

# informatorium

## A Concerto Twice Lost

### The Autograph of Martinů's First Violin Concerto H 226 Rediscovered

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The genesis of the piece is complicated indeed. Very soon after it had been completed, the composition was considered to be lost. According to the preserved correspondence, Martinů worked on the concerto in 1932 and 1933 and had deemed it finished, yet the famed violinist Samuel Dushkin, who had commissioned it, kept urging him to remake it. Bearing witness to this process are the letters Bohuslav Martinů wrote home to Polička, as well as his correspondence with Schott,<sup>1</sup> which planned to publish the piece. The premiere of the concerto, to be conducted by George Szell,<sup>2</sup> was set for January 1934, and the publisher even began preparing the materials for the performance. The scheduled concert was announced in the Prague German-language journal *Musikblätter des Anbruch*,<sup>3</sup> and Szell was given the opportunity to look over the materials.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, other preserved correspondence between Schott and Samuel Dushkin<sup>5</sup> has revealed that Dushkin was not entirely satisfied with Martinů's piece, and hence the planned premiere was ultimately abandoned.<sup>6</sup> Stanislav Novák also showed an interest in performing the concerto, but Dushkin did not give his assent.<sup>7</sup> So as to make the account of the circumstances complete, we should add that Martinů himself also mentioned in February and November 1934<sup>8</sup> the planned performances, but he ultimately composed another work for Dushkin a few years later titled *Suite concertante* H 276. We can assume that, following several years of striving to present the concerto, Martinů felt disillusioned and finally gave preference to simply "forgetting" about it. This development appears to be surprising, however, as the collaboration between the two artists, at least at the beginning, seemed to have been very fruitful, with Dushkin highly praising Martinů's faculties, as well as the concerto itself.<sup>9</sup> In a letter dated 5 October 1933,

<sup>1</sup> The correspondence is deposited in copies at the Bohuslav Martinů Institute Library.

<sup>2</sup> It is mentioned by Willi Strecker in his letter to Samuel Dushkin dated 21 November 1933 (Bohuslav Martinů Institute = BMI, Call No. SM 1933-11-21), as well as in a letter Martinů wrote to Polička dated 1 October 1933 (BMI, Call No. Mar 1933-00-00a): "Dushkin will probably play the violin concerto in January in Prague, at the New German Theatre."

<sup>3</sup> *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 15 (1933), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> See the letter dated 29 September 1933, BMI, Call No. SM 1933-09-29.

<sup>5</sup> The Bohuslav Martinů Institute acquired copies of the letters from Schott this year.

<sup>6</sup> Martinů complained of it in a letter to Schott dated 22 December 1933 (BMI, Call No. SM 1933-12-22).

<sup>7</sup> See the letter dated 25 July 1933 (BMI, Call No. SM 1933-07-25).

<sup>8</sup> See the letters dated 8 February 1934 and 27 November 1934 (BMI, Call No: Mar 1934-02-08 and Mar 1934-11-27).

<sup>9</sup> "... [Martinů] has a very exceptional sense for the violin", from a letter dated 11 June 1932, BMI, Call No. SM 1933-06-11. Martinů also helped him with rewriting the orchestration of Igor Stravinsky's

Willi Strecker at Schott wrote to Dushkin: “Wir alle hier finden das Konzert ein ganz ausgezeichnetes Werk und hervorragend instrumentiert.”<sup>10</sup> In all likelihood, problems arose concerning the quality of and the deadline for the making of the piano reduction,<sup>11</sup> and, what is more, Dushkin fell ill in December.<sup>12</sup> Yet the question remains of whether these were the actual reasons why the premiere was postponed, and what other matters may have played a role in this respect. We have yet to ascertain what subsequently happened to the concerto’s autograph manuscript. In January 1939, Martinů composed the aforementioned *Suite concertante*, which Dushkin premiered in 1943. Martinů dedicated the final version of the work to Dushkin. For a long time, his second violin concerto, dating from 1943 (dedicated to Mischa Elman), was therefore regarded as *Concerto No. 1*.

In 1961, the musicologist and archivist Hans Moldenhauer bought the autograph manuscript of the 1930s violin concerto from another collector, Boaz Piller, contrabassoonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra<sup>13</sup> (along with the *Scherzo Caprice*, originally the fifth part of *Suite concertante I*). Piller was a friend of Martinů’s, and in 1939 and in the 1940s the two men exchanged a number of letters.<sup>14</sup> We may assume that Martinů gave the autograph manuscript to Piller as a gift,<sup>15</sup> but this is impossible to prove, just as is it not possible to know with certainty that Martinů had the autograph manuscript in his possession. In 1972, Moldenhauer addressed Josef Suk, asking him whether he would perform the concerto in Chicago with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Several letters that Moldenhauer and Suk wrote to each other have been preserved in Josef Suk’s personal effects, which are now kept at the Czech Museum of Music. The world premiere took place on 25 October 1973, followed by a performance two days later on 27 October in Chicago, conducted by Sir Georg Solti. The critics responded with enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup> The piece soon received its Prague premiere on 8 November 1973, played by the Czech Philharmonic, which performed it again on the following day. In all likelihood, Suk brought to Prague copies of the parts, but a copy of the score must have existed as well, because in 1979 the concerto was published by Supraphon.

