

NIGEL ARMSTRONG

Bach
Bartók
Korngold

Sir Neville Marriner
The Colburn Orchestra



YARLUNG RECORDS
BOB ATTIEH, PRODUCER



1-4	Sonata for Solo Violin Béla Bartók	24:19
	<i>Tempo di ciaccona</i>	8:29
	<i>Fuga</i>	4:21
	<i>Melodia</i>	6:12
	<i>Presto</i>	5:17
5-8	Violin Sonata No.3 in C Major, BWV 1005 Johann Sebastian Bach	19:49
	<i>Adagio</i>	3:54
	<i>Fuga</i>	9:05
	<i>Largo</i>	3:10
	<i>Allegro assai</i>	3:40
9-11	Violin Concerto in D Major Erich Wolfgang Korngold	23:21
	<i>Moderato</i>	8:29
	<i>Romanze</i>	7:20
	<i>Allegro</i>	7:32



Photo: Jeff Fasano

Nigel Armstrong

a special journey

What does a producer do when one has the opportunity to work with a violinist like Nigel Armstrong? One celebrates. This has been an interesting journey. Nigel grew up in Sonoma, California and was appreciated as a prodigy from an early age. Nigel earned his bachelor's degree from The Colburn School where he was a student of the famed Robert Lipsett. Nigel performed well in a series of international violin competitions during his student years and debuted with important orchestras in North and South America and Europe before earning a post graduate diploma from Curtis.

Celebrating Nigel will be a different experience than celebrating other superstar young players, however. Nigel comes with innate musicality; his use of color, his musical line, his flair for expression... these come from his body and blood. Unlike some great musicians who can intellectualize "musical intent" in everything they play, Nigel just does it. When I asked him what inspired a particularly wonderful take, Nigel couldn't always tell me. His playing is supremely intelligent, but he doesn't let his intellect interfere with his playing. It comes from his body and from his cultivated instincts.

Nigel worked hard to raise his playing to the level of the international concert stage but one can tell this effort came naturally to him. His flexible athletic technique and his innate musicality means he didn't have to fight with himself to produce his sound and his music. Nigel is a "natural," and while Nigel plays with technical magnificence, Nigel is not a show off. He doesn't feel nervous when approaching a threatening passage, he just plays the music and gives us a window into the composer's soul.

LACO is among the great orchestras which hired Nigel to make his debut while still an undergraduate. Nigel played the Mozart Violin Concerto No. 3 with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, conducted for that performance by Andrew Shulman.

I collaborated with Nigel on Mozart's G Major Violin Concerto with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. His musicianship is extraordinary. He has a quiet assurance and an athletic virtuosity which, when combined with his chamber-music like sensitivity and beauty of tone, made for a wonderfully spontaneous, yet precise and elegant performance. I look forward to working with him in the future.

-Andrew Shulman, conductor

Nigel is a consummate artist who brings both imagination and conviction to his performance. His influence on young artists and audiences is concomitant with the intensity of his virtuosity and his musical personality. The breadth of his repertoire and experience is remarkably misleading when you realize the age of this young artist -- an asset to his generation.

-Neville Marriner

Los Angeles had been home to Nigel during his four years at The Colburn School. He has friends and family here, in the school community, at American Youth Symphony where he served as concertmaster, and at Yarlung. Nigel had been performing on the east coast and arrived in Los Angeles for our recording sessions on a spectacular day. I picked him up at Colburn School, where he was staying for the week, and drove him to USC so we could hear him in the concert hall where we made our recording.¹ In the car, we talked about orchestras and conductors in North America and Europe with whom Nigel would soon be performing concertos, and about how Nigel saw his career now that he had graduated from Curtis. Rather than giving me a line carefully honed for public relations, Nigel said “I keep looking for the meaning in my playing, Bob, and for what I bring to the concert stage. I am afraid it is not enough, that I’m not contributing enough as a person. Is this what I am supposed to do?” This is a question few of us are brave enough to ask, of course, and I did not have an answer for him. Life as a soloist on the concert stage is one of the most demanding (often demeaning) and disruptive sorts of life one can live. Concert tours are hard on one’s family and one’s sleep and can be damaging to one’s ego, either by artificially inflating and/or deflating it repetitively. And it can be exhilarating. Nigel went on to explain that playing with glamorous orchestras and conductors and earning higher and higher fees was never part of his ambition and he humbly didn’t know what special thing he had to offer that world. He was just as happy or happier playing with a few friends as he was on a feted European concert stage.

So in-between concerts, Nigel spent part of the next spring studying at a zen monastery in upstate New York (the monks and nuns were particularly happy to hear him with his violin) and he spent the following summer working on an organic

¹ Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Antonio Damasio we recorded the Bach and Bartok on this album at The Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Within this Neuroscience institute, Dr. Damasio built Cammilleri Hall, a jewel of a theater designed by Yasuhisa Toyota. Mr. Toyota and his firm have become famous for some of the finest new concert halls in the world, including Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Finnish Radio Symphony Hall in Helsinki, and Suntory Hall in Tokyo.

We recorded the Korngold concerto at a live concert conducted by Sir Neville Marriner with The Colburn Orchestra in Royce Hall at UCLA. It is interesting but not surprising that Nigel’s album unites three great music schools in Los Angeles in his debut album: Colburn, USC and UCLA.

farm in Germany. This came as a surprise to some of his friends in the music world but Nigel has received support, especially from those institutions with the “most to lose” should Nigel give up the violin at some point. Nigel could dedicate his life to raising carrots or developing networks of community agriculture, or who knows... establish a new religious community.

Sel Kardan serves as President of The Colburn School. I asked Sel his views during a visit to my home. Sel spoke about Nigel and his special artistry and how music is larger than concert halls. Sel said that the study and performance at the highest levels of achievement lead to the development of an empathetic, sensitive and communicative being, whether one seeks a career as a soloist or not. Nigel will make The Colburn School proud, Sel elaborated, in whatever endeavor he pursues. “We are not a factory,” Sel continued, “We are a great conservatory, but more importantly, a community, that supports creative growth and achievement. It has been our pleasure to be part of Nigel’s development as an extraordinary artist and person, and we look forward to the next chapter in his life with interest and enthusiasm.”

Since this recording, Nigel has returned to Germany and Italy for more performances, including additional Korngold violin concertos with Sir Neville Marriner on the podium. We look forward to his next Los Angeles concert, or to the taste of a new Armstrong organic carrot, whichever comes first.

We made this album in two concert halls with great acoustics. For the Bach and Bartok sonatas in The Brain and Creativity Institute’s brand new Camilleri Hall at USC, we used one AKG C24 microphone generously provided by Jon Fisher from Gearworks



Photo: Jeff Fasano

Pro Audio. For the live Korngold violin concerto in Royce Hall at UCLA, we chose two Neumann U47 microphones and two AKG C12 microphones from Gearworks. We used microphone amplification by Elliot Midwood for both recordings. We recorded to high resolution digital media and to RMGI 468 analog tape, with tube recording electronics designed for us by Len Horowitz. We are especially grateful to Susan Lynch, Pamela McNeff-Smith and Nic Monaco, who worked closely with Dr. Antonio Damasio to make us feel so welcome in the jewel that is Cammilleri Hall.

I particularly want to thank Sir Neville, who along with Lady Marriner, champions Nigel and his playing. They love Nigel as a person and as a violinist. Sir Neville was happy we were able to capture this performance in Royce Hall. We are also grateful to Sir Neville for serving as such an intelligent and experienced advisor to Yarlung Artists. We treasure him and his input on every level.

As with the Korngold concerto, Nigel's performances of the Bach and Bartok sonatas are "live to tape," complete takes. I remember Sel Kardan sitting in my living room shortly after the orchestra recording saying to me, "is that really one take? Nigel plays so beautifully. Did you fix any mistakes?" No, I told Sel, we didn't fix any mistakes. There wasn't really much that would benefit from "fixing." We are indeed proud of Nigel.

Bob Attiyeh, producer

Executive Producers **Randy and Linda Bellous** join Nigel and Bob in thanking the generous people and institutions who supported Nigel with his debut album, especially

The Stratton-Petit Foundation
Ann and Jean Horton
Carlos and Haydee Mollura
Jerry and Terri Kohl

We also wish to thank friends and supporters who have helped generously with this release: Raulee Marcus, Drs. Antonio and Hanna Damasio, The Brain and Creativity Institute at Dornsife College, USC, Sir Neville and Lady Marriner, The Colburn School, Patrick and Erin Trostle, European American Music, Wes and Nancy Hicks, Rinchen Lhamo, Michael and Linda Rosen, Peachy and Bud Spielberg and Maureen Keesey Fuentes.



Photo: David Fung



Photo: Jeff Fasano

Nigel's thoughts on the music:

The Adagio in Bach's C Major sonata is one of the most contemplative movements I know for solo violin. Most of the piece offers gently pulsing chords that unfold from one harmony to the next. I've found it wonderful, while playing, to allow the music to lead, to follow the individual lines as they manifest. I love submitting myself and my violin to the power of Bach. He leads us into often inexorable and surprising directions.

The fugue that follows his adagio is the longest fugue Bach wrote for the violin. It is also, in my opinion, the grandest. He gives relief from the complexity of the fugal sections with spans of gently running eighth notes. There's a moment in the last of these simpler sections that always gives me a thrill--the violin starts climbing, measure by measure, step by step, until it reaches two plaintive Gs, the highest notes in the piece, and then gently returns to earth to begin a quiet restatement of the theme.

