

Chi Lee

Program Notes for DMA Recital, March 3rd, 2024

Franz Anton Hoffmeister – Duo for Violin and Viola in G major, Op.7, No.1

Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) was born in Rottenburg am Neckar in Austria, now located in Germany near Stuttgart. He moved to Vienna to study law at a young age, but quickly ended his studies to become a musician and ended up as one of the most respected composers in Vienna during the late 18th century. While his name is still known as a composer, he is now primarily remembered for his business endeavors in the field of publishing. Hoffmeister founded the publishing company Ataria & Co. in 1785, which published many works by composers such as Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart. He was a close friend of Mozart's and ended up publishing the first editions of many of his pieces in Vienna. Because of their friendship, Mozart dedicated his String Quartet No.20, K.499 to Hoffmeister, which is now better known as the Hoffmeister Quartet.

Hoffmeister composed prolifically throughout his life, which is surprising given that he also had his publishing business to look after. One advantage that Hoffmeister gained from having his business was that he could publish his own works whenever he pleased and use his network of distributors to make sure people knew about his new pieces. By combining his skills as a composer and a businessman, he was able to better navigate the overcrowded musical scene of composers in Vienna. His prolific writing can be found in genres such as his 50 symphonies, 40 string quartets, and over 350 works that include the flute. His eight operas found some success in Vienna and eventually Hoffmeister would sell his publishing businesses to companies such as C.F. Peters so that he could focus on composing full-time.

Hoffmeister wrote a number of works for the viola, including the Viola Concerto in D major and 12 Etudes for solo viola. In the genre of string duos, he was prolific in writing duos for the violin and viola. There are a number of opus numbers from Hoffmeister that are string duos for the violin and viola: the 3 Duets, Op.7, 6 Duets, Op.19, and 6 Duets, Op.65. Perhaps as a way to sell the same pieces twice, Hoffmeister included his Op.7 duets as the last three duets of his Op.65, so in total there are 12 original duets written by Hoffmeister for violin and viola.

His Duo for Violin and Viola in G major, Op.7, No.1 is typical of the genre from the Classical period. It starts with a fast Allegro movement where both instruments trade off the solo line with accompanying each other, with a few interesting canonic entrances. This idea of trading off the melody continues into the second movement, Poco Adagio, and the third movement, Rondo. Hoffmeister tried to make both voices equal in this duo and the writing is idiosyncratic to the instruments. One can hear why Hoffmeister was so respected by his peers when listening to this work, as the writing feels natural for both instruments and there are many interesting compositional choices made throughout the piece.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Duo No.1 for Violin and Viola in G major, K.423

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), born just two years after Hoffmeister, composed two of the most famous duos for violin and viola in 1783. These two duos – No.1 in G major, K.423 and No.2 in B-flat major, K.424 – were composed under unusual circumstances with an interesting backstory. Michael Haydn, the brother of Joseph Haydn, was commissioned by the Archbishop Colloredo to write a set of six sonatas for the violin and viola, but became ill

and could not finish the last two works in the set. This made him at risk of not being paid for the commission. Mozart stepped in to complete the set with these two duos and the commissioner couldn't tell that Michael Haydn hadn't composed the last two works. This is especially interesting, as the Archbishop knew Mozart and music very well and employed Mozart to compose works for him, although the two did not always have the best relationship.

It's interesting to speculate that Colloredo's negative behavior towards Mozart may have tempted Mozart to fool him by writing works under his colleague's name. Michael Haydn's style was not significantly different from any other composer at the time, so it would have been easy for Mozart to hide his identity. Either way, Michael Haydn had one of the best jobs in Salzburg as concertmaster, where he worked for 44 years, and it would have benefitted Mozart to help out his friend who was so important to local musical life. Being from Salzburg, Mozart was always interested in having the job of Kapellmeister at the court in Salzburg, but never had the opportunity to get the position. Because of this, he had to freelance most of his life as a composer in Vienna.

While Colloredo was fooled by Mozart, there are important differences between the sonatas for violin and viola by Michael Haydn and the two duos by Mozart. The difference in genre (sonata and duo) is important to note, as the sonatas by Michael Haydn given the solo voice to the violin throughout and leave very little melodic material for the viola. This approach was similar to the six sonatas that Joseph Haydn wrote in Esterhazy, which give the most attention to the violin and relegate the viola to accompanying. While Mozart and both Haydns all composed in a similar musical style, Mozart gave equal voicing to both instruments in his duos, which makes them stand out as exceptional works. The Duo No.1 in G major, K.423 would

have been the first work in the set to give such prominence to the viola. Mozart had previously given the viola as a solo instrument attention in his Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola, but also wrote prominent viola parts in his chamber works, such as the six quintets for string quartet with an extra added viola.

As is typical with string duos from the Classical period, there are three movements, starting with a fast Allegro, a middle Adagio, and ending with a Rondo. Since the viola writing is meant to be equal with that of the violin, there are many long lines and runs of notes that can be challenging for performers. The canonic effects that Mozart used between both instruments is impressive, as they often go undetected upon first listen. The skilled writing of both parts has contributed to it being part of the standard duo repertoire for both instruments. While Michael Haydn was a capable composer, Mozart's compositional virtuosity outperformed Michael Haydn's sonatas for violin and viola when writing this string duo.

