



sebastian bohren

mendelssohn
britten

violin
concertos

royal liverpool philharmonic orchestra andrew litton



mendelssohn britten

violin concertos

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

	Violin Concerto in E minor Op. 64	28.12
1	I. Allegro molto appassionato	13.09
2	II. Andante	8.41
3	III. Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace	6.22

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)

	Concerto for violin and orchestra Op. 15	33.25
4	I. Moderato con moto	10.07
5	II. Vivace – Cadenza	8.50
6	III. Passacaglia: Andante lento (un poco meno mosso)	14.28

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

7	Sérénade mélancolique Op. 26	8.55
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,... of all musical instruments
devised by man
the vio capable
of the most exalted song.'

(by F. C. Schang, 1893–1971)

In 1835 **FELIX MENDELSSOHN** was appointed director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig and before long he had installed his old friend Ferdinand David as its leader. Under this regime the orchestra flourished and Mendelssohn's admiration for David's violin playing steadily increased. In the summer of 1838, while he was visiting his family in Berlin, Mendelssohn wrote to tell David that he was hoping to compose a violin concerto for him to play the following winter. 'I have one in E minor in my head,' he explained, adding that 'the opening leaves me no peace'. These ideas were to remain in his head for almost seven years for the concerto was not ready for performance until March 1845. Even at the eleventh hour Mendelssohn was still having doubts about the piece as can be seen from another letter he wrote to David from Frankfurt on 17 December 1844. 'Today I must ask you a favour,' wrote Mendelssohn. 'I have sent the score of the Violin Concerto to Breitkopf and Härtel [the publishers] and I have lately made several alterations in it with pencil, which can be copied into the parts. I have changed a number of things in the solo

part too, and I hope they are improvements. But I would particularly like to have your opinion about all this before I give up the music irrevocably to the printer'. Mendelssohn then listed those points on which he sought not only the violinist's opinion but also that of his Danish colleague, Niels Gade, who was to conduct the first performance. It is difficult to believe that a concerto which sounds so natural and effortless should have had so long a gestation period and to have caused its composer to agonize so much over so many details right up to the last minute. The concerto received its first performance on 13 March 1845 at the Leipzig Gewandhaus with David as soloist and Gade as conductor.

Although the concerto is cast in the usual three movements these are linked together so that the whole work plays without a break, possibly to ensure that there is no time for applause between them. Mendelssohn also provided a cadenza for the first movement in order that it would form an integral part of the musical argument and not be purely a vehicle for a display of virtuosity on behalf of the soloist. Over the years, most violinists, including Sebastian Bohren, have respected the composer's wishes on this point, rather than improvising a cadenza of their own.

On 8 August 1936, Antonio Brosa played Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto at London's Queen's Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sir Henry Wood at the first night of that season's Promenade Concerts. A week or so earlier, in a letter to his mother, **BENJAMIN BRITTEN** had been

worrying whether, following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Brosa and his wife would be able to travel from Spain for this concert.

The seventeen-year-old Britten had been introduced to Brosa by his composition teacher, Frank Bridge, in 1931 and, on 19 March that year, he recorded in his diary that he had been to a 'topping recital' that the Spanish virtuoso had given adding that he was 'simply superb', had an 'incredible technique' and was, indeed, 'a great violinist'.

Some nine years later – on 31 March 1940 – Britten was to write to 'my dearest Toni' to thank him for 'most marvellous show' and to tell him that 'the work will never be better played or more completely understood than it was by you'. The work in question was Britten's Violin Concerto of which Brosa had given the first performance three days earlier at New York's Carnegie Hall under the baton of John Barbirolli in a concert which also included Rossini's Overture, *Semiramide* and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Olin Downes, the music critic of the New York Times, noted that at the end of the concerto 'the composer appeared, with the conductor and the violinist, to acknowledge long and cordial applause'.

Britten and his life-long partner, the tenor Peter Pears, had travelled to North America in May 1939, first visiting Canada and then New York. From St Jovite, in the Province of Quebec, Britten wrote to his friend Henry Boys, whom he had met while they were both studying at the Royal College of Music in London, and told him that he was 'well



on with your violin concerto'. Boys and Britten had spent many hours discussing and playing music, notably by composers such as Mahler and Berg, and it was to Boys that Britten was to dedicate his concerto.

