

JONGEN: *Danse lente* for Flute and Harp

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2021

Ten years ago, a video of a crowded department store at Christmastime went viral. In it, holiday shoppers suddenly find themselves awash in music—a thundering rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus. The video shows bewildered customers, store clerks and live singers shuffling about in a gleeful heap. It happened at a Philadelphia Macy's (formerly Wanamaker's), home of the world's largest pipe organ.

The Wanamaker Organ was the crown jewel of one of America's first department stores. During the 1920s, Rodman Wanamaker paid to have the instrument refurbished and enlarged to 28,482 pipes and decided to commission some new music for its rededication. **He chose the famous Belgian organist Joseph Jongen, who responded with his *Sinfonia concertante* (1926), a piece the composer would later refer to as "that unfortunate work."**



Jongen's *Sinfonia* is a masterpiece, a tour de force celebrated by organists around the world. Unfortunately, due to a series of mishaps, the *Sinfonia* waited more than 80 years for a performance on the Wanamaker Organ.

Today, Jongen is best remembered as an organ composer, although he wrote chamber works, a symphony and concertos, among other things. It's only been in recent years that musicians have begun to explore Jongen's other works.

From an early age, Jongen excelled at the piano and began to dabble in composition; he entered the Liège Conservatory at age seven and continued his studies into his twenties.

During the 1890s he worked as a church organist around Liège and later joined the faculty at the Conservatory. After the German army invaded Belgium in 1914, he took his family to England where he formed a piano quartet and traveled the UK, entertaining a war weary people. It was during his World War I exile, around 1917, that he wrote the haunting and poetic *Danse lente* for Flute and Harp.

JONGEN: *Danse lente* for Flute and Harp
This is an ASO premiere.

BRUCH: Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor

Always, musical insiders refer to this piece as “the Bruch Violin Concerto.” It is a mainstay for soloists and a perennial audience favorite; however, the fact that it’s known as the Bruch Violin Concerto speaks volumes about something that became a bone of contention for its composer: Bruch wrote three violin concertos, not one.

In a letter to the publisher Fritz Simrock, the composer wrote:

Nothing compares to the laziness, stupidity and dullness of many German violinists. Every fortnight another one comes to me wanting to play the first concerto. I have now become rude; and have told them: ‘I cannot listen to this concerto any more—did I perhaps write just this one? Go away and once and for all play the other concertos, which are just as good, if not better.

During his lifetime, Bruch was an important conductor, choral composer, and professor of music. He conducted the premiere of his First Symphony at the age of fourteen, and wrote at least some of the material that went into the Violin Concerto while still a teenager. He started to sketch out the Concerto in 1864 and conducted its premiere in 1866, but

was dissatisfied with it. By then, he had caught the attention of the famous violinist Joseph Joachim, who helped make revisions. In 1868, Joachim played the second premiere as we know the piece today.



By the age of 30, Bruch had a huge hit on his hands and probably expected to grow into a long life as an esteemed composer. But nothing he wrote compared to the popularity of his Violin Concerto No. 1.

100 years after his death, Bruch has been spared the fate of the one-hit-wonder by two delightful, if not quite as popular works: the Scottish Fantasy, based on Scottish folk song, and *Kol Nidrei*, based on sacred Hebrew melodies.

BRUCH: Violin Concert No. 1 in G Minor

First ASO Performance: **MAR 3, 1953** | Henry Sopkin, conductor | Robert Harrison, violin

Most Recent ASO Performance: **MAR 11, 2020** | Yoel Levi, conductor | Pinchas Zukerman, violin

Instrumentation: Solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

MOZART: Symphony No. 38, "Prague"

Atlanta
Symphony
Orchestra



“If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere,” goes the song. For Mozart, that place was Vienna, the cultural capital of the Holy Roman Empire—and the seat of power.

Thanks in part to Peter Shaffer’s *Amadeus*, many are under the false impression that Mozart was a has-been and a pauper when he died at age 35. In fact, he was a big spender. Fancy apartments, trips to the spa, servants and boarding school didn’t exactly help him to weather the ebbs and flows of a freelance career.

Mozart’s father had wanted his genius son to win a job as a court musician and live out his days as a servant to a high-ranking nobleman. But the younger Mozart was perhaps too independently minded for that.

In Shaffer’s *Amadeus*, the emperor says to the composer “[Beaumarchais’] Figaro is a bad play. It stirs up hatred between the classes. . . . My own dear sister Antoinette writes me that she is beginning to be frightened of her own people.” (Of course, Marie Antoinette would die at the guillotine in 1793.) With fears of revolution growing among the ruling class, the play was banned from the Austrian stage. Audaciously, Mozart chose it as the subject of his next opera.

Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* dances on the edge of sedition; reactions in Vienna were mixed. Farther away from the seat of power—in Prague—its reception was glowing. When Mozart arrived there in January of 1787, he was treated like a rock star. He stayed as a guest at the palace of fellow Freemason Count Franz Joseph Thun-Hohenstein and wrote home: “Here nothing is talked about except Figaro; nothing is played, blown, sung, or whistled except Figaro.”

On January 19th, 1787, Mozart staged a concert at Prague’s National Theater, a lucrative affair which featured a brand-new symphony. Dated December 6, 1786, the symphony came to be known as “The Prague” Symphony.

An eye witness wrote:

“We did not know, in fact, what to admire most, whether the extraordinary compositions or his extraordinary playing; together they made such an overwhelming impression on us that we felt we had been bewitched. When Mozart had finished the concert he continued improvising alone on the piano for half an hour.”

Mozart went home to Vienna with a commission to write his next opera, *Don Giovanni*.



MOZART: Symphony No. 38, "Prague"

First ASO Performance: **SEP 25, 1948** | **Henry Sopkin, conductor**

Most Recent ASO Performance: **FEB 6, 2011** | **Robert Spano, conductor**

Instrumentation: **2 flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings**