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Post-mortem heartbeats:
a violoncello recital.



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POST-MORTEM HEARTBEATS:

A VIOLONCELLO RECITAL

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Music
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts, Honors College

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APPROVED:

J. Robert Hladky
Dr. J. Robert Hladky, Adviser

III. CHILLO TECHNOLOGY STUDIES

Influence

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P R O G R A M

for

Karen Eckhoff, Violoncello

Assisted by Lee Meyer, Piano

10 May 1985

Suite No. 1 for Solo Violoncello in G Major, BWV 1007
 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Prelude
 Allemande
 Courante
 Sarabande
 Menuetto I
 Menuetto II
 Gigue

Vocalise for Cello and Piano,
 Op. 34, No. 14
 Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
 transcribed by Leonard Rose

Méditation Hébraïque for Cello and Piano
 Ernest Bloch (1880-1959)

Sonata in A Minor for Cello and Piano
 Op. 36
 Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Allegro agitato
 Andante molto tranquillo
 Allegro

I. CONCERT PIECES

The senior degree recital is the culmination of four or more years of rigorous musical training at the university level. The recital is meant to show to the audience and music faculty that the musician has achieved certain technical and musical facilities and is accomplished enough to be graduated with a university degree. In order to opt for a recital for one's senior project, the musician must have reached the third year or "300" performance level and maintain it for three terms.

For my recital, which was Friday evening, 10 May 1985, four pieces were scheduled. They were selected in consultation with my performance instructor, Dr. J. Robert Hladky. The pieces are examples of the various musical periods of history and are intended to show some broad knowledge and versatility on the part of the performer.

I specifically requested two of the pieces for the recital: Suite No. 1 for Solo Violoncello in G Major by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and the Vocalise by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). Both are pieces I had previously worked on which have become personal favorites. I had never performed the Bach but had set a goal to be strong enough to tackle this musical marathon. The Rachmaninoff is an extremely lyrical work which was originally for voice and was transcribed for cello. With its haunting melodies and toneful lines, it is well suited for the cello.

The other two pieces, Ernest Bloch's (1880-1959) Méditation Hébraïque and Sonata in A Minor by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) were selected with Dr. Hladky's assistance to balance the content of the recital and to provide a variety of musical challenges. The Grieg is a duo sonata with cello and piano having equally difficult and important parts. Balance of volume becomes a critical element in the performance as the melody shifts from one instrument to the other. Another potential problem lies with the tempos. Changing tempos within movements challenges the ensemble playing of the performers. A long and virtuosic piece, the Grieg demands stamina and unrelenting fire and verve from its players. The Bloch is a Jewish piece intending to show the pathos and suffering of the Jewish people. It covers the entire range of the cello and, although very lyrical, is sometimes dissonant.

In performing this range and variety of musical works, the cellist must have mastered certain techniques. For a recital with so many pieces, the greatest of these techniques is endurance. Strength is needed to avoid fatigue, and control of both left and right hands is crucial. The bow technique must facilitate the playing of passages in coordination with the left hand. Balance with the instrument is important, as all playing must look and feel, and in the end be, natural. It is toward these ends that many hours per day of practice and rehearsal time were spent.

II. AUDIENCE

Audiences at degree recitals vary greatly in their formal musical backgrounds from friends and family with sometimes little or no special training, to university faculty members who may have several degrees. I had hoped to and did attract and interest an audience comprised of such a variety of listeners. Many of my colleagues from the School of Music attended, for they have similar training and professional goals. Other friends from outside the Music School also came, as well as my parents and relatives, plus a few of their close friends. In addition, a panel of two faculty members of the Music School attended to criticize the performance and passed it as a final project for graduation. One member of the Honors College Oral Examination Committee was not present and received a copy of the performance tape.

The divergence in expertise of this particular audience had little to do with the selection of concert repertoire. This performance was a degree recital, meant to show to the faculty and public some technical expertise on my part. In a professional recital setting, other factors may be taken into consideration. In a professional situation, repertoire may be chosen because of its general popularity. Most of my audience were invited guests--a phenomenon not common within the concert circuit. Therefore, it does not reflect the audience which a professional would face. As previously stated, two of the pieces were chosen for personal enjoyment; and this may have

helped to convey the musical communication. The scheduled pieces had something of interest for anyone who enjoys music and, hopefully, those who have studied it found much to understand in this recital.

