

Henri Vieuxtemps – Violin Concertos Nos.4 & 5 (Heifetz) [2001]



Concerto No.4 op.31 for violin and orchestra *I. Andante - Moderato - Cadenza II Adagio religioso III. Scherzo: Trio IV. Finale marziale: Allegro*

Concerto No.5 op.37 for violin and orchestra

I Allegro non troppo II Adagio III Allegro con fuoco

Jascha Heifetz - violin London Philharmonic Orchestra John Barbirolli - conductor

The orchestral writing in this, Vieuxtemps' own favorite among his concertos, is sensitive and makes particularly good use of the woodwinds. But aside from the substantial introduction and various tutti passages, the violinist is clearly the center of attention. The first movement, Andante, begins with a lengthy, weighty introduction that opens like a quiet chorale and then gradually builds speed, loudness, and intensity, with brass and tympani providing extra heft. As all of this recedes, a downward-swirling figure in the strings suggests water flowing away into the murk. The soloist finally enters with a declamatory line, spitting out double-stop notes, but this almost immediately melts into more lyrical, yet still ardent material. This, with its recitative-like material, seems like a second introduction, but it is indeed the movement's main thematic substance. A lengthy, tempestuous cadenza eventually surrenders to a stern orchestral passage; this fades into a long-held horn note that serves as a bridge to the second movement. This Adagio religioso begins with a woodwind chorale; the violin soon enters, serenely trilling above the orchestra, and sings a long, ardent prayer that gradually builds to a state of ecstasy. As the music calms, harp arpeggios grace another passage of violin trills. Some contemporary listeners may find this movement's pretty pieties off-putting, but religious sentimentality was a major element of much Franco-Belgian music of the mid-nineteenth century, and this Vieuxtemps slow movement is an important example of the style. The Scherzo, marked Vivace, brings a welcome impishness to the concerto and has much in common with the vibrant, assertive violin works of Saint-Saëns. The movement's central trio section slows down and stretches out with grand, sweeping orchestral support for the violin's happily quivering line. Before the Finale marziale fully gets underway, the strings and woodwinds revisit material from the concerto's beginning. This time, the Andante introduction is succinct and the full orchestra soon presents a festive march, again resembling the style of Saint-Saëns. After a full tour around the parade ground, the soloist finally joins in, first with a

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recitative and then with the main march tune. Rapid passagework and harrowing double-stops prevent the movement from falling into pomposity; at one point, the violin plays an ardent, decidedly non-military melody. And later, the soloist even gives the march tune a remarkably lyrical treatment. Midway through this movement, the music kicks into the major mode and the concerto ends in heady victory. ---Rovi

Although the Violin Concerto No. 4 is "the" Vieuxtemps concerto, No. 5 in A minor is also relatively familiar and has been championed by the likes of Leopold Auer, Jascha Heifetz, and Itzhak Perlman. Vieuxtemps wrote it in 1858-1859 as a competition piece for Hubert Léonard at the Brussels Conservatory. The work originally held only two movements, but Vieuxtemps later added a third; they are played without interruption.

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, announces its main themes through the orchestra without soloist. The opening motif is suspenseful and tragic; soon the music becomes grander with the orchestra playing at full blast, and eventually the thematic material spreads out with longer note values, and subsides. The violin finally enters with rising, searching phrases, which quickly morph into complex passagework, a preview of coming attractions. Soon the soloist picks up the orchestra's themes, punctuating their lyricism with flurries of virtuosity. Vieuxtemps provided two cadenzas; one is fairly contrapuntal, and the other is full of double stops and other splashy techniques.

A brief *Moderato* passage leads to the *Adagio* movement, an effusion of A minor lyricism. Toward the end, the music modulates to C major to quote a melody from André Grétry's opera *Lucile*, here highly romanticized (hence the concerto's sometime nickname, "Grétry"). After the violin plays the final ornamented measure of this older material, the music swoops back into A minor for the concluding *Allegro con fuoco*, a final burst of virtuosity so brief that it is little more than a coda to the preceding two movements. ---Rovi

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