

HAUSMANN, Robert

Born: 1852, 23rd August (Rottleberode, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany)

Died: 1909

This article wishes to bring to public attention the most interesting career of the romantic cellist Robert Hausmann, who can be considered as one of the great chamber-music players of the second half of the nineteenth century. His long-term friendships with Brahms and Joachim undoubtedly marked his artistic path; it is a shame that we have lost some of the many anecdotes from the times!

ROBERT HAUSMANN was born in 1852, at Rottleberode, in the Harz, and started cello at the 'Gymnasium' at Brunswick, benefitting between the years 1861-1867 from the cello teaching of Theodor Muller, who by all accounts advanced him considerably. He then became the leading student of the Berlin High School for Music - the 'Berlin Hochschule' was founded in 1869 and Hausmann was one of its first pupils. During his three years in the school he developed his violoncello studies under the direction of Wilhelm Muller (coincidentally nephew of the Brunswick master just mentioned). Joseph Joachim was also the violin professor there, and he took the young Hausmann to London, where the cellist met, and then pursued a course of lessons with the great Italian (almost nationalized *British!*) master Alfredo Piatti. Hausmann later visited Piatti on at his property at Caddenabia (on Lake Como) for extra guidance and advice.

Shortly after this Hausmann took an engagement with Count Hochberg, in Silesia, as cellist of the string quartet formed by him, but after this was dissolved, in 1876, he was named second master of Cello playing at the Berlin High School for Music; three years later he rose to the position of first teacher (receiving the title of 'professor' in 1884 for his very able work, and succeeding, or perhaps even displacing, his old teacher Wilhelm Müller), and from that time he fulfilled the duties alone in his own department.

Hausmann was a celebrated soloist and chamber musician who played an active role in the musical life of London as well as of the Continent. His greatest chamber role was undoubtedly in the Joachim Quartet, but before that he had gained considerable experience in the Dresden String Quartet. He was a member of the Joachim quartet for almost twenty years; he had joined the Joachim Quartet in 1878 succeeding, once again, Wilhelm Müller, and stayed with them until the violinist's death in 1907. His friendship and understanding with Joachim was to play a decisive role in his artistic evolution. By the way, it should be made clear that the Joachim Quartet in London was a different group, of which Piatti was the cellist; the London ensemble performed regularly at the famed Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts, and this quartet is remembered for performing the late Beethoven string quartets for the *first time* in public in London.

As a performer, fortunately a far amount has been documented about him. Although he *never used an end-pin* he was known for his powerful sound, which was once compared to that of a trombone, and that being meant in a positive sense! This obviously was an advantage for Hausmann in playing a work like the Brahms F major Sonata, particularly in the passages where Brahms could imagine trombones treating themes "*threateningly in a Schubertian manner*". As is always repeated, he was an excellent quartet player, which should be highly evident from the fact that Joachim chose him as his usual quartet associate. However, he was also a distinguished solo player, with many invitations. Whilst maybe not being renowned as a high virtuoso he was nether-the-less widely regarded as one of the most eminent masters of his instrument.

It is exceedingly difficult to find details about Hausmann's own compositions, though we might ascertain that they were Germanically based, and received a certain publicity from the 'Brahms school'. The only works that I have been able to undercover have been the 3 Easy Sonatinas for violin and piano, Op.10, and the series of cello pieces 'Siluetas', Opus 41 - of which one piece, called 'Morning', was dedicated to Karl Davidov (it is worth pointing out that Davidov held Hausmann in very high esteem indeed). The very fact that he arrived at *opus 41* shows that he clearly had a compositional impulse, even though these very compositions appear to have been performed very rarely even in his lifetime.

Hausmann was not especially noted for coaxing or 'badgering' new compositions out of composers, but he was given several important tasks in this respect, especially from Johannes Brahms. It was he who made Brahms' E-minor sonata widely known and appreciated, through numerous performances of it with the composer. According to Elisabet von Herzogenberg, Hausmann was "crazy with excitement" when he received the new F major Sonata, Op.99 . Composed in the summer of 1886 at Thun, the Sonata (of course, dedicated to Hausmann) was first performed on November 24, 1886 by the cellist with Brahms himself at the piano, at Hausmann's concert in the Kleiner Musikvereinsall, Vienna. He was also to be the soloist, with Joachim, in the premiere of the Double Concerto, Op. 102. The story of this concerto is that the long friendship between Brahms and Joachim was interrupted when Brahms unintentionally contributed to the dismissal of charges against Joachim's wife for adultery with the music publisher Simrock. Clara Schumann reconciled the old friends, with the final result that Joachim and the cellist Hausmann, were to give the premiere of the work. Regarding the compositional stage we know: *"I have been of late unable to resist the idea of a Concerto for violin and cello, however much I have tried, again and again, to talk myself out of it,"* - at least this is what Johannes Brahms was reported to have told violinist Joseph Joachim in July 1887. The Double Concerto was to be his last orchestral work; a fitting end to resolving his differences with Joachim and the delivery of a promised concerto to Hausmann.



Robert Hausmann, with Brahms

Following the Cello Sonatas and the double concerto, we have detailed information relating to Hausmann on Brahms's Trio for clarinet, cello and piano in A minor, Op.114. In November of 1891 Brahms is invited to Meiningen, where on the 24th of the month, after rehearsing from the manuscripts, the first private rendition of the work was made - along with the Quintet Op.115 - in the court of the Duke of Saxony, George II. The performers were: Brahms at the piano, Mühlfeld on clarinet and Robert Hausmann on cello. These musicians brought about the public premiere on the 12th December of this year in Berlin; however, there was a triumphal greeting of the Berlin public from the first instance, even from the dress rehearsal on 10th December 1891!

