

## Cello Concerto

WILLIAM WALTON

B. March 29, 1902, Oldham, England

D. March 8, 1983, Ischia, Italy

*Premiered at Symphony Hall, Boston, January 25, 1957.*

*Scored for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings (approx. 29 minutes).*

**William Walton's Cello Concerto was commissioned by Gregor Piatigorsky (to whom Walton also dedicated the work), and it was first performed by Piatigorsky with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Charles Munch in 1957. The work received its United Kingdom premiere in a Royal Philharmonic Society concert a month later, with Piatigorsky again the soloist, accompanied by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent (a concert broadcast on the BBC Home Service). An American cellist and composer originally from the Ukraine, Piatigorsky was one of the leading cellists of his generation. From 1941 to 1949 he was head of the cello department at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, and he later taught at the Chamber Music Institute at Tanglewood, Boston University and the University of Southern California. He also recorded extensively as a celebrated trio with Arthur Rubenstein and Jascha Heifitz.**

Walton composed three concertos in total. In addition to the cello concerto, the violin concerto (1936-39) was composed for Jascha Heifitz, while the viola concerto (1928-29) was originally composed for the great English violist Lionel Tertis, but was premiered with Paul Hindemith as soloist and Walton himself as conductor in London in 1929. While the violin is ideally suited as a concerto solo instrument, the viola and cello both present substantial challenges for the composer, in both balancing the soloist and orchestra, and in writing successfully for the solo passages. In the cello concerto, Walton's choice of shimmering orchestrations to accompany many of the solo passages in the cello part shows the composer carefully working to balance the soloist and orchestra. After the famous series of Shakespearean film scores from the 1940s and 1950s (*Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*), the Cello Concerto marked a successful return to the concert hall. Like the Vaughan Williams symphony on this program, this concerto shows a rejection of the post-Romantic style and a movement toward a more modern approach. Although the work is in the traditional three movements expected for a concerto, the approach to form and material is much more complex, with material from the first two movements reappearing in the finale, in the manner that one might expect more from a symphony than a concerto. In the fourth variation of the finale, "Rapsodicamente," Walton has an extended cadenza for the soloist, followed by a coda-like section in which the music of the first movement is recalled.

### **DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:**

Walton, Cello Concerto and Dvorak, Cello Concerto, Charles Munch conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Gregor Piatigorsky (solo cello), RCA Victor Living Stereo 66375.

*Program note by David Kidger, associate professor of music history at Oakland University.*