

David Oistrakh (1908 -74), one of the very greatest violinists of the twentieth century, was born in Odessa. His mother sang in the local opera house and there was always music in the house. Consequently, both parents indulged his young musical interest by purchasing a violin so that he could begin lessons. He had been taken many times to the opera where he would stand in the orchestra pit, fascinated by all the musicians and their instruments. He was encouraged to play for his classmates and soon he performed his first official public concert in 1923. Initially he studied both violin and viola (his teacher Pyotr Stolyarsky, insisted all his violin pupils should learn to play both) and between 1923-26 at the Odessa Conservatory, he was leader of the student orchestra. In 1927 he played Glazunov's *Violin Concerto* in both Odessa and Kiev under the composer's direction and in the following year he performed Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* with Nikolay Malko in Leningrad. Malko had heard Oistrakh in Odessa and invited him to play in the Philharmonic's opening concert of the 1928/9 season. Following the concert, an initially sceptical orchestra and audience treated him to fulsome applause and he was invited back to play Glazunov's *Violin Concerto*, but with a different conductor since by that time Malko had left the USSR.

He moved to Moscow in 1927 where he met his future wife, Tamara Rotareva. They were married the following year and their only son, Igor, was born in 1931. He began to be noticed there not only by local musicians but by performers and critics further afield especially after he won a violin competition in the Ukraine. In 1930 he made his first recordings which became available in Europe, so his fame across the continent spread, Oistrakh received an invitation to tour Germany in 1933. However, being the child of Jewish parents, the offer was swiftly rescinded by the new National Socialist government and it was to be many years before he was able to play there.

From 1934 Oistrakh taught at the Moscow Conservatory and over the years his pupils included Oleg Kagan and Gidon Kremer, as well as his own son. Still under thirty years old, Oistrakh entered further competitions winning a Russia-wide competition in 1935 and at the Wieniawski Competition in Warsaw, he won second prize, losing to the 15-year old sensation Ginette Neveu. Lastly, in 1937 he won the inaugural Ysaÿe (Queen Elisabeth) Competition held in Brussels. During that Ysaÿe Competition he was contacted by Walter Legge of the Columbia record label to make a number of recordings was unable to take advantage of the offer as he was under strict instruction by the Soviet government to return home immediately after the event. During the Second World War, Oistrakh bravely offered his services as an entertainer, giving numerous concerts close to the front line as a result of which he was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1942. Around that date Oistrakh

also formed a notable trio with Lev Oborin and Sviatoslav Knushevitzky and they performed and recorded together regularly until 1963.

After the war, Oistrakh was part of a select group of artists allowed to tour outside the Eastern bloc with appearances in Helsinki (1949), Florence (1951), France (1953), London (1954) and the USA (1955). He was also now permitted to make recordings outside the Soviet Union, including the first of many for Walter Legge at EMI studios in Sweden (Sibelius and Beethoven *Violin Concertos* with Sixten Ehrling conducting). Then, during his first visit to England in 1954 he recorded the Khachaturian *Violin Concerto* under the direction of the composer. Other early Columbia recordings include Max Bruch's *Violin Concerto No.1* (ALC 1356), Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No.1* (ALC 1318) and the Brahms *Double Concerto* with Pierre Fournier.

During a long career, Oistrakh premiered many new works and several leading composers, including Myaskovsky, Khachaturian, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, dedicated new works to him. For relaxation Oistrakh liked to play chess and he found in Prokofiev a worthy adversary. He worked closely with many composers particularly with Shostakovich who dedicated his *Violin Concerto No.1* (ALC 1337) to the virtuoso violinist in 1955. Several years later Shostakovich told Oistrakh that he planned to compose and dedicate a new concerto for him to coincide with the violinist's sixtieth birthday. Unfortunately, Shostakovich made a mistake about Oistrakh's age, presenting him with a concerto one year early. He then agreed to compose a new work again for Oistrakh to coincide with Oistrakh's real landmark birthday.

David Oistrakh also developed a successful career as a conductor and often performed alongside his son Igor (born 1931) either as conductor or a viola player (as Igor once claimed, 'when we play together, we are not father and son but musicians'. His first official conducting engagement took place in Moscow in 1962 (Brahms *Symphony No. 2*, a Prokofiev concerto and Berlioz' *Harold in Italy*) and he conducted regularly thereafter. Oistrakh suffered a serious heart attack in 1964 and subsequently made fewer appearances although he kept especially busy throughout 1968 in when celebrations set for his for his sixtieth birthday. He only felt able to accept one opera engagement (*Yevgeny Onegin* at Berliner Staatsoper) but this event never took place with him. Performances were scheduled for the spring of 1975 but a few months earlier in October 1974 Oistrakh suffered a fatal heart attack whilst on tour in Amsterdam.

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Johann Sebastian Bach was born on 21 March 1685 in the town of Eisenach on the edge of the Thuringian Forest. His family had been a musical one for many years and Johann Sebastian was to become its most famous member. When he was nine years old both his mother and father died so the young lad went to live in Ohrdruf with his brother, Johann Christoph, who was the organist at a church there. Bach studied at the lyceum and was taught the harpsichord by his brother. At the age of eighteen he was appointed organist at the Church of St Boniface in Arnstadt and four years later he moved to Mühlhausen where he took up a similar post.

After only a year at Mühlhausen he was offered the role of organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Saxe-Weimar and during his time in Weimar two of his most musically gifted children were born; Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel.

In 1717, Bach began to seek employment elsewhere and before long Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen invited him to become his *Kapellmeister*. To begin with Duke Wilhelm Ernst would not let Bach leave, even going to the extreme of having him locked up for several weeks, so it was not until the end of the year that Bach was free to take up his new post. His main duty in Cöthen was to direct the Prince's orchestra and to provide music for it.

His next and final move was to Leipzig where his duties involved teaching singing and Latin at the school, supervising and examining the boys and providing music for the town's two main churches. The music he provided included countless cantatas, the Passions of St John and St Matthew and oratorios for Christmas and Easter.

By 1750 Bach's health had deteriorated considerably and he had begun to lose his sight. He was operated on twice by an English oculist named John Taylor and, although vision was restored for a time, he suffered a stroke soon afterwards and died on 28 July.

Apart from the six *Brandenburg Concertos*, the only other concertos by Johann Sebastian Bach to have survived in their original form are the three for violin; in *A minor (BWV1041)* and *E major (BWV1042)* for solo violin and in *D minor for two violins (BWV1043)*. These all date from Bach's time in Cöthen.

Although both he and Prince Leopold were violinists, it is thought that Bach composed his violin concertos with the leader of the Prince's orchestra in mind, a musician called Joseph Speiss who had arrived in Cöthen from Berlin in 1714. Each of these concertos is in three movements - two fast ones surrounding a slow one - thus following the pattern set by the Italian composers of the time, notably Vivaldi.

Not one to waste good material, Bach frequently incorporated music he had composed previously into new works or, as in the case of the violin concertos, transcribed them in their entirety for other instruments. Thus the A minor concerto for solo violin re-emerged as the *harpsichord concerto in G minor BWV1058*, the E major concerto as the *harpsichord concerto in D major BWV1054*, and the double violin concerto as the one for *two harpsichords and strings in C minor*, BWV1062.

It was on 24 March 1721 that Bach sent to the Margrave of Brandenburg '*Six Concerts avec Plusieurs Instruments*', the title page of which (in translation) reads as follows: '*Six Concertos with Several Instruments. Dedicated to His Royal Highness Monseigneur Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg &c.&c.&c by His very humble and very obedient servant Johann Sebastian Bach, Capellmeister of His Most Serene Highness the Reigning Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen.*'

To accompany this, Bach wrote a very ingratiating letter in which he humbly reminded His Royal Highness that two years previously the Margrave had taken 'some pleasure in the small talents which Heaven has given me for Music' and had asked the composer to send him 'some pieces of my composition'. Bach went on to beg His Royal Highness 'not to judge their imperfection with the rigour of the fine and delicate taste which the whole world knows Your Highness has for musical pieces; but rather to infer from them in benign Consideration the profound respect and the most humble obedience which I try to show Your Highness therewith'.

Judging by the fact that, at the time of his death in 1734, the Margrave of Brandenburg was employing only six musicians while Bach's orchestra at Cöthen boasted practically all the instruments and enough players needed for them, it seems likely that the so-called 'Brandenburg Concertos' were originally intended for use at the Court of Prince Leopold and not that of the Margrave. Thus it would appear that Bach had not been commissioned by the Margrave to provide

him with these concertos but was offering him samples of his work in the hope that one or two of them would take his fancy. Bach himself certainly never used the term ‘Brandenburg Concertos’ to refer to these works.

In each of these concertos Bach used a different combination of his ‘several’ instruments. In the first he employed two horns, three oboes, a bassoon and a ‘violino piccolo’ all to be accompanied by strings and continuo, while the second uses a trumpet, a flute, an oboe and a violin as its group. The third is scored for strings (three each of violins, violas and cellos) and continuo as is the sixth (two *viola da braccio*, two *viola da gamba* and cello) while the fifth has a very important part for solo harpsichord and less prominent parts for flute and violin.

The fourth of these concertos, as recorded here, has solo parts for violin and two *fiauti d’echo*. The exact meaning of the term *fiauto d’echo* is not known but it is clear that the instrument intended would have been of the recorder type, held vertically and with the air blown directly through the mouthpiece. Often, however, modern orchestral flutes (with the air blown across the mouthpiece) are used in this concerto. As with the violin concertos, this fourth Brandenburg also appears in Bach’s catalogue as a harpsichord concerto, the one in F major, BWV1057. © Peter Avis; July 2018

It was as a composer-pianist that **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) first appeared before the Viennese public in March 1795 playing his *Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major* (despite its number this was actually the first concerto to be composed). He had arrived in the Austrian capital three years previously to study with Haydn – a situation that did not last – and his works composed before the concert largely harked back to the previous generation; only occasionally did they give an indication of the direction Beethoven was to take. As the decade progressed Beethoven’s reputation at the keyboard and as a composer increased, as did his self-esteem. He was disparaging about the *B flat major Concerto* upon its publication in 1801, having that year completed a powerful new concerto (*No. 3 in C major*) which, despite the handicap of increasing deafness, ushered in a new and confident style. The astonishing burst of creativity during the five years following the premiere of this *Third Piano Concerto* is without equal in classical music as within the period (1803-08) Beethoven composed his *Symphony Nos. 3–6*, *Fidelio*, *Piano Concerto Nos. 4–5*, *Violin Concerto*, *Waldstein* and *Appassionata Piano Sonatas*, *Rasumovsky String Quartets* and *Mass in C*.

Beethoven composed his *Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61* in 1806 for Franz Clement, leader and conductor of the Theater an der Wien orchestra where *Fidelio* had premiered the previous year. Beethoven’s haste in composing the piece meant that there was little time for proper rehearsal so that at the premiere (23 December 1806) Clement’s reputation as one of the finest players of the day was tested: indeed, the soloist found himself in the position of almost sight-reading the piece. Evidently Clement was quite a showman; he had taken advantage of the occasion at the Theater an der Wien to award himself a benefit and, turning his instrument upside down, he interpolated one of his own compositions between the first and second movements of the concerto. A common perception is of Beethoven as an unsmiling, unkempt artist but he was fond of complicated word-play and the mixing of languages and he headed the score ‘Concerto par Clemenza pour Clement, primo violino e direttore al teatro a Vienna’. One wonders at Beethoven’s reaction to Clement’s antics which were clearly more appreciated by the audience than Beethoven’s own new *Violin Concerto*; one critic complained afterwards of ‘endless repetition of unimportant passages’. It is difficult to understand why this work, a centrepiece of the concert violinist’s repertoire, languished in relative obscurity until taken up by Joseph Joachim nearly forty years later. The *Violin Concerto* was published in August 1808 and dedicated to Stefan von Breuning, an old friend of the composer who had assisted him in the revision of *Fidelio*. That month Beethoven also published an arrangement of the piece as a piano concerto (for which he wrote four lengthy cadenzas) which he dedicated to von Breuning’s wife Julie. In this performance of the *Violin Concerto*, recorded in the Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin, Schneiderhan plays his own adaptation of the cadenzas originally composed for a piano and timpani transcription and published as Op.61a. It is assumed that at the premiere Clement improvised his own cadenzas on the spot and did not write those down.

What strikes the listener to the *Violin Concerto* is its extraordinary lyricism and general absence of virtuosity. The five soft drumbeats that open the work permeate the first movement, much of which is cast in sombre colours; the violinist’s role is introspective, apparently musing on what has passed before. The lyrical second theme takes the violin into its highest reaches whilst the orchestra, dominated by horns, trumpets, bassoons and timpani, assumes a martial air. During the lovely second movement (for which Beethoven was surely inspired by his two *Violin Romances* composed a few years previously), the soloist provides a most delicate and ethereal accompaniment to a set of variations. The wind section is reduced to clarinets, bassoons and horns whilst the strings, which provide the initial theme, are muted almost throughout. A powerful utterance from

the strings would seem to prepare the listener for a return to the sombre atmosphere of the opening movement; instead it dissolves without a break into one of Beethoven's most famous creations. In this carefree rondo finale, the violinist has the opportunity to display his virtuosity even in the more restrained contrasting section as the instrument explores its highest register. Beethoven's playfulness is to the fore throughout the rondo as the soloist emerges from the final cadenza reprising the initial motif like a graceful dancer allowing the orchestra to participate joyfully in the final chords.

James Murray 2016 (www.kernowclassics.co.uk)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) first began work on his *Violin Concerto* in 1838. It was the last of his major works for solo instrument and orchestra, his two piano concertos having been composed in 1832 and 1837 respectively (he had in addition completed other concertos whilst in his teens). He had been appointed conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra in 1835, during which time sought to promote not only the works of his contemporaries (Schumann's First, Second and Fourth Symphonies all received their first performances during his time in Leipzig) but he also re-discovered a number of works by J S Bach (eg *St Matthew Passion*) which had lain dormant for several decades.

Upon his assumption of the post of conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Mendelssohn appointed his friend Ferdinand David as leader of the orchestra. Mendelssohn had known David (1810 – 73) for some time, the two having played chamber music together since 1826, when both musicians were together in Berlin, David having just completed his studies with Spohr in Kassel. Although Mendelssohn was more than competent in several instruments (viola, piano, organ) and had shown a natural affinity for orchestration in the past, he was modest enough to consult David at length during the *Violin Concerto's* composition which was begun in 1839 and completed in 1844. That relatively little music was composed during this period can be explained by Mendelssohn's extraordinary hectic concert schedule with time divided between Leipzig, where he was invited to found a new Conservatory; his family home in Berlin, (where the King of Prussia commissioned him to compose incidental music for a number of plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to add to the brilliant overture of 1826); the Lower Rhineland, where he had been a favoured guest conductor at the local music festival since 1834; and England, where he was universally feted and where he conducted and played in many acclaimed concerts. Mendelssohn had also married in 1837 and by the summer of 1843 he and his wife Cecile had four children.

With so much having happened in recent years, Mendelssohn felt entitled to enjoy an extended holiday between July and September 1844 in Soden. It was during this period that he completed the *Violin Concerto*, one of the most enduringly popular works in that *genre*.

Mendelssohn is not generally regarded as being a great innovator, but it is noteworthy that in his concertos he introduced fresh ideas (his linking of movements and the lack of an opening orchestral *tutti*) which later influenced and were adopted by other composers. Another change introduced in the *Violin Concerto* is the placing of the cadenza: Mendelssohn disliked the idea of showing off and wrong-footed the audience by placing the cadenza at the end of the development rather than having it in its traditional position towards the end of the movement.

If it is felt that Mendelssohn's music composed in the last years of his life was somewhat lacklustre, then the *Violin Concerto* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* are the glorious exceptions and one never ceases to marvel at the lightness of touch in the concerto's finale and the blissful serenity of its slow movement. The first performance was given by David in March 1845 in Leipzig, unfortunately missed by the composer due to illness. The furious pace at which he worked continued unabated until his death in November 1847 aged only thirty-eight.

James Murray 2003 (www.kernowclassics.co.uk)

Like Mendelssohn, **Johannes Brahms** (1833-97) was inspired whilst on holiday. It was in the picturesque village of Pörschach on the northern shore of Wörthersee (Carinthia), to which he made three summer visits (1877-9) from his home in Vienna, that he composed some of his most lyrical works including his *Second Symphony*, *Violin Concerto* and the *Violin Sonata in G major*. During this time his physical appearance changed considerably: his previously rather delicate features were replaced by a bushy and prematurely grey beard and an increased girth giving him a portly, professorial appearance. This was perhaps a conscious attempt to distance himself from the modernist Liszt-Wagner camp and to emphasize his allegiance to previous generations of classical and romantic musicians.

Whilst working at the *Violin Concerto* in August 1878 Brahms sought technical advice from Joseph Joachim, the foremost violinist of the day, giving Joachim licence to change parts that were 'difficult, awkward or impossible to play.' Joachim generally considered the piece to be rather

good but nevertheless make some alterations. Apart from planning a four-movement work (the original slow movement and a Scherzo were replaced by the Adagio performed today) Brahms harked back to the spacious, technically demanding violin writing of Beethoven and J S Bach, whose works were much to the forefront of his mind during this period. With Brahms conducting, Joachim premiered the *Violin Concerto in D major, Op.77* at a Leipzig Gewandhaus concert on New Year's Day, 1879. Despite Joachim's alterations, most violinists – including the legendary Sarasate – initially fought shy of the work; the conductor, violinist and Director of the Vienna Conservatoire Joseph Hellmesberger complained that it was a 'Concerto against the violin' and the difficulties inherent in the piece also alienated listeners at the premiere. However, Joachim played Brahms' concerto throughout Europe; in England the piece was particularly well received although sadly Brahms was unable to witness its success: chronic shyness and a fear of sea-sickness combined to prevent him crossing the Channel.

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Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904) composed his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, Opus 53, in 1879-80, in three movements, *Allegro ma non troppo*, *Adagio ma non troppo* and *Allegro giocoso ma non troppo*. The following description is by William F. Apthorp:

“The first movement is not very regular in form. It begins, without slow introduction, *Allegro ma non troppo* in A minor (4/4 time), with an exposition of the first theme; this exposition is then repeated in the subdominant, D minor. A some-what altered version of the theme soon passes on to the second theme, in B-flat major and A minor. The solo violin then enters with the first theme in the dominant, E major, and briefly develops it together with the orchestra, soon passing to a new version of the second theme. Extended developments on both these themes now follow, almost amounting to working-out; then the solo instrument brings in a third theme, beginning in C major, but constantly modulating, and soon takes up a scherzando variation of it. The work then returns to the first theme in the tonic A minor, the solo violin soon taking part in the development, the tempo gradually slackening, until we pass over to the next movement, with which this one is enchained.

The second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo* in F major (3/8 time), is a Romariza containing the very extended development of three themes, the first given out and carried through by the solo violin in the tonic, F major, the solo violin later enters with the second theme in F minor, *pocopin mosso*; and then the development and working-out of the second and third themes continues-now

in the solo violin, now in the orchestra against passage-work in the solo instrument-until a brief return of the first theme in the tonic, F major, in the horns against arpeggios in the solo violin, brings the movement to a close.

The third movement, *Finale: Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo*, in A major (3/8 time), is a brilliant and elaborately developed Rondo on three themes, with occasional subsidiary passage-work. At end, extended developments on the third principal theme are followed by another return of the first theme in the tonic. The third theme (in 2/4 time) makes a brief reappearance just before the Coda.” - **Sidney Finkelstein**

Max Bruch began composing the first of his three violin concertos, in the summer of 1864 just before being appointed director of the Royal Institute of Music in the town of Coblenz. Several years were to elapse, however, before he had completed it to his satisfaction. Its first performance took place in Coblenz on 24 April 1866 with Otto von Königsłow as soloist and with Bruch conducting. Immediately after this performance, the composer began to have doubts about the quality of his work so he sent the manuscript to the Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) for his comments. Joachim was slow to respond but eventually he sent back the score together with a long letter in which he dealt systematically with the points Bruch had asked him to consider. He had written out a cadenza and made notes on the score, using a pencil so that they could be easily erased if they found no favour with the composer. On the whole, however, Joachim found the work pleasing and looked forward to learning to play it. In his reply, Bruch outlined the changes he envisaged, some of which followed Joachim's suggestions and some of which resulted from second thoughts of his own. Later the two men met in Hanover and were able to play through the concerto at the piano and make arrangements for a private performance with orchestra.

