

Aram Il'yich Khachaturian
Violin Concerto in D minor, Op.46
I. Allegro con fermezza
II. Andante sostenuto
III. Allegro vivace

Aram Ilyich Khachaturian was born on 6 June 1903 in Tbilisi, Georgia, into a poor Armenian family. In 1921 he moved to Moscow, soon entering the Gnessin Institute as a cellist and, in 1925, began his composition studies, before transferring to the Moscow Conservatory to further his studies under Russian composer, Nikolai Myaskovsky in 1929. Even in his early years, Khachaturian had been fascinated by Armenian folk-music and its 'oriental' sounds and melodies, graduating with a work in this style, the First Symphony (1934). It was also around this time when he married the composer Nina Makarova, a fellow student from Myaskovsky's class.

"Instrumental singing has long been on of the basic traditions of Russian and Soviet violin playing. All the virtuoso violin sections of the Concerto as well as the orchestral accompaniment are very melodious. But the themes themselves are the most captivating. Its overall sound is based on Armenian folk songs and dance tunes." ~ Aram Khachaturyan

This piqued the interest of fellow Soviet legendary violinist, David Oistrakh, and invited Khachaturian to his country home to play his composition for him. Impressed, Oistrakh requested the composer to leave the score with him and agreed to meet again in a few days.

"In about two or three days, Oistrakh came to Staraya Ruza to play the Concerto. My little cottage was full of people. It was summer and the door to the porch was open. Many friends were there--composers and musicians. All those present, myself included, were astonished by Oistrakh's enchanting performance. He played the Concerto as though he had been practicing it for months, just as he was to play it subsequently on the concert stage."

Khachaturian was in jubilant spirits during the time he was composing his Violin Concerto. Building on the success of his Piano Concerto from four years prior, it was the composer's second major work, and would remain as his only concerto written for violin.

"I wrote music as though on a wave of happiness; my whole being was in a state of joy ... I worked quickly and easily; my imagination seemed to fly. Themes came to me in such abundance that I had a hard time putting them into some sort of order." Khachaturian finished composing the concerto in two months. It premiered on November 16th 1940, at the Soviet Music Festival in Moscow, conducted by Aleksandr Gauk with David Oistrakh as soloist. Khachaturian had written the concerto with Oistrakh in mind, and dedicated it to him. In his turn, Oistrakh had worked with the composer on the solo part before the premiere and again before publication.

The first and second movements (*I. Allegro con fermezza* & *II. Andante Sostenuto*), though powerful and outstanding in their own ways, can also be alternatively understood as a restocking of ammunition in preparation for the brilliant and wild finale, the *III. Allegro vivace*. The opening movement begins with the explosive first subject, a hopping danceable rhythm on the solo instrument, before giving way to the slower more lamentative subject that stretches into the preceding musical material. After the cadenza, the second subject escapes and transitions into a variation of the opening material before coming to a crashing halt. This contrasts with the second movement, a serene yet dark landscape of a main theme first sung on the bassoon and repeated on clarinet, while a gong-like steady beat is maintained by double basses. The soloist enters quite sometime later to develop on the subject while the viola section intermittently interjects with the same theme throughout. What's especially unique is how delocalized the tension is across the orchestra; not one section remains in the background while the others keep on pace with the soloist — the most distinct voice would be the piccolo's high pitch, where it can still be clearly heard at the very top of the chaos.

The third movement opens with all the orchestral sections working their hardest to create a controlled mayhem; an immense pandemonium at such a volume perhaps only heard in the very peak climaxes of Mahler symphonies. It only dies down to yield for the clarinet solo, which brings in the violin on an extremely rhythmic yet playful main-subject, a dance in triple-meter. Throughout the concerto, there are musical elements drawn from the folk songs and dances of Khachaturians' native homeland of Armenia. Although there are no direct quotations from individual folk songs, the exotic, oriental flavor of Armenian scales and melodies alongside its captivating rhythmic diversity of dances immediately sets this concerto apart from the others, announcing to all of its intrigued listeners that this is no product of Western Europe.