

LOVRO MATAČIĆ

Mario-Osvin Pavčević, Dušan Stranić, Ivan Supek, Mladen Tarbuk



MAX BRUCH

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26

David Oistrakh, London Symphony Orchestra, Lovro von Matačić

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SERGEY PROKOFIEV

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 in D, Op. 19

David Oistrakh, London Symphony Orchestra, Lovro von Matačić

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When the editor-in-chief asked me to write a review on violin concertos for the Christmas issue, mentioning that the issue was dedicated to Lovro Matačić, it was all clear to me at once. In fact, I was given a delicate task to write about Matačić the Conductor, but this time from the position of conductee. As a viola player in the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, I had the honour to work with Maestro Matačić on numerous concerts. To experience Matačić at the conductor's stand was for me, and I believe for other colleagues also, an unforgettable artistic experience. His physical stature was like Meštrović's rustical sculpture, which would be named *The Giant*, and really, he was a giant, not only by his stature but also in terms of music as an art he delivered to us in a mesmerising manner. Matačić's interpretation of a score was so well thought and clear that we were able to understand and enjoy listening to his words *žOne should look for what lies hidden behind the notes in a score*, and Maestro would know how to feel and find it, and this exactly where his greatness lies. During the last ten years Matačić conducted without the baton and would often push the conducting technique in the background. Namely, never being indifferent to music, he was emotional about every rehearsal and every concert; so that he would frequently express his emotions and interpretation with wide and huge gestures and I believe that it was exactly why his interpretation so much enchanted the audience. I played with Maestro Matačić in many concerts in which we accompanied various soloists and in such a situation Matačić the Conductor was a completely different artistic personality - he was tolerant, discrete, subject to the soloist and his or her interpretation, without wide gestures. Unlike many other conductors, he was always prepared for a dialogue with the soloist and never had I heard that he suggested or imposed before the orchestra his own vision of interpretation of a solo part of the score.

Matačić's first visit to the West after the World War II marked the beginning of his international career. He told us himself that Herbert von Karajan, whom he had met in Munich, was the first to help him on his way to do that. Karajan recommended Matačić to the famous label EMI as his substitute in a recording session. At that time, 17th to the 20th November 1954, his recordings of these famous violin concertos with David Oistrakh were recorded.

During his career, Oistrakh made two recordings of M. Bruch's *First Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. The first recording was made in Moscow in 1946, with the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR under the baton of Alexander Gauk, and the other was made in London with the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Lovro von Matačić. Both recordings are in my collection of records so that I can compare them. They are both almost equal in duration - 24' 43" (Gauk), and 24' 30" (Matačić). However, I must admit that I prefer the first one because of a more vivacious playing of Oistrakh, with a lively expressive vibrato and more pronounced romantic freshness. Playing on the latter record is more measured and rational, there is no youthful enthusiasm and the vibrato is deprived of fireworks of romantic hues, the use of the fingering is more refined, which is particularly noticeable in the second movement. One cannot but compare it with the anthological recording of the same concerto in the interpretation by the fifteen-year old Yehudi Menuhin, who, unfortunately, never again managed to achieve such a level of playing - which I feel free to claim since I possess all recordings of this Bruch's concerto according to the published discography of Menuhin. However, I will avoid attempt to compare these two musicians because there is only one Oistrakh and only one Menuhin, apart from few other deities of violin, and deities may not be žblasphemed!

Matačić's approach in Bruch's concerto can be felt primarily in the vehement sound of the orchestra, which he leads by the power of his personal charisma almost to volcano-like eruptions of sound. However, in the second movement, Matačić has entirely surrendered to the accompaniment of Oistrakh, with a nice and resounding pianissimo and by musical highlighting of his solo violin playing. Matačić conducts the third movement *Allegro energico* following the authentic markings but in a more reserved tempo, with a fine rhythmic emphasis of the main motif of the movement. The orchestra evolve its full and dynamic sound in the second theme, to bring the short stretta together with the soloist to an effective end of the entire concerto. The playing and the noble sound of the London Symphony Orchestra are on the level with *King David* and Lovro Matačić.

Prokofiev composed his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1* in 1917, but it was premiered in Paris as late as 1923. Marcel Darrieux played the solo violin, Sergei Koussevitsky was the conductor, while the orchestra remained unquoted. Compared to Bruch's *Concerto*, in Prokofiev's *Concerto* Ostrakh was, in my opinion, more on his own turf. The many years of his cooperation with Prokofiev (with whom he has as first category player also played chess matches in public) enabled him to assert himself as an authentic interpreter of the concerto - which is fully corroborated by this recording. As far as Matačić is concerned, acting as accompaniment in Prokofiev's concerto, my impression is that he almost surrendered his leadership to Oistrakh, impressed by his playing and authoritative knowledge of the work, having skillfully converted Oistrakh's interpretative requirements into a fine musical performance of the excellent London Symphony Orchestra.

Dušan Stranić

ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 8

NHK Symphony Orchestra, Lovro von Matačić

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Lovro Matačić conducts the Japanese NHK Symphony Orchestra and, one would say, East meets West. A live recording of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 8* was issued to serve as evidence of this collaboration (one of the numerous, because Matačić was, in addition to Karajan, probably the most favourite conductor in Japan). However, it is yet to be seen to what extent has such an eccentric meeting contributed to the deepening of the exotic relationship between the Croatian (and, of course, also European) conductor and the Far East that was fascinated by the penetrating western culture and its benign musical offshoots.

To Bruckner, the Symphony No. 8 is exactly what Symphony No. 9 means to Beethoven - fighting for expression, transformation of the Christian processuality of being into a civil idea of accomplishment of justice and the truth, here and now. And yet, this is for Bruckner essentially an internal process, uncovering of its own abysses, purification of its own motifs. Indeed, it is exactly this self-observation which reminds us of the great Buddhist tradition of the East, and it is probably not accidental that it was also discussed in the body of work of Wagner's idol Schopenhauer (who, on the other hand, never recognised any traces of his own ideas in Wagner's music).

In Matačić's interpretation, the crucial emphasis was placed on processuality. Matačić perceived music first of all as movement and transformation from one mood into another. Such entirely romanticised interpretation was carried out with full exactness, without a single compromise, and this is exactly what underlies its greatness. No trace of adherence to certain preceding and monumentally extending interpretations (Furtwängler, Klemperer): tempo is fast and closely related to the desired sound, the connective tissue of the form is always somewhat faster, in a transition to the basic elements, in short, this is an in-depth reading and problematisation of Bruckner's fundamental principles of composing. This magic formula of conductors of older generations, the interpretation of the form, that is, minor deviations of the basic tempo, is best seen in the way how Matačić slowly brings down the tempo of the trio up to the point where the harp and the strings anticipate the second, lyrical part of the first theme of the third movement. The great closing gradation of the fourth movement toward the initial *Abgrund* motif of the first movement is constructed in a similar manner. In addition to the long gradations, which distinguished Matačić from other conductors of his generation, all other points of transition were resolved by contrasting tempos and dynamics, that is, as angularly and unpolished as Bruckner wanted it. It is precisely the uncompromising quality of interpretation, comparable with a gigantic building made of valuable but undressed stone that attracts by the harmony of its form that, in this respect, characterises and distinguishes Matačić's understanding of Bruckner from all that could have been heard before or could be heard subsequently.

Unfortunately, the orchestra did not manage to follow this extensive Matačić's undertaking. The brass section is raw and insecure in terms of tone, which is particularly true of the first trumpet, which could not endure the arduous demands of Bruckner's score - play continuously and very loud but with clear intonation. Those who are used to the characteristically dark sound of Bruckner's orchestra will find this recording somewhat too bright, which is also due to the manner of performing, which is even today one of the distinctive features of many Japanese orchestras. The most successful move in the right direction was made by the first oboe and the cello section, which, mostly in the second theme of the third movement, rendered the correct concept of sound and phrasing. To summarise: a great interpretation, a less successful recording but certainly an interesting choice.

Mladen Tarbuk

CARL MARIA VON WEBER

Der Freischütz

R. Schock, G. Frick, C. Watson, L. Schädle, Zbor i orkestar Deutsche Oper Berlin, Lovro Matačić

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If it were not for the recording of *Der Freischütz* by Carlos Kleiber with the German competitive ensemble of the Dresden Opera, where available to him was the excellent female pair Janowitz-Mathis, Matačić's interpretation of the first German national opera from 1967 would be considered a reference recording. In this way, we are lucky to have the opportunity to compare these two recordings and can leave the final choice to rest with every opera lover based on his/her own judgement.

To conduct and at the same time to conceive the performance of this Early Romanticist opera is a particularly demanding task because of permanent exchange of sung and recitative parts, which are charged with drama and are almost as important and weighing as musical parts or arias. Having managed to engage an original German ensemble and predominantly German soloists, Matačić managed to work out the recitative parts, where sometimes, considering the fascinating quantity of rhythm, diction and melodic hues, one has the impression that he conducts the singers even when they speak and that, in cooperation with them, he elaborated the interpretation in detail. A first thing worth mentioning about this remarkable performance is music full of spirit, character, humour, achieved by a splendid selection of tempo, logical phrasing, opulent orchestral sound but also refreshing onomatopoeic details and a close cooperation between the orchestra and the soloists. The contribution of Matačić can be found in his discretion and authority, which provides the performance with a pulse and an impetus fully in accordance with the musical logic of this piece.

To Rudolf Schock the naïve but determined Max was the role of his career, and his mobile dramatic tenor of a pleasant colouring is manifested here in its full expressive dimensions. His extraordinary diction is a significant aid in creating a role, enabling him to shape a wide range of dramaturgical and musical gradation without resorting to ungainly agogic, sometimes very popular among singers. I was even more fascinated by the malicious tragic figure of Kaspar, rendered by Gottlob Frick. His mature but well-preserved bass meets all the demands of this role, it is equally fine both in spoken and sung parts, it is mobile and entirely homogenous in all registers. It was not that much impressed by the female part of the ensemble. Namely, with Claire Watson one can discern, despite the correctness, how she does not render the German language with the native diction. However, Claire Watson as Agatha and Lotte Schädle as Änchen are fairly different in terms of colours of their lyric sopranos and this provides additional charm to their duets. Watson has a dark lyric soprano, full of metal hue, whereas the voice of Schädle verges on the so-called 'goat-like soprano', it is bright in hue but possesses the flexibility of coloratura. The singing of the both is highly cultivated, crystal clear and very natural.

The level of precision and inspiration of the Choir and the Orchestra of the German Opera of Berlin when playing most important parts (Overture, Hunters' Choir) is impressive. Unfortunately, the recording does not support the plasticity and stageability of the performance because soloists are much too emphasised, whereas the choir and the orchestra remain far in the background of the sound image. However, this cannot spoil the overall excellence of the performance, for which Matačić, Schock and Frick, each with one of his best operatic creations, deserve most credit. Mario-Osvin Pavčević

LOVRO VON MATAČIĆ & ZAGREB PHILHARMONY

J. Brahms: A German Requiem ♦ D. Detoni: Élucubrations ♦ J. Haydn: Symphony No. 104 ("London")
L. Janáček: Sinfonietta, Glagolitic Mass ♦ M. Kelemen: Changeant ♦ W. A. Mozart: Symphony No. 25
and No. 40 ♦ Boris Papandopulo: Sinfonietta ♦ F. Schubert: Symphony No. 2 ♦ G. Verdi: Requiem
R. Wagner: Siegfried Idyll, Five Songs of Mathilde Wesendonk

The anthological selection of the recordings made with Zagreb Philharmony and a number of excellent soloists, such as Nicolai Geda, Siegfried Palm, Ruža Pospis-Baldani, Margaret Price, Vladimir Ruždjak... certainly deserve to be mentioned as part of this recollection of Maestro Matačić. The selection, presented on 8 compact disks, represents a valuable document of the time when Maestro and our Philharmony were at the peak of their collaboration, when the joy of performing together frequently produced excellent interpretations. This set was presented by the Zagreb Philharmony together with the last year's subscription, which is why the subscription was more than worth its price. However, we can hope now that these recordings will be also commercially issued. Namely, some of the interpretations, to name now just Verdi's *Requiem*, are exquisite and should find place in your record collection.

Ivan Supek