

MUSIC REVIEW

# BSO concert spotlights work by Czech composer killed in Holocaust

By David Weininger | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    OCTOBER 10, 2012



STU ROSNER

**Marcelo Lehninger leads the Hawthorne String Quartet with members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra on Tuesday.**

It's always good to see the Boston Symphony Orchestra spotlight its own deep talent pool, and on Tuesday it did just that. With violinist Joshua Bell, soloist for the first

three concerts of this subscription series, unavailable, the BSO turned to the Hawthorne String Quartet, composed of four of its string players: violinists Ronan Lefkowitz and Si-Jing Huang, violist Mark Ludwig, and cellist Sato Knudsen.

The Hawthorne has dedicated itself to performing “Entartete Musik” — works by composers vilified by the Nazis. Among those was Ervín Schulhoff, a Czech composer whose Jewish ancestry, leftist politics, and openness to modernism all provoked the Third Reich’s scorn. He died in the Wülzburg concentration camp in 1942, only 48 years old.

His Concerto for String Quartet with Wind Orchestra, from 1930, shows how completely Schulhoff had absorbed a number of competing impulses and forged them into an idiosyncratic style: Elements of European Romanticism, folk music, jazz, and an acidic tonal harmony all commingle. Hearing the piece gives a sense of the artistic exhilaration that briefly flourished in Europe before its erasure by National Socialism.

The concerto thrives on contrasts. Especially in the outer movements, the wind writing is spiky and restless, the string sections more lyrical and ruminative. Perhaps most effective was the slow movement, a brooding nocturne that featured interlacing melodies and pungent wind sonorities. The Gershwin-flavored finale had irrepressible rhythms, not least in the foxtrot that pops up in the middle of the movement.

Marcelo Lehninger, now in his third season as a BSO assistant conductor, did a superb job managing the piece’s unusual balances between the winds and the quartet. The Hawthorne played superbly, but even more than the quality of the performance, one was grateful for the sheer fact of it. Groups that keep repertoire like this alive deserve an especially fervent vote of support.

The rest of the program duplicated that of last week’s concerts: Tchaikovsky’s “Romeo and Juliet” and Dvorak’s Eighth Symphony. The Tchaikovsky had exciting moments that seemed to come out of nowhere; it lacked the dynamic contrasts that would have made its narrative clearer. That was also true of the first two movements of the Dvorak, much of which was surprisingly lyrical and soft-edged. But the scherzo had a graceful, unhurried swing, and Lehninger did a terrific job navigating the twists and

turns of the finale, which was thrilling. The brass played superbly throughout. So did the cello section, making you wonder whether any composer wrote better music for this instrument. Lehninger wisely gave the section a solo bow at the end.

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