



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

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Max Bruch

6th January, 1838 – 2nd October, 1920

Max Bruch Biography (BBC)



"His name will endure, if only thanks to one superb violin concerto." Thus *The New Grove* on Max Bruch, a prolific composer who was much admired in his lifetime. His talent for melody and orchestration revealed itself at an early age, and he was encouraged to travel to Leipzig to imbibe the influence of Mendelssohn. The opera *Die Loreley* and the cantata *Frijthof* established his reputation in Germany, but it was to be his choral music – both sacred and secular – that kept his name before the public.

The *First Violin Concerto* was the first of a string of works for the instrument (the *Scottish Fantasy* is still performed occasionally), and he composed three symphonies, the *Kol nidrei* for cello and orchestra, and a final, unsuccessful opera, *Hermione*. He was a respected teacher, and numbered Respighi and Vaughan Williams among his students in Berlin. He held posts in Koblenz, Sondershausen, Breslau and Liverpool, but he reacted against the innovations of Liszt and Wagner, and found himself isolated from contemporary opinion later in life.

Profile by © Owen Mitchell

The popularity of his first violin concerto, however, eclipsed his overall output, and his talents were overshadowed by those of another German composer, Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). In 1907 Bruch told American music critic Arthur Abell: "As time goes on, [Brahms] will be more appreciated, while most of my works will be more and more neglected. Fifty years hence he will loom up as one of the supremely great composers of all time, while I will be remembered chiefly for having written my *G-Minor Violin Concerto*."

For better or worse, Bruch's historical assessment was correct. Despite his vast catalogue, today concertgoers are typically treated to just three of his works with some frequency: the previously mentioned *Violin Concerto No. 1*, as well as his *Scottish Fantasy* for violin and orchestra and his *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra.

Early Years

Bruch was born in Cologne, Germany, on January 6, 1838. His father was a lawyer, and his mother was a singer. Both of his parents encouraged his prodigious talents. (It's said that the first piece Bruch wrote, at the age of nine, was a song in honour of his mother's birthday.) Bruch had one sibling, a sister named Mathilde.

At the age of 14, Bruch was awarded the prestigious Frankfurt Mozart Foundation Prize due, in part, to a recommendation from the acclaimed composer and conductor Ferdinand Hiller (1811–1885), who founded the Cologne Conservatory in 1850. (Hiller had heard a number of Bruch's works while visiting the Bruch's home on occasion.) The prize allowed Bruch to study composition with Hiller as well as piano with Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), one of the conservatory's professors.

In 1858, six years after Bruch won the Mozart prize, he premiered his first published work: a one-act opera called *Scherz, List, und Rache* (*Jest, Cunning, and Revenge*), based on text by Goethe. Other works followed, and his reputation as a serious composer was cemented with his opera *Die Loreley* (1862) and his cantata *Frithjof* (1864).

Career and Compositional Style

During his long career, Bruch was a well-regarded conductor and teacher as well as a composer. He served as music director for a number of organizations, including the Stern Choral Society in Berlin, the Philharmonic Society in Liverpool, and the Orchesterverein in Breslau. From 1890 to 1910 he taught at the Berlin Academy, where his students included Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958). In 1893 he was awarded an honorary doctorate in music from Cambridge University.



Bruch's music was firmly rooted in Romantic classicism, which put him at odds with innovative, avant-garde contemporaries like Franz Liszt (1811–1886) and Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Scholars have noted that Bruch's style remained virtually unchanged throughout his career, and they've pointed to a perceived conservatism and sentimentality in his work as having limited the scope of his legacy — especially since, in his later years, Bruch was composing at the same time as revolutionaries like Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971).

(Acknowledgement: santafechambermusic.com)

Sculpture on the restored tower
of the Cologne City Hall

Personal Life



Max Bruch met Clara Tucek, his wife to be, in Germany while on a tour. She was a singer. Later In January 1881, he tied the knot with her. The couple was blessed with their first born a daughter, Margaretha in 1881. They also had three other children Max Felix, Hans, and Ewald. His wife later died in 1919.

