

# Béla Bartók

The 2 Violin Concertos



## Arabella Steinbacher

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

## Marek Janowski



**Béla Bartók** (1881-1945)

**Violin Concerto No. 2** (1938)

- |                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
| 1 Allegro non troppo | 16. 39 |
| 2 Andante tranquillo | 10. 35 |
| 3 Allegro molto      | 12. 21 |

**Violin Concerto No. 1,  
Op. Posth.** (1907-08)

- |                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| 4 Andante sostenuto | 9. 21  |
| 5 Allegro giocoso   | 12. 03 |

**Arabella Steinbacher**, Violin

**Orchestre de la Suisse Romande**

conducted by

**Marek Janowski**

Recording venue: Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland (June/July, 2009)

Executive Producer: Job Maarse

Recording Producer: Job Maarse

Balance Engineer: Erdo Groot

Recording Engineer: Roger de Schot

Editing: Roger de Schot

**Total playing time: 61.12**

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Whilst unfulfilled passion and unrequited love have driven many to depression, Béla Bartók was able to sublimate such personal disappointment into exuberant creativity. In February 1908, after his passionate courting attempts had been rejected by the Swiss violinist, Stefi Geyer, Bartók wrote her: “*Having read your letter, I sat down at the piano – and had the sad premonition that, in life, music is to be my only consolation.*” He illustrated these lines with a musical quotation which included the broken major-seventh chord, c-sharp – e – g-sharp – b-sharp, adding the words: “*This is your leitmotiv.*” It will have been particularly bitter for the composer that he had completed the score of the violin concerto, which had been written for Stefi, and into which he had poured his profound feelings for her, just a few days before her rejection. It is also to her that he dedicated the concerto, which, as in “a narcotic dream” (Römer), had been inspired a year earlier by his intoxicating love for her, but he did not do so without adding a tragic poem by Béla Balázs to the autograph score. Stefi Geyer kept the score until her death in 1956, without ever performing the concerto publicly. It was not until 30 May 1958, thirteen years after Bartók’s death, that the concerto finally had its first public performance, in Basel, under the baton of Paul Sacher, with Hansheinz Schneeberger as soloist.

The early violin concerto is clearly intended as a double portrait of the dedicatee. Bartók characterised the first movement as “*a musical picture of Stefi Geyer in idealised form, celestial and deeply felt.*” Correspondingly, the Andante sostenuto, introduced by the above-mentioned leitmotiv in unaccompanied form, is a lyrical outburst characterised both by profound emotion and inner peace, with a quality not far removed from late-romantic sweetness. In complete contrast, the Allegro giocoso, written in sonata form, presents a “*joyous, witty, entertaining portrait of the vivacious Stefi Geyer*”; its character is dance-like and rhythmic, but above all, virtuosic. And the movement is filled with autobiographical allusions to experiences shared with the beloved Stefi. Here, compositional innovations, viz., the craggy textures, dissonances, variational developments and polytonal combinations of a much later Bartók, are already pre-

saged. And thus, the First Violin Concerto is in two senses a farewell, taking leave both from a composer's late-romantic period and a young man's unfulfilled love.

In contrast with the First Violin Concerto, which had been born largely of an inner expressive need, the Second was composed as a result of a commission, namely, from renowned violinist, Zoltán Székely, who personally asked Bartók to write the work. Bartók worked on the concerto from August 1937 until 31 December 1938. The world première, with Székely as soloist, took place in Amsterdam on 23 March 1938, albeit without the composer being present. Whilst superficially complying with Székely's express desire for a work in three movements and thus adhering to the outer form of the traditional concerto, for the inner structure of his last composition prior to emigrating to the United States, Bartók clearly chose a path all his own: one of continuous variation. This 'artistic disobedience' notwithstanding, Bartók on several occasions sought Székely's opinion whilst composing the piece, in particular with regard to the solo part (cf. Brahms' consulting of Joseph Joachim concerning his violin concerto, or Stravinsky's seeking advice from Paul Hindemith about his). Aesthetically speaking, the work is situated in a line with the great concerti of Beethoven and Brahms: the orchestra is treated in a relatively conventional manner; the approach to violin technique is in the tradition of the latter 19-century works. But what is new about this arguably most important violin concerto of the 20th century? Bartók establishes his variational idea both at the level of overall form and that of motivic detail. The third movement is a free variation of material from the first movement (a treatment which even extends down to the smallest of elements); the second, in contrast, is an independent variation cycle with six variations on an original theme. Bartók's monumental achievement with the Second Violin Concerto consists in the attainment of a synthesis of all of his compositional advances thus far, which in turn yields a balanced, dialectical relationship between modern techniques and traditional approaches. This explains why one encounters in the concerto both romantic horn writing and a dodecaphonic (albeit entirely tonal) theme, and why the work features a traditional formal structure with strict motivic-thematic work juxtaposed with quarter-tone structures and free melodic digressions. Put succinctly: modernity and tradition are here in perfect equilibrium, to a degree seldom found in the great works of musical history.

