



VOX
LEGENDS
2 CDs

CDX2 5523

Bronislaw Gimpel

plays

Violin Concerti

by

BRUCH

DVORAK

&

GOLDMARK

KREISLER

Transcriptions

In the year 1850 in Cologne there was presented to the musical world the first symphony by Max Bruch, age twelve years. Born January 6, 1838, Bruch had the good fortune to be the son of a highly esteemed soprano and music pedagogue. His mother became overseer of her son's musical fortunes and because of her experience and associations was able to guide him along the smoothest pathways to a sound musical training. Combining this with a domestic atmosphere of devoted love for the craft, she nurtured his great gift until it found fulfillment in the esteem of many of his contemporaries.

Although represented today in the concert world by little more than his first Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in G Minor, and his setting for cello of the *Kol Nidrei*, the catalog of Bruch's compositions overwhelmingly favors works for voices and orchestra, mostly pieces of heavy proportions. Three operas are known, including an early setting of an adaptation of Goethe's *Scherz, List und Rache*, and his best-known product in this medium, *Die*

Lorelei. In a commemorative essay about Bruch, Hans Pfitzner, one of the outstanding composers of German opera, considered this latter work one of the important contributions to the category. He placed *Die Lorelei* among the best works in this field, in a class with *Don Giovanni*, *Der Freischuetz*, and *Hans Heiling*. He also found Bruch's first violin concerto most joyful-sounding. Bruch quickly achieved worldwide recognition with the concerto; indeed he himself later called it "mein Allerweltskonzert" ("my worldwide concerto"). The first performance was given on January 7, 1868, at Bremen, with the eminent Joseph Joachim as soloist. Four years later, on February 3, 1872, Pablo de Sarasate performed it for the first time in America, with the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society.

The first movement of the Bruch concerto is a prelude, *Allegro moderato*, in 4/4 time. This is a true preluding movement, as if the soloist were asked to come before the audience and demonstrate "warming-up" procedures, usually reserved for the dressing

room. He tries the bow, and the fingers, improvising little rapid passages up and down the strings. After a bit of this he begins to sing a fine broad melody, to test how the instrument is going to react to a change in atmospheric conditions. Then some more rapid improvisations, and a transition to the second movement, *Adagio* (E-flat major), in 3/8 time, the music for which the soloist has prepared himself in the prelude. It arrives quietly and warmly as a wonderful cantilena. In contrast to this the second group is somewhat more impetuous and leads the solo far in all directions. All this is recalled with more adventuresome excursions by the soloist, and the movement comes to a close with a coda-like version of the opening music.

In the third movement, *Allegro energico* (G major), in 2/2 time, a vague suggestion of darkness is given, but is soon laughed away by the explosive joviality when the solo enters. These good spirits pervade the entire movement, with many irrepressible antics rushing the music on to its conclusion.

Perhaps the best-remembered sound from the early twentieth century "golden age" of violin playing was that of Fritz Kreisler. Nobody has ever successfully imitated his unearthly beautiful sound, characterized by a natural vibrato that appeared to originate not with a particular technique or muscle group, but somehow from within the sound itself. His was a long career, and he survived comparison with masters like Ysaÿe, Szigeti, and Heifetz on his own terms; or, perhaps more accurately, he transcended comparison. Those who remember hearing Kreisler in concert use words like "warmth," "radiance," "glow," and "*joie de vivre*" to describe his playing.

Kreisler was an archetype Viennese – a bon-vivant, full of *gemütlichkeit*. Unanimously beloved by colleagues and audiences, he was charming, urbane, well-read, multilingual, and an expert all-around musician. In frequent need of encore pieces, Kreisler composed a number of jewel-

like miniatures crafted to reflect his own strong points as a performer. For years, Kreisler cautiously concealed the works' true origin, instead attributing many of them to other composers – mostly seventeenth and eighteenth century masters like Couperin, Boccherini, and Martini.

