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CONCERTI FOR CELLO & ORCHESTRA

Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra | Petr Vronský, conductor
Carmine Miranda, cello

CONCERTO FOR CELLO & ORCHESTRA IN A MINOR, OP. 129

ROBERT SCHUMANN

- 1 I. Nicht zu schnell..... 11:03
- 2 II. Langsam..... 4:09
- 3 III. Sehr lebhaft..... 7:20

CONCERTO FOR CELLO & ORCHESTRA IN B MINOR, OP. 104

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

- 4 I. Allegro..... 15:04
- 5 II. Adagio ma non troppo..... 11:37
- 6 III. Finale. Allegro moderato..... 12:44

Total duration 61:59

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ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK *Concerto For Cello & Orchestra In B Minor, Op. 104*

The *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor, Op. 104* was the last concerto written during Antonín Dvořák's residency as Director of the National Conservatory in New York City during 1894-1895. Known for his strong sense of nationalism, Dvořák's compositions have been often labeled as purely Czech or Slavic in nature; fitting into the proper traditional style of Western music writing. What many views of this particular piece miss to realize is the strong cosmopolitan influence that Dvořák underwent his entire life. Particularly during his childhood years, Dvořák was introduced and heavily influenced by the works of the great Italian, French and German Masters and later in life travelled extensively throughout Europe and the United States.

It is important to emphasize, yet again, Dvořák's affinity for cosmopolitan nationalism, especially his desire to discover "American Music." He contributed towards giving the United States a sense of musical identity linked with his fascination for Native-American music and African-American spirituals. Dvořák's residency in the United States (1892-1895) culminated with a vast amount of home sickness, particularly during the time he began writing his *Cello Concerto in B minor* which eventually played a very important role in the piece. Although Dvořák had a great compositional advantage as a violist, he was originally reluctant to write for the cello as a soloistic instrument. Nonetheless Dvořák gathered inspiration to write the piece by listening to Victor Herbert's *Cello Concerto No. 2 in E minor*, especially its second movement in B minor. Additionally Johannes Brahms, a longtime friend and mentor of Dvořák, also helped to revise and orchestrate the score.

There is nothing simple about the Dvořák's Cello Concerto, the piece delves into the concept of "complexity within simplicity" or "intellectuality within simplicity of life" reminiscent of the composer's personality. Every single note and phrase in this Concerto has meaning and purpose, which constantly varies in musical character and style from beginning to end. The entire piece fluctuates from traditional and proper to the folklore of the Czech, Slavic and Romani heritages. Like many of

the great Masters, Dvořák understood very well the age old tradition of thematic variation. The Cello Concerto begins with a main theme introduced by the woodwinds in the *First Movement (Allegro)*, which is later reintroduced by the solo cello in a quasi-improvisatory manner and further varied throughout the entirety of the piece; both in the orchestral and solo cello parts.

During the midst of writing the Cello Concerto, Dvořák learned about the death of his beloved sister in law Josefina Kaunitzova, née Čermáková; a girl whom he fell deeply in love almost thirty years earlier. The notation of the main theme is reorganized in the *Second Movement (Adagio ma non troppo)*, where it is once more introduced by the woodwinds and given to the solo cello. In this movement Dvořák based a secondary theme as a quotation from his *lieder Lass mich allein Op. 82 "Leave Me Alone"* as this was Kaunitzova's favorite song. Furthermore the piece climaxes with an almost gypsy-like variation of the main theme in the solo cello line that starts the *Third Movement (Allegro Moderato)* which was later dedicated in Kaunitzova's memory.

Although commonly regarded as "The King" and "Mount Everest" of all cello concerti for its technical demands, range expansion and symphonically balanced orchestration, the real challenge of Dvořák's Cello Concerto relies on understanding where the composer retrieved inspiration from every section within the score; applying this knowledge to the interpretation. It is a simple task to produce another interpretation of the Cello Concerto from a purely customary perspective. This is the same Dvořák that wrote *Te Deum Op. 103*, *Gypsy Songs Op. 55*, *B. 104*, several operas and the famous *New World Symphony*. The *Cello Concerto in B minor* is a testament to Dvořák's prolific compositional diversity, sophistication and complex genius. Antonín Dvořák was a composer who understood the importance of nationalistic traditions and the importance of cosmopolitanism but most importantly, he was a citizen of the World.

ROBERT SCHUMANN *Concerto For Cello & Orchestra In A minor, Op. 129*

Robert Schumann wrote the *Concerto For Cello & Orchestra In A minor, Op.129* in a period of two weeks between 10 October and 25 October 1850, during his stay in Düsseldorf as the Municipal Music Director where he and his wife Clara Wieck Schumann were received with open arms. Although Schumann had long desired a position that would provide him with the chance to conduct his own orchestra, his move to Düsseldorf would result in a tumultuous period of high stress, anxiety, agitation, and mental breakdown. The composer revised the score over a period of two years and finally completed the piece in February 1854, a couple of days before his notorious attempt to commit suicide by jumping into the Rhine River. At first glance while not unusual, the most noteworthy aspect of the Cello Concerto in A minor is that it differs from the traditional three separate movements in the concerto form structure. Granted that the piece is based on three main sections considered to be movements, Schumann wrote it to be continuously performed from beginning to end without interruptions.

The concerto not only uniquely illustrates what took place inside the mind of the composer, but also demonstrates Schumann's compositional genius. Very often Schumann's compositional decisions are based on very calculated and highly premeditated ideals, especially his affinity for including hidden messages through the use of musical cryptography. It is easy not to question the reasoning behind Schumann's "out of the box" decisions in his Cello Concerto and to simply justify them as the product of mental deterioration and insanity. For this reason, it is essential to understand and dissect the driving force that compelled Schumann to take a different approach with the Cello Concerto and what he is trying to tell listeners and performers by means of this piece. Thematic development is a crucial and central point to consider in order to understand the meaning behind the Cello Concerto in A minor.

The main theme of the piece is centered on a very simple yet complex concept; a second inversion A minor arpeggio consisting of three notes E-A-C. The first hint that Schumann

gives the listener as to the main theme is at the very beginning of the concerto; it is also an important indication that the composer is going to break the rules of tradition. This is due to the peculiar choice of arpeggiating an A minor chord as a short introduction which can be interpreted on the surface as an outline of the concerto's main key. Moreover Schumann keeps varying and expanding the main theme throughout the first movement and entirety of the piece.

Schumann's emphasis on the E-A-C theme in the Cello Concerto is not to be overlooked. There is evidence that Schumann possessed knowledge of cryptography and was aware of the *Clef Anglaise or English Key* method of encryption; a method that was probably older than the nineteenth-century. This key, a version of the substitution method, consists of using a diatonic scale from A to G while continuing the alphabet under every single letter. It had been popularly named the French method in modern times due to its preference by French composers such as Maurice Ravel and Florent Schmitt, who applied it in their music during the twentieth-century. This system of musical encryption aligns with the E-A-C theme of the Cello Concerto, as the key of the piece in A minor perfectly matches with the English model from A to G. Further analysis of the E-A-C theme on the *English Key* along with its corresponding letters, shows that Schumann encoded every first letter in Clara's name deliberately using the key of A minor.

By reorganizing the E-A-C theme in its mirror image C-A-E, the first note "C" represents two letters; C as a literal representation for Clara and J for Josephine; her middle name. The second note "A" represents the letter V, as this is the phonetical representation of Clara's paternal last name Wieck, pronounced "Veek." The third note "E" represents the letter S for Schumann, which is the initial of the composer's paternal last name adopted by Clara during marriage. The expanded E-A-B-C theme in the solo cello melody becomes a literal reinstatement of Clara's full name in the music. By adding the note "B," the composer pairs it with the letter W for Wieck.

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z

Example of the *Clef Anglaise* based on a diatonic scale from A-G, where every letter of the alphabet is placed underneath each letter.

E A B C
S J
V W

Example of the reorganized EACB solo cello theme within the *Clef Anglaise*.

The Cello Concerto in A minor is a testament to Schumann's desire to unify himself with his wife through music. His ability to clearly and carefully infuse meaning into every section of the entire piece is impressive. As Clara Schumann herself remarked:

"The romantic quality, the flight, the freshness and the humour, and also the fascinating interweaving of cello and orchestra are, to be sure, wholly ravishing."

This concerto manifests his struggle to cope with anxiety, depression, fantasy, and reality, while always trying to find light at the end of the tunnel through his immense love for his wife Clara. The Cello Concerto not only verifies Schumann's wide knowledge and fascination in cryptography, but also his astonishing ability to smoothly write a complex meaningful masterwork in the midst of a psychosomatic thunderstorm; leaving traces of his life like a message to be discovered by the performer.

– Carmine Miranda

Recommended Reading

Carmine Miranda's in-depth article "Decoding the Schumann Cello Concerto" in *The Musical Times Journal of Music* vol. 157 no.1934 (Spring 2016), on his discovery of Schumann's cypher in the Cello Concerto. All material used as reference for other written works must be quoted and credited to the original writer and author of this article.

To learn more about Carmine Miranda please visit www.carminemiranda.com

This recording was made possible by Gary Hopkins, Blue Chip 2000, Azzi Fine Violins, and Cupertino Strings. Dedicated to Katie (Katja Von) Rios.

This recording was performed on a 2005 Jules Azzi cello made in New York City with a set of Dogal Montagnana Strings handmade in Venice, Italy courtesy of Cupertino Strings. Special thanks to GMJ, Gary Hopkins, Jules Azzi, Cupertino Strings, Antonia Saglimbeni, Joseph Backer, Cody Vickers, and the PARMA Recordings Team.

Schumann Cello Concerto in A minor recorded June 15, 2015 at Reduta Hall, Olomouc Czech Republic

Producer VÍT MUŽÍK
Engineer JAN KOŠULIČ

Dvořák Cello Concerto in B Minor recorded June 12-13, 2015 at Reduta Hall, Olomouc Czech Republic

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Engineers ALEŠ DVOŘÁK & JAN KOŠULIČ

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