

NAXOS

Miklós
RÓZSA

Violin Concerto • Sinfonia Concertante

Anastasia Khitruk, Violin
Andrey Tchekmazov, Cello
Russian Philharmonic Orchestra
Dmitry Yablonsky



Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995)

Violin Concerto, Op. 24 • Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Cello and Orchestra, Op. 29

The music of Miklós Rózsa tempers an arch romanticism with an innate classicism. Perhaps this reflects the fact that he was born in Hungary but trained at the Leipzig Conservatory. It is true both of his film music, where romanticism is rather more to the fore, and his concert works, where form and substance never fail to satisfy.

Rózsa arrived in Hollywood in 1940, after stays in Paris, where Arthur Honegger introduced him to the idea of composing music for films, and London, where he wrote his first film score for Alexander Korda's *Knight Without Armour*. In California he found a thriving community of musical émigrés, including composers such as Toch, Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Korngold, as well as performers such as Piatigorsky and Heifetz. He quickly established himself as one of the most sought-after composers for A-list films, and had so solidified his reputation by 1952 that when he renewed his contract with MGM that year he was able to insist on an unprecedented clause giving him three months off every summer to dedicate exclusively to his concert work. The *Violin Concerto, Op. 24*, was the first fruit of that happy circumstance.

Rózsa's first violin concerto, written during his student days in Leipzig, was never published, and by the time he was looking forward to his first summer break from MGM, he felt ready to write a mature one. Recalling that many of the great concerti were written with specific artists in mind (such as Brahms for Joachim) he decided to approach Jascha Heifetz. He had met the great violinist only once but knew the virtuoso's accompanist, Emmanuel Bay. Through him he heard back that Heifetz was interested but wanted a sort of trial first movement which they could work through together before he would make a final decision to sponsor the work. Rózsa knew this would be risky (Heifetz had previously approved the opening pages of Schoenberg's concerto only to refuse to play the full work) but decided to go ahead anyway. After leaving Hollywood and settling with his family in a beautiful

villa in Rapallo, he began work on that first movement, only to be inspired to complete the entire work in just six weeks. Heifetz liked the piece, and collaborated with the composer on a few changes. Rózsa arranged for a private read-through to check the orchestral balance against the solo part, which resulted in much thinning of the orchestration. Heifetz finally gave the première of the concerto in Dallas on 15th January, 1956. The work was enthusiastically received, and Heifetz's RCA recording, made shortly thereafter, stood alone and unchallenged in the catalogue for over forty years.

The first movement begins gently but seems unsettled, oscillating between D major and D minor, and between dupe and triple metre. The soloist enters immediately with a soaring theme which takes virtuosic flight into the upper register of the instrument; after a short bridge featuring double stops it is taken over briefly by the full orchestra before a more lyrical and less agitated theme appears in a duet between soloist and solo horn. Both themes are extensively explored over a long development section which incorporates an impressive cadenza for the soloist.

The lyrical second movement, one of many Hungarian-tinged nocturnes in Rózsa's output, begins with a theme which incorporates a very gypsy-like "Scottish snap" rhythm. It is succeeded by a simpler motif sustained by a rocking accompaniment in clarinets (making use of the same "Scottish snap") and an echo of the first theme in the oboe.

Unlike the first two movements, the finale opens with a long orchestral passage. The soloist enters with a terse, argumentative motive that soon expands into a playful theme, only to be quickly succeeded by another. These two ideas are developed amidst great rhythmic activity until a more lyrical contrasting subject provides a short-lived moment of calm. The full orchestra soon regains control, however, and when the soloist reenters the fray there is no stopping the wild rhythmic ride which propels the work to its dizzyingly virtuosic conclusion.

A number of years after its composition for the concert hall, Rózsa's concerto would find itself as the basis for *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970). It was directed by Rózsa's friend and frequent collaborator, director Billy Wilder, who suggested that since the central character was an amateur violinist, the composer might raid the concerto for some of the film's themes. The lyrical subject of the second movement was transformed into the film's "love" theme, and the tempestuous opening of the finale served as a theme for the Loch Ness monster.

Rózsa's experience with Heifetz was considerably less happy when he came to write the *Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 29*. The composer was first approached by his long-time friend, cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, with the notion of writing a double concerto for himself and Heifetz. Rózsa was excited by the prospect, and in the summer of 1958 he went off to his beloved Rapallo and finished the work in just three months. But when he showed the draft to the soloists back in Hollywood, Heifetz was dissatisfied; the violinist complained that the violin and cello parts were unequal, with the cello having the more featured rôle. Rózsa tried to address these concerns, making the work longer as a result and even composing an entirely new second movement. Ultimately, Heifetz did not like the new movement but agreed to perform the original one (a theme and variations) with a reduced chamber orchestra accompaniment which the composer reluctantly supplied. Heifetz and Piatigorsky even recorded this

segment of the concerto, but it was the only part of it they ever played. The entire work eventually had its première in Chicago under the baton of Jean Martinon; it was deemed over-long by the critics and the frustrated composer agreed, subjecting it to numerous cuts before it reached its final published form.

The cellist gets things underway immediately in the first movement with a muscular theme that is soon echoed by the violinist. Gently rocking thirds in the clarinets herald the second theme, this time played first by the violinist. The ensuing development section subjects both themes to a thorough working-out, culminating in a double cadenza that builds to a fiery climax before subsiding and yielding to the second theme which begins the recapitulation.

The theme of the second movement is introduced by the cellist (a source of irritation for Heifetz) and then subjected to a series of five variations, some lyrical and some playful. The movement ends with a moment of exquisite calm, the mood of which is immediately dispelled by the long, rhythmically complex orchestral introduction to the last movement. The soloists enter with a vigorous Hungarian folk-dance, against which Rózsa juxtaposes a more lyrical, haunting second subject. The development includes another double cadenza (considerably shortened by Rózsa after the première) before the inexorable drive to the final *Vivace*, volatile and breathless.

Frank K. DeWald

Anastasia Khitruk

Born in Moscow to a family of artists and musicians, the violinist Anastasia Khitruk has a passionate devotion to musical discovery that has been the hallmark of her career. She has brought her fiery virtuosity to the service of the unjustly forgotten Russian composer Ivan Khandoshkin, Kapellmeister of Catherine the Great (Naxos 8.570028), and on this disc, to the post-romantic master Miklós Rózsa. Raised in New York, trained at the Juilliard School, and a laureate of the Premio Paganini, she has performed worldwide in concert under the batons of Hannu Lintu, Saulis Sondeckis, Claude Bardón, Patricio Cobos and Vladislav Bulakhov. She also has an active chamber music career, collaborating regularly with violinists Alexandre Brussilovsky and Mark Peskanov, pianists David Korevaar, Valery Afanassiev, and cellists François Salque and Emilio Colon. Her search for contemporary composers has led her to perform the works of Yves Prin, Philippe Hersant, and Michael Colina.

Andrey Tchekmazov

Hailed by critics as an 'extraordinary musician' (*Washington Post*), cellist Andrey Tchekmazov is known for his versatility as a soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. Grand Prize winner of the Vittorio Gui International Competition and Prize Winner of Premio Trio de Trieste, he has performed throughout North and South America, Europe, Russia and Asia, appearing at the Concert Hall of Moscow Conservatory, New York's Alice Tully Hall, Osaka Symphony Hall, Sala São Paulo and with orchestras such as the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, the São Paulo Symphony, and the Manhattan Chamber Symphony, among others. An active educator and a founding member of the New York Lyric Chamber Players, Tchekmazov performs with the New York Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players, at the Philips Collection, Bargemusic, and Lukas Foss's Music Festival in Long Island. His recent performance at the St Maarten Music Festival was with violinist Anastasia Khitruk.

Russian Philharmonic Orchestra

The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra is firmly rooted in Russia's rich musical traditions, and has achieved an impressive and outstanding musical quality by drawing its musicians from the highest ranks of Russia's most famous orchestras such as the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra and the State Symphony Orchestra. The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra was originally formed as a recording ensemble and has gone on to receive high acclaim also for its concert performances. In addition to regular recordings for leading international companies, the orchestra has undertaken tours to Turkey, Austria, Germany, China, Taiwan, Finland and elsewhere. Dmitry Yablonsky was appointed Music Advisor to the orchestra in 2003.

Dmitry Yablonsky

Dmitry Yablonsky was born in 1962 into a musical family. His mother, Oxana Yablonskaya, is a highly regarded concert pianist, and his father is a principal oboist with the Moscow Radio and Television Orchestra. He entered the Central School of Music for Gifted Children in Moscow at the age of six, and at the age of nine made his orchestral debut with Haydn's *Cello Concerto in C major*. In 1977, he and his mother emigrated to the United States, where he studied at the Juilliard School of Music, the Curtis Institute, and Yale University. His principal cello teachers have been Isaak Buravsky, Stefan Kalianov, Aldo Parisot and Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky has performed in many prestigious venues throughout the world, including La Scala, Milan, the Concertgebouw in the Netherlands, the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory, and St Petersburg Philharmonic Hall, in addition to numerous appearances in the United States, including concerts at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. He has appeared in collaboration with major orchestras and conductors, and together with chamber music partners of distinction. His interest in conducting began at Yale, when he studied with Otto-Werner Müller and also with Yuri Simonov. He made his debut as a conductor in 1990 with the Santa Cecilia Orchestra of Rome. In 1999 he was named Principal Guest Conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, and has appeared as guest conductor with orchestras in Europe and in the Far East, and was for three years Principal Guest Conductor of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. In 1998 he founded the summer Puigcerdà Festival on the French-Spanish border, and in 2002 became Principal Conductor of the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra. His many recordings, both as a cellist and as a conductor, include a number of releases for Naxos and Marco Polo.



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65:40

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Born in Hungary and trained in Leipzig, Miklós Rózsa moved to America in 1940, winning a name for himself as a master of the Hollywood epic. During his summer breaks in Italy, however, Rózsa was able to devote himself to his concert works. Combining dazzling virtuosity with Hungarian-tinged lyricism, the *Violin Concerto*, written for Jascha Heifetz in just six weeks, is one of his finest works, later to be adapted for the Billy Wilder film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. The angular *Sinfonia Concertante* (a double concerto for violin and cello) was written originally alongside the score of *Ben-Hur*. It, too, is rich in reminders of the composer's Hungarian origins.

Miklós
RÓZSA
(1907-1995)

Violin Concerto, Op. 24 **31:54**

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| ① | Allegro non troppo ma passionato | 13:27 |
| ② | Lento cantabile | 9:39 |
| ③ | Allegro vivace | 8:48 |

**Sinfonia Concertante
for Violin, Cello and Orchestra, Op. 29** **33:46**

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| ④ | Allegro non troppo | 10:52 |
| ⑤ | Andante: Theme and Variations | 13:32 |
| ⑥ | Allegro con brio | 9:22 |

Anastasia Khitruk, Violin • Andrey Tchekmazov, Cello
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