



This compact disc provides much-needed additions to available recorded performances of the music of the prolific Hungarian-American composer MIKLÓS RÓZSA (1907-1995). Included are three compositions from Rózsa's concert oeuvre: *Duo for Violin and Piano*, Op.7 (1931); *Sinfonia Concertante, for Violin, Cello, and Orchestra*, Op. 29 (1962/1966); and the *Sonata for Violin Solo*, Op. 40 (1985-1986). The three works illustrate the development and evolution of Rózsa's compositional style over more than five decades.

The most informative source about Rózsa is his autobiography, *Double Life* (London, 1982/1989), written shortly after completion of *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1981), the last of his more than 100 film scores. The double life in the title refers to his position as the leading composer of Hollywood film scores (no small achievement with contemporary competitors like Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Dimitri Tiomkin, Franz Waxman, Alfred Newman, and Bernard Herrmann, just to name a few), while simultaneously achieving and maintaining credibility with the performers, conductors and publishing companies of the Classical music world. Rózsa appropriated the title from the Academy Award winning film *A Double Life* (1948) for which Ronald Colman received Best Actor Award, and Rózsa Best Scoring of a Dramatic Picture. One questions the appropriateness of the film title for the autobiography, since the film is about a psychologically deranged Shakespearean actor turned murderer.

Miklós Rózsa was born in Hungary in 1907. His mother, with whom he first studied piano, was a classmate of Béla Bartók's at the Budapest Academy. His uncle, a musician with the Hungarian Opera, taught him violin and viola. Rózsa began composing at age seven, and was soon drawn to the music of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, and like them, developed a deep interest in music of the Hungarian peasantry.

Rózsa enrolled at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1926, and studied composition and musicology. His first works were quickly published by Breitkopf & Härtel. He moved to Paris in 1931 and completed his *Theme, Variations and Finale, Op. 13*, a work he would revise in 1943 and again in 1966, and that would bring him international acclaim. Profoundly influenced by the film music of Arthur Honegger, he began composing for the film studio London Films, working with the Hungarian-born producer Alexander Korda, with whom he moved to Hollywood in 1940. He became a highly successful freelance film composer and was a staff member at

MGM from 1948 to 1962. He received Academy Awards for the films *Spellbound* (1945), *A Double Life* (1947) and for the epic film *Ben Hur* (1959).

Hollywood of the 1930s was the refuge of hundreds of performing musicians, composers, writers, dancers, and artists who had been forced to leave Europe, in most cases to save their very lives. They found employment in the movie studios, mega-corporations that dominated popular entertainment in the United States from the 1920s until the advent of television in the 1950s. Most of the performers and composers had been trained and educated in the conservatories and universities of Berlin, Vienna, Munich, and Leipzig. Some emigrated before the Nazi take-over and had established themselves as composers for silent films. Rózsa belonged to the subsequent generation and composed largely for the genre called FILM NOIR.

Roger Hickman (*Miklós Rózsa's Ben-Hur, A Film Score Guide*, Scarecrow Press 2011) categorized the film noir for which Rózsa provided scores as PURE NOIR, MELODRAMA, COMEDY, and PSYCHOLOGICAL. But regardless of the film type, the restrictions placed on the quantity and character of the music by producers and directors, notably Alfred Hitchcock and David Selznick, limited expression and stylistic development. Consequently, Rózsa led a double life, setting aside large blocks of time to focus on Classical genres. He kept in touch with performers and conductors, among them Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Piatigorsky, Eugene Ormandy, Georg Solti, Bruno Walther, and Walter Hendl, and taught at the University of Southern California from 1945 to 1965. Steven D. Wescott's work list appended to his article on Rózsa in *The New Grove...*, (2000) cites approximately 45 major instrumental works, among them concertos, sonatas, symphonies, string quartets, and an impressive list of vocal works composed by Rózsa. But the stereotype of Rózsa the film composer prevails even now, even though the actual amount of music in the films is less by far than that of the concert works.

The four movements of the *Duo for Violin and Piano, Op. 7* (1931) were composed soon after his graduation from the Leipzig Conservatory. The first movement (*Tranquillo*) is in sonata allegro form with the traditional two themes; the second (*Allegretto capriccioso*) is a scherzo in ABA form, again with two contrasting themes; a nocturne in ternary form follows (*Largo doloroso*), and the piece closes with a rondo (*Allegro vivo e giusto*). Generally, Rózsa's stylistic evolution can be viewed as progressing from a modal folk style similar to that of Zoltán Kodály, toward a more motivic and cell-structured one like Bartók's. In the first, melodies are pentatonic, mildly chromatic and suggest Hungarian folk music, although Rózsa never quotes specific folk tunes. Phrases are symmetrical and periods are formed through extensive use of sequences. These features, especially the sequential repetition of phrases, were equally effective in film and concert music of the time.

