



Regal Classics

On the first half of today's concert, music by two German composers provides us with a travelogue of Scotland: Mendelssohn's descriptive *Hebrides Overture* and Bruch's delightful *Scottish Fantasy*. After intermission, we'll hear one of the great symphonies of the 20th century, Sir William Walton's No. 1.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born 3 February 1809; Hamburg, Germany

Died 4 November 1847; Leipzig, Germany

The Hebrides Overture ("Fingal's Cave"), Op. 26

Composed: 1829-33

First performance: 14 May 1832; London, England

Last MSO performance: March 2016; Jun Märkl, conductor Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

In the summer of 1829, the 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn and his friend Karl Klingemann went on a walking tour of Scotland. They also traveled to the Hebrides Islands, off the country's west coast, and later to Fingal's Cave on the Island of Staffa. It is said that, after seeing the breathtaking scenery there, Mendelssohn composed the opening bars of his overture and sent them to his sister Fanny, writing, "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, I send you the following, which came into my head there." The composer completed the overture's first draft in Rome, late in 1830. Unhappy with this initial endeavor, he worked on the piece over the next few years. It was premiered in London in 1832, then further revised before its publication in 1833.

Set in sonata form, the overture does not tell a story, but rather evokes the sea and the scenery Mendelssohn encountered. The undulating rhythmic pattern, an arpeggiated fragment in B minor, depicts the sea's ebb and flow. Dramatic crescendi and sforzandi represent the crashing waves. The second theme, set in D major, first appears in the cellos and bassoons. It is unfettered and more expansive, deemed "the greatest melody Mendelssohn ever wrote" by the ever-quotable Sir Donald Francis Tovey. At the end of our voyage, the clarinet offers a wistful statement of the opening motive, then defers to the flute, who has the last word with its ascending B minor arpeggio above hushed pizzicato strings.

Recommended recording: George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Sony) 

MAX BRUCH

Born 6 January 1838; Cologne, Germany
Died 2 October 1920; Friedenau, Germany

Scottish Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 46

- Composed:** 1879-80
First performance: 22 February 1881; Liverpool England
Last MSO performance: May 2012; Christopher Warren-Green, conductor;
Jennifer Frautschi, violin
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns,
2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass
drum, cymbals), harp, strings
Approximate duration: 30 minutes

The catalog of German composer Max Bruch contains nearly 100 opus numbers, including three operas, melodious and idiomatic choral music (both sacred and secular), songs for voice and piano, and a wide variety of instrumental compositions. Perhaps because of their tunefulness and easy assimilation, many of his works now seem dated, with only first of two violin concertos, the *Scottish Fantasy*, and *Kol nidre* (Op. 47, for cello) remaining in the standard repertoire. (Throughout his life, the popularity of his Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor was a source of consternation for Bruch. That early work was written when the composer was just 28 years old.)

In his biography of the composer, Christopher Fifield tells us that Sir Walter Scott's writings were on Bruch's mind when he set to work on the *Scottish Fantasy*. It was published under the title *Fantasy for Violin with Orchestra and Harp, freely using Scottish Folk Melodies* (as rendered in English). The mention of the harp is significant, because Bruch associated the instrument with the ballads of old and, more specifically, with the folk music of the British Isles.

Set in four continuous movements, the *Fantasy* possesses the spaciousness and virtuosity of a violin concerto, though it is more rhapsodic in form. One of Bruch's friends later stated that its introduction took its inspiration from the image of "an old bard contemplating a ruined castle and lamenting the glorious times of old." Following the slow, sustained chords of the opening, the violin enters with a recitative-like solo; the mood brightens as the music moves from minor to major. In each of the movements, Bruch uses a Scottish folksong; the first, "Through the Wood, Laddie," is introduced here. It's an affecting melody, lushly developed and filled out with double stops from the soloist.

The lively scherzo employs a Scottish dance tune called "The Dusty Miller." Open-fifth drones in the bass provide a bagpipe-like sound, and Bruch ornaments the vigorous, straightforward melody with filigree from the solo violin. The tempo slows as a reminiscence of "Through the Wood, Laddie" takes us to the Andante sostenuto, based on "I'm a'Doun for Lack o' Johnnie." The composer's love of an expressive melody is on full display here.

The Finale bears the unusual marking *Allegro guerriero* (a "warlike" Allegro). It's appropriate, though, because Bruch incorporates the battle song "Scots, Wha Hae." A central *tranquillo* episode recalls the mood of the third movement, but it is soon dispelled by material from the Finale's opening measures. Following a blazing solo passage and a brief nod to material from the first movement, the *Fantasy* concludes with a statement of the warlike theme.

Recommended recording: Jascha Heifetz; Sir Malcolm Sargent, New Symphony Orchestra of London (RCA Red Seal) 🎧

WILLIAM WALTON

Born 29 March 1902; Oldham, England

Died 8 March 1983; Ischia, Italy

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat minor [corrected 1968]

Composed: 1932-35

First performance: 6 November 1935; London, England

Last MSO performance: MSO premiere

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets,
2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba,
2 timpani, percussion (cymbals, field drum, tam tam), strings

Approximate duration: 43 minutes

With successful works such as *Portsmouth Point* (1925), the *Viola Concerto* (1929), and the celebrated cantata *Belshazzar's Feast* (1931) already in his catalogue, William Walton, then in his early 30s, was eager to write a symphony; Beethoven would serve as his role model. When a request for such an opus came from conductor Sir Hamilton Harty, he set to work on the B-flat minor symphony early in 1932.

Work progressed slowly—over the course of two years he had completed only the first three movements. The Finale proved a huge challenge to Walton, mainly because he had spent much of the summer of 1934 writing his first film score, *Escape Me Never*, for an enticing fee. In December of that year, Harty performed the three completed movements of the symphony without the Finale. By then, its beginning and coda had been set down, but the composer was unhappy with the middle section. Fellow composer Constant Lambert then suggested a fugal episode, and the work was completed in the late summer of 1935.

An ominous timpani roll on B-flat opens the work. It foreshadows the turmoil of the first movement, one in which a passionate, personal drama is played out. We could analyze the music in terms of intervals, ostinato, pedal points, and the like, but it's useful to know that Walton's girlfriend, Baroness Imma von Doernberg, a young widow, left him for another man some time in 1934. The composer poured all his pain into the *Allegro assai*. It's an unrelentingly intense outpouring.

The scherzo is to be played "fast, with malice." In its dark and electrifying energy, one senses the bitterness and resentment of a lover scorned. The slow movement, *Andante* "with melancholy," opens with a dejected flute melody. After a second bittersweet theme is introduced by the clarinet, Walton intertwines them, leading to an impassioned climactic outburst. The music then diminishes and ends quietly as the flute sings a lament in C-sharp minor.

The Finale brings us back to B-flat, but this time in the major mode. The composer called it "a piece for the mob," but went on to say that "in some ways, I think the movement to be the best of the lot. At any rate, it will be the most popular, I think." There's a ceremonial mood to Walton's music here, one that presages *Crown Imperial* (1937), written for the coronation of King George VI. It's no surprise when, after the fugue, the regal music returns. A distant trumpet call is heard just before an onslaught of strings, brass, and percussion bring the symphony to its proud conclusion.

Recommended recording: Andre Previn, London Symphony Orchestra
(RCA Gold Seal) 

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.