MAX BRUCH
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26
Born: January 6, 1838, in Cologne
Died: October 20, 1920, in Friedenau, near Berlin
Work composed: 1864–68
World premiere: January 5, 1868, in Bremen. Joseph Joachim was the soloist, and Karl Reinthaler conducted.

Although he lived well into the 20th century, Max Bruch belongs to the mainstream of German Romanticism. His expressive melodies, rich harmonic palette and brilliant but never facile treatment of instruments place his style close to that of Mendelssohn and Schumann. These traits are most apparent in Bruch’s popular works for solo string instruments with orchestra: the *Scottish Fantasia* for violin; *Kol Nidrei* for cello; and the Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26.

The latter piece, composed between 1864 and 1868, follows the standard three-movement concerto format but telescopes the first and second movements into one large, two-part section. Bruch also replaces the orchestral exposition that traditionally opens such a work with a brief prologue in which statements of a three-note motif for the orchestra bring rhapsodic answers from the violin. The third of these solos continues as the movement’s principal theme. A second subject offers a lyrical contrast. Following a stormy orchestral passage, however, the movement is cut short by a return to the music of the prologue which, in turn, leads directly into the *Adagio* that forms the middle movement.

The principal melody of the finale has some of the rustic flavor of gypsy fiddle music. This and a second theme, majestically introduced by the orchestra, are developed with real Romantic flair and bravura passagework for the soloist.

What to Listen For
The principal theme of the concerto’s opening movement is an impassioned melody whose double-stopped harmonization demands sure technique from the soloist. A contrasting second theme calls on the singing voice of the violin. A dream-like melody for the solo instrument establishes the enchanted character of the second movement. By contrast, the finale entails virtuoso passagework for the soloist and closes with a coda that accelerates in exciting fashion to the concluding moments.

*Scored for pairs of winds, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.*