

THE MOST WONDERFUL SORT OF HARMONY:
A DUO RECITAL

by
Emily Torkelson

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the School of Music
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THE MOST WONDERFUL SORT OF HARMONY:
A DUO RECITAL

Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Juliette Herlin, D.M.A.
School of Music

Elisabeth Adkins, D.M.A.
School of Music

Wendy Williams, Ph.D.
John V. Roach Honors College

ABSTRACT

Within the world of classical music, many forms of collaboration and ensemble exist, with different demands, repertoire, challenges, and triumphs. For this honors project, my colleague and I have embarked on a journey to learn, rehearse, and perform a recital of duets for violin and cello, learning about the specific challenges of such an instrumentation and an intimate collaborative process along the way. Alongside our end goal of a performance on May 4, 2024, we also intend to learn about the composers who wrote the pieces we chose to learn and the ways in which we must interact with these composers and their works in order to perform as effectively as possible. Our recital program, a link to the recital livestream, and my own program notes, along with a bibliography, are submitted as my thesis.



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

Emily Torkelson, violoncello
Alexia Wixom, violin

Saturday, May 4, 2024

2:00

Van Cliburn Concert Hall

Program

Eight Pieces for Violin and Cello

Prelude

Gavotte

Berceuse

Canzonetta

Intermezzo

Impromptu

Scherzo

Etude

Reinhold Glière
(1875-1956)

Two Pieces for Viola (or Violin) and Cello

Lullaby

Grotesque

Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)

Three Dances in the Old Style

Andantino Scherzando

Andante

Andante

Lera Auerbach
(b. 1973)

Passacaglia

G. Handel, J. Halvorsen
(1685-1759, 1864-1935)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Departmental Honors in Music. Emily Torkelson is a student of Dr. Juliette Herlin and
Alexia Wixom is a student of Dr. Elisabeth Adkins.

The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.
Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

Program Notes

Collaboration lies at the heart of what I do as a musician and performer. Music is, by nature, inherently collaborative, and classical music explores many of those different aspects of collaboration, from symphonic to solo. Not only is collaboration fundamental to the act of making music, but it is also one of my favorite parts of being a performer. Some of my most fulfilling memories and experiences in music come from working with incredible colleagues and friends to create something beautiful. To that end, I wanted my honors project to reflect that love and that emphasis that I myself place on the collaborative process by working with my dear friend and colleague, Alexia Wixom, to further explore the opportunities and the limits of chamber music.

When I say that collaboration is at the heart of what we do, I mean that in a very broad sense, across many different kinds of classical music. The most obvious is chamber music—small, conductorless groups learning how to play together, breathe together, lead together, and create one unified sound together. Chamber music itself is a broad term, allowing for as few as two people and as many as a small orchestra. But I would argue that every form of classical music is a kind of collaborative process, from massive symphonies down to solo playing. Large, conducted ensembles still need to work together and collaborate to create the music they play. While the conductor is certainly an important part of the ensemble, so are the principal players in each section, who often work together to create a sense of chamber music in the conductor's circle. There is a clearly delineated hierarchy within the symphony, which allows for communication to occur efficiently, but still allows for people sitting in the back of a section to have a voice and important role. Finally, symphonic playing works best when the members of the orchestras view their roles as collaborative, putting aside their individual egos to create

something striking and bigger than themselves. For these reasons, orchestral playing can be the most fulfilling or the most frustrating experience I have ever had—being able to trust fifty other people to create some of the most beautiful and enduring pieces of music the world has ever seen is a privilege, while trying to trust fifty other people can feel futile, and an exercise in frustration when others do not seem to hold the same passion for the music.

More controversial, perhaps, is my claim that solo playing is also collaborative. As a cellist, some of the most important works in our repertoire are for solo cello, such as the Bach cello suites, which are universally beloved. Alongside these, we have many other striking works for solo cello: caprices by Pjatti and Dall'Abaco, suites by Britten, sonatas by Ligeti and Kodaly, works that highlight the virtuosity of the performer and the limits of the cello. In any solo piece, the performer must grapple with their relationship to the audience. Without a pianist or a group of collaborators onstage, the performer takes the energy and anticipation the audience provides, using it to help build their world of sound. In solo performance more than any other, the musical role silence plays is a crucial element of working with the audience to create something striking, dramatic, and beautiful.

