

Stravinsky Violin Concerto | Works for **Violin & Piano**

audite

LIANA GOURDJIA

KATIA SKANAVI piano

Deutsche Radio Philharmonie | **Zsolt Nagy**

Chanson Russe 4:14
Danse Russe 2:52

Divertimento

I. Sinfonia 7:12
II. Danse suisse 5:23
III. Scherzo 3:17
IV. Pas de deux 3:41
V. Variation 1:08
VI. Coda 2:16

Suite italienne

I. Introduzione 2:19
II. Serenata 3:36
III. Tarantella 2:19
IV. Gavotta 3:44
V. Scherzino 1:26
VI. Minuetto e Finale 4:27

Berceuse 3:17

Tango 3:26

Violinkonzert

I. Toccata 6:01
II. Aria I 4:40
III. Aria II 5:17
IV. Capriccio 6:37

Prélude et Ronde des Princesses 6:09

Circus Polka 4:11



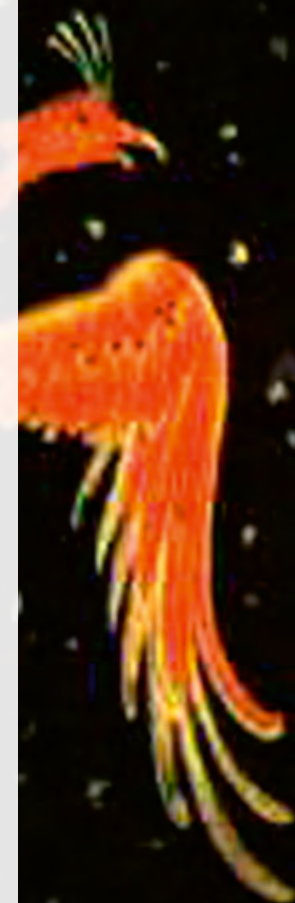
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major (1931) and Transcriptions for Violin and Piano

A violin concerto from the pen of Igor Stravinsky didn't seem to be a promising idea at first. It turned out that the composer, despite his remarkable creativity, felt he lacked the experience necessary for writing a violin concerto and taking full advantage of the instrument's possibilities in concertante style. Stravinsky explained his reticence at the time in the following words: "I am not a violinist and I was afraid that my slight knowledge of that instrument would not be sufficient to enable me to solve the many problems that would necessarily arise in the course of a work specially composed for it." Stravinsky was not entirely inexperienced in handling strings, however, a fact that he was aware of: "I was not a complete novice when it came to handling the Violin Concerto. In my pieces for string quartet, in many passages in the score of *Pulcinella*, but most of all in *The Soldier's Tale* I had the occasion to use the violin as a solo instrument and to become familiar with its technique."

Stravinsky's self-doubt went so far that he even solicited advice from Paul Hindemith, who was well-known as an accomplished violinist and violist: "I asked him whether the fact that I did not play the violin would not inevitably be to the disadvantage of my composition. He reassured me completely by saying that, on the contrary, he thought it would help me to avoid a routine technique and would give rise to ideas that would not be suggested by the familiar movement of the fingers."

It took some persuasion to change the composer's mind. He was supported and encouraged to go forward with the project from several sides at once. Stravinsky's publisher Willy Strecker from Schott Verlag, violinist Samuel Dushkin and his supporters, and American composer Blair Fairchild (who commissioned the piece) all sought to dispel his doubts. Violinist Samuel Dushkin (1891-1976) was willing to offer his assistance while the Violin Concerto was being composed, giving Stravinsky advice from the perspective of an experienced soloist, and this turned out to be very helpful (his collaboration on the solo part is explicitly noted in the score). Stravinsky and Dushkin had met in 1931, at Willy Strecker's home in Wiesbaden. The Polish-born violinist was 39 years old at the time. He had come to America as a child, where he had studied violin in New York with Leopold Auer and been one of Fritz Kreisler's few "official" pupils. He had already been successfully touring as a soloist for years, had often played in Europe, and was particularly interested in contemporary music. Both men became friends, and a fruitful artistic collaboration developed between them. Stravinsky noted that Dushkin had "a musical culture, a delicate understanding, and – in the exercise of his profession – an abnegation that is very rare."