*Franz Steiger*

## Arabella Steinbacher

Arabella Steinbacher made her international breakthrough in Paris in March 2004 with the Orchestre Philharmonique of Radio France, under conductor Sir Neville Marriner. She was given a tumultuous reception from the audience and the press wrote as follows: "A superior and fully mature performing artist, whose beauty of tone is overwhelming." Her career then took off rapidly, with concert performances under world-famous conductors such as Vladimir Fedosejev, Valery Gergiev, Fabio Luisi, Neeme Järvi, Sakari Oramo, Yuri Temirkanov, Lorin Maazel, Charles Dutoit, Christoph von Dohnányi and Marek Janowski.

In addition, she has given concerts with internationally reputed orchestras such as the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra of Moscow Radio, the NHK Symphony Orchestra, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

In Germany, Arabella Steinbacher regularly performs with most of the major orchestras, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis, the NDR Symphony Orchestra under Christoph von Dohnányi, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig under Riccardo Chailly, the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne under Andris Nelsons, the hr-Sinfonieorchester (= radio orchestra of the Hessischer Rundfunk) under Yakov Kreizberg, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Marek Janowski, the Bavarian State Orchestra under Fabio Luisi and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (= German Chamber Philharmonic) under Herbert Blomstedt. Moreover, in 2008 she was the soloist for the opening concert of the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival. During this performance, which was broadcast live on television, she was again accompanied by the NDR Symphony Orchestra under Christoph von Dohnányi.

Significant international appearances include various débuts: e.g. at the London Proms in July 2009 with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra under Jonathan Nott; the Philharmonia and Philadelphia Orchestras, at the time under Charles Dutoit; the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis; the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Christoph von Dohnányi; the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Marek Janowski; and with the Orchestre de l'Opéra National de Paris under Christoph von Dohnányi. In 2009, she was invited to perform in London with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Lorin Maazel, and subsequently to tour Germany with the orchestra.

Arabella Steinbacher is a prizewinner of the Hanover Violin Competition, which is dedicated to Joseph Joachim. In 2001, she

received the sponsorship prize of the free state of Bavaria, and that same year she was awarded a scholarship from the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation. From Anne-Sophie Mutter, who had supported her personally, she received a bow made by master luthier Benoit Rolland. In 2007, Arabella Steinbacher was awarded one of the most sought-after prizes in the profession: the "ECHO Klassik" award as "Young Artist of the Year".

Arabella Steinbacher was born in Munich in 1981 (her mother is Japanese, her father German). She received her first violin lessons at the tender age of three, and was accepted six years later by Ana Chumachenko, as her youngest student, at the Munich Musikhochschule (= Academy of Music). To this day, Ana Chumachenko remains one of her closest friends. She continues to receive valuable musical inspiration and guidance from Ivry Gitlis.

Arabella Steinbacher plays the "Booth" Stradivarius (Cremona, 1716), loaned to her by the Nippon Music Foundation.

*English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale*

## Marek Janowski

Marek Janowski has been Artistic Director of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin since 2002 and in 2005 he was also appointed Musical Director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva. He is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the world, working on a regular basis in the USA with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (where he holds the Otto Klemperer Guest Conducting Chair), the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in Europe with the Orchestre de Paris, the Orchester der Tonhalle Zürich, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen and the NDR-Sinfonieorchester Hamburg.

