

PHCD

104

Benjamin Britten

SCOTTISH BALLAD, Op. 26

1 13:06

Bohuslav Martinu

CONCERTO for TWO PIANOS AND ORCHESTRA

2 Allegro non troppo 6:14 3 Adagio 9:59 4 Allegro 6:28

5 Fantasia for Two Pianos 6:53

6 Three Czech Dances 3:28 7 4:55 8 4:57

Joshua Pierce and Dorothy Jonas, pianists
The Luxembourg Radio Symphony Orchestra
Ettore Stratta, Conductor

DDD

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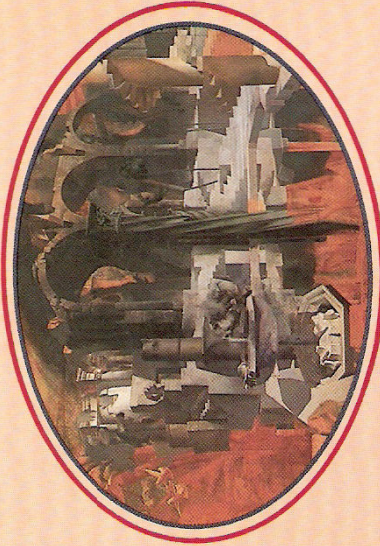
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Scottish Ballad

Bohuslav Martinu

Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra
Fantasia for Two Pianos • Three Czech Dances



Joshua Pierce and Dorothy Jonas, pianists
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Edward Benjamin Britten

The **Scottish Ballad**, is one of Britten's early works, preceding the lone *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* by about four years. Written in 1941 while the young composer was staying in California, it received its premiere performance on November 28 in Cincinnati. For several years the work was included in the repertoire of Clifford Curzon and Britten when performing as a duo-pianist team. Though occasionally performed in Europe since, it has basically fallen into an obscurity ill-deserved for such a brief, felicitous piece - waiting almost 40 years to the day of its composition, for a recording.

Featuring brilliantly written solo parts, the *Ballad* is in one movement, divided into three smaller sections. The first offers spare and terse variations on an ancient Scottish air - "Dundee," while the second section is based on a "Pibroch," a Scottish funeral march here evoked by relentless repetition in the pianos and a building ominous mood punctuated by mournful outcries from the orchestra. A whipcracking version of the Highland reel in which the pianos and orchestra try to outdo and outrun each other in virtuosity concludes the work.

Concertos are relatively rare in the Britten oeuvre: including the piano and violin concertos, the *Diversions for the Left Hand* and, stretching it a bit, the *Cello Symphony*. The neglect is not hard to account for: after Britten's 1945 success with *Peter Grimes* the die was cast and thereafter the public - and the composer himself - thought of Britten as an "opera man." The world is, of course, infinitely richer because he focused so consistently on the lyric theatre, producing arguably the greatest English vocal works since Purcell. Still, one wishes he had chosen to write more for piano and orchestra while rejoicing in the re-discovery of the present work.

Bohuslav Martinu

An account of Bohuslav Martinu's beginnings seems better suited to the opening chapters of a romantic novel than to the factual description of a man's life. He was born in the tower of St. Jacob's Church in the little Bohemian town of Policka, in 1890. His father had, in addition to his vocation of cobbler, the civic duty of fire-watchman for the area. The tower, as the highest vantage point available, became the family's residence. At six, Martinu was studying the violin, his teacher being the local tailor. The village schoolhouse found him a most infrequent visitor. By the age of ten, music had become so much a part of his life that he had mastered several 19th Century violin concerti and had written a string quartet.

When he reached the age of sixteen, wealthy friends of the family agreed to underwrite the young man's studies at the Prague Conservatory. He was, however, unable to abide the rigid disciplines imposed there. At this early stage of his career, Martinu began to feel the words with which he was to

greet his first American pupils nearly forty years later: "The textbooks have all the correct answers and they can't produce a measure of living music." He spent the better part of his conservatory days, like Dvorak before him, attending concerts and plays and reading poetry. In 1913, he joined the Czech Philharmonic as a second violinist.