Death

Max Bruch took his last breath on October 2nd, 1920 at his home in Berlin. It is believed that he died a painless death. He was 82 years old at the time of his death. He was laid to rest next to his late wife in Berlin's Old St. Matthäus churchyard. She had died the previous year in August.

Max Bruch lived for 82 of the most exciting years in the history of music though he remained staunchly resistant to musical developments during his lifetime. Mendelssohn had yet to write *Elijah* when Bruch was born; but by the time of his death, in 1920, Mahler had been dead for nine years, having stirred a symphonic revolution, and Stravinsky's harshly modernist *Rite of Spring* was already seven years old. Bruch raged futilely against the unstoppable: Wagner and Liszt, the so-called German New Romantics, were his nemesis, and any conductor who dared promote their work over his was usually dismissed as a 'podium peacock'. (Classical-Music.com)

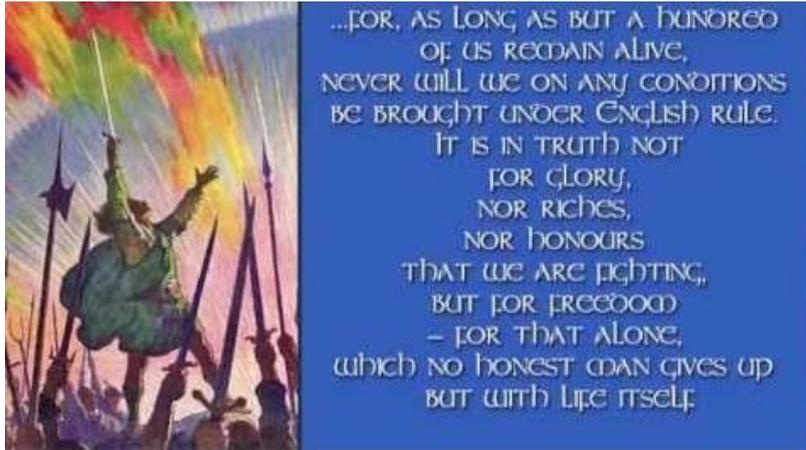


Today's Music selections

Scottish Fantasy Opus 46

Like many composers, Max Bruch was captivated by both the idea and the sound of folk music. Nowhere is this more evident than in his *Scottish Fantasy* for violin and orchestra.

This work received its UK premiere while Bruch was rather grumpily in charge of the Liverpool Philharmonic in 1881, some seventeen years before he took over at the Scottish Orchestra. His time in Scotland was no more successful than his tenure in Liverpool.



Despite the fact that Bruch was a virtual stranger to Scotland at the time he wrote his *Scottish Fantasy*, there is nothing to suggest that the work is based on anything other than wholly authentic Scottish melodies.

Its opening movement uses 'Auld Rob Morris'; from there, we move on to 'Dusty Miller', before 'I'm down for lack of Johnnie' in the third movement and, to conclude, the ebullient 'Scots Wha Hae' in the finale.

Interestingly, Bruch uses a harp in the *Scottish Fantasy* – strongly suggesting he thought the instrument was a central part of authentic Scottish folk music. Whether he had actually heard a Celtic harp played at the time he wrote the piece is still very much open to debate. (classicfm.com)

Fantasia opens with a slow, solemnly bardic introduction for brass and harp, and then a recitative for the soloist on a soft cushion of strings. This leads directly to an Adagio cantabile in E flat major, based on the song "Auld Robin Morris," with the harp nearly as prominent as the violin's decorations.

The G major second movement has various titles -- "Scherzo: Allegro" and "Dance" -- and is based on "Hey, the Dusty Miller." Drone basses imitate the sound of bagpipes, while the violin adds all manner of pyrotechnics after it introduces the tune on double-stopped strings (two strings played with one stroke of the bow). The merriment ends with a bridge passage recalling "Auld Robin Morris." This leads without pause to the third movement, a set of plushly sonorous variations in slower time, Andante sostenuto, on the song "I'm Down for Lack o' Johnnie." The violin rhapsodizes eloquently throughout, and concludes with a memorable sigh.

