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Joseph Dall'Abaco – Caprice No. 1

Joseph Dall'Abaco, an Italian cellist and composer, grew up in the early 18th century with musical training from his father, who was an esteemed contemporary of Johann Sebastian Bach, as seen by Bach's numerous copies of his chamber music manuscripts. Dall'Abaco, for his part, worked successfully as a court cellist, music director, and composer in Germany, Italy, and England. Dall'Abaco wrote 11 Capricci for solo cello in the 1770's after marrying into wealth, retiring from his career as a professional cellist, and settling down on a large estate outside Verona.

Caprice No. 1 is somber and dignified, the cello moving fluidly between three separate voices, often with a bass note compelling motion at the beginning of each figure, and middle/upper voices tangling among each other for the rest of the figure. These rapid changes of register also represent a change from harmonic function (the bass voice) to melodic function (the top voice). The lowest voice, though only heard as one note at the start of each figure, contains the most gravity. The middle voice, heard twice in the figure, serves as a sort of intermediary between bass and melody, harmonically supporting the melody after the foundation of the bass has cleared. The top voice is the lightest of the three, adding an ornamental melodic flair to the strong harmony at play in the other voices.

In the second half of the caprice we are introduced to a new section where a pleasing harmonic sequence is arpeggiated in simple figures of tension-release. Through this sequence Dall'Abaco transports us to the lowest range of the cello with increasing tension, until the arrival to the lowest note playable on the cello springs us into a two octave leap, through which we are returned to the original repeated figure.

Music written during this period had a primary goal of being simply pleasing; a descriptor which excludes passion, complexity, struggle, intense joy or sadness or any other emotion. Rather, the pleasure accrued from this music was meant to be light and sophisticated. Though deep thoughts and feelings may not be addressed, Dall'Abaco's Caprice No. 1 will sparkle and dance.

Paul Hindemith – Phantasiestück for cello and piano

Paul Hindemith was born in the German town, Hanau, in 1895, learning violin as a child. At age 21 he became concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra, but after his father's death a year later, Hindemith was conscripted into the Imperial German Army. After being deployed as a sentry in Flanders, he writes in his diary that his deployment had him "surviving grenade attacks only by good luck."

Upon returning home to Germany after the armistice, Hindemith became one of Germany's leading composers and music theorists, developing a distinct harmonic language as detailed in his three-volume instructional treatise, *The Craft of Musical Composition*. He experienced success in performance as well, founding the extensively touring Amar quartet (himself playing viola, his brother on cello) and performing William Walton's famous viola concerto in its 1929 premiere. The Nazi regime's rise to power in the 1930's complicated life for Hindemith, whose "degenerate" music had him falling in and out of favour with the authorities. In December of 1934 during a speech at the Berlin Sports Palace, Germany's Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels publicly denounced Hindemith as an "atonal noisemaker."

Hindemith's *Phantasiestück*, part of his 3 pieces for cello and piano, comes much before these issues with authority. The premiere of this work was in 1917 in Frankfurt, the same year of Hindemith's conscription into the army. *Phantasiestück* (meaning 'fantasia' or 'character piece') is indicative of Hindemith's early works, which use an increasingly colorful palette, a wider range of musical means, and push tonality to its limits to express exaggerated emotions. The piece is open and soaring, the ever-expanding cello melody accompanied by churning harmonic ambiguity in the piano accompaniment. A gramophone reviewer writes, "here we meet not the austere neo-classicist of later years, but a carefree, youthful eclectic still in search of a definitive style. …*Phantasiestück* betrays the unashamed romanticist hidden behind the sophistication."

Sergei Prokofiev – Sonata for cello and piano in C major

Sergei Prokofiev was born in 1891 in a small village in the Russian Empire. His formal music training began at age 13 at the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he had opportunities to perform as a pianist, study the music of Stravinsky, and explored innovation in his compositions. It would be over 40 years later that Prokofiev would write his Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major; years of political instability in the Soviet Union, with Prokofiev touring and living abroad as a concert pianist while continuing to search for a more avant-garde compositional style. Prokofiev returned home to the Soviet Union in 1933 and experienced compositional success until the censures of the Soviet Communist Party in 1948, which, by the Zhdanov Decree, accused Prokofiev of 'formalism' (meaning music influenced by modernism, and as such, perceived to be too close to the supposedly decadent West, characterised as anti-humanist, nihilistic, and in decline). Though much of Prokofiev's music was banned, he continued to compose despite misgivings as to whether his new works would ever be performed in public.

A year after the censures began, in 1949, Prokofiev attended a concert featuring Mstislav Rostropovich performing Nikolai Miaskovsky's Cello Sonata No. 2 in A minor. Prokofiev was so impressed by Rostropovich's performance that he was determined to write a cello sonata for him. The work was premiered on March 1, 1950, by Rostropovich and pianist Sviatoslav Richter, but only after multiple test performances in front of Soviet censure committees. In his memoirs Richter wrote:

"We gave the first performance of Prokofiev's Cello Sonata. Before playing it in concert, we had to perform it at the Composer's Union, where these gentlemen decided the fate of all new works. During this period more than any other, they needed to work out whether Prokofiev had produced a new masterpiece or, conversely, a piece that was 'hostile to the spirit of the people.' Three months later, we had to play it again at a plenary session of all the composers who sat on the Radio Committee, and it wasn't until the following year that we were able to perform it in public, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on March 1, 1950."

The piece itself is simple and uncluttered; gone are Prokofiev's previous abrasively dissonant techniques. The cello explores the lower register in a joyful and lyrical way, and struggle, rather than dark and brooding, is up-beat and positive. Perhaps the Zhdanov Decree, whose main principal was often summarized by the phrase "The only conflict that is possible in Soviet culture is the conflict between good and best," was responsible for Prokofiev's somewhat sudden shift in compositional style, as heard in his Sonata for Cello and Piano.