Stravinsky thus wrote his Violin Concerto for Dushkin, who held the exclusive performance rights for five years. The work was composed in spring and summer in Voreppe, a small town near Grenoble where the composer owned a house. The premiere was directed by Stravinsky and took place on October 23, 1931 at the Haus des Rundfunks in Berlin. The soloist was Samuel Dushkin. In January 1932, Dushkin performed the American premiere with the Boston Symphony



Orchestra under the direction of Serge Koussevitsky, and the first recording featuring Dushkin, the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux, and Stravinsky was made in Paris in 1935.

Dushkin was able to skillfully reconcile Stravinsky's compositional ideas with the possibilities of the violin. Stravinsky repeatedly showed him what he had committed to paper. This could have been a whole page, sometimes half a page, sometimes just a few lines. Then they spoke about it. "Whenever he accepted one of my suggestions, even a simple change such as extending the range of the violin by stretching the phrase to the octave below and the octave above, Stravinsky would insist on altering the very foundations correspondingly. He behaved like an architect who, if asked to change a room on the third floor, had to go down to the foundations to keep the proportions of the whole structure."

In his conversations with his assistant Robert Craft, Stravinsky spoke extensively about his Violin Concerto in 1961 and categorized it: "The subtitles of my Concerto – *Toccata, Aria, Capriccio* – may suggest Bach, and so, in a superficial way, might the musical substance. I am very fond of the Bach Concerto for Two Violins, as the duet of the soloist with a violin from the orchestra in the last movement of my own Concerto may show. But my Concerto employs other duet combinations too, and the texture is almost always more characteristic of chamber music than of orchestral music. I did not compose a cadenza, not because I did not care about exploiting the violin virtuosity, but because the violin in combination was my real interest. But virtuosity for its own sake has only a small role in my Concerto, and the technical demands of the piece are relatively tame."

The concerto is written in four movements. Stravinsky did not include a cadenza where the soloist could have given full rein to his virtuosity. He had hinted to his publisher Willy Strecker that he was thinking of composing a truly virtuoso concerto. But he eventually decided to place much more emphasis on the interplay between the solo violin and the other instruments of the orchestra. All the same, Stravinsky's Violin Concerto is a brilliant and ingenious work with flashes of virtuosity in the outer movements, though this virtuosity is never the priority. In their calm serenity, the two aria movements remind us of Bach.

The Violin Concerto is a quintessential example of Stravinsky's "Neoclassicism," which is not interested in copying styles, but in creatively appropriating older models; in the process (and occasionally through moments of parodistic disassociation), something completely new is created. The movement titles clearly refer to the Baroque forms that have been borrowed from. *Toccata* and *Capriccio*, two motorically driven fast movements, frame the inner movements, the *Aria I* and *Aria II*, which are characterized above all by highly ornamented cantabile lines. The solo violin intones a striking wide chord, like a motto, at the beginning of each movement. Dushkin relates how this idea came to Stravinsky: "During the winter of 1930-31 I saw Stravinsky in Paris quite often. One day when we were lunching in a restaurant, Stravinsky took out a piece of paper and wrote down this chord (D-E-A) and asked me if it could be played. I had never seen a chord with such an enormous stretch, from E to the top A, and I said, "No". Stravinsky said sadly, "Quel dommage" (what a pity). After I got home, I tried it, and, to my astonishment, I found that in that register, the stretch of the eleventh was relatively easy to play, and the sound fascinated me. I telephoned Stravinsky at once to tell him that it could

be done. When the Concerto was finished more than six months later, I understood his disappointment when I first said “No”. This chord, in a different dress, begins each of the four movements. Stravinsky himself calls it his “passport” to that Concerto. The chord, incidentally, involves a “constellation of fifths”; three notes (here D, A, and E) standing at the interval of a fifth to one another (with octave displacement). This is one of Stravinsky’s favored cadential devices.”

Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto is not about thematic relationships, developments, climaxes, and points of culmination. First and foremost, it is about creating sequences of compositional elements, like in a collage. It is lively, sparkling, and lighthearted music with the transparency of a chamber work, and places “objective” expression above emotional subjectivity.

