



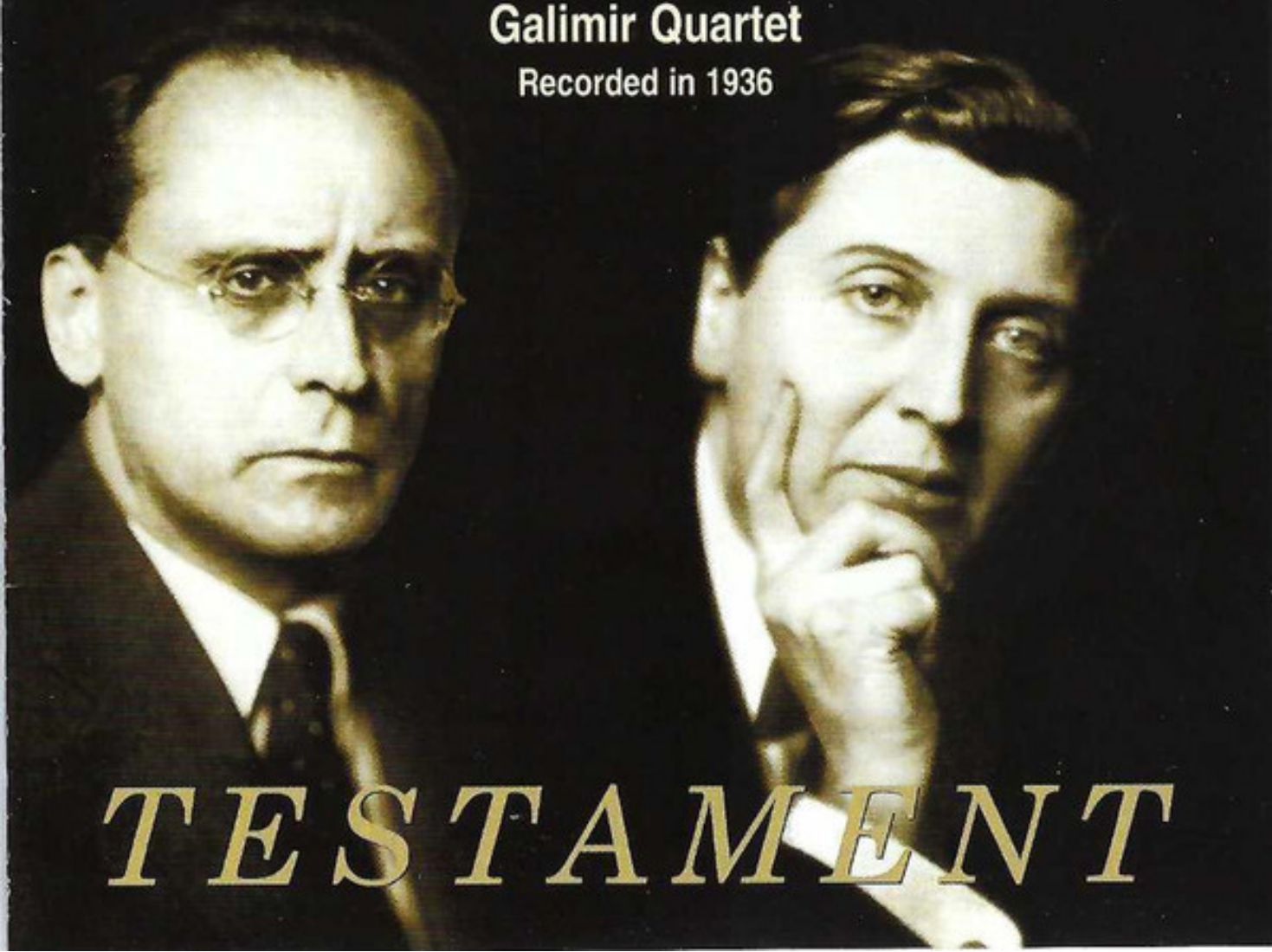
Anton Webern

Berg Violin Concerto · Lyric Suite

Louis Krasner · BBC Symphony Orchestra

Galimir Quartet

Recorded in 1936



TESTAMENT

Alban Berg 1885-1935

Violin Concerto (1935)

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Andante — Allegretto | 13.19 |
| 2 | II Allegro – Adagio | 16.24 |

Louis Krasner – violin

BBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by **Anton Webern**

(Recorded: 1 May 1936, Concert Hall, Broadcasting House, London)

Lyric Suite for string quartet (1925-26)

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 3 | I Allegretto giovale | 2.55 |
| 4 | II Andante amoroso | 5.01 |
| 5 | III Allegro misterioso – Trio estatico | 3.36 |
| 6 | IV Adagio appassionato | 6.06 |
| 7 | V Presto delirando – Tenebroso | 3.49 |
| 8 | VI Largo desolato | 5.52 |

Galimir String Quartet:

Felix Galimir & Adrienne Galimir – violins

Renée Galimir – viola • **Marguerite Galimir** – cello

(Recorded 1936)

