

# Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”



HARTFORD  
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SEPTEMBER 2015

## Masterworks #1: Focus on Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26



**What do Roseanne Cash, Janis Joplin, Jim Henson, Steve Martin, Carl Orff, Engelbert Humperdinck and John Pachelbel all have in common with Max Bruch?**

**Each was considered a “one-hit wonder.”\***

Whether it's contemporary music or classical, both genres have had their share of “one-hit wonders.” While a “top 40” hit is a great achievement, the downside is profound: a well-known piece can turn into “too much of a good thing.”

And so it was for Max Bruch. To the composer's great chagrin, despite his impressive body of work, Bruch became so completely and successfully identified with his first violin concerto that audiences and orchestras virtually ignored nearly everything else he wrote.

A child prodigy who began composing at age 11, by age 14 Max had composed a string quartet and symphony that secured him a prize: the right to study with Karl Reinecke and Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne.<sup>i</sup> All signs pointed to a brilliant future. The successful version of Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor was anything but an effortless “hit.” Bruch withdrew his first version of the concerto after just a single performance in early 1866; when the scheduled soloist cancelled due to last-minute illness, the concertmaster's less-than stellar performance of the piece convinced Bruch to “tweak” his composition.<sup>ii</sup>

The final version of Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 premiered in Bremen in January of 1868 to audience enthusiasm and critical acclaim. And today, the piece remains not only Bruch's best-known composition, but one of the most frequently performed in the violin concerti repertoire.<sup>iii</sup>

Happily ever after? Not exactly. Yes, the piece brought Bruch well-deserved fame, praise, recognition, but it also brought him intense torment and frustration. Bruch composed over 200 works in his lifetime, yet his first Violin Concerto essentially, “eclipsed all else he did.”<sup>iv</sup>

Bruch's son recalls one of his father's outbursts:

*“The G-minor concerto again! I couldn't bear to hear it even once more!”<sup>v</sup>*

Bruch's mounting frustration was voiced not only to his family, but to his publisher Simrock, in 1888:

*“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 tell them: “I cannot listen to this concerto anymore...Go away and play the other concertos, which are just as good, if not better.”<sup>vi</sup>*

Max Bruch



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And to make it even worse, Bruch, doubting the strength and future success of his first violin concerto, had sold the work outright to a publisher, August Crazz!<sup>vii</sup> Rubbing salt in the wound, this gifted composer received little more than mere tokens for what would become his greatest "hit" of all time. As a last attempt, Bruch did try to recoup some income from his composition by trying to sell his original manuscript in the United States, but he died before receiving any payment.<sup>viii</sup>

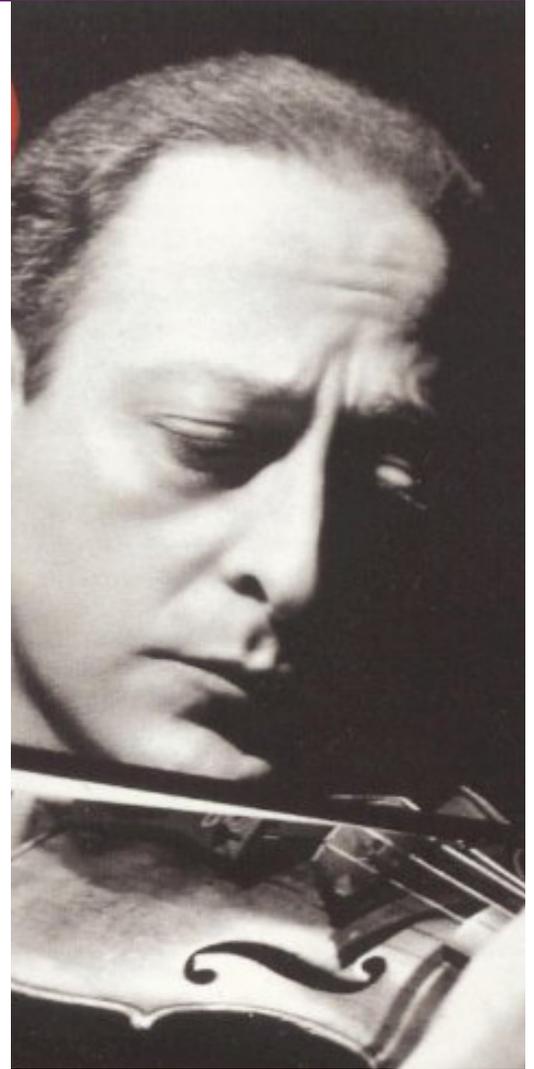
In the 21st century, Max Bruch, an esteemed composer with a 200 piece repertoire list and respected in text books, is still best known for his first violin concerto; alas, his second most popular violin concerto called "The Scottish Fantasy" trails as a distant second. Bruch's Kol Nidrei for cello and orchestra is based on Hebrew themes and well-known in the cello repertoire. But sadly, the rest of his compositions are rarely performed and unfamiliar to anyone but the most serious students and musicologists.

Come join the HSO's season-opening Masterworks performances, October 1 – 4, 2015, and hear violinist Caroline Goulding perform Bruch's iconic concerto. And judge for yourself if the composition deserves the intense popularity heaped upon it for more than one hundred and fifty years.

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*Heifetz – from his recording of the Bruch Violin Concerto*



**\*"A one-hit wonder is a person or act known mainly for only a single success." Wikipedia.**

<sup>i</sup> "Max Bruch-Violin Concerto No. 3 in D Minor." The Tutor Pages-Classical Violin Help. The Tutor Pages, 01 Dec. 2011. Web. 07 July 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> "The Story of Max Bruch's First Violin Concerto." Classic FM. This Is Global Limited, 2015. Web. 16 June 2015.

<sup>iii</sup> "Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 02 Jun. 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. "Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor Op. 26." The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, 2013. Web. 02 June 2015.

<sup>v</sup> "Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26." The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2015. Web. 01 June 2015.

<sup>vi</sup> The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. "Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor Op. 26." The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, 2013. Web. 02 June 2015.

<sup>vii</sup> "The Story of Max Bruch's First Violin Concerto." Classic FM. This Is Global Limited, 2015. Web. 16 June 2015, "Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26." The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2015. Web. 01 June 2015.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid