

## ROBERTSCHUMANN

### Violin Concerto in D minor

**BORN:** Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810

**DIED:** Enderich, near Bonn, June 29, 1856

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1853

**WORLD PREMIERE:** November 26, 1937, in Berlin. Georg Kulenkampff was the soloist, and Georg Schünemann conducted the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra.

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Having established highly contrasted modes of expression in the orchestral paragraph that opens the concerto, Schumann introduces the solo violin in a passage featuring a series of short pleading phrases. This idea and the two themes introduced by the orchestra play important roles as the first movement unfolds.

The concerto's final movement adopts not only the pace but also the rhythms of a polonaise, the proud Polish dance that Chopin used as the premise for some of his most extroverted compositions.

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"I consider Schumann's Violin Concerto to be one of the great concertos ever written for violin. It builds a bridge between Beethoven and Brahms in the Romantic repertoire. While being very demanding for any player, it 'compensates' all investments of conquering the score by offering to the audience and all musicians involved a most powerful statement, while the slow movement will remain in music history forever as the most intimate, sincere and touching 'confession' on love ever written for violin. I like to surprise people with discoveries and the Schumann score is just that. Still not seen much in the mainstream repertoire, it offers me a wonderful opportunity to open a less known beautiful 'territory' to listeners."

– Gidon Kremer

Unlike Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann achieved nothing notable in music until he was in his late 20s. But he quickly made up for this late start, becoming an intensely expressive and, at times, extraordinarily productive composer. Although it is difficult to characterize succinctly his large and varied output, it is fair to say that Romantic reverie, mercurial caprice, solemn grandeur and ecstatic effusion all have their place in it.

When his inspiration was flowing, Schumann wrote at a remarkable pace. It was not unusual for him to produce several songs or other short pieces in a day, or a major orchestral work in two or three weeks. The composer's Violin Concerto provides an example. Schumann wrote this composition over the course of just two weeks, in the early autumn of 1853, intending it for Joseph Joachim, one of the great violinists of the 19th century. Joachim read through the piece but declined to perform it. Instead, he suppressed the work, which he considered not up to Schumann's usual high standards, though in a letter he allowed that "some passages ... give evidence of the profound spirit of its creator."

After Joachim's death, in 1907, his son gave the manuscript score of the Violin Concerto to the Prussian State Library. Having been hidden away for more than half a century, the music would have to wait three more decades before finally being heard. Its recovery happened in a truly strange manner. In 1933 the Hungarian violinist Jelli d'Aranyi, for whom Bartók and Ravel both wrote important works, claimed to have

contacted Schumann's spirit through a psychic medium. The composer allegedly told d'Aranyi of the concerto's existence and of the manuscript's location in the Prussian State Library. It must be noted, however, that d'Aranyi was the grand-niece of Joseph Joachim, so it is entirely plausible that she had some prior knowledge of the concerto and its whereabouts. In any event, the music was soon published and performed, and it is now in the repertory of some of the world's finest violinists. Foremost among them is Gidon Kremer, the soloist in our performance, who for many years has been a devoted and eloquent advocate for this concerto.

Schumann begins the composition with a dramatic orchestral statement, one very much in the Romantic tempest-tossed manner. Soon, however, the composer softens the music's stern countenance with a gentle second theme. The dissimilar characters of these two ideas, which the solo instrument joins in elaborating, makes for a movement whose richly varied expression is entirely typical of Schumann.

In contrast to this impassioned first movement, the second is songlike and deeply intimate. As he did in his Piano Concerto, Schumann connects the slow movement to the finale with a brief acceleration to a quicker tempo. In the ensuing music, the violin prances and leaps to a robust accompaniment, with trills and other ornamental figuration heightening the already considerable athleticism of its part.

*Scored for pairs of winds, horns and trumpets; timpani; strings.*

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