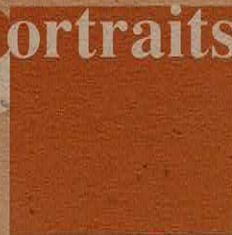




Premieres

Personalities

Portraits



new music concerts

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son

Robert Aitken
artistic director

new music concerts presents
the music of

Erwin Schulhoff



Sunday, February 5, 1995, 3:00 pm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Walker Court

Sunday, February 5, 1995
 3:00 pm
 Walker Court
 Art Gallery of Ontario

Erwin Schulhoff

Works from his Dada and Jazz periods

Erwin Schulhoff

Divertissement (1926) dur. 15'

Cynthia Steljes, oboe
 Stanley McCartney, clarinet
 Fraser Jackson, bassoon

Hot Sonate (1930) dur. 14'

David Tanner, alto saxophone
 Andrew Burashko, piano

Bassnachtigall (1922) dur. 5'

Fraser Jackson, solo contrabassoon

Esquisses de jazz (1930) dur. 8'

Andrew Burashko, solo piano

Concertino (1925) dur. 15'

Dianne Aitken, flute
 Douglas Perry, viola
 Roberto Occhipinti, double bass

New Music Concerts gratefully
 acknowledges the financial support of
 The M.M. Webb Foundation

New Music Concerts presents
Lost Composers II:
Works from the Dada and Jazz Periods of
Erwin Schulhoff

Erwin (later known as Ervín) Schulhoff was born in Prague on June 8th, 1894. The offspring of a German-Jewish merchant father, his paternal grandfather was the pianist Julius Schulhoff (1825-98); his mother's family included the concertmaster of a theatre orchestra in Frankfurt-am-Main. It was through these family connections that the talented young pianist was brought to the attention of Antonín Dvorák. The encouragement he received from him inspired him to pursue an interest in composition that led to many years of study in Vienna, Leipzig, Cologne and Paris. Among his teachers were prominent piano pedagogues (Kaan, Willy Thern, Teichmüller, Friedberg), musical theoreticians (Kreihl, Steinbach, Schiedemayr) and famous composers (Reger, Debussy).

At the age of nineteen his abilities as a pianist were recognized in Berlin through the awarding of the prestigious Felix Mendelssohn Prize. The Wüllner Prize, bestowed upon him in the same year, afforded him the opportunity to pursue graduate studies, an activity that was fore-shortened by the outbreak of war. He served in the Austrian Army and saw action at both the Russian and Italian fronts. Twice wounded in battle, his experience of war nurtured in him a growing sense of irony and cynicism which led him to espouse a pacifist, even anarchist philosophy.

Far from fostering a spirit of internationalism and understanding, the bitter devastation of the First World War did little to quell the xenophobia that continued to flourish in the post-war Weimar Republic. Consider, for example, the language used to describe French culture by the still powerfully influential musicologist Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935) in the introduction to his 1918 edition of Beethoven's op.111 sonata:

The German nation will have to expose, in their full poverty and incompetence, these trumped up nations, whose lies are so abundant, as are their libels, disloyalty, cruelty and so on, from which they still have to be freed. The German genius must chastise their fatuity and clean their insides to make it worthy of culture - something they have never possessed.

(Translated by Richard Lanham Smith,
from *The Musical Times*, Dec. 1994)

Schulhoff's widely-shared conviction that the self-destruction of European culture had rendered the notion of Art meaningless naturally led him to associate himself with a movement of anti-art that thrives to this day. "Dada", art reduced to the mindless babble of a drooling babe, was conceived in a spirit of bitter revenge for all that had been lost. In music the purported direct line connecting Marcel Duchamp to John Cage has repeatedly been cited by Cage himself. Schulhoff anticipated Cage's notorious 1952 "silent piece" 4'33" decades ago with his *In futurum*

of 1919, a composition that consists entirely of rests.

III. In futurum.

Zeltmaß-zeltlos.


tutta la canzone con espressione e sentimento ad libitum, sempre, sin al final

Erwin Schulhoff.
In futurum.
© Hans & Son, Berlin, 1919

In Germany the Dada movement flourished in Berlin and Dresden. Georg Grosz's hideous caricatures of corpulent, porcine businessmen and monocled dandies appealed to Schulhoff's sense of outrage far more directly than Duchamp's

comparitively frivolous painting of a moustache on the Mona Lisa or his celebrated signed urinals. He and Grosz collaborated on Dadaesque theatrical productions; the composer also came to know other artists such as Daubler and Klee.

The Dada spirit can still be discerned in his 1922 composition, *Bassnachtigall*. Though the notion of a work for solo contrabassoon may be seen by some as a subject for ridicule, Schulhoff maintains in his introduction to the work that *"the creative spark can be found as easily in a contrabassoon as in a liver sausage."*



The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "II Perpetuum mobile". The tempo is marked "Allegro" and the performance instruction is "sempre stacc.". The dynamics are marked "mf". The score consists of two staves of music, both in bass clef. The music is a continuous, rhythmic sequence of notes, characteristic of a "perpetuum mobile" style. The first staff begins with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, creating a steady, flowing pattern.

