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## Konzert nach Mathias Georg Monn



Title                   Konzert für Violoncello und Orchester D-Dur  
nach dem Concerto per Clavicembalo von Matthias Georg Monn

Time of Origin    1932/33

Premiere           7 November 1935, London

Duration           ca. 16 min.

1. Adagio Moderato
2. Adagio, alla marcia
3. Tempo di Menuetto

During Arnold Schönberg's discussion with Eberhard Preussner and the music critic Heinrich Strobel on Berlin Radio (1931), the latter accused the composer that his music, despite being strange, was not "new." Schönberg retorted that "there is nothing that is absolutely new! The relatively new, however, is rooted in tradition, and it is only agreeable to me if one recognizes this – even in a roundabout way." Schönberg's efforts to make his music comprehensible from within tradition are evident in numerous texts, especially during the late 1920s and early 1930s, such as the Prague lecture "Neue Musik, veraltete Musik, Stil und Gedanke" (1930). Such efforts also found musical expression in several arrangements of works by older composers: the "rearrangement" of the Cello Concerto based on the D major Harpsichord Concerto by Matthias Georg Monn (1932/33), the arrangement for string quartet and orchestra of Georg Friederich Händel's Concerto Grosso in B flat major, op. 6 No. 7 (1933), the orchestral arrangement of Johannes Brahms's Piano Quartet in G minor, op. 25 (1937), and a fragmentary reworking of Johann Sebastian Bach's Viola da Gamba Sonata for violoncello and orchestra (1939). With the arrangement of Monn's Harpsichord Concerto, Schönberg resorted to a piece that was already familiar to him; in 1911/12, through Guido Adler's mediation, he had created a continuo realization for it for the "Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich." The immediate reason for Schönberg's renewed involvement with the work was a suggestion by the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals, who had already performed Monn's Concerto in G Minor in 1913 – a work for which Schönberg had also provided a continuo realization. A draft letter to Casals, presumably written in Barcelona in the winter of 1931/32, provides information about Schönberg's first thoughts: "Yesterday you asked me if I would write a piece for cello. I answered you: I have often thought about it and have intended to do it many times. I could also have told you that I had just thought about it again, because your playing gave me an immense desire to do it; furthermore, regarding my plans. [...] I will briefly indicate some of them: 1. a Fantasy on a Bach piece (a beautiful Adagio or Minuet, Gavotte, or something similar) possibly in variation form; or 2. a Piano Suite or a Trio Sonata or something similar reinterpreted for cello. 3. one of these works either a) for solo cello or

b) [for] cello and piano or c) [for] cello and orchestra." However, the composition of the work – which, incidentally, was the last one Schönberg wrote in Berlin – did not take place until about a year later, between November 11, 1932 and January 4, 1933. Regarding the character of the concerto, Schönberg wrote to Casals: "I think it has become a very brilliant piece. In any case, I have taken great care regarding the sound and am very pleased with it. The piece is in some respects less soloistic than a concerto by Monn would be; for oftentimes the cello operates as if it were a soloist in a chamber music setting, whose brilliant playing produces a very beautiful and engaging sound. Incidentally, my main concern was to eliminate the deficiencies of the Handelian style [...]. Just as Mozart did with Handel's Messiah, I have removed entire sections of sequences (rosalias, 'cobbler's spots') and replaced them with real substance. Then, I tried to eliminate the other main defect of the Handelian style, namely, that the theme is always at its best during its first appearance, and becomes more and more insignificant and inferior during the course of the piece. I believe I have succeeded in bringing the whole closer to the style of Haydn. In terms of harmonic content, I sometimes go a little (and sometimes more than a little) beyond that style. However, nowhere does the harmony venture much further than Brahms, and in any case, there are no dissonances that cannot be explained through the traditional theory of harmony; and: nowhere is it atonal!" (February 20, 1932) The "free arrangement" – as the title of the work states – of Monn's composition goes far beyond the limits of how Schönberg had treated it in 1911/12. At first glance, his interventions correspond to the standard procedures: rearrangements, deletions, interpolations of individual measures or sections, harmonic enrichment through tonal colors. However, Schönberg did not limit himself to transcribing the score note for note, but rather added new parts and recomposed entire sections of the work. For example, the first movement in Monn has only 84 measures, whereas in Schönberg's version it is expanded to 97 measures. Schönberg made another significant change from the original in the area of sound, which, as indicated in the letter, was particularly important to him. The drastic change in instrumentation must also be seen in this context: the harpsichord is replaced by the solo cello, and the three-part string section with continuo in Monn is now replaced by a modern symphony orchestra with extensive percussion as well as celesta and harp. In doing so, he considered the cello part "a draft, a sketch [...] as long as you [Casals] are of the opinion that something does not sound good or does not work well for the instrument." (Letter of March 16, 1932) Schönberg's "reworking" was thus clearly aimed at an "improvement" of the original: what bothered him most about Monn were the "deficiencies of the Handelian style," stating that "the latter's counterpoint is poor and simple, and its secondary voices [...] really inferior." ("Neue Musik, veraltete Musik, Stil und Gedanke") However, the project of a joint premiere with Pablo Casals – as Schönberg had suggested in the letter he wrote in February – could not be realized. Although Casals immediately began rehearsing the work, he was skeptical about an early performance, which Schönberg was aiming for in view of the political situation. "I can only tell you that I am working incessantly on Monn's concerto – I have never studied such a difficult work and – as a testament of my admiration – the difficulties are so manifold that it would be too much to say when the work can be presented to the public." (Letter from Casals, July

22, 1933). In the end, the work would not be heard until two years later in London with Emanuel Feuermann as the soloist – in Schönberg's absence.

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