REGER

Three Suites for Viola Solo op. 131d

Dimitar Penkov

GALLO

CD-1729

SPOHR • Duo for Violin and Viola op. 13

Max REGER

Suite Nr. 1 for viola solo op. 131d 14’41

1. I. Molto sostenuto 5’30
2. II. Vivace 4’34
3. III. Andante sostenuto 3’16
4. IV. Molto vivace 1’18

Suite Nr. 2 for viola solo op. 131d 10’36

5. I. Con moto (non troppo vivace) 2’33
6. II. Andante 3’30
7. III. Allegretto 1’44
8. IV. Vivace 2’47

Suite Nr. 3 for viola solo op. 131d 11’47

9. I. Moderato 3’59
10. II. Vivace 2’37
11. III. Adagio 2’59
12. IV. Allegro vivace 2’01

Louis SPOHR

Duo for violin and viola op. 13 19’26

13. I. Allegro moderato 10’13
14. II. Adagio 4’03
15. III. Tempo di Minuetto 5’07

Total: 56’22

Evgenia-Maria Popova – violin
Dimitar Penkov – viola

Recorded by Georg Burdicek in Konzerthaus Wien, August 2024

Max Reger (1873-1916), Three Suites op. 131d for viola solo

With the use of the term „Suite“, Max Reger characterizes each one of three compositions written collectivly for solo viola in his opus 131d and thus assigns them a tradition of music reaching deliberately back to Baroque times. A suite - which can perhaps be described as „an installment in serial form“ or simply as a „series of pieces“ - evolved from a well-known set-up of contrasting dances and soon enjoyed the social flair of a typical „genre“ in music.

The Reger suites however do not follow the regular pattern - which consists of an opening prelude and a freely inspired number of other fashionable mode of dance movements - but rather chooses a more restrictive form of four movements - prescribing only the traditional Italian characterization of a certain mood and tempo to each one of them. Time and again Reger had occupied himsel with solo literature for stringed instruments, until then however exclusivly for violin; now the expansive collection of opus 131 comprises solo compositions for violin (and violin duo), violoncello and viola! The restriction to one stringed instrument was an absolute ordeal for Reger (he commented later that such a restriction condemned him to apply a „chastity belt“ to himself as a composer) because it was impossible here for Reger to exploit the full range of his complex harmonies and let them radiate with multiple effect and colouring from an orchestral source, or even to draw on the extravagant manual of harmonies like on his organ to intoxicate the listener. Reger‘s ambition was to exemplify Johann Sebastian Bach, who had aready forged such superior archetypes as his Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin and his six Suites for the cello, that in the course of time nobody had ever seriously endeavoured to copy, sequel or even surpass them. On the other hand Reger was consciously compelled to reduce the comprehensive output of his productions for reasons which originated in his personal situation. Reger was simultaneously leading Musical Director of the Orchestra at the traditional Court of Meiningen and had sufferred a severe break-down while touring with the Orchestra in 1914 and consequently submitted a request to resign from his occupation. By temperament

and stature blessed with a rugged and indestructible bavarian physical constitution, and now deprived of all vitality, he had to succumb to the prevailing confinement and restriction of a cure in a sanatorium by Meran. It was here, that Reger was inspired by the idea of working on the neo-classic number of pieces included in op. 131, an impulse which he set forth in op.132 - which should in turn become his most illustrious achievement for all time: the „Mozart Variations“ for Orchestra.

The first pieces of op.131 took shape in Meran and were called:„Violin compositions in an old Style“, and were concipated with an enlightening „air“ of exercise in minimalistic music.

However, World war I broke out and brought forth a more fundamental change in Reger‘s artistic approach, which resulted in a further retreat from over-substantial orchestral sound -material back to a purified neo-classical simplicity. Consequently, when Reger was able to move to Jena in the summer of 1915 and was filled with new creative energy, he continued the work on op. 131 and accomplisched three more solo suites for violoncello (op. 131c) as well as three for the viola (op. 131d). These bear the mark of Reger‘s specific and very own idiom, which combines - despite the restriction to a solitary instrument - thematic and motivic ingenuity with adventurous harmony. In addition, the suites for viola set completely new technical and musical standards for this, until then, rarely represented soloinstrument.

Reger concipated his dedications just as carefully as his compositions, endowing musical friends or instrumental virtuosos as well as acquaintancies, as is the case with the suits for viola. But nevertheless, the three viola suites op. 131d were first made known to the public after his death : Else Mendel-Oberüber launched the premiere performance of these viola suites in 1917 in Berlin, and remarkably played solo pieces for violin by Johann Sebastian Bach and Joseph Joachim in the same concert.

