

Ida Haendel

Max Bruch 1838-1920

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO.1 IN G MINOR, OP.26

I. Vorspiel (Allegro moderato) -

II. Adagio -

III. Finale (Allegro energico)

Recorded: 4 October 1948, No. 1 Studio, Abbey Road

Producer: Walter Legge; Engineer: Douglas Larter

2EA 13310-15; C 3802-4

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MAJOR, OP.61[†]

I. Allegro ma non troppo (Cadenza by Joachim)

II. Larghetto -

III. Rondo (Cadenza by Joachim)

Recorded: 15 & 16 September 1949, No. 1 Studio, Abbey Road

Producer: Walter Legge; Engineer: Robert Beckett

2EA 14172-82; C 4126-31

Ida Haendel, violin

Philharmonia Orchestra

conducted by **Rafael Kubelik**

[†]There is some distortion on the original tapes of the Beethoven Concerto which, unfortunately, it has proved impossible to treat.

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IDA HAENDEL PLAYS BRUCH & BEETHOVEN CONCERTOS

When Ida Haendel entered EMI's Studio No.1, at Abbey Road, London, on 4 October 1948, it was an important moment for her. She was then only in her early twenties, but she had already become a very experienced artist on the concert platform, having played in public since the age of five. She was also a seasoned recording artist, having made records, including concerto repertoire, for another company between 1940 and 1947. This, however, was her most prestigious recording engagement to date, as a new HMV artist. Britain's finest orchestra, the three-year-old Philharmonia, was in attendance, and the conductor was Rafael Kubelik.

Throughout the years when she recorded for Decca, she had always wanted to make records for EMI, and at length, in 1948, her father decided to approach Walter Legge, who at that time was acting as a producer for both HMV and Columbia, and had been given the task of finding new artists for both companies (though Columbia in particular), in the aftermath of the Second World War. He at once made a recommendation to his superiors within EMI that Ida Haendel should be offered an HMV contract, and the deal was soon struck. Haendel was to make some recordings of shorter pieces, with Gerald Moore as piano accompanist, but more importantly, the agreement also stipulated that she should make two concerto recordings for HMV within a year.

It was an important time for Kubelik, too, for only a month earlier he had left his native Czechoslovakia and its new communist regime in order to make a career in the west. He had just made his recording debut with the Philharmonia, on the previous day, 3 October, conducting for Moura Lympany in Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No.1; and on the next day, 5 October, he would start to record Dvořák's Eighth Symphony, followed by the same composer's Cello Concerto with Pierre Fournier (a performance available on Testament SBT 1016). Only when these sessions were completed would EMI decide whether to offer Kubelik a new contract: his existing contract to make records with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra was now obviously void. In fact he made a great impression on company representatives and especially on the Philharmonia players, so a renewed offer was soon made.

Kubelik had made a previous post-war visit to London, in early 1946, and it was then that he had worked with Ida Haendel for the first time, conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra for her in the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto at a concert in the Royal Albert Hall. The young violinist had just returned from her first tour of the United States, and she was at once struck by Kubelik's exceptional musical gifts and the warmth of his personality. However, at rehearsal, she was taken aback by the conductor's quiet observations on one or two details in her playing, which he said were at odds with the orchestra's role in shaping the interpretation. Such things had never been said to Ida Haendel by a conductor colleague before, but on reflection she realised the worth and positive helpfulness of Kubelik's observations. So, when discussions of the two concerto recordings took place she asked Walter Legge if Kubelik could be her conductor. Legge, who had made recordings with the conductor in Prague two years earlier, and thus already knew how fine a musician he was, readily agreed.

Both the Bruch First and the Beethoven Concertos were already very much at the centre of Ida Haendel's repertoire at the time of the recordings. Her first encounter with the Beethoven had come at a very early age, when she took part in a competition open only to child violinists, held in Warsaw, for the Huberman Prize. Even at that stage in her infant career, in the early 1930s, she had already met Huberman himself, and, although she was very much overawed by the great violinist's presence, had impressed him enormously by her playing. The competition was the first occasion when Haendel played with an orchestra: she duly won the Prize, and became famous overnight throughout Poland.

The Bruch sessions, produced by Walter Legge, went well, and 22 years later, in her autobiography, *Woman with Violin* (Gollancz, London: 1970), Ida Haendel wrote, ‘When Kubelik, Legge and I listened to the playbacks we were all pleased with the results. Walter Legge left Kubelik and myself to our own devices most of the time during the recording; if he once made a remark, I found it sound and intelligent. There was only one criticism I had of the recording: I found the sound of the violin blended too much with that of the orchestra.’

The Bruch Concerto was issued on three plum label 78s in November 1948, only a month after the recording, and the performance was well received. Lionel Salter, in ‘Gramophone’, wrote, ‘Ida Haendel takes the stage as to the manner born: her tone has never been more opulent, her technique more brilliant, her bow more lively (listen to her *spiccato* at the start of the finale)’ . Kubelik and the Philharmonia were also praised: ‘Such superb and vital playing, such bite and youthful ardour, such model accompanying, such perfectly graded tone, might well be held up as examples to us all’.

It was not until September 1949 that Haendel and Kubelik recorded their second concerto together, the Beethoven. Walter Legge was again the producer, but this time there was more delay in the issue of the records, which were not made available until the end of 1951. This was unfortunate, for by this time Decca and other companies had gained an advantage over EMI by building up a substantial catalogue of records in the new LP medium. Ida Haendel’s Beethoven Concerto was only issued in the awkward format of six double-sided and one single-sided 78s. The performance was praised for its musical wisdom and technique, and was compared favourably with some pretty stiff competition, which included Fritz Kreisler, Jascha Heifetz, Yehudi Menuhin, Josef Szigeti and Bronislaw Huberman. But the 78rpm record was already almost obsolete, and the set did not make the impact that it should have done. Only in the USA did both the Beethoven and Bruch concerto recordings appear on LP.

Nearly 40 years later Haendel and Kubelik both spoke of their musical collaboration in a programme made for Canadian television. In her tribute to Kubelik, Haendel said, ‘I was enchanted by his music-making. He opened my eyes to many, many things’. Kubelik’s appreciation of Haendel was equally warm: ‘She is an extraordinary woman. She is not only a great artist, but I always felt that she wanted to get to the core of things and find the real musical understanding of composers.’

Ida Haendel had to wait three and a half years before making her next concerto recording for EMI, which was the Brahms Concerto with Sergiu Celibidache and the London Symphony Orchestra (available with Haendel’s recording of the Tchaikovsky Concerto on Testament SBT 1038). In retrospect such neglect seems strange, for Haendel had surely proved her abilities in the recording studio at the highest level, and deserved more frequent opportunities.

Ida Haendel has consented to the reissue of both these early concerto recordings on CD, but wishes to make it clear that they represent her approach to both works as she interpreted them over four decades ago, and not as she performs them now.