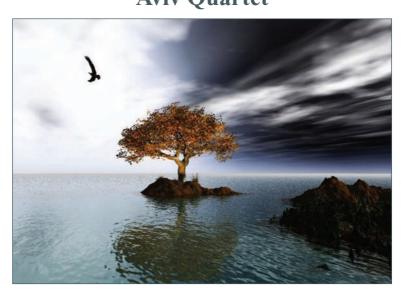


Erwin SCHULHOFF

String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 Five Pieces for String Quartet Aviv Quartet



Erwin Schulhoff (1894–1942) String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 • Five Pieces for String Quartet

Erwin Schulhoff was born in Prague on 8th June 1894 and showed musical ability from an early age. A musical career was decided upon on the recommendation of no less than Antonín Dvořák, and Schulhoff studied at the Prague Conservatory from 1904, followed by piano tuition in Vienna from 1906 then composition in Leipzig with Max Reger from 1908 and subsequently in Cologne with Fritz Steinbach from 1911. In the meantime he had laid the basis of a career as a pianist, while his efforts at composing were rewarded with the Mendelssohn Prize in 1918 for a piano sonata. His music up to the First World War had shown the expected influences from Brahms and Dvořák and, by way of Strauss, to Debussy and Scriabin, but four years in the Austrian army saw him adopt a more radical stance artistically and politically. In the next few years he absorbed the values of the Expressionism represented by Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School as well as the Dadaism espoused by Georg Grosz, whose advocacy of jazz was to find its way into much of Schulhoff's music from that period.

The later 1920s saw something of a rapprochement between these competing aesthetics, evident in a number of chamber works and concertos, as well as in the First Symphony, the ballet Ogelala, the 'jazz oratorio' HMS Royal Oak and an opera about Don Juan entitled Flammen (Flames) which was a failure at its Brno premiere in 1932. That year also saw Schulhoff's Second Symphony, its clear-cut neo-Classicism hinting at a new direction the political motivation of which was confirmed in the cantata Das Manifest, setting texts by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Looking to the Soviet Union for a solution to the political and economic problems besetting Europe, he focussed on the symphony as the best medium with which to communicate his convictions. Six more of these were begun between 1935 and 1942, though the Seventh and Eighth remained unfinished. Having lived in Prague during most of the inter-war years, working as a pianist in theatre productions and radio broadcasts, Schulhoff found himself without any means of support after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia early in 1939. Having assumed Soviet citizenship, he was arrested before he could finalise his emigration to the Soviet Union, and was then deported to a concentration camp in Wülzburg where he died (most probably of tuberculosis) on 18th August 1942.

The works on this recording come from what is likely the most significant phase of Schulhoff's composing career. He was no stranger to the string quartet medium, having written a Divertimento in 1914 and a full-length string quartet some four years later. Nevertheless it was a String Sextet, written between 1920 and 1924, which made possible the stylistic synthesis of the chamber works that followed. Among these, the First String Quartet from 1924 ranks among his most successful works and was recognized as such at its première in Venice, given under the auspices of the International Society for New Music, by the Zika Quartet on 3rd September 1925. Although Schoenberg is still prominent, elements of Bartók, Stravinsky and Hindemith are equally significant, drawn into a musical idiom both personal and distinctive in capturing the restless spirit of its time.

The first movement opens in decisive fashion with hectic interplay between the four instruments, the thematic material having a bracing folk-inflected quality. There is no development as such, making its sudden ending the more unexpected. The second movement focuses on an arching theme for the violin, against a backdrop of muted and pizzicato strings, that unfolds ruminatively until (around mid-point) the texture thins out noticeably. From here, a succession of disconnected references back to the initial theme effects a hesitant close. After a bracing initial section, the third movement indicates its debt to traditional Slovakian music with an earthy theme that insistently takes hold of the ensemble; the opening music then returning for a spirited conclusion. The finale is the longest movement, beginning with an eloquent interplay that brings several brief but intense solos in its wake. At length,

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a more sustained violin soliloquy brings the impassioned climax, the music gradually retreating into a more fragmented texture, as in the second movement, before the work draws to its introspective close.

Schulhoff had been encouraged to write a string quartet following the success of his Five Pieces for the medium, composed in 1923 and first heard in Salzburg on 8th August 1924. Although following the outlines of a Baroque dance suite, each of the pieces is a self-contained miniature that emulates a particular dance style and in a manner which unashamedly recalls the popular music of the era.

The first piece is a moody and wide-ranging waltz, made more so by its rhythmic displacement (this hardly being a waltz for dancing). The second piece is an equally oblique take on the serenade, its strummed undertow giving an ominous quality to music whose irony threatens to take on a more threatening guise at every turn. The third piece is a further instance of the composer's acknowledged debt to Czech folk-dance, its unbridled rhythmic drive exuding real energy for all its brevity. The fourth piece is a highly distinctive take on the tango (and has achieved popularity in arrangements that more closely reflect its models), though here the underlying rhythmic elasticity undercuts the music's sultry and provocative manner. The fifth piece looks to the tarantella in a headlong drive that continues unabated through to the decisive closing chords.