Louis Spohr (1784-1859), Duo for violin and viola op. 13

Louis Spohr (5 April 1784 – 22 October 1859), baptized Ludewig Spohr, later often in the modern German form of the name Ludwig was a German composer, violinist and conductor, highly regarded during his lifetime.

He studied violin in his native town Brunswick and in 1802 with Franz Eck, who took him on a tour of Russia. In 1820 Spohr made the first of his six tours in England. He became court conductor at Kassel in 1821. In his later years his political radicalism incurred the displeasure of his patron, the elector of Hesse-Kassel, who pensioned him in 1957. Shortly afterward he broke his left arm and was no longer able to play the violin.

As composer, Spohr produced more than 150 works with opus numbers, in addition to a number of nearly 140 works without such numbers. He wrote music in all genres. His nine symphonies, ten operas, four oratorios and various works for small ensemble show a progress from the classical style of his predecessors to program music, winning their author a conspicuous place in the music literature of nineteenth century.

Between 1803 and 1844 Spohr wrote more violin concertos then any other composer of this time, eighteen in all, including works left unpublished at his death. Among Spohr`s chamber music is a series of no fewer than 36 string quartets, as well as four double quartets for two string quartets. He also wrote an assortment of duos, trios, quintets and sextets, an octet and a nonet.

A selection of his works was published from 1949 onward at Kassel, where in 1954 a society to propagate his music, the Spohr-Gesellschaft, was founded.

Dimitar Penkov was born 1953 in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria and studied at the National Academy of Music in his hometown. In 1974 he was the youngest participant and won the 1. Prize and a Gold Medal at the International Music Competition in Sofia. Dimiter Penkov reached international acclaim when he was laureate at the International Music Competition in Geneva in 1977. Dimitar Penkov then became a member of the National String Quartet of the Bulgarian Radio, with which he won prizes in the competitions in Colmar and Evian.
After 1979 Dimitar Penkov continued his studies with Yfrah Neaman in London, who described him as a „brilliant violist, perfect musician and sensitive chamber musician".
In the following years he performed as a soloist and chamber musician all over the world.

In 1985 he was commissioned as leader to the viola section of the Philharmonia Orchestra of the Broadcasting Commission in North Germany. Dimitar Penkov continued to expand his career and regularly perform on stage as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor. Numerous recordings testify his commitment to contemporary music and a rare repertoire.

In November 1985 he was bestowed with the honour of premiering the Viola Concerto by Krzysztof Penderecki at the Festival of Contemporary Music in Metz to the audience in France. Olivier Messiaen described him as a phenomenal violist. He was engaged for various live recordings with Radio Paris, Sofia, Zurich and Moscow and his Vita graces recordings for Balkanton, Melodia, Gallo, GEGA, Fox Records, CPO and Romeo Records NY.

In the course of his comprehensive career as an artist, Dimitar Penkov has collaborated with many well-known conductors: including Aldo Ceccato, Pierre Bartolomée, Michael Tabachnik, Vasil Stefanov, Lutz Herbig, Gilbert Varga, Konstantin Iliev, Anthony Bramall, Vasily Kasandjiev, Plamen Djourov, Nikos Athineos, Otmar Maga and others.

So far released by Gallo:
Arthur HONEGGER: Sonata for Viola and Piano; Johannes BRAHMS: Two Sonatas op. 120 for viola and piano (with Wolfgang Manz, piano). Gallo CD-833

Paul HINDEMITH, Petar CHRISTOSKOV, Alexander RAICHEV, Krzysztof PENDERECKI, Max REGER: Works for Viola sola. Gallo CD-1577

Bulgarian violinist **Evgenia-Maria Popova** is among her country`s foremost musicians. She is one of the last pupils of the legendary Leonid Kogan at the Moscow State Conservatory.
Popova`s concert carrier begins after winning top-prizes in some of the most important violin contests – J.Thibaud, C.Flesch, Montreal, to name a few.
Evgenia-Maria Popova has performed as a soloist in the most prestigious concert halls all over the world. Her CDs of Six Solo Sonatas by Ysäye ("Leman Classics"), and the world premiere recording of the 24 Bulgarian Caprices by Peter Hristoskov, dedicated to her ("Dynamic"), have been highly praised internationally ("The Strad", "American Record Guide", "CD Classica").
Ms. Popova`s enormous repertoire includes all important works for the violin. Her brilliant integral performances of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Ysaÿe, Vivaldi have won her high critical acclaim and artistic prestige.
Evgenia-Maria Popova plays a G.Cappa-1691, property of Bulgarian State, given to her in recognition of her outstanding achievements.