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**ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD | LEONARD BERNSTEIN**

Violin Concerto, Op. 35 | Serenade after Plato's "Symposium"

**Liza Ferschtman**

Prague Symphony Orchestra | Het Gelders Orkest

Jiří Malát | Christian Vásquez



SUPER AUDIO CD

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**ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD** (1897-1957)

**Violin Concerto, Op. 35**

- |                          |             |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| [1] Moderato nobile      | <b>9:55</b> |
| [2] Romanze              | <b>8:44</b> |
| [3] Allegro assai vivace | <b>8:06</b> |

**LEONARD BERNSTEIN** (1918-1990)

**Serenade after Plato's "Symposium"**

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| [4] I. Phaedrus: Pausanias (lento and allegro)                      | <b>7:02</b>  |
| [5] II. Aristophanes (allegretto)                                   | <b>4:25</b>  |
| [6] III. Eryximachus (presto)                                       | <b>1:30</b>  |
| [7] IV. Agathon (adagio)  | <b>7:18</b>  |
| [8] V. Socrates: Alcibiades (molto tenuto and allegro molto vivace) | <b>10:59</b> |

total time 58:21

All works are live recordings

For me, both works on this disc revolve around love. In Bernstein's Serenade quite literally, looking at it from the perspective of different philosophers present at Plato's Symposium, (although, as stated in Bernstein's own words, it's not a programmatic piece in the classic sense). In Korngold's concerto, the sheer abundance of love and love for life is shared so generously that all that is left, both as listener and performer, is to feel embraced and uplifted by it.

Generosity is a term I associate very much with love, and a quality that great music can have. Both these compositions are giving in an overwhelmingly warm manner.

It is this similarity, and the fact that they both have the rare ability of uniting the highest compositional qualities - intricate use of thematic material, structure and virtuosic instrumentation - with a whiff of popular culture through seductive use melody and rhythm, together with a great sense of humour (and in the case of Bernstein outright swing!) that I felt they would make a wonderful match on this disc.

It is not uncommon to hear classical music "experts" speak of both Korngold and Bernstein with slight disdain when referring to their so-called "classical" compositions. The suggestion has been made that as they wrote for the silver screen and hence in a slightly popular fashion, it makes them lesser classical composers. All I can say to those critics is; you do not know these works!

Being a “serious” musician myself there is no question for me that these compositions are of the highest rank, despite, or maybe precisely because they can go straight to people’s hearts!

Liza Ferschtman

### **Child prodigy composer**

He was a prodigy, but not on the violin, the piano or any other instrument. The Austrian composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold was an extremely gifted child. His first opera, written when he was just eleven years old, was a sensation at the Vienna Court Opera. Over the years, he composed one masterpiece after another, mostly in a fantastical, passionate style that could be compared to the *Jugendstil* movement in the visual arts. His operas in particular were well-loved, with *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City) being the absolute summit.

However, his career took an unexpected turn when he received a request in 1934 from America to write some music for a film version of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The film was a major success and new commissions for film music soon followed. It was not such a huge step for Korngold to head for the USA, not least because, being a Jew, he viewed the rise of Nazism in Germany and his native Austria with keen concern. In Hollywood, he quickly became one of the best-known film composers in his newly adopted country. His opulent compositional style suited not only the romantic film dramas that were so popular at the time, but also the spectacularly lavish action films of the day.

### **Film music as a violin concerto**

However, memories of his earlier life in the classical world in Vienna eventually started to gnaw away at him. He longed to return, particularly after the end of World War II. He put his career as a film composer to one side and reverted to writing classical works. One of the first of these was the *Violin Concerto*,

completed in 1945. This is a beautiful, late Romantic work that harks back clearly to Korngold's earlier compositional style, when he was a younger man living in Vienna. But had he really turned his back on film music? Every movement of the concerto is scattered with fragments from a range of his film scores. The opening theme of the first movement is the main theme from the romantic film *Another Dawn* (1937) and also contains snippets from *Juarez* (1939). The beautiful opening violin solo in the second movement is the love theme from the film *Anthony Adverse* (1936). The climax of the finale is taken from the swashbuckling action movie *The Prince and the Pauper*, from 1937, though it starts with a jolly, lively jig, closely related to the American popular dance music of Scots and Irish immigrants. And – neatly enough – this extremely virtuosic jig already contains the seeds of the melody from the film, which we hear later at the climax of the movement.