III. CELLO TECHNIQUES STUDIED

In choosing a performance instructor to guide one through one's college career, one seeks to gain the technique taught by this person to its fullest potential. Musicians choose a university by its faculty. I have spent five years in college plus one year of high school studying with a man whose principles and technique I greatly admire. He has, of course, had a profound influence upon me.

Dr. J. Robert Hladky is a fine cellist who teaches by exemplification of proper technique and facility. Playing the cello should be natural, and he bases his teaching on sound principle. There are logical reasons for learning these principles which include facility over every part of the instrument. The thumb position and tenor and treble clef reading have been emphasized as my facility occasioned it. Quickness of articulation, bow technique and a strong left hand are combined with an ear trained for good intonation and always good tone. Dr. Hladky's teaching is never experimental for its own sake. He has never said to me, "Do this because I say so." He has always based his teaching in the naturalness and balance of cello playing.

Dr. Hladky is a busy performer whose many concert and

recital appearances are never dull. If I were to choose one thing to emulate about him, it would be his always fresh outlook and approach to playing which evidences his deep love of music. His captivating tone and ever-present expressiveness pervade every note, making listening enjoyable even with unfamiliar pieces.

Several other artists, both cellists and various string players, have also influenced me. The late Pablo Casals made a recording of the Bach Suites which was very important to me in preparing the recital. Casals' recording brings Bach to life with sweeping dynamics, tasteful articulation and undeniable musicality. His mastery of the cello is evident as he imparts meaning to every note in the piece. While disagreement about bowings still exists because of the lack and ambiguity of markings in the original parts, Casals is totally committed to the articulation he uses and conveys only the deepest meaning to the work.

As I have been fortunate enough to hear violinists Isaac Stern and Itzhak Perlman perform live, I was most impressed with their vigor in performance. They play to enjoy and, in so doing, pass the enjoyment on to the audience. As I play, I hope I may have some of that spark of excitement.

Finally, I must be eternally grateful to Luigi Silva, for he discovered and prepared Robert Hladky for his career and Dr. Hladky passes the knowledge on to students like myself.

IV. TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

The selections on my recital present as wide a variety of technical problems as they represent different periods of history. The program opened with the Bach Solo Suite No. 1 in G Major for Violoncello. This is a set of five dances with prelude. From the Baroque period, this piece demands precision and accuracy of intonation. A solo suite, the performer is exposed alone to express the clarity of the work. The music has no points of rest. It is a musical endurance test. Within the monophonic lines are implied harmonies; melody and phrase must be made in musical fashion and according to Baroque performance practice.

Baroque performance practice is an unwritten set of guidelines for appropriate ornamentation and articulation of Baroque music. Originally transmitted orally, the rules were gradually written down. They include style and interpretation. Very few markings were added to the original parts. Interpretation was left to the taste and discretion of the performer. In the Bach Suite, I was most affected by the tradition of beginning trills on the upper note. It was also the fashion that an appoggiatura leading into a quarter note would be played as if the two notes were eighths. An example of this in measure 26 of the Bach Courante is:



I was advised by Dr. Hladky to take only the first section repeats of each movement. This was intended to provide endurance for the rest of the recital.

Each dance is a contrast of styles to the others. The same tempo is carried out throughout each movement, but the character of each dance differs, as does the tempo. Dynamics are terraced --either loud or soft-- suddenly changing as was the style.

The Bach Suite was written c. 1720 during Bach's employment as a court musician in Cöthen. That was also the year his first wife, cousin Maria Barbara, died. This is the period of his life when Bach composed most of his greatest chamber music. The Suite No. 1 for Solo Violoncello shows Bach's adeptness at writing counterpoint, refined harmony, and interesting rhythm without using accompaniment. Being an organist, Bach used the equivalent of pedal tones in the lower register of the cello. In the Prelude, the slurred string crossings leave the lower strings ringing while the upper are played, filling in chordal tones and implying harmonies. This movement requires a great deal of left-hand strength, as the musician must "grab" all notes of the chord before bowing. Vibrato is used to clarify the sound and help retain resonance.


Preludes were designed to be played as an introduction to the total composition, such as the suite. This tradition began around 1650 and, with few exceptions, has been limited to solo instrumental music. The titles of the movements of the Bach are French, with the exception of the Allemande which is German,

and the Menuetto which is Italian. Also about 1650, the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue became the standard movements of the suite. At the same time, in the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, the formerly peasant dance, the minuet, became a refined court dance and a part of the French suite.

The Allemande is a moderately quick movement in 4/4 time with the characteristic short upbeat and continuous eighth and sixteenth notes usually bowed in groups of four or more to maintain smoothness. It has short running figures which weave their way through the various voices of a contrapuntal framework. In the 17th Century the Allemande became a stylized dance type and was regularly used as the first movement of the suite.

The Courante joined the standard movements of the suite in the mid-17th Century. Typically, it is in triple meter and may use hemiola effects to create rhythmic variety. Bach uses this effect most in the last measure of each section so that the accents shift from $\bar{1} \ 2 \ \bar{3} \ 4 \ \bar{5} \ 6$ to $\bar{1} \ 2 \ 3 \ \bar{4} \ 5 \ 6$. The Courante in the Suite for Solo Cello resembles the Italian Corrente, with continuous running figures in the texture. Sequences at various pitch levels are used here.

This Courante moves quickly and requires much finger dexterity. It has some long crescendos comprised of small sets of fast notes. As it moves along quickly, it is slowly growing louder within the phrase. This effect is set off with subito pianos. The real difficulty, however, lies in the bowing of the fast passages. They consist of groups of four sixteenth

notes, bowed in groups of three plus one (). Care must be taken to save bow on the groups of three notes while moving quickly on the single note in the opposite direction.

The Sarabande is a slow and dignified dance in triple meter. It usually has no upbeat and often has a prolonged tone on the second beat, as in the cello suite. Its origins are in Mexico where it began as a wild 16th Century dance. After 1600, when it appeared in France and England, the transition toward the later dignified form began. Around 1650 the Sarabande became one of the standard suite movements.

The Sarabande in the Suite for Solo Cello has long sustained lines which must be maintained by smooth bow changes. The phrases are long and must not be disrupted by abrupt bow changes. As with the other movements, crescendos accompany a rising line and decrescendos accompany a falling line. The emphasis in this movement is upon the lyric beauty of the melody.

The Menuetto began as a French country dance and was introduced to the court of Louis XIV around 1650. It is the only one of the Baroque dance types which did not fade to obsolescence after the decline of the dance suite c. 1750, the year that Bach died. In a moderate 3/4, the Menuetto had a choreographic floor pattern of Z or S and became very popular all over Europe, superseding older dance types and ushering in a completely new period of dance and music. The Bach Menuettos are arranged in alternative patterns of two contrasting Menuettos: M₁- M₂ - M₁, which led to the development of the minuet and trio movement of the sonata.

In the Bach Suite, the first Menuetto is in G major. It is a moderate 3/4 movement and is played with both repeats. After the repeat of the second section, the second Menuetto is played with repeats. It is in G minor and I played it a little slower than the first because I feel a minor key is a bit more somber than the major. This is also part of Baroque performance practice and is debatable by the experts. After playing the second Menuetto, the first returns in its original tempo without repeats.

The lively Gigue is usually the final movement of the Baroque dance suite. It evolved from the Irish and English jigs of the 16th Century, which developed differently on the Continent. The French type commonly uses compound duple time, such as the 6/8 in the Bach. The six eighth notes are grouped into two sets of three eighth notes. These are bowed two-to-one, and the single eighth gives a lift into the next set. This is emphasized by a hemiola effect in the first half. Bach uses the characteristic dotted rhythms, wide intervals, and continuous triplet movement to keep things lively. The overriding difficulty in this movement is endurance. The sixteenth notes begin in full force in the second half with a few difficult fingerings for the left hand. The diatonic run in the penultimate measure seems like the most difficult scale ever written by the end of this solo expedition.

