

This release celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Fritz Kreisler (February 2, 1875 – January 29, 1962) by presenting his complete repertoire of violin concertos recorded for release on disc. While he was to remake the Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms works in London during the latter half of the 1930s, the earlier versions offered here are generally considered to be his best.

Kreisler's first concerto recording, the Bach "Double", made a month before he turned forty, has the distinction of being the first violin concerto recording ever made. Only slightly cut to fit three 12-inch 78 rpm sides, it was much more complete than the only previous attempt at a concerto recording, Wilhelm Backhaus' 1909 version of the Grieg, which had been slashed to two sides. Although the work was then hardly known, it seemed a perfect fit for the limitations of the time: it was short, and could be recorded nearly complete with minimal forces. The one-to-a-part string quartet backing even had the advantage, in hindsight, of having rather HIP proportions. Partnering Kreisler here was the 25-year-old Russian-born, Auer-trained Efrem Zimbalist, whose style made for an interesting contrast with Kreisler's Viennese tradition.

It would be nearly a decade before Kreisler returned to the studio for another concerto recording, which turned out to be two within the course of a month. Sir Landon Ronald's backing for the Mozart seems overly-romanticized by today's standards, but matches Kreisler's portamento-laden solo performance – beautiful, if more than a little anachronistic. The Bruch Concerto fares better from the violinist's approach, which makes it doubly regrettable that it remained unissued until the 1970s. The only surviving test pressings of the set, given by Kreisler to Elgar, are now housed in Yale University, which was the source used for the present restoration.

Following these recordings are two frustrating "might-have-beens": movements from the Tchaikovsky Concerto and Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* which were recorded with piano accompaniment and which, like the Bruch Concerto, were never issued, possibly for the same reason. The Lalo was recorded the month after the Bruch, just as electrical recording was beginning to take hold; and the hope might have been that Kreisler would get around to recording the entire works using the new technology, which unfortunately never occurred.

The Beethoven and Mendelssohn concertos were made almost exactly two years later, at the end of 1926 in Berlin. Although electrical recording was now the norm, the practice of reinforcing the timpani and string basses using a tuba to support the lower frequencies on early playback devices continued, as can be heard in the Beethoven, particularly during the opening of the first movement and just after the third movement cadenza.

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disc one
(69:40)

Acoustic Recordings, 1915-1925

J. S. BACH Concerto in D minor for two violins, BWV 1043

1. 1st mvt. - Vivace (3:48)
2. 2nd mvt. - Largo ma non tanto (5:00)
3. 3rd mvt. - Allegro (4:58)

Efrem Zimbalist, violin 2

String Quartet

(Howard Rattay, violin 1; Pasqualli Bianculi, violin 2; John Fruncillo, viola; Rosario Bourdon, cello)

conducted by Walter B. Rogers

Recorded 4 January 1915 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey · Matrices: C 15560-4, 15561-3 & 15562-2

First issued on Victor 76028/30

MOZART Violin Concerto No. 4 in D major, K.218 (*Cadenzas: Kreisler*)

4. 1st mvt. - Allegro (9:11)
5. 2nd mvt. - Andante cantabile (8:33)
6. 3rd mvt. - Andante grazioso - Allegro ma non troppo (8:38)

Orchestra conducted by Sir Landon Ronald

Recorded 1-2 December 1924 in the HMV Studios, Hayes · Matrices: Cc 5396-2, 5397-1, 5398-3, 5399-1, 5400-1, 5401-2, 5408-1 & 5409-1

First issued on HMV DB 815/8

BRUCH Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

7. 1st mvt. - Introduction: Allegro moderato (7:21)
8. 2nd mvt. - Adagio (7:32)
9. 3rd mvt. - Finale: Allegro energico (6:39)

Orchestra conducted by Eugene Goossens

Recorded 29-30 December 1924 and 2 January 1925 in the HMV Studios, Hayes · Matrices: Cc 5508-3, 5509-1, 5510-3, 5511-3, 5512-7 & 5513-4

Unissued on 78 rpm

10. TCHAIKOVSKY Violin Concerto in D major Op. 35 - 2nd mvt. - Canzonetta (4:02)

Carl Lamson, piano

Recorded 24 January 1924 in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey · Matrix: C 29401-2

Unissued on 78 rpm

11. LALO Symphonie espagnole in D major, Op. 21 - 2nd mvt. - Scherzando (3:58)

Carl Lamson, piano

Recorded 13 February 1925 in the Victor Studios, New York City · Matrix: C 31947-3

Unissued on 78 rpm

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Nevertheless, and despite the somewhat recessed placement of the orchestra, the new technology captured a great deal of detail and presence. Blech's accompaniment is leisurely on both concertos; but this pays dividends in Kreisler's performance, particularly in the first movement section of the Beethoven starting around 12:27, where time seems to stand still during Kreisler's plaintive, *sehnsucht*-filled playing. The Brahms from eleven months later was the last recording Kreisler made with Blech. While from a technical standpoint the sound is less clean and clear compared to the 1926 sessions, the performance itself is quite fiery and intense.

Kreisler's next concerto sessions, delayed due to the ensuing Depression, moved to London, where he remade the Mendelssohn under Ronald in April, 1935, and the Beethoven and Brahms under Barbirolli in June, 1936. In December of the latter year, he was in Philadelphia for Eugene Ormandy's first recording session with the orchestra to which he had been named co-conductor with Stokowski. On the program was Kreisler's arrangement of the first movement of Paganini's First Concerto into a self-contained single movement work. Victor's relative inexperience at the time with concerto recording was actually an advantage here, as Kreisler was not spotlight-miked, but recorded with the same balance as he would have been heard by an audience in the Academy of Music. Kreisler's arrangement turns the work into the kind of delightful Viennese confection he might have composed from scratch himself.

Kreisler made one more concerto recording in London (a remake of the Mozart, done with Malcolm Sargent in February, 1938) before focusing the remainder of his recording activities in America. His last concerto set was made in May, 1945 when he was seventy years old, with his frequent collaborator from *The Telephone Hour* radio program, Donald Voorhees, conducting.

Earlier in his career, Kreisler had become somewhat infamous for his "musical forgeries" of works attributed to then little-known Baroque composers which were in fact his own concoctions, a practice which he had begun in an attempt to avoid filling his recital programs with his own name, and which he had owned up to in 1935 to the amusement of many and the outrage of some (mainly critics). His 1927 concerto originally credited to Vivaldi we now know sounds very little like the Italian composer, although that familiarity postdates even this late recording. Although Kreisler's technique was beginning to falter at this stage in his career (as can be heard on some of his radio recordings of the time), especially after his injuries due to a 1941 car accident, he acquits himself well in this final concerto performance on disc.

Mark Obert-Thorn



disc two
(71:41)

Electric Recordings, 1926

BEETHOVEN Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61 (*Cadenzas: Kreisler*)

- 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (24:04)
- 2nd mvt. - Larghetto (10:26)
- 3rd mvt. - Rondo: Allegro (10:20)

Berlin State Opera Orchestra conducted by **Leo Blech**

Recorded 14-16 December 1926 in the Singakademie, Berlin · Matrices: CwR 631-1A, 632-2, 633-1A, 634-4A, 635-2, 636-3A, 637-2A, 638-2, 639-3A, 640-2 & 641-2A · First issued on HMV DB 990/5

MENDELSSOHN Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

- 1st mvt. - Allegro molto appassionato - Presto (12:10)
- 2nd mvt. - Andante (7:48)
- 3rd mvt. - Allegro non troppo - Allegro molto vivace (6:53)

Berlin State Opera Orchestra conducted by **Leo Blech**

Recorded 9-10 December 1926 in the Singakademie, Berlin · Matrices: CwR 614-2A, 615-1A, 616-1A, 617-1A, 618-2A, 619-2A & 620-3 · First issued on HMV DB 997/1000

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director) for providing source
material

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photograph of Fritz Kreisler

Total duration: 3hr 27:33

disc three
(66:11)

Electric Recordings, 1927-1945

BRAHMS Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77 (*Cadenzas: Kreisler*)

- 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (20:50)
- 2nd mvt. - Adagio (7:49)
- 3rd mvt. - Allegro giocoso ma non troppo (8:14)

Berlin State Opera Orchestra conducted by **Leo Blech**

Recorded 21, 23 & 25 November 1927 in the Singakademie, Berlin · Matrices: CwR 1355-3, 1356-3, 1357-1, 1358-4, 1366-2, 1367-4, 1368-2, 1369-3 & 1376-5 · First issued on HMV DB 1120/4

PAGANINI (arr. Kreisler) Concerto in One Movement (17:32)

(Arranged from the first movement of Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 6)

The Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by **Eugene Ormandy**

Recorded 13 December 1936 in the Academy of Music, Philadelphia · Matrices: CS 03149-1, 03150-1, 03151-2 & 03152-2 · First issued on Victor 14420/2 in album M-361

KREISLER Violin Concerto in C major (*in the style of Vivaldi*)

- 1st mvt. - Allegro energico ma non troppo (4:50)
- 2nd mvt. - Andante doloroso (4:04)
- 3rd mvt. - Allegro molto (2:52)

Victor String Orchestra conducted by **Donald Voorhees**

Recorded 2 May 1945 in the Lotos Club, New York City · Matrices: D5-RC-949-2A, 950-2 & 951-2A · First issued on RCA Victor 11-9264/5 in album M-1070

Fritz Kreisler, violin

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