In 1914 Martinu went "into hiding" (in his home town) to avoid Austrian Army service in World War I. Like other Czech nationalists, he felt it was morally wrong to bear arms against the allies. With the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the forming of the Czech state in 1919, he resumed his career with the Czech Philharmonic and also decided to have another go, part-time, at the formal study of composition, this time under the personal supervision of Joseph Suk, son-in-law of Dvorak and the Prague Conservatory's most respected teacher.

In 1923, Martinu again bolted the formalism of the Conservatory, quitting the orchestra to go to Paris on a government stipend. His projected stay of three months lengthened into nearly seventeen years, much of it as a student of the only teacher from whom he was ever able to receive any useful assistance, Albert Roussel (though, characteristically, he couldn't quite manage the discipline the French modernist required of his pupils). Martinu married a Paris dressmaker in 1931 and settled down to the life of a starving composer. He was largely unknown to the public but his accomplishments were noted and appreciated by his musical contemporaries. Slowly he began to make his music more widely known and varied conductors including Serge Koussevitsky, Vaclav Talich and Charles Munch began to champion his works. Despite occasional commissions from friends, however, Martinu still was having trouble making ends meet when the Nazis overran France.

June 10, 1940 was a cataclysmic day in the life of Paris. Armies were poised in the northern suburbs, ready to march into the city. At every railroad and bus station in the city, crowds jammed the waiting rooms in hopes of getting *something* going south. Two of these refugees-to-be were the 50-year-old Czech born composer and his wife, Charlotte, on the run because Martinu had been branded a traitor by Hitler's puppet government in Czechoslovakia. Now a resident of Paris for more than 15 years, he had ignored a government order to return to Czechoslovakia with his French-born wife.

The capitulation of France was so sudden that the Martinus showed up at the railroad station with only one suitcase between them. Left behind in their apartment were most of their belongings and dozens of musical manuscripts. They really didn't know where they were going; like hundreds of others at the station that day, they'd take any train going south. To see them off, and give M. Martinu a hand with his luggage, an old handyman came along. Known affectionately as Pere Gogo, the old man who often ran errands for the composer or fixed a kitchen cabinet for Mme. Martinu volunteered to run back to their apartment and bring back whatever additional baggage and manuscripts he could. But while he was gone, police locked the gates to the station, already jammed with thousands of bodies.

Wandering around the rail yards while waiting to see if there'd be any standing room on the next scheduled train, Martinu discovered an unscheduled train about to leave. And - best of all - it was almost empty. He found his wife and they jumped aboard.

The train took them to Villefard, where they spent the night with conductor Charles Munch. The next day, they headed for Aix-en-Provence, then still in Free France (within days, all of southern France came under the control of the Nazis through the provisional government of Vichy). Promptly upon their arrival, Martinu applied for an exit visa. Friends in America, hearing that he was in unoccupied France, wrote that they would arrange passage to New York.

The visa request was turned down by the provisional government. In Aix, the Martinus were desolate. In New York, the musical community was angry. The United States had not yet broken diplomatic relations with either Vichy or Berlin, and the musicians put pressure on the State Department, which in turn suggested to the French and Germans that they reconsider.

They did, on January 7, 1941. So, at 3 a.m. the following morning, the Martinu made their way through the deserted streets of Marseilles to catch a train to Madrid. Between them, they carried only the one bag they had brought from Paris. From Madrid, they travelled to Lisbon, where they had to wait three months for space on a ship. Finally, on March 31, 1941, they landed in New York.

Martinu was welcomed into the musical life of New York with open arms. In Paris, the press had never paid any attention to him. In New York, reporters wanted to interview him. A friend offered him the use of his home in Pleasantville, N.Y. There, the composer met conductor George Szell and showed him the score for his new *Sinfonietta*. The two men promptly set to work revising it for performance the following year.

But it was to be Koussevitzky with whom he would work most closely, preparing a number of works for Boston Symphony Orchestra programs in Symphony Hall and Tanglewood.

