



Richard Stöhr's mother, Mathilde Stern, painted by Anton Romako (1882): detail

Richard **STÖHR**



Chamber Music Volume One

The Works for
Cello and Piano:

**Cello Sonata
in A minor, Op. 49**

**Fantasiestücke,
Op. 17**

**Stefan Koch, cello
Robert Conway, piano**

FIRST RECORDINGS

RICHARD STÖHR, VIENNESE COMPOSER IN AMERICAN EXILE

by Stefan Koch

Richard Stöhr (1874–1967) was born Richard Stern in Vienna in the same year as Arnold Schoenberg. His Jewish parents were originally from Hungary. His father, Samuel, was a professor of medicine at the University of Vienna, and his mother, Mathilde, was the sister of Heinrich Porges, one of Richard Wagner's closest associates.¹ The portrait of Mathilde Stern by Anton Romako (1832–89) held in the Österreichische Galerie in the Belvedere Museum, Vienna, and reproduced on the back page of this booklet – also known as *Lady in Spanish Costume* – gives an indication of the cultured circles into which Stöhr was born.²

Stöhr first obtained a degree in medicine from the University of Vienna, in 1898, but immediately entered the Vienna Academy of Music (now known as the University of Music and the Performing Arts) as a composition student of Robert Fuchs.³ At this time he also changed his name from Stern to Stöhr and (like many other Jewish composers at the time, most notably Mahler) converted to Christianity.

In the summary he made of each year's diary he wrote of 1898:

This was the year the big change occurred. Herewith I have sealed the fate of my future life. Now I am a musician and I carry this responsibility seriously, consciously and without regret. At the same time came the actual change of my name to 'Stöhr', on which I had decided already in the summer. It was just the right time for this and I am glad I didn't miss it. I am certain that in the future advantages will come from this for me.⁴

¹ Porges (1837–1900) was another of the Jewish musicians with whom, paradoxically, the anti-Semitic Wagner surrounded himself (another was the conductor Hermann Levi, who conducted the premiere of *Parsifal*). Porges, born in Prague of a Jewish family that can trace its roots back several centuries, studied philosophy and law before turning first to music-criticism; he was also active as a choral conductor and composed a number of songs. He wrote extensively on Wagner. His daughter Elsa Porges-Bernstein – Richard Stöhr's cousin – was the librettist of Engelbert Humperdinck's opera *Königskinder* (1895).

² Romako also painted Stöhr's father, Samuel, a portrait which is likewise kept in the the Österreichische Galerie.

³ Fuchs (1847–1927) was perhaps Vienna's foremost teacher of composition, as well as being an esteemed composer in his own right, the popularity of his five *Serenades* (four of them scored for strings, the fifth for small orchestra) earning him the nickname 'Serenaden-Fuchs'. Fuchs' other students included Enescu, Korngold, Mahler, Schmidt, Schreker, Sibelius, Wolf and Zemlinsky.

⁴ Stöhr's papers are held privately by his family, by St Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont, and by the Austrian National Library in Vienna.

The picture on the back cover is *Mathilde Stern* by Anton Romako. The original painting is part of the collection of historicist art of the Österreichische Galerie of the Belvedere in Vienna. Beside its famous collection of Gustav Klimt oil-paintings such as *The Kiss*, the Belvedere is also home to the premier collection of art from the so-called 'Ringstrasse era'.



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Produced and edited by David Lau

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He was also helped and encouraged in his musical studies by Heinrich Porges, of whom he wrote in the annual summary of his 1899 diary:

Uncle Heinrich stayed with us as guest in the middle of September. His brief presence gave me enormous advantages, especially the ability to get free tickets, even orchestra seats at the opera. He even introduced me to Mahler and in general did everything for me that I wished and what could only be an advantage for me. His opinion about my musical ability surprised me particularly. He emphasised my ability in counterpoint, where he is probably right.

After completing his studies with Fuchs and earning a PhD in Music, in 1903, he worked first at the Academy as a rehearsal pianist and choral director. Soon he was teaching courses in theory, composition and the history of music, and coaching chamber music. Upon Fuchs' retirement in 1911 Stöhr took over his most advanced courses⁵ and became a full professor at the Academy in 1915. That year he was called up to serve as a doctor in the Austrian army and while serving in a hospital in the suburbs of Vienna was able to live at home and continue teaching at the Academy. His first book on harmony appeared in 1906⁶ and his early success as both author and composer is indicated in the diary summary for 1909:

Even more important for me was the success of my 'Harmonielehre', of which the first edition was already sold out in June and has therefore already appeared in the second edition. The reviews of this work were extremely positive from all sides. The performances of my compositions reached such frequency this season that some newspapers even commented that this was inappropriate.



Richard Stöhr c. 1920

⁵ In an indication of the standing Stöhr enjoyed, Fuchs' position was first offered, in turn, to Richard Strauss, Sibelius and Reger, all of whom turned it down.

⁶ *Praktischer Leitfaden der Harmonielehre*, Universal Edition, Vienna.



Stöhr in his music room at home in Vienna, c. 1925

Between the world wars Stöhr continued his prolific work as composer, author and teacher. His eventual output as a composer includes seven symphonies, two operas, choral music, 150 lieder, fifteen violin sonatas, at least a dozen other major chamber works and solo piano music.⁷ His literary output extends to half a dozen books and numerous articles.

Stöhr's former student Hedy Kempny⁸ recalled his Vienna years as follows:

⁷ A full list of his compositions can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Stöhr.

⁸ Hedy (Hedwig) Kempny (1895–1986) was the daughter of the scientist, doctor and composer Peter Kempny. After working for an Austrian bank, she worked in journalism and publishing, leaving Austria for Switzerland after the Anschluss and, in 1947, emigrating to New York. Her extensive correspondence with Arthur Schnitzler was published in 1984.



Stefan Koch is a native of York, Pennsylvania, and received his musical training at Temple University in Philadelphia, where he studied with Hirofumi Kanno and Orlando Cole. He also has a Master's Degree in Philosophy from the University of Michigan. He formerly held positions as a national buyer of both books and CDs for Borders Book and Music. Having returned to full-time performing in 2001, Stefan Koch is a member of the Lansing Symphony and is a frequent performer with the Kalamazoo Symphony, West Michigan Symphony, Toledo Symphony, Michigan Opera Theatre and Grand Rapids Symphony orchestras. In 2004, 2006 and 2007 he toured the USA and Canada with the Carl Rosa Opera Company and since 2007 has been spending his summers at the Utah Festival Opera in Logan, Utah. Outside of the classical realm, he has also performed with Sarah Brightman, Anne Murray, Barbara Cook, Dionne Warwick and Burt Bacharach, Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, Garrison Keillor, Dave Brubeck, The Boys' Choir of Harlem, Mannheim Steamroller, Bernadette Peters, Amy Grant, the Von Trapp Family, Doc Severinsen, Earth Wind & Fire, and Julius 'Dr. J.' Erving.



Robert Conway is an associate professor of piano at Wayne State University (Detroit), where he is also the director of the piano area. Since 1989 he has performed regularly as orchestral keyboardist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and has been a soloist with them on several occasions. He has been a musical representative of the United States as an Artistic Ambassador of the United States Information Agency on a month-long tour of South Asia and the Middle East in 1997, as well as acting as a Department of State Cultural Envoy to Jamaica in 2005 and Azerbaijan in 2008. As a soloist and chamber musician, he has appeared at numerous national and international festivals, performed concertos with many orchestras, collaborated with prestigious composers, given countless premieres and is featured on recordings on a variety of labels. He received a bachelor's degree in piano performance from the New England Conservatory and master's and doctoral degrees in piano performance from the University of Michigan. His principal teachers were Theodore Lettvin, Rudolf Kolisch and Eugene Bossart.

Stöhr's Cello Sonata, Op. 49, was composed in 1915, while he was serving as a doctor in the Austrian Army and was published in 1919. Again, he mentions this work in the diary summary of that year:

My colleagues, including the commandant of the hospital, were very nice to me. They all respected me as an artist and took my age into consideration and also my profession at the time. The hospital only took up three hours a day, so that I was able to continue instruction at the Academy and on top of that draw double salary. I spent a creatively rich and pleasant summer. A lot of well written lieder and also a cello sonata originated there.

The Sonata – written for Walter Kleinecke, principal cellist with the Vienna State Opera and a member of the Vienna Philharmonic, and his wife Risa – is expansive and broadly conceived. Hints of martial music may be detected in the *Allegro con brio* first movement [5], reflecting the ongoing war. The second movement, *Andante sostenuto* [6], is a deeply felt statement about the world in which it was created. The *Allegro* finale [7] at times hearkens back to the more idyllic world of the *Fantasy Pieces* but is tinged with more melancholy. Interestingly, as with all the *Fantasy Pieces*, all of the movements of the Sonata end softly. It took a mature composer, sure of his aesthetic, to completely eschew the grand *forte* ending that conventionally ends a work of such scale.



Explore Unknown Music with the Toccata Discovery Club

Since you're reading this booklet, you're obviously someone who likes to explore music more widely than the mainstream offerings of most other labels allow. Toccata Classics was set up explicitly to release recordings of music – from the Renaissance to the present day – that the microphones have been ignoring. How often have you heard a piece of music you didn't know and wondered why it hadn't been recorded before? Well, Toccata Classics aims to bring this kind of neglected treasure to the public waiting for the chance to hear it – from the major musical centres and from less-well-known cultures in northern and eastern Europe, from all the Americas, and from further afield: basically, if it's good music and it hasn't yet been recorded, Toccata Classics is exploring it.

To link label and listener directly we run the Toccata Discovery Club, which brings its members substantial discounts on all Toccata Classics recordings, whether CDs or downloads, and also on the range of pioneering books on music published by its sister company, Toccata Press. A modest annual membership fee brings you, free on joining, two CDs, a Toccata Press book or a number of album downloads (so you are saving from the start) and opens up the entire Toccata Classics catalogue to you, both new recordings and existing releases as CDs or downloads, as you prefer. Frequent special offers bring further discounts. If you are interested in joining, please visit the Toccata Classics website at www.toccataclassics.com and click on the 'Discovery Club' tab for more details.

During the 1930s I was a student of Dr. Richard Stöhr at the Academy of Music in Vienna. He was my teacher of History of Music and Harmony. All of us women students were very fond of him. Not only was he a very handsome man, but we also found his teaching fascinating. Soon we followed him wherever he went; to concerts or when he was invited into private homes, where musicians dared to make us acquainted with a new kind of music by composers such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Erich Korngold and many others. Stöhr was still conservative, but open-minded about the new era, which soon hypnotised us.

Stöhr lived in a typical 'old Vienna' home with two pianos in the huge music room. On the walls there were photos of composers and famous people he knew in various countries, as well as snapshots of students and friends. Every two weeks he had a 'musical evening' to which anyone who wanted to come was invited. We would gather at about seven o'clock and bring along friends who wanted to meet Dr. Stöhr. It was quite informal, and sometimes he came later and found the apartment crowded by thirty or more people. Many of us brought food such as cheese, sausages, salads, fruit or cakes. We deposited these in the kitchen and after a short time we gathered in the living room, where all the goodies were displayed on the table and we helped ourselves.

But soon Stöhr got up and went to the music room and sat at the piano. He called out 'Pifferl', his pet name for his wife Mitzi, and she came quickly and stood behind him and massaged his head while he played. Indeed this was strange, but we knew of this eccentric behaviour of his and nobody minded. He had other strange habits. For instance, when he was invited to someone's house he brought out of a pocket a folding coat-hanger for his coat.

Many times all kinds of famous people attended these gatherings without fanfare. For instance Bruno Walter, Felix Weingartner, Korngold and other musicians. Sometimes Stöhr's beautiful Lieder were interpreted by opera singers. Later in the evening there were discussions, not only about music, but also about what was new and exciting in Vienna. Stöhr talked and listened and argued. He was versed in every field and subject. The discussions were most interesting and stimulating. Stöhr's heart and mind stayed young and flexible. He gave help and advice to us younger ones who asked for it. What a wise man he was!⁹



Stöhr in Vienna c. 1937.

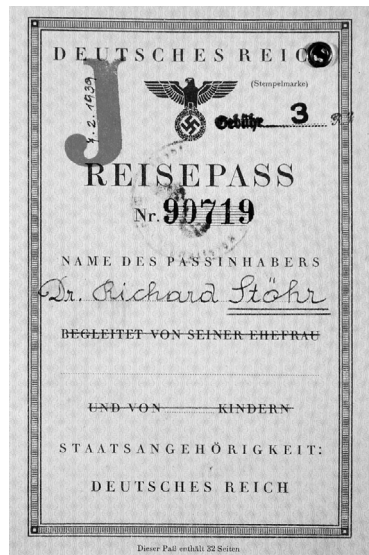
⁹ Privately held papers.

