

GREAT VIOLINISTS • JASCHA HEIFETZ

Max BRUCH (1838-1920):

**Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26**

- 1 I Vorspiel: Allegro moderato
- 2 II Adagio
- 3 III Finale: Allegro energico

**London Symphony Orchestra • Sir Malcolm Sargent**

Recorded at EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London, 18th May 1951

Matrix nos.: 2EA 15603-3, 15604-3, 15605-1, 15606-1, 15607-3 and 15608-1

First issued on RCA Victor LM-9007

22:01

7:36

7:53

6:32

**Violin Concerto No. 2 in D minor, Op. 44**

- 4 I Adagio ma non troppo
- 5 II Recitative: Allegro moderato
- 6 III Finale: Allegro molto

**RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra • Izler Solomon**

Recorded at Sound Stage 9, Republic Pictures Studios, Hollywood, 2nd November 1954

Matrix nos.: E4-RC-0544 through 0546 • First issued on RCA Victor LM-1931

23:34

11:37

3:40

8:17

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827):

7 **Romance No. 1 in G major, Op. 40**

8 **Romance No. 2 in F major, Op. 50**

**RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra • William Steinberg**

Recorded at Sound Stage 9, Republic Pictures Studios, Hollywood, 15th June 1951

Matrix nos.: E1-RC-2414-2 and 2415-1; E1-RC-2416-1 and 2417-1 • First issued on RCA Victor LM-9014

7:03

8:06

Louis SPOHR (1784-1859): **Violin Concerto No. 8 in A minor, Op. 47 'Gesangsszene'**

- 9 I Allegro molto
- 10 II Adagio
- 11 III Andante; Allegro moderato

**RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra • Izler Solomon**

Recorded at Sound Stage 9, Republic Pictures Studios, Hollywood, 3rd November, 1954

Matrix nos.: E4-RC-0547 and 0548 • First issued on RCA Victor LM-2027

17:46

4:16

5:25

8:05

Reissue Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn  
Special thanks to Nathan Brown and Charles Niss for providing source material

BRUCH: Violin Concertos Nos. 1 and 2  
BEETHOVEN: Two Romances  
SPOHR: Violin Concerto No. 8



Jascha Heifetz

London Symphony Orchestra

RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra

Malcolm Sargent • William Steinberg • Izler Solomon

## Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987)

### Bruch • Beethoven • Spohr

It would have been possible for Jascha Heifetz to meet Max Bruch, as the German composer lived until 1920 and the ripe age of 82; but it never happened. That is a pity, for Bruch would surely have been gratified to encounter the young man who would become the finest exponent of his music for the violin. Heifetz was only twelve when he gave his first important performance of the *G minor Concerto*, in Berlin, soon after his sensational début in the German capital; and months later he repeated his interpretation in Leipzig. His favourite Bruch work was the *Scottish Fantasy*, which he performed regularly with piano from 1919; he made four recordings with orchestra, of which three were published, and there is a video of him performing the *Fantasy* without conductor. After his early flurry of performances, the *G minor Concerto* re-entered his repertoire in 1938; and that same year he began programming the *Second Concerto*, in D minor, with piano. Bruch's works for violin and orchestra demand a silky legato, classically contained phrasing and considerable technical dexterity, and that combination of characteristics might be said to define Heifetz. To these advantages he added superb intonation and perfectly judged romantic portamenti, as well as the unique colours of the Heifetz tone. With Bruch he was on firm ground, as the public liked this music even if some of the haughtier critics sneered. With Louis Spohr, Heifetz had to work harder, as he came along at a time when Spohr's concertos were retreating from the repertoire. Austro-German violinists such as Adolf Busch, Erica Morini and Georg Kulenkampff still championed a few of them but only the *Eighth*, the *Gesangsszene* composed in the form of an operatic *scena* for Spohr's first visit to Italy, remained in the central repertoire. Like the Bruch *G minor*, it was on the list of works that Heifetz studied with Leopold Auer, and he played it in recital with piano from 1918. We are fortunate that he saw fit to record it, as he tackled no other Spohr apart from a late performance of the great *D minor Double Quartet*.

