

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV (MÁV Szimfonikus Zenekar) was founded in 1945 by the Hungarian State Railways. With ninety professional musicians, it now ranks among the best professional orchestras in Hungary. In recent decades it has developed a wide-ranging repertoire from the Baroque to the contemporary, establishing close artistic relationships with famous conductors and soloist in Hungary and abroad. Concert tours have brought appearances throughout Europe and in Cyprus, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Japan and China. With a long list of recordings to its credit, the orchestra has participated in numerous prominent festivals including Lourdes, Vienna, Thessaloniki, Rome and Assisi; in connection with the last mentioned event performing in 1988 a special concert for Pope John Paul II at Castelgandolfo. In September 2010, Gábor Takács-Nagy, a world acclaimed artist, became the orchestra's new Artistic Director and Chief Conductor.



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Photo: Evin Thayer



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Mariusz Smolij

The conductor Mariusz Smolij has won high acclaim from the international press, and has led over a hundred orchestras on four continents, appearing in some of the most prestigious concert halls of the world. In North America, among many others, he has collaborated with the Houston Symphony (Resident Conductor 2000–2003), New Jersey Symphony, Orchestra of the Chicago Lyric Opera, Rochester Philharmonic NY, the Indianapolis Symphony, Symphony Nova Scotia and Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra. He has appeared with leading orchestras in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, Israel, Holland, South Africa, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and his native Poland. He has directed concerts at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kimmel Center, Tonhalle Zurich, Paris Salle Gaveau, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and the Warsaw National Philharmonic. He is a founding member of the Penderecki String Quartet, former artistic director of the Lutosławski Wrocław Philharmonic and International Festival Wratislavia Cantans, Poland, and currently serves as Music Director of the Acadiana Symphony in Louisiana and Riverside Symphonia in New Jersey. www.mariuszsmolij.com

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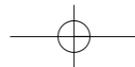


Miklós RÓZSA

Three Hungarian Sketches Cello Rhapsody • Hungarian Nocturne

Mark Kosower, Cello
Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
Mariusz Smolij





Miklós Rózsa (1907–1985)

Overture • Cello Rhapsody • Notturmo ungherese • Three Hungarian Sketches

Since his death fifteen years ago, the concert music of Miklós Rózsa has held its place in the recital halls, concert stages and recording studios of the world. Along with his legacy of nearly one hundred film scores, it continues to be celebrated with live performances, archival releases and new recordings. The Rózsa Society (www.miklosrozsa.org) reports a steady growth in the number of performances, especially since the commemoration of his centennial in 2007. His journey from Budapest to Hollywood, via Leipzig, Paris and London, so eloquently chronicled in his autobiography, *Double Life*, left a legacy of orchestral, concertante, chamber, solo, choral and vocal music that is being rediscovered by new generations of artists and audiences.

The *Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 3*, was Rózsa's first published orchestral work, written at the end of his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory (1929). He composed it for Hans Münch-Holland, principal cellist of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. A transitional work, it finds the young composer trying to establish his own voice (Rózsa himself described it as “six themes in search of a style”). Hungarian melodic contours and rhythms can clearly be heard emerging from an elaborate, Germanic context that is very much of its time and place. The influence of Reger is apparent in the complex harmonic language, which includes hints of polytonality and whole-tone scales.

The soloist opens the work alone, and in the first fourteen measures introduces three motives which will be subjected to rigorous development over the course of the work. Although it changes mood with almost dizzying speed, the *Rhapsody* is tightly structured in an arch form (ABCDBA-Coda) often used by Bartók. Its motives are never repeated in exactly the same way, and Rózsa seems determined to wring out every last ounce of latent counterpoint. There is a suggestion of a nascent concerto movement in the short cadenza-like passages for the soloist and the hints of sonata-allegro form; the *Vivace*

conclusion prefigures the technical fireworks present in the final moments of each of Rózsa's five mature concertos.

Over the next decade, Rózsa built a strong reputation for himself, especially with the success of *Theme, Variations and Finale, Op. 13*, given its première in 1933 and taken up by Munch, Walter and other major conductors of the day. His ballet, *Hungaria* (1935), was a huge success for the Markova-Dolin company in London (where it played for two years), and perhaps played a part in his winning the coveted Franz Joseph Prize from the city of Budapest in both 1937 and 1938. This recognition of his contribution to Hungarian culture inspired him to undertake a new symphonic work which would pay homage to the land of his birth. Begun in the spring of 1938, *Capriccio, Pastorale e Danza, Op. 14* (only later was it revised and re-titled *Three Hungarian Sketches*), was first performed to great acclaim at the 1939 International Music Festival in Baden-Baden, Germany. Press reviews were ecstatic, proclaiming Rózsa an “undoubted musical talent”.

The *Capriccio* is built around two complementary themes, each of which is subjected to numerous variations. Constantly shifting metres keep the listener off-balance until the sustained, quiet ending with solo violin. This moment of repose is carried over into the *Pastorale*, an evocation of the nocturnal Hungarian countryside (one of many such in Rózsa's output) where again two themes alternate. The first is introduced by muted violas; the second is more rhythmic and hints at a peasant celebration accompanied by bagpipes and twittering birds (who sing in a different key!). Three themes vie for prominence in the concluding *Danza* – the first a scurrying, off-beat whirl for violins, the second a flat-footed peasant dance and the third a jubilant fanfare introduced by French horns. Ultimately, the first theme triumphs in a dizzying conclusion of rhythmic virtuosity.