Unusually for a violin concerto, but like that by Beethoven, Britten begins his with solo taps on the timpani. He also, following the example of Mendelssohn, links his concerto's movements together and provides it with a written-out cadenza which, in this case, joins the second to the third.

In 1935, the year before he had played the Mendelssohn, Brosa played Tchaikovsky's concerto at another Promenade Concert. In his diary Britten, having noted that the rest of the programme consisted of other popular works by the same composer – which were 'very great & lovely' – added that although Tchaikovsky is 'of course maligned and scoffed out of all reason now' it is really 'rather fun admiring him so'.

On 13 February 1875, **PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY** wrote from Moscow to his brother Modest encouraging him to continue to write for *Golos*, the political and literary newspaper published in St Petersburg, despite the fact that it had recently refused to publish an article that he himself had written for it. Having apologized for such a short letter, Tchaikovsky ended by saying that he was very tired but had just finished his piano concerto and had written a violin piece that he had promised to Auer. This seems to be the only reference in Tchaikovsky's correspondence to the piece which was to be published as his *Sérénade mélancolique* and given the opus number 26.

Leopold Auer was an Hungarian violinist who, since 1868, had been Professor of Violin at the St Petersburg Conservatoire where his pupils were to include Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz and Nathan Milstein. It seems he and Tchaikovsky did not meet until January 1875 when they were both guests at the house of Nikolay Rubinstein who had roundly condemned Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto when the composer had played it to him on Christmas Eve 1874. Tchaikovsky thought highly of Auer's playing which he once praised for its great expressivity and for the thoughtful finesse and poetry of his interpretation.

However, when the *Sérénade mélancolique* was given its first performance, in Moscow on 28 January 1876, it was not Auer who was the soloist but Adolf Brodsky who, some five years later, was to give the first performance of another work that Tchaikovsky had originally intended for Auer, his Violin Concerto. Nevertheless, it was Auer who was to introduce the *Sérénade* to St Petersburg on 18 November 1876.

There are echoes in the *Sérénade mélancolique* of two of Tchaikovsky's most recent works – the Piano Concerto, with which it shares the key B flat minor, and the opera *Vakula the Smith*.

© Peter Avis, June 2018



sebastian bohren

Born in 1987, **SEBASTIAN BOHREN** completed his training in Zürich, Lucerne, and Munich with Zakhar Bron, Robert Zimansky, Igor Karsko, and Ingolf Turban. He received further instruction from Ana Chumachenco and Hansheinz Schneeberger.

With his expressive, soulful playing, the young swiss violinist has quickly established himself as one of the most interesting talents of his generation. Ninety concerts each year as a soloist and chamber musician lead the young musician around the globe. He appears as a soloist with Orchestras such as the Sinfonieorchester Basel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, St. Petersburg State Academic Cappella, Orchestra di Padova, Zürcher Kammerorchester, Musikkollegium Win-

terthur and Argovia Philharmonic under the direction of Heinrich Schiff, James Gaffigan, Patrick Lange, Elim Chan, Muhai Tang and Douglas Boyd. In September 2018 he's making his debut at the Lucerne Festival.

Bohren's recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, released in 2016 with RCA Red Seal, won enthusiastic acclaim from the press. In 2017 another recording followed featuring violin concertos of Mendelssohn, Hartmann, and Schubert as well as a digitally-released live album with works by Peteris Vasks and Gija Kancheli.

Bohren is a member of the Stradivari Quartet. In 2018 the ensemble performed at venues including the Seoul Arts Center, National Center for Performing Arts Beijing, and Shanghai Symphony Hall, and toured Japan. Highlights of recent seasons have included performances at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Victoria Hall in Singapore, the Rheingau Musik Festival, Kissinger Sommer, and Rubinstein Piano Festival.

Bohren plays an instrument by G.B. Guadagnini (Parma 1776) from a Swiss private collection.

andrew litton

CONDUCTOR

Recently named Music Director of New York City Ballet and Principal Guest Conductor of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, **ANDREW LITTON** is also Conductor Laureate of Bournemouth Symphony and Music Director Laureate of Norway's Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. Previously Litton was Music Director of the Dallas Symphony, a position he held from 1994 to 2006, Music Director and Principal Guest Conductor of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, and Artistic Director of the Minnesota Orchestra's Sommerfest, a position he held for fifteen years before stepping down in summer 2017.