Heifetz was born in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 2nd

February 1900. His father Rubin, a competent fiddler, started him on the violin when he was three before passing him on to the Auer pupil Ilya Malkin. At six Jascha made his début and a year later he played the Mendelssohn *Concerto* in Kovno. To enable him to stay with his family when he entered Auer's St Petersburg Conservatory class in 1910, his father was enrolled too. Heifetz became Auer's favourite student and made his St Petersburg début on 30th April the following year. On 24th May 1912, still using a three-quarter-sized instrument, he played the Mendelssohn *Concerto* (with piano), Wieniawski's *Souvenir de Moscou* and short pieces at the Berlin Hochschule; and on 28th October 1912 he replaced the indisposed Pablo Casals in a Berlin Philharmonic subscription concert. Playing the Tchaikovsky *Concerto*, he impressed the evening's conductor Arthur Nikisch and was entertained afterwards by the musicologist Arthur Abell. Fritz Kreisler accompanied him from memory in the Mendelssohn *Concerto* and announced to a throng including Bronislaw Huberman, Carl Flesch, Joan Manén, Willy Hess and Jan Kubelík: 'Well, gentlemen, now we can all break our violins.' Heifetz gave a further Berlin concert and Nikisch invited him to the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, where he appeared on 12th February 1914. In Vienna he played the Mendelssohn under Vassily Safonov and he developed steadily through the early years of the Great War. In those days he often played Bach's *Double Concerto* with his Auer classmate Toscha Seidel, whom he later eclipsed. He missed the chaos of 1917 but caused his own October Revolution that year with his historic New York début at Carnegie Hall. In 1920 he made his London bow with two Queen's Hall concerts which were so successful that he returned the same year – playing the Elgar *Concerto* with the composer present. He also visited Paris and Berlin; and in 1921 he toured Australia. In 1925 he took U.S. citizenship, in 1926 he played in Palestine and in 1928 he married the film star Florence Vidor. In 1939 he premiered the Walton *Concerto* in Cleveland; and during World War II he

gave many concerts for the U.S. forces. In 1947 he reintroduced himself to London with the Beethoven and Tchaikovsky *Concertos* at the Royal Albert Hall, before the Queen and an audience exceeding 6,000. After the 1946–47 season, he took a twenty-month break from the concert hall. In 1949 he played for President Truman and President Chaim Weizmann of Israel in New York and again offered Londoners the Elgar, also recording it. When he played the Tchaikovsky at Lewisohn Stadium in July that year, 20,000 people were in the audience and 1,000 had to be turned away. Heifetz became one of the first soloists to play at the new Royal Festival Hall in London, in May 1951, and visited London again in June 1953 and November 1954. In April 1953 he made his second tour of Israel but insisted on breaking a twenty-year ban on German music by programming Richard Strauss's *Sonata*, saying: 'There are only two kinds of music – good music and bad music.' Following his Jerusalem recital, a fanatical young man attacked him with an iron bar, injuring his right arm. Heifetz then toured Italy and Europe, shrugging off his pain. In 1959 he performed for the United Nations General Assembly but in the 1960s he began to confine himself mainly to the West Coast of America; chamber music also loomed larger in his life, through the Heifetz-Piatigorsky Concerts. Having given his last concert in 1972, he grew increasingly reclusive; and he died in Los Angeles on 10th December 1987. Heifetz did some teaching but his influence was mainly disseminated through his playing and his many recordings. Although he had a 1731 Stradivarius, his favourite fiddle was the 1742 'David' Guarnerius del Gesù.

On 21st June 1950 Heifetz recorded Beethoven's two *Romances* at Abbey Road Studios in London, with the Philharmonia under Walter Susskind, but (like a *Symphonie espagnole* made on the following two days) those versions were not issued in his lifetime. A year later in Hollywood, with William Steinberg conducting an orchestra largely made up of players from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the trim versions

reproduced here were achieved. Meanwhile on a trip to Britain in May, Heifetz again visited Abbey Road to record one of the most popular concertos in the repertoire, the Bruch *Concerto in G minor*. Because he successfully remade this work in stereo exactly eleven years later, with the same conductor, Sir Malcolm Sargent, many listeners may have forgotten this 1951 monophonic recording. Dare one suggest that, despite the necessity of still recording in 78rpm-sized takes of less than five minutes, even on tape, this earlier performance is more spontaneous? It makes a good contrast with the precisely controlled 1962 version and the sound is good for the period. If only one could say the same for the two works recorded in Hollywood early in November 1954; but, even though by this time RCA Victor had the full benefit of tape recording in longer takes, the engineering team did not achieve smooth orchestral sound. This was a pity, because Heifetz never returned to the Bruch *D minor Concerto* or the Spohr *Gesangsszene* – and in fact these were probably his only performances of them with orchestra. Fortunately Heifetz himself, placed fairly far forward in relation to the orchestra, came across well. Both works have operatic connections. Writing for the Spanish virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate, Bruch accepted a highly imaginative programme which his soloist suggested. The slow opening movement represents the aftermath of a battle in the Spanish Carlist civil war: a young woman searches for her lover among the dead and dying, and a burial procession is heard. The central *Recitative* is like an extended upbeat to the finale, in which we hear a cavalry regiment on the move. Spohr's *Gesangsszene*, also in three basic movements, is cleverly through-composed: after an orchestral introduction, alternating sections of recitative and arioso are followed by a beautiful cavatina with a contrasting central section, more recitative, a cabaletta, a cadenza and a final stretta. Mindful of the concerto's title, Heifetz makes use of *parlando* bowing to lend a haunting vocal quality to his more lyrical phrases.

Tully Potter