The violin/cello duo, then, lies in a murky region between solo playing and traditional chamber music. Aspects of chamber music exist in the fact that there is another onstage collaborator: we must work together through discussion, rehearsal, and compromise to feel time in the same way, breathe together, lead together, and find ways to blend our sound. At the same time, the duo is intimate enough that we must also view the audience as a true collaborator in our performance, taking their energy and letting it guide us through our own collaboration onstage. This dynamic push-and-pull relationship

creates a feeling onstage that is simply electric, leading our recital to be one of the most exhilarating performances I have ever given.

Eight Pieces for Violin and Cello, Op. 39 by R. Glière

An often-overlooked figure in today's classical music world, Reinhold Glière (1875-1956) was a highly successful Russian composer in his own day, winning competitions and receiving awards throughout his career. His music is highly inspired by the Romanticism of his youth; in fact, one of his teachers was the successful and incredibly Romantic Anton Arensky¹, a contemporary of Tchaikovsky. Despite these ties back to an era that had all but disappeared, Glière's own work never sounds stale or uninteresting, with lush harmonies and charming melodies taking the listener on a journey in as little as a few measures of music. Glière would eventually become the teacher of a young Sergei Prokofiev,² another master of vibrant, sumptuous melodies and harmonies.

Although Glière wrote in many genres, from operas and symphonies down to the much more intimate works, he gave special attention to pairs of players, lavishing special attention on cellists. Alongside these eight pieces for violin and cello, he wrote ten duets for two cellos, a ballade for cello and piano, twelve album leaves for cello and piano, and twelve duets for two violins. Of these works, the eight pieces for violin and cello are the

¹ Joanne Talbot, "Glière: Complete Duets with Cello: Eight Duets for violin and cello op.39, Ballade for cello and piano op.4, Ten Duets for two cellos op.53, Twelve Album Leaves for cello and piano op.51," *The Strad*, December 4, 2013, <https://www.thestrad.com/gliere-complete-duets-with-cello-eight-duets-for-violin-and-cello-op39-ballade-for-cello-and-piano-op4-ten-duets-for-two-cellos-op53-twelve-album-leaves-for-cello-and-piano-op51/2627.article>.

² "Obscure Music Monday: Glière's 8 Pieces for Violin and Cello," *Performers Edition*, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.performersedition.com/content/obscure-music-monday-glieres-8-pieces-for-violin-and-cello/>.

earliest, dating back to 1909 and thus prior to the fall of the Russian empire and the ensuing tumult.³

While other works in our program will certainly seem more daring and inventive, these eight pieces are a phenomenal place to dip our toes into the world of duo playing, as it were. Ever the traditionalist, Glière primarily keeps his melodies in the violin, reserving the cello for basslines. Frequently in these eight pieces, the cello spends much of its time outlining the chord progressions the violin plays over. Such clearly delineated roles are not always easy to find in chamber music, and it is a hearkening to much earlier times, when the violin was the primary solo instrument and cello used almost exclusively in Baroque basso continuo—one of the two instruments that would make up the basslines of any piece.

The eight pieces that make up this work are all short and sweet, with an extra emphasis on both those elements. Each movement is three minutes or shorter, and the melodies remain charming and playful without ever wandering into the saccharine. We begin, aptly enough, with a prelude, in which a pleasant (but highly chromatic) melody passes off between the pair—first in the cello, then the violin—as the accompanying instrument plays double stops to fill out the texture and give us a sense of the harmonic changes, some of which are slow to appear, instead treating the listener to the gently intensifying G pedal in the double stops. The second movement is a gavotte—a Baroque dance with a rustic feeling and, in this version, a playful quality. Glière adds interest in the form of ornaments throughout, and inserts a “Musette” B section of a more lyrical quality to go alongside the bouncy, playful gavotte. Next, Glière gives us a delicate, airy

³ Audrey Chen, “Program Notes,” Newburgh Chamber Music, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.newburghchambermusic.org/copy-of-live-concert-stream-2>.

berceuse, a lullaby played *con sordino* (with a mute) on both instruments. The berceuse is the first movement in which the violin is relegated to melody the whole time, and the cello likewise relegated to the accompaniment. The fourth movement, a canzonetta (a movement styled after singing), introduces more complex collaborative moments, especially in the rhythmic elements. Despite this, the melody remains simple, light, and strikingly beautiful.

The second half of the eight pieces becomes gradually more difficult in various ways. The intermezzo features some of Glière's more daring harmonic adventures and challenging accompanimental figures while also departing from the simple, airy melodies of the previous two movements. The sixth movement, an impromptu, has extremely quick transitions between its long lines and more soaring melody and the chromatic accompanimental figures. The next movement, a scherzo, demonstrates Glière's late-Romantic harmonic tendencies by playing the main motives in as many distantly related keys as we can find. This penultimate movement is triumphant and bold, and feels a little like the proper finale of the piece. The actual final movement, titled "Etude" (meaning "study") is a little less like eating dessert after a meal and more like eating a little post-dessert snack. The etude is the most seemingly virtuosic, but it is ultimately lighthearted and silly, giving the audience a treat at the end of the more heartfelt and delicate prior movements.