He continues to guest conduct the world's leading orchestras and opera companies and has a discography of over 130 recordings with awards including America's Grammy, France's Diapason d'Or, and many other honours.

Under Litton's leadership the Bergen Philharmonic gained international recognition through extensive touring, making debuts at London's BBC Proms, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and appearances at Vienna's Musikverein, Berlin's Philharmonie, and New York's Carnegie Hall. They recorded 25 CDs and in recognition of Litton's service to the cultural life of Norway, Norway's King Harald knighted Litton with the Royal Order of Merit.



Born in New York City, Litton earned bachelor and masters degrees from the Juilliard School in piano and conducting. He served as Assistant Conductor at La Scala and at the National Symphony under Rostropovich. Also an accomplished pianist, Litton often conducts from the keyboard and enjoys performing chamber music with his orchestra colleagues.

The logo features a stylized orange graphic of three curved lines, resembling a flame or a musical note, positioned to the left of the text.

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Founded in 1840, by a group Liverpool music-lovers, the **ROYAL LIVER-POOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA** is the UK's oldest continuing professional symphony orchestra. Vasily Petrenko was appointed Principal Conductor of the Orchestra in September 2006 and in September 2009 became Chief Conductor. Now in its 13th year, his dynamic music partnership with the Orchestra has attracted global critical acclaim and drawn new audiences, including many young people, to live classical music.

Petrenko joins a distinguished line of musicians who have led the Orchestra during its illustrious history including Max Bruch, Sir Charles Hallé, Sir Henry Wood, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Sir John Pritchard, Sir Charles Groves, Walter Weller, David Atherton, Marek Janowski, Libor Pešek KBE, Petr Altrichter and Gerard Schwarz.

The Orchestra gives over 70 concerts each season in its home, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and in recent seasons

has given world premiere performances of major works by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Sir John Tavener, Karl Jenkins, Stewart Copeland, Michael Nyman, Michael Torke, Nico Muhly, James Horner and Sir James MacMillan alongside works by Liverpool-born and North West-based composers.

The Orchestra also performs widely throughout the UK and internationally, most recently touring to China, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, Spain, Germany, Romania, the Czech Republic, Japan, Italy and Slovenia.

The Orchestra has a distinguished discography with international record labels. Recent additions include a third volume of Vaughan Williams' symphonies with Andrew Manze. With Vasily Petrenko recordings include the first instalment of Stravinsky's ballet music, featuring *The Rite of Spring*, coupled with Rachmaninov's *Spring* and Debussy's *Printemps*; award-winning surveys of Rachmaninov's symphonies, orchestral works and complete piano concertos with Simon Trpčeski and the complete symphonies of Shostakovich Elgar, and Tchaikovsky's symphonies and piano concertos which have garnered international acclaim. The recording of Tchaikovsky's Symphonies Nos. 1, 2 and 5, won 'Recording of the Year' and 'Orchestral Recording of the Year' at the BBC Music Magazine Awards 2017.

liverpoolphil.com



ANDREW LITTON



ANDREW KEENER



SEBASTIAN BOHREN

„... unter allen
Musikinstrumenten,
die der Mensch erdacht hat,
steigt das Lied der Geige
am höchsten.“

(F. C. Schang, 1893–1971)

1835 wurde **FELIX MENDELSSOHN** zum Kapellmeister des Leipziger Gewandhausorchesters ernannt und bestimmte nur wenig später seinen langjährigen Freund Ferdinand David als dessen Konzertmeister. Unter dieser Doppelspitze blühte das Orchester auf und Mendelssohns Bewunderung für das Geigenspiel Davids nahm stetig zu. Als Mendelssohn im Sommer 1838 seine Familie in Berlin besuchte, schrieb er David von der Idee, ihm ein Violinkonzert für die folgende Wintersaison zu komponieren: „Eins in e-moll steht mir im Kopfe, dessen Anfang mir keine Ruhe lässt.“ Diese unruhigen Gedanken sollten Mendelssohn noch rund sieben Jahre beschäftigen, bis das Konzert im März 1845 endlich aufgeführt werden konnte.

