

NAXOS

Leó
WEINER

Violin Concerto No. 1

**Variations on a Hungarian Folksong • Serenade
Divertimento No. 3 'Hungarian Impressions'**

Júlia Pusker, Violin

MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Budapest • Valéria Csányi



Leó
WEINER
(1885–1960)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 41 (1958)

25:54

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Moderato – Allegro non troppo | 5:36 |
| 2 | II. Allegro vivo e giocoso | 4:39 |
| 3 | III. Andante | 6:59 |
| 4 | IV. Presto | 8:50 |

5 Variations on a Hungarian Folksong, Op. 30 (1949)

5:18

Serenade, Op. 3 (1906)

22:19

- | | | |
|----------|--------------------------------|------|
| 6 | I. Allegretto, quasi andantino | 6:26 |
| 7 | II. Lebhaft, sehr rhythmisch | 5:31 |
| 8 | III. Rubato – Andantino | 4:40 |
| 9 | IV. Allegro molto | 5:42 |

**Divertimento No. 3, Op. 25 ‘Impressioni ungheresi’
('Hungarian Impressions') (1950)**

14:18

- | | | |
|-----------|--|------|
| 10 | I. Duda-nóta ('Bagpipe Song'): Allegretto (poco andantino) | 4:04 |
| 11 | II. Kesergő ('Lamenting Song'): Moderato (quasi andante) | 1:08 |
| 12 | III. Juhász-tréfa ('Shepherd's Joke'): Allegretto ben moderato | 2:08 |
| 13 | IV. Ballada ('Ballad'): Andante (poco mosso) | 4:11 |
| 14 | V. Maskara-nóta ('Masquerade Song'): Allegro | 2:47 |

Leó Weiner (1885–1960): Violin Concerto No. 1

Variations on a Hungarian Folksong • Serenade • Divertimento No. 3 ‘Hungarian Impressions’

Leó Weiner was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Budapest on 16 April 1885. His parents didn't arrange for him to learn music; he only attended professional music lessons for a few months, instead learning composition by analysing the works of great masters. At the age of 16 he applied to the Liszt Academy in Budapest, not to become a composer, but to become more familiar with great classical repertoire. Between 1901 and 1906 he studied under Hans von Koessler (1853–1926, known as 'János' Koessler in Hungary), who also taught Bartók, Kodály and Dohnányi. During Weiner's last year at the academy, he won several prizes, which allowed him to go on a European study tour. For a short period he worked as a répétiteur-conductor in the Népszínház (folk theatre), and from 1907 until his death in 1960 he was a professor at the Liszt Academy, teaching multiple generations in the composition and chamber music departments. Almost all the world-renowned Hungarian musicians who emerged from this period were students of Leó Weiner.

After rejecting two pieces, the first composition Weiner later acknowledged in his more mature years was *Serenade, Op. 3*. This composition was awarded the Erkel Prize by the Lipótváros Casino, and it was premiered on 22 October 1906 at a concert given by students to celebrate the anniversary of Liszt's birth, with the orchestra of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, founded by Ferenc Erkel, conducted by István Kerner at the Budapest Opera. The premiere was an enormous success, and was followed by several concerts in Hungary and abroad – the *Serenade* can still be heard in concert halls around the world. The score – dedicated to his professor Hans von Koessler – was published the following year by Lauterbach & Kuhn in Leipzig (after 1908 Bote & Bock, Berlin) along with a transcription for piano four hands.

In this piece, Weiner uses a smaller ensemble than was typical at the time: it was Beethoven's orchestra, with double woodwind, two French horns, two trumpets and only two timpani for percussion. Weiner described the composition in a programme note:

The Hungarian-style serenade, in four movements, is Weiner's first orchestral piece. [...] The light and melodic nature of serenades is present through all the movements. As for the structure, the first movement is an *Allegretto* in sonata form.