The first public performance of the *Violin Concerto No.1* in its final form was given in Bremen on 7 January 1868 with Joachim as soloist and Carl Reinthaler as conductor. Despite its great success, Bruch was never to gain financially from this work since he foolishly sold it outright to the publisher for a paltry sum. It had been Bruch's original intention to dedicate the concerto to Joachim 'in respect' (*Verehrung*) but the dedicatee himself substituted the word 'friendship' (*Freundschaft*) and this is the term that appears on the printed score. The work contains no full-scale cadenza (despite Joachim's suggestion that there should be one) but there are several

short cadenza-like passages in the first movement which is referred to as a *Vorspiel* (prelude) and leads into the famous central *Adagio* without a break. If the *Finale* seems reminiscent of the corresponding movement in Brahms' *Violin Concerto* it should be noted that Brahms did not compose his until 1878.

Despite its universal success (or rather, because of it) Bruch himself came to hate this work, not least because he was earning no money from it. To make matters worse, although he managed to negotiate more favourable terms with the publishers of his other works for violin and orchestra, violinists tended to persist in playing the *G minor concerto* while ignoring the others.

Bruch composed both his second concerto and his *Fantasia for Violin and Orchestra with Harp, freely using Scottish Folk Melodies*, commonly known as the **Scottish Fantasy**, with the Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasate in mind. By the time Bruch met him in 1877, Sarasate (1844-1908) had been playing the first concerto with great success in France and Belgium, and later that year, both men travelled to England where, at Crystal Palace, they performed the first concerto together on 13 October and gave the first performance of the second on 4 November.

It was during the winter of 1879-80 that Bruch composed his *Scottish Fantasy*. It seems that the inspiration for this piece came from the writings of Sir Walter Scott and that the introduction to the first movement (*Grave*) was intended to represent 'an old bard, who contemplates a ruined castle, and laments the glorious times of old'. Throughout the work Bruch quotes Scottish folk tunes and in the *Scherzo* - which he described as a 'Dance' - he made an attempt at imitating the bagpipes. That part of the first movement which is marked *Adagio cantabile* is based on the song *Auld Rob Morris* while the *Scherzo* is built around *The Dusty Miller*. In the third movement (which follows the second without a break) the song used is *I'm down for lack of Johnnie*. The *Finale* makes much use of *Scots wha hae*, a song which legend has it was associated with Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn which took place in 1314. (The unusual term *guerriero* means 'warlike'.)

The first performance of the *Scottish Fantasy* took place in Liverpool on 22 February 1881 Bruch having become by then the Musical Director of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. Although dedicated to Sarasate, it was Joseph Joachim who gave this first performance. All was not well,

however, and Bruch complained that Joachim had played the work 'carelessly, with no modesty, very nervously, and with quite insufficient technique' - in fact, he had 'ruined it'. This outburst could have been a case of sour grapes on Bruch's behalf as his friendship with Joachim had recently cooled somewhat but it could also have been the result of Joachim's own domestic problems for he was currently suing his wife for divorce. Eventually Sarasate himself took up the work, often describing it as a concerto rather than a fantasy. When he played it in London on 15 March 1883, for example, it was designated *Concerto for Violin (Scotch)*. This performance was also billed as the first in England which, of course, it was not.

Johannes Brahms produced four books of *Hungarian Dances*, two in 1869 and another two in 1880, all originally for piano duet. In the 1850s he had gone on concert tours with the violinist Eduard Reményi who was equally at home with the classical repertoire and the *Zigeuner*, or gypsy, style. It was probably during these tours with Reményi that Brahms began to discover the music of the gypsies which was to influence him in several of his compositions. In a letter to his publisher he actually disclaimed authorship of the melodies he used in the *Hungarian Dances*. He refers to the dances as 'genuine gypsy children', although it seems that he did not realize that there are considerable differences between 'gypsy' music and 'Hungarian' music. These pieces sparked off several others for piano duet similarly nationalistic in mood, Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* and Grieg's *Norwegian Dances* being the most famous. Brahms later arranged some of his *Hungarian Dances* for orchestra and his friend Joseph Joachim turned these three into pieces for violin and piano.

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In his teens in Bonn **Beethoven** was an accomplished viola player and once in Vienna in 1792 he became acquainted with several fine violinists. It seemed inevitable that he would compose works for stringed instruments. Upon arrival in Vienna he began work on a *Violin Concerto in C* of which just 259 bars of the first movement remains. It is thought that **Romance for Violin and Orchestra in F** (which probably dates from 1798 and although labelled *No. 2*, was actually the first to be composed) was intended as a slow movement for this aborted concerto. The **G major Romance** followed in 1801-2. Both works were offered to the publishers Breitkopf and Härtel in the autumn of 1802 but the *G major Romance* was only published in 1805.

James Murray 2016 (www.kernowclassics.co.uk)

Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) was a musical bridge between the 19th and 20th centuries. He personally knew Tchaikovsky, who died in 1893. Glazunov composed eight symphonies and many ballets and chamber works, most of which were written before his promotion in 1905 to head the Conservatory. His works do not deserve the relative neglect into which they have fallen. His *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, written in 1904, is a fine example of his melodic inspiration and his imagination and taste in musical construction. While it is in three movements, it is similar in form to a one-movement concerto such as the Liszt *A Major Piano Concerto*. In a more circuitous way it recalls the Chopin Ballades and the tone poems of the national school, like those of Smetana and Glazunov's own *Stenka Razin*. The music reminds one of old folk tales of love and battle. The classic orchestral introduction and statement of thematic material is abandoned. The violin takes command from the beginning, and its haunting first theme has an epic sweep like the opening of an old ballad. It is a typical romantic theme, which never comes to a clearly defined end but wends its way along, one phrase giving birth to another. The second theme is more wistful_ There is no immediate development. Instead, after the exposition, a full-fledged slow movement is heard, soaring to expressive heights. Then the cellos bring back the opening theme of the concerto, and there is an impassioned development of both first-movement themes, culminating in a cadenza. The drums announce a change of mood, military calls are heard from the trumpets, and the violin takes these up, dissolving them into a set of Russian dance variations, which call upon all the brilliant effects of which the violin is capable.

Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904-87) wrote the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, Op. 48 in 1948. The concerto was described by Louis Kaufman, the noted Hollywood violinist who performed the American premiere on May 14, 1950, over the NBC Pacific Network: "Today, when contemporary music thought is often characterized by a formidable complexity, it is refreshing to come upon a work like the Kabalevsky Violin Concerto. Here is music of unabashed exuberance - melodically rich, imbued with an almost naive douceur, yet contrived with a knowing mastery of form and lively violinistic and orchestral colour. Underneath this apparent simplicity of approach there is a depth of meaning not to be comprehended on casual acquaintance. The first movement, in the fresh, unconstrained and sincere language of Kabalevsky, is an *Allegro con brio* which is candidly traditional in form and lively and ingratiatingly warm in content. The *Andante cantabile* opens with a beautiful melody worthy of the great Russian romantic tradition, which is immediately contrasted with a rhythmically developed motive of capricious character that leads back to the first

subject intoned by the orchestra. This is gracefully accompanied by the solo violin, in muted scale and trill passages and ends with the soloist singing the basic theme simply, without the slightest affectation.

The concluding third movement is a breathless *Vivace giocoso*, full of vitality and good-natured zest. This infectiously merry section includes a witty homage to Mendelssohn in the cadenza, after which the headlong pace is resumed, terminating in a brief and triumphant coda."

Reinhold Glière (1875-1956), like Kabalevsky, is known primarily for his colourful ballets, in particular *The Red Poppy* (1927). Of Belgian descent, he was thoroughly Russian in compositional style, and in fact became head of the organizing committee of USSR Composers Union in 1939. This lovely *Romance for Violin and Orchestra*, Op.3, was published in 1902. Glière's two prior publications were a *String Sextet*, Op.1, and a *String Quartet*, Op.2, both from 1900, the year he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied violin and composition.

- **Sidney Finkelstein**

In 1939, **Aram Khachaturian** (1903-78) was appointed Deputy President of the recently formed Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Composers, the same year in which that Committee founded the Ruza Home for Composers in a pine forest on the bank of the River Moskva. Khachaturian and his family spent the summer of 1940 in one of the cottages on that estate and there composed his *Violin Concerto*. It was a very creative period as he himself acknowledged: 'I worked without an effort, sometimes my thoughts and imagination outraced the hand that was covering the staves with notes. The themes came to me in such abundance that I had a hard time of it putting them in some sort of order.' (It is interesting to note that Khachaturian was obviously following the advice given to him by fellow composer Sergei Prokofiev at the time he was beginning to compose the *Piano Concerto*. 'It is very difficult to write a concerto,' Prokofiev had told him. 'A concerto must have ideas. I advise you to jot down all the new ideas as they occur to you without waiting for the thing as a whole to mature. Make a note of separate passages and interesting bits, not necessarily in the correct order. Later on you can use these as "bricks" to build the whole.')

During that summer, Khachaturian was able to consult David Oistrakh, to whom the *Violin Concerto* was to be dedicated, about various technical aspects and to hear him play it through at

the Home for Composers. While working the concerto, Khachaturian claimed that he had in mind the concertos of Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov - 'masterpieces of world violin literature' as he called them - but added that he wanted to create 'a virtuoso piece employing the symphonic principal of development and yet understandable to the general public'. This public heard the concerto for the first time on 16 November 1940 when Oistrakh played it in Moscow with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra and conductor Alexander Gauk.

Khachaturian was very pleased with Oistrakh's performance and, no doubt speaking both as a composer and as the Deputy President of the Composers' Union, he expressed himself thus: 'I regard you as an artist and violinist of epoch-making importance, that means that in your outstanding personality as an artist you reflect our Soviet era and that you stand at the top of the Soviet school of violin playing and interpretation. For this reason it doesn't only please me but it is flattering that my concerto has stimulated your creative imagination...' For his part, Oistrakh was very pleased with the concerto and has described how he was 'immediately enchanted by the colouring of the wonderful music: the finale with its sweeping, dancing tearfulness, the second movement with its deep lyrical episodes, and the first movement with the incredible dynamic force of its first theme'. The authorities must also have been pleased with this concerto since its composer was awarded a Stalin Prize for it in 1941.

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Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) emigrated to the West in 1918, settling in Paris two years later, but decided to return to the Soviet Union in 1933. The two *Violin Concertos* (1917 and 1935) therefore flank this period of self-imposed exile. The timing of his return unfortunately coincided with the onset of 'socialist realism' and Prokofiev was among the composers severely criticised in 1948 for 'formalist tendencies'. Ironically he was unable to experience life in post-Stalinist Russia – he and Stalin both passed away on 5 March 1953.

The *Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major*, Opus 19 was begun in 1915 and completed in 1917 at around the same time as the *Symphony No.1* (known as the 'Classical'), and shortly before Prokofiev started work on the *Piano Concerto No. 3*. Not being immediately popular at its premiere in Paris in October 1923 under the baton of Serge Koussevitzky (Prokofiev attempted unsuccessfully to interest Bronislaw Huberman in giving the premiere and instead had to make

do with the orchestra's leader Marcel Darrieux), it required the enthusiasm of the virtuoso Joseph Szigeti and later Nathan Milstein and Ruggiero Ricci to bring the piece to a worldwide audience. The first movement is typical of its composer being a string of episodes superbly held together with the magical opening theme returning to be played on the flute with solo violin, harp and muted string accompaniments - one of the most glorious passages in all Prokofiev's *œuvre*. The second movement is a dazzling scherzo-rondo whilst the third movement has something of the first movement's lyricism and the middle movement's virtuosity. To violin trill accompaniment, the opening theme returns towards the end and gradually becomes somewhat impressionistic. The orchestra is not of unusual size but features an important role for the tuba during the final movement.

The *Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Opus 63* was commissioned by the French violinist Robert Soetens (1897-1997) whilst Prokofiev was living in Paris but belongs to the group of works composed shortly after his return to the Soviet Union, being completed in Baku in 1935. Its sound in many ways resembles *Romeo and Juliet*, the work that immediately followed (the opening gloomy passage for solo violin soon gives way to a tender second subject whose throbbing string accompaniment is reminiscent of so much of the *Romeo and Juliet* ballet score). The charming slow movement demonstrates Prokofiev at his most childlike, its 12/8 rhythm allowing ample scope for tricky figurations whilst the orchestra provides a strumming accompaniment and an unexpected and brilliant touch comes shortly before the movement's close when the soloist and orchestra swap roles. The third movement is a coarse peasant-like dance-rondo that recalls briefly main themes from the preceding movements in the manner of earlier concertos. In many ways the *Second Violin Concerto* is the more traditional of these two violin concertos, using a smaller orchestra and with a movement pattern of fast / slow / fast reminiscent of similar works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whereas the *First Violin Concerto* seems more improvisatory in nature. The *Violin Concerto No.2* was premiered by Soetens in Madrid on 1 December 1935 whilst he was on tour in the Iberian peninsular and North Africa with Prokofiev (who had been given leave to tour outside the Soviet Union as a cultural ambassador).

Following the premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* Prokofiev was asked to provide another full-length ballet, this time on the subject of *Cinderella (Cendrillon)*, for the Kirov in Leningrad. Having received a ballet scenario from Nikolai Volkov, Prokofiev began work in 1940 but having composed

much of the first two acts in piano score he turned instead to more patriotic subjects during the summer of 1941 as news arrived of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. For the following two years Prokofiev, evacuated by the authorities first to the Georgian capital Tbilisi and then to Alma Ata in Central Asia, concentrated upon his opera *War and Peace*, scoring the Eisenstein film *Ivan the Terrible* and the *Seventh* and *Eighth Piano Sonatas*. Then, in 1943 as the tide began to turn against the German invader, Prokofiev returned to Moscow and to working on *Cinderella*; by the end of the year his piano score had been completed. Prokofiev finished his orchestration whilst working simultaneously on his *Symphony No. 5*. In the end it was the Bolshoi in Moscow that staged the premiere of *Cinderella* on 21 November 1945 with the ballerina Galina Ulanova in the title-role. Prokofiev made several transcriptions for piano of episodes from the ballet *Cinderella*, five of which were transcribed in turn by Mikhail Fichtenholz for violin and piano.

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In early 1948 **Dmitri Shostakovich** (1906-75) was one of the prominent Soviet composers denounced by the Party for “formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies alien to the Soviet people” which led to his dismissal from his post at the Moscow Conservatoire. At the time Soviet-based composers were required to submit their new work to censors who examined each piece for ideologically unsound, anti-Soviet sentiment and Shostakovich’s public reaction to his latest dressing-down was to compose tuneful scores for patriotic films and heroic cantatas. Justifiably scared of revealing his true feelings, he also suppressed works which did not tally with the official party line until it was safe to release them. One of these works was the *Violin Concerto No.1 in A minor Op.77* which he began in July 1947 and completed in March 1948.

Following Stalin’s death in 1953 there was a gradual relaxation in official attitudes towards artists. Shostakovich first released his *Tenth Symphony* (which many have seen as his joyful reaction to Stalin’s death and a general commentary on the Stalinist era) and then set about revising the unperformed *Violin Concerto No.1* with its dedicatee David Oistrakh (the extent of this revision is unknown). Eventually a date was set for the premiere with Oistrakh, the Leningrad Philharmonic and Yevgeny Mravinsky in October 1955 and since changes had been made to the score it was allocated a new opus number (Op.99). Oistrakh was a powerful advocate of the concerto which, although well received by the public at the premiere, was slow to gain recognition from the musical press. Oistrakh memorably compared the challenge of being the soloist in this concerto

as being akin to undertaking a ‘very profound major Shakespeare role, demanding from the artist the greatest emotional and intellectual dedication’.

The *Violin Concerto No.1* is in four movements opening, as so often with Shostakovich, with a slow movement (Nocturne) full of reflection and foreboding (as Oistrakh later remarked ‘an expression of strong feelings suppressed’). The second movement (Scherzo), described by Oistrakh as ‘demonic’, is an energetic and (for the soloist) virtuosic peasant dance. It was during this movement that Shostakovich revealed his personal musical motto DSCHE (the first letters of the German spelling of his initial and surname) that also make up the notes D, E flat, C, B. The third movement (Passacaglia) which builds to a powerful climax concludes with a lengthy cadenza linking this to the final movement in which echoes of the fate motif from Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* can be heard. The principal motifs from the Passacaglia are further developed in the energetic final movement (Burlesque), a typical example of Shostakovichian wit.

Shostakovich composed his *Violin Concerto No.2 in C sharp minor Op.129* during April and May 1967 anticipating Oistrakh’s 60th birthday the following year. Shostakovich’s general health had recently taken a turn for the worse and following a heart attack in 1966 he had been admitted to hospital. A serious fall shortly after completion of the *Second Violin Concerto* necessitated another spell in hospital (he joked that just needed to damage his left hand in order to put all his extremities out of order) and he was unable to be present at the premiere of the concerto. Again Oistrakh proved to be a superb advocate of the piece and delighted the composer (who was sent a recording of the performance) at the run-through in Bolshevo (13 September 1967) a fortnight before the official premiere in Moscow under Kondrashin. Just three weeks later Oistrakh and Eugene Ormandy gave the first performance outside the Soviet Union in London. This work has never achieved the popularity of the earlier concerto but is highly regarded nonetheless. Sparsely scored, its more traditional three movement format is typical of Shostakovich’s late emotionally intense style and the soloist remains constantly involved, engaging in lengthy dialogues with the other instruments, notably with timpani, tom-tom, horn, bassoon and flute.

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Following the traumas of his disastrous marriage to Antonina Miliukova, **Pyotr Tchaikovsky** (1840-93) fled to the peaceful resort of Clarens on the shores of Lake Geneva intending to occupy

himself with the composition of a new piece, the *Grand Sonata* for piano. There he was joined by the young violinist Iosif Kotek who had been studying with Joachim in Berlin. Of several works discussed by Tchaikovsky and Kotek, Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* made a positive impression and Tchaikovsky wrote to his friend and patron Nadezhda von Meck that Lalo 'in the same way as *Delibes* and *Bizet*, does not strive after profundity but carefully avoids routine, seeks out new forms and thinks more about musical beauty than about observing established musical traditions'. In March 1878, Tchaikovsky laid aside the *Grand Sonata* and completed the **Violin Concerto** (including a complete rewrite of the slow movement) in a few weeks. His original slow movement later became the *Méditation* from *Souvenir d'un lieu cher* Op. 42 (Memory of a dear place), a group of three pieces completed in May 1878 whilst he was staying at Brailivo, an estate belonging to Nadezhda von Meck in the Ukraine. He left the manuscript, dedicated to B***** (clearly the Brailivo Estate), in the care of Von Meck with a request that it be sent to Władysław Pachulski to prepare for publication. Jurgenson published *Souvenir* in May 1879 and the composer declared himself satisfied with the result. *Méditation* is more often played as a separate piece, occasionally in a version arranged by Glazunov for violin and orchestra commissioned by Jurgenson after Tchaikovsky's death.

Although Kotek assisted with the violin writing Tchaikovsky was reluctant to dedicate the *Violin Concerto in D major* to him, fearing it would lead to gossip. Kotek became progressively less keen on the concerto as time went on and Tchaikovsky then approached the Hungarian virtuoso Leopold Auer but he too pulled away, saying that the violin writing was 'not suited to the character of the instrument'. Finally, Alfred Brodsky agreed to give the premiere which took place in Vienna on 4 December 1881 under Hans Richter. Pitifully under-rehearsed, the orchestra played with little conviction and with minimal support for Brodsky. The audience was by no means negative but critics – in particular the notoriously hard-to-please Eduard Hanslick – condemned the piece. Hanslick's verdict on a concerto that is now amongst the most popular in the repertoire is hard to justify: he commented that the opening movement started well but descended into chaos where 'it was no longer a question of whether the violin was being played but that it was being ripped about and torn to tatters'. The second movement Hanslick found quite pleasant but the sudden jolt of the transition into the finale raised his blood pressure once more and he compared the final movement to 'the brutish grim jollity of a Russian Church festival' with its 'common, ravaged faces, rough oaths and cheap vodka'.

