

Saxophone Concerto in E-Flat major, Op. 109

Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936)

The saxophone, still in its youth in 1934, found an unlikely suitor in the aging Russian composer, **Alexander Glazunov**, when he composed his Saxophone Concerto. Both parties were immigrants to France. The saxophone had been brought to life in 1840 by Alphonse Sax, son of a Belgian musical instrument builder and dealer. Sax moved to Paris in 1842, where he continued to work on and improve the mechanics of his new instrument. Within a short time, the French adopted the newcomer, and the saxophone became a regular member of French military bands, where it provided a good tonal link between the voices of the clarinets and brass. It was praised by the French musical statesman **Berlioz** and French composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including **Debussy**, **Bizet**, and **Saint-Saëns**, who soon incorporated its sound into chamber and symphonic works.

In 1929 **Glazunov**, the revered Russian composer and teacher—he was the Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory for many years—settled in Paris. So it was that the two French émigrés—the adolescent saxophone and the semi-retired Russian musician—started a relationship that resulted in a saxophone quartet and concerto. Both works were completed in 1934; the quartet was started in 1932 and underwent many revisions as **Glazunov** listened to rehearsals, making changes in order to achieve the desired blend of the four instruments' tonal ranges. The concerto, which turned out to be his last composition, was started in 1934 at the urging of a prominent saxophonist, Sigurd Raschèr, who premiered the work in Sweden later that year. Due to **Glazunov's** poor health, he was not able to attend the performance, and he passed away in 1936, only months before the work's premiere in Paris. Both works were published posthumously as Opus 109, and it is likely **Glazunov** never heard a public performance of either.

Since its premiere, **Glazunov's** Saxophone Concerto has become a treasured staple of the saxophone repertoire. Its splendid blend of the solo reed instrument with the string accompaniment suggests a marriage of sound that is the culmination of a centuries-old relationship, rather than its relatively young coupling. Its beguiling and suave mood, and its surprisingly modern and somewhat jazzy lilt, belie its Russian paternity; only its restrained but unmistakable melancholy reveals its composer's heritage. The work, played without pause, is broadly separated into three sections, *Allegro Moderato*, *Andante*, and *Fugato*.

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 (1st movement)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto would top most people's "favorite" list. Composed when **Grieg** was 25, as he was beginning to make a name for himself in Denmark and Norway, the work, which premiered in Copenhagen in 1869, catapulted the young composer into the world's attention. The instant success of the work resulted in a lifetime annual stipend from the Norwegian government, providing **Grieg** the security to devote his life to composition.

Grieg's talent for music had been cultivated by his mother, a competent amateur pianist and singer, and, at age 15, **Grieg** was sent to the Leipzig Conservatory to study at the school founded by **Mendelssohn**. **Grieg** chafed at the stilted piano instruction but was enthralled by what he heard at the local Gewandhaus concert hall—works by **Schumann**, **Liszt**, **Mendelssohn**, and **Wagner**. A particular inspiration was hearing Clara Schumann perform her late husband's Piano Concerto in A minor, and, ten years later, when **Grieg** composed his own Piano Concerto, also in A minor, and also beginning with a

muscular cascading chord, the effect of **Schumann's** work on the young composer was easily discernable.

Back in Norway, at the urging of **Niels Gade**, at the time Denmark's premiere composer, **Grieg** began work on a symphony. But, despite the completion of several movements, the effort was abandoned, as **Grieg** felt unequal to the task. Therefore, the presentation of the Piano Concerto, a work that is fully mature, masterfully orchestrated, and brimming with memorable melodies, was an unexpected accomplishment. Despite the work's immediate and unqualified success, **Grieg**, over the period of many years, went on to make at least seven revisions to the score, the last only months before his death. The edition most often performed today is a posthumous revision made in 1917 by the pianist Percy Grainger, who had studied the score with **Grieg** and often performed the piece; **Grieg** let it be known that Grainger's performances of the work were his favorite. Compositions would continue to flow from **Grieg's** pen for most of his life, and many of his later works, such as the incidental music to *Peer Gynt* and the several suites of Norwegian melodies, have also become worldwide favorites. But it can be argued that it is the Piano Concerto, his only concerto and largest orchestral piece, that crowns his musical offerings.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26 (3rd movement)

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Born in Cologne, Germany, **Max Bruch** was passionate about music from his childhood on. His mother was a professional singer, and both parents enthusiastically supported his talent, providing lessons with able teachers. At age 14 he received a Mozart Foundation scholarship that enabled him to study theory and composition, encouraging him in the composition of his first symphony. Already by age 20, **Bruch** began teaching music at the conservatory in his hometown of Cologne, and, by age 28, he accepted the post of musical director of the Concert Institution at Coblenz. From his youth **Bruch** had been composing, and he began work on the Violin Concerto at age 19. However, due to his teaching and conducting assignments and his habit of making revisions, the work was not completed until 1866. **Bruch** conducted the orchestra at its premiere, and immediately continued making revisions with the assistance of the prominent violinist, Joseph Joachim. Two years later, in Bremen, Joachim performed the piece to immediate acclaim, and it is this version that remains in the repertoire. It was Joachim's opinion that the concerto, when compared to the other great German violin concertos—those of **Beethoven**, **Mendelssohn**, and **Brahms**—is “the richest, the most seductive.”

The work's first movement, rather than following the expected sonata form, consists of a series of flourishes by the solo violin and orchestra into which **Bruch** inserts two expansive melodies. The following *Adagio* transforms the mood of the piece into a lyric rapture before the final *Allegro energico*, brims with a military brilliance that gains momentum as it joyously heads to the concluding *presto con fuoco*. The musicologist Michael Steinberg finds the last movement “crackling [and] gypsy-tinged” and wonders, as have many others, whether the Hungarian exuberance inspired **Brahms**, ten years later, to conclude his own violin concerto in like manner.

Serenade for Strings in E minor, Op. 20

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Elgar's Serenade for Strings is the earliest of his works to become well-known and continues to be the earliest of his works that remains in the standard repertoire. It was composed and first performed in 1892 at a private concert in Worcester, at a time when **Elgar** was still struggling to receive recognition for his work as a composer, supporting himself by playing the violin in the local orchestra and teaching. The work did not receive its first public performance until 1905 in London, well after **Elgar's** international reputation had been assured with the composition of the symphonic *Enigma Variations* (1899) and *The Dream of Gerontius*, for soloists, chorus, and orchestra (1900). His love of the violin and string

instruments in general is apparent in the Serenade, and was later displayed to great applause in his well-received Violin Concerto (1910). Alongside these three well-known works, the tender and unassuming Serenade has always remained in the repertoire, never overshadowed by those larger compositions. The musicologist Adrian Jack reports that later in life, **Elgar** singled out the Serenade as his favorite work and described it as “really stringy in effect,” including it as one of his last gramophone records the year before he died.

“O Magnum Mysterium”

Morten Lauridsen (1943)

Morten Lauridsen is an American musician who has been a professor of composition at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music for more than 40 years. From 1994 to 2001 he was composer-in-residence of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and in 2006 he was named an “American Choral Master” by the National Endowment for the Arts. Many of his compositions are for choral works, and for these he was recognized in 2007 with a National Medal of Arts, conferred by the President “for his composition of radiant choral works combining musical power, beauty and spiritual depth that have thrilled audiences worldwide.”

The choral composition, “O Magnum Mysterium,” is based on a Gregorian chant that venerates the nativity scene at the birth of Jesus. Today’s performance is a transcription for concert band.

Jurassic Park Highlights

John Williams (1932)

The American composer John **Williams’** domination of music for American films started with his first Academy Award nomination in 1967 for the film score for *Valley of the Dolls*. Since then, the list of blockbuster films with music credits by **John Williams** comprises a history of American movies, including *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Schindler’s List*, and the series *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. He has been nominated for 51 Academy Awards, currently the most Oscar nominations for a living person, and only the second in Academy Awards history behind Walt Disney’s 59. The score for *Jurassic Park* (1993) was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1994. Its bold themes that perfectly evoke the Grandeur of the dinosaurs have become some of **Williams’** most beloved melodies