In the main theme, we immediately hear augmented seconds (the 'Gypsy scale') and the highly ornate melody of the second theme evokes the *rubato* tempo of gypsy orchestras – these and the syncopation in the closing theme are the most conspicuous elements of the Hungarian tone. Weiner continues: 'The second movement is a *scherzo* in trio form.' In the first section, a playful element is the stubbornly repeated, stumbling rhythm of the theme, with Hungarian-style syncopation at the end of the phrases, and in the trio, the metre changes from three of 2/8 to two of 3/8, and is accompanied by a iambic ostinato. The programme note states:

The third movement is a theme and variations: a solo clarinet begins the theme in a melancholy mood, and is followed by bassoon, oboe and flute solos, all increasing the tempo with a variation; finally, the theme returns: the solo clarinet closes the movement in the same mood as it began.

Contemporary audiences felt this solo was an evocation of the shepherd's pipe. The composer goes on to say: 'The fourth movement is an *Allegro molto* in sonata form.' In the finale, the Hungarian-style elements of the first movement return.

Both audiences and professional musicians recognised the significance of both the composition and the 20-year-old composer. Géza Csáth wrote in his review:

Weiner [...] with his serenade for small orchestra soon achieved what composers of symphonies, operas and oratorios could not achieve for a hundred years and on thousands of pages. He realised how trimmable and malleable the ornamental elements of Hungarian music were if he were to use them in a wide-flowing sonata form. The rhythm is stylised from Hungarian dances and, joined to an original counterpoint technique, it creates an intimate, lovely, cheerfully musing orchestral language. We feel he is not experimenting with forms, he is not trying to add a racial character to his music by using harmonies of racial tones, but he feels all this honestly and purely. [...] This is the Hungarian soul that can add to the age-old European culture something new, something which has an ease and nobility in its expression, something whose products will still be valued – even after the inevitable depreciation due to transport – in Paris, New York, Christiania, Berlin, Rome and even Vienna.

As new, modern musical styles quickly emerged that brought about a change in public taste and that were very different from Weiner's personality, he experienced a creative crisis – so much so that he resigned from his position as a teacher of composition at the Liszt Academy. It was in folk melodies that he found the inspiration to overcome this. His approach to folk music was somewhat different from that of Kodály and Bartók. As Melinda Berlász, the author of a monograph on Weiner wrote: 'For Weiner, folk music was exclusively a musical quality; it was a valuable body of music with unique characteristics, which he, as he put it, could turn into a "classic" style with "the delicate restraint of a composer"'. These compositions brought him international success.

The horrors of the Second World War triggered another creative crisis, which lasted for seven years. After the war he wrote a number of compositions for teaching purposes, refined and arranged his early pieces and wrote some compositions summarising his *oeuvre*.

A typical piece from this period is *Divertimento No. 3, Op. 25 'Impressioni ungheresi'* ('Hungarian Impressions'). While the opus number follows that of *Divertimento No. 2*, there are nine years between the two pieces. As one of the selected compositions written for the 100th anniversary of the Hungarian war of independence, *Divertimento No. 3, Op. 25* was performed on 23 November 1948 at the Liszt Academy in Budapest by the Metropolitan Orchestra, conducted by László Somogyi. Every movement is an arrangement of a piece from *Hungarian Peasant Songs, Vol. 1 (Op. 19, pub. 1932)* and *Vol. 3 (Op. 22, pub. 1937)*: *Op. 25, No. 1 – Op. 22, No. 2; Op. 25, No. 2 – Op. 22, No. 1*, entitled *Szár az ágon sír a madár* ('A Bird is Weeping on a Dry Branch'); *Op. 25, No. 3 – Op. 19, No. 3; Op. 25, No. 4 – Op. 19, No. 5*, entitled *Elment Simon disznót lopni* ('Simon Went to Steal a Pig'); *Op. 25, No. 5 – Op. 19, No. 6*. To quote Weiner's description:

The themes of *Divertimento No. 3 ('Hungarian Impressions')* are from the folk song collection of the Museum of Ethnography, just as in *Divertimentos No. 1* and *2*, but there is a substantial difference: the first two were written for a string orchestra, and this one is for a full symphony orchestra. The composition has five short movements, linked like the movements of a suite. Movement I (*Duda-nóta – 'Bagpipe Song'*) has three joyful themes and is structured like a rondo. Movement II (*Kesergő – 'Lamenting Song'*) is slow, *parlando*-like; it begins with a violin solo to which the whole orchestra responds. Movement III (*Juhász-tréfa – 'Shepherd's Joke'*) is a humorous, strophic song: the first strophe is a flirtatious *grazioso*, the second is a heavy *fortissimo* and the third has a *dolce-espressivo* quality. Movement IV (*Ballada – 'Ballad'*) is slow, again; a four-bar melody and its six variations are intertwined in a chaconne-like structure. The theme is presented by the strings, the first variation is a clarinet solo, the second variation is played by the orchestra without the trombones, trumpets and the timpani, the third variation is a flute solo, in the fourth variation the melody is carried by the cellos, the fifth variation is an oboe solo, and the end of the sixth variation is *fortissimo*, played by the full orchestra with trombones, trumpets and timpani; in the coda, the theme returns on the strings. Movement V (*Maskara-nóta – 'Masquerade Song'*) is based on a single theme, which begins *piano* and concludes *fortissimo*.

Variations on a Hungarian Folksong, Op. 30 is also from this period. It was written for the newly established Honvéd [Army] Ensemble and premiered in August 1949, conducted by Gyula Dávid. The composition is an arrangement of the final piece (*No. 8*) in *Vol. 3* of the previously mentioned *Hungarian Peasant Songs* for piano. Weiner composed a new, dramatic variation, which turned the joyful suite movement into a piece that can be performed on its own. The theme is a march-like interpretation of a folk song with saucy lyrics, followed by seven variations. Weiner wrote a transcription for two pianos of this piece as *Op. 32*, but this was only published in 1969, after his death.

For a long time Weiner's students tried to persuade him to write a violin concerto. It was only after he resigned from his teaching post at the Liszt Academy in 1957 that he finally did so. Within the two sonatas he completed in the 1910s there was the promise of two concertos, and not only was Weiner a great orchestrator, he also loved this kind of work. His last major composition was his first *Violin Concerto in D major*, which is an orchestration of his excellent *Sonata for Violin and Piano in D major, Op. 9* (1911), dedicated to Jenő Hubay. The manuscript of the score remains unpublished – the date of completion is indicated as 22 May 1958, which means that his *Violin Concerto, Op. 41* was completed later than four other works that have higher opus numbers. The premiere was planned for 14 April 1960, Weiner's 75th birthday, but instead the *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* was performed. Weiner died five months later, hence the work remains in the shadow of its sister, the second *Violin Concerto*, based on his *Sonata No. 2 in F sharp minor*. The piece was premiered in 2003, 45 years after the score was completed. The soloist was Vilmos Szabadi, with László Kovács conducting the North Hungarian Symphony Orchestra, Miskolc.

This brilliant arrangement of *Sonata for Violin and Piano in D major, Op. 9* is a testament to Weiner's expertise – which was acknowledged by his contemporaries, including Bartók – and to his 50 years of experience. Only minor changes were made to the violin part of the *Sonata* – there are no new musical elements in the *Concerto*. Just as in the adaptations of several of his early works, Weiner considered arrangements to be new compositions, as the orchestration highlighted previously hidden qualities of the original pieces. The description below was written by Weiner about the *Sonata*, and is presented here because the music is identical:

The first movement's structure is a fantasia, with only the outlines of a sonata, and it has a lyrical quality. The second movement is a fast, waltz-like *scherzo* in trio form. It has a cheerful, playful quality. The third movement is a lyrical *andante* with a sonata structure. The fourth movement is a fast-paced *presto*, with its themes derived from the previous three movements. As for its structure, it is a grand sonata. Its character is changeable, now playful, now lyrical, now dramatic. The composition ends with a *prestissimo* coda, which begins *pianissimo* and with a single great crescendo rises to *fortissimo*, with which it ends.

As far as we can establish, this is the first recording of the concerto without any cuts. We have not adhered to the three cuts in the fourth movement inherited from the sonata's performance tradition – 115 bars in total – as these were not made by the composer.