After the *Anschluss* in March 1938 Stöhr was immediately identified by Nazi officials as a Jew and fired from his position at the Academy of Music. In February 1939 he emigrated to the United States. (Had he not left Vienna, he probably would have shared the fate of his sister Hedwig, who was rounded up by the Nazis in 1941 and died in a transit camp in Poland in 1942.) From this time until the end of his life he used the alternate spelling of his name: Stoehr, just as Schönberg became Schoenberg. He was hired personally by Mrs Mary Bok Curtis to come to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, initially as music librarian and subsequently to teach courses in theory and composition. Stoehr was also hired to translate part of the Burrell Collection of the letters of Richard Wagner.¹⁰

In 1941 Curtis downsized its faculty because of the war and Stoehr's job there was eliminated. He quickly found another position at St Michael's College in Winooski Park (now called Colchester), where he taught German as well as music. But the College was not able to pay a full-time salary, and so he was assisted by at least one refugee aid-organisation. Stoehr continued to compose prolifically during his years in the United States in all major classical genres except opera. Although virtually all of his compositions before 1939 were published by major firms, including Universal Edition, none of the numerous works from his US years was ever published.

During his fifty-year career as a teacher his students numbered in the thousands and included Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Marlene Dietrich, Herbert von Karajan, Erich Leinsdorf and Rudolf Serkin. Stoehr died on 11 December 1967 in Montpelier, Vermont, and is buried in Merrill Cemetery in Colchester.

¹⁰ Published as *Letters of Richard Wagner*, The Burrell Collection, Macmillan, New York, 1950.



Stöhr's Nazi-issued passport, used to emigrate to the USA in 1939, stamped with a 'J' for 'Jude'

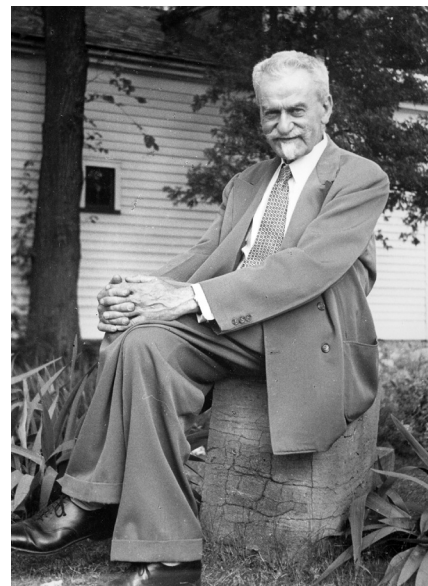
The Works for Cello and Piano

Although Stöhr wrote all of fifteen sonatas for violin and piano, as well as a suite for violin and organ, the two works recorded here constitute his entire output for cello and piano. The four *Fantasiestücke* ('Fantasy Pieces'), Op. 17, were composed in 1907 – apparently the only work he wrote that year because of the emotional turmoil that accompanied the end of his first marriage – and published in 1909. In the diary summary of 1907 he writes:

My activity in composition lay almost completely dormant until the autumn. In the summer I suffered terribly because of the inability to work and only finished the copying of my text book on counterpoint, which I hope will be printed in the course of the next year.¹¹ Now in the autumn I have completed Four Fantasy Pieces for cello, which were well done and from which I conclude that the well is not yet dry.

The *Fantasy Pieces* evoke the world of Schumann and Brahms. Stöhr's former teacher Robert Fuchs composed seven *Fantasy Pieces* for cello, but although Stöhr may have borrowed the idea for such pieces from Fuchs, he appears to have looked to those earlier composers for inspiration. These four pieces were published in two miniature suites of two pieces each, and can be performed as such. But when all four are taken together, they come full circle, since the first piece, an *Andante espressivo* [1], and the *Prestissimo* fourth [4] have a very similar ABAB structure. A gifted teacher and practitioner of counterpoint, Stöhr includes a very finely crafted canon in the third *Fantasy Piece*, marked *Andante con moto* [3].

¹¹ He was to be disappointed: his *Praktischer Leitfaden des Kontrapunktes* was published by Benjamin in Hamburg only in 1911.



Stöhr outside St Michael's College, Winooski Park, Vermont, June 1949