In 1956, Rózsa was in the middle of his thirteen-year

contract with MGM and flush with motion picture work. Nonetheless, when asked by one of his publishers (Ernst Eulenberg) for a short orchestral work, he responded by writing *Overture to a Symphony Concert*. It was given its première in Düsseldorf in September, 1957, at which time the composer wrote: “The *Overture* does not express any definite programme, though now – a year after its creation – I have to admit that the events of the Hungarian uprising, the tragic and dramatic experiences of the Hungarian people striving for liberation, had a bearing on the character of my music”. The work is certainly full of a sense of struggle and angst. The opening, canonic fanfare expands into the principal melodic idea, which tries valiantly to rise but constantly falls back on itself. Rózsa works the orchestra up into a frenzy until a nervous, edgy flute solo (later piccolo) tries to interject a note of calm, as does an eerie-sounding, upward-reaching string line that, like the first theme, falls back to the depths from which it emerged. These three ideas are worked out in a tightly-structured, mostly unrelenting musical argument, rife with counterpoint, shifting metres and pounding accents. A terse coda (considerably shortened by the composer after the première) brings the work to an abrupt close. The overture is dedicated to Eugene Zador, a fellow Hungarian expatriate and composer who was Rózsa's orchestrator (turning the composer's detailed sketches into full orchestra scores) during his MGM years.

By 1962 Rózsa was exhausted from scoring four consecutive epic films: *Ben-Hur*, *King of Kings*, *El Cid* and *Sodom and Gomorrah*. He desperately needed a break from film scoring, and it came in the form of a commission from the Edward B. Benjamin Tranquil Music Project. Benjamin (1897-1980), a wealthy southern philanthropist, had established the project in 1953 at the Eastman School of Music to encourage Howard Hanson's pupils to compose music that, in his own words, “charms and soothes”. The Project eventually expanded to include commissions for the North Carolina Symphony, the Juilliard School of Music and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Rózsa, recommended to Benjamin by his friend and long-

time Philadelphia conductor Eugene Ormandy, gladly accepted the task, and set to work during the summer of 1963 while in Rome with his family. The piece, *Notturmo ungherese*, begins and ends quietly but, as the composer said in his autobiography, “I cannot remain *pianissimo* for eight minutes”. When Ormandy conducted the première with the Philadelphia Orchestra in April, 1964, Benjamin sat next to Rózsa, who relates: “As the music grew, so did Mr Benjamin's unease, until the climax stirred him to a glare. Then, as the music subsided, the angelic smile returned. Afterwards he told me, very kindly, that somehow he could never make composers understand exactly what he wanted”.

The work opens with solo clarinet against soft strings, evoking the calm of the Hungarian countryside at sunset. More winds join in as the theme is developed, leading to its first statement by the full orchestra. String harmonics, harp and celesta create an eerie atmosphere as the cellos introduce a second, more impassioned melodic idea. This is developed into a climax of great intensity (how Mr Benjamin must have fretted!) whereupon the opening clarinet idea returns, softly at first, building to yet another ardent peak of soaring violins and stentorian horns. Then, “as night descends slowly on the little village where I spent my youth, and the memories fade away into the oblivion of the past”, the music dissipates in an impressionistic haze of harp, celesta, glockenspiel, string harmonics and a final whisper of timpani.

Rózsa concluded his memoir by noting that, although he had always written music that refused “to take cognizance of modish, contemporary trends”, his great success, many honours and countless “fans” testified “to the fact that my music brings joy to people, stimulates pleasure in life and pride in life. And as an *apologia pro vita sua* – whether that life be single, double or quadruple – this is the most, and the best, that any creative artist has the right to expect”. This disc gives further proof that the joy and pleasure of his musical legacy continue to inspire artists and listeners.

Frank K. DeWald

Photo: Hymn Kang



Mark Kosower

One of the outstanding cellists of his generation Mark Kosower has appeared as guest soloist with orchestras worldwide including the Orchestre de Paris, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the China National Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, the Kansai Philharmonic, and the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra. An Avery Fisher Career Grant winner, he has been guest soloist in the United States with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Ravinia Festival Orchestra, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and the symphony orchestras of Detroit, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minnesota, Oregon, North Carolina, Phoenix, and Seattle, among many others. He has appeared in recital on the Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center as well as at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Aspen Music Festival, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and in major cities throughout the United States and the world. A frequent guest of chamber music series and festivals alike he has performed at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, with the Juilliard String Quartet, and with Leon Fleisher, Robert Mann, and János Starker. He has also recorded for Naxos, Delos, Ambitus, and VAI. He was appointed to the faculty of the Cleveland Institute of Music in 2009 and named Principal Cello of the Cleveland Orchestra by Music Director Franz Welser-Möst in 2010. He has also held positions as Solo Cellist of the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra and as Professor of Cello and Chamber Music at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

