

**NAXOS**

**Miklós  
RÓZSA**

**Sonata for Solo Violin**

**Variations on a  
Hungarian Peasant Song**

**North Hungarian  
Peasant Songs and Dances**

**Philippe Quint, Violin  
William Wolfram, Piano**



## Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995): Music for Violin and Piano

Miklós Rózsa, one of the pre-eminent composers of Hollywood's Golden Age, was a committed writer of works for the concert hall before, during, and after his movie career, which included such famous films as *The Thief of Baghdad*, *Double Indemnity*, *Spellbound*, and *Ben-Hur*. Born in Budapest in 1907, he demonstrated a talent for music from a young age. While his father indulged those interests he did not encourage them, and much of his musical education and activities took place almost surreptitiously. In spite of this, the young Rózsa mastered the violin (playing Mozart in public at the age of seven, dressed as the composer) and managed to familiarise himself with much of the classical repertoire then popular in Hungary, most of it centred on Liszt. With other young friends he championed the cause of Bartók and Kodály, but those efforts were not appreciated by his conservative teachers, earning him a reprimand from the principal of his secondary school.

Another important influence on the young Rózsa was the peasant music he heard during summers spent on his family's estate north of Budapest, in the village of Nagylóczy. He loved his time there, writing, "The music was all around me; I would hear it in the fields when the people were at work, in the village as I lay awake at night; and the time came when I felt I had to try to put it down on paper and perpetuate it". Although not a methodical folk-song collector like Bartók and Kodály, and rarely resorting to direct quotations of folk melodies, he absorbed the folk idiom so completely and deeply that it became an integral part of his mature musical language, "stamped indelibly in one way or another on virtually every bar [I] ever put on paper".

When it came time to further his education, Rózsa desired to escape the stifling culture of his native Budapest. His father eventually agreed to let Miklós leave home and enroll at the University of Leipzig as a chemistry major with a musicology minor. By the end of the first year, it was so obvious that Rózsa's heart was completely given to music that his father relented and

allowed him to enroll at the Leipzig Conservatory, where he studied composition with Hermann Grabner. He was remarkably successful as a student in Leipzig, and by the time he graduated from the Conservatory in 1928 he already had two pieces (a string trio and a piano quintet) published by the distinguished firm of Breitkopf and Härtel. His career as a successful composer seemed assured.

The works on this recording span the entire length of that career. The *Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song*, *Op. 4*, the *North Hungarian Peasant Songs and Dances*, *Op. 5*, and the *Duo for Violin and Piano*, *Op. 7*, are all early works (1929–31), written just after his graduation from the Conservatory. The *Sonata for Solo Violin*, *Op. 40* (1985–86), on the other hand, is one of a series of late works for solo instruments written when a degenerative illness made the physical labour of writing for large ensembles impossible; there are also solo pieces for flute, clarinet, guitar, oboe, and viola dating from this period.

The *Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song* and the *North Hungarian Peasant Songs and Dances* are two of only three works in Rózsa's entire *œuvre* (the other is his pastiche ballet, *Hungaria*) that use actual folk melodies. *Opus 4* is the first of many sets of variations Rózsa would compose (including some in his film scores). It is based on a simple eight-bar tune, stated initially by the piano. The thirteen variations which follow alternate song-like, *cantabile* sections with virtuosic, dance-like ones, culminating in a fiery finale. By contrast, *Opus 5* (also known as *Little Suite*) lays out four different tunes from the composer's "little black book" in a slow-fast-slow-fast configuration. Here the folk material is presented more directly, with little in the way of contrapuntal development.

The *Duo*, *Op. 7*, begins with a traditional sonata-allegro movement. After a slow introduction, two themes are introduced, the first striding confidently forward and the second more like a gentle waltz. Both

are of a pronounced Hungarian character but neither is an actual folk tune. A coda brings back the introductory idea and the first theme is heard in slow, tranquil octaves. The second movement is a quicksilver scherzo, utilizing two themes arranged in ABA form—the first playful, the second more lyrical. This is followed by a rhapsodic and haunting Hungarian nocturne, also in ternary form, and the piece is brought to a rousing conclusion by a virtuosic peasant dance in rondo form which incorporates much development of the main theme surrounding the two episodes.

By the time he came to write the *Sonata for Violin Solo, Op. 40*, in 1985–86, Rózsa had left film scoring behind yet had over sixty years of compositional experience. He brings all of it to bear in this, the most complex and challenging of his late works for solo instruments. Its structure is considerably more diffuse

than his earlier sonatas; the first movement is constructed more from motivic cells than clear-cut themes, the variations which constitute the second movement wander so far from the original tune as to be virtually new material, and the concluding *Vivace* brings back a motive from the first movement to contrast with its own two themes. Virtuoso technique is required from the soloist throughout, and the listener is confronted with an amount of dissonance (rife with tritones and sevenths) unusual even for Rózsa, who was sometimes taken to task in Hollywood for writing film music that was too modernistic, too “Carnegie Hall”. It is restless music, glowering and edgy. The work is dedicated to Manuel Compinsky, who often advised the composer on technical matters related to string instruments.