Bruch gave his finale the same warlike marking, *Allegro guerriero*, that Mendelssohn used in the last movement of his *Scottish Symphony*. "Scots wha hae" is the dominant folk melody, legendarily sung by Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn. The violin adds excitement by playing on two, three, even four strings simultaneously until a tender reprise of the first movement. "Scots wha hae" returns.

(Acknowledgement allmusic.com).

We hear violinist Stefan Jackiw, with the *Sinfónica de Galicia* conducted by Rumon Gamba perform the 1st movement. The YouTube link (for the complete work) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aVET-CDRWk>



Kol Nidrei opus 47

At the centre of the Jewish year are High Holy Days, culminating in Yom Kippur. Leading to this Day of Atonement is Kol Nidrei, which is a service and a prayer. The chant on which this work is based is the solemn one with which the service begins for the eve of Yom Kippur--the Day of Atonement, a fast day and the highest of all the Jewish holy days. The chant is said to have originated at the time of the Inquisition in Spain, when many Jews, known as Maranos, outwardly adopted Christianity but continued to practice their hereditary faith in secret. The words "Kol nidrei" mean "All vows": the text is a renunciation of false allegiance sworn under duress. All vows, all words spoken against righteousness, are repented.

Composer Max Bruch was a Protestant in 1880s Berlin, but knew the city's cantor-in-chief, Abraham Lichtenstein. Bruch learned the Kol Nidrei melody and others from the Lichtenstein family. He loved the beauty of these tunes. Complex rhythmic shades were woven into deceptive simplicity—just like Gregorian chant, in fact, just like the folk music of other traditions.

Bruch composed Kol Nidrei for cello and orchestra, not for a sacred service. He assembled tunes for a cellist who asked him for a piece. It's music to be played in a concert hall for people of all faiths and no faith.

The Official Translation of the Kol Nidre Oath
"All Vows, obligations, oaths, anathemas, whether called konam, konas, or by any other name, which we may vow, or swear, or pledge or whereby we are bound, from this Day of Atonement unto the next, whose happy coming we await, we do repent. May they be deemed absolved, forgiven, annulled, and void and made of no effect; they shall not bind us or have power over us. The Vows shall not be reckoned vows; the obligations shall not be obligatory; nor the oaths be oaths."

But perhaps it is a prayer. Perhaps something happens when we hear the Bruch Kol Nidrei. In the midst of our busy comings and goings, among our vows to accomplish this or that, this Kol Nidrei stops us and calls us to something deeper.

The chant itself has the character of a lament; by way of leavening, Bruch balances this theme with a second, more radiant one, set in the major, which dominates the second part of the piece and brings it to its serene conclusion.

The cellist for this performance is Mischa Maisky. He is accompanied BY THE Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Paavo Järvi. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGzOozXt4ek>

Concerto for Two Pianos Opus 88a

Bruch's *Concerto for Two Pianos* had an awkward history. The work's genesis dates to April 1904, when Bruch was in Capri for a medically-enforced vacation. "In the evening between eight and nine," he wrote to his family, "a procession in the narrow streets and alleys of Capri. Leading it was a messenger of sadness with a large tuba on which he played a kind of signal." He then notated a phrase markedly similar to what would open the *Concerto*. "Not bad at all," he continued. "One could make quite a good funeral march out of it! Next came several large flowered crosses, one carried by a hermit from Mount Tiberio. A few hundred children dressed in white and carrying large burning candles, each of them also holding a small black cross. They sang in unison a kind of lamentation that sounded approximately thus"—and then he transcribed nine measures of their song.

At that point he began working on his *Third Suite for Orchestra* (with a prominent organ part), which incorporated those melodies into the first and last of its four movements. In May 1909, the *Suite* was premiered at a *Promenade Concert* in London, with Henry Wood conducting, but Bruch continued to re-write the piece through 1915. In the end, he did not publish it. Instead, he refashioned it into his *Concerto for Two Pianos*.



The concerto's dramatic beginning, slightly suggesting the intense opening of Brahms's *First Symphony*, is based on the tuba fanfare Bruch had heard in Capri. This cedes to a fugato section featuring the two pianos—the hymn from the children's procession—with the "tuba motif" superimposed as it unrolls.

