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Concert of the year? A provocative, even erotic, musical mix in the Nasher's Soundings series

<http://www.dallasnews.com/arts/classical-music/2016/12/15/provocative-musical-dramatic-mix-nashers-soundings-series>

By Scott Cantrell, Special Contributor

The first sounds we heard, from behind a scrim, were the yearning suspensions opening the third act of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, played by pianist (and Soundings artistic director) Seth Knopp. In fact, this was the introduction to the third of Wagner's love-smitten Wesendonck Songs, an introduction Wagner subsequently expanded into the orchestral prelude. Together with two other songs from the cycle at the end of the concert, it was elegantly sung, with incandescent tone, by soprano Melanie Henley Heyn.



Soprano Melanie Henley Heyn and pianist Seth Knopp perform Richard Wagner's "Im Treibhaus" at Soundings: New Music at the Nasher on Thursday, December 15, 2016 at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. (Jeffrey McWhorter/Special Contributor)

Next came a lighthearted evocation of love, Erich Wolfgang Korngold's violin-and-piano arrangement of a waltzlike movement from his incidental music for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. With silken tone, violinist Daniel Chong joined Knopp in a warmly expressive performance.

A wholly different aspect of love was portrayed in the *Sonata erotica* [sic] by Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942), a brilliant Czech composer whose Jewish heritage and later Soviet sympathies doomed him to death (of tuberculosis) in a Nazi concentration camp. For solo female voice, this "sonata" actually notates a crescendo and decrescendo of gasps, moans, screams and murmurs of a woman in, shall we say, physical ecstasy. It was quite convincingly realized by Liza Sadovy.

After these permutations of love, Steve Reich's 1988 *Different Trains* and Schulhoff's 1920-1924 String Sextet took us to very different places, although one could imagine connections. In the former, train trips before, during and after World War II are evoked in recordings of chugging, whistling trains and snippets of speaking voices; a string quartet supplies its own chuggings, but also anticipates, doubles and echoes the pitches and rhythms of the speaking voices. The Parker Quartet--violinists Chong and Ying Xue, violist Jessica Bodner and cellist Kee-Hyun Kim--collaborated in a gripping account.

Right-wing governments are invariably hostile to artistic innovation, and Schulhoff's embrace of influences from the Dada movement as well as both musical and visual expressionism further doomed him during the Nazi occupation.

After a roughhewn, atonal *Allegro risoluto*, the Sextet's following three movements are less confrontational, though hardly soothing. Free-range lines--not really melodies--are woven through various accompanimental textures. The third movement is an earthy quasi-folkdance à la Bartók. Adding violist Roger Tapping and cellist Natasha Brofsky, the Parker Quartet too readily sacrificed tuning to fury in the first movement, but thereafter the playing was impressively focused and compelling.



Violinist Ying Xue performs Steve Reich's "Different Trains" with the Parker Quartet at Soundings: New Music at the Nasher on Thursday, December 15, 2016 at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. (Jeffrey McWhorter/Special Contributor)



Violinists Daniel Chong, left, and Ying Xue, center, and cellist Natasha Brofsky perform Erwin Schulhoff's "String Sextet" at Soundings: New Music at the Nasher on Thursday, December 15, 2016 at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. (Jeffrey McWhorter/Special Contributor)

Scott Cantrell, former classical music critic of The Dallas Morning News, has also written for The New York Times and numerous music magazines.