The collaboration between Stravinsky and Dushkin would continue to bear fruit. Immediately following the premiere of the Violin Concerto, Stravinsky began composing the *Duo Concertante*, his only original work for violin and piano. Then he made a series of transcriptions, working with Dushkin to create a repertoire for their concert tours together during the 1930s. A selection of these can be heard on this CD. The arrangement of the Berceuse from *The Firebird* was written in 1931, and the Danse Russe from *Petrushka* and *Suite italienne* followed in 1932, joined by the *Divertimento* in 1934. *Chanson Russe* is an arrangement of Parasha’s lament from the one-act opera *Mavra* that Stravinsky made in 1937, for his second America tour with Dushkin. The *Tango*, which took its inspiration from a traditional song, was written by Stravinsky in 1940 and published only as a piano piece. It was arranged by Dushkin for violin and piano.

In March 1932, Stravinsky and Dushkin performed their first concert together in Milan. Besides the arrangement of the Violin Concerto for violin and piano, the program included the *Pulcinella* Suite (“Suite d’après des thèmes, fragments et morceaux de Giambatista Pergolesi”), a transcription of passages from the ballet *Pulcinella* (1919). Stravinsky arranged the suite in 1925 for Polish violinist Paul Kochanski, later revising it further for Dushkin, who encouraged him to compose an additional movement, the Scherzino. The new version now bore the title *Suite italienne*. Stravinsky and Dushkin performed it for the first time on October 28, 1932 in Berlin, together with the *Duo concertante*. The *Suite italienne* draws from the model of an 18th century partita and has six movements: a march-like Introduzione, a Serenata resembling a Siciliana, an energetic Tarantella, a Gavotte, the lively Scherzino, and Menuetto e Finale.

The *Divertimento* for violin and piano is an arrangement of music from Stravinsky’s ballet *The Fairy’s Kiss* (1928), based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale *The Ice Maiden*. The ballet music is an homage to Tchaikovsky, a composer Stravinsky greatly admired and source of inspiration to him. When the ballet was premiered in Paris in 1928, it was not crowned with success, but the music was immortalized when Stravinsky later transcribed it for orchestra. The *Divertimento* essentially follows the plot, and with its four movements (Sinfonia, Danses suisses, Scherzo, and Pas de deux), is something like an abbreviated version of the ballet.



LIANA GOURDJIA

Liana Gourdjia was introduced to the violin at the age of four by her grandmother. Her debut as a soloist with an orchestra was at the age of nine. At the age of six, she appeared on Moscow television as a rising star and has since performed concertos and recitals in many prestigious venues throughout Russia including the Great Hall and the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, and the Philharmonic Hall in Saint Petersburg. She became a laureate of the Tchaikovsky International Competition for Young Artists in Sendai in Japan at the age of fourteen and subsequently appeared numerous times on television and radio programmes dedicated to presenting young stars in Russia and Europe.

Liana Gourdjia began her studies at the Central Music School at the Moscow State Conservatory in the class of Iryna Bochkova and then Maya Glezarova. Upon graduating with distinction, she was awarded a scholarship to study at the Cleveland Institute of Music with professors David and Linda Cerone. She received an Artist Diploma from the Indiana University, Bloomington, studying in the class of Jaime Laredo and the chamber music classes of Menahem Pressler and Janos Starker.

Liana Gourdjia is winner of the Sion-Valais International Competition and has also won prizes at the Michael Hill, Corpus Christi, Hudson Valley and Kingsville International Competitions. She was awarded a Residency with the Montgomery Symphony in the U.S., where she served as a soloist, concertmaster and recitalist and recorded a CD with pianist Efi Hackmey. As a laureate of the New Names and Vladimir Spivakov Foundations in Moscow, she also made recordings in Russia.

She has soloed with numerous orchestras in Europe, Russia and the U.S. under conductors such as François-Xavier Roth, James Gaffigan, Sergei Stadler and Shlomo Mintz. Liana Gourdjia was invited to festivals including The Marlboro Music Festival, Printemps des Arts in Monte Carlo, Musique de Chambre de Lyon, the 92/Y in New York, Campos do Jordão in Brazil and the International Music Festival in Colmar. As an active chamber musician, she has collaborated with renowned artists including e.g. Jaime Laredo, Alexander Melnikov, Richard Goode, Lawrence Power, and François-Frédéric Guy. A proponent of contemporary music, she is a member of Paris-based Ensemble Variances with whom she is regularly on tour in Europe and the U. S.

Liana Gourdjia is a professor at Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris.