The *Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Cello and Orchestra, Op. 29* was written in two phases. The second movement, *Tema con Variazioni*, (there are seven variations) was written first, commissioned by Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky for their concert series in Los Angeles in 1962. The outer movements were added in 1966. The complete work (*Allegro ma non troppo; Tema con Variazioni; Allegro con brio*) is scored for pairs of woodwinds, four horns, three each of trumpets and trombones, harp, celesta, strings and an assortment of percussion including xylophone. The instrumentation is typical of a Hollywood studio orchestra of the time. The piece is dedicated to Gregor Piatigorsky, who was pleased with the emphasis on the cello. Heifetz was less happy and complained that he had to "*stand there like an idiot*" while the cello stated the entire principal theme in the second movement.

In the outer movements the writing for the violin is particularly virtuosic, with extensive passages in parallel octaves, frequently in the high register. In the words of conductor Steven Huang, "*...the piece is competitive, athletic—truly adversarial. At*

times the parts circle one another. There is less of the collaborative feeling that one gets in the Mozart Concertante or the Brahms Double Concerto.” Violinist Marjorie Bagley and cellist Michael Carrera both noted the intonation challenges presented by the numerous parallel octaves and fourths between the solo instruments.

Rózsa's mature style is illustrated by the *Sonata for Violin Solo, Op. 40*. By the time of its composition, he was free of the film world and was focusing entirely on concert genres. In the first movement *Allegro Moderato*, the mono-rhythmic, symmetrical, lyrical melodic sequences that characterize the early works are replaced by short, more sharply-crafted motivic pitch cells with profuse syncopations and Scotch snaps. There are frequent meter shifts that give the music a compelling momentum. In the second movement, *Canzone con variazioni*, in which the long-short-short pattern of the traditional canzona is discernible, a wider range is covered and expression is more intense. In the closing *Finale: Vivace*, virtuosity is further increased and there is considerable use of the high register. (The violin sometimes sounds like an ondes martenot, an instrument for which Rózsa composed a sonata in 1987.)

Throughout his life, Rózsa employed quartal harmonies, interlocking triads that suggest bitonality, parallel chord movement, and chromatically altered pentatonic and octatonic modes. But in his mature style his music became more abstract. While some earlier works could be modified to serve another genre (film scores were adapted to concert pieces, and vice versa, e.g., *Spellbound Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, 1946), that was no longer an appealing prospect. Rózsa achieved a long-sought synthesis of features of the music of composers he most admired — Paul Hindemith, Zoltán Kodály, and especially Béla Bartók — and fused them with his personal creative genius to form a distinctive style of his own.

— Richard Wetzel

For current information on the artists, please visit their websites

Violinist MARJORIE BAGLEY: marjoriebagley.com

Cellist MICHAEL CARRERA: michael-carrera.com

Pianist STEPHEN SWEDISH: stephenswedish.com

Conductor STEVEN HUANG: stevenwhuang.com



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Thanks to: Ohio University Research Committee and the Baker Awards Committee for funding assistance. University of North Carolina Greensboro School of Music, Theater and Dance for use of the Recital Hall and Steinway piano. Scott Rawls for his work as producer during the sessions for the Duo and Solo Sonata. Cristinel Bacanu for his work as producer during the sessions in Moldova. Mihai Agafita for his assistance in hiring the orchestra in Moldova.

Duo for Violin and Piano, Op. 7

Tranquillo 6:01

Allegretto capriccioso 2:41

Largo doloroso 5:13

Allegro vivo e giusto 4:09

Marjorie Bagley, violin, Stephen Swedish, piano

Sonata for Violin Solo, Op. 40

Allegro moderato 7:21

Canzone con variazioni 10:04

Finale: Vivace 5:46

Marjorie Bagley, violin

Sinfonia Concertante, for Violin, Cello, and Orchestra, Op. 29

Allegro non troppo 10:31

Theme and Variations: Andante 12:53

Allegro con brio 8:34

Marjorie Bagley, violin, Michael Carrera, cello

The National Philharmonic of Moldova: Steven Huang, conductor

Miklós Rózsa's

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Duo for Violin and Piano and *Sonata for Solo Violin* recorded May 11-13, 2010
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24-25, 2007, in Chisinau, Moldova. TOTAL TIME: 73:17

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