Although these eight pieces seem remarkably simple in comparison to some of the other pieces on our program, it is through light, simple pieces like these that we can begin to learn how to work together in such an intimate setting as a duo. In more complex pieces, it is easy to become complacent in simply learning our own individual parts and playing them at the same time, rather than telling a cohesive story as one unit. The

simplicity of these pieces forces us as performers and collaborators to really think about the most fundamental aspects of our collaboration, such as tuning, vibrato, and bow speed. It is through these simple pieces that we find our group sound, which is the most important aspect of any sort of chamber collaboration, from a duo to a full-fledged orchestra.

Two Pieces for Viola (or Violin) and Cello by Rebecca Clarke

Continuing in our theme of overlooked composers, the next work on our program is the *Two Pieces for Viola (or Violin) and Cello* by the British-American composer Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979). Clarke was an immensely talented violist and composer with support early on from her family to support her childhood inclinations towards music; unfortunately, she would not see widespread success despite her composition awards, accolades, and recognitions. Her family withdrew her from music lessons as a teenager following her teacher's attempted proposal to her, and she abandoned music entirely for many years to become a nanny.⁴ Of the nearly one hundred pieces she wrote, only a few were published in her own lifetime, and it is through the dedication of a few devotees that any of the others have seen the light of day.⁵ Despite these many obstacles Clarke had to overcome in order to pursue music, she remained passionately fond of composing and performing, making ends meet as a violist for a time and winning first prize in a competition for her viola sonata.⁶ Clearly inspired by the sounds of classical music she heard growing up, Clarke's music sounds like an expansive amalgamation of

⁴ "Her Life," The Rebecca Clarke Society, accessed March 24, 2024, <https://www.rebeccaclarke.org/her-life/>.

⁵ "Rebecca Clarke," The Rebecca Clarke Society, accessed March 24, 2024, <https://www.rebeccaclarke.org/>.

⁶ Nelson, Trevor, "Composer Biography," Music by Women, accessed March 24, 2024, <https://www.musicbywomen.org/composer/rebecca-clarke/>.

German Romanticism and French Impressionism, with her own personal touches often leaning towards a more pastoral sound.

Clarke's duo is divided into two movements: the first titled "Lullaby," and the second titled "Grotesque." The lullaby is simple and sweet, reminiscent of the berceuse or canzonetta of the Glière before, with the cello and violin trading the melody and open accompanimental figures. Unlike Glière, Clarke utilizes extended techniques in both movements throughout, indicating moments for harmonics, left hand pizzicato, and more interplay and exchange between the two voices. In the lullaby, the cello takes the simultaneous role of melody and accompaniment in a tender lullaby accompanied by the cellist's own left hand pizzicato. Meanwhile, the violinist has double stops that are more challenging to tune than those found in the Glière, with thirds and fourths making appearances throughout. The second movement, the "grotesque," is a faster, wilder movement, filled with dramatic color changes. This movement has some humor in it, coupled with a folksy charm that makes it undeniably entertaining both to play and to hear.

In collaboration, the two movements are tricky in aspects of timing and showmanship. Clarke has many moments in both with tempo changes—ritardandos, tenutos, and even fermatas placed over the measure lines—all of which serve to give both movements a much more elastic sense of tempo. In pieces like these, making these dramatic changes part of the music rather than some sort of gimmick can be challenging—and finding ways to incorporate the silences that some of these bring can be even more challenging. In this step of the collaborative process, the Clarke duo demands both a constant dialogue between the two performers and requires us to continue to

breathe together and lead together, acting as one cohesive unit rather than two separate musicians.

Three Dances in the Old Style, Op. 54 by Lera Auerbach

As the only living composer on our program, I have chosen to insert Lera Auerbach's (b. 1973) personal biography as found on her website: "A renaissance artist for modern times, Lera Auerbach is a widely recognized conductor, pianist, and composer. She is also an award-winning poet and an exhibited visual artist. All of her work is interconnected as part of a cohesive and comprehensive artistic worldview.

"Lera Auerbach has become one of today's most sought-after and exciting creative voices. Her performances and music are featured in the world's leading stages – from Vienna's Musikverein and London's Royal Albert Hall to New York's Carnegie Hall and Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center.

