

HENZE

Violin and Viola Works

Pollicino: Violin Sonatina

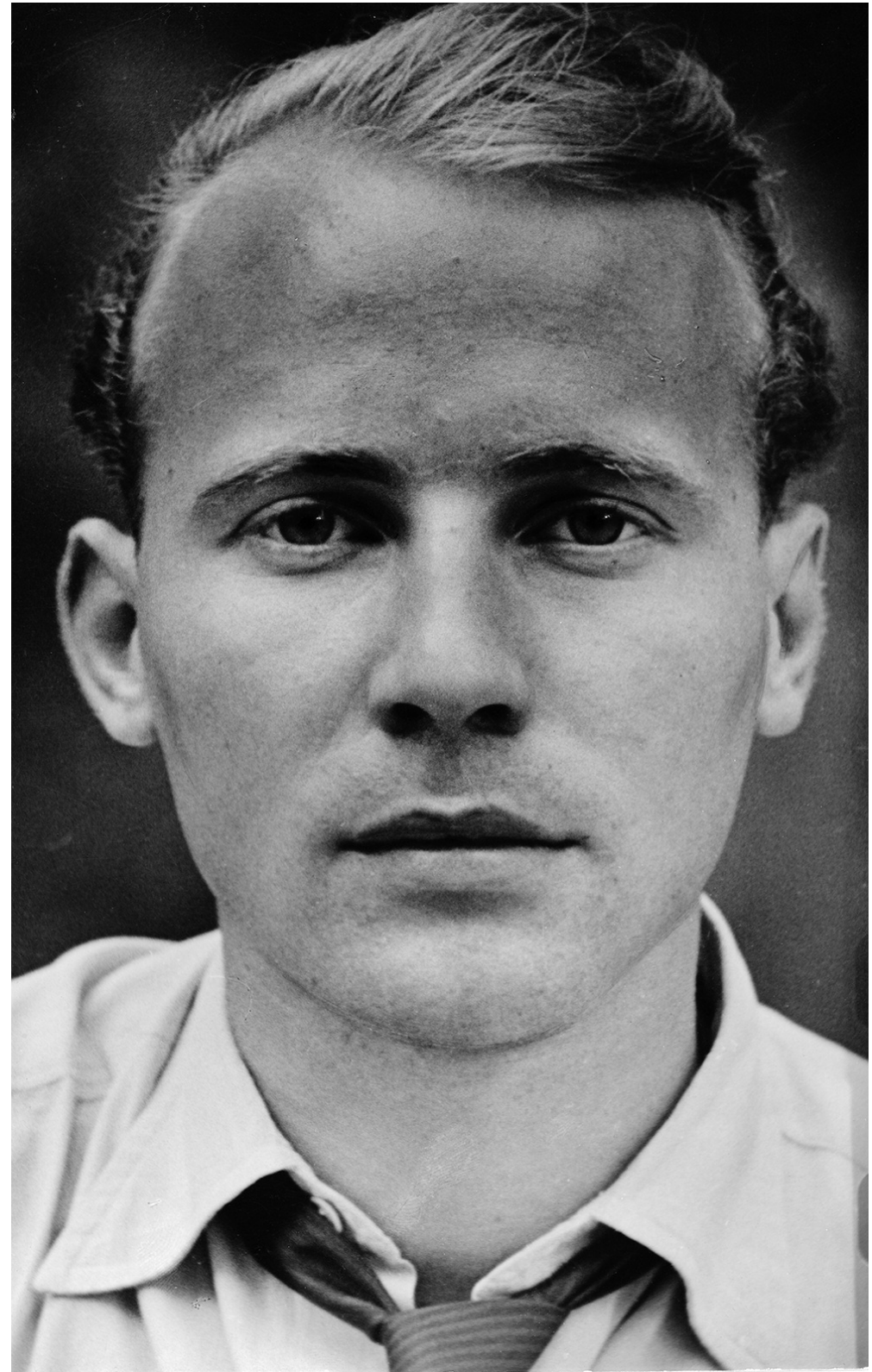
Solo Violin Sonata

Violin Sonata

Viola Sonata

**Peter Sheppard Skærved,
Violin and Viola**

Roderick Chadwick, Piano



Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012)

Violin and Viola Works

Henze: A Personal View

The circumstances in which Hans Werner Henze became a composer imbued him with a lifelong sense of his obligations as an artist and human being. His *A Letter to Young Artists*, written in 1981 clarifies his position:

'There is a new task for your work, one that has never existed before, and has never been more urgent. Art must now take the side of the repressed, the humiliated, the offended. Art is to take the part of the weak and the poor, and to gain vigour and impulse from its need to be a voice for the oppressed.'¹

The sonatas recorded here stretch from the very beginning of Henze's creative life up to his Cantiere dell'Arte festival in Montepulciano, the actualisation of these beliefs.