The autograph manuscript of the violin concerto wandered onwards after Hans Moldenhauer’s death in 1987, when his extensive collection was divided among various archives in the USA and Europe. According to Harry Halbreich,

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*Violin Concerto* (see the letter dated 27 June 1932, BMI, Call No. SM 1933-06-27 – “He [Martinů] enjoyed it immensely. He really has a fantastic facility of knowledge of the orchestra.”).

<sup>10</sup> BMI, Call No. SM 1933-10-05.

<sup>11</sup> See the letter dated 1 October 1933, BMI, Call No. SM 1933-10-01, and the letter dated 5 December 1933, BMI, Call No. SM 1933-12-05.

<sup>12</sup> Martinů mentioned it in the letter to his family in Polička, dated 8 February 1934 (BMI, Call No. Mar 1934-02-08).

<sup>13</sup> According to the text in the original programme for the premiere, a copy at the BMI, without a call number.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. the letter dated 26 August 1942 (BMI, Call No. Boa 1942-08-26).

<sup>15</sup> In a letter dated 18 May 1937 (BMI, Call No. 1937-05-18), Martinů writes to Boaz: “Je vous envoie mon autographe et quelques lignes pour votre collection.”

<sup>16</sup> “Music following [...] consisted of works that projected virtuoso qualities of the symphony especially in Martinů’s ‘Concerto For Violin No. 1’ that was receiving its world premiere with Josef Suk as soloist. Martinů’s work is difficult, but Suk, an exceptional instrumentalist whose virtuosity comes with precision, was equal to its staggering demands.” *Chicago Defender* (Oct. 31, 1973), p. 11.

a Martinů researcher and the author of a catalogue of Martinů's compositions,<sup>17</sup> the autograph was first deposited at the Hans Moldenhauer Archive in Spokane and subsequently at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. Nonetheless, the autograph is actually in the possession of the Library of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, which has long been keeping it as part of the unprocessed section of its collection, hence it was generally considered to have been lost. This February, the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague finally acquired a high-quality digital copy of the source, including a copy of the solo part. The Northwestern University Library has also provided a copy of two pages of sketches, a page of corrections, and the "alternative" finale of the concerto, amounting to 12 pages. Noteworthy is the fact that the ending of the finale, the first page of which bears the number 129, is dated "7/December 1932", whereas the recently discovered score is not dated. Accordingly, we may assume that the alternative finale is actually the original finale, while the newly found, 122-page, score, which includes revised sections, has been shortened and features a different ending. This hypothesis has been supported by one of the letters Dushkin sent to Schott. On 21 December 1932, the violinist wrote to Willi Strecker: "He [Martinů] is now rewriting the middle of the last movement!! From the first movement's original 75 pages, about 50 are left."<sup>18</sup> When it comes to the characteristics of the newly discovered autograph manuscript, it is evidently a revised version, not quite definitive, since it does not contain tempo indications; Martinů probably intended to add them after he had received the performer's opinion. Furthermore, the manuscript contains deletions, pencil-written inscriptions, paste-overs, and renumbered pages. In another letter, dated 16 February 1933, Dushkin informed Schott: "... his Concerto is now finished, except for a few details. [...] It is extremely brilliant."<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Dushkin would never get to perform this intriguing, splendid work. That June, further changes to the concerto were to have been undertaken at his request (see e.g. Martinů's letters written to his family in Polička in June and July 1933),<sup>20</sup> but we have yet to learn whether they were actually carried out, as the music materials we possess do not provide any clues in this regard.

The Institute also has available copies of the orchestral parts used at the world premiere, kept in the archive of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Further comparison and thorough assessment of the sources will result from new research. We can particularly look forward to seeing them in the concerto's publication within the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition, which Baerenreiter is scheduled to issue within the next few years.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Harry HALBREICH: *Bohuslav Martinů. Werkverzeichnis und Biographie*, Schott Musik, Mainz 2007, p. 303.

<sup>18</sup> BMI, Call No. SM 1932-12-21.

<sup>19</sup> BMI, Call No. SM 1933-02-16.

<sup>20</sup> Call No: Mar 1933-06-27 and Mar 1933-07-25.

<sup>21</sup> Special thanks to Alan Akers at the Northwestern University Library, Evanston, USA. The research was supported by the GA13 – 19162S project – the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition, Phase 2, Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.