

HARMONIZING STRINGS: EXPLORING VIRTUOSITY
AND EXPRESSIVITY IN A FUSION OF
VIOLIN AND CELLO DUOS

by

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ABSTRACT

The art of chamber music focuses on the collaboration and connection between a small group of musicians. It is my belief that every musician craves intimacy and connection, whether it's from their audience, or from a fellow artist. Chamber music is arguably one of the most serious kinds of music because of the intimate connections formed by its very function - to connect through music. In fact, it is my belief that the smaller the chamber group the more intimate the connection has to be in order to create a convincing performance. This paper is written in relation to a joint Honors Recital performed by a colleague and I. In my portion of the project, I will begin by providing a brief history of chamber music and duets, and then discuss my collaboration experience with Emily Torkelson, a friend and cellist. I will lastly provide the program notes written for the program and discuss the history of musical elements of the pieces programed. Throughout the paper I will analyze the roles of both the violin and the cello since each composer utilizes the voices of the violin and cello differently, carefully considering the melodic roles, textual variety, dialogue and interaction, balance and blend, expressive techniques, and partnerships of both instruments.

PROGRAM

- I. 8 Pieces for Violin and Cello (1909) – Reinhold Glière**
 - Prélude*
 - Gavotte*
 - Berceuse*
 - Canzonetta*
 - Intermezzo*
 - Impromptu*
 - Scherzo*
 - Etude*

- II. Three Dances in The Old Style, Op. 54 (2000) – Lera Auerbach**
 - Andantino scherzando*
 - Andante*
 - Andante*

- III. Two Pieces for Viola (or Violin) and Cello (2002) - Rebecca Clarke**
 - Lullaby*
 - Grotesque*

- IV. Passacaglia (1894) – Handel-Halvorsen**

Violin and Cello Duets: A Brief Overview

The term “chamber” was first used in the 16th century to define soft vocal ensemble music that was performed in a private aristocrat’s residence. The music performed during this time was secular and typically avoided by the church until about the end of the 17th century, where “court” and “chamber” music ended up becoming synonymous. By the end of the 18th century C.F. Daniel Schubart (1784) regarded chamber music as primarily instrumental, either solistic or orchestral, and it now encompasses both secular and sacred music (Baron, 2). Chamber duets were no different, seemingly belonging to the private quarters of the performers themselves and not to any public sphere (Baron, 197).

In the eighteenth century, duets were typically written for pedagogical reasons and are still currently used in that way by string teachers to help beginners with intonation, rhythm, and basic style. The students would typically play the easier, first violin part, while the teacher would play the harder, second violin part to provide accompaniment. On the other hand, duets were also a way for musicians with varying skill to informally get together and enjoyably pass the time. Because duets began in the privacy of one’s home, the ensemble could not be influenced by pressures of a listening, criticizing audience, and both virtuosic duets and easy duets could be performed without embarrassment (Baron, 197).

Since the sixteenth century, the pedagogical purpose of duets was the most important element. After 1780 there was a flourish of duet compositions that served the same function but also with many differences. There was a substantial market in the amateur string players of Paris, London, Amsterdam, Vienna, and other European countries. Hayden’s pupil, Ignaz Pleyel wrote many of his own duets for market along with Franz Anton Hoffmeister, an amateur himself, who also wrote duets for the market. Other composers like Franz Krommer wrote duets, but with a

slight change (Baron, 197). The first violin part was now the more difficult part while the second violin part not only provided accompaniment, but participated in the themes and motives of the piece as well. It wasn't until Giovanni Mane Jarnowick that violin duets with the accompaniment of another instrument became popular. His Piece, *Duo Favorit* for violin and cello was the only piece that had both instruments as concertante, meaning they performed equally with one another.

String duets were very popular towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century. However, they were no longer a "serious type of composition" (Baron, 280). Duets had become purely pedagogical after 1830, but many of the serious duets from before have continued to be practiced by violinists of varying skill. By the nineteenth century, there was a tendency to focus on the individual duet by making it lengthier and more difficult, as opposed to the earlier duets which were typically published in groups of six (Baron, 281).

In my opinion, baroque and classical composers typically have an advantage when working with two string instruments because they are familiar with creating assuming bass lines with predictable chord progressions. Their music also consists of clear and concise formal structures that follow an established set of conventions for creating thematic developments and repetitions. Chromaticism and dissonance were not common and were only used for expressive purposes.