Tan Xiaolin – Duet for Violin and Viola (1943)

Tan Xiaolin was born in Shanghai in 1911. After studying music, violin, and pipa at the Shanghai Conservatory, he came to the United States in 1939 to study composition with Paul Hindemith at Yale University. He came to the United States at an unusual time in Chinese history during the Chinese Civil War, predating the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party. When Tan Xiaolin grew up in Shanghai, there was already a number of European musicians active performing Western music in Shanghai. The oldest symphony in China is the Shanghai Symphony, founded in 1879, and during the 1920's Chinese musicians

became to be involved in performing with European immigrants in concerts. Shanghai at the time was rather cosmopolitan, with a number of people from throughout the world doing business there. In this context, Tan learned about both Chinese and European music at the same time. Much of what the Communist Party did to dismantle Western influence in China came after Tan Xiaolin's life when the People's Republic of China was formed in 1949. He died in 1948 at the age of 37 after returning to Shanghai to teach music theory at the Shanghai Conservatory.

Under Hindemith's teachings, Tan learned the modernist techniques of 20th century music that Hindemith cultivated in his music. While Tan Xiaolin's life was brief and there are only a handful of works that survive under his name, they can be considered a unique synthesis of Chinese music and modernist European music. While there are many composers who studied with Hindemith from this time that adopted his style of composing, such as Joseph Ladone, Wilson Osborne, and Yehudi Wyner, Tan Xiaolin was perhaps the only Chinese composition student that he ever had and the only one that was influenced by non-Western music. Tan Xiaolin's instrumental music includes a String Trio, for violin, viola, and cello (1945), the Romance for Viola and Harp (1944), and the Duet for Violin and Viola (1943). He also composed a number of Chinese songs that are still part of the song repertoire in China.

The Duet for Violin and Viola was premiered during his studies at Yale with Tan Xiaolin performing on violin and Paul Hindemith performing on viola. There are five movements to the piece, each with their own unique character and techniques used. The first movement, Allegro vivace, starts with a pentatonic theme in the violin part, evocative of Chinese music, and quickly modulates to different keys in the style of Hindemith's music. Touching on atonality in different

sections, Tan comes back to the same melody a number of times with both instruments. The second movement, Andante, begins with a similar pentatonic melody transformed in the viola part. After the opening section is completed, there are a number of consecutive double stop 5ths heard in both instruments.

The third movement, Scherzo, is the first time that the sound of Chinese instruments is imitated in the violin and viola. The two hand pizzicatos imitate the sound of the pipa being plucked back and forth. The same idea is explored in the fourth movement, Lento. The viola part, played with a mute throughout, is featured as the solo instrument. Tan Xiaolin writes in slides to be played, which imitates the sound of the erhu. Above the melody, the violin plays in double stop harmonics, which sounds like the sheng, a reed wind instrument made with bamboo pipes.

The final movement, Allegro ma non troppo, is an inverted canon in 4/4, but with the entrance displaced by three quarter notes. The result should be an atonal canon on paper, but because the melodic content is written in a pentatonic scale, there are moments of unintentional harmony. Eventually the canon ends and the melodic material from the first movement reappears in the viola, with the violin playing a chromatic accompaniment. The piece is fascinating for its time and Tan Xiaolin's unique musical language is very interesting to look at for its synthesis of influences.

Mark O'Connor – F.C.'s Jig, for violin and viola (1991)

Mark O'Connor (b.1961) is a three time Grammy Award winning violinist and composer who performs both bluegrass and classical music. His music is generally described as being crossover, combining bluegrass and classical together. He has recorded over 45 albums of music and widely performs his own music around the world. He started performing fiddle music from the age of 12 and ended up winning a number of bluegrass competitions in his teenage years. Outside of performing on the violin, he has also won awards performing on the guitar and mandolin. He has recorded with other crossover artists such as Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and Sam Bush and recorded the albums "Appalachia Waltz" and "Appalachia Journey" with Yo-Yo Ma and Edgar Meyer, which both spent years on top of the best-selling Classical albums list.

Widely active in promoting fiddle music and technique to young players, he has written his own technical method called "The O'Connor Method – A New American School of String Playing". The 10 volume set of method books is meant to be a challenge to other beginning method books, such as the Suzuki method. Mark O'Connor's books focus on performing American musical styles as well as classical techniques, without only focusing on European classical music.

His composition "F.C.'s Jig" is an adaptation from material that can be found in his Fiddle Concerto from 1992 (F.C. standing for "Fiddle Concerto"). Mark O'Connor has made different versions of this duo over the years, in versions for violin with another violinist, viola, or cello. On the album "Appalachia Waltz", Mark O'Connor recorded the duo with Yo-Yo Ma. With his wife, Maggie O'Connor, he has performed this jig many times and have made recordings of it.

The duo is a light and fast jig that's meant to emulate the feeling of Appalachian fiddle music. One interesting compositional decision made by Mark O'Connor is to change between

the standard 6/8 bars by adding occasional 9/8 bars throughout the jig. In both instruments, he tried to write passages that sound virtuosic and impressive, but actually lay well on the instruments in a natural way. Many of the notated triplets of 5 and 4 in 6/8 sound like ornamental runs, harkening back to O'Connor's influence from Appalachian fiddle music.