Martinu's 'American Period' can, in fact, be said to have begun with a performance of his *Symphony No. 1*, commissioned by the admiring Koussevitzky and played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on November 13, 1942. Not that the composer's art was unknown in the United States; to the contrary: Koussevitzky had first introduced Martinu's music to the U.S. as early as 1927 and 28, when performances of his *Bagarre (Turnuit, Allegro for Orchestra)* and the *Rhapsody for Orchestra* were premiered at the Berkshire Festival in Tanglewood.

The war years in America were prolific ones for the composer: 1943 brought forth the present *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, the *Violin Concerto* - commissioned by Mischa Elman -, the *Memorial to Lidice*, the *Symphony No. 2* and *Memorial Stanzas* for violin and piano, dedicated to Albert Einstein and played by the famous scientist with Robert Casadesus at the former's house in Princeton, N.J.

Inspired by the talents and influence of the acclaimed pianists Pierre Luboschutz and Genia Nemenoff, the *Two-Piano Concerto*, composed in New York in January and February of 1943, is fiendishly difficult, infected with a kind of cataclysmic glee. Reflecting the general tumult of the apocalyptic war years and, perhaps, the Paris hair's-breadth escape, this virile, assertive work includes elements of the composer's prewar neo-baroque style, augmented by a songlike directness, influenced by Czech folk music. The rapid toccata-like fire of the first and third movements contrasts with the power-in-repose mesmerism of the second.

In 1948, Martinu returned to Paris and, like many a refugee before him, found that it was not the city he had loved ten years before. In the fall he was back in New York. In 1953 he left Paris again - and came back after 18 months. One of the attractions on this side of the Atlantic was his work at the Berkshire Music Festival, located by now in Lenox, Massachusetts. He loved the pastoral beauty of Lenox and nearby Great Barrington, where he could relax, teach and compose as the fancy took him. The piano concerto form seems to have held a special fascination for Martinu, especially in his last years. The *Piano Concerto No. 4* was completed in January 1956, shortly before the composer embarked on a final trip to Europe. The *Piano Concerto No. 5* ('*Fantasia Concertante*') composed for the eminent Swiss pianist Margret Weber was his last, completed in Switzerland in 1959, where he died on August 28.

British critic Eric Blom has written about Martinu "... (his) work has vitality and a very pronounced originality that can take all sorts of different forms, and at his best he is a genuine music-maker, who writes, not for the sake of achieving a style - indeed he has no settled style - but for the sake of giving pleasure to performers as well as to listeners."

Fantasia For Two Pianos was begun in Policka (Bohemia) and finished in Paris, in September of 1929. It is strongly bitonal and rhythmically complicated. It is a rather brilliant neo-classical movement in toccata style and a Rondo in form, exploiting the full percussive and melodic resources of the two keyboards. There is much use of dissonance, created by the pianos playing octaves, arpeggios and scales at a minor second apart.

The **Three Czech Dances** were composed after the completion of the *Sinfonia Concertante*, between April 5th and 11th, 1949. Martinu composed these Dances for the two piano team of Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson. The second dance, of a slightly slower pace, separates the two outer Toccata-like dances, which require a formidable technique.

Joshua Pierce / Dorothy Jonas

Duo-pianists Pierce and Jonas have been called "consummate technicians with marvelous articulation" by Fanfare Magazine, while the San Francisco Chronicle has praised their "exceptional ensemble and glitter", and Newsday said "they displayed the sort of emotional and interpretive union that must be second nature to a two-piano team."

Joshua Pierce and Dorothy Jonas mark their 10th anniversary as a duo-piano team during the 1988/89 season. While each artist also maintains a successful career as a soloist, together they have appeared throughout the United States, Mexico, Europe and South America, winning raves for their recitals and orchestral appearances as well as for their ever-growing list of records and compact discs. They have performed as a team with such orchestras as the Houston, San Antonio, Louisville and Utah Symphonies, the Orquesta Nacional Sinfonica de Mexico City, l'Orchestra de Radio-Television Luxembourg, and the Orchestra da Camera di Roma. In May 1987 they appeared with the London Philharmonic at Royal Festival Hall in a Command Performance honoring composer Mikos Rosza.