Baroque and classical compositions also utilized smaller ensembles and limited instrumentation compared to the expanded orchestras of the romantic period. It's also important to note that baroque string instruments have noticeable differences in their production than their modern counterparts. Baroque violinists and cellists typically perform in the comfortable ranges of the instrument and the instrument itself reflects the preference with a shorter finger board.

Even though gut strings were harder to play on, they were still preferred because musicians could produce a deep, rounded sound.

In comparison, romantic and modern works typically expand traditional formal structures and elongate movements. Hybrid forms and unconventional structures are also more common which result in compositions that are less predictable in their organization. In a duo setting, romantic and modern composers need one of the instruments, or both, to provide more harmonic structure than the other because of the unpredictability of their chord progressions. In order to achieve a fuller, harmonic structure, composers typically write in double-stops or four-note chords to fill the empty space in the musical progressions.

Furthermore, the instruments have evolved, allowing greater versatility for the musicians. Both instruments benefit from longer finger boards, enabling them to navigate a wider range demanded by their repertoire. Meanwhile, innovations for the violin, like the chin and shoulder rests, enhance comfort as musicians scope out the range of their instruments. Cellos now utilize a long metal endpin that, like the violin, allow for greater flexibility. Additionally, the use of synthetic strings gives the modern instruments a louder, brighter sound that is often favored in romantic and contemporary compositions.

The Collaborative Process

Throughout the program you will notice just how important it is for Emily and I to connect with one another. String duets are supposedly less complicated than performing in an ensemble with two or more musicians; However, there were times when it was difficult to achieve a purely homogenous sound between us. The lack of a tempered keyboard in this program meant that Emily and I had to spend most of our rehearsal time tuning to each other, and running the pieces very slowly.

String duets have relatively thin textures and tend to utilize double-stops to create fuller textures and create tension. Every piece in our program had moments of tension that utilized chords and consisted of either one instrument, or both, playing chords simultaneously. It was those “fuller” spots in the Glière, Auerbach, Clarke, and Handel-Halvorsen that we found ourselves having to focus on and communicate with each other more in order to solidify the harmonic progressions.

String instruments can also create an illusion of “fullness” by utilizing embellishments and a variety of techniques. Both the violin and cello are directed by their scores to utilize tools such as a mute, and specific techniques that create the illusion of fullness and add character that is not achievable with a keyboard. Common techniques heard throughout this program involve spiccato, ricochet, sul ponticello, harmonics, tremolo, sul tasto, double stops, arco, and pizzicato. Furthermore, strings also utilize grace notes, glissandi, and other embellishments to create that fullness in texture and keep the music interesting.

In the program, the roles of the violin and cello greatly differ in each piece. You will see that both the violin and cello are typically used as melodic instruments with melodies

intertwining between the two parts. You will also see the cello doubling up as a bass instrument or the violin providing harmonic and rhythmic support as the cello has the melody.

It is not uncommon for string duets to fill-in, apply, or completely disregard harmonies underneath their melodic lines. Many composers also have previous knowledge or performance experience with the piano and are simply trying to alter the composition in a way that better suits the string pairing. If a composer desires a string duet to be fuller, then an element of technical ability comes in with the musicians performing the piece. There then becomes more of an art quality to the piece, with the musicians needing to become more virtuosic in order to appropriately perform what is demanded from them from the repertoire.

The less demanding of the duet composition, the less material the musicians will be given, which usually results in the lack of harmonic analysis on the theory side of things. When there is less material that is comprehensible, there is less harmonic analysis available to the musicians performing the piece.

Program Notes

Reinhold Glière: 8 Pieces for Violin and Cello, Op. 39 (1909)

Reinhold Glière (1875-1956) was a Soviet composer, of German and Polish descent, who was noted for incorporating folk music elements from several Eastern Soviet republics. He attended the Moscow Conservatory – where he studied violin, composition, and music theory with many notable composers such as Anton Arensky and Sergei Taneyev. As a student of Arensky and Taneyev, it's no surprise that Glière's music is steeped in Russian Romanticism. His study with Taneyev in particular, reinforced a strong skill in counterpoint that allowed his duos to be so artfully constructed.