It was at this point in his life that Schulhoff was awarded a second Mendelssohn Prize for his 1918 *Piano Sonata*. He also became a founding member of Dresden's "Werkstatt der Zeit" (Contemporary Workshop), the purpose of which was to present the most progressive music of the time. He devoted himself to a close study of the music of Schoenberg, Scriabin and Stravinsky and kept up a lively correspondence with Alban

Berg. He became particularly fascinated with American Jazz and its energizing influence permeated his subsequent compositions, as did his intimate knowledge of Czech and Slovak folk music.

In 1920 he accepted a position as professor of piano in Saarbrücken and it was there that he met his wife Alice. They returned to Berlin in 1922, where their only child, Peter, was born. After a short time Schulhoff felt increasingly isolated in Berlin and resolved to return home to Prague and become once more a part of its vibrant musical culture. His *Violin Sonata* and *Sextet* received prestigious premieres there in 1924.

In addition to his growing fame as a composer Schulhoff was equally celebrated as a pianist, noted for his "excellent technique, incisive rhythmic acuity and artful touch". He made numerous recordings for international radio networks of both his own music and that of others. His activities in this regard ranged from the controversial quarter-tone compositions of Alois Haba to the latest jazz idioms, and included an absolute mastery of the classical repertoire. His talents proved lucrative in this regard, leading to many engagements abroad, particularly in Germany, until 1933.

Schulhoff's fateful reaction to the rise of the Nazis in Germany was to embrace Communism. He composed a cantata to texts from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, wrote a series of revolutionary songs, and dedicated symphonies to Socialist causes. As German forces bore down

upon Bohemia he abandoned Prague to work in Slovakia. In 1941 he and his family were granted Soviet citizenship but were arrested by the Nazis on the eve of their departure. Subsequently tortured for both his racial origins and Communist sympathies, Schulhoff died of tuberculosis in a concentration camp at Wülzburg in Bavaria on August 18th, 1942.

Despite his short life and frenetic activity as a performer, Schulhoff was a prolific (one could even say compulsive) composer. Beautifully engraved volumes of his piano works, so often performed at international festivals of contemporary music, appeared throughout the 1920's from the highly prestigious *Universal Edition* of Vienna, only to be suppressed as "degenerate" in the Nazi regime that soon followed. It was not until the centenary of his birth in 1994 that the German publisher Schott resolved to publish his complete works.

Schulhoff's compositions, when they are not directly related to Dadaism (*Bassnachtigall*) or Jazz idioms (the *Hot Sonate* and the *Esquisses de jazz*, both written in 1930) exhibit a dense polyphony and a carefully weighed dialogue between passages of a diatonic and relatively joyful character (Gallic 'neo-classicism") strongly contrasted with introspective, restless music of an atonal nature (Teutonic "expressionism") as exemplified in the various movements of his *Concertino* (1925) and *Divertissement* (1926). His is an international aesthetic that can arguably be considered an intuitive prophecy of musical post-modernism.

A SHORT HISTORY OF NEW MUSIC CONCERTS

New Music Concerts was founded in 1971 by the internationally acclaimed Canadian flutist and composer, Robert Aitken and composer Norma Beecroft. Its aim and purpose is to promote interest in the art of music and contemporary music in particular. This mandate has resulted in the presentation of over 183 Toronto concerts of the music of our time by Canadian and international composers. A consequence of this juxtaposition of worldwide composers and their Canadian colleagues has been a legacy of global rapport and good will. Impressed by the calibre of performance and dedication to the musical ideal by our local musicians, these composers (and on occasion, artists) return home with a deeper appreciation and respect for Canadian composers and performers. Added to this are numerous tours of Canada, the United States and Europe. Extending this fundamental aspect of our mandate, NMC also offers lectures, films, mixed media presentations, forums, reading weekends and music theatre. Ninety percent of our concerts are recorded for broadcast on CBC FM's "Two New Hours". Many of these broadcasts then travel to foreign networks for further transmission. In its 24 years, NMC has produced or performed on seven recordings, the latest of which is "O Bali" recorded by CBC on the CBC label and released in 1993.

New Music Concerts has fertilized the ground over the years for contemporary musical activities in Toronto. This has been accomplished by the excellence of performance and diversity of programming which has built an appreciative audience for contemporary music in Toronto.,

New Music Concerts

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2 Sunday, November 27, 1994
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3 Sunday, February 5, 1995
Art Gallery of Ontario
Walker Court
Erwin Schulhoff

4 Sunday, March 19, 1995
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre
Tan Dun/Melissa Hui



Premieres

Personalities

Portraits

94
Season

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Harbourfront Centre
Udo Kasemets

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