The second movement proceeds without a break out of the first, via some dreamy writing for the lower strings, into a fleet expanse of Mendelssohnian vigour and optimism. The third movement returns to wistfulness; its spun-out melody works up to almost operatic passion.

The finale begins by recalling the "tuba motif" from the concerto's outset and then moves into a free fantasia on the material. The pianos introduce the movement's principal theme, a grand idea embroidered with swirling scales and arpeggios. Again, the effect seems grounded in the musical ideals of Mendelssohn, who had died nearly seven decades before this piece saw light of day. The harmonic language may perhaps be enriched by the vocabulary of Saint-Saëns (one can hear his *Organ Symphony*, from 1886, lurking somewhere around the fringes), but on the whole Bruch's *Concerto for Two Pianos* is a fly preserved in the amber of an earlier time—or, better put, a beautiful butterfly.

—James M. Keller (sfsymphony.org)

We listen to the 1st & 4th movements played by the *St. Petersburg Symphony Orchestra* conducted Mikhail Tchernigovskiy. The Soloists are Anna Grishko & Aleksandr Larionov. The link to YouTube is: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11_rU1Kz-Xw&t=57s



Leonidas

Leonidas (c. 530–480 B.C.) was a king of the city-state of Sparta from about 490 B.C. until his death at the Battle of Thermopylae against the Persian army in 480 B.C. Although Leonidas lost the battle, his death at Thermopylae was seen as a heroic sacrifice because he sent most of his army away when he realized that the Persians had outmaneuvered him. Three hundred of his fellow Spartans stayed with him to fight and die.

Statue thought to be of Leonidas
5th century BC

As king, Leonidas was a military leader as well as a political one. Like all male Spartan citizens, Leonidas had been trained mentally and physically since childhood in preparation to become a hoplite warrior. Hoplites were armed with a round shield, spear and iron short sword. In battle, they used a formation called a phalanx, in which rows of hoplites stood directly next to each other so that their shields overlapped with one another. During a frontal attack, this wall of shields provided significant protection to the warriors behind it. If the phalanx broke or if the enemy attacked from the side or the rear, however, the formation became vulnerable. It was this fatal weakness to the otherwise formidable phalanx formation that proved to be Leonidas' undoing against an invading Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C.

Leonidas achieved lasting fame for his personal sacrifice. Hero cults were an established custom in ancient Greece from the eighth century B.C. onward. Dead heroes were worshipped, usually near their burial site, as intermediaries to the gods. Forty years after the battle, Sparta retrieved Leonidas' remains (or what were believed to be his remains) and a shrine was built in his honour.



The Männerstimmen Basel (the Male voices of Basel) were founded 10 years ago. Their appearance is deliberately old-fashioned: clothes from the 20s, Knickerbockers, suspenders, corduroy jackets. However, they are a bunch of young lads who are dedicated to mastering great choral music. The Symphony Orchestra Basel, is conducted by Oliver Rudin with baritone Robert Koller in the role of the warrior Leonidas before he dies an heroic death.

Listen to them on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHHdUfSfvnU&t=910s>

Double Concerto for Viola, Clarinet and Orchestra Op 88

The Concerto for clarinet, viola and orchestra, Op 88, fails to get mentioned in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (an encyclopedic dictionary of music and musicians – currently comprising 29 volumes) and considerable mystery surrounds its composition. It is important to point out that it should not be confused with the *Double Piano Concerto, Op 88a*: there is no similarity.

Bruch writes the opening movement, *Andante con moto*, in common time, setting the mood in a warm, lyrical late-Romantic manner. The solo viola opens boldly at the start immediately followed by the clarinet giving an autumnal melancholic glow to the solo instruments which later weave their ways both independently and corporately in turn.

The second movement, an *Allegro moderato* in 3/4 time, is again lyrical in style, the solo instruments almost singing a long duet together with the orchestra acting as the accompanying ensemble. For example, at bar 78 the strings play *pizzicato*, suggesting either a guitar or harp.

