

- 1 Sonata for Viola and Piano** **Paul Hindemith**
Op. 11, No. 4 (16:52) **(1895-1963)**
① I Fantasie (2:50)
② II Thema mit Variationen (4:17)
③ III Finale (mit Variationen) (9:45)
- 2 Märchenbilder, Op. 113 (15:19)** **Robert Schumann**
(1810-1856)
I Nicht schnell (3:21)
3 II Lebhaft (4:01)
4 III Rasch (4:01)
5 IV Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck (5:08)
- 6 Beau Soir (2:41)** **Claude Debussy**
(trans. by K. Dreyfus) **(1862-1918)**
- 7 Suite Populaire Espagnole (12:59)** **Manuel de Falla**
(trans. by P. Kochanski) **(1876-1946)**
El paño moruno (2:06)
- 8** Asturiana (2:15)
9 Canción (2:27)
10 Jota (2:51)
11 Nana (2:44)
12 Polo (1:19)
- 13 Romanze, Op. 85 (8:25)** **Max Bruch**
(1838-1920)

Karen Dreyfus, viola
Robert McDonald, piano

Total Time: 56:43

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Notes by Benjamin Folkman

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), one of the few composers who adopted the viola as his primary instrument, enjoyed a significant international career as a soloist and chamber-player. Hindemith had mastered the violin during his youth, becoming concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera at age 19, but switched to the viola after returning from military service at the end of World War I. It was during his first months at the new instrument that he completed his magnificent Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 11, No. 4 (1919), perhaps the finest of his many viola works. A score with a powerful dramatic appeal that stems from its ingenious structure, the sonata abounds in the kind of lyricism, dash, humor and urgency that one often misses in the composer's later scores. The sonata is cast in three movements, heard without pause. Movement I (*Fantasia*) presents a peaceful pastoral surface through which rhapsodic virtuoso ornament occasionally erupts. Movement II opens with a wistful A-B-A-form theme, marked to be played "simply, like a folk song." Four variations follow: the first plaintive and elegant, deriving a hint of mystery from quasi-oriental figurations; the second contrasting the elfin sparkle of piano double-notes with glumly earthbound viola comments; the third passionate, with a full-voiced viola fervently aloft on a flood-tide of piano *arpeggios*; the fourth obsessive, built on a reiterated four-note *ostinato*. A climactic crash brings the finale, which begins in sonata-style. The first subject, of gypsy-like *brio* and rhythmic freedom, has its own cadential *codetta*; the second subject commences with a flowing piano melody soon taken up by the viola. A third subject, surprisingly, turns out to be another variation of the slow-movement theme, and thus the ensuing dominant-

preparation transition-passage, with masterly suspense, leaves the astute listener to guess between two alternatives: will the first subject now reappear, in accepted sonata-style? Or will the re-established variation pattern continue, perhaps culminating in a fugue, as variation-pieces often do? Hindemith's answer is a triumph of wit. With poker-faced lugubriousness, the viola embarks on a dyspeptic *fugato*-variation, marked "to be played with bizarre awkwardness," which lurches preposterously toward a climax. The variation-fugue scheme having heaped hilarious ridicule upon itself, the sonata-style energetically re-surfaces, all three subjects reappearing in a full recapitulation. A march-like return of the variation theme initiates a coda, which builds with fire and frenzy toward an ebullient conclusion.

Even after Robert Schumann (1810-1856) moved beyond the piano music that had obsessed him during the first decade of his career, he persisted, at first, in specializing in one musical medium at a time: the year 1840 he devoted to *Lieder*, 1841 to orchestral music, 1842 to chamber works and 1843 to choral pieces. In later years, however, he made a conscious effort to write for neglected instruments, providing needed repertory for oboe, for clarinet, and for horn, along with two chamber scores involving the viola: *Märchenbilder* (Fairy-tale Pictures), Op. 113, for viola and piano (1851) and *Märchenerzählungen* (Fairy-tale Narratives), Op. 132, for clarinet, viola and piano (1853). It seems oddly appropriate that the troubled, quintessentially romantic Schumann should associate the viola with the supernatural fairy world, employing its dark, elusive, hollow voice to create nocturnal soundscapes a-flicker with shifting shadows and faintly but definitely tinged with E.T.A. Hoffmann-like menace. Nothing could be more different from the shimmering high-register colors heard in the fairy-music of Schumann's idol Mendelssohn.

The first of the four *Märchenbilder* is a melancholy free-form exfoliation of two themes, delivered by viola and piano, respectively, at the outset, and later intertwined over suspenseful pedal-points. The remaining three pieces are in sectional forms. No. 2 is an exultant march with two trios, the first quizzical and cajoling, the second marked by skittish contrapuntal paradox. No. 3 is a stormy, bardic D-minor affair suggesting medieval derring-do, its central portion (in the radiant sub-mediante of B major) appearing as a graceful contrast. The final movement is a veritable lullaby, folk-like in the outer sections, rapt and exalted in the middle episode, where wisps of viola *arpeggio* decorate a piano chorale.

Beau Soir by Claude Debussy (1862-1918) is a song of notable beauty and even more notable precocity, dating, as it does, from the composer's sixteenth year. Popular with vocal recitalists, it is also often heard in transcriptions for various instruments—indeed, the Russian composer Alexander Gretchaninoff even published an arrangement of this gentle work for trombone and piano. The transcription heard here was made by Karen Dreyfus. With its richly atmospheric colors, *Beau Soir* is wholly free of the predictable formal conventions usually found in even the finest student compositions, freely expanding, instead, in a single lush and spacious lyrical arch.

