

In the years immediately following the Second World War, Yehudi Menuhin found himself at the forefront of a new and demanding repertoire for the violin. The two works brought together on this recording, by Béla Bartók and Sergei Prokofiev, stand among the most searching and uncompromising contributions to the instrument's twentieth-century literature. Both were written during periods of profound upheaval, and reflect in very different ways the tensions of their time.

Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin occupies a unique place in Menuhin's career. The work was composed in 1944 at Menuhin's request, and he gave its first performance in New York on 26 November of that year. Bartók died less than a year later, leaving the sonata as one of his final completed works. Menuhin returned to it in June 1947 at Abbey Road, setting down what appears to be the first recording of the work. As such, this performance stands not merely as an early document, but as a direct continuation of the composer-performer relationship from which the sonata itself had emerged.

The sonata's four movements - *Tempo di ciaccona*, *Fuga*, *Melodia* and *Presto* - trace a path from severe, almost architectural contrapuntal writing to a finale of extraordinary rhythmic vitality. In Menuhin's performance, the music retains its structural clarity while revealing a strong sense of expressive purpose. Writing in 1948, *The Gramophone* described the performance as displaying "incredible virtuosity and superb musicianship", adding that it must rank "as one of the outstanding achievements of our time." Such contemporary testimony is borne out by the recording itself, which captures the work at a point when it was still new, its idiom not yet absorbed into the mainstream of violin playing.

The Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor by Prokofiev, recorded the following year in the same Abbey Road studio, presents a very different but equally compelling sound world. Begun in 1938 and completed in 1946, the sonata received its first performance in Moscow in October of that year. Menuhin's 1948 recording with the pianist Marcel Gazelle is among the earliest accounts of the work and appears very likely to have been its first commercial recording in the West, following shortly after the initial Soviet recording by David Oistrakh and Lev Oborin.

Where Bartók's sonata explores the possibilities of the violin alone, Prokofiev's work unfolds as a tense and often sombre dialogue between violin and piano. The opening *Andante assai*, with its spectral, descending scales, sets the tone for a work in which lyricism is frequently shadowed by unease. The central movements contrast a sharply etched *Allegro brusco* with a more inward *Andante*, before the finale returns to the atmosphere of the opening in music of remarkable intensity. Reviewing the recording in 1949, *The Gramophone* described it as "an authoritative performance of a remarkable work", noting in particular the expressive depth of the slow movement.

Taken together, these recordings document Menuhin at a pivotal moment in his artistic development. In Bartók's sonata he appears as the work's dedicatee and first interpreter, preserving on disc a piece closely bound to his own musical identity. In Prokofiev's sonata he assumes a different role, that of an early advocate bringing a recent and little-known work to a wider audience beyond its country of origin. Both performances were made at a time when this repertoire was still in the process of establishing itself, and both retain the sense of immediacy that comes from such proximity.

Heard today, they offer not only historical insight but performances of enduring conviction, shaped by a musician deeply engaged with the challenges and possibilities of the modern violin repertoire. In this new Pristine Ambient Stereo XR remaster, these historic recordings are heard with a new clarity, depth and presence that bring their immediacy vividly to life.

PACM 132

menuhin

plays contemporary sonatas

bartók
sonata for solo violin

prokofiev
violin sonata no. 1
marcel gazelle, piano

Pristine
XR

studio recordings · 1947/48

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACM 132

BARTÓK SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN - PROKOFIEV VIOLIN SONATA No. 1
YEHUDI MENUHIN, MARCEL GAZELLE

menuhin

plays contemporary sonatas

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACM 132

BARTÓK SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN - PROKOFIEV VIOLIN SONATA No. 1
YEHUDI MENUHIN, MARCEL GAZELLE

PACM 132

PRISTINE
AUDIO

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Yehudi Menuhin

Total duration: 53:04

BARTÓK Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz. 117, BB 124

1. 1st mvt. - Tempo di ciaccona (9:39)
2. 2nd mvt. - Fuga (4:30)
3. 3rd mvt. - Melodia (6:57)
4. 4th mvt. - Presto (5:11)

Recorded 2-3 June 1947 in EMI Studio No. 3, Abbey Road, London · First issued on HMV DB9231/33 (special order)

PROKOFIEV Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80

5. 1st mvt. - Andante assai (6:16)
6. 2nd mvt. - Allegro brusco (6:56)
7. 3rd mvt. - Andante (6:59)
8. 4th mvt. - Allegrissimo - Andante assai, come prima (6:36)

Recorded 30 September - 1 October 1948 in EMI Studio No. 3, Abbey Road, London · First issued on HMV DB6845/47
Marcel Gazelle, piano

Yehudi Menuhin, violin

© 2026 Pristine Audio