57.27

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Alban Berg was born in Vienna in 1885 and died there from blood poisoning 50 years later. Coming from a comfortable family background in Vienna, he composed songs in his teens but received no formal musical education until, at the age 19, he began private composition lessons with Schoenberg. He gave up his career in the civil service and gradually emerged as a leading avant garde composer, with his friend Anton Webern, espousing the cause of Schoenberg and what became known as the Second Viennese School. He prepared the vocal score of Schrecker's opera *Die Ferne Klang* in 1911 and between 1914 and 1920 he composed his opera *Wozzeck*, which on its first performance in December 1925 was immediately recognised as a seminal work. During the last decade of his life he produced the *Lyric Suite* and Chamber Concerto, and worked at his second opera *Lulu*, left incomplete at the time of his death. Early in 1935 he accepted the commission from Louis Krasner to write the Violin Concerto, and shocked by the death of the 18-year-old Manon Gropius, daughter of Mahler's widow and the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius, was stimulated into sustained activity, completing the Concerto in just four months, and giving it a requiem-like character with the inscription 'To the Memory of an Angel'. He little thought that he had written his own requiem.

The Berg Violin Concerto is said to be the first fully serial concerto, though it has many tonal twists to it. The soloist announces the series, a succession of rising thirds, topped by a tritone: G, Bb, D, F#, A, C, E, G#, B, C#, Eb, F. Berg also uses a Carinthian folk-tune and the Bach chorale 'Es ist genug' from the Cantata No.60, *O Ewigkeit du Donnerwort*, and the first four notes of the latter are also the last four notes of the row. The row also encompasses the four open strings of the violin.

The Concerto falls into two parts, though each subsumes two movements, the outer movements being slow. Commentators close to Berg referred to the work as a 'love poem' about Manon Gropius, the young girl whose death at 18 caused its dedication 'Dem Andenken eines Engels'. The second movement includes a trio in 3/8 which

gives the music a waltz-inflection, though played notably slowly by Webern. Towards the end of the movement the Carinthian folk-tune appears. The second part opens (the third movement) in a harsh and dissonant manner, the portrait of the young Manon nearing her end. The last four notes of the row appear backwards (as the first hint of the Bach chorale) as reminiscences of the first part are heard. A catastrophic climax ensues; this disintegrates and leads to the statement of the chorale which becomes the main matter of the music that follows. Towards the end a distant reminiscence of the Carinthian folk-song is heard before the work ends with a reminder of the rising violin arpeggios with which the work began.



Manon Gropius

Louis Krasner was born in Cherkassy, in the Ukraine, in 1903, but was taken to the USA when he was five. During the 1920s he became known as a soloist who espoused the cause of new music, and gave the first performance of the Casella Violin Concerto. He commissioned the Berg Concerto and gave the first performance of both it and the Schoenberg Concerto. He made comparatively few commercial recordings, although he recorded both the Berg and the Schoenberg, the former on 15 December 1940 with the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Arthur Rodzinski. His performance of the Berg Concerto given on Swedish Radio on 20 April 1938 with the Stockholm Philharmonic, conducted by Fritz Busch, has also appeared on LP. Krasner's only other commercial recording as soloist is of the Walter Piston Violin Sonata (1939) with the composer at the piano. From 1944 to 1949 he was concertmaster (leader) of the Minneapolis Orchestra under Dmitri Mitropoulos, with whom he gave the world première of the Roger Sessions Violin Concerto in 1946 and made a pioneering recording of the Schoenberg Serenade. Between 1949 and 1972 he taught at the University of Syracuse, helping to found the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. Since 1976 he has taught at the New England Conservatory in Boston, and at Tanglewood, where he continued to teach until shortly before his death on 4 May 1995.

ABOUT WEBERN AS CONDUCTOR by Louis Krasner

I met Anton Webern in Vienna on several occasions in the early 1930s through young composers and other musicians close to the Schoenberg circle. Sometimes I was invited also to join the group, when they accompanied Webern to their usual 'stamplatz' in the well-known Café Museum after a concert.

What still excites my memory, however, as an early profound music experience, were the lectures on Beethoven piano sonatas that Webern gave for a few invited musicians at the home of my pianist friend, Dr. Rita Kurzmann. They were musical revelations for me. Webern played a phrase or two of a Beethoven sonata and then in most minute detail he analysed the sense, the feel, of each motive and each bar of music. He searched out the communicative meaning and its innermost expressive content, the significance and relationship of each sub-phrase and the necessity and inevitability of each progression in the organisation of Beethoven's completed and convincing musical idea. Webern's voice was quiet and sometimes hesitant, with sculptured gestures, but it was always enormously expressive and emotionally captivating. Webern's words and his music constantly intertwined. They were targetted with persuasive intensity, direct from their inner source to penetrate the receptive consciousness of all the entranced listeners in the hushed room. Webern was totally engrossed. His slight physical frame seemed to fade out, and he was all spirit. Webern was himself consumed – he became Beethoven and he drew his listeners into his being. As a performer, Webern was re-creator.

Alban Berg shattered the music world by his death on Christmas Eve of 1935 at the age of 50. Two weeks later, in January 1936, the Vienna branch of the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM) cabled me in the US, asking that I advance, by over a year, the originally planