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## Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

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**Saturday, March 7th, 2009, 5:00-6:00 p.m.**

**Ferdinand Hiller** (1811-1885). Piano Concerto No. 2 in F-sharp minor, Op. 69 (1843). Howard Shelley, piano/conductor, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. Hyperion 67655. Tr 4-6. 19:55

**Max Bruch** (1838-1920). *Suite on Russian Themes*, Op. 79b (1903). Rhenish Philharmonic, Wolfgang Balzer. EBS 6071. Tr 2-6. 16:30

**Max Bruch**. *Swedish Dances Nos. 6, 7*, Op. 63 (1892). Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Kurt Masur. Philips 420932. Disc 2, Tr 9-10. 3:09

Max Bruch is known today mostly by his G minor Violin Concerto and *Scottish Fantasy*, while Ferdinand Hiller isn't known at all. Yet in their day they were not only famous, but influential.

Hiller's fall into obscurity is the more remarkable when we consider the heights he inhabited. He not only knew, but was close friends with Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, Chopin, Rossini, Liszt, Meyerbeer, Cherubini, and many of the most powerful musicians of the time. He was a major musical force in more than a half-dozen cities around Europe, conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Italian Opera in Paris, was an early friend of Wagner's, and was even at Beethoven's deathbed. Hiller played the piano like a dream, taught organ, wrote articles, founded festivals, judged competitions, and composers from Bruch to Humperdinck to Respighi came to study with him.

But his fame was not to last. His music, at first traveling with the progressives, decamped around the time of Wagner's ascendancy, and the times were to pass him by. He increasingly opined against the new wave of German music, and his own music did not have the depth and melodic richness of a Brahms to buffer his reputation from the backlash. Still, he was an extremely talented composer of fine taste, which we can hear in his second concerto for piano, perhaps his finest work. From the unusual beginning, where the piano states its case alone, through the overlapping themes of the finale, Hiller balances the competing claims of soloist and orchestra in a satisfying example of the Romantic piano concerto tradition.

Bruch, Hiller's student, was even more conservative in his generation than Hiller was in his. Interestingly, one hallmark of his style—folk music—has been employed by conservatives *and* progressives throughout the years; in his case, it was a safe outcropping from the slippery slope of Wagnerian harmonic confusion. Bruch used German and other folk elements in many of his works, such as in his choral music, the *Kol nidre* for cello and orchestra (Bruch was introduced to the Jewish cantorial tradition by Hiller), and in music on today's program, the *Suite on Russian Themes* and *Swedish Dances*. Folk music was in the air, and Bruch helped to keep that spirit alive. One who famously carried the torch in his own country was the Bruch student Ralph Vaughan Williams.

It is fascinating to witness these student-teacher relationships playing out against evolving musical landscapes. There are no templates by which we can prophesy success, or rather, there are as many templates as there are composers. But regardless of the shifting places of Hiller and Bruch in the repertoire, hearing their music now can transport us to a world where they still hold sway.

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Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).