The *Violin Concerto* was a huge success at its premiere, not least due to the performance by Jascha Heifetz as soloist. Korngold himself waxed lyrical about Heifetz's performance: "In spite of the demand for virtuosity in the finale, the work with its many melodic and lyric episodes was contemplated more for a Caruso than for a Paganini. It is needless to say how delighted I am to have my concerto performed by Caruso and Paganini in one person: Jascha Heifetz." Ultimately, his *Violin Concerto* would be the first of Korngold's post-War works to stand the test of time. That said, it remains one of the most popular and most performed violin concertos of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Classical composition**

The 1950s, a period when Korngold's career and indeed his life were drawing to a close, were a most productive time for Leonard Bernstein. He was achieving major successes on Broadway with his musicals, such as *West Side Story*, writing operettas and also music for the film *On the Waterfront*, which gained him an Oscar nomination. His reputation as an orchestral conductor was also burgeoning, confirming that Bernstein's inspiration and interest were also entrenched in the classical genre. One of the results of this was the *Serenade* for violin, strings, harp and percussion. There were two factors behind the composition. He had accepted a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation in 1951, though he had not yet written any specific work for this. Also, he had long been promising a new piece for his close friend, the violinist Isaac Stern. Both of these commitments coincided in the *Serenade*, an entirely new work with a virtuoso solo part for the violin. Isaac Stern performed the work's premiere in Venice in 1954, with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the composer.

### **Plato and Symposium**

Apart from the fact that the *Serenade* is an extremely lyrical, five-movement work, akin to a violin concerto, Bernstein's actual inspiration for writing the work is not easy to discern. He was emphatic that the work had no literary background, though he also made a specific reference to Plato's *Symposium*, a text in which the Greek philosopher muses on love. He does this by describing a banquet attended by himself and some of his friends, each with his own views on love. Each speaker takes up where the previous one left

off, then providing his own twist on the discussion. This is also exactly what Bernstein does with the musical themes in the *Serenade*, bearing witness to the contributions from each of the speakers in turn. In the first movement, Phaedrus declaims an ode to Eros, god of love, introduced by a fugato. Pausinias then goes on, in the same movement, to emphasize the duality of the love between two people, represented by Bernstein as an allegro based on the theme from the fugato. Aristophanes then proceeds to narrate a classical myth about love, at which point Bernstein takes a motif from the first movement, and then encapsulates the saga in a song-like melody. This song is then elaborated as a canon in the address given by the doctor Eryximachus, discussing principally the physical aspects of love. Agathon, who expands on the power of love, is followed by the great thinker Socrates, discussing the only true love, founded in wisdom, where Bernstein transforms a theme from the Agathon movement into something entirely novel. When Socrates is rudely interrupted by Alcibiades, dancing drunkenly and bringing the banquet to an end, Bernstein makes an obvious gesture in the direction of jazz in his whirlwind conclusion.

### **Character analysis**

It's a fine description of the *Serenade*, principally drawn from Bernstein himself, but whether the ancient Greek writing was an inspiration for the composer from the very outset...? According to the biographer Humphrey Burton, Bernstein only alighted on the notion of Plato's Symposium once the work was largely completed, having originally described the piece simply as *Concerto*. The five movements also contain elements of five short pieces the composer had written as birthday presents for some of his friends. Burton suggests

that the *Serenade* may be a trifling exercise by Bernstein in analysing his own character, in which he displays himself in turns as noble, childlike, exuberant, serene, philosophical and finally elated.

*Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations*

## **Liza Ferschtman** violin

Dutch violinist Liza Ferschtman is known for her passionate performances, interesting programs and communicative qualities on stage. The daughter of Russian musicians, Liza Ferschtman grew up constantly surrounded by music. One of her earliest major influences was the violinist Philipp Hirschhorn, a close family friend. She received her formal training from Herman Krebbers at the Amsterdam Conservatory, Ida Kavafian at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and David Takeno in London. In 2006 she received the highest accolade awarded to a musician in the Netherlands, the Dutch Music Award.

Liza Ferschtman's worldwide appearances include: BBC National Orchestra of Wales and London Philharmonic, Dallas and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, Essen Philharmonic, Budapest Festival Orchester, Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra, Orchestre National de Belgique and Flanders Symphony Orchestra, Radio Symphony Orchestra of Prague, Malmö Symphony and Bergen Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Orchestra, Malaysian Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic as well as virtually every Dutch orchestra, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Rotterdam Philharmonic.

Amongst the Conductors with whom she has worked are: Stefan Blunier, Frans Brüggen, Christoph von Dohnányi, Claus Peter Flor, Neeme Järvi, Yakov Kreizberg, Zdeněk Macál, Jun Märkl, Gianandrea Noseda, Anthony Hermus, Leonard Slatkin, Thomas Søndergård, Karl-Heinz Steffens, Mario Venzago, Ivan Fischer, and Jaap van Zweden.

An avid chamber musician, Liza Ferschtman has collaborated regularly with artists such as Jonathan Biss, Nobuko Imai, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Christian Poltera, Lars Anders Tomter and Alisa Weilerstein. Appearing at venues such as Alice Tully Hall (New York), Wigmore Hall (London), Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Liederhalle (Stuttgart) and Beethoven Haus (Bonn), she is also present at major international Chamber Music festivals such as Lockenhaus and RUSK festival in Finland. Moreover, Ms. Ferschtman has been the artistic director of the Delft Chamber Music Festival since 2007, one of the most admired festivals in the Netherlands.

Liza Ferschtman's recording of the Beethoven Concerto and Romances was received with great critical acclaim, as were other recordings with concertos by Dvořák and Mendelssohn, solo CD's with works from Bach and Ysaÿe (STRAD CD choice of the month) and Bach, Biber, Bartók, Berio, and duo works by Beethoven and Schubert.

## **Christian Vásquez** conductor

Christian Vásquez became Chief Conductor of the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra at the beginning of the 2013/14 season. The 2015/16 season saw him become the Principal Guest Conductor of the Het Gelders Orkest, starting his tenure with a tour of the Netherlands featuring an all-Latin programme. He is also Music Director of the Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, notably leading them on a tour of Europe which saw them perform in London,

Lisbon, Toulouse, Munich, Stockholm and Istanbul. Highlights of the 2015/16 season included projects with the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, the Prague Radio Symphony, and Poznan Philharmonic. Last season, Christian made his debut with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Pinchas Zukerman. He also reunited with the Turku Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic and collaborated with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. In addition to his regular commitments in Stavanger and Arnhem, 2017/18 sees Christian return to the Danish National Opera for New Year's concerts with the Royal Danish Orchestra. He will also make his debut with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra. Further orchestral highlights include collaborations with the RTE National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and a European tour with the Het Gelders Orkest. Born in Caracas, Christian joined the San Sebastian de los Reyes Symphony Orchestra as a violinist at the age of nine. He began conducting studies under the tutelage of José Antonio Abreu in 2006 and was appointed Music Director of the Aragua Juvenile Symphony Orchestra Jose Felix Ribas soon after.

### **Het Gelders Orkest**

Driven by musical ambition, inspired by the public and attached to their environment. That is Het Gelders Orkest! They share their passion for classical music with people of all ages in Gelderland and beyond. They perform famous and lesser-known works, and appear with world-renowned soloists, young stars and great guest conductors. Their musicians grow and shine under the direction

of chief conductor Antonello Manacorda. As a youthful 'old soul', his ability to fuse the emotions of the audience and the orchestra is second to none.

Het Gelders Orkest strives to touch as many people as possible. That is why they organise not only symphonic concerts but also a surprising array of alternative musical encounters and adventurous crossovers, in the form of children's concerts, educational and amateur projects, films and workshops.

### **Jiří Malát** conductor

After studying at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, the conductor Jiří Malát was engaged in 1981 as the conductor of the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň. At the same time, he guest conducted many important orchestras, not only in Czechoslovakia, but also in Germany, Italy and Switzerland. In 1985 he became the conductor of the Pilsen Radio Orchestra, later becoming the conductor of the Janáček Philharmonic in Ostrava, and in 1988 an opera conductor at the National Theater in Prague. Since 1992 Jiří Malát has been living in Germany. He is welcomed as a guest conductor by major orchestras around the world (Berlin Philharmonic, Tonhalle in Zurich, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Teatro Municipal in Sao Paolo and Sala Verdi in Milan). From 1992 to 2002 he was the music director of the Mannheim Chamber Orchestra. Recently he has been conducting in Canada, France, Portugal, several times in Mexico and in the USA where he led conducting courses at Florida Southern College in Lakeland in the autumn of 2005. From 1998 to 2002 he was a regular guest conductor at the Prague State Opera, and since 2003 he has been a regular guest conductor of



the WDR Radio Orchestra in Cologne. In the spring of 2004 he conducted the Pilsen Philharmonic on its first tour of the USA, and between 2005 and 2008 he was its Chief Conductor. From 2004–2013 he was Chief Conductor of Vogtland Philharmonie Greiz-Reichenbach (Germany). Jiří Malát makes recordings for such labels as Arte Nova, Koch Classics, Panton and Supraphon and for radio stations in Stuttgart, Cologne and other places.

### **Prague Symphony Orchestra**

The Prague Symphony Orchestra was founded in the autumn of 1934 by the conductor Rudolf Pekárek. He defined the new ensemble's fields of activity with the words Film-Opera-Koncert, and such the abbreviation FOK became part of the orchestra's title. By recording music for the majority of Czech films in the 1930s and performing regularly in live broadcasts on the Czechoslovak Radio, the FOK Orchestra made a name for itself and its economic existence was assured. This allowed the gradual development of regular concerts, whose main promoter from the very beginning was Dr. Václav Smetáček. After Smetáček's departure from the post of chief conductor, artistic leadership was taken over in succession by Ladislav Slovák (1972 – 1976), Jindřich Rohan (1976 – 1977), and then Jiří Bělohlávek (1977 – 1989), whose work marked an important stage from the standpoint of the ensemble's intensive artistic development.

After Bělohlávek came Petr Altrichter (1990 – 1992), Martin Turnovský (1992 – 1995), and Gaetano Delogu (1995 – 1998). Other important Czech conductors who have worked with the orchestra for an extensive time include Václav Neumann, Zdeněk Košler, and Vladimír Válek. From March 2001 to the end of the 2005/2006 concert season, the Chief Conductor and Music Director of the orchestra was Serge Baudo. Since the 2006/2007 concert season, Jiří Kout has held the the position of Chief Conductor, whilst Serge Baudo is the honorary Conductor. Pietari Inkinen assumed the role of Chief Conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra in September 2015. Over the course of the orchestra's history many of the world's most important conductors have appeared with the FOK as guest conductors, as well as a wide range of soloists. The orchestra has performed in nearly every country in Europe, repeatedly in Japan and the USA, and has also visited South America, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Korea, Turkey, Israel and Oman.

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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Executive producer: Anne de Jong  
Violin Concerto Op. 35 recorded at: BASF-Feierabendhaus, Ludwigshafen, Germany  
Recording dates: 22 & 23 November 2017  
Serenade after Plato's "Symposium" recorded at: Muis, Arnhem, the Netherlands  
Recording dates: 9 & 13 June 2017  
Recording: Northstar Recording Services BV  
Producer, balance engineer, editing & mastering: Bert van der Wolf  
Recording Assistant: Martijn van der Wolf  
A&R Challenge Classics: Anne de Jong  
Liner notes: Kees Wisse  
Translations: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations  
Booklet editing: Boudewijn Hagemans  
Cover photo: Marco Borggreve  
Product coordination: Boudewijn Hagemans  
Graphic Design: Natasja Wallenburg & Juan Carlos Villarroel, [newartsint.com](http://newartsint.com)

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