

“Scottish Fantasy,” Op. 46 (1880)  
Max Bruch (1838 – 1920)

- I. Introduction: *Grave – Adagio cantabile*
- II. *Scherzo: Allegro – Adagio*
- III. *Andante sostenuto*
- IV. Finale: *Allegro guerriero*

In his long and productive life, Bruch was a very versatile and creative composer. He wrote three symphonies, chamber music, songs, sacred and secular choral pieces, and three operas. He was an excellent conductor and was appointed – belatedly, in 1891 – as a professor of composition at the Berlin Academy. Between 1878 and 1880, he was conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society (in England) for two seasons. He was disliked by the orchestra members, who considered him a German martinet and were delighted when he left. Despite his Germanic conducting style, Bruch was, in his time, respected as a composer; sadly, he is remembered nowadays only for his G-minor Violin Concerto and this “Scottish Fantasy.”

Bruch was much attracted to German, Scottish, and Welsh folk songs, and while he was in England he studied the latter two extensively. The inspiration for this composition came to Bruch after he had read several of Sir Walter Scott’s novels. The composer’s intentions in the work are clear from the title; his thorough knowledge of Scottish music enabled him to use real Scottish melodies as the basis for virtually all the main themes. The full title of this work is “Fantasie (Introduction – *Adagio-Scherzo-Andante-Finale*) for Violin with Orchestra and Harp, with the Free Use of Scottish Melodies.” Bruch dedicated it to the great Spanish violinist Pablo Sarasate, who presented its première in September, 1880 at a Bach festival in Hamburg. The public liked the work, but most of the critics did not.

Stately brass chords with added rhapsodic comments by the soloist comprise the somber introduction, which leads to a solo presentation of “Auld Robin Morris”; the orchestra then takes over the melody while the soloist takes off on a virtuosic voyage that includes such musical gymnastics as double stops and parallel thirds. The second movement, in which French horns and strings emulate bagpipes, is a vivacious folk-dance based on the tune “Hey, the Dusty Miller,” which is played first by the orchestra and then taken over, with brilliant ornamental variations, by the soloist. When violas recall

the “Auld Robin Morris” theme, the orchestra tries to brighten the mood; the soloist insists upon retaining the melancholy atmosphere, which becomes an introduction to the third movement. Tenderly and gently, the soloist ushers in the tune based on the wistful melody “I’m a-doun for Lack of Johnnie,” and then again takes off in flights of fancy as the theme is repeated by the orchestra. The finale is based mostly on the Scottish war-song “Scots Wha’ Hae Wi’ Wallace Bled” that was sung in 1314 by the Scottish forces, only 10,000 strong, at the Battle of Bannockburn, during which they roundly thrashed well over 20,000 English. The movement, a real *tour-de-force*, is a supreme challenge to the soloist, who, with harp accompaniment, presents the theme with a pyrotechnical display that includes triple-stopping. After a nostalgic recall of “Auld Robin Morris” from the first movement, the main theme returns and the movement ends in a splendid blaze of orchestral color.

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