



audite

Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Myths and Melodies

Music between the Wars

violin **Stefan Hempel** | **Daniel Seroussi** piano

Myths and Melodies

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Five Melodies, Op. 35b

- I. Andante 2:08
- II. Lento, ma non troppo 2:30
- III. Animato, ma non allegro 3:27
- IV. Allegretto leggero e scherzando 1:30
- V. Andante non troppo 3:08

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI

Mythes, Op. 30

- I. La fontaine d'Arethuse 5:42
- II. Narcisse 6:49
- III. Dryades et Pan 7:58

MAURICE RAVEL

Pavane pour une infante défunte

(Arr. for Violin and Piano by Paul Kochanski) 4:57

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Fantaisie 8:26

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

Four Pieces from the Incidental Music to Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing", Op. 11

- I. The Maiden in the Bridal Chamber 3:26
- II. Dogberry and Verges. March of the Watch 3:06
- III. Scene in the Garden 5:17
- IV. Masquerade. Hornpipe 2:24

Paths of the Violin during the Twentieth Century

“The times when the violin was the most distinguished of all musical instruments, the times when music learned to proclaim the message of humanity – and which instrument would have been more suitable here than the violin with its soulful tone? – are probably over. They were already over in the nineteenth century, when the piano overtook the violin and assumed the dominant position. Today, the violin is merely one instrument among many others of equal standing.” This was the sobering conclusion drawn by the Berlin music historian Rudolf Stephan in 1972, closing an essay on twentieth century violin music: having portrayed the large panorama of solo works, chamber music and concertos for and with the violin written during the twentieth century, he announced, in a manner of speaking, the end of “musical art”. The instrument which like no other embodied a sphere of beauty, nobility and truth untouched by the adversities of the world, was directly affected by this. Was Stephan right? The virtuosity which the present programme demands of the performers and the splendour unfurled by the violin would seem to contradict him. But the composers of the works for violin and piano performed here – in the case of Korngold’s *Suite*, Prokofiev’s *Melodies* and Ravel’s *Pavane*, including in arrangements by their own creators as well as by other composers – were directly confronted with the political upheavals of the “black” twentieth century and the experiences of revolution, war, exile and totalitarian rule. As a paramedic during World War I, Maurice Ravel was confronted with the senseless massed dying on the Western Front; Sergei Prokofiev left Russia for the USA and France after the October Revolution of 1918, but advanced to become a loyal state composer in the Stalinist Soviet Union during the 1930s; Karol Szymanowski had to experience the destruction of his home during World War I; Olivier Messiaen became a German prisoner of war in 1940 and was interned for several months in a camp near Görlitz. Finally, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who, following the so-called “Anschluss” of Austria to Nazi Germany in 1938, remained in Hollywood due to his Jewish faith, was rejected in his home city of Vienna, which deeply offended him.

Admittedly, it would be naïve to take a work of art as a direct mirror of a biography or of history, even if created during a profound caesura in contemporary history, such as Szymanowski’s *Mythes* of 1915 or Messiaen’s *Fantaisie*, composed in 1933. (Often, connections of which the artists themselves may not have been aware only become apparent in retrospect: accordingly, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno assigned great art of the twentieth century the task of producing an “unconscious historiography”). Furthermore, the choice of a particular instrument in a composer’s oeuvre does not necessarily mean that she or he has a special bond with it (with the possible exception of the first instrument via which someone has discovered music). In many cases pieces were commissioned by an instrumental virtuoso, and the composer then sought the advice of the instrumentalist in question. Such collaborations often resulted in new perspectives, developing the character of an instrument and expanding playing techniques. This is especially true of the violin, which undoubtedly during the nineteenth century was attached to the cliché of being a primarily “soulful” instrument, even though at the end of the seventeenth century Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber had already demonstrated the instrument’s potential in his highly virtuoso violin works (including by retuning the strings, the so-called *scordatura* technique). The twentieth century produced a number of works in which this other side of the instrument comes to the fore, such as Webern’s *Vier Stücke Op. 7*, Stravinsky’s *Trois pièces pour quatuor à cordes*, Schoenberg’s *Phantasy for Violin and Piano Op. 47* (see audite 21.412) and Brian Ferneyhough’s *Unsichtbare Farben* for solo violin of 1999. And yet twentieth century composers never lost sight nor sound of the expressive melodic qualities of the violin, which it shares with the human voice. The transcend-

ent, quasi-religious atmosphere which it can produce, and which uniquely unfolds in the violin solo of the “Benedictus” of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, can also be experienced in key works such as Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto, Béla Bartók’s Sonata for Solo Violin (see audite 97.758) and also, with some electronic alienation, in Luigi Nono’s monumental late work *La Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura*.

