

ROBERT VOLKMANN

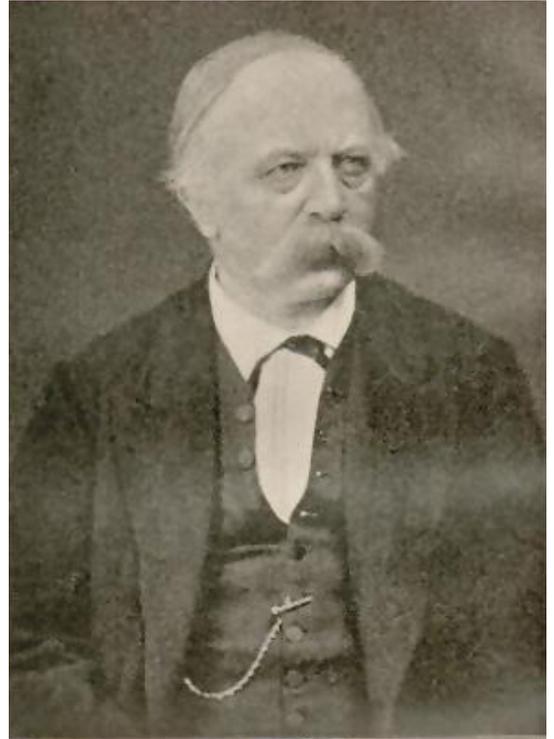
David C F Wright DMus

When I was a boy, eons ago, I was the proud possessor of the Eulenberg scores of the Volkmann string quartets.

He is another forgotten composer and one may wonder why. Was it because he lived in the shadow of other German composers such as Brahms and Schumann?

Volkmann was born on 6 April 1815 at Lommatzsch, Saxony in Germany. His father was the musical director in a local church and so young Robert was trained in music possibly to succeed his father. The boy became a 'complete' musician in that he could play the piano, had lessons with Friedel on the violin and cello, and, at the age of twelve, was playing the cello in string quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

In order to become a teacher, Volkmann entered the Freiberg Gymnasium in 1832. He studied music with Anacker and this inspired the teenager to devote himself to music. He continued his studies with Carl Ferdinand Becker in Leipzig. Another source of encouragement came from Schumann.



As a vocal tutor in Prague was Volkmann's next move but, in 1841, he moved to Budapest as both a piano teacher and a journalist for the Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung. As a composer, his first success was his Piano Trio no 2 in B flat minor Op 5 of 1850 which was admired by Liszt and von Bulow and played by them many times.

At the age of 39, Volkmann moved to Vienna and four years later, in 1858, returned to Budapest where the publisher Gustav Heckenlaet published all of his works until his business closed in the 1870s.

Volkmann had become close friends with Brahms and they corresponded regularly. In his last years, Robert Volkmann was professor of harmony and counterpoint at Budapest's National Academy of Music where Liszt was its director.

Robert Volkmann died in Budapest on 30 October 1883. He was 68.

Among his works are six string quartets which vary in quality. The Quartet in 1 in A minor Op 6 is a leisurely 35 minutes work whereas the Quartet no 4 in A is very attractive and well-written. His piano works include a very fine Sonata in C minor Op 12 which has lyrical, drama and virtuosity and abounds in melodic content. The virtuosity is not contrived but naturally evolves from the music. The performance by Adrian Ruiz is staggering. The six minute Fantasy is also a very fine piece.

Of note is the Konzertstück for piano and orchestra in C minor lasting about 20 minutes. One cannot help considering Chopin's works for piano and orchestra and how poor is Chopin's orchestration and its integration with the soloist. Not so, here. The work begins rather feebly but develops into an impressive treatise.

The Cello Concerto is only 15 minutes in length but is magnificent. It is so well written that one can

only admire it. It is not pompous as one famous concerto is and the cello part does not sound like a frantic bumble bee trapped in match box. The distinguished American cellist, Lynn Harrell, said that there are only two great cello concerts those by Dvorak and Dutilleux. Yes, indeed, but the Walton, Finzi and the Volkmann would make up the top five.

There are two symphonies which I have not heard but the scores look impressive. The overture Richard III gives a fine example of his orchestral prowess.

His piano trios Op 3 and Op 5 are worthy pieces but I do feel that his slow movements tend to occasionally be somewhat aimless.

His wrote two Masses Op 28 and Op 29 which I would like to acquaint myself with. Other choral works which I have heard are very telling and have much to commend them.

WORKS INCLUDE:

Six Fantasy Pieces for piano Op 1
Five Songs Op 2
Piano Trio no 1 in F Op 3
Piano trio no 2 in B flat minor Op 5
Souvenir de Maroth for piano Op 6
Romance for violin and piano Op 7
Nocturne for piano Op 8
Quartet no 1 in A minor Op 9
Chant du Troubadour for violin and piano Op 10
Six pieces for two pianos Op 11
Piano Sonata op 12
3 Gedichte Op 13
Quartet no 2 in G minor Op 14
Allegretto capriccose for violin and piano Op 15
3 Songs Op 16
Buch der leider Op 17
Deutsche Tanzweisen for piano Op 18
Cavatina and Barcarolle for piano Op 19
Ungarisher Leider for piano Op 20
12 Musical Poems for piano Op 21
4 Marches for piano Op 22
Wanderskizzen for piano Op 23
Ungarische skizzen for piano, four hands Op 24
Handel variations for piano Op 26
Leider der Grofmutter for piano, four hands Op 27
Mass in D Op 28
Mass no 2 in A flat Op 29
Six songs for chorus Op 30
Rhapsody for violin and piano Op 31
Cello Concerto Op 33
Quarte no 3 in G Op 34
Quartet no 4 in E minor Op 35
Quartet no 5 in F minor op 37
Konzertstuck for piano and orchestra op 42
Quartet no 6 in E flat Op 43
Symphony no 1 in D minor Op 44
An die Nacht fantasy piece for viola and piano Op 45

Offertorium Osanna Domine Deo for chorus Op 47
3 Songs for choir Op 48
Sappho, song Op 49
Festival Overture Op 50
Ballad and Scherzetto for piano Op 51
3 Songs Op 52
Symphony no 2 in B flat Op 53
Songs Op 56
Sonatina for two pianos Op 57
Two Songs for choir Op 58
Weihnachtslied for choir Op 59
Sonatina for violin and piano no 1 Op 60
Sonatina no 2 for violin and piano Op 61
Serenade no 1 in C for string orchestra Op 62
Serenade no 2 in f Op 63
Altdeutscher Hymnus for choir Op 64
Kirchenaire for choir Op 65
Songs Op 66
Six Duets Op 67
Overture Richard III Op 68
Serenade no 3 Op 69
Two Songs for choir Op 70
3 Hozhzeitslieder for choir Op 71
3 Songs op 72
Capriccio for cello and piano op 74
Piano Trio Op 76

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