**Frank K. DeWald**

## **Philippe Quint**

Born in St Petersburg, Grammy Award nominee violinist Philippe Quint has already established himself as one of the most brilliant and charismatic young artists of his generation. His début recording of William Schuman’s *Violin Concerto* (Naxos 8.559083) with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and José Serebrier was nominated for two Grammy awards, including one for best soloist with orchestra, also named as Editor’s Choice by both *The Gramophone* and *The Strad* magazine. His recording of Bernstein’s *Serenade* (Naxos 8.559245) with Marin Alsop and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra was also named Editor’s Choice by *The Gramophone* and CD of the week by *The Daily Telegraph*. Other acclaimed recordings include Rorem’s *Violin Concerto* (Naxos 8.559278) with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under José Serebrier. His appearances include performances with the Detroit, Bournemouth, Royal Liverpool, Minnesota, Houston, Indianapolis, China National Symphony, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestras, and at the Mostly Mozart Festival, under the batons of Marin Alsop, Andrew Litton, Klauspeter Seibel, Kurt Masur, Hans Graf, Arild Remmereit, Maxim Shostakovich, JoAnn Falletta, Jorge Mester, Carlos Miguel Prieto, and Kenneth Schermerhorn. He performed the world première of Lera Auerbach’s *Concerto No. 1* at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, a work that was written for and dedicated to him. Since becoming an American citizen in 1991 he has made numerous appearances in Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall, and performed at festivals, and radio and television stations throughout the United States, Europe and South America. A former student of Dorothy Delay, Cho-Liang Lin, Masao Kawasaki, and Felix Galimir at the Juilliard School, he took top prizes at the 1998 Juilliard Competition, the 1997 Pablo Sarasate International Violin Competition and the 1997 Salon Virtuosi Award. He has been awarded grants by the Clarisse Kampel and Bagby Foundations, and was nominated Young Artist of the Year by the British Royal Philharmonic Society in 2007. Philippe Quint plays a 1723 “Ex-Kiesewetter” Antonio Stradivari violin on loan to him from Mr. and Mrs. Clement Arriison through the generous efforts of the Stradivari Society in Chicago.

## William Wolfram

The American pianist William Wolfram was winner of the Silver Medal in both the William Kapell and the Naumberg International Piano Competitions. He also holds the distinction of Bronze medallist of the prestigious Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow. A versatile recitalist, concerto soloist, and chamber musician, he has won the respect of musicians and the acclaim of critics across the country. His concerto debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony under the baton of Leonard Slatkin was the first in a long succession of appearances and career relationships with numerous American conductors and orchestras. He has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, the New Jersey Symphony, the National Symphony, and the Florida Orchestra among many others, and enjoys regular and ongoing close associations with the Dallas Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony, and the Minnesota Orchestra. Conductors with whom he has worked include Mark Wigglesworth, Andrew Litton, Jeffrey Tate, Andreas Delfs, Hans Vonk, Jeffrey Kahane, James Paul, JoAnn Falletta, William Eddins, Jerzy Semkov, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Daniel Hege, and Marin Alsop. Abroad William Wolfram has appeared with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, Moscow Philharmonic, Budapest Philharmonic, Capetown and Johannesburg Symphonies of South Africa and the National Symphony of Peru. An enthusiastic supporter of contemporary music, he has close ties with a number of composers. In the recording studio, he has undertaken a project featuring the piano concertos of Edward Collins with Marin Alsop and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and contributed to the Naxos series devoted to the piano music of Franz Liszt (8.557014). A graduate of the Juilliard School, he lives in New York City.





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Playing Time  
60:32

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RÓZSA: Music for Violin and Piano

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One of the pre-eminent composers of Hollywood's Golden Age, Miklós Rózsa was also a committed writer of works for the concert hall. The overtly Hungarian *Variations* and *Peasant Songs and Dances*, two of only three Rózsa works to use actual folk melodies, are early works (1921-31). Over 50 years later, at a time when illness forced him to concentrate principally on music for single instruments, Rózsa wrote his *Sonata for Solo Violin*, the most complex, challenging and dissonant of his late works.

Miklós  
**RÓZSA**  
(1907-1995)

**Music for Violin and Piano**

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|----|---|--------------|
| 1  | <b>Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song, Op. 4 (1929)</b>   | <b>9:30</b>  |
|    | <b>Duo for Violin and Piano, Op. 7 (1931)</b>                 | <b>17:54</b> |
| 2  | Tranquillo  | 6:08         |
| 3  | Allegretto capriccioso  | 2:44         |
| 4  | Largo doloroso  | 4:53         |
| 5  | Allegro vivo e giusto   | 4:09         |
|    | <b>North Hungarian Peasant Songs and Dances, Op. 5 (1929)</b> | <b>9:29</b>  |
| 6  | Molto tranquillo  | 2:15         |
| 7  | Allegro giusto  | 3:04         |
| 8  | Andante sostenuto   | 1:43         |
| 9  | Allegro giocoso   | 2:26         |
|    | <b>Sonata for Violin Solo, Op. 40 (1986)</b>                  | <b>23:39</b> |
| 10 | Allegro moderato  | 6:55         |
| 11 | Canzone con variazioni  | 10:53        |
| 12 | Finale: Vivace  | 5:51         |

**Philippe Quint, Violin • William Wolfram, Piano**

Recorded at Glenn Gould Studio, CBC Toronto (tracks 1-9) and at St John Chrysostom Church, Newmarket, Ontario (tracks 10-12) Canada from 5-7 January, 2007

Producers: Bonnie Silver and Norbert Kraft • Engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver

Publisher: Breitkopf & Härtel

*Philippe Quint plays the 1723 'Ex-Kiesewetter' Antonio Stradivari violin, kindly on loan from Clement and Karen Arrison through the Stradivari Society, Chicago*

Booklet Notes: Frank K. DeWald • Cover Photo: Philippe Quint (by kind permission)

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