

Joseph Joachim's Authoritative Interpretation of the Violin Concerto op. 61

The 19th century conception of Beethoven's violinistic keystone as evidenced by written sources and previously neglected sound documents

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Requirements: Computer projection with sound

From his London debut in 1844 Joseph Joachim's interpretation of Beethoven's violin concerto was seen as exemplary, and, as Eugene Ysaÿe wrote, he played it so well "that he now seems part of it." However, shortly after Joachim's death in 1907 the concerto was subjected to the radical paradigm shifts at the beginning of the 20th century, and when Fritz Kreisler made his landmark recording of the work in 1926 the work's accepted interpretation had already changed completely. Kreisler's recording itself led to a globalisation of the concerto's performance practice which still holds today, and can even be witnessed in historically informed performances.

However, although there is no recording of the work with Joseph Joachim, there are some very detailed written sources, reaching from Eduard Hanslick to Donald Tovey, which give a clear picture of how different 19th performances of the work in general, and Joachim's in particular must have been from how we know the concerto today. The evidence clearly shows that Joachim's conception was at least in part influenced by earlier Viennese practices that may date back to his studies with Joseph Böhm 1839-43 in Vienna. Besides his rather fast tempi, flexible agogics and characteristic means of expression, Joachim was particularly known for his use of "Freispielen" ("free playing"), a jargon word that he himself evidently used in teaching, and there is detailed evidence on where and how he employed this device in the concerto.

Additional ear-opening confirmation of Joachim's authoritative interpretation is presented through previously neglected sound documents, with the first ever recordings of the concerto dating back as far as 1912 and 1916, and other recordings, with violinists rooted deeply in the 19th century tradition, from as late as 1926, the very year Fritz

Kreisler made his recording of the work. It can also be shown how individual performers were directly influenced by Kreisler's rendition when they re-recorded the work after 1926.

The presentation will examine some key passages in the work and will illustrate the textual evidence with examples from recordings. It will take into account written sources by Joachim's students, and examine in depth how the face of Beethoven's violin concerto op. 61 was substantially changed in several stages into what we recognize today as the accepted appearance. The number and quality of new sources will also have an impact on future performances.