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) spent most of his thirties in Paris establishing an international reputation, at last moving back to his native Spain in 1914. Shortly before leaving France, he composed his *Popular Spanish Songs*, and in these works — suffused with ethnic traits yet authentically modern in compositional craft — he is generally considered to have reached full artistic maturity. Today, these songs are often performed in violin-and-piano transcriptions by Paul Kochanski.

One may well wonder what drew a Polish violinist to Spanish folklore. Here, however, the transcriber and the composer had a close associate in common—the celebrated pianist Arthur Rubinstein, who frequently partnered his compatriot and life-long friend Kochanski in recital, and was also an assiduous champion of Falla's music. In his autobiography, Rubinstein recalled that when Kochanski first played his transcriptions, at an informal domestic summer-evening 1920s musicale in the south of France, the listeners—who included composer Maurice Ravel and violinist Jacques Thibaud—unanimously judged the arrangements to be even more superbly effective than Falla's originals.

Karen Dreyfus here performs the Falla-Kochanski *Suite Populaire Espagnole* essentially as written—something of a *tour-de-force*, since the solo part ranges considerably higher than does normal viola music. The Suite contains six songs: No. 1—*El paño moruno* (The Moorish Cloth), a lusty, quintessentially Spanish melody; No. 2—*Asturiana* (Asturian Song), a lament of languorous gravity; No. 3—*Canción* (Song), a witty dance garnished with sparkling harmonics and earthy double-stops; No. 4—*Jota* (Jota), a cross-rhythmed traditional dance interrupted by arch, sensuous solo meditations (the words deal with the sweetness of a forbidden affair between young lovers); No. 5—*Nana* (Lullaby), a haunting strain reportedly sung to the composer in infancy by his mother; and No. 6—*Polo* (Polo), a torrid evocation of the percussive guitar techniques and the florid vocal ornaments heard in *flamenco*.

In his early seventies, Max Bruch (1838-1920), still busy and active as a composer, took an exceptional interest in the viola. He completed a set of eight pieces for clarinet, viola and piano (Op. 83) in 1909 and produced two substantial viola works in 1911: the *Romanze* for Viola and Orchestra, Op. 85 and the Double Concerto for Clarinet, Viola

and Orchestra, Op. 88. The *Romanze*, heard here with piano accompaniment, exhibits all of the solid and appealing qualities one expects from Bruch. It is an unfailingly euphonious, impeccably crafted work in the post-Mendelssohn idiom, cast in a modestly proportioned sonata form (Bruch deliberately refrains from expanding his second subject). The principal theme, hymn-like yet sensuous, is delivered by the viola after a brief accompanimental introduction; the second subject begins in ardent double-stops, loosely inverting the opening intervals of the main theme. The development is rather turbulent, but the onset of the recapitulation restores calm. A new continuation of the first subject brings a luminous excursion to the distant flat-supertonic key; and after the viola demurely eases the music back to the F-major tonic, the reprise follows a normal course toward a coda of rapt stillness.

Karen Dreyfus has been the recipient of many prizes, both in this country and abroad, including the Naumburg Viola Competition (1982), the Lionel Tertis Competition (1980), the Washington International Competition (1979), and the Hudson Valley Competition (1978). Miss Dreyfus has concertized extensively in the United States, Europe, and the Far East. Her recent collaborations include Music From Marlboro, Philomusica, Theatre Chamber Players of the Kennedy Center, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Karen Dreyfus has performed in recital with Yehudi Menuhin at Carnegie Hall and with artists including Rudolf Serkin, Leon Fleisher, Chick Corea, and her husband, Glenn Dicterow. She has been a frequent participant at the Casals, Aspen, and Marlboro Music Festivals.

Born into a family of musicians, she began studying the violin with her father, a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and later decided to pursue a career on the viola. A 1979 graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, Miss Dreyfus studied with Karen Tuttle and Michael Tree. In 1985 Karen Dreyfus received a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalists Award and gave debut recitals in New York and Boston to critical acclaim. Miss Dreyfus is a founding member of the Lyric Piano Quartet which made its New York debut in December of 1988. Karen Dreyfus has recorded for ECM, DG, Vanguard, Bridge and New World Records. She is currently on the faculty of Queens College.

Robert McDonald has enjoyed critical success as a recitalist, chamber musician and orchestral guest soloist throughout the United States, Latin America and Europe. Winner of the Gold Medal at the Busoni International Piano Competition, he counts among his other honors the first prize at the Washington International Competition for Pianists, the top prize at the University of Maryland International Piano Competition, the Artist Award from the National Federation of Music Clubs and a Solo Recitalist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. After graduating from Lawrence University, Mr. McDonald studied at the Curtis Institute and the Juilliard and Manhattan Schools, his teachers including Rudolf Serkin, Seymour Lipkin, Mieczyslaw Horszowski, Beveridge Webster and Gary Graffman.

Mr. McDonald has performed at the Marlboro, Montreux, Lucerne, Bergen and Besançon festivals, toured nationally with Music from Marlboro and has been a guest artist with such leading chamber groups as the Juilliard, American, Orlando and Fine Arts string quartets. Mr. McDonald has concertized extensively with Isaac Stern in the United States and Europe, and appears frequently with Elmar Oliveira, Young Uck Kim, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and Midori. He has recorded for the Vox Cum Laude, Musical Heritage Society, CRI, Stradivari and Bridge labels, and is a member of the piano faculty at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Mr. McDonald also directs the keyboard program at the Taos School of Music and Chamber Music Festival in New Mexico.

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Robert McDonald and Karen Dreyfus