In 1935, he finally admitted authorship – and found himself at odds with a few powerful critics who felt they had been taken in. Others, such as *The New York Times'* Olin Downes, received the news graciously and with sense. "It was undoubtedly to the great advantage of the compositions that they did not bear [Kreisler's] name as a composer," wrote Downes. "Neither the public, nor the press, nor Mr. Kreisler's colleagues would have taken as kindly to these compositions had they been designated as being merely the creations of a living violinist."

Decades have passed since Kreisler's modest revelation, and we are free to admire his flashing talent and skill as a composer of miniatures. Together with his lovely arrangements and transcriptions of works actually by

other composers – on this recording, the De Falla, Rachmaninoff, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Tartini pieces – Kreisler's short works constitute an important and well-loved contribution to the literature for solo violin. A great deal is demanded of the player: imagination, tonal beauty, fleet fingers and a nimble bow, and relaxation at a level permitting optimal freedom of articulation and expressivity. Technical challenges abound, including extensive use of multiple stops; some contemporaries found Kreisler's double-stopping to be both the most characteristic and the most beautiful aspect of his technique.

Many of the pieces include brief cadenza-like sections that have an improvisatory air, allowing for a broad scope of personal expression from the performer. Spontaneity was an essential element in Kreisler's approach to the violin, and his statement, "Practice is a bad habit," holds an honored place in musical lore. More specifically, he once explained, "If I played too frequently, I should rub the bloom off the musical imagination."

An accomplished pianist, Kreisler wrote idiomatic piano parts with the same elegance and natural ease that characterize his violin compositions. When he eventually wrote orchestral settings for many of his most popular pieces, he also showed himself to be a skilled orchestrator with a keen ear for instrumental color and balance.

On Kreisler's death in 1962, Mischa Elman wrote, "His style of playing and his style of composing [were] identical: full of courtly elegance and grace - one could not be separated from the other. His Art had dimples, full of smiles and beauty."

Marcia Young

Dvorak undertook his single violin concerto at the suggestion of the virtuoso Joseph Joachim. This stimulating request was one of the first results of Dvorak's newly-won fame as a "nationalistic" composer. Smetana had established in the public mind a taste for Czech music that amounted almost to a

craze, and Dvorak found himself deluged with orders from publishers and performing groups for works emphasizing this variety of local color. Their demands were usually for easy and "practical" pieces, however, such as his *Slavonic Dances*; Dvorak enjoyed writing such works, of course, and was devoted to the folk-music of his country, but it can be imagined with what relief he turned to the task of a serious and extended concert work. Postponing all other orders, he went into retirement on the estate of a Prince Rohan at Sychrov, Bohemia, to fulfill Joachim's commission and there completed the Violin Concerto in September, 1880.

This work stands between the earlier Piano Concerto and the mature and popular Cello Concerto. In the Piano Concerto, Dvorak had not yet quite grasped the principles of keyboard writing, and was not entirely able to structure his ideas, striking and evocative though they were in themselves, in a convincing symphonic architecture. In the Violin Concerto, on the other hand,

he was writing for an instrument he loved and understood; the solo part is generally clear and effective, and, reflecting his great professional growth, the formal design of the work is sensible and well-executed. The Cello Concerto, coming fifteen years after, presents only a somewhat riper achievement of these things, and the two compositions not only stand as Dvorak's best works in the form, but are among the most effective concertos of the period, as well.

Dvorak sent the completed Violin Concerto to Joachim for criticism (not, as Brahms did, simply to have the counterpoint looked over). After the violinist's suggestions had been incorporated into the work, Dvorak cast about for performances, but, curiously, was unable to arrange this until the fall of 1883, when the violinist Frantisek Ondricek gave the composition its première in Prague. Its success was assured by a brilliant performance by the same artist a few months later with the Vienna Philharmonic under the direction of Hans Richter, one of the most important conductors of the time.

Dvorak was one of the most prolific composers of his day; Brahms once remarked that the Bohemian composer's unused ideas would keep other men going for years. This fertility did not, however, result in a loss of musical quality. Dvorak's work has a unique naturalness and charm which, coupled with his highly-developed orchestral imagination and hard-won constructive skill, is the substance of his lasting contribution to the literature. His Violin Concerto is a distinguished representative of his best characteristics.