Born in 1939 in Warsaw and educated in Germany, Marek Janowski's artistic path led him from Assistant positions in Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Hamburg to his appointment as General Music Director in Freiburg im Breisgau (1973-75) and Dortmund (1975-79). Whilst in Dortmund, his reputation grew rapidly and he became greatly involved in the international opera scene. There is not one world-renowned opera house where he has not been a regular guest since the late '70s, from the Metropolitan Opera New York to the Bayerischer Staatsoper Munich; from Chicago and San Francisco to Hamburg; from Vienna and Berlin to Paris.

Marek Janowski stepped back from the opera scene in the 1990's in order to concentrate on orchestral work and was thus able to continue

the great German conducting tradition in the symphonic repertoire. He now enjoys an outstanding reputation amongst the great orchestras of Europe and North America. He is recognised for his ability to create orchestras of international standing as well as for his innovative programmes and for bringing a fresh and individual interpretation to familiar repertoire.

Between 1984 and 2000, as Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Marek Janowski led the orchestra to international fame as the leading orchestra in France. From 1986 to 1990, in addition to his work in France, Janowski held the position of Chief Conductor of the Gürzenich-Orchester in Cologne, and between 1997 and 1999 he was also First Guest Conductor of the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. From 2000 to 2005 Janowski served as Music Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, and from 2001 to 2003 he also held the position of Chief Conductor with the Dresdner Philharmonie. Marek Janowski has made many recordings over the past 30 years, including many complete operas and symphonic cycles, many of which have been awarded international prizes. To this day, his recording of Richard Wagner's complete tetralogy *The Ring Cycle* with the Staatskapelle Dresden (1980-83) remains one of the most distinguished and musically interesting recordings that has been made of this work.

## The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was founded in 1918 by Ernest Ansermet, who remained principal conductor until 1967. The orchestra employs 112 permanent musicians and performs a series of subscription concerts in Geneva and Lausanne, the symphony concerts of the city of Geneva, the annual concert for the United Nations as well as playing for opera performances at the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Marek Janowski has been the orchestra's artistic and music director since 1 September 2005.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande achieved world renown under its founding conductor and under its successive music directors: Paul Kletzki (1967-1970), Wolfgang Sawallisch (1970-1980), Horst Stein (1980-1985), Armin Jordan (1985-1997), Fabio Luisi (1997-2002), Pinchas Steinberg (2002-2005) and continues to make an active contribution to music history by discovering or supporting contemporary composers of prime importance whose works were first performed in Geneva. These include Benjamin Britten, Claude Debussy, Peter Eötvös, Heinz Holliger, Arthur Honegger, Michael Jarrell, Frank Martin, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky and others. Since the year 2000 the Orchestre de

la Suisse Romande has given the world premieres of about twenty works in cooperation with Radio Suisse Romande. The orchestra also supports contemporary music in Switzerland by regularly commissioning works from the composers William Blank and Michael Jarrell.

Working closely with Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, music performed by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was very soon broadcast on radio and on short wave and was thus received by millions of listeners throughout the world. Thanks to the partnership with Decca, which gave rise to several legendary recordings, the orchestra's renown continued to grow. The OSR has also recorded for Aeon, Cascavelle, Denon, EMI, Erato, Harmonia Mundi, PentaTone and Philips and many of these recordings have been awarded major prizes.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande has undertaken international tours and performed in prestigious concert halls in Asia (Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing), in Europe (Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Vienna, Salzburg, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Amsterdam, Budapest, Istanbul, London, Paris etc.) as well as in major American cities (Boston, New York, San Francisco, Washington, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, etc).

The orchestra has also performed at various festivals, for instance, since 2000 the Budapest Spring Festival, the Chorégies d'Orange, the Festival de Musica de Canarias, the Lucerne Festival At Easter, the Festival of Radio France and of Montpellier, the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, the Robeco Zomerconcerten, at the Septembre Musical Festival in Montreux, at the Bucarest Festival.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande is supported by the canton and the city of Geneva, by Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, friends associations as well as by several sponsors and donors. For the concerts performed in Lausanne the orchestra also benefits from support by the canton de Vaud.