Yet another interesting anecdote relates to the Clarinet Quintet, in which Hausmann also played. According to the English cellist Percy Such, Hausmann had related to him that Brahms was at one point very seriously 'toying' with the idea of a Cello Concerto, and that work (which would have been dedicated to Robert Hausmann) would not have simply been developed from those 'seeds of ideas' and from that basis into the new Double Concerto (which has often been implied since by writers). Percy Such very clearly said that Hausmann assured him that the theme which became the *opening* melody of the Clarinet Quintet had originally been conceived as an important theme for the first movement of a Cello Concerto in A minor. This news comes perhaps to the lasting regret of many a cellist!

There is no doubt to distrust either Hausmann or Such. Hausmann had every confidence of Brahms. There was true affection between the colleagues. In May 1894, a group photo was taken of Brahms among his close friends. Towering in back of Brahms (who is seated) is the tall and distinguished-looking Hausmann. With a look of boyish mischief on his face, Hausmann is holding his arms outstretched over Brahms, pretending to "play" Brahms like a cello! Few cellists would have had the opportunity, in this way, to "play Brahms"!

He was the dedicatee of many other works, the majority of which are simply lost or have not survived the passing of time. However, Max Bruch wrote for him the Hebrew Adagio 'Kol Nidrei' Op.47 for cello and orchestra, and Hausmann gave the world premiere in 1881; the work has commanded a high place in the cello repertoire ever since.

In other aspects he also tried nobly to help the cello's cause. He published an edition of the Bach Suites which is generally closer to the original text than those of almost all of his contemporaries. He made an edition of both Mendelssohn Sonatas, and the 'Variations Concertantes' of the same composer. He also made a cello/piano version of Schumann's 'Marchenbilder' (Fairy Tales), Op.113, originally written for viola.

The Elegiac Variations by Sir Donald Tovey were written in memory of Robert Hausmann in 1909. Hausmann's death, at only 56 years old, had come as a shock to Tovey. Tovey (1875-1940) is more usually known as one of the greatest writers on musical topics, but he was also a solid composer whose style could be said to be somewhere between Brahms and Elgar. Indeed, he saw himself primarily as a composer. He was also a fine pianist, and Hausmann was a cherished chamber-music partner. Tovey and Hausmann had often performed together, including the complete works of Beethoven for cello and piano in public; and Tovey had also performed a number of times with the Joachim quartet. Their mutual appreciation was summed up by a contemporary at the time (a certain Miss Weisse):

"Hausmann's love for the young Tovey - both as a musician and as a man - touched me deeply. After they had rehearsed together for the first time, I came in as they ended, and, Tovey having gone, I asked Hausmann about the rehearsal, he said 'Das war gar keine Probe; er hat gespielt, und ich habe vor Thränen kaum sehen können um mitzuspielen'. ('That was no rehearsal; he played, and I could hardly see my own music for tears'.)"

Not only that, but the *Elegiac Variations* were first performed in October 1909 on the occasion of Casals' and Tovey's first appearance together and were repeated in their Oxford and London concerts. The contrasting tone of the dark, heroic Elegiac Variations for cello and piano was obviously inspired, if that might be the correct or appropriate word, by the death of Robert Hausmann. By the way, as an anecdote, Tovey's Cello Concerto - written for his friend Pablo Casals in 1932-33 - may perhaps be the longest cello concerto ever in history, comfortably passing an hour long of music! He also produced, for Casals, a very large-scale (if slightly academic) Solo Sonata for Cello in D Major..

Of Hausmann's students very little has been written about, and few became top level interpreters of the instrument. I have found the following names:

English cellist Percy Such (b. 1878), *as previously mentioned, worked with Hausmann, and also studied chamber music with Joachim. He also, as like Hausmann, played without a spike, surely one of the last 'serious' exponents of the modern cello to do so.*

Ernst Koch (1862 – 1927) *was a German composer, cellist and teacher.*

He was born in Berlin and studied cello with Robert Hausmann and composition with Woldemar Bargiel at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. He served as a cellist in the Royal Orchestra of Berlin between 1882 and 1891, after which he accepted a position of music director (Kapellmeister) for the resort town of Baden-Baden. A year later, he returned to Berlin, where he concentrated on composing and teaching, eventually becoming a professor and director of theory at the Musikhochschule where he had studied. Boris Blacher and Paul Kletzki were among his many students.

Roth

Dechert

Ludemann

Robert Hausmann played a superb Stradivarius cello dated 1724, from Stradivarius's best period, which today still bears his name as the 'Hausmann' Strad. The instrument had first been heard in Great Britain on 25 April 1900 when the ensemble made their debut at the St. James's Hall in London. This cello passed, for many years, to Edmund Kurtz.

In summing up, Robert Hausmann is not generally so widely known today as his German contemporaries Grutzmacher, Klengel or Becker. Perhaps this is because he did not consider producing a major treatise on the instrument, or because he did not have an important line of students to follow him. Neither did he produce any lasting compositions for the cello repertoire, not even in his own age. However, he is definitely a player worth while discovering once more. By all accounts he was a *stylish* player whom Brahms fully trusted and entrusted, and who was above all a faithful servant of good romantic music.

DAVID JOHNSTONE