The finale, an *Allegro molto* in 2/4, opens with a fanfare from trumpets and timpani but soon employs the full orchestra in a lengthy tutti. The clarinet first enters at bar 49 but now the two solo instruments have considerable interplay in their more animated writing, here more demanding technically than in the first two movements. This swift but charming finale completes a work through which pervades a warm nostalgic glow of the late nineteenth century.



The *Double Concerto* was expressly written for his son Max Felix Bruch, a gifted clarinetist. Scored in three movements, virtuosity throughout serves the expressive qualities of the music, and the slow harmonic and metrical motion imparts the music with a sense of rhapsodic beauty. The *Double Concerto* was first published in 1942—22 years after the composer's death—but it took

the discovery of the original autograph score in 1991 for the work to be officially included into the collected works. (Hyperion).

The two solo instruments thread and entwine melody around each other. It's a rhapsodic work, full of his son's youthful high spirits, that captivates many listeners once they have encountered it, hardly less than the composer's *First Violin Concerto*, and a discovery well worth making for anyone not wholly in thrall to the tenets of Modernism which Bruch resisted so stoutly.

WE hear the 1st movement played by Yevgeny Yehudin, Principal Clarinet of Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and Violist: Yuri Bashmet. The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra is conducted by Yoel Levi. The link to YouTube is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciaSeohiZ28>

Concerto No 1 for Violin and Orchestra Opus 26

The concerto was first completed in 1866 and the first performance was given on 24 April 1866 by Otto von Königslow, with Bruch conducting. The concerto was then considerably revised with help from celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim and completed in its present form in 1867. The premiere of the revised concerto was given by Joachim in Bremen on 5 January 1868, with Karl Martin Rheinthal conducting.



Violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim and pianist Clara Schumann. Joachim first performed the revised version of Bruch's First Violin Concerto.

Max Bruch resented that his First Violin Concerto (of three) achieved widespread fame while the rest of his output was largely neglected. But with its brooding melodies, unusual form, and joyous finale, it has become one of the most popular violin concertos of all time. Unfortunately the success of the First Violin Concerto haunted him for the rest of his life and as if to rub salt into the wound, he unwisely accepted a one-off payment for the work and so missed out on a fortune in royalties.

Bruch wrote the first movement as one sprawling introduction. A timpani roll and ominous woodwinds herald the solo violin, which rises in twists and turns, like smoke. Bruch originally wanted to call this movement a "fantasy," but settled on the more sober-sounding "prelude" after consulting his friend, the violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. For the first movement in a concerto, composers in Bruch's time would usually state a theme and develop it through the formal template of sonata form. Instead, Bruch writes a free-flowing prelude that takes a while to settle into a groove. When it does, it is a slow clip-clopping in the low strings – like a gunslinger riding into a dusty town at high noon. The violin continues its insouciant inventions, embellishing the tune with folksy double stops.

Bruch wrote his Violin Concerto at the height of romantic virtuoso-worship, when violinists like Joseph Joachim were adored for demonstrating their heroic musical prowess against the machinery of the romantic orchestra.

While it is certainly anachronistic to associate Bruch's vamping strings and improvised-sounding violin with the soundtrack of a Spaghetti Western, I can't help hearing a cowboyish swagger, a curled lip, and a snarl in the descending double stops of the violin.

A Swooning Adagio

If the first movement is an introduction, what does it introduce? The slow second movement, usually a downbeat break from the fireworks of the surrounding movements, is here the main event. There is no break between the first and second movements in this concerto. The strings float downward at the end of the first movement and the solo violin enters with the main theme of the second. The theme is played on the lower strings of the violin, giving it a warm, intimate tone.

A Smoking Finale

The third and final movement features a fiery dance tune. The orchestra plays a quiet but excited introduction that launches the solo violin into rhythmic double stops. There is an expansive, contrasting second theme embraced by the orchestra and then the solo violin [2:35], but the dance theme returns in the orchestra, which leaves space for the violinist to play some smoking-hot runs. Remember to blow the smoke off the violin at the end.

(Acknowledgment: Matthew Lorenzon - abc.net.au)



The complete concerto is played for us by Hilary Hahn with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrés Orozco-Estrada. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDJ6Wbzy3E&t=99s>

