

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes  
February 10, 2018  
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Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Concerto No.1 for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Op.26

*Bruch's first violin concerto was completed in 1866, and the final version was performed for the first time by soloist Joseph Joachim in January 1868.*

Max Bruch is known today primarily for two solo violin works, the G minor concerto heard here, and the *Scottish Fantasy*, and his *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra. However, Bruch was a tremendously successful composer in his day, with a catalog of nearly a hundred works that included three operas, three symphonies, and many solo pieces, sacred and secular choral works, art songs, and chamber works. He was a well-regarded conductor and one of the most sought-after composition teachers in Europe—Ottorino Respighi and Ralph Vaughan Williams were among his more famous pupils.

Bruch made the first sketches for a violin concerto as early as 1857. He finished the work early in 1866, and in April of that year, conducted a preliminary version at a benefit concert in Koblenz, where the solo part was played by a violinist from Cologne, Otto von Königsglöw. Bruch made several significant revisions after hearing this performance, even considering recasting the work as a “Fantasy” because of its relatively free form. Finally, Bruch solicited the advice of the greatest Austrian virtuoso of the day, Joseph Joachim, who was impressed, and suggested several additional changes. Joachim played the premiere of the revised concerto, and Bruch dedicated the published score to him. Almost forty years later, Joachim cited the Bruch G minor as one of the “four German violin concertos”—alongside the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, and Mendelssohn—calling it the “richest, most seductive” of the four.

The concerto is set in the traditional three movements, but none of the three follows a strict Classical form. Bruch titles the first movement “*Prelude*” and it serves as a kind of extended free-form introduction to the second movement. Two ideas are introduced and briefly developed: a very lyrical solo line played over a quiet orchestral accompaniment and a contrasting melody, played above *pizzicato* basses. The prelude builds to a peak and then dies away, leaving space for a lovely cadenza, which ties directly into the second movement (*Adagio*). The *Adagio* is carried entirely by the solo part, which plays almost without pause until a brief orchestral passage in the middle. The violin introduces three unhurried and beautiful themes, developing each in turn.

Joachim placed this piece alongside the more famous violin concertos of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Brahms, and it is in the finale (*Allegro energico*) that the resemblance is clearest. Though Bruch does not use the same Classical Rondo form as the others, the spirit is the same. After an opening orchestral flourish, the violin introduces the main theme—a lively Gypsy-style melody played in double stops. The family resemblance

between this and the main theme of Brahms's finale is particularly close, though Brahms's concerto was written some ten years later. The movement proceeds in a loose sonata form, with a slightly more solemn second subject. The main theme dominates throughout in both the solo part and accompaniment, eventually becoming the basis for a flashy and exhilarating coda.

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The BraziLionaires is a Latin fusion band fronted by vocalist Dove Benoit and guitarist "Rico" Wayne Johnson. Their music has been described as a rich blend of Latin rhythms under a layer of jazzy, sophisticated pop. The band is backed by a stellar lineup of musicians including Andy Crawford (bass), Tom Marko (drums), Jose Reyes (percussion) Todd Kelly (trumpet), and Jim Curless (tenor saxophone).

Forming in Central Illinois in 2012, the group garnered success with their first album "*Algo Diferente*" (2015), which was picked up by Pandora & Spotify. Now based out of Nashville, the band is working on their second album "*Proximo*", due out in 2018.

The BraziLionaires are excited to take their music from the jazz stage to the symphonic hall with their performance entitled "*Passion and Amor*". Rico and Dove's original compositions have reached new heights with the opulent orchestration and arrangement by Scott Hall (8 selections) and Tom Marko (2 selections). Hall is the Director of Jazz studies at Columbia University in Chicago and orchestrated the music of the great jazz pianist/composer Ramsey Lewis. Marko is the Director of Jazz Studies at Illinois State University and is a composer and jazz recording artist on the Summit Records label.

In "*Passion and Amor*", the BraziLionaires set out to create an auditory "telenovela" for the listener. Through these ten compositions, the audience is taken on a journey through desire, heartbreak, and hope - everything that comprises a true love story.

