*, harmonics, and multiple stopping are included to show-off the virtuosity of the players. Ultimately though, the movement ends humorously with some final *pizzicati* from both players.

Marked *Andantino*, the third movement is surprisingly gentle by comparison to the second. Its melody, initiated by the violin but later traded to the cello, is strangely nostalgic, recalling in us some forgotten past experience. The cello's accompaniment line, played *pizzicato*, is virtually a walking bass, something Schulhoff would have encountered frequently in listening to jazz. The violin also takes up this gesture when it switches to the accompaniment role. After some alternation between melodic soloists, both instruments offer melodies concurrently, although not always in sync. The final few measures return to the dichotomy of the opening. The fourth movement parallels the first: it is again marked *Moderato* and follows a rondo form where slower, sorrowful sections erupt into faster, more aggressive areas. Even the melodic material of the fourth is derived from the first. In these ways then, the fourth movement brings circularity to the Duo. It also brings closure: unlike the first movement which had ended softly, the fourth movement ends violently with one final explosion.

Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935), after Handel Passacaglia in G minor for violin and cello

With his friends and colleagues Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen, Johan Halvorsen is regarded as one of the leading figures in Norwegian music at the turn of the twentieth century. In his youth, Halvorsen was primarily known as a violinist: after studies with the renowned Adolf Brodsky in Leipzig, he frequently played as soloist in concerto performances, served as concertmaster, and also taught violin. From the 1890s, however, he made his reputation as a conductor, directing the orchestra of the National Theatre in Christiania (Oslo) for thirty years among other posts. Soon, he was regarded as second only to Svendsen among the great conductors of Norway.

Composition was in some ways an afterthought for Halvorsen. This violinist and conductor only began composing after his appointment to the faculty of the Helsinki Music Institute in 1889 where, among the large number of receptive musicians, was the forward-thinking Ferruccio Busoni, a composer as well as a pianist. Halvorsen actually had little training as a composer, apart from some lessons in counterpoint he received around this time. Once he began composing, however, he produced many magnificent works in the Romantic nationalist language of Grieg, Svendsen, and the rest. His works reflect a distinctive and brilliant approach to orchestration inspired by the French Romantics and include three symphonies, an impressive Violin Concerto (thought lost until its rediscovery in 2015), much incidental music for his National Theatre productions, as well as orchestrations of several of Grieg's piano works.

The Passacaglia in G minor heard this afternoon is a free interpretation of a work for harpsichord by Baroque composer George Frideric Handel. In Handel's era, the term "passacaglia" referred to a series of variations on a repeated bass line. While Halvorsen kept many of Handel's variations, he also added several of his own. Halvorsen began on his arrangement in 1893, but continued to make revisions through 1914. Halvorsen originally scored his version for violin and viola, but this work has subsequently been heard in many different instrumental combinations. Halvorsen himself played the viola part at the premiere and, although his skill as a violinist allowed him to include much showmanship in the violin part, he did not limit interest to this part: the viola part also demands superb technique and accordingly gets time in the spotlight. In addition to the sheer virtuosity of the parts, Halvorsen also utilizes a number of novel effects, including *sul ponticello* (bowing near the instrument's bridge), thick guitar-like *pizzicati*, and ricochet (or bouncing of the bow). Techniques like these make the Passacaglia quite the exciting piece, and it has become one of Halvorsen's most famous compositions.



Johan Halvorsen



George Frideric Handel



About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a music scholar and composer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson remains active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. He

also blogs at MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. As a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into pieces which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. In fall 2016, Jackson began graduate studies in musicology at the University of Louisville where he has recently been awarded the Gerhard Herz Scholarship in recognition of his accomplishments. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He also sings with the University of Louisville Chorus and participates in the School of Music Composition Seminar.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.