

One of the 20th century's greatest violinists, Leonid Kogan was less widely known than his somewhat older contemporary David Oistrakh, but no less a first-tier artist. More concentrated in tonal focus and with a quicker vibrato than Oistrakh and others of the Russian school, Kogan was avowedly a man of his time. His espousal of the four-octave scale for exercises assured the infallibility of his technique by strengthening his fingering hand in the upper positions. Although he died at age 58, he had amassed a discography that remains as a commanding legacy. Although his were not especially musical parents, Kogan conceived a fascination for the violin by age three. At six, he began lessons with Philip Yampolsky, a pupil of Leopold Auer. When Kogan's family moved to Moscow when he was ten, he began studies with Abram Yampolsky (no relation to Philip, but another Auer disciple). Kogan progressed through the Central School of Music, then the Moscow Conservatory, where he trained from 1943 to 1948. Postgraduate studies at the conservatory occupied him from 1948 until 1951. At age 12, Kogan was heard by violinist Jacques Thibaud, who predicted a great career for him. Although his parents resisted exploiting their son as a prodigy, Kogan made his debut at 17 and performed in many Soviet venues while still a student. Wider recognition came when Kogan shared first prize at the 1947 Prague World Youth Festival. In 1951, he won first prize at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. Oistrakh, who was a member of the jury (along with Thibaud), thereafter came to regard Kogan as a colleague, while Kogan closely observed his elder associate during the latter's evening classes for other students. After teaching at the Moscow Conservatory and playing a busy schedule of concerts in the Soviet Union over the next few years, Kogan made his first appearances in Paris and London in 1955, following those with a tour of South America in 1956 and another of the United States in 1957. Less gregarious than Oistrakh, Kogan was not as aggressively promoted abroad by the Soviet government. After being named People's Artist in 1964, Kogan received the Lenin Prize in 1965.



BEETHOVEN
Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61
Leonid Kogan
Constantin Silvestri
Paris Conservatoire Orchestra



The work was created in 1806, soon after Fourth Symphony and Piano Concerto No. 4, and parallel to Quartets Op. 59. After its Viennese premiere by Franz Clement (23 December 1806), critics complained of tedious repetitions of “vulgar fragments.” It should be remembered that this Violin Concerto, clearly transcending the genre’s boundaries of the time, is a mysterious work and one difficult in reception as well as in performance.

The time of its first movement (*Allegro ma non troppo*) is the initial tempo of Ninth Symphony and the masterpieces of the latter half of the century, the quasi-brucknerian “nicht zu schnell.” Until then, Beethoven held on to *Allegro con brio*; here, time seems to flow according to the rhythm of natural phenomena. It is kept by five steady beats of the kettledrums, the structural axis of the section and its sole source of energy. For neither the main hymnic theme that seems to echo *Dona nobis pacem* in Haydn’s *Harmoniemesse*, nor the singing second theme – both are diatonic, simple in rhythm, initiated legato by a chorus of winds – serve to develop the movement: “they also serve who” are only there to be contemplated. Indeed, their essence is to remain in unchanged form – hence the repetitions, which also concern both the simple motives of the bridge and the epilogue, and entire structures. This is further evident in the character of the solo part. Its fluent figurations, mingling with bassoons or clarinets into a peculiar complex of colour, serve – again! – only to colour the expression of the melody. At the end of the development, the solo violin usher in a completely new idea (in G minor), extended over a pedal structure of mild, extended notes and obsessive beats that slowly encompass the entire spectrum of sound. At this point, only once in the entire concerto yet with unusual power, the growth of tension paves the way for the climax of the main theme. Recapitulation has a lively mood; the tone

of the orchestra is fuller, octaves and chords appear in the violin part. Of the famous solo cadences of J. Joachim and F. Kreisler, the latter is ideally suited to the climate of the coming finale, the form of which is ample proof that Beethoven’s masterpieces are all unique and inimitable.

Movement Two (*Larghetto*, G major) preserves the reflexive mood thanks to the tonal uniformity of all of its components, yet the strophic theme itself arches all the way to F sharp major. The form is first developed in variations, yet a decisive repetition of the theme in the orchestra is followed by a fantastic accompanied cadenza with a new motivic episode. The original order recurs for a while in the third variation of the solo voice over a pizzicato theme, only to recede before an improvisational narration of the cadenza.

A recitative bridge leads straight on to the third movement (*Rondo. Allegro*), the expression of which is modelled by song-like intonations. The violin ushers in a vigorous refrain that could fit in quite well into a dancing song. It is again strictly diatonic and, similarly to the bridge intoned by the horns, with “hunting music” connotations. The initial couplet (A major) carries on the mood of the refrain, while the second (G minor) is a beautiful ballad-like song, conducted by the violin dialoguing with a bassoon. The solo part becomes increasingly impressive towards the end, while the colours of the orchestra bring to mind Pastoral Symphony. This feeling is enhanced by a striking and, at the same time, a subtly witty coda that follows after a short cadence: this is a Beethoven without his titanic mask, intent on the voice of nature with a deeply human curiosity.

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- 1. Allegro Ma Non Troppo - Cadenza (By Joachim)**
Tempo I 24:57
 - 2. Larghetto 10:28**
 - 3. Rondo (Allegro - Cadenza (By Joachim) - Tempo I 9:32**
- Total Time 44:57**

Recorded by EMI Records 1959



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