Zweifel an seinem Werk plagten Mendelsohn bis zuletzt, wie aus einem anderen Brief an Ferdinand David hervorgeht. Am 17. Dezember 1844 schrieb Mendelssohn aus Frankfurt: „Ich habe heut eine Bitte an dich. An Breitkopf & Härtel [den Verlag] habe ich jetzt die Partitur des Violin-Concertes geschickt, und noch mancherlei mit

Bleistift darin geändert, was Henschke in den Stimmen ändern soll. Auch in der Principalstimme sind manche Änderungen, [und] wie ich hoffe Verbesserungen. Über alles das hätte ich nun gar zu gern deine Meinung, ehe ich es der unwiderruflichen Öffentlichkeit übergebe.“ Anschließend stellte Mendelssohn eine Liste mit all jenen Punkten zusammen, zu denen er sich nicht nur von David ein Urteil erhoffte, sondern auch von seinem dänischen Kollegen Niels Gade, der später die Uraufführung dirigierte. Es ist kaum vorstellbar, dass ein so leicht und natürlich klingendes Konzert einen derart langen Reifeprozess durchlaufen musste und seinen Komponisten dazu veranlasste, sich bis zur sprichwörtlich letzten Minute über kleine Details den Kopf zu zerbrechen. Am 13. März 1845 schließlich erklang das Violinkonzert zum ersten Mal im Leipziger Gewandhaus – mit Ferdinand David als Solist und Niels Gade als Dirigent.

Obwohl das Konzert die übliche Dreisätzigkeit aufweist, sind die einzelnen Sätze thematisch eng miteinander verbunden und gehen nahtlos ineinander über; vielleicht sollte auf diese Weise unerwünschter Zwischenapplaus verhindert werden. Für den ersten Satz hat Mendelssohn selbst eine Kadenz komponiert, die so zum integralen Bestandteil der musikalischen Dramaturgie wird, anstatt einzig und allein der Zurschaustellung von Virtuosität und Brillanz des Solisten zu dienen. Diesem Anliegen des Komponisten haben über die Jahre die meisten Geiger, darunter auch Sebastian Bohren, entsprochen und keine eigene Kadenz improvisiert. >



Am 8. August 1936 spielte Antonio Brosa Mendelssohns Violinkonzert mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra unter Sir Henry Wood im ersten Promenade Concert der Saison. Nur eine gute Woche zuvor hatte sich **BENJAMIN BRITTEN** in einem Brief an seine Mutter gesorgt, ob Brosa und seine Frau nach Ausbruch des Spanischen Bürgerkriegs überhaupt zu diesem Konzert anreisen könnten.

Der 17-jährige Britten hatte Brosa 1931 über seinen Kompositionslehrer Frank Bridge kennengelernt. Am 19. März desselben Jahres hielt Britten in seinem Tagebuch fest, er habe einen „erstklassigen Klavierabend“ des spanischen Virtuosen erlebt und fügte hinzu, er sei „einfach grandios“, habe eine „unglaubliche Technik“ und sei in der Tat „ein großartiger Geiger“.

„Mein liebster Toni“, wandte sich Britten etwa neun Jahre später – am 31. März 1940 – an Antonio Brosa, um sich

für die „fabelhafte Aufführung“ zu bedanken und ihm zu versichern, „das Werk wird niemals besser gespielt oder in seiner Gesamtheit verstanden werden können als von dir“. Die Rede ist dabei von Brittens Violinkonzert, das Brosa drei Tage zuvor unter Leitung von John Barbirolli in der New Yorker Carnegie Hall zur Uraufführung gebracht hatte. Ebenfalls auf dem Programm standen Rossinis Ouvertüre zu *Semiramide* sowie Beethovens Fünfte Symphonie. Am Ende des Konzerts, so Olin Downes in der New York Times, „erschien der Komponist, zusammen mit dem Dirigenten und dem Solisten, um einen langen und herzlichen Applaus entgegenzunehmen“.