It is up to listeners to decide for themselves whether, as Rudolf Stephan, they perceive the twentieth century works recorded here as a dethronement of the instrument, or whether they admire the enormous tonal versatility of the violin which composers and interpreters have elicited from it. It is fascinating to observe the different technical tasks and stylistic roles that the violin has taken on within a period of just three decades – the earliest original composition heard here, Szymanowski’s *Mythes*, dates from 1915, the latest, Messiaen’s *Fantaisie*, from 1933. Chronologically, the *Four Pieces from the Incidental Music to Shakespeare’s “Much Ado About Nothing”* by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, published in 1921, no longer belong to the “world of yesterday” – as Stefan Zweig had entitled his last book (written in Brazilian exile) as a farewell to the perished pre-World War I Europe: however, stylistically and tonally they do, thanks to Korngold’s ingenious somnambulist handling of the props of the tonal age, especially in the field of musical theatre, and later of film scores. In 1920 Korngold’s incidental music (for chamber orchestra), conducted by himself for a performance of Shakespeare’s comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* at Vienna’s Schönbrunn Palace, was met with such success that he created from it an orchestral suite and four pieces for violin and piano during the following year. For the violin version, he chose the three interludes to Acts 2-4 and the march of the two comic guards, Dogberry and Verges, from Act 3, but in the reverse order of their placement in the incidental music. Korngold’s exceptional compositional talent becomes immediately apparent, for the vividness of the themes and the idiomatic transfer to the two instruments make the work seem like an original composition that needs no programmatic *raison d’être*.

Sergei Prokofiev’s *Five Melodies* Op. 35b were published in 1925, but they hark back to the *Songs without Words* Op. 35, also written in 1920, which he had composed for the soprano Nina Koshetz (1891-1965), who was originally from Kiev and had trained in Moscow. Since the original piece is a vocalise, its transcription for the violin is particularly revealing. Still featuring romanticising harmonic traits (including retaining specific tonalities) as well as bearing reminiscences of Fauré in its general elegiac tone, the version for violin soon asserted itself and was taken up by distinguished violinists; the interpretation by David Oistrakh and his duo partner Frida Bauer, which was preserved as a film, may be regarded as exemplary. Prokofiev, an exceptional pianist, enjoyed a special affinity with the violin, which he had already revealed in his First Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 19 (1917), and which was also expressed in his respective dedications of the individual pieces: the first, third and fourth are dedicated to the Polish violinist Paul (Pawel) Kocanski; the second to Cecilia Hansen, a student of Auer, and the last to Joseph Szigeti, one of Prokofiev’s favourite violinists who left behind significant recordings of Prokofiev’s sonatas and concertos.

A student of Fauré, Olivier Messiaen became world-famous as the composer of challenging piano, organ and orchestral works, the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (completed while a German prisoner of war and premiered in the camp) and the opera *Saint François d’Assise*. However, one of the works in which he broke new compositional ground early in his career was written for violin and piano: the *Thème et variations* of 1932 was a musical wedding gift to his first wife and fellow student at the Paris Conservatoire, the violinist and composer Claire Delbos (1906-1959). While this piece is said to have prompted the young Pierre Boulez to choose Messiaen as his teacher, the *Fantaisie pour*

violon et piano, composed a year later, was only discovered in Messiaen's estate in 2007. It was also written for his wife (who tragically fell ill with an incurable nervous disorder during the 1940s) and was premiered by both of them in 1935. Although here the sound of the violin and the virtuosity of the performers are in the foreground, the rhythmic irregularity and intensity of the themes, as well as the unusual handling of tonal elements anticipate Messiaen's later development in an almost leitmotiv-like manner. One of the themes also appears in the organ work *L'Ascension*, composed at the same time, referring to the firm religious grounding of the music of Messiaen, an ardent Roman Catholic who, paradoxically, was also strongly attracted to surrealism.

Karol Szymanowski's contribution to twentieth century violin music is a small one in terms of quantity, but all the more significant in terms of quality, comprising the two one-movement Violin Concertos Op. 35 (1916) and Op. 61 (1932/33 – the opus number corresponds to that of Beethoven's Violin Concerto!) as well as his *Mythes* Op. 30 of 1915. In violin literature, Szymanowski's three-movement *Mythes* represents, to a certain extent, the counterpart to Ravel's piano work *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908/09), whose symbolist programme, complex textures and innovative piano writing clearly impressed and influenced Szymanowski, an outstanding pianist himself who premiered the work with the aforementioned Paul Kochanski in 1915. Szymanowski's programme testifies to an intense engagement with the ancient heritage of the Mediterranean. The titles of the individual movements refer to places and characters: the first movement denotes a spring in the Sicilian city of Syracuse, from which the nymph Arethusa emerged on her return from Arcadia; the second movement refers to the famous story of the youth Narcissus; the third movement again indicates nymphs – the so-called Dryads, or tree spirits – and Pan, the god of the forest and shepherds. (The painter Arnold Böcklin had created the painting *Pan and Dryads* in 1897, to which Szymanowski may have referred). The result is an exquisite, delirious, barely comprehensible soundworld which requires a virtuoso familiar with the music of Liszt, Debussy and Ravel, even in the piano part. The violin part, however, goes far beyond this in its technical demands, especially in the use of double stops, trills and harmonics. At the beginning of the last movement, during the course of which the violin also imagines Pan's flute, Szymanowski calls for quarter tones to be produced on the fourth string. This is probably the first instance of these being utilised in violin literature and their effect not only electrified Bartók and Prokofiev but also opened up a new dimension for the instrument.