Rachmaninoff was a Russian composer who was also a virtuoso pianist. He was born in Russia in 1873 and became a citizen

of the United States shortly before his death in 1943. Rachmaninoff married his cousin Natalie Satina in 1902. He used minor keys in much of his music, including the Vocalise. The mood of this song, originally the last of a set of 14 written in 1912, is melancholy. Its simple, lyrical lines wind slowly above the piano accompaniment, which emphasizes the phrases by melodic inflections. The Vocalise demands smooth bow changes and sustaining and phrasing of the lines. A slower, wider vibrato than usual helps enhance the tonal color.

Swiss-born American Ernest Bloch was a composer of Jewish ancestry who died in Portland, Oregon, in 1959. He studied violin and composition and had a feel for what was idiomatic to the cello, which he proved in 1924 by composing the Méditation Hébraïque. This lyric work covers the entire range of the cello and incorporates dissonance and quarter-tones as well as augmented seconds in an imitation of Hebrew chant. The cello mourns in a Jewish cantor style and some portato is appropriate here.

The program concluded with Grieg's Sonata in A Minor for Cello and Piano Op. 36 (1883). This is a chamber music selection and gives both musicians a chance to play exciting parts. The balance and interplay between parts is critical. It is an extremely Romantic piece with swell dynamics and expansive lines. Percussive chords are used in the cello part; and, unlike Bach, one or more tempo changes may occur within the movement. This provides a challenge to the teamwork between the cellist and pianist.

Grieg (1843-1907) was a Norwegian nationalist-Romantic composer who was born and died in the city of Bergen. He married his cousin, singer Nina Hagerup in 1867. Grieg received honorary music doctorates from Cambridge and Oxford and, in his later years, shunned public acclaim by remaining close to home.

Grieg found the chamber music idiom difficult to work in and only wrote three violin sonatas, one cello sonata, and two string quartets, one of which he never finished. A nationalist flavor is apparent in his compositions, although he rarely quoted Norwegian folk songs directly. Some of the movements of his chamber music lack continuity and coherence. Several tempo and mood changes may occur within a movement, challenging the performers to phrase carefully and give the movement cohesiveness. The third, or Allegro, movement begins with an introduction

The first movement, Allegro agitato, contrasts lyric and rhythmic material and is in sonata form. It is in A minor and begins mysteriously, then builds dynamically to the main theme. The cellist must be no stranger to thumb position, as this piece soars and falls, using a broad range of technique. Grieg uses arpeggiated chords slurred across all four strings, and some are bowed as in the Bach Courante, three notes plus one. Grieg also uses a chromatic series of octaves. The major challenge, however, is to contrast the lyric cantabile sections where the cello has the melody with the surrounding background sections, to make sure the melody is discernable throughout. The movement closes with a very difficult sextuplet arpeggio figure which is

marked Presto. This is capped off by a Prestissimo coda which is in thumb position and has an awkward G#. The piano ending is a very showy set of arpeggios; then simultaneous rhythmic chords for both musicians close the movement.

The second movement, Andante molto tranquillo, is very lyric and smooth. It is in three parts, with the middle section being Poco piu mosso (a little faster). Dynamics are the key here, as each phrase starts quietly and builds to a gradual forte. In the Poco piu mosso section, the phrases build like a magnified Bach: they rise melodically as well as dynamically. When the first tempo returns, the movement is very loud and deliberate, almost angry. It then drops immediately to piano, the primary theme recurs, and the movement closes very peacefully.

The third, or Allegro, movement begins with an introduction for solo cello before launching into a rollicking rondo in A major. It has galloping sixteenth notes contrasted with lyric bits of melody. Lush chords and jazzy sevenths permeate the transitions, and the second theme uses thumb position as well as octave-wide stretches. Although difficult, it is not impossible. Melody hops back and forth from piano to cello, and balance is important for the audibility of the melody. A mysterious section with cello pizzicato creeps into the most difficult section for the cellist--quadruple-stopped chords in very high positions. This requires great finger strength combined with bow control so as not to choke the chords. The movement is very long and demands great energy at a point when most fuel is already burned.

The piece's internal energy carries it through, however, and it ends victoriously on outlined dominant and tonic triads, the culmination of an exciting movement. The Grieg is also very virtuosic and, although difficult, proved to be the most energizing experience of the evening.

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