"Auerbach's exquisitely crafted, emotional, and boldly imaginative music reached global audiences. Orchestral collaborations include the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, Munich's Bayerisches Staatsorchester, Staatskapelle Dresden, and Vienna's ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester, among many others. Auerbach's works for orchestra are performed by the world's leading conductors, including Manfred Honeck, Christoph Eschenbach, Alan Gilbert, Neeme Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Charles Dutoit, Andris Nelsons, Osmo Vänskä, Hannu Lintu, and Marin Alsop, to mention only a few.

"During the 22-23 season, Lera Auerbach performed concerts with Hilary Hahn at Wigmore Hall in London and Boulez Saal in Berlin. She also conducted Tchaikovsky's

5th Symphony with Enescu Philharmonic in the subscription series, as well as played and conducted Mozart's *Piano Concerto K466*.

“Other recent season highlights also included WienModern's 3.5-hour production of *Demons & Angels* with Auerbach as conductor. Washington D.C.'s National Symphony premiered her 4th Symphony “*ARCTICA*” – a work commissioned by the National Geographic Society. Also, her *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra “Diary of a Madman”* commissioned by the Munich Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra, and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, received its global premieres with cellist Gautier Capuçon.

“Her 4th Violin Concerto “*NYx: Fractured Dreams*” was commissioned and premiered by the New York Philharmonic with Alan Gilbert and Leonidas Kavakos, and the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra premiered her symphonic poem *Eve's Lament* with Marin Alsop. In 2022, the Nuremberg State Philharmonic presented the world premiere of *Symphony No. 5 “Paradise Lost”* conducted by Joana Mallwitz, and her *Symphony No. 6 ‘Vessels of Light,’* a commission of Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, was unveiled in Lithuania as part of the city's Cultural Capital of Europe celebrations and received its American premiere at Carnegie Hall on April 19, 2023.

“Amare at the Hague will present a two-week Auerbach Festival in October 2023, including all aspects of her artistic offerings, conducting, piano performance, composition, poetry, and visual art.

“Her music is championed and recorded by today's most prominent classical performers, including violinists Gidon Kremer, Leonidas Kavakos, Daniel Hope, Hilary Hahn, Vadim Gluzman, Vadim Repin, Julian Rachlin; cellists Alisa Weilerstein, Gautier

Capuçon, Alban Gerhardt, David Finckel; violists Kim Kashkashian, Nobuko Imai, and Lawrence Power, and many others.

“Auerbach is equally prolific in literature and the visual arts. She incorporates these forms into her professional creative process, often simultaneously expressing ideas visually, in words, and through music. She has published three books of poetry in Russian, and her first English-language book, *Excess of Being* – in which she explores the rare form of aphorisms. Her next book, an illustrated work for children, *A is for Oboe*, published by Penguin Random House, won Audiofile Best Audiobook 2022. She is the recipient of the 2021 Marsh Hawk Press – Robert Creely Memorial Award for her English poetry manuscript “Morning Music.

“Auerbach has been drawing and painting all her life as part of her creative process. Her visual art is exhibited regularly, included in private collections, and represented by leading galleries.

“Lera Auerbach holds multiple degrees from the Juilliard School in New York and the Hannover University of Music, Drama, and Media in Germany. Her teachers include Milton Babbitt, Rosalyn Tureck, Joseph Kalichstein, and Einar Steen-Nøkleberg. The World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, selected her in 2007 as a Young Global Leader, and since 2014, she has served as a Cultural Leader. Boosey and Hawkes / Sikorski publish her music, and recordings are available on ECM, Deutsche Grammophon, Nonesuch, Sony Classical, Alpha Classics, BIS, Cedille, and many other labels.”⁷

⁷ “Biography,” Lera Auerbach, updated 2024, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://leraauerbach.com/biography/>.

Auerbach has an extensive musical output, including two operas, fifteen ballets, six symphonies, and near countless other works for many different instrumentations, from solo to orchestral. Her three dances in the old style, written in 2000, are elegant and charming, showing a sense of both style and humor throughout the short movements. Throughout, elements like glissandi, trills, flautando, false harmonics, sul ponticello, and other techniques are employed to create a wide range of colors and contrasts, from an intimate warmth to a more eerie feeling. Auerbach's three dances feel like a natural sequel to Clarke's two pieces; both works are short, both use similar extended techniques, and both require more precision in the collaboration between the two performers. The sweet, the warm, the serious, the creepy, and the funny all live side-by-side in these pieces, and switching characters to create a compelling narrative can be deceptively challenging in some of the off-kilter interplay between the two voices.