Glière wrote *Eight Pieces for Violin and Cello, Op. 39* just after returning from Berlin. The piece itself is rather pastoral and comforting and showcases the peasant routes of dance songs in the form of folksongs and improvisations. Glière, being somewhat of a traditionalist allows the violin to dominate melodically, with the cello often consigned to a harmonic role; However, both parts have plenty of double-stops to perform. The piece begins with a rather nefarious, or anticipatory opening section. The “Prelude” starts off mysteriously with the violin coming in on pulsating eighth notes while the cello plays a haunting melody which the violin later repeats. The “Gavotte” is a light-hearted dance in A major that could easily have been written during the Baroque Era. The sudden change to A minor in the “Musette” B section is more lyrical and sprinkled with ornaments throughout. The double stop writing is very reminiscent of the Renaissance hurdy gurdy. The movement overall is prim and proper sounding, as if right out of the Baroque or Classical eras. There is a timeless, melancholy quality to the third movement of the set. The sweet, peaceful melody of the “Berceuse,” or *lullaby*, is played exclusively by the violin and set against an undulating cello accompaniment playing an ostinato

of sorts. The fourth movement, the “Canzonetta,” draws on the Russian Romantic tradition and is styled after singing. Similar to the Berceuse, this movement features the violin playing a deeply passionate, and intense melodic part while the Cello plays undulating triplets underneath the melody.

The fifth movement, the “Intermezzo,” is short and waltz-like in character. The harmonies become more interesting as the accompaniment figures in the cello part twirl around the drunken beats of the violin. On the other hand, the sixth movement, the “Impromptu,” is angst-ridden and tortured as the cello earns its spotlight with the melody and the violin accompanies chromatically. The seventh movement, the “Scherzo,” is mostly joyful and triumphant despite its slew of double stops and hemiola figures. This movement in particular highlights Glière’s late-romantic harmonies as the main motive is played in many distantly related keys throughout the piece. Perhaps giving us a glimpse into this work’s original motivation, the final movement, titled “Etude,” is a fitting, virtuosic, and ultimately gentle ending to set. Both instruments perform incredibly fast sixteenth notes throughout the piece before ending with a quiet and cheeky set of pizzicatos. Finally, the cello gets its spotlight, being the main, melodic driving force in the piece.

Glière wrote his 8 pieces for violin and cello fairly early on in his career, prior to the tumult of the revolution that led composers like Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky to flee the country. The duets are a set of miniatures, each with their own charming characters that are deceptively simple to learn and perform.

Rebecca Clarke: Two Pieces for Viola (or Violin) and Cello (2002)

British-American composer Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) was born in Harrow, Middlesex of an American father and a German mother. She spent much of her adult life in the United States, claiming both English and American citizenship. Chamber music was encouraged in the family and she started playing violin at the age of eight. In 1902, she entered the Royal Academy of Music until she became Stanford's first female pupil at the Royal College of Music.

To support her studies, she began an active career on the viola, and in 1912 she became the first woman ever to be hired in a professional orchestra, playing the Queen's Hall Orchestra. From 1919-1924, she toured extensively around the world, primarily to Hawaii and the British Colonies, after which she settled in London and became a well-known chamber music performer. With the onset on World War II, she moved to the United States where she re-devoted herself to composing while she supported herself by working as a nanny.

Rebecca Clarke wrote nearly one hundred pieces but the majority of her music was never published (*One Moment Please*). Out of the few pieces released to the public, her sound was heavily influenced by the classical music she heard and performed growing up, often showcasing a mix of pastoral sounds with romantic tendencies.

The *Two Pieces for Viola (or violin) and Cello* showcase Clarke's English musical influences and her Romantic and early 20th century style. The piece consists of two contrasting movements labeled "Lullaby" and "Grotesque." The Lullaby requires both instrumentalists to be muted, overall creating a soft and sweet feel. The violin starts the piece with the melody with the cello playing its role as a bass instrument, keeping time with steady quarter notes and the occasional triplet motif. For a moment the violin and cello switch roles, allowing the cello to have its limelight with the melody as the violin plays gentle eighth notes in a supporting role. The Grotesque is the complete opposite of the lullaby, instructing the musicians to take off their

mutes and be more dramatic throughout the piece. There is a charming, humorous feel throughout the movement as the musicians are forced to change timbres, colors and moods quickly between each section. The movement is entertaining to both the musicians and the audience as they hear the same motif played in different dynamics and techniques (at one point the motive is performed *sul ponticello*, creating a grating, raspy effect towards the end of the piece). Despite the buildup of the piece, the Grotesque ends the two pieces with a quite pizzicato from both the violin and the cello.