Benjamin Britten und sein lebenslanger Partner, der Tenor Peter Pears, waren im Mai 1939 nach Nordamerika gereist, zunächst nach Kanada und schließlich nach New York. Aus Saint-Jovite in der Provinz Québec schrieb Britten an seinen Freund Henry Boys, den er während ihres gemeinsamen Studiums am Royal College of Music in London kennengelernt hatte, er liege „gut in der Zeit mit deinem Violinkonzert“. Boys und Britten hatten unzählige Stunden damit verbracht, Musik zu besprechen und zu spielen, vor allem Musik von Komponisten wie Mahler und Berg. Boys war es auch, dem Britten sein Konzert widmen sollte.

Ungewöhnlicherweise, aber darin dem Vorbild Beethovens folgend, beginnt Britten sein Violinkonzert mit einem Paukensolo. Und wie Mendelssohn lässt er die einzelnen Sätze nahtlos ineinander übergehen und fügt dem Solopart eine ausgeschriebene Kadenz hinzu, die in diesem Fall vom zweiten in den dritten Satz überleitet. >

1935 und damit ein Jahr, bevor er das Mendelssohn-Konzert spielte, war Antonio Brosa mit Tschaikowskys Violinkonzert in einem anderen Promenade Concert zu Gast. In seinem Tagebuch notierte Britten, dass sich auch das restliche Programm aus bekannten Stücken dieses Komponisten zusammensetzte, die „ganz herrlich und wunderbar“ waren. Weiter schreibt er, dass es „ziemlich viel Spaß macht“, Tschaikowsky zu bewundern, obschon er „heute natürlich aus allen möglichen Gründen verachtet und verschmäht“ werde.

In einem Brief aus Moskau vom 13. Februar 1875 ermutigte **PIOTR ILJITSCH TSCHAIKOWSKY** seinen Bruder Modest, weiterhin für die in St. Petersburg erscheinende politisch-literarische Zeitung *Golos* zu schreiben, obwohl ein Artikel, den er selbst für das Blatt verfasst hatte, erst kurz zuvor abgelehnt worden war. Nachdem er sich für die Kürze seines Schreibens entschuldigt hatte, erklärte er abschließend, er sei müde, habe aber soeben sein Klavierkonzert vollendet und ein Auer versprochenes Violinstück komponiert. In Tschaikowskys gesamter Korrespondenz scheint dies der einzige Hinweis auf das Werk zu sein, das später als *Sérénade mélancolique* und mit der Opuszahl 26 veröffentlicht wurde.

Leopold Auer war ein ungarischer Geiger und seit 1868 Professor am Konservatorium in St. Petersburg, wo unter anderen Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz und Nathan Milstein zu seinen Schülern zählten. Es scheint, als wären sich Auer und Tschaikowsky erst im Januar 1875 begegnet, als

beide bei Nikolai Rubinstein zu Gast waren (Rubinstein hatte kurz zuvor Tschaikowskys Klavierkonzert rundheraus abgelehnt, als der Komponist es ihm an Heiligabend 1874 vorspielte). Auf Auers Violinspiel, das er für seine große Ausdruckskraft, seine umsichtige Finesse und die Poesie in seinen Interpretationen lobte, hielt Tschaikowsky große Stücke.

Und dennoch: Bei der Uraufführung der *Sérénade mélancolique* hieß der Solist am Ende nicht Leopold Auer, sondern Adolf Brodsky, der knapp fünf Jahre später auch ein weiteres Werk uraufführen sollte, das eigentlich Auer zugeordnet war: das Violinkonzert. Trotz alledem war es Auer, der die *Sérénade* am 18. November 1876 erstmals in St. Petersburg zur Aufführung brachte.

In dieser *Sérénade mélancolique* hallen Klänge aus Tschaikowskys jüngsten beiden Kompositionen nach: dem Klavierkonzert, mit dem es die Tonart b-Moll gemein hat, sowie der Oper *Schmied Wakula*.

© Peter Avis, Juni 2018

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thank you!

This CD couldn't have been possible without many people's support:

I wish to thank the owner of my current instrument, the Ex-Wannamaker-Hart Guadagnini (1767), who wishes to remain anonymous. As well, thanks to Andrew Keener for helping me to set up this recording. To executive producer Martin Korn. To Pylvax & Obery and Simone Claaßen for the EPK and artwork. Finally to Florence Forster, whose generous support turned the dream of this recording into reality.

Sebastian Bohren

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