

the

Strad

ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE MUSICIAN'S WORLD SINCE 1844

MUSIC *and* CONFLICT

STRING PLAYERS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

**MIRECOURT
MAKERS AT
THE FRONT**

**MUSIC IN THE
TRENCHES**



Henschel Quartett



Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj *Christoph Henschel* *Monika Henschel* *Daniel Bell*
Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj, Cello
Evah Pirazzi Gold
Christoph Henschel, Violin
Evah Pirazzi Gold
Monika Henschel, Viola
Evah Pirazzi, Passione
Daniel Bell, Violin
Evah Pirazzi

SEIT 1798
PIRASTRO
MUSIKSAITEN



Strings Handmade in Germany
www.pirastro.com



Schulhoff's *Five Pieces for String Quartet*

Violinists Christoph Henschel and Daniel Bell, violist Monika Henschel and cellist Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj discuss how to play this lively work

BY THE HENSCHEL QUARTET

DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, ERWIN SCHULHOFF (1894–1942) served in the Austro-Hungarian army on the Russian front. The Czechoslovakian composer was injured and interned in an Italian concentration camp until 1918. Later, as the Nazis rose to power, he found his works blacklisted and his concerts cancelled: he was from a family of German Jews. He was arrested in 1941 and deported to the concentration camp at Würzburg, Bavaria, where he died one year later. After that, his works were largely forgotten.

Nevertheless, Schulhoff was one of the most talented and multifaceted composers of his generation. He showed his extraordinary gifts as a pianist and composer at an early age – he received the Felix Mendelssohn Prize in 1913 as a pianist and again in 1918 as a composer. His teachers included eminent composers such as Max Reger and Claude Debussy, and his compositions display a huge variety of styles, from neoclassicism to impressionism and expressionism. Works in the spirit of Dadaists such as the German-French abstract artist and poet Hans Arp are also part of his oeuvre, and he was considered a specialist in the quartertone music of Czechoslovakian composer

Alois Hába. He was one of the first European composers to incorporate jazz elements into serious art music.

Five Pieces for String Quartet, written in 1923, is a collection of dance movements dedicated by Schulhoff to French composer Darius Milhaud. The work shows his boundless appetite for stylistic and rhythmic experimentation. It is gripping, colourful, grotesque, thrilling music. A review published in the Czechoslovakian journal *Der Aufrikt* in 1924 describes it perfectly: 'The famous piano virtuoso from Prague, Erwin Schulhoff, has created electrifying string quartets that don't try to be anything more than they are: healthy, lively, ingenious music of brilliant craftsmanship. They received a tumultuous reception.'

The tension and drama both within and between the pieces make the work an enlivening contrast as part of a classical quartet programme. Schulhoff wrote in 1919: 'Music should first and foremost produce physical pleasure, yes, even ecstasies. Music is never philosophy – it arises from an ecstatic condition, finding its expression through rhythmical movement.' This applies absolutely to the *Five Pieces for String Quartet*.

I ALLA VALSE VIENNESE

This opening piece is a wonderful, grotesquely charming waltz. It is written in 4/4 time, but the score instructs us to play as if it were

in 3/4 time. Despite the continuous accents, the viola should clearly round off the phrase from the second beat, especially at the start. After these opening bars there needs to be a clear

sense of direction towards figure 1, where the waltz opens with a delayed feel on the third beat (**example 1**). After the down-bow first beat in the violin and viola parts, use a 'Viennese retake' ▶

1 Use a 'Viennese retake' to play the up-bow quaver (♪) at the beginning of the waltz in the third beat of figure 1

2 Articulate the pairs of slurred notes to emphasise the dance-like nature of the music

5

mp cresc. poco a poco

pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

3 Don't rush the ricochet in the first violin part – start it on the fourth beat of the bar to give yourself enough time

rapidamente

saltato

V V V

for the following note. This was a term introduced to us by the Amadeus Quartet: it is how they described a technique commonly used in Viennese folk music. It is a short, fast movement in the lower part of the bow, where a bouncing sound is created as the bow is lifted on the up bow. In slow motion the bow moves in a small circle and stays put for an instant before moving on – the stroke is so small that the contact point does not change.

After the comma at figure 3, we recommend taking a somewhat slower tempo in order to build an exciting stringendo. As a general principle in long increases of tempo and dynamic,

it is often helpful to execute both stringendo and crescendo later than notated – try to play them less with mathematical accuracy and instead let them develop from an inner sense of musical necessity.

The slurs of two and four notes in this movement (**example 2**) should be well articulated to underscore the dance element of the music. We have noticed that the score and the parts are not always identical – at figure 5, for example, the dynamics are not consistent between the first violin and the middle voices. We decided to match our dynamics here across all four parts: it doesn't make sense to play

them differently. At figure 7 the first violin part has a different bowing from the others, so we have altered this to make all the parts match.

For the cello pizzicatos, we recommend playing quick downward arpeggios instead of block chords in order to achieve a full and grounded tone. For some extra finesse from figure 5, play the arco-pizzicato passages marked piano using left-hand pizzicato, but play those marked forte and fortissimo with the right hand. The added advantage of using left-hand pizzicato on the quiet notes is that you have more time to get ready to bow the D–A 5th.