István Kassai

English translation: Villam Translation Services and Paul Merrick

Júlia Pusker

Photo: Szilvia Csibi-Müpa



Júlia Pusker came to international prominence for her prizewinning performances at the 2019 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition. Recent highlights include her Wigmore Hall recital debut with Christia Hudziy, as well as her performance of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* with the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège under Gergely Madaras, which was broadcast live on Medici TV and later streamed on Mezzo. Pusker was selected for the Rising Stars programme of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO) for the 2023/24 season, and as a chamber musician has collaborated with artists such as Kristóf Baráti, Frank Braley and Jean-Yves Thibaudet. She has been a recipient of various notable awards, including the renowned Junior Prima and Cziffra Festival prizes, and between 2016 and 2021 was artist-in-residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Brussels. Recent recordings include Eric Tanguy's *Second Violin Concerto* (Ondine), and her solo album *Schubert on Violin* (Hungaroton). Pusker studied at the Liszt Academy, Budapest and the Royal Academy of Music, London. She plays the c. 1714 'Massart' Antonio Stradivari violin kindly loaned to her through the Beare's International Violin Society by the Pauk family. www.juliapusker.com

MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Budapest



The MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Budapest is one of the leading orchestras in Hungary. It was founded in 1945 after the Second World War by the president of the Hungarian State Railway (MÁV). The orchestra's repertoire ranges from Baroque to contemporary works, with an audience of over 50,000 people annually, reaching out to many more through radio and television broadcasts and online platforms. Successful tours have gained the orchestra acclaim across Europe and South America, as well as in China, Egypt, Hong Kong, Japan, Lebanon, Oman and South Korea. During its more than eight decades of activity, it has worked with numerous world stars including Kiri Te Kanawa, Helen Donath, Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, José Carreras, Andrea Bocelli, Roberto Alagna, Ruggiero Ricci, Elisabeth Leonskaja and Lazar Berman, among many others. Numerous internationally celebrated conductors have conducted the orchestra, including Kurt Masur, János Ferencsik, Zoltán Kodály, Miklós Rózsa, Lamberto Gardelli, Franco Ferrara, Roberto Benzi, Angelo Ephrikian, Arvid Jansons, Herbert Blomstedt, James Levine, Jesús López Cobos, Charles Dutoit, Thomas Sanderling, Christoph Eschenbach and Gábor Takács-Nagy. www.mavzenekar.hu

Valéria Csányi



The Hungarian conductor Valéria Csányi (b. 1958, Budapest) studied at the Liszt Academy of Music, obtaining a music teacher's and choral conductor's diploma in 1982 and a conductor's diploma in 1984. She has attended masterclasses given by Karl Österreicher in Vienna, Péter Eötvös in Szombathely and Milan Horvat in Salzburg, and since 1983, has been a member of the Hungarian State Opera, initially as a répétiteur. She was given the opportunity to conduct opera in 1988, leading several works, including premieres, and between 1995 and 2009 she took part in all of the ballet productions of the State Opera. She has worked extensively at the Hungarian State Opera, conducting more than 700 performances. She has toured Austria, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Mexico. Csányi has made recordings for Naxos including the operetta *Fürstin Ninetta* by Strauss II with the Stockholms Strauss Orkester [8.660227-28] as well as the first complete recording of Erkel's opera *István király* ('King Stephen') [8.660345-46], Széchenyi's *Complete Dances for Orchestra* [8.573807], and Weiner's ballet *Csongor and Tünde* [8.573491], *Toldi – Symphonic Poem* [8.573847] and *Divertimentos Nos. 1 and 2* [8.574125].

Leó Weiner was one of the most important of all Hungarian pedagogues as well as being a distinguished composer. The success of his *Serenade*, written when he was 21, was immediate – its light, intimate and richly melodic qualities, some of which derive from stylised Hungarian dances, are still captivating today. The *Divertimento No. 3* and *Variations on a Hungarian Folksong* mine joyful music from a collection in Budapest's Museum of Ethnography. The *Violin Concerto No. 1* is a masterly orchestration of his *Violin Sonata, Op. 9*, alternating between the playful and the dramatic. The performance heard here restores 115 bars that were cut from the fourth movement, making this the first complete recording.

Leó
WEINER
(1885–1960)

Complete Works for Orchestra • 4

1–4	Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 41 (1958)*	25:54
5	Variations on a Hungarian Folksong, Op. 30 (1949)	5:18
6–9	Serenade, Op. 3 (1906)	22:19
10–14	Divertimento No. 3, Op. 25 ‘Impressioni ungheresi’ (‘Hungarian Impressions’) (1950)	14:18

***FIRST COMPLETE RECORDING**

Júlia Pusker, Violin 1–4

MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Budapest • Valéria Csányi

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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