

Max Bruch (1838-1920)
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in G minor

Any person who lives 80 years is likely to see consequential change unfold before their eyes, and in a myriad of ways. This is true in any generation but perhaps more so for the 82 year old Max Bruch, who was born a decade after Beethoven's death and died a decade after Mahler's. In terms of European history, he very nearly gulfs the distance between the Napoleonic War and the Second World War, missing each by a short twenty years.

It is not difficult, therefore, to see Bruch's artistic output of over 100 published pieces overshadowed by the stylistic changes that came with every generation. He was firmly ensconced in his middle romantic genre, unyielding, distrustful and holding in contempt the swirling mass of ideas around him. Those ideas included the music of some fifty great composers including Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Bizet, Debussy, Wagner, Liszt, Rachmaninov and Stravinsky. That Bruch was inflexible in his approach to anything other than his style, caused a waning in popularity which unfortunately exists to this day.

We acknowledge his Violin Concerti, the *Scottish Fantasy* and *Kol Nidrei* for Cello. But who remembers his great forays into opera, especially *Die Loreley*, or his extraordinary mastery of massed choral music, accounting for 19 works, both genres propelling him, at least at the time, into semi stardom. It is a dominant fact of his life – and a cause for continuing bitterness - that having counted himself with the more conservative writing of the Mendelssohn- Schumann school, he never bested the great Johannes Brahms, despite outliving him by two and a half decades.

The Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor comes from a period between 1858 and 1865 where his journey to Leipzig brought him into contact with the Mendelssohn legacy and where he met with Ferdinand David who later advised him on the piece. It is possible to conjecture that this connection adds to the greatness of the piece, David providing excellent advice just as he had for Mendelssohn's concerto earlier. Bruch was not certain at the time whether he would remain a successful freelance conductor and composer despite the encouragement of several luminaries, earlier in his career.

It is unfortunate that Bruch's reputation is not commensurate with his actual musical mastery. His legacy also extends to his conducting, notably in Liverpool and Breslau. His stint as a revered professor at the Berlin Academy brought him pupils like Respighi and Vaughan-Williams, who at times demonstrate close stylistic ties with their mentor. Aside from his operas and choral music, his three symphonies, and for that matter the three orchestral suites, ranging from the 1860's to the 1900's provide intoxicating glimpses into his world of sound -carefully crafted and brimming with inventive and pleasing melodies.