In early life **Jean Sibelius** (1865-1957) had hopes of sustaining a career as a concert violinist and his decision to concentrate instead on composition was one he regretted over the years. The first mention of a *Violin Concerto* by him came in a letter written by the composer in September 1899 but Sibelius only began to draft the work in 1902, completing the first two movements by the end of 1903 with the finale following soon after. Sibelius himself conducted the premiere on 8th February 1904. He had dedicated the concerto to Willy Burmeister who had played under Robert Kajanus and was now a travelling virtuoso. However, once Sibelius had decided to hold the premiere in Helsinki, Burmeister made himself unavailable and the first performance of the *Violin Concerto in D minor* was entrusted to Viktor Nováček, who despite playing from memory, found his technique unequal to the task. Critical reaction was mixed and Sibelius undertook considerable revision. Richard Strauss conducted the first performance of the new version in Berlin on 19th October 1905. Once again Burmeister was unavailable and the soloist's part was taken by the leader of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Halir. It was some years before the **Violin Concerto in D minor** became a regular item in concert repertoire and it was not until the 1930s and 1940s when Jascha Heifetz and Georg Kulenkampff both promoted the work that others then took note and took it up.

The opening movement has three distinct themes which are developed fully either side of a cadenza. The slow movement is intensely romantic whilst the exotic third movement, famously described by Professor Donald Tovey as a 'Polonaise for Polar Bears', is in the tradition of other nineteenth century concerto finales.

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The Polish composer **Karol Szymanowski** (1882-1937) was born in Tymoszkówka (then part of the Ukraine), and studied theory with a distant relative Gustav Neuhaus (father of the pianist Heinrich Neuhaus). In Warsaw in 1901 he joined Zygmunt Noskowski's composition class and after moving to Berlin he founded the Polish Young Composer's Publishing Company in 1905. By then he had completed several piano pieces and in 1904 a **Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 9**. Early influences at that time included Richard Strauss, Alexander Scriabin and most notably in the *Violin Sonata*, César Franck. This work, which follows the traditional sonata formula and features related themes across all three movements, had to wait several years for its premiere but once performed it proved to be an immediate success. Szymanowski dedicated the sonata to the amateur violinist Bronisław

Gromadzki but having later befriended another violinist Paweł Kochański (1887-1934), he entrusted the premiere in April 1909 to Kochański who was accompanied by Artur Rubinstejn. This premiere was hugely successful (the middle movement being encored) and the sonata was repeated several times. Although gratified by the work's reception Szymanowski was slightly nonplussed by its success, writing after one performance that 'the reviews were excellent although, as you might guess, very stupid'.

During the Great War Szymanowski returned to the Ukraine where he composed his *Violin Concerto No.1, Op.35* in the autumn of 1916. Before the outbreak of war Szymanowski had twice travelled to North Africa and this, together with an interest in Arabic culture and Greek mythology and a gradual shift in musical influence from German romanticism towards French impressionism, gave his own music at this time an exotic, shimmering quality. Not only had Szymanowski developed an interest in Arabic culture, he also became receptive to the expressionist and mystical poetry of his contemporary Tadeusz Miciński (1873-1918) and although he did not attach a programme to this concerto, commentators have often expressed the opinion that Szymanowski had these lines from Miciński's poem *Noc majowa* (May Night) in mind: 'All the birds pay tribute to me, / for today I wed a goddess. / And now we stand by the lake in scarlet blossoms / in flowing tears of joy, with enchantment and fear, / burning in amorous conflagration.' The concerto is unique: composed in a single span it resembles more a richly atmospheric fantasy, much of it intimate and contemplative but with moments of heightened lyricism and passion. Although the orchestra is large, there are several passages of delicate interplay between violin and other solo instruments.

Szymanowski composed his *Violin Concerto No.1* for Kochański who assisted him with the violin writing and composed the lengthy cadenza towards the end of the work. Kochański had left Poland for America by the time of the actual premiere in 1922 (an earlier premiere had been planned for St Petersburg in 1917 but was aborted due to the Russian revolution) and the first performance was given by the leader of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Józef Ozimiński. Szymanowski continued to acknowledge the role played by Kochański in the concerto's creation, writing in 1920 that they had together created a 'new style, a new mode of expression for the violin' and Kochański introduced the concerto to American audiences in 1924 under the direction of Leopold Stokowski, repeating it several times with other conductors. He was also the dedicatee of Szymanowski's *Violin Concerto No.2* (1932-33). Oistrakh is accompanied in the Szymanowski *Violin Sonata* by his regular collaborator in the 1950s, Vladimir Yampolsky (1905-65).

When just nineteen years old **Paul Hindemith** (1895-1963) was appointed leader of the Frankfurt Opera orchestra but by the end of the Great War he had given up the violin in favour of the viola, joined the Amar Quartet, and as a composer had become the musical *enfant terrible* of Weimar Germany. Falling foul of the Nazis, his music was banned on the radio in the 1930s and he featured in their *entartete Musik* (degenerate music) exhibition. He left Germany for Switzerland in September 1938 and then emigrated to the USA in February 1940. One of the last pieces he composed before leaving Europe was the *Violin Concerto* in late 1939 which had been commissioned by Willem Mengelberg. Hindemith had hoped that the great violinist Georg Kulenkampff would be the soloist (Kulenkampff had flouted the Nazi ban by presenting Hindemith's *Violin Sonata in E* in Berlin in 1936) but this was not to be – it is assumed that Kulenkampff was prevented by the Nazis. Instead Ferdinand Hellmann gave the premiere with Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw orchestra on 14 March 1940, two months before the German invasion of Holland.

Hindemith's *Violin Concerto* follows the traditional three movement structure. The quiet timpani opening recalls Beethoven's concerto and the soaring violin line is punctuated by military fanfares throughout the first movement which inevitably suggest a tense situation (the 'phoney' war taking place at this time). In contrast the slow movement, apart from occasional bursts of aggression, has a rhapsodic air about it. The final movement puts the violinist through their paces but there are moments of great beauty and unexpected levity, as if the composer was harking back several decades to the late romantic era, an aspect of the piece well illustrated in this recording directed by the composer himself.

