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DOHNÁNYI Serenade in C
HEIFETZ • PRIMROSE • FEUERMANN

GRUENBERG Violin Concerto
HEIFETZ • MONTEUX

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

DOHNÁNYI

SERENADE IN C, OP. 10

JASCHA HEIFETZ, VIOLINIST • WILLIAM PRIMROSE, VIOLIST
EMANUEL FEUERMANN, 'CELLIST

GRUENBERG

CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA, OP. 47

JASCHA HEIFETZ, VIOLINIST

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PIERRE MONTEUX, CONDUCTOR

More than a half-century has elapsed since the publication, in 1904, of the string trio that is listed as *Serenade, Opus 10*, in the long catalogue of works by Ernst Dohnányi. The composer was twenty-six at the time and, like Brahms before him, a barnstorming pianist. A distinguished career was ahead of him, the latter years of it in the United States. But to this day the *Serenade* has remained the most enduringly popular of all his compositions.

In creative matters, too, Brahms was Dohnányi's model. The older master's influence is discernible in the *Serenade*, but with the difference that Dohnányi "shuns boredom absolutely," as Sir Donald Francis Tovey put it—hence music "in which the form arises organically from the matter." This is a somewhat equivocal evaluation that does not obviate the Brahmsian ways of the *Serenade*, and the rationalization does not profit from Tovey's allusion to the Dvořák Terzetto: "But Dohnányi's wit and technique are too resourceful to keep him waiting for inspiration until a fourth movement."

Actually, Tovey's solicitude is as unnecessary as it is understandable. He loved the *Serenade*, wanted it to live. It has, anyway, on its own merits. And the truth is that, whether or not its debt to other composers is inordinate, its integrity as music is sufficient to guarantee the continued attentions of a grateful posterity.

There are five movements. The first is a buoyant Marcia. There ensues a folk-like Romanza of wistful loveliness. The central Scherzo is a prankish fughetta. Five short variations on a rustic tune come next. The Finale is a sprightly rondo with a Haydn-esque double theme that echoes the Marcia before fading down to a whisper and then suddenly, at the very end, erupting in a fortissimo sneeze.

* * *

In his career on the concert platform Jascha Heifetz has enriched the literature for the violin substantially, not only by his own transcriptions, but by the commissions he has awarded to composers for the creation of works for the violin. Concertos by William Walton and Louis Gruenberg now exist in the literature, thanks to Heifetz' commissions. Gruenberg, composer of the opera *Emperor Jones*, completed

his violin concerto in May of 1944. Mr. Heifetz recorded it in December of 1945. Composer and violinist collaborated closely in working out the intricate solo part of the concerto. We are told that at one point Mr. Heifetz complained that it was becoming too complicated. The composer was content to reply pointedly at such times, "You're Heifetz, aren't you?"

In recounting the genesis of Louis Gruenberg's Concerto we can scarcely hope to better the highly revealing words of the composer himself; for on the occasion of the world premiere by Mr. Heifetz and the Philadelphia Orchestra, the composer sent the following commentary to that organization's program annotator:

"... I have often wondered why a composer should be asked to invent (mostly) episodes in words after he has perspired and prayed over a composition for a seemingly everlasting period, when the work itself is its own illuminating commentary.

"Oh, if only we could really hide faults and shortcomings with words! Can I say that the Concerto is beautiful, profound and terribly important as I sometimes thought in highly optimistic moments, or shall I say that it has turned out only fairly satisfactory as I have in pessimistic moods?

"What CAN a composer say concerning something he has slaved over after sending it out in the world except to hope, to hope, and hope again? What else should be expected from a composer except music? And if he delivers beautiful melodies supported by beautiful harmonies and orderly construction, that is, to sum it up in two words, passion and order, surely, if he delivers this, there is no need for words. But, if he doesn't, well, there is even greater need for silence on his part.

"However, the composition is the result of a commission by Heifetz, who desired to add an American concerto to his already stupendous repertory, and this was, of course, nothing less than a challenge. It raised up that question of questions again as to what was really American music. To my mind, American music consists of All human emotions. Nothing less!

"In order to add spice to the work, I have used several bars of two Negro Spirituals in the second movement besides endeavoring to imitate a hill-billy

fiddler and a small town religious revival meeting in the third. The score was composed in three weeks, polished, orchestrated and completed months later, last May."

The music of Mr. Gruenberg's Concerto, being tailor-made for Heifetz, places a premium on the utmost in lyric warmth and richness of tonal color. Hand in hand with this we find plenty of opportunity for violinistic fireworks, but these are in the nature of development and ornamentation of the thematic material rather than startling tricks in the Paganini tradition. The scoring for orchestra is extremely full, with much use of the bright percussion instruments like the tambourine, celeste, triangle, glockenspiel, etc. The composer's aim here has not been to lay on the orchestral color in thick layers, but again to provide the greatest possible variety of scintillating decoration. The over-all effect on the ear of this technique is comparable to the visual effect afforded by a sumptuous tapestry replete with all manner of fascinating details woven in with richly colored threads.

The opening movement is called Rapsodie by the composer. Here the soloist and orchestra range through a wealth of original thematic material... some of it passionate and declamatory, as in the opening recitative, some of it in blues style, and some naïve and folklike such as the horn melody which is later elaborated by the solo violin. This theme, by the way, returns in highly dramatic fashion near the end of the Concerto.

The slow movement (With Simplicity and Warmth) features a predominantly lyric treatment of two Negro Spirituals, *Oh, Holy Lord* and *Master Jesus*, interrupted at only one point by a brief dance-like episode.

The combined barn dance and revival meeting evoked in the finale find the solo violin taking the lead almost all the way, even to near quotations of *The Arkansas Traveler*. Only near the end does the festive spirit give way to more serious utterance, as the composer recalls for us some of the lyric material heard in earlier portions of the score. A crescendo roll of the snare drum brings back the spirited barn dance tune once more, and the music ends in gay and brilliant fashion.

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