This story starts appropriately with the upbeat samba "**TakeOff**", introducing the audience to budding young lovers. The trumpet fanfare cues the arrival of a new romance: "You make me high, just the thought of you gives the urge to fly!" The music carries a sense of passion and excitement - the unknown possibilities to come, ending with the violin section playing the characteristic montuno exuberantly announcing that love has arrived!

Quickly the listener is moved into a rhythmic bolero, reminiscent of a heart beat. In **Venetian Blinds**, the darkness of passion is uncovered: obsession. "I can't deny the one who waits for me". What begins as a quiet conversation between the horn and trombone suddenly leads to a dizzying cacophony: will the lovers prevail? With the flute trailing at the end, the audience is left on the edge of their seats in anticipation.

In **Blue October**, the full orchestra sets the scene for the lovers with the tympani rolling into a lone guitar that strums a slow Bossa nova. This foreshadows the mood which is carried throughout the song with a haunting melody and heartbreaking lyrics: “Winter seems the time to go, leaving footprints in the snow...It never crossed my mind at all, you’d leave in Fall”. The second section of the piece abruptly shifts to a fast samba like the quickening heartbeat of the jilted lover hoping for reconciliation.

A flourish of strings and thundering tympani like rain clouds, are parted by a lone Bflat clarinet, denouncing love and romance. The defiant samba of **Tudo Bem** (It’s All Good), lets the audience clearly know that the jilted lover doesn’t need the storm of love. “Everything’s just fine since you’ve been gone!” The lover’s angst is truly felt in the last notes where the entire orchestra plays dissonant chords that end just as suddenly they began.

The regret of leaving can be heard in the passionate music of the instrumental bolero aptly named “**Saudade for Her**”. The strings play somber descending whole notes capturing a longing for the past. “Saudade” is a Portuguese word that has no true English equivalent but speaks of nostalgia and desire. This melancholy is only broken briefly by an excited up tempo Tumbao section featuring a marimba and the brass - could the spark still be there? The return of the pensive strings at the end suggests it truly may be over...

Great despair is felt at the entrance of **Follow You**, performed by only voice, guitar, and a single flute, “You’ve sailed on, to the land of love of laughter, if only you would let me follow...” More than heartache, the pain of loss is endured through the entire Bossa nova with a haunting bass line like a metronome of time that feels endless without love. They plod along...separate, but aching for their love, “without you I've lost my muse”.

**El Cambio**, with its rhythm based on the Reggaton style, is a welcome reprieve for the audience. The syncopation of the bass line along with dramatic percussion makes it almost impossible to sit still. No longer is there despair, but hope and encouragement. The lyrics, in Spanish, suggest one lover is taunting the other, roughly translated, “You can change everything about yourself, except the way you feel about me”.

In the entrance to **Used 2 Be**, an intriguing exchange between the wind instruments leads the audience into curious anticipation. This syncopated samba is a conviction of love, “It used to be so you, it used to be so me, it felt like everything was meant to be”. The brass can be heard repeating the signature line, signifying the lovers replaying history over and over again, trying to reconcile what went wrong.

With all of its drama and fervor, **La Libertad** (translated: freedom) is an exaltation, asking for forgiveness of the past. The fiery passion of this rhythm, based on the Catalan rumba, is not to be understated. The rhythm section drives the music and emphasizes a

desire to move forward. “In my dreams, I imagine what it means to be carefree, as I spread my wings to fly! Free from blame, and forgiven for mistakes of yesterday, heading for blue skies.” With dramatic descending scales in the background, soloists announce that the lovers are cleared for take off onto new adventures.

In the finale, **The Encounter**, the lovers find themselves face to face once again. With a rhythm described as a “Latin waltz”, a conversation ensues. The awkwardness of the moment is easily felt as the words are so careful, yet each line seems to cut the former one off. They admit that their romance was imperfect and there is forgiveness of the past. Ultimately the lovers part ways...it is forever, or just for now?