Pierce and Jonas have introduced and recorded many American and 20th-century works. They performed the world premiere of Piston's *Concerto for Two Pianos*; as well as Rosza's *Spellbound Concerto Fantasy* and *New England Concerto* (both written for and dedicated to them).

Their recordings of classical, romantic and contemporary works have brought the duo ten Grammy Award nominations, and kudos from the press. The New York Times called their two-piano version of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* "electrifying"; Ovation Magazine described Martinu's *Concerto for Two Pianos* as "a thrilling reading, sonically and technically"; and High Fidelity called their world premiere recording of Rosza's *Spellbound* and *New England* concertos "excellent performances of Oscar-winning caliber". Pierce and Jonas were responsible for the first recording of Britten's *Scottish Ballad* as well as the first digital recording of Martinu's *Concerto for Two Pianos*. A new cross-over compact disc, *Classically Broadway*, features music by Jerry Herman, Richard Rodgers, Marvin Hamlisch, Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Leonard Bernstein.

A native of New York, Joshua Pierce was a scholarship student at the Juilliard School, where he received seven Heckschire Foundation Awards and was 1967 winner of the Juilliard Concerto Competition; in 1968 he was awarded the Victor Babin Award from the Cleveland Institute. Mr. Pierce earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees on scholarship at the Manhattan School of Music, and did postgraduate work in conducting at Columbia Teachers College. His principal piano teachers have been Dorothy Taubman (with whom he continues to coach), Artur Balsam and Robert Goldsand. He has given recitals and appeared with orchestras on several continents; in 1986 the American Festival of MicroTonal Music Ensemble, of which he is Artistic Advisor, had the distinction of being the only

American group invited to perform at the Futurissimo/Futurissimi Festival of Contemporary Music in Venice, Italy. He has also been Music Director and Conductor for a national tour of "Stop the World, I Want To Get Off", performed in marathon concerts with composer/conductor Lukas Foss at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and taken part in a tribute to Rosalyn Tureck with violinist Erik Friedman in New York. Included in his large discography is a five-recording John Cage series (to be issued on compact disc), as well as a new recording of the Liszt "Tottentanz" and the Prokofiev D-flat piano concerto.

Dorothy Jonas, a native of San Antonio, Texas, was a scholarship student at the Juilliard School in New York, where she earned her Bachelor of Music degree and pursued graduate studies. Winner of the National Piano Tournament and recipient of the Hertzberg Award for ten consecutive years, Ms. Jonas has toured throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, appearing with such conductors as Igor Stravinsky, Max Reiter, Nicolas Flagello, Ettore Stratta, Elmer Bernstein, and the late Andre Kostelanetz. She has been guest soloist with the symphony orchestras of Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Santa Fe, Jacksonville (Florida), and the Philharmonic Orchestra of Mexico City. As a participant in the Futurissimo/Futurissimi Festival in Italy, she performed two-piano quarter-tone works by Mordecai Sanberg and Charles Ives with Joshua Pierce. Ms. Jonas has appeared regularly on nationally-syndicated radio, and has been a featured artist on national and regional television.

Ettore Stratta

Conductor, pianist, composer and record producer ETTORE STRATTA, born in Cuneo, Italy, studied Piano and Composition at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory of Music in Rome and continued his musical studies in New York. He has also studied conducting with Tibor Serly, Nicolas Flagello and Eleazar de Carvalho. In 1968, Mr. Stratta produced the sensational electronic album by Walter Carlos, "Switched-on-Bach," which was to become the fastest selling classical LP in history, as well as a major breakthrough in electronic music.

As a conductor he has appeared with symphony orchestras all over the world and most recently with the Vancouver, Indianapolis, Hartford, Atlanta and Quebec Symphonies as well as the Slovak Philharmonic in Czechoslovakia. Mr. Stratta has recorded with the London Symphony a new digital album, entitled "Music From the Galaxies", and the first digital "Porgy and Bess" with soloists Claudia Lindsey and Benjamin Matthews, both on the KEM-Disc label.