

KOGAN (American Recording Debut)

MONTEUX

BOSTON SYMPHONY

KHACHATURIAN

VIOLIN CONCERTO

SAINT-SAENS

HAVANAISE

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Khachaturian VIOLIN CONCERTO

Saint-Saëns, HAVANAISE, Op. 83

Leonid Kogan, Violinist

Boston Symphony Orchestra • Pierre Monteux Conducting

The American debut of the Russian violinist Leonid Kogan took place in Symphony Hall, Boston, on the afternoon of January 10, 1958. The orchestra accompanying him was the Boston Symphony; the conductor was Pierre Monteux (who used no score); the work was the *Concerto in D for Violin and Orchestra* by Johannes Brahms. It was an affair long anticipated by the city.

The previous day, in a press interview, the 33-year-old violinist—a slim though solid man, a little more than five feet tall, with dark eyes, dark hair, dark ample brows, and fingers constantly active as though in the act of being limbered—had confessed that his first surprise on arriving in America was the enormous number of cars. He had chosen the Boston Symphony Orchestra with which to make his American debut, he said, as his way of returning the compliments of the Soviet Union and the great pleasure the orchestra had given him during its appearances in Moscow the previous year. As he conversed through an interpreter, he flashed a winning smile, discoursed on the necessity for a further expansion of the exchange of American and Soviet artists and cultural institutions, and made an impression as a man of a lively mind, wide-ranging interests and, above all, a passion for music.

As he appeared on the stage of Symphony Hall the following day in a dark business suit, a black bow tie and with his State-owned Stradivarius of 1707 under his arm, he was given a greeting by the audience unusual for unknown artists—but he had been preceded by his reputation. During the long orchestral tutti he seemed extremely nervous, fidgeting with his bow and his tuning somewhat more than is customary among artists so experienced as he. But from the moment of his solo entrance the transformation from the understandably nervous young man to the transcendent violinist and musician was complete. Standing still throughout the performance, without mannerism or seeming physical effort, he electrified audience and orchestra alike with the lyrical beauty of his playing as well as with the fleetness and security of his technique. At the

end he was recalled to the stage four times—most unusual in Boston—for an ovation in which bravos and stamping of the feet drowned out the applause of the more sedate members of the audience.

Next day the critics were unanimous in their conclusions: a great new star had appeared. His tone was described as round and full and luminous, his range of dynamic shading exceptional, his bowing poised and graceful, his playing remarkable for the clarity of the phrases.

Within forty-eight hours of his concert debut Kogan, the Boston Symphony, and Pierre Monteux joined forces again in Symphony Hall, this time with an audience composed only of microphones and RCA Victor recording technicians, and in a prolonged session recorded the performances on this disc. It was a tour de force in more ways than one, for Maître Monteux had never before performed the Khachaturian Concerto. Nevertheless the accompaniment measured up in all respects to the accomplishment of the solo artist, as this recording attests.

Acclaim is nothing new to Leonid Kogan himself: since graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1948, he has had an extensive career both in Russia and abroad, having appeared in England, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Greece, France, China, and in many cities in South America and Canada. In the Soviet Union, where he gives many concerts each year, he commands two thousand rubles a performance, supplementing this huge income (by Soviet standards, where the average worker receives one thousand rubles a month) by teaching.

He was born in November 1924, in the Ukrainian city of Dnieperpetrovsk on the Dnieper river. His musical vocation was evident at an early age. When he was ten years old his parents took him to Moscow so that he could have the benefit of the classes for exceptionally talented pupils at the Moscow Conservatory. There he studied with Abraham Yampolsky and later with David Oistrakh.

He made his official debut at the age of sixteen.

In 1951 Leonid Kogan won the coveted first prize at the *Concours Ysaye* in Brussels. Jacques Thibaud, who had heard him play some fifteen years before in Moscow and had predicted a great future for him then, was one of the judges.

The Violin Concerto of Aram Khachaturian is, for all its surface glitter, infinitely more than a showpiece for the instrument. As in all the works of this 54-year-old son of a Tiflis bookbinder, it is saturated with genuine and imitation folk idioms, not only those of his native Armenia but of Georgia, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Russia. His music is characterized by great vitality, by a rhapsodic freedom and a sense of vivid coloration, yet it is always lyrical. In the usual three movements, the Violin Concerto is filled with brilliant technical effects and voluptuous melodies and with exotic rhythms and harmonies as well.

Camille Saint-Saëns, one of the most lovable all-around musicians France ever produced, is known mostly today—among lovers of the violin, that is—as the composer of the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, an essay for violin and orchestra notable for its swift change of mood and its passages of great brilliance. Less well known is the later *Havanaise*, Op. 83, an engaging work suggesting, in its broad opening section, a Spanish atmosphere of comfortable indolence. The following Allegro, sustaining the Iberian flavor, is brilliant and dashing, yet it also provides moments of broad singing and playfulness. The Finale features brilliant glissando scales and builds to a big climax, then subsides into a mood of lighthearted happiness and fulfillment.

Notes by RUDOLPH ELIE
Music Critic of The Boston Herald
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