Richard STÖHR

CHAMBER MUSIC, VOLUME THREE
VIOLIN SONATAS I
VIOLIN SONATA NO. 1 IN G MAJOR, OP. 27
VIOLIN SONATA NO. 2 IN A MAJOR, OP. 62

Ulrike-Anima Mathé, violin
Scott Faigen, piano

FIRST RECORDINGS
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. Stöhr first obtained a degree in medicine from the University of Vienna, in 1898, but never practised as a doctor and 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. At this time he also changed his name from Stern to Stöhr and converted to Christianity. In the annual summary he entered in his 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.

1 Porges (1837–1900) was another of the Jewish musicians with whom, paradoxically, the antisemitic 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 – Richard Stöhr’s cousin – was the librettist of Engelbert Humperdinck’s opera Königskinder (1895).

2 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.

3 Stöhr’s papers are held privately by his family, by St Michael’s College, Colchester, Vermont, and by the Austrian National Library in Vienna.
After completing his studies with Fuchs and earning a PhD in Music, in 1903, he immediately joined the faculty of the Academy. 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 courses 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, since he was serving in a hospital in the suburbs of Vienna, he was able to live at home and continue teaching at the Academy.

His first book on harmony appeared in 1906, the year that the Piano Trio, Op. 16, was composed. 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.

Between the world wars Stöhr continued his prolific work as composer, author and teacher. 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 alternative spelling of his name: Stoehr, just as Schönberg became Schoenberg. He was hired personally by Mrs Mary Curtis Bok, founder of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, to come to the Institute, 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.

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5 In the previous sentence Stöhr mentions receiving his first income from the publication of a composition.
Curtis downsized its faculty in 1941 because of the war and Stoehr was ‘let go’ from his job there. He quickly found another position at St Michael’s College in Colchester, Vermont, where he taught German as well as music. During his years in the United States Stoehr continued to compose prolifically in all major classical genres except opera. His output as a composer includes seven symphonies, two operas, choral music, 150 Lieder, fifteen violin sonatas, at least a dozen other major chamber works, as well as solo piano music. Although virtually all of his compositions before 1938 were published by major firms, including Universal Edition, none of the numerous works from his US years was ever published. His literary output extends to half a dozen books and numerous articles. 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.

Stefan Koch is a native of York, Pennsylvania, and received his musical training at Temple University in Philadelphia; he also has a master’s degree in philosophy from the University of Michigan. In 2001 he became a member of the Lansing Symphony and is a frequent performer with the Kalamazoo, West Michigan, Toledo and Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestras and the orchestra of Michigan Opera Theatre. In 2012 he undertook a series of recitals presenting the first US performances of the music for cello and piano by Richard Stöhr, the fruits of which, with the pianist Robert Conway, were released on a Toccata Classics album (TOCC 0210) in August 2014.

\footnote{A full list of his compositions can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Stöhr.
The two sonatas for violin and piano presented here are the first of fifteen for this genre that Richard Stöhr would compose between 1911 and 1950. His output of chamber music was enormous, but he favoured no other genre to the same extent – and there are also two suites for violin and piano from 1946 and numerous collections of miniatures.

**Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 27 (1911)**

Stöhr’s First Violin Sonata, Op. 27, in G major, was composed in the same year that he took over the chair for composition at the Vienna Conservatoire, after his teacher, Robert Fuchs, retired; it was published in Vienna by Universal in the same year. The optimistic opening theme of the first-movement *Allegro moderato* is characterised by its flowing beauty, a theme of grace and tranquillity which is nonetheless both convincing and haunting. The second subject is a gentle march, surprisingly also in G major. Only in the closing material of the exposition does another tonality occur, in a new theme in E major. But more surprising is the transition into the reprise, where material embedded in the accompanying figures comes out of the shadows to reveal itself as the opening figure. Having stayed in the tonic for the march in the exposition, Stöhr now replaces it with a fugato which travels through the circle of fifths, showing off his harmonic fireworks and culminating with the material from all three themes simultaneously to end the movement.

The second movement, *Andante religioso*, begins with a whole-note Catholic hymn which yields to a bucolic shepherd’s recitative. The middle section, *Andantino lusingando*, keeps the rustic character in a playful dance-like interlude, replete with pizzicato and ostinato drum beats.
The finale, marked *Allegro giusto* [3], is built on three themes, all of which have an unmistakably Russian character and which are interwoven in a complex fugato. In the surprising ending, one hears the boots marching away into the dark snow, keeping the listener in suspense as to whether it will end in major or minor.

**Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 62 (1923)**

Stöhr's Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 62, in A major, was composed twelve years after the First, in 1923, and published in Zurich by Musikhaus Büni. The self-assured opening, *Allegro* [4], shows an openness and freshness which expresses the optimism of post-World War One society. Stöhr’s confidence is heard not only in the horn-like passages heard in this first movement but in his willingness to repeat rhythmic structures again and again, knowing that his harmonic ingenuity will keep it alive – and Stöhr was a master at his craft, even if his harmonic language seems blithely unaware of the avant-garde trends of his time.

The Intermezzo, *Andante sostenuto* [5], is a return to the Viennese coffee house, with its gypsy-violin style and simple bass. There is, perhaps, a hint of scandal but without any cheapness. Both the harmony and the style of the violin part are reminiscent of Fritz Kreisler’s Viennese writing – except that this Sonata pre-dates most of that body of music.

The finale (Allegro risoluto) [6] has an unusual structure: it is a rondo, but hardly one in the conventional sense. I view it as tripartite: AB / CAB / AB / coda, the lower-case ‘a’ representing a brief but striking mention of the opening material. This movement again displays the confidence that marked the opening one, but in an angrier way. Stöhr’s willingness to leave entire bars of rest, even three bars at one point, is quite unusual for him. In the second statement of the main theme he fills those silences in with repeated notes. The second section of the rondo is a chorale set in the pentatonic. In the long final section of the piece, the repeated notes come together with scales to build a grandiose and powerful ending, filled with harmonic surprises and a crashing downward scale to finish.

Stöhr’s music was never once performed at the Marlboro Festival, which took place every summer only miles from his home in Vermont, even though he had taught the
pianist Rudolf Serkin and violinist Felix Galimir, both co-founders of the Festival — and Galimir, Serkin and Serkin’s father-law, Adolf Busch, another co-founder, were themselves refugees from Nazism. Did they see him as an old Viennese professor with stuffy ideas that were no longer in mode? Whatever the reason for Stöhr’s neglect after his emigration, he and his music had integrity: one could hardly claim that he reached out for new worlds, but he was a master of his art as he had learned it and stayed true to his view of what music should be. Now it’s time to put aside judgements of ‘historical relevance’ and enjoy Stöhr’s music as he intended it.

**Ulrike-Anima Mathé** studied with Françoise Zöldy in Basel, with Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School in New York and with Tibor Varga in Detmold; Rudolf Serkin and Sándor Végh were also major influences on her musical development. Her artistic profile has further been enriched by an involvement with contemporary music and the study of historical performance.

As a soloist she has performed extensively with such orchestras as the Czech Philharmonic, the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the Camerata Salzburg and the Polish Radio Orchestra, and in major international venues, such as the Philharmonien of Berlin and Cologne, the Carnegie Hall in New York and Kennedy Center in Washington, the Mozarteum in Salzburg and the Tonhalle in Zurich. International awards include first prizes at the European Violin Competition in Vienna in 1985 and at the Young Concert Artists Audition in New York in 1988, and a prize, and the audience prize, at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 1989.

Ulrike-Anima Mathé is also a passionate chamber musician. The festivals at which she has been a regular guest include Hitzacker, Ittingen, Lockenhaus, Marlboro and Prussia Cove. She has made many recordings; that of the Reger solo sonatas, Op. 91, won plaudits around the globe. In 1999 she was appointed violin professor at the Hochschule für Musik in Detmold.
The American pianist Scott Faigen enjoys a distinguished career as concert pianist, composer and conductor. At age sixteen he performed the Mendelssohn G minor Concerto with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He went on to study at Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Illinois. Active as soloist and chamber musician, he has served on the faculties of the National Academy of Music, the North Carolina School of the Arts and the Stuttgart Music Conservatoire.

For six years he held performing positions at the Juilliard School, as well as Sarah Lawrence College and the Aspen Music Festival. In 1983 he served as class accompanist for Itzhak Perlman at the Brooklyn Conservatory. He has accompanied master-classes for the singers Kathleen Battle, Juan Diego Flórez and Maureen Forrester and the instrumentalists Dorothy DeLay, Ivan Galamian, Joseph Gingold, Gidon Kremer and Leonard Rose. He has been the official pianist at many international competitions, including the Queen Elisabeth, Spohr, Kreisler, Marteau and Wieniawski.

Concert tours have brought him to forty countries, playing with such highly regarded musicians as Norbert Brainin, Steven Isserlis, Ulrike-Anima Mathé, Antônio Meneses, Midori, Berl Senofsky, Gil Shaham, Arnold Steinhard, Wanda Wilkomirska and Peter Zazofsky. He was a founding member of the Bamberger Trio and since 1989 has been on the faculty of the Mannheim Conservatoire.
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Recorded on 14 and 15 July 2017 in the Clara-Wieck Auditorium in Sandhausen bei Heidelberg, Germany
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Recording engineer: Eckhard Steiger

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RICHARD STÖHR Chamber Music, Vol. 3: Violin Sonatas I

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 27 (1911)  28:51
1 I Allegro moderato  12:32
2 II Andante religioso – Andantino lusingando  9:27
3 III Finale: Allegro giusto  6:52

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 62 (1923)  27:42
4 I Allegro  10:18
5 II Intermezzo: Andante sostenuto  5:23
6 III Finale: Allegro risoluto  12:01

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FIRST RECORDINGS