Lera Auerbach: Three Dances in The Old Style, Op. 54 (2000)

Russian-American Composer, concert pianist, poet and visual artist Lera Auerbach (b. 1973) has become one of today's most sought after and exciting creative voices. She has published more than 100 works for orchestra, opera and ballet, as well as choral and chamber music and her intelligent and emotional style has connected her to audiences around the world. Her work is championed by today's leading performers, including violinists Gidon Kremer, Leonidas Kavakos, and many others (Biography).

Auerbach is equally prolific in literature and the visual arts, especially painting and sculpture. She incorporates these forms into her professional creative process, simultaneously expressing ideas visually, in words, and through music. Her paintings are often exhibited at performances of her musical work and have been reproduced in magazines, CDs and books.

Auerbach's *Three Dances in the Old Style, Op. 54*, is a piece with three short movements. The names of the movements are *Andantino scherzando*, *Andante*, and *Andante*. Together they total up to about 4 minutes long with each individual movement no longer than 2 minutes. Throughout the movements you will hear both the violin and cello use techniques and

embellishments to create a humorous, yet charming feel. Both employ glissandi, trills, flautando, false harmonics, and sul ponticello to create a range of colors, contrasts and moods. The movements will feel warm, eerie, dance-like, and fun to both the audience and the performers as Auerbach experiments with unique harmonic progressions to create an entertaining story.

Handel-Halvorsen: Passacaglia (1894)

The Passacaglia with its attribution to both Handel and Halvorsen is a famous virtuoso piece for violin and cello (or other arrangements of string instruments). The piece was published by Norwegian composer Johan Halvorsen in 1894 and it was based on the final movement from George Frideric Handel's *Harpsichord Suite in G Minor (HWV 432)* (1720).

Handel's *Harpsichord Suite in G Minor* was a Baroque giant with a total of 12 variations comprising the work; although Handel's original work contained 15 variations. Handel Composed numerous harpsichord suites comprising dance movements, sometime concluding with the traditional Baroque passacaglia, a term originally referencing a Spanish "street dance," despite the earliest examples being Italian (Christiansen). The passacaglia is a baroque-flavored composition that briefly became popular towards the ends of the 19th century. The most noticeable feature of the passacaglia is its usage of short, resolved chord progressions repeated over and over as a continuous harmonic bedrock. As the piece carries on, the repeated chord progressions are further improvised as each variation becomes more and more inventive.

Johan Halvorsen was a key figure in Norwegian music during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He established himself as a multi-talented professional, excelling as a concertmaster, conductor of theater orchestra, and composer of incidental music, symphonies, and chamber music in Norway and across Europe. Halvorsen was a celebrated violinist, conductor and

composer who is remembered today primarily for his brilliant “extrapolation” of Handel’s passacaglia for two stringed instruments.

The theme of the Handel-Halvorsen *Passacaglia* is a brief, four-measure sequence of eight chords with a characteristic dotted rhythm generating a series of thrilling variations in a tour de force of musical invention (Christiansen). In order to create a full four-part harmony, the violin and cello play numerous double and triple stops, as well as multi-note chords to complete the texture. However, some of the variations take a different approach and utilize swift, melodic lines rather than chords to create a more linear harmonic effect over time.

Passacaglia opens with the cellist courageously stating the four-measure ground bass while the violinist introduces the melody in a series of powerful double stops. This opening statement is followed by a series of variations that feature melodies in both the violin and cello in a wide range of contrasting moods and styles. Techniques such as pizzicato, ponticello, spiccato, and legato bow strokes are used throughout the different movements, often being used on the second repeat of the variation to introduce a new color or mood. Halvorsen’s *Passacaglia* lasts several minutes longer than Handel’s work, as each variation elaborates extensively on the main theme, showing off every angle of the two instruments.

The last few variations are the most virtuosic for both musicians, featuring dramatic scales in both the violin and cello that span the extreme low and high registers of the instruments. The final variation is a series of double-stop sixteenth notes that start reserved but slowly gather speed until both instruments charge to the finish line together. Unlike the somber conclusion of the Handel movement, Halvorsen calls for a Picardy thirds – a bold G Major chord - closing the piece in triumph.

The Handel-Halvorsen Passacaglia is a general favorite and well deserved of its popularity. The piece is technically challenging for both performers, yet it shows off a wide range of techniques, tempos, colors, and atmospheres that continue to draw in audiences and musicians alike.

LIVE STREAM

This paper is part of a final recital project that you can access on the TCU school of music events page or at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxiau-LJ-0Ue>

The recital was performed in the Van Cliburn Concert Hall on May 4th, 2024 at 2:00 pm.

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