A GRADUATE CELLO RECITAL:

WORKS BY KODALY, HAYDN AND BRAHMS

An abstract submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Music,

Performance

By

Thomas Balazs Lovasz

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The abstract of Thomas Balazs Lovasz is approved:

__________________________________________
Dr. Diane Roscetti

__________________________________________
Professor Michael Ferril

__________________________________________
Professor David Aks, Chair

California State University, Northridge
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ABSTRACT

A GRADUATE CELLO RECITAL:
WORKS BY KODALY, HAYDN AND BRAHMS

By

Thomas Balazs Lovasz

Master of Music in Performance

Zoltan Kodaly: Sonata for Solo Cello op. 8

Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly wrote his famous solo sonata for cello at the beginning of the First World War, in 1915. It was a revolutionary piece in which he exploited the technical capabilities of the solo cello at the highest artistic level.
In this masterpiece, Kodaly combined the features of Hungarian folk music and Western European classical music. Though he never used any actual folk songs in the sonata, we can feel the Hungarian spirit of folk music in every measure. Kodaly used special techniques in his piece, such as the scordatura (tune down the two lower strings by a half step), ponticello (special effect: playing close to the bridge with the bow) and left hand pizzicato.

The six cello suites of Johann Sebastian Bach likely influenced Kodaly, which he probably knew as a self-taught cellist and as a friend of Pablo Casals, who was the first cellist who performed the Bach Suites since Bach’s time. Bach wrote his Suites two hundred years before Kodaly wrote his solo sonata and, until Kodaly, in those two centuries nobody wrote major works for the solo cello, except Max Reger. Though Kodaly knew the Bach suites he never imitated them. Instead, he composed a revolutionary new masterpiece with completely new ideas and unique style. As Bela Bartok writes:

*The cello solo sonata does not bear any resemblance to any other similar compositions, least of all to Reger's pale Bach imitations. Kodaly expresses new thoughts in a brand new form, at the same time using the simplest instrument, such as the solo cello. Interestingly this problem solving process provided the composer with the opportunity of perfecting a very original, unusual technique, which produced surprising sound effects: but the composition's inner musical value is outside of these effects, in fact it radiates above it all.*

Joseph Haydn: Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in D major, Hob. VIIb-2

Joseph Haydn wrote his second cello concerto in 1783. At this time he was working as a Kapellmeister for the Esterhazy family, one of the wealthiest and most powerful families of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His employer and patron, the Hungarian Prince, Nicholas Esterhazy I. (“The Magnificent”) was a great supporter of arts and also an enthusiastic musician who played the cello, viola da gamba, and his favorite instrument, the baryton. The baryton is similar to the cello, but has more strings behind its neck, which the player can pluck with his or her left hand as an accompaniment. He was very generous with Haydn and as a music-lover highly appreciated his art. As Haydn wrote:

*My Prince was satisfied with all my labors, I received applause; as director of the orchestra I could make experiments, observe the result of them, perceive that which was weak, then rectify it, add, take away. I was cut off from the world; no one in my vicinity knew me or could make me go wrong or annoy me, so I was forced to become original.*

In this great inspirational environment, Haydn wrote a flood of compositions in almost every genre and among them the two concertos for cello. He was also probably influenced by Anton Kraft, the principal cellist of Esterhazy’s orchestra, who was an acclaimed virtuoso and composer. The second concerto in D major (written two decades later than the first concerto) is delightful and elegant – conveying Haydn’s healthy, joyful

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and optimistic personality. Though it is more relaxed and seems less virtuosic than the first concerto, it demands even higher technical skill from the performer. The opening movement of the concerto is in sonata form. The second movement is a beautiful, heartfelt aria of the solo cello. It is written in a five-part rondo form in the dominant key of A major. The last movement is a lively, cheerful rondo with virtuoso passage-work, double stops and octave passages.

Johannes Brahms: Sonata for Cello and Piano in D major, Op. 78 (transcribed from the Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1, in G major, Op. 78)

Brahms completed his violin sonata in G major in the summer of 1879 in the beautiful town of Pörtschach, Austria. He composed it at the high peak of his career after his first two symphonies and the Violin Concerto in D major, which he wrote right before the violin sonata in 1878. Actually, the G major sonata was probably his fourth violin sonata, but the first three sonatas were either lost or destroyed by Brahms, because he was not satisfied with them. This sonata is the first one of his three violin sonatas, which he finally, at the age of forty-six, considered worthy enough to publish. Brahms also made a connection between his G major sonata and Mozart’s (K. 301) and Beethoven’s (Op.96) G major violin sonatas\(^3\), which indicates Brahms’ intention to deliberately continue the

tradition of the great classical masters (which explains why he waited so long to write his first violin-piano sonata).

