

challenge to his electrifying precision of execution. His diamond-point tone and quick vibrato afforded his playing a clarity of line that some felt was almost too perfect, even cold. Most conductors and other violinists -- and audiences -- felt differently and a Heifetz concert inevitably drew sell-out crowds.

Heifetz's American debut took place at Carnegie Hall in 1917, eliciting such observations as "only the molten gold of Fritz Kreisler can be conjured up in comparison" (Herbert F. Peyser) and "He is a modern miracle" (Pitts Sanborn). The ensuing year brought triumph after triumph, with critics vying with each other to offer the most extravagant superlatives. A period of transition a few years later brought some critical reservations as Heifetz sought to move away from the overt emotionalism of his Russian training and become a more objective player. By the mid-1920s, however, a balance had been struck and once again accolades flew as critics and audiences noted a new, more mature approach to his music.

Heifetz became an American citizen, settled in California, and enjoyed the benefit of a long-term recording contract with RCA, amassing a sizable discography over the years. Throughout his career, Heifetz favored gut strings, perhaps to temper the fine-edged aggressiveness of his attack and the enormous strength of his bowing arm. Early recordings of concertos, made mostly overseas, were gradually redone -- though not supplanted -- with American orchestras and in improved sound. Nonetheless, many of the earlier releases, despite their having been done in short takes required by 78-rpm discs, still compel attention for their unsurpassed mastery.

BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO (IN D)



HEIFETZ · MUNCH

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Beethoven wrote his Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61 (1806), at the height of his so-called "second" period, one of the most fecund phases of his creativity. In the few years leading up to the violin concerto, Beethoven had produced such masterpieces as the Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 (1803), the Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 58 (1805-1806), and two of his most important piano sonatas, No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 ("Waldstein," 1803-1804), and No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata," 1804-1805). The violin concerto represents a continuation -- indeed, one of the crowning achievements -- of Beethoven's exploration of the concerto, a form he would essay only once more, in the Piano Concerto No. 5 (1809).

By the time of the violin concerto, Beethoven had employed the violin in concertante roles in a more limited context. Around the time of the first two symphonies, he produced two romances for violin and orchestra; a few years later, he used the violin as a member of the solo trio in the Triple Concerto (1803-1804). These works, despite their musical effectiveness, must still be regarded as studies and workings-out in relation to the violin concerto, which more clearly demonstrates Beethoven's mastery in marshalling the distinctive formal and dramatic forces of the concerto form.

Characteristic of Beethoven's music, the dramatic and structural implications of the concerto emerge at the outset, in a series of quiet timpani strokes that led some early detractors to dismiss the work as the "Kettledrum Concerto." Striking as it is, this fleeting, throbbing motive is more than just an attention-getter; indeed, it

provides the very basis for the melodic and rhythmic material that is to follow. At over 25 minutes in length, the first movement is notable as one of the most extended in any of Beethoven's works, including the symphonies. Its breadth arises from Beethoven's adoption of the Classical ritornello form -- here manifested in the extended tutti that precedes the entrance of the violin -- and from the composer's expansive treatment of the melodic material throughout. The second movement takes a place among the most serene music Beethoven ever produced. Free from the dramatic unrest of the first movement, the second is marked by a tranquil, organic lyricism. Toward the end, an abrupt orchestral outburst leads into a cadenza, which in turn takes the work directly into the final movement. The genial Rondo, marked by a folk-like robustness and dancelike energy, makes some of the work's more virtuosic demands on the soloist.

At the prompting of Muzio Clementi -- one of the greatest piano virtuosi of the day aside from Beethoven himself -- Beethoven later made a surprisingly effective transcription of the violin concerto as the unnumbered Piano Concerto in D major, Op. 61a, famously adding to the first movement an extended cadenza that employs tympani in addition to the piano.

Jascha Heifetz was the leading figure among the extraordinary group of Russian Jews who dominated violin playing in the second and third quarters of the 20th century. As a technician he had no superior, and, of all the artists of his time and later, only two or three could even offer a

Beethoven Violin Concerto (In D)

Jascha Heifetz, Violin

Charles Munch - Boston Symphony Orchestra

1 Allegro, Ma Non Troppo 20:33

2 Larghetto 8:45

3 Rondo 8:23

Recorded November 27 and 28, 1955, at Symphony Hall, Boston
Produced by John Pfeiffer Recording Engineer Lewis Layton



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