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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

Saturday, November 6th, 2010, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

[Xaver Scharwenka](#) (1850-1924). [Piano Concerto No. 4 in F minor, Op. 82](#) (1908). Stephen Hough, piano, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Lawrence Foster. Hyperion 66790. 39:18

[Scharwenka](#). [Andante religioso](#), Op. 46a (1881). Gävle Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Fifield. Sterling 1060. 7:36

Xaver Scharwenka was a composer, educator, conductor, editor, impresario, and world-famous pianist born in Poland, who established his career in Germany and founded a conservatory in New York City. Two quite different pieces, the formidable Fourth Piano Concerto and an utterly gorgeous *Andante religioso* for strings, organ, and harp, show the depth of his creativity.

(As an aside, German names can be a puzzle. His full name is Franz Xaver Scharwenka, but, as J.S. Bach was called Sebastian, not Johann, during his life, Scharwenka is properly known as Xaver. Bach, though, is so universally known nowadays as J.S. or Johann Sebastian, that anyone referring to him today as Sebastian—outside of the smallest of musicological circles—would sound a bit precious. Not so with Scharwenka or, for that matter, Franz Joseph Haydn. Call him Joseph and you'll be just fine.)

(Just in case you were wondering.)

Xaver's older brother (Ludwig!) Philipp was also a composer and teacher, and he ended up working for Xaver at the Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin. Xaver founded this after teaching at the New Academy of Music in Berlin and achieving celebrity as a pianist. He played not only his own music, which was well received, but he was highly admired as a keen performer of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Liszt. He soon was touring beyond the continent, with more than two dozen trips to the U.S. and Canada. The first time he visited America, in 1891, he liked it so much that he decided to stay, living here for seven years and opening a branch of his school in New York City.

He still had ties to the city after he moved back to Berlin. Scharwenka performed his Fourth Piano Concerto in 1910 with the New York Philharmonic under their newly hired Music Director, Gustav Mahler (just a year before Mahler's death). This work is the summation of his creative output, but it fell into oblivion, with most of his music, after his death. One reason may be that, even for imposing romantic piano concertos the Scharwenka Fourth is an especially difficult piece to play.

For this recording, Hyperion scoured the world for the music of this once-renowned pianist/composer. They came up empty until looking across the Atlantic and finding it in the Fleisher Collection. There has since been a small renaissance of Scharwenka's music, and deservedly so. This recording was named 1996 Record of the Year by Gramophone magazine.

A very un pianistic work is the *Andante religioso*, a re-orchestration of part of a cello sonata. From that unlikely beginning Scharwenka crafts a luminous work far removed from the grand statements of the concerto. Niceties abound. He divides the first violins, unusually, into three groups, giving the melody to the lowest ones. He doubles them with the cellos and weaves the remaining violins around and above them, creating a work of nuance and charm. It stuns in its own small way, and may be one of those pieces where you say, "Why have I never heard this before?" It's hard to imagine an orchestra not loving this work, but it's becoming easier to see why more and more people are beginning to notice Xaver Scharwenka.

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](#).