Paul Kochanski (1887-1934), who was born in Odessa and died in New York, had already premiered Szymanowski's Violin Sonata Op. 9 in 1909 with his duo partner Artur Rubinstein and was also the dedicatee of his first violin concerto, for which he wrote his own cadenza. Kochanski's creative abilities also benefited his arrangements of modern music for his instrument, as in his 1927 adaptation of Ravel's immortal piano piece *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, which had already been published in 1898 and has since been popularised and trivialised in numerous (mostly insufferable) arrangements. Kochanski's noble version, on the other hand, retains the pavane's mysterious veil in the peculiar combination of gentle mourning and noble equanimity. Perhaps the violin even manages to throw this into sharper relief than could the piano?

DUO STEFAN HEMPEL & DANIEL SEROUSSI

The first musical encounter of the German violinist and Israeli pianist took place whilst they both studied at the Hochschule "Hanns Eisler" Berlin and were selected for a cultural exchange in 2008 with the Juilliard School in New York, where they performed together.

They continued a close musical partnership over many years, continuously expanding their duo repertoire and conveying the diversity of the dialogue between the two instruments in regular concerts in Germany and abroad.

The highlight of their collaboration was winning second prize (with the first prize not awarded) at the international "Schubert und die Musik der Moderne" competition in Graz in 2009.

**STEFAN HEMPEL**

Born in Leipzig, Stefan Hempel is one of the most versatile violinists of his generation and has won numerous prizes as a soloist at international competitions such as the Max Rostal Competition (Germany) and the Michael Hill International Violin Competition (New Zealand).

In 2009 he joined the Morgenstern Trio, one of the leading piano trios of Hempel's generation, performing on the most important stages in Europe and the USA. Winner of the prestigious Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Award, the trio also made its debut in South Korea and Taiwan in 2017. Numerous portraits, radio and CD recordings document the exceptional status of the ensemble, which was awarded the Förderpreis des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen in 2015.

As the first violin of the Chagall-Quartett between 2001 and 2009, Hempel won prizes at the German Music Academy Competition in Frankfurt / Main and the International Joseph Joachim Chamber Music Competition.

Stefan Hempel studied with Stephan Picard (violin) and Eberhard Feltz (chamber music) at the Hochschule Hanns Eisler in Berlin.

Having taught at the Stuttgart Musikhochschule, Stefan Hempel was appointed as one of Germany's youngest professors at the Rostock Hochschule für Musik und Theater in 2010. He is a sought-after guest concertmaster with several chamber orchestras (Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn, Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss, Mendelssohn Kammerorchester Leipzig, Ensemble Ruhr), frequently directing from the violin. He teaches master classes in several countries and is now also in demand as a juror at international music competitions.

Stefan Hempel plays a violin by Nicolò Gagliano, Naples, of c.1760.

DANIEL SEROUSSI

The Israeli pianist Daniel Seroussi, who lives in Berlin, made his debut as a soloist at the age of twenty, accompanied by the Israel Symphony Orchestra under Maestro Mandy Rodan, and has performed with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the Folkwang Kammerorchester Essen, the Berlin Echo Ensemble and the student orchestra of the Summer Academy in San José, Costa Rica.

He has since undertaken concert tours to North and Central America, China and Israel and given performances in major European concert halls as well as at several music festivals such as the Lake Constance Festival, Festival Internacional de Santander and the Singapore Violin Festival.

Seroussi has won several piano competitions, including the MozARTE Piano Competition Aachen 2010 and the Katz Piano Competition Tel Aviv 2006. In 2008, he won a special prize awarded by the German Academic Exchange Service for an outstanding achievement by a foreign student at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin.


Born into a musical family in Tel Aviv, Seroussi had his first piano lessons with Neta Yahel. He later studied with Emanuel Krasovsky in his home city and in Berlin with Michael Endres, Georg Sava and Henri Sigfridsson. He received further formative stimuli from Dmitri Bashkirov, Paul Badura-Skoda, Martino Tirimo and Eberhard Feltz.

In addition to his performing activities, Seroussi is a lecturer in string repertoire studies at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin and at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Rostock and enjoys dialogue with young, aspiring musicians.

His recording of the piano piece *Through the Keyboard* by his father, the composer Ruben Seroussi, was released in 2017.

audite

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