

MAX BRUCH

Born 6 January 1838 in Cologne; died 20 October 1920 in Friedenau, near Berlin.

Scottish Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 46 (1879-1880)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Hamburg, September 1880; Max Bruch, conductor; Pablo de Sarasate, soloist
PSO PREMIERE: 14 December 1951; Syria Mosque; Maurice Abravanel, conductor; Samuel Thaviu, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 28 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Max Bruch, like many Romantic composers, was interested throughout his life in folk song. In 1863, he published twelve Scottish folk airs in four-part settings, and incorporated German, British and Hebrew traditional music into his works. (One of his best-known compositions is the *Kol Nidrei* for Cello and Orchestra, based on an ancient chant of the Hebrew ritual.) When Bruch was conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society from 1878 to 1880, he took the opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge of Great Britain's indigenous music, and, like Mendelssohn (one of the gods in Bruch's musical pantheon), he was inspired by the music, lore and land of Scotland to produce one of his finest works — the *Fantasy with Free Use of Scottish Airs* for Violin and Orchestra.

In a letter to the publisher Simrock on July 30, 1880 explaining the work's appellation, Bruch wrote, "The title 'Fantasy' is very general, and as a rule refers to a short piece rather than to one in several movements (all of which, moreover, are fully worked-out and developed). However, this work cannot properly be called a concerto because the form of the whole is so completely free, and because folk-melodies are used." Abraham Veinus added, "Bruch operates freely with a set of Scottish folk melodies, distinguished, as such melodies are, by a wholesome simplicity and beauty. Grafted on to this is the kind of elaborate virtuoso technique which usually brings the house down. Bruch's harmonic idiom and his orchestration technique run to juicy, well-rounded and solidly set sonorities."

The *Fantasy*, composed for the celebrated virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate, is in four movements rather than the concerto's traditional three. The opening movement is divided almost equally between a solemn introduction and an elegant setting of the tune *Auld Rob Morris*. The music scholar Wilhelm Altmann, a Berlin friend of Bruch, said that the *Fantasy* had been inspired by the books of Sir Walter Scott. The prominence of the harp, with its bardic and folk associations, prompted Altmann to continue that this opening movement represents "an old bard who contemplates a ruined castle and laments the glorious times of old." The vigorous second movement, subtitled *Dance*, is based on the song *Hey, the Dusty Miller*. Connecting passages resembling recitative lead without pause to the next movement, a richly bedecked version of the touching Scottish love ballad *I'm a-doun for lack o' Johnnie*. The rousing finale uses the traditional war song *Scots wha hae*, which, according to legend, was sounded by Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.