Each time I play it, I learn something new from the Largo, the third movement of the sonata. It demands simplicity and innocence, two qualities which are sometimes the hardest to convey.

The finale is quick and joyful. Bach again uses the high G (this time triumphantly), just before bringing the sonata to a close.

In his Sonata for Solo Violin, Bartók writes with an expressive force that grabs me by the ear from the first chord. Like Bach's famous Ciaccona from the Partita in D Minor, Bartók's first movement explores a vast architecture of emotion. From the rough pride in the opening statement to the tentative searching that follows, from the wild outbursts in the final climax to the calm resignation of the ending, the piece remains eternally new for me.

In the second movement, Bartók creates a fugue injected with a raw intensity.



Sir Neville Marriner rehearses in Royce Hall with Nigel Armstrong and The Colburn Orchestra

It is thrilling to witness and exhilarating to play. The Melodia that follows, on the other hand, expresses a faded beauty unique in all the pieces I play. It reminds me of a grainy photograph that evokes some childhood memory of innocence, a souvenir that's difficult to recall in any detail.

Bartok's finale is exciting, tempestuous, and brings back some of the earthiness of the opening movement. I'm very fond of the last few seconds.

Korngold wrote his violin concerto in Los Angeles and I feel lucky that I was able to perform this work, in Los Angeles, with The Colburn Orchestra and Sir Neville Marriner. I have since played this concerto with Sir Neville in front of other important orchestras in Europe. But there will always be something special for me in this first performance with my conservatory orchestra, especially in the shimmering middle movement.



Nigel's recording session in Cammilleri Hall
photo: Marcus Rinehart



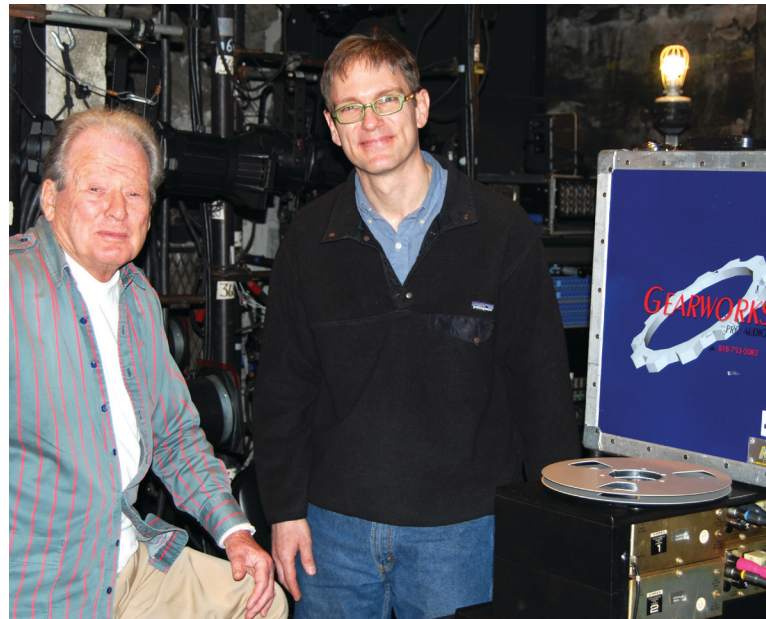
Yarlung Artists board chairman
Michael Rosen and Nigel,
concert at annual meeting

Not only is Sir Neville one of the world's greatest conductors but he is a kind spirit whose mentorship I have appreciated greatly. Maestro tells wonderful stories when he works with an orchestra and he never fails to inspire us musically and enliven the spirits of those around him.

Nigel Armstrong
Götzenmühle, Germany

Layout: Eron Muckleroy
Cover photograph: Jeff Fasano

Korngold violin concerto published by Schott Mainz and Japan



Sir Neville and Bob backstage at Royce Hall

Nigel Armstrong, violin

Sir Neville Marriner, The Colburn Orchestra



Nigel Armstrong



Sir Neville Marriner

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| 1-4 | Sonata for Solo Violin | Béla Bartók |
| 5-8 | Violin Sonata No.3 in C Major, BWV 1005 | Johann Sebastian Bach |
| 9-11 | Violin Concerto in D Major - Moderato | Erich Wolfgang Korngold |

This recording made possible with generous support from:

The Stratton-Petit Foundation

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Carlos and Haydee Mollura

Jerry and Terri Kohl

Recorded at the Brain and Creativity Institute's Camilleri Hall,
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, October 21-23, 2013

Korngold violin concerto recorded in Royce Hall at UCLA, February 13th, 2011

Producer and Recording Engineer: Bob Attiyeh

Assistant Producer: Jacob Horowitz

Executive Producers: Randy & Linda Bellous

Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman & Bob Attiyeh

AKG C24 tube microphone: Gearworks Pro Audio

Microphone preamplification: Elliot Midwood



Breaking the Sound Barrier

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