

# ART OF DISSIDENT



## Case Study: Erwin Schulhoff, composer 1894 – 1942

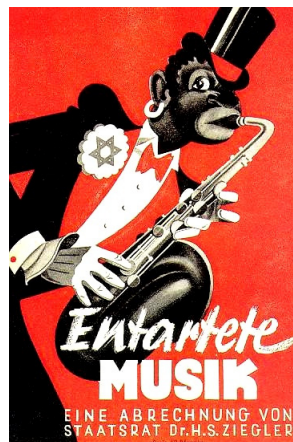
Anton Dvorak predicted a great musical future for Prague-born piano prodigy Erwin Schulhoff who was in Cologne studying music when WWI broke out. Although Schulhoff was in the field during WWI, he developed a network of friends in Cologne who inspired his dada works and influenced his political leanings.

Immediately before the war Schulhoff composed Lieder, a lighthearted orchestra overture, a chamber music divertimento, a sonata and several piano works. The titles of Schulhoff's pieces between 1915–1918 suggest the change and range of the feelings brought out by war: Three Preludes and Three Fugues (1915), Five Grotesques (1917) and Five Burlesques (1918).

Schulhoff returned to a Cologne art scene changed as much by war as he. The art collector Karl Nierendorf, inspired to rebuild the world through the arts, had founded the Gesellschaft der Kunst (GDK) which issued its pro-worker manifesto in the periodical *Der Strom* in 1919.<sup>1</sup> The Hoerles, Willy Fick, the Ernsts, Johannes Theodor Kuhlemann, Otto Freundlich and many others associated themselves with the GDK. The first *Der Strom* exhibition was in the Kolnischer Kunstverein in Jan 1919.

Even if Schulhoff hadn't met the artists from the GDK group before the 1919 exhibition, he most certainly met them at the music events Nierendorf hosted. Nierendorf's good friend Otto Klemperer conducted the Mar 2, 1919 "Mahler Matinee" in the Roccoco Salon of Hotel Ditsch in Cologne.

The GDK's Mar 12, 1919 lecture on "The Symphonic in Poetry" featured poet Johannes Theodor Kuhlemann. Kuhlemann, valued in the GDK group for the fun he brought with his poetic recitations in the Koelsch dialect, had written a small volume of poems between 1910-1914 which he called *Consolamini*<sup>2</sup> Max Ernst created illustrations for *Consolamini* which Nierendorf published in his Kairos Verlag in 1919.



Kuhlemann wrote a series of poems called "Die Landschaften" in 1917 which he dedicated to the GDK artist Heinrich Hoerle. In 1918 Schulhoff set five of Kuhlemann's poems from *Die Landschaften* to music.<sup>3</sup> In 1919 Schulhoff also created choral music for five poems by Kuhlemann's friend, poet Theodor Daubler. Schulhoff

titled the Daubler piece "Menschheit". Works such as "Menschheit" and Heinrich Hoerle's "Kruppelmappe" combined with other GDK work showed how the artists in Cologne struggled with the meaning of what it meant to be human in a post WWI world.



March 30, 1919 Nierendorf hosted a Chamber Music Matinee with first performances of works by Pfitzner and Debussy—an event that Schulhoff would definitely have attended as he had had lessons from Debussy. By this time, Schulhoff, like his friends Angelika and Heinrich Hoerle, had turned his WWI rage into works rife with irony. In 1919 he composed Five Humoresques, Five Arabesques, Five Picturesques and finally in 1920 Five Ironies.



Although Schulhoff was not done with the dada impulse in 1920, he aligned himself to new influences when he moved to Dresden. He turned to jazz. His 1921 "Suite" for chamber orchestra included movements titled ragtime, Boston waltz, tango, shimmy, step and jazz. It began and ended with short dadaesque nonsense poems and was dedicated to Berlin artist George Grosz who shared Schulhoff's enthusiasm for jazz, ragtime and dada.

In 1922 Schulhoff created a choral piece which according to Schulhoff's own words was inspired by, "the holy spirit of Hans Arp"! Schulhoff had met Arp in Cologne. The 1922 work called "Die Wolkenpumpe, op. 40" was based on Arp's dada poems. "In Futurum", another dada-inspired composition, had a middle movement marked only with a rest and the notation, "with feeling".

In 1922 when Berlin's artistically radical Novembergruppe finally started music evenings, Schulhoff capitalized on his dada friendships to participate in concert programs that featured Schoenberg, Hindemith, Berg, Stravinsky, Satie, Bartok, Ravel and Webern. Schulhoff had met Arnold Schoenberg when Klemperer conducted his F Minor Quartet at the Oct 9, 1919 GDK concert in Cologne. He corresponded with Anton Berg.

In Schulhoff's 1924 "Hot Sonata", sometimes called his jazz concerto, the last section marked *allegro alla jazz* used a siren, car horn, anvil, cowbells, rattle, tam-tam, Japanese drums and a whole array of non-traditional percussion. Touches such as those contributed to Schulhoff's reputation as dada's foremost composer.



During what remained of the Roaring Twenties, Schulhoff toured as a celebrated pianist in Germany, France and England while continuing to compose. As well as showcasing virtuosity in his classical repertoire, Schulhoff worked as a jazz pianist and improviser in Europe's hot

jazz clubs. These good times ended as the decade ended.

As Hitler rose, Schulhoff became progressively more radical in his politics. In 1932 he set the Communist Manifesto to music in a cantata for soloists, chorus and horns. In 1933 he wrote songs for a soloist titled "1917" after the year of the Russian Revolution. As a Jew and a communist Schulhoff was doubly branded degenerate.

Schulhoff fled to Czechoslovakia where between 1933 and his death he composed his last five symphonies. He dedicated Symphony #3 to hunger strikers in Slovakia and Symphony #4 to fighters in the Spanish Civil War. Although Schulhoff took Soviet citizenship he did not emigrate. He was arrested the day after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. He died of tuberculosis in the Wulzburg Concentration Camp in 1942. He had started his 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

<sup>1</sup> Nierendorf's GDK was a branch of the Berlin Arbeitsrat fur Kunst.

<sup>2</sup> Consolamini, consolamini, translates to comfort ye, comfort ye and is from Isaiah 40: 1. It is also a Gregorian Chant from the 1400s

<sup>3</sup> The fact that Kuhleemann dedicated a handwritten manuscript of "Die Landschaften" to Heinrich Hoerle with the words "Zum Kubistischen Cyklus Heinrich Hoerle gewidmet" in 1917 indicates that Schulhoff might have had the poems to set to music earlier than 1918-1919.