As for so many other young people, the fall of the Third Reich in 1945 was a time of hunger and anxiety. It was then that his burning need to compose was kindled. His first works flowered in the midst of poverty and humiliation. In conversation with me in 1998, he remembered:

'My first musical studies were in Brunswick ... and I lived in a room with six other people of the same age. One was studying the bassoon, another was a trombonist, another was learning the violin, and so on.'²

Looking back on that hard year immediately after the end of the War, Henze found it difficult to remember which of his early pieces were written when:

'I can no longer recall the order in which these pieces were written. Only two of them were published, a Fortner-like sonatina for flute and piano, and a violin sonata.'³

In 1946 he wrote his *Violin Sonata* and began formal composition lessons with Wolfgang Fortner (1907–1987). Fortner's influence is evident in Henze's early works for string instruments. Without doubt, the work that he did making the 'piano reduction' of Fortner's *Violin Concerto* affected his approach. The fiercely intense, 'concertante' tenor of Henze's sonata makes it, in some ways, a study for the extraordinary *First Violin Concerto* (Naxos 8.557738) which emerged the following year. That work

has a similar four-movement form, replacing the whimsical irony of the sonata's third movement with vitriolic sarcasm. Working with Henze, I was always struck by his expectation that the broadest range of human emotion and mood should be rendered as directly as possible. This range of expression was evident from his earliest works, reflecting the environment in which they were born.

Henze suggested that one source for this *Violin Sonata* was a set of six lost sonatas which he wrote in the summer and autumn of 1945. After being de-mobbed, he had been finally able to return 'to my parents' house in the Senne',⁴ where, subsisting on his mother's 'swede bread, swede syrup, and swede coffee', he loaded munitions crates into trucks for the Allied forces, and 'when I was not required, worked on a cycle of Hindemithian sonatas and read voraciously.'⁵ Speaking of the 1946 *Violin Sonata*, he noted:

'Inevitably the imaginary world of the six amateur sonatas of 1945 was re-explored here, but this time on a quasi-professional basis.'⁶

It seems that the original cycle of six sonatas was left in a chest of music and clothes abandoned, when he had to leave a rented room in Heidelberg in 1949.

Henze's three 'mature' sonatas all have links to Italy, most particularly, the Tuscan hill town of Montepulciano, where he founded the Cantiere dell'Arte in 1976. The tremendous *Solo Violin Sonata* was premiered at his Cantiere on 10 August 1977, the second year of the festival. Henze recalled the composition of the piece:

'I spent Christmas (1976) on St Lucia in the West Indies – sketching out my violin sonata.'⁷

Henze, described the *Solo Violin Sonata* as 'a real piece of theatre';⁸ it is grounded in the work of the humanist poet Agnolo (Angelo) Ambrogini, (1454–1494), known as Poliziano (derived from the Latin name of his birthplace, Montepulciano). The work is a three-part

dramatic 'scena', in which, as Henze put it, 'Death is admitted into the cheerful world of the pastoral'⁹. It presents three characters who appear in the prologue to Poliziano's *Favola d'Orfeo*, 'Tirsi', 'Mopso' and 'Aristeo', straw-hatted shepherds, 'mechanicals' of Shakespearian stripe. Henze himself described this trio as 'sexy clowns'. In 1998 he wrote:

'My sonata is a triptych of portraits – I drew and photographed these three lads from Montepulciano, whistling, laughing and joking as they saunter through the stubble, until one of them, Aristeo, spies the nymph Eurydice and sets off in pursuit, his unambiguous intentions reflected in the tempo of the music. Just as Eurydice reaches the haven of the forest, she is bitten by a tiny grey and murderous viper, an emissary from hell: she screams and at the very same moment, Aristeo, too, till more than half a kilometre from the object of his desire, lets out a piercing scream. A great moment!'¹⁰

Aristeo's final 'piercing' scream was a gesture which Henze had given to the violin before, at the very end of the *Second Violin Concerto* (Naxos 8.573289), which like the *Solo Violin Sonata*, pushes the soloist well beyond the point of exhaustion and control. He told me:

'Why shouldn't instrumentalists get exhausted too – the composer did! The 'almost impossible' is always interesting in music. It's a bit like a circus act – will she, or will she not, fall from the rope?'¹¹

I worked with Henze on the *Solo Violin Sonata* late in our collaboration, after a time when we were not in contact. When he invited me to play it, he said: 'And you must play my revised version'. When this 'revised' version appeared in my letter box, it proved to take the form of numerous 'cuts', some small, some substantial, to the 1977 original. I told him that I was not sure that I liked the 'thinned-out' version. He laughed:

'All right, we will make a deal. For now, you play and record it this way, and ... later, you can do it the other way! Then we will see who is right!'¹²

And so I did, in many performances of cycles of the sonatas, and my 1999 recording of the unaccompanied works... But now, in the context of these two other sonatas, I have returned to the original, rougher, more

violent, version of the work, as he told me I should.