Karl Goldmark has been less celebrated in the concert hall recently than in anecdotes and historical sketches. Some of his work still finds performance from time to time, however, notably his *Sakuntala Overture* and his *Rustic Wedding Symphony*. His Violin Concerto No. 1 received a deserved revival in this Vox release of 1956, and has been recorded many times since.

The violin was Goldmark's first

and most-loved instrument. His preference for it can be demonstrated by the fact that he wrote two violin concertos, and none for any other solo instrument. He was also an accomplished performer of chamber music. Unfortunately, the circumstances of Goldmark's early professional life were such that he was forced to play in pit orchestras rather than in quartets and as a soloist. The experience never seems to have soured him, however, and in his touching and informative memoirs, *Notes on the Life of a Viennese Composer* he reflects that this is the only way for a composer to accumulate the practical experience and contact with the theatre necessary to writing operas, another of his major interests.

Goldmark was able to extricate himself from this situation later in his life. He went on to become critic for the *Konstitutionelle Zeitung* in Vienna, where, it is interesting to see, he became a partisan of Richard Wagner while at the same time maintaining a close friendship with Brahms. In the light of Goldmark's attitude toward Wagner,

it is surprising to learn further that it was through the sponsorship of Wagner's great journalistic enemy Edouard Hanslick that Goldmark eventually achieved the unquestioned successes of his later career.

The Violin Concerto No. 1 comes slightly before this period in his work. It reveals quite a degree of individuality, sometimes of a most unexpected sort: unusual chromatic passages abound in the first movement; there are deliberately emphasized parallel fifths, contrary to the holiest law of nineteenth century pedagogy. The *finale* is characterized by an obscurely Spanish flavor, traced by some commentators to Goldmark's association with the virtuoso Sarasate. The Concerto is a craftsmanly and frequently affecting work.

Russell Smith

BRONISLAW GIMPEL
plays BRUCH, DVORAK, GOLDMARK Violin Concerti
KREISLER Transcriptions

CD 1 – 70:22 Minutes

BRUCH:

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor,
Op. 26 – 25:22

1. I. Prelude: Allegro moderato – 8:23
 2. II. Adagio – 9:16
 3. III. Finale: Allegro energico – 7:33
- Southwest German Radio Orchestra,
Baden-Baden
Rolf Reinhardt, Conductor*

FRITZ KREISLER TRANSCRIPTIONS

4. Tartini: Fugue in A Major – 3:51
 5. La Gitana – 3:04
- Three Old Viennese Dance Melodies
6. I. Liebesfreud – 3:19
 7. II. Liebesleid – 3:31
 8. III. Schön Rosmarin – 1:52
 9. Polichinelle – Serenade – 1:42
 10. Rimsky-Korsakov: Arab Song
from Scheherazade – 4:38
 11. Prelude and Allegro (In The Style of
Gaetano Pugnani) – 5:29
 12. La Précieuse (In The Style of
Louis Couperin) – 3:19
 13. Caprice Viennois – 4:14
 14. Tambourin Chinois – 3:31
 15. Rachmaninoff: Marguerite
(Albumbblatt) – 3:16
 16. Falla: Danse Espagnole – 3:16

*Pro Musica Orchestra, Stuttgart
Curt Cremer,
Arranger & Conductor*

CD 2 – 62:03 Minutes

DVORAK:

Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 53 – 32:02

1. I. Allegro ma non troppo – 10:01
2. II. Quasi moderato;
Adagio ma non troppo – 11:54
3. III. Finale: Allegro giocoso,
ma non troppo – 9:57

GOLDMARK:

Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 28 – 36:18

4. I. Allegro moderato – 12:35
5. II. Andante – 6:34
6. III. Moderato – 10:57

*Southwest German Radio Orchestra
Rolf Reinhardt, Conductor*

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Bruch & Goldmark recorded in 1956; Dvorak & Kreisler in 1957 by
Heinz Jansen, Südwest Tonstudio, Stuttgart. Bruch and Kreisler never before released

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