KATIA SKANAVI

Katia Skanavi began her musical studies in Moscow at the School for Gifted Children, and at the age of 12 she gave her first public concert with orchestra in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, performing Kabalevsky's third Piano Concerto under the composer's direction. On her 18th birthday she became a multiple prize-winner in the finals of the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud Competition in Paris. Appearances followed in the major international concert venues, including the Musikverein and Konzerthaus Vienna, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Suntory Hall in Tokyo. In spite of her early successes she continued her studies at the Conservatoire National in Paris and the Moscow Conservatory, later on at the Cleveland Institute. In 1994 she won the Maria Callas Competition in Greece, in 1997 she was finalist at the Van Cliburn Competition.

Katia Skanavi is a favoured partner of musicians such as Yuri Bashmet and Gidon Kremer, both as a concerto soloist and a chamber musician. She followed invitations to solo recital and orchestral engagements in Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Luxembourg, Madrid, Moscow and Paris and has appeared at numerous European festivals including La Roque d'Anthéron, the Lockenhaus Festival and the Kammermusikfestival Stavanger. Other successful engagements include her debut at the Berlin Philharmonie with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester and concerts with the Orchestre National de France under Kurt Masur. Her most notable American performances include recitals in New York, Ravinia and Washington, and concerto appearances with the Symphony Orchestras of Cincinnati, Dallas, Indianapolis and San Francisco. In addition, she played with the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra under Oleg Caetan, the Bournemouth Orchestra under Dmitri Sitkovetsky, and the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Michel Tabachnik. Katia Skanavi made her successful debut in Australia with a three week national recital tour for Musica Viva.

Katia Skanavi's repertoire is an eclectic mix of music from the classical period to contemporary music. Her numerous recordings received great critical acclaim, e.g. her Chopin live-recital was named 'Classical Recording of the Month' by Gramophone Magazine.

ZSOLT NAGY

Zsolt Nagy studied conducting with István Párkai at the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest. Further studies with Péter Eötvös led him to become Eötvös' assistant at the Institute for New Music of the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe and for numerous other projects including Guest Professor at the International Eötvös Institute. He has been active as an opera and concert conductor since 1987 and leader of various orchestra projects and masterclasses for conductors in European, North- and South-American, and Asian conservatoires since 1992. In 1999 he was appointed Chief Conductor and Musical Advisor of the Israel Contemporary Players. From 2002 to 2014 he was Professor of Conducting at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Dance in Paris (CNSMDP). Zsolt Nagy appears regularly on stages of four continents, working with outstanding soloists, conducting leading orchestras, ensembles and choirs. He has premiered over 800 new compositions, has made a number of radio and CD recordings and has received among others a special award for excellence in performing new Israeli music.



A painting depicting a woman in a vibrant red dress reaching out towards a large, glowing phoenix. The phoenix is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a dark, starry night sky. The woman is positioned in the lower left, looking up at the bird. The overall scene is illuminated with warm, golden light, creating a sense of wonder and aspiration.

**DEUTSCHE RADIO PHILHARMONIE
SAARBRÜCKEN KAISERSLAUTERN**

The Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern presents concert series in the cities of Saarbrücken and Kaiserslautern. It makes regular appearances across the border in France and Luxembourg, as well as in Brussels, Mainz, Karlsruhe, and Mannheim. Tours in recent years have taken the orchestra to Switzerland, China, and Japan, and in 2016 it will be visiting South Korea for the third time, followed by an appearance at the Warsaw Beethoven Festival in 2017.

The principal conductor of the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie is Karel Mark Chichon, who hails from Britain. His predecessor was Christoph Poppen, who served in the position since the orchestra was founded in 2007. As principal guest conductor, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski maintains a close relationship with the orchestra, and was named conductor laureate in 2015 at the age of 92.

The Deutsche Radio Philharmonie was created in 2007 out of the fusion of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Saarbrücken (SR) and Rundfunkorchester Kaiserslautern (SWR). A core repertoire centered on Classical and Romantic works, regular premieres of contemporary music, and pieces commissioned by the orchestra form the ensemble's main focus. Many CDs from the orchestra's extensive discography have won international awards. With the Saarbrücken Composer's Workshop, the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie provides young composers with a platform for performing their first orchestral works.



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