'This is gripping, colourful, grotesque, thrilling music': the Henschel Quartet



SUSANNA JUST

Imagine the posture of a Spanish dancer in order to find the right tempo

II ALLA SERENATA

In this marvellously atmospheric and colourful piece it could be helpful to imagine the posture of a Spanish dancer in order to find the right tempo. The tempo will also depend on the acoustic of the concert hall, but we play it at about ♩ = 120. You should be aiming for exactly this kind of poise – a tension between movement and resistance. To give the pizzicato a quiet yet distinct tone, you could try rubbing a little rosin dust from the bow stick on to the tip of your pizzicato finger.

At figure 1 you should find an expressive but relaxed sound for maximum contrast with the massive fortissimo outburst at figure 2. Play here with the bow hair completely flat, quite close to the bridge and with the full weight of the arm. The *sul ponticello* may be

played with one hair of the bow, but don't compromise on the colouristic effect. Have faith that the sound will carry! When placing the two last pianissimo 5ths in the cello part, you will achieve maximum precision when the bow is dropped from as close to the string as possible.

III ALLA CZECA

In motoric, predominantly loud compositions of this type, we find it helpful to bear in mind that a differentiated approach to the notated forte dynamics can achieve a stronger dramatic effect. Too often one tends both to play and to perceive a greater difference between piano and forte than between forte and fortissimo. In this piece, start the glissandos as early as possible, otherwise they can get lost in the overall texture. The stringendo at

the end should be led by the shortest note values. In the fifth and third bars from the end there is an unexpected mezzo-forte that often gets ignored, but which can be very effective if observed.

IV ALLA TANGO MILONGA

Here we are given an opportunity for practising tempo rubato. Many classically trained musicians could be more adventurous in this respect. The tango feeling of resistance and release is essentially the definition of tempo rubato: to give back the extra time that you have taken. The 'dance pair' of violin and viola at the beginning needs a leader, and tonally that should be the lower voice. When you start the piece, you should also bear in mind that later you'll have to accommodate two *poco più mosso* tempo changes – these can easily become too fast. Take it easy at the beginning and let the music develop.

Begin the long, first violin ricochet in the fourth bar of figure 2 (example 3) at the beginning of the fourth beat: it requires some time. ▶

Well balanced:
Henschel Quartet



GEORG THUM

To give the pizzicato a quiet yet distinct tone, try rubbing a little rosin dust from the bow stick on to the tip of your pizzicato finger

At the crescendo nine bars before figure 3, the first violin shouldn't get too loud because the viola and cello need to continue to build the dynamic further. For the 'un poco con malinconia' from figure 3, take a slightly slower tempo – or, to use a concept of the Hungarian chamber violinist Sándor Végh, stay within the lower range of the tempo.

V ALLA TARANTELLA

This brilliantly furious conclusion contains some technical and balance-

related challenges. For example, at figure 2 (**example 4**) the second violin should lead tonally – it is playing one octave below the first violin on the weaker A string, and it is easy for the first violin, on the E string, to be too loud. For the viola and cello at figure 2, we recommend practising with one member of the quartet playing continuous quavers (♩), to synchronise the passage and to identify any problematic rhythmic tendencies. To gain incisiveness in the cello part it is advisable to play

the C-string spiccato notes from the string, and to re-place the bow on the string during the quaver rest to dampen it. This also prepares you to play your next note. Here, for clearer articulation, the cellist can use a down bow for the up-beat.

Seven bars after figure 3, the violin ricochet tends to be too loud because of the bowing style and the register. Interpret the fortissimo in relative terms to help the cello, which has the main voice, to be heard. The viola has pizzicato here, and that is also hard to follow if the violins play too loudly.

At figure 4 (**example 5a**) the outer voices need to make room for the inner voices and shouldn't be much louder than poco forte. The somewhat unusual bowing at figure 4 is not easy for the cello or first violin, so we suggest practising it in dotted rhythms.

4 The second violinist should play out here, to compete with the high first violin part. Practise the viola and cello parts while another member of the quartet plays constant quavers, to iron out any rhythmical issues

Figure 4 shows measures 2-5 of a musical score. The Violin I and II parts have melodic lines with slurs. The Viola and Cello parts have rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *f*, *ff*, and *arco spiccato sempre*.

5a Don't allow the busy outer voices to dominate the second violin and viola melody

Figure 5a shows measures 4-7 of a musical score. The Violin I and II parts have melodic lines with slurs. The Viola and Cello parts have rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *ff sempre* and *cantando*.

5b Practise the unusual bowing at figure 4 in dotted rhythms, lightly accenting the up bows for increased clarity of sound

Figure 5b shows measures 4-7 of a musical score. The Violin I and II parts have melodic lines with slurs. The Viola and Cello parts have rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *ff sempre* and *cantando*.

The cello can lightly accent the up bows for greater clarity in the lower register (**example 5b**). This exercise is very simple but effective. Similarly at figure 8 the viola can begin with an up bow, so that the open C string comes on a down bow. In the sixth bar after figure 5, the viola's dynamic should be matched to the violins, although nothing is marked here.

The scales in the violins after figure 6 begin in piano, as they do in the viola part.

SCHULHOFF'S MUSIC has not yet won the place in concert programmes that it deserves, although since its 'rediscovery' – particularly thanks to Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer – it has gained some significant attention.

In our experience Schulhoff's music in concert invariably arouses great enthusiasm. It is music that leaves you wanting more, and we recommend it wholeheartedly. ■

**NEXT MONTH LEON BOSCH
ON DITTERSDORF'S SECOND
DOUBLE BASS CONCERTO**