

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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FEATURE on ROBERT VOLKMANN

Robert Volkmann was born in Lommatzsch (Saxony) on April 6th, 1815. Lommatzsch is located near Meißen, and at that time it belonged to the Kingdom of Saxony; it became a member of the German Empire from 1871. It is currently, of course, one of the states that make up the Federal Republic of Germany.

Volkmann received the first musical teachings from his father. At the age of twelve he had already become an excellent cellist. At that age he was playing the cello part in string quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. He studied at the Freiburg Gymnasium. He continued his training in Leipzig in 1836 with Carl Ferdinand Becker. There he met Robert Schumann. The great composer encouraged him in his studies.

In 1839 he began working as a singing teacher in Prague, but soon gave up this job to take private lessons. For a time he was tutor to the daughters of Countess Stainlein-Saalenstein, in her domain in Hungary. In 1841 he moved to Budapest, at that time formed by the city of Pest and the fortress of Buda. Belonging to the Austrian Empire, the nobility and gentry spoke German. Culturally it was a city similar to Vienna. Among his jobs in this city were as a piano teacher and as a correspondent for the 'Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung' newspaper. He composed in virtual obscurity until 1852, when his Piano Trio in B-flat minor caught the ears of Franz Liszt and Hans von Bülow, who proceeded to play it several times all over Europe.

After the failure of the struggles for independence in Hungary, life in Pest becomes duller. For this reason Volkmann left the city and went to the capital of the Empire, Vienna, in 1854. But there he found that the artistic competition was very great and he could not prevail, returning again to Pest in 1858. An editor, Gustav Heckenast, had him offered in 1857 the edition of ALL his works. Thanks to this he could live comfortably from the composition. While visiting Vienna in 1864, Volkmann became acquainted with Johannes Brahms, and they became close friends. In letters they addressed each other as "*lieber Freund*" ("dear friend").

In the early 1870s his publisher Heckenast closed down the Hungarian publishing house, but Volkmann was already directing his own works, known throughout Germany. However, from the 1870s Volkmann slowed down and composed very little. Then in 1875 he was appointed professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Budapest Conservatory, directed by Franz Liszt, where he continued until his death on October 30th, 1883. His fame as a composer gradually diminished with the turn of the new century but his music has recently been greatly revived, showing him to be an elegant, classy and exquisite composer in the line of Brahms and Bruch.

WORKS with a special interest for cellists:

Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 33

Serenade No. 3 in D minor, for Violoncello and Strings, Op. 69

Capriccio, for Cello and Piano, Op. 74

Andante mit Variationen, for Three Cellos

String Quartet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 9

String Quartet No. 2 in G minor, Op. 14

String Quartet No. 3 in G Major, Op. 34

String Quartet No. 4 in E minor, Op. 35

String Quartet No. 5 in F minor, Op. 37

String Quartet No. 6 in E-flat Major, Op. 43

Piano Trio No. 1 in F Major, Op. 3

Piano Trio No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 5

Trio, for Viola, Cello and Piano, Op. 76



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