Passacaglia, Op. 20, No. 2 by G.F. Handel and J. Halvorsen

In a fitting end to our collaborative recital, we turn at last to a product of a collaboration spanning both countries and centuries: the famous *Passacaglia* by German-British Baroque composer George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) and Norwegian Romantic violinist-composer Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935). This spirit of collaboration and transformation is at the heart of what we do in the world of performance, and in our recital, we can show this in a beautifully apt way by further transforming Halvorsen's reimagining of Handel's work into a different instrumentation than Halvorsen's original vision.

Originally part of a harpsichord suite by George Frideric Handel, Johan Halvorsen's reimagining of this *Passacaglia* has turned it into one of the most popular and

enduring works in the duo repertoire.⁸ Halvorsen originally scored the work for violin and viola, but it is most commonly performed on violin and cello, with the lower register of the cello providing a stronger bass than the viola. However, its popularity as a chamber work has seen the work arranged for other duo combinations, including two violins, two cellos, and violin and double bass, among others.

At its heart, the passacaglia as a genre is a set of variations, held together by an ostinato pattern in the bass, known as ground bass.⁹ In the Handel-Halvorsen Passacaglia, the cello asserts the ostinato pattern in the beginning, then joins the violin in a virtuosic back and forth that showcases a wide range of different techniques, including pizzicato, ponticello, double stops, spiccato, and saltando. While neither voice outright restates the ostinato, that ground bass pattern is easily identifiable throughout all of the variations, creating a satisfying cohesion over the course of the piece. The passacaglia builds on itself, finding different textures in the different techniques, employing different tempi and even double stops for a lush, full texture. Finally, the passacaglia reaches a moment of ultimate drama in a *con fuoco* variation that extends the harmonic progression through sixteenth notes and double stops. In our interpretation of this work, my colleague and I choose to further heighten the drama of this work in a rare deviation from the composer's directions, starting the *con fuoco* at a much slower, more stately tempo, then accelerating and becoming progressively wilder as the piece builds to its final cadence. Finally, in what could sound a little like a musical joke to our modern ears, the piece ends on a Picardy third, substituting the dark sounds of G minor that we have heard throughout the whole piece with a bright, open, and triumphant G major chord.

⁸ Lillian Matchett, "Inside the Music: Halvorsen's Passacaglia," Colburn School, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.colburnschool.edu/inside-music-halvorsens-passacaglia/>.

⁹ Kai Christiansen, "Passacaglia (After Handel)," Earsense, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.earsense.org/chamber-music/Johan-Halvorsen-Passacaglia/>.

One of the most difficult aspects of the Handel-Halvorsen *Passacaglia* is the virtuosity the piece demands of both performers. The extended techniques, difficult runs of notes, and the complete change of character at the drop of a hat all work together to create something that is both physically tiring to play and incredibly exhilarating. The physical demands are also supplemented by the collaborative demands this sort of piece requires: to truly play this passacaglia well, the performers must be so in sync as to be one person. It is, then, appropriate to end our recital program with such a piece, one that demonstrates our individual skill on our instruments and our ability to not just play together, but to breathe, move, and tell a story in the most wonderful sort of harmony.

Acknowledgements

Without the help of many different people, this honors project would never have come into being. Firstly, I want to thank my collaborator, Alexia Wixom, for also feeling strongly about chamber music and agreeing to explore this well of incredible repertoire alongside me. Secondly, my honors committee: Dr. Juliette Herlin, Dr. Elisabeth Adkins, and Dr. Wendy Williams. Dr. Williams taught one of my honors classes a little over a year ago, and it ended up being one of the best academic experiences I have had at TCU. Dr. Adkins is a kind role model, who has always had thoughtful, helpful feedback whenever she has listened to me play, whether in a coaching, a lesson, or in my jury. Dr. Herlin, my own cello professor, has (with as little exaggeration as possible) changed my life. I would not be the person I am today without her, and I would certainly not be the cellist I am today without her. Her guidance and support have made a world of difference to me throughout the three years we have worked together. Finally, I want to thank all the people I have ever collaborated with in chamber music over the years. They are far too many to count, between the various traditional ensembles, my semester in Collegium

Musicum, and my years in the TCU Cello Ensemble. If I had not gotten the robust experiences in traditional chamber music that I did, this recital would have been a poor representation of what chamber music can be.

Recital Link

The livestream of our recital can be found through the following link. A recording can also be made available upon request, if necessary.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/nxiau-LJ-0U?feature=shared>

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