The Second String Quartet appeared in 1925 but seems not to have met with a success comparable to that of the earlier pieces, nor has it enjoyed the same degree of revival over more recent years. Yet it is stylistically no less assured

a work, continuing the drive towards greater rhythmic and harmonic directness as makes one regret that Schulhoff completed no further works for the medium (a third quartet was begun later that decade but left in fragmentary form).

The first movement is a compact overall design whose coursing main theme is heatedly discussed in the central section before reasserting itself as the music heads to its animated close. The second movement is a sequence of variations on the eloquent theme announced on unaccompanied viola at the outset. The first variation brings the remaining three instruments musingly into play, while the second gradually intensifies the sombre discourse. The third variation breaks out into an excited dance over a loping pizzicato accompaniment, before the fourth restores a measure of calm with its sustained exploration of the theme's harmonic subtleties. The viola returns to round off proceedings with a tranquil recollection of the initial theme. The third movement is another of the composer's spirited takes on folk music, its rhythmic components exchanged in no uncertain terms between instruments as the music pursues its vigorous course before suddenly tapering off in an unexpectedly quiet ending. The finale commences with an introduction whose elegiac manner promptly gives way to a lively theme, given emphasis by its bracing rhythmic profile. This reaches a forceful climax, after which the elegiac music re-emerges - only for its lively successor to take hold again in the brusque closing bars.

Richard Whitehouse



Aviv Quartet

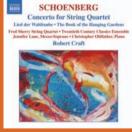
Winner of the Grand Prix and four special prizes at the Third Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition in 1999, the First Prize, the Amadeus Prize at the Charles Hennen Competition in Holland in 1999, the Schubert Prize at the 2003 Schubert Competition in Graz, and Second Prize (no First Prize awarded) and the International Critics Prize at the 2003 Bordeaux String Quartet Competition, the Aviv Quartet has performed at leading venues throughout the world, such as Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Auditorium de Louvre, Wigmore Hall, Sydney Opera House, Salzburg Mozarteum and many others. The Quartet has also performed at leading Festivals of Chamber Music, including the Verbier Festival (performing the entire cycle of Shostakovich Quartets), Folles journées de Nantes, the Festival de Radio France in Montpelier, and others. The Quartet's début CD of Franz Anton Hoffmeister's *Op. 14 String Quartets* was released by Naxos in 2003 (8.555952) and between 2004 and 2006 the Aviv Quartet recorded several Shostakovich quartets for the Israeli Label Dalia Classics.

Photo from left to right: Rachel Mercer, Evgenia Epshtein, Shuli Waterman, Sergey Ostrovsky (Roman Malamant)

Also available:



8.555952



BERG
String Quartet * Lyric Suite
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New Zealand String Quartet

8.557374



8.557520 8.557543-44

NAXOS

Music for

String

Quartet

Largely forgotten in the decades after his death, the wide-ranging output of the Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff has come to much greater prominence over the last quarter-century. The music featured here dates from the mid-1920s, a productive period in which he forged a distinctive and highly personal musical style. Both the *First String Quartet* and the *Five Pieces* achieved a notable success at their premières, and all three works are among the most successful and enduring of Schulhoff's compositions.

Erwin SCHULHOFF (1894–1942)

(1074-1742)

Music for String Quartet

String Quartet No. 1	
(1924)	17:05
1 I. Presto con fuoco	2:20
2 II. Allegretto con moto e con	
malinconia grotesca	4:20
3 III. Allegro giocoso alla	
slovacca	3:10
4 IV. Andante molto sostenuto	7:04
Five Pieces (1923)	13:57
5 No. 1 Alla Valse viennese	2:05
6 No. 2 Alla Serenata	2:53
7 No. 3 Alla Czeca	1:42
8 No. 4 Alla Tango Milonga	4:13
9 No. 5 Alla Tarantella	2:45

String Quartet No. 2	
(1925)	19:40
10 I. Allegro agitato	3:31
11 II. Tema con variazioni:	
Moderato	6:31
12 III. Allegro gajo	2:52
13 IV. Finale: Andante quasi	
introduzione - Allegro molto	6:34

Aviv Quartet
Sergey Ostrovsky, First Violin
Evgenia Epshtein, Second Violin
Shuli Waterman, Viola
Rachel Mercer, Cello



Recorded at St Anne's Church, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 11–13 March 2008 Producers: Norbert Kraft & Bonnie Silver • Engineer & Editor: Norbert Kraft Publishers: Universal Edition (tracks 1–4, 10–13), Schott Music (5–9) Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse • Cover image © Michal Grossmann / Dreamstime.com



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