Henze began work on his *Viola Sonata* over the winter of 1978–79, shortly after the completion of his ballet *Orpheus*. He noted that the *Solo Violin Sonata* had been one of the pieces written 'en route to the Orpheus music'.¹³ The emotionally shattering quality of the *Viola Sonata* is to my mind, the result of its composition in the 'aftershock' of the *Orpheus* piece. Henze began it a week after the Knightsbridge party celebrating the completion of the stage work. He wrote:

'I began work on a sonata for the Scottish viola player, Garth Knox. Saturn entered the Tropic of Cancer, which made me think that things would now get better.'¹⁴

The sonata seems to exist in two worlds: first, a psychologically fraught, 'orphic' one, about which Henze wrote:

'It is the experience of despair, madness and self-destruction on which the new tonal relationships are based, but on which now the full light of joy and happiness can now fall.'¹⁵

Balancing this was a 'frozen' world, no doubt reflecting the hard winter that year, from which it seemed, Henze could not escape in any country:

'It was 20 degrees below zero [...] during a raging gale I went for a walk in Hyde Park with Michael Vyner [...] Deep Snow in London. I did not feel so good.'¹⁶

It was inspired by the extraordinary sound and presence of Garth Knox. The 'voice' of the viola in this sonata, ranging from cataclysmic tempest to terrifying purity, would have been inconceivable without Knox's peerless vision of sound. The work was premiered in the spring of 1980 at the Wittener Tage für neue Kammer-musik by Knox with the pianist/conductor, Jan-Latham Koenig, who conducted the premiere of *Pollicino* a few months later at Montepulciano.

The *Violin Sonatina* was premiered on 2 December 1980 at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, by Jenny Abel and Roberto Szidon. It is drawn from the children's opera *Pollicino* premiered on 2 August that year, at the Montepulciano Cantiere dell'Arte. Henze himself

described the construction of the opera as ‘a box of children’s bricks, so it is possible to extract various groups of single pieces from it: it includes a violin and piano sonatina, a set of guitar pieces, interludes for children’s orchestras, and some piano pieces as well.’¹⁷

The *Sonatina* was completed before the final version of the opera, reflecting the function of the instruments in the theatre piece. The composer noted:

‘I wrote a piano part and a solo violin part into the score. These are supposed to be played by professionals; in school performances they would be taken by teachers. They have a double function; to help the young players to keep in tune, in time, and to relax the ear, from time to time, from the sound of recorders. They also have the task of telling the story; the violin is the voice of the Grandmother, who narrates and moralises.’

Although the *Sonatina* is ‘drawn from the opera’,¹⁸ it is not a miniaturised version of the stage piece. Its three movements seem to be moments of dramatic reflection, like the ‘serenades’ through *The English Cat*, which Henze began work on in 1980. The final *Passacaglia* begins like a memory of the lost ‘post-Hindemith’ sonatas of 1945. It ends with a notated bar of apparent silence, but Henze indicated to me this was a dramatic long piano pedal-sustain, a device used in the *Fünf Nachtstücke* which he would write for me a decade later.

Henze produced short solo and chamber works throughout his life, as presents for special occasions, weddings, funerals, etc. They offer insights into his musical concerns and state of mind at particular times – often they were written at one sitting. From a performer’s point of view they are concentrated reminders of Henze’s determination ‘to involve them as human beings.’¹⁹ This is not music which can be played dispassionately, nor should it be.

Für Manfred was composed on 7 September 1989, as a memorial to Manfred Gräter (1928–1989), a polymath writer, publisher, critic and pioneering director of television productions of new music, including many films made at the Cantiere. Henze’s manuscript reveals much which is absent from the simplified ‘computer-set’ score which appeared ten years later. Although the work is for violin alone, the manuscript shows the composer thinking as if for two players. The introduction and coda, of this ‘ABA’ structured work, are written on a higher stave than the middle, more impassioned, section, leading up to a climax marked *feierlich, deklamatorisch* (‘solemnly, declamatory’). This lower stave material quite literally ‘climbs’ back up to the higher stave by way of a rising whole-tone scale, alluding to the chorale ‘*Es ist genug*’ used by Alban Berg in his *Violin Concerto*. Berg’s *Concerto*, (‘*Dem Amdenken eines Engels*’, ‘To the memory of an angel’) was never far from Henze’s mind when he wrote for string instruments.

Peter Doll zum Abschied (‘Farewell to Peter Doll’) was written on the death of the director of the Württembergische Staatstheater (Stuttgart), Hans Peter Doll (1926–1999), who was the dedicatee of *The English Cat*. It was played at his funeral by the violinist Joachim Schall.

The sincerity and emotion of these works takes me back to Henze’s *A Letter to Young Artists*. It’s as resonant today as the day it was written:

‘Every verse you write, every painting you paint, every lesson you give, every bar of music you write or play, can be a move against those who want to reverse the wheel of history to use the power of the police and of blackmail to drag you back into their sullenness [...] Don’t lose heart!’²⁰

Peter Sheppard Skærved

1 A Letter to Young Artists, Hans Werner Henze, 1981, In *Music and Politics*, Hans Werner Henze, Faber and Faber, London, 1982, pp. 276–77.
2 Arc p.
3 In *Music and Politics*, Hans Werner Henze, Faber and Faber, London, 1982, p. 69
4 Ibid 51.
5 Ibid 53.
6 B5, p. 69.
7 B 5ths, p. 301.
8 Conversation with Peter Sheppard Skærved, Arc, p. 56.

9 Intro.
10 Bohemian fifths, p. 364.
11 Arc, p. 59.
12 Conversation between HWH & PSS, Genoa 1997.
13 Music and Politics, pp. 248–49.
14 B 5ths, p. 378.
15 MandP, p. 252.
16 B5s, p. 378.
17 HWH, In RNCM Programme, p. 13.
18 ‘Drawn from the opera’ – title page of the published edition of the *Sonatina*.

Roderick Chadwick



Photo: Benjamin Harte

Roderick Chadwick is a pianist, teacher and writer on music. In recent years he has made a speciality of performing large-scale piano works from the last 50 years including Lachenmann’s *Serynade*, John McGuire’s *48 Variations* for two pianos with Mark Knoop, and Stockhausen’s *Mantra*, recorded with Knoop and Newton Armstrong on the Hat Hut label. He has also featured on recordings of music by Gloria Coates, Michael Finnissy and Sadie Harrison, among others. As a member of the ensembles Plus-Minus and Chroma he has played at the Ultima (Oslo), Huddersfield, Buxton and TRANSIT (Leuven) Festivals, and his duo partnerships with several leading violinists have led to recitals from Kioi Hall in Tokyo to Trolldhaugen. Chadwick is a frequent performer of Messiaen’s music, and in 2008 he was artistic advisor to the Royal Academy of Music for their part in the Southbank Centre’s Messiaen Centenary Festival. He has recently completed a book on the genesis of Messiaen’s *Catalogue d’oiseaux* with Peter Hill.

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd



The British violinist Peter Sheppard Skærvæd is the dedicatee of over 400 works by composers including Hans Werner Henze, Poul Ruders, David Matthews, Judith Weir and George Rochberg. He has a diverse international career, ranging from solo appearances in over 30 countries, to in-depth projects and residencies. Skærvæd is a prolific recording artist, resulting in GRAMMY® and *Gramophone* award nominations, and awards from *BBC Music Magazine*. He is the only musician to have curated an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, London and has made projects for the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and many other galleries worldwide. During 2018 he will be leading and performing a series of concerts of 17th-century solo music in 20 of the Christopher Wren churches in London's Square Mile. He is married to the Danish writer and poet, Malene Skærvæd, and is the Viotti Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, London, where he was elected Fellow in 2013.

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The sonatas recorded here encompass almost the entirety of Hans Werner Henze's creative life. Composed in difficult conditions just after WWII, the *Violin Sonata* covers the broadest range of human emotions, and is in some ways a study for the extraordinary *First Violin Concerto* (recorded by Peter Sheppard Skærved on 8.557738). Steeped in Italian mythology, the *Solo Violin Sonata* is 'a real piece of theatre', as is the emotionally shattering *Viola Sonata*, written straight after the completion of the ballet *Orpheus*. The *Violin Sonatina* is drawn from Henze's children's opera *Pollicino*, and the two remaining miniatures are memorials for lost colleagues.

Hans Werner HENZE (1926–2012)

Pollicino: Violin Sonatina (1979)	8:39	Violin Sonata (1946)	15:04
1 I. Allegretto	3:10	7 I. Prélude	3:29
2 II. Moderato assai	1:39	8 II. Nocturne	4:38
3 III. Passacaglia: Moderato	3:41	9 III. Intermezzo	0:59
		10 IV. Finale	5:48
Solo Violin Sonata (1977, original version)	18:15	11 Für Manfred (1989)	2:14
4 I. Tirsi	5:47	12 Peter Doll zum Abschied (1999)	2:57
5 II. Mopso	6:35		
6 III. Aristeo	6:02	13 Viola Sonata (1979)	20:40

Peter Sheppard Skærved, Violin 1–12, Viola 13

Roderick Chadwick, Piano 1–3 7–10 13

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