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The year 1703, as well as seeing him ordained as a priest, also marked the beginning of **Antonio Vivaldi's** long association with the *Ospedale della Pietà*. This charitable institution, one of four such in Venice, looked after, and gave an education to, orphaned and abandoned girls. At the *Pietà*, to which Vivaldi was first appointed violin teacher, some of the girls were given a general education while others a more definitely musical one. Over the years Vivaldi held various posts there and composed a considerable amount of music for his pupils to play. On 2 July 1723, the Governors of the *Pietà* decreed that Vivaldi should henceforth provide two concertos every month (to be sent by post, at no cost to themselves, if the composer happened to be away from Venice at

the time) and that he should rehearse each of them three or four times before performance. Of these concertos about twenty of them were for two violins one of which, the one in A minor, Op.3 No.8, Bach later transcribed for the organ.

When David Oistrakh first heard **Isaac Stern** playing concertos by Mozart, Brahms and Bach (the A minor) in Antwerp he wrote home to tell his family that he had just seen and listened to ‘a new star from the violinists’ heavens’. That was in 1951 and, within four or five years, the two of them were recording a double concerto by Vivaldi in Philadelphia. According to Stern, they had tossed a coin to decide which of them should play first violin and which second on this occasion. Listening to the recording many years later, Stern claimed to find it difficult to determine which of them had played which part.

When Isaac Stern was about ten months old – he had been born on 21 July 1920 in the Ukraine – his parents took him to San Francisco. There he studied the violin at that city’s conservatory and, at the age of fifteen, played the *Brahms Concerto* with its Symphony Orchestra and Pierre Monteux. Over the next sixty years Stern enjoyed an illustrious career which took him all over the world, playing with all the great orchestras and conductors. He was also politically active, especially in support of Israel, and refused to play in Germany because of the Holocaust. He died in September 2001 at the age of eighty-one. © **Peter Avis, April 2015**

Giuseppe Tartini was born in Pirano (now Piran in Slovenia) in 1692 where his father managed the local salt mills. His education pointed towards a career in the Church, however the young Tartini had other ideas. When he was sixteen he travelled to Padua where he studied law. His studies were interrupted when he was forced to leave Padua, having married outside his family’s wishes. For a number of years he was given refuge in a Franciscan order in Assisi, and it was during this time that he taught himself the violin. Following the death of his protector he was able to support himself playing the violin and it is known that in 1714 he was playing at the opera house in Ancona. Although details of his early life are sketchy it is documented that between 1717 and 1721 he spent time as a peripatetic violinist in various churches, opera houses and schools in the area around Venice.

By 1721 his reputation was such that he was invited to become the first violinist at S Antonio in Padua without having to pass the required examination. He was also given leave to travel to other

areas in Italy whilst in post. This special permission proved useful two years later when he was able to travel to Prague in order to perform at the coronation of Emperor Charles VI of Bohemia. From his early years Tartini had been something of a hothead (as well as an excellent fencer) and this visit to Prague apparently coincided with a scandal in which Tartini was accused of fathering a local innkeeper’s child! However it is known that three years later he was back in Padua where he was soon to open an internationally recognised violin school, probably the first of its kind. This academy proved to be highly influential: many of his students (who generally remained for a couple of years) went on to teach, perform and compose throughout Europe. Tartini was also friendly with other experienced teachers such as Padre Martini whose own school in Bologna acted as a magnet for many composers.

Despite tempting offers from elsewhere in Europe, Tartini maintained his base in Padua until his death in 1770. He did make short visits to other Italian cities as a virtuoso performer until c1740 when his career was foreshortened by a stroke which left him partially paralysed.

In later years Tartini published various treatises which expanded on his teaching theory, performing styles, harmony, philosophy and mathematics. Much of this was unintelligible to his intended audience (which did not however prevent Leopold Mozart and others from plagiarising his work) and his dense prose was heavily criticised. Rousseau however acknowledged Tartini’s theories to support his own work.

Many of Tartini’s innovations and theories stemmed from his early days in Assisi, and perhaps the most important of these theories is that of the ‘resultant’ tone. The ‘resultant’ tone can be heard when two loud notes are played together, and two other tones can also be heard: a low one (known as the difference tone, so called because it corresponds to the difference between the two vibration numbers) and a higher, much fainter one (the summation tone which corresponds to the sum of the vibration numbers). Another innovation of Tartini’s came about because he wished his students to imitate the phrasing and expression of a singer, and so he introduced the longer bow to help them in phrasing.

Although he played in opera house orchestras and lived when a successful musical career could generally only be achieved by writing for the stage, Tartini showed no inclination to compose

operas. The vast majority of works by this hugely prolific composer were either concertos for violin (c135) or string sonatas (c200). However as his violin teaching demonstrated, he did have an interest in the human voice and he left a handful of religious works.

Tartini's works quickly went out of fashion after his death in 1770 and it is only due to the unstinting work of the 20th century musicologist Minos Dounias that we are aware of the extent of Tartini's *oeuvres*. Dounias has catalogued Tartini's music, not in chronological order (for as more music is discovered it would lead to untold confusion!) but according to their keys.

Tartini once dreamt that he had bargained his soul with the devil. As he later recounted to J G de Lalande (*Voyage d'un François en Italie* 1769) he was initially delighted to have such a 'novel servant'. Handing the devil his own instrument, Tartini heard him play 'a sonata so unusual and so beautiful performed with such mastery and intelligence, on a level I had never before conceived was possible! I was so enraptured and overcome that I stopped breathing and awoke gasping. Immediately I seized my violin, hoping to recall some shred of what I had just heard – but in vain. The piece I then composed, the ***Devil's Sonata***, is without doubt my best, but it falls so far short of the one that stunned me that I would have smashed my violin and given up music forever if I could but possess it'.

One can perfectly understand that Tartini found this experience exhilarating as the resulting work, even if 'far short of the one that stunned', is itself of exceptional difficulty. The work is in three movements, the first of which is based upon a simple melody and gives little indication of the fireworks to come; the second movement is rather more intricate whilst the finale subtitled 'Sogni dell'autore' (the author's dreams) contains the hair-raising passages that give the sonata its name in which the player's left hand is required to carry two parts simultaneously. Although known during Tartini's lifetime, it was only published complete as part of a collection *L'art du violon* by J B Cartier in 1798. Its route to publication was circuitous, having come to Cartier from Tartini's pupil Pietro Nardini by way of Nardini's student Pierre Baillot. De Lalande dates the sonata as early as 1713, but experts consider this unlikely, placing it instead from the late 1740s. Post-Tartini, tales of diabolical violinists excited later audiences: Paganini, aided by his cadaverous appearance, was widely believed to be possessed; an E T A Hoffmann heroine sings herself to death egged on by a demonic violinist and Pugnî's ballet *Le violon du diable* (1849) concerns a violinist who enlists

the help of Satan in winning his sweetheart.

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(ALTO Distribution, Magnus House, 8 Ashfield Rd, Cheadle SK81BB, UK)**

Cover image: 'David Oistrakh with Violin'

Design produced by Imergent Images Ltd (info@imergent.co.uk)

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