Brahms’ compositions for violin were greatly influenced by two contemporary Hungarian violin virtuosos - Ede Remenyi and Joseph Joachim - who became his lifelong friend. After the publication of the sonata in 1879, Joachim performed it throughout of Europe and it immediately became an important part of the violin repertoire.

Twenty years after Brahms wrote the G major Violin Sonata, Paul Klengel, a German pianist, violinist and composer, arranged the sonata for cello and piano. His brother Julius Klengel was a recognized cellist, teacher and composer, who made a few changes in the score and performed it for the first time on the cello. From that time on, many cellists performed it along with the two sonatas for cello, and in recent years it became very popular.

The Sonata in D major, Op. 78 is an extraordinary cello sonata, because it is very lyrical throughout the whole piece with long singing melodies and a peaceful and sometimes melancholic mood. It does not strive to be virtuosic and is not about the capabilities of the instruments, but rather it is very expressive, singing and simple, where all notes serve the meaning of the music. This makes Brahms’s music honest and powerful, because instead of showing something merely technical, it conveys his message, the feelings and emotions directly to the listener’s heart. One can also discover

a similarity in the setting of Brahms’ art songs and the Sonata in G major. The cello sings like a singer, while the piano gives the harmonic context, sets up the mood and atmosphere of the music and has a more transparent texture. Of course, many times the piano also has a singing role and in many cases it sings together with the cello in a Duet. In fact Brahms originally followed Beethoven and wrote the title “Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin” clearly indicating the equal roles of the violin and the piano.

The first movement (vivace ma non troppo) is in sonata form. It has a pastoral character and it is very optimistic. The primary theme is simple and joyful. It starts with a three-notes motive with a dotted rhythm, which is constantly recurring throughout the whole piece. The secondary theme is heartfelt and warm, while the closing theme is playful, happy and graceful, but in a “Brahmsian” weightier way. The development is very passionate and powerful with fast ascending and descending scales, arpeggios, and exciting conversations between the piano and cello. In the recapitulation Brahms faithfully follows the classical tradition and repeats the themes of the exposition in the home key and closes the movement with a highly effective ending.

The second movement (adagio) is written in a ternary form. It has a very intimate atmosphere. First, the piano presents the beautiful longing theme, then the cello joins to sing together. The middle section is like a funeral march. The listener can hear again the dotted rhythms of the main theme of the first movement in the left hand of the piano. Then the first part recurs again, but now the cello plays the theme in double stops. At the end of the Coda section, the music beautifully fades away.

In the third movement, Brahms directly quotes Regenlied (Rain Song) No. 3 and Nachklang (Tears) No. 4, two songs from his collection of Lieder und Gesange, Op. 59.
Regenlied was Clara Schumann’s favorite song. After Brahms sent the manuscript to her she wrote:

*I must send a line to tell you how deeply excited I am over your sonata. It came today; of course I at once played it through, and at the end could not help bursting into tears of joy over it. After the first delicate charming movement and the second, you can imagine my rapture, when in the third I once more found my passionately loved melody with the delightful quaver rhythm.*

The third movement is in an unusual rondo form, because at the second half of the movement, the theme of the second movement returns. After this part, we hear the rondo theme once again and the piece ends with a gorgeous coda, where Brahms recalls the main themes of this well-organized sonata and closes it in a glorious and an unusually gentle way.

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California State University, Northridge
Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication
Department of Music

Presents

Thomas Lovasz, cello

In his Master of Music Recital*

A student of David Aks

Saturday, April 19, 2014, 7:30 PM
Music Recital Hall

*In partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree in Cello Performance
Program

_Sonata for Solo Cello, op. 8_  
Zoltán Kodály  
(1882-1967)

I. Allegro maestoso ma appassionato

_Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in D major, Hob. VIIb-2_  
Joseph Haydn  
(1732-1809)

I. Allegro moderato (Cadenza by Thomas Lovasz)

II. Adagio

III. Rondo. Allegro

Intermission

_Sonata in D major for Cello and Piano, Op. 78_  
Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

(transcribed from the _Sonata in G major No. 1 for Violin and Piano “Regen”, Op. 78_)

I. Vivace ma non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Allegro molto moderato
Bibliography


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Webster, James and Feder, Georg. “Haydn, (Franz) Joseph.”
http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.csun.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51879?q=brasms&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit (11 April 2014)