



Franco Gulli and Enrica Cavallo have performed together for forty years

## Gulli and Cavallo: masters of music

**Franco Gulli, violin and Enrica Cavallo, piano**  
November 6  
Convocation Hall

review by John Charles

The annual concerts presented by the Department of Music in memory of Nicholas Arthur Kilburn have become an event to anticipate. If pianist Jorge Bolei, and soprano Ely Ameling have been the most riveting artists in previous years, violinist Franco Gulli and pianist Enrica Cavallo proved themselves to be equally distinguished musicians.

Gulli performed several times with the Edmonton Symphony under maestro Pierre Hetu, in the 1970's, and Gulli and Cavallo once played the Mendelssohn Double Concerto in a chamber orchestra concert, but this was the first time they have been heard locally on their own.

There was nothing unexpected on the program, which offered Mozart, Brahms, and Respighi. Mozart's first Mannheim Sonata, in G Major, K. 301 began the evening, immediately revealing Gulli's warm elegant tone (he plays a Stradivarius of 1716), Cavallo's forthright manner, and their exceptional ensemble playing.

Written in 1778, at the end of his 22nd year,

Mozart's two-movement piece demands more of an equal partnership than most sonatas of that era which were basically piano or harpsichord sonatas with violin obbligato. And these musicians' ability to mesh phrasing and style, though Gulli stood a few feet behind Cavallo throughout, made for a beautifully flowing performance.

In the second movement their trills were clean, firm, and evenly matched, and the stylish playing allowed the listener to accept the musicians as pure conveyers of the music and delight in Mozart without distractions.

Brahms' third and last violin sonata (in D minor, Op. 108) is his greatest, and has an almost symphonic breadth in its four movements. Here Gulli's tone seemed no larger than in the Mozart, but his tone had greater variety of colour, positively gleaming in high passages. His accents in the dramatic opening phrase managed to shape the drama without distorting it.

At times this listener wanted more explicit passion, but Gulli always contained the emotion, and never got carried away. This is the sort of mature mastery that contrasts with, say, last week's fiery Edmonton Symphony guest violinist, Nigel Kennedy.

## Gulli's life in music

interview by John Charles

When Franco Gulli was five, in Trieste, Italy, his father put a little violin in his hands and started teaching him to play. At seven Gulli gave his first public performance.

"I was a prodigy—for a while. Then World War II came, and everything stopped," Gulli said, a few hours before his recital last Friday. Gulli and his wife, pianist Enrica Cavallo, were chosen to perform this year's annual Kilburn Memorial Concert at Convocation Hall.

A professor at Indiana University's widely respected music department since 1972, Gulli is admired as a musician's musician, and it was instructive to chat with this violinist, who is very much the elegantly turned-out Italian gentleman.

"The war was terrible, of course," Gulli continued, "but in a special sense it was good for my life."

Instead of continuing to perform with his youthful gifts he was forced to stop and think about the music, and make sense of it. So much happened in Italy during those years that it was not easy to start up a career afterwards. Gulli moved to Milan and became concertmaster of the Milan Chamber Orchestra, where he performed as a soloist several times each year, learned important orchestral works inside out, and played with many great conductors.

"Leonard Bernstein conducted his first Italian concert with my orchestra, in the late 1940's," Gulli proudly recalled. "And there I also met my wife. Last February we celebrated our fortieth anniversary of concertizing together."

By the age of twelve, Gulli had played all the most flashy, virtuoso concertos—works of Paganini and Wieniawski—and in Milan he grew to be a subtler sort of musician. Asked to name his favorite concert now, he declined, adding: "Maybe, if I had to make one choice for composer, it would be Mozart. But there are too many wonderful composers to choose. I don't want to be a specialist; that's such a limitation. I have 50 concerti in my repertoire, but in a given season I offer about a dozen from which orchestras choose. And three of those are usually by Mozart."

Gulli's Edmonton concert offered masterpieces, and no fluff: three sonatas by Mozart, Brahms, and Respighi. Ottorino Respighi, a fellow countryman who died in 1936, is best known for his splashy orchestral tone poems, *The Pines of Rome*, and *The Fountains of Rome*. But Respighi was a scholarly music professor, and some of his quieter, formally constructed works are among his best. *The Violin Sonata in B Minor* (1917) is one of these. Aside from a 1950's recording by the legendary Jascha Heifetz it's still not well-known on this continent.

"I heard the work on the radio six years ago, and didn't recognize it," Gulli said. "I was impressed by its careful structure and its beauty, and when they announced it as Respighi, I said to Enrica, 'We've got to learn this.' We recorded it recently for an Italian label. Why isn't it better known? Maybe Respighi was writing 'behind' his time. Remember that four years earlier, Stravinsky wrote *Le Sacre du Printemps*, a very modern work, while Respighi's music still speaks of an earlier age."

As a violin professor, Gulli has twenty-one

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students and his pianist wife has twenty. With doctoral committees, recitals to grade, auditions and much else, it's remarkable that the musicians can still have an international career.

"I don't know how we do it, but we do!" Gulli said. "Our students like us to be away sometimes and miss their weekly class, because it gives them extra time to rehearse. But my wife and I teach two semesters—not our summer session—so we usually tour when school is out in May, or at Christmas vacation. Or we go away just for the weekend, as for our Edmonton concert."

On Saturday Gulli offered a masterclass at Con Hall for local violinists who had been screened by a committee. But what can a single masterclass accomplish between a master and student who are unknown to each other?

"Sometimes they don't work," the violinist admitted. "But sometimes it happens. If ten or twelve students are there at the same time, one suggestion to the student who's playing at the moment can be useful for everyone. The purpose is to share the experience of someone who's been forty years on stage with people who haven't gone through things only by reason of their age. It's talking of music and how to approach music."



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