

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Thursday June 19, 2025

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Overture *The Barber of Seville* Fantasie for piano 6-hands

Gioachino Rossini
(1792-1868)
arr. Carl Czerny

Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* was one of the most popular operas of the 19th century, if not of all time. Based on a play by the French writer and jack of all trades, Beaumarchais, it is full of intrigue, great characters (such as the irrepressible Figaro), and comic turns of event, each captured perfectly in Rossini's facile and fluent music. Curiously, the original overture for the opera was lost. The now famous overture that is tied to the opera was a substitute that Rossini had written for a different opera altogether. What is surprising is that its music is a marvelous introduction to *The Barber of Seville* and sets the mood with an uncanny resemblance to the events that follow. Some commentators, who weren't aware of its origin, have even surmised that the melodies represent musical portraits of the main characters.

The overture opens with a slow introduction, at first suspenseful, and then progresses through three melodies that are marvelous examples of Rossini's facile style. They sound like they tumbled out of his imagination pretty much as they are and, in fact, they probably did. He was known to compose with great facility. The rhythms are clever, sometimes driving, and always appealing. The melodies are always charming and easy to remember. This audience (that's you!) will likely be stuck with them as "ear worms" for a few days! Just try to get them out of your head.

The version of this work we hear tonight, an arrangement for six-hand piano by Carl Czerny is unique. Remember that before the invention of recordings, the only way one could have music in the home was to make it oneself. And the most popular instrument was the piano, available in most middle-class homes. The piano duet – for four hands - was ideal for imitating a bigger orchestral sound. It also was useful to keep young people on dates from getting into trouble. So piano duet arrangements were made of many of the most popular symphonies and operas of the time. But the piano trio was less common. As they say, "two's company, three's a crowd!" But when it happens, it is great fun. Be ready.

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 for flute and guitar

Ária (Cantilena)

Heitor Villa-Lobos

(1887-1959)

Heitor Villa-Lobos was the single most well-known composer in 20th-century Brazilian art music. But his music wasn't like most traditional Brazilian music. As noted by scholars of his output, he created a unique compositional style in which contemporary European techniques and traditional Brazilian elements are combined. By learning about the music of Debussy, Satie and Stravinsky from visitors, and by hearing the work of his father's students who were being taught the fundamentals of traditional harmony and melody, and by playing popular music in street bands, he became facile in many western music traditions. Perhaps his most famous non-western music is the collection of nine compositions that are all somehow Brazilian sounding but European in style – these are the *Bachianas Brasileiras*. As Gerard Béhague wrote in his book, *The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul*, this music represents a fusion of Brazilian folk and popular music on the one hand and the style of Johann Sebastian Bach on the other, an attempt to freely adapt a number of Baroque harmonic and contrapuntal procedures to Brazilian music.

Number 5 in this series was originally a vocal aria accompanied by 5 cellos. However, the composer responded to a request to arrange the cello group for solo guitar, and the aria is often played by any solo instrument. One of the most common arrangements is the one for guitar and flute which we will hear now. It is noteworthy that the melody itself is memorably beautiful, often considered Villa-Lobos' most familiar and beloved musical moment. Most of the audience will likely recognize this tune.

Divertissement for oboe, clarinet, and bassoon

Ouverture – Allegro con moto

Burlesca – Allegro molto

Romanzero – Andantino

Charleston – Allegro

Tema con Variazione e fugato – Andante

Florida – Allegretto

Rondino~Finale – Molto allegro con fuoco

Erwin Schulhoff

(1894-1942)

Erwin Schulhoff's career resembles a roller coaster. Born in Czechoslovakia, he began as a child prodigy on the piano. He later studied composition and began his career as a neo-romantic composer, a student of the Czech national heroes, Dvořák and Smetana, as well as others. After four years in the Austrian army during WW I, he decided the values of much of western society were hypocritical and he became a political radical. In the process, his entire attitude toward composing changed. At first, he became a devotee of Schoenberg and the Viennese Expressionists, but some time in Berlin convinced him that Dadaism was a better means of expression and he began to compose music that was often jazzy and surreal. He subsequently moved back to Czechoslovakia and became the model for Soviet socialist realism in his music. He wrote a cantata on Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, and, as a Jew, built stronger and stronger antipathies for what was happening in Germany. When Czechoslovakia was invaded in 1938, he was left with no means of income. His condition deteriorated and he tried unsuccessfully to emigrate. Eventually, he was arrested in 1941 and died a few months later in a German concentration camp.

Schulhoff's *Divertissement* belongs to the progressive period in the 1920s when he was occasionally in Berlin and close to the famous Dadaist painter, George Grosz. Among other things, Grosz had a large collection of American jazz recordings which greatly impressed Schulhoff. He became fascinated with the new style from the United States which had already swept Paris and was now attracting similar attention in Berlin. The music he heard at Grosz's

filled him with enthusiasm. He determined that his revolutionary spirit was better suited to the “pro-active anti-bourgeois stance of the Berlin Dadaists, than to the esoteric and intensive artificiality of the Viennese Expressionists.”

Schulhoff composed *Divertissement* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon in 1927. It is a suite of characteristic movements, each in a rather different style. Some, such as the opening *Ouverture*, the *Tema con Variazioni* (theme and variations), and the *Rondino~Finale* suggest traditional classical structures and ideas. Others, however, such as the *Charleston* or the *Florida*, both popular dances in Paris in the ‘20s, or the *Burlesca* (a humorous type of piece), and the *Romanzero* (a romance) have specific characteristics with which listeners would be familiar.

Schulhoff’s music is marvelously expressive of these characteristics. The *Ouverture*, after its opening of three long notes, sounds very classical with all the instruments zooming along in clever counterpoint, punctuated by occasional restatements of the opening three notes. The *Burlesca* is fast, charming, and full of cute alternations between the three instruments. The *Romanzero* is slower, but not particularly romantic sounding. One thinks of a vaudevillian kind of romance by an inept lover of the old *commedia dell-arte* named Pierrot. The *Charleston* is full of jazzy syncopations one can imagine hearing in the traditional American charleston of the ‘20s; the image of a “flapper” girl might come to mind. The *Tema con Variazioni* is perhaps the most studious of the movements; the original theme is quite complex with countermelodies and imitation between the instruments. Then, the variations are quite inventive and, in the manner of Beethoven, move away from the original theme. Following the last variation without pause, the *Florida* bursts on the scene with more “flapper” music. Although not as syncopated as the *Charleston*, it is plenty saucy. The raucous *Rondino~Finale*, called “rondo” because the opening theme comes back from time to time, is a charming and quite difficult romp to the end.

Suite for viola and double bass

Reinhold Glière
(1875-1956)

Prelude – Andante

Gavotte – Allegretto

Cradle Song – Tranquillo

Intermezzo – Andantino

Scherzo – Vivace

Glière was born in Kiev (then in the Russian Empire) in 1875 to a father who was an instrument maker. So, Reinhold grew up presumably surrounded by music. After his own music education (playing and composing music in Kiev and Moscow), he moved into a professional career as a composer. He was quite prolific throughout his life with works for the operatic stage, the symphonic concert hall, and the chamber music environment. It was for some uncertain chamber music setting that he composed the suite we will hear tonight.

This suite is unbearably charming. It has five movements and each has a most distinctive character. The opening *Prelude* has the two instruments passing a charming musical tune back and forth between them. The second movement, *Gavotte*, is a recognizable traditional dance tune with a slower minor key section in its middle. This is followed by what might be called the *pièce de résistance*. Glière called it the “Cradle Song” and it can make the most grown-up of us long for the days of our cradles. Just listen to the beautiful melody and see if you aren’t taken away. After the brief *Intermezzo* that makes up the 4th movement, there is a cute little syncopated gem, the *Scherzo*, that brings the movement to a rhythmically charming closure. This is a rarely heard musical gem. ENJOY!

Piano Sextet in C Major, Op. 37

Allegro appassionata

Intermezzo – Adagio

Allegro con sentimento

Finale – Allegro vivace, giocoso

Ernö Dohnányi

(1877-1960)

Ernö Dohnányi (1877-1960), born in Bratislava, was one of the most important Hungarian composers around the turn of the century. In addition to developing his own career as a pianist and composer, he vigorously supported the careers of some other younger Hungarians - Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. He was known internationally as a composer, conductor and pianist, and is generally considered the “chief architect” of 20th-century Hungarian musical culture.

Dohnányi composed the Sextet in C Major in 1935. His style is generally considered reminiscent of Brahms, particularly in his chamber and orchestral music. His relationship with Brahms was curious, for the older German composer did hear Dohnányi's Piano Quintet in 1895 and declared that “I myself could not have written it any better.” The young Hungarian must have been delighted and determined to continue composing in the same manner.

The first movement of the Sextet, *Allegro appassionato*, is Brahmsian in several ways. First, in it the composer pursues the kind of thematic unity for which Brahms was so famous. As one listens, one can sense that much of the melodic material seems to grow out of the original theme. Second, the movement is in the traditional sonata form, a form which Brahms inherited from the classical era and developed with great care. Third, and perhaps the most noticeable Brahmsian quality, is the rhapsodic, romantic melody. Each phrase suggests the urgent, romantic and passionate outpouring that we associate with the 19th century. Dohnányi's music is not, however, all derivative, for he has his own harmonic style that identifies him as a 20th-century composer, albeit a somewhat old-fashioned one.

The second movement, *Intermezzo – Adagio*, opens with lush harmonies in the strings alone and with brief interjections by the piano. This soon gives way to a more animated march which suggests the struggles of a military hero. At the end, the music returns to the rich harmonies with which it began. The third movement, *Allegro con sentimento*, should be the *scherzo* in the traditional order of things, and Dohnányi does not disappoint us here. This *scherzo* often alternates, however, between the fast and light rhythms one might expect and more rhapsodic passages. In some of the latter, individual instruments, piano included, present glorious lyrical melodies.

The *Finale – Allegro vivace, giocoso* (very fast, jocular), is a bright conclusion indeed. The opening melody sounds like a central European composer's version of a jazz tune with controlled syncopations and even occasional bluesy sounds. Part of the charm of this movement is achieved by the “conversation” between the players; they appear to be locked in a spirited dialogue with everyone getting in his word, edgewise or any way possible. After a brief reminder of the music that opened the first movement, this spirited finale comes to a satisfying and emphatic close.

