

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, carries the subtitle *Vorspiel* (Prelude), a holdover from when Bruch was intending to call this a fantasy rather than concerto. A quiet timpani roll and a few disconsolate woodwind phrases set the stage for the violin's meditative entrance, a melody that rises gradually. This is all repeated a bit more assertively, until the full orchestra takes forceful control of the woodwind motif, and the violin spins out a long, impassioned theme over quivering strings and ominous timpani thuds. The second principal subject is more songful and lies lower in the violin's range, until a series of trills take it into a more ardent high register where it hovers for quite some time. The first theme is presented again, double-stops doubling its intensity. This launches the development section, a stormy sequence for the orchestra during which the violin holds its peace. In the return to the movement's opening bars, the violin's solo phrases now serve as abbreviated cadenzas. A short orchestral recapitulation-coda combo leads to the second movement.

The *Adagio* is a nostalgic aria for the violin. The solo writing becomes increasingly intricate, drifting into a more ardent, but less clearly defined second subject that culminates in three heaving sighs for the orchestra and then the soloist. Bruch subjects all this to a heart-on-sleeve development, deeply emotional without quite becoming mawkish. The recapitulation eases off and inserts a very brief pause before the final movement.

That's the *Allegro energetico*, which after a careful orchestral buildup turns out to be a joyful dance in a faintly Hungarian style (a tribute both to Joachim, who was Hungarian, and to the Joachim-influenced finale of the Brahms violin concerto). The dance theme is succeeded by some scurrying virtuosic material for the soloist and then a grand romantic melody that creates a climax of its own near the end of the exposition section. Bruch's idea of development here is largely a matter of repeating everything transposed and played at a slightly higher emotional pitch. It's the Hungarian dance that carries the concerto to an exhilarating conclusion that one could hardly anticipate from the work's gloomy beginning.

Zino Francescatti

Sibelius

Concerto In D Minor For Violin And Orchestra Op. 47
Leonard Bernstein / New York Philharmonic



Bruch

Concerto No. 1 In G Minor For Violin And Orchestra, Op. 26
Thomas Schippers / New York Philharmonic

The Violin Concerto is not the only work Finland's Sibelius wrote for solo violin with orchestra; he wrote a variety of excellent, shorter works including Two Serenades (1913) and Six Humoresques (1917). But the concerto is certainly the most ambitious of all these works. Despite the early enthusiasm of a few violinists -- notably Maud Powell, who was the soloist in the American premiere with the New York Philharmonic in 1906 and repeated the work several times on a transcontinental tour -- the concerto was slow to catch on with audiences. Not until Jascha Heifetz took up the work and recorded it in the 1930s did the concerto become what it is today, one of the most popular of the national Romantic concerto repertory.

Sibelius was himself a fine violinist. He took up studying the instrument at 15 with his hometown's military bandmaster, and shortly thereafter was taking part in chamber music performances and playing in his school's orchestra. He felt he had taken up the violin too late in life to become a true virtuoso, but he brought his intimate knowledge of the instrument to bear on this, his only concerto, which he completed in 1903. The soloist at the first performance was to be the composer's friend Willy Burmeister. But when scheduling difficulties intervened, Viktor Novacek was given the honor of premiering the work in Helsinki on February 8, 1904, with Sibelius himself conducting. After this indifferently received performance, Sibelius withdrew the work for revision. Ultimately, the work was shortened, including the excision of one solo cadenza, and featured a brighter orchestral sound. The first performance of the revised score took place on October 19, 1905 in Berlin, with Richard Strauss conducting and Karl Halir, a member of Joseph Joachim's quartet, as soloist.

Sibelius had a less than high regard for virtuoso violinists or for many of the works written for them. In his concerto, he manages to strike an ideal balance between instrumental brilliance and the more purely musical, structural, and emotional values. At one point he gave a pupil some advice about writing concertos, saying that one should be aware of the

audience's patience (and the stupidity of many soloists!) and avoid long, purely orchestral passages. He certainly took his own advice, as the violinist takes up the expressive main theme of the first movement in the fourth bar, and rarely relinquishes center stage for the remainder of the concerto's half-hour duration.

The opening movement, cast in first-movement sonata form, contrasts passages of restraint and melancholy with passages of great force and intensity. One unusual feature is the mid-movement cadenza for the soloist, which shares some qualities with like passages in the great virtuoso concertos of the nineteenth century, but is more substantial and more fully integrated into the overall form of the piece. Wind duets start the slow second movement, after which the soloist takes up the lush, almost Tchaikovskian main melody. Later in the movement the violinist is called on to play a fiendish two-part counterpoint. This is but one of the numerous technical hurdles the soloist must conquer in this work; many more arise in the brilliant, dance-like third movement, with its insistent rhythm and the folk-like cast of its melodies. The excitement and momentum carry through to the very end of the work.

Bruch wrote six substantial multi-movement works for violin and orchestra, but only this -- the first of his three official concertos -- and his Scottish Fantasy remain familiar today. Compensating for such neglect is the fact that this is one of the most popular nineteenth century concertos in the repertory, which is all the more remarkable because it was the first big orchestral work Bruch ever published. It didn't come easily to him. Bruch first sketched out the concerto in 1857, but withdrew it after its 1866 premiere. After a thorough revision based on suggestions from a number of violinists and composers, most notably the violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim, Bruch released a final version in 1868. It was premiered by and dedicated to Joachim. Although he cast the work in the traditional fast-slow-fast sequence, Bruch generated each movement in sonata form, connecting them all without pause.

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Sibelius Concerto In D Minor For Violin And Orchestra Op. 47 (28:19)

I - Allegro Moderato 14:04

II - Adagio Di Molto 7:00

III - Allegro Ma Non Tanto 7:05

Bruch Concerto No. 1 In G Minor For Violin And Orchestra, Op. 26 (22:35)

I - Vorspiel: Allegro Moderato / II - Adagio 15:50

III - Finale: Allegro Energico 6:40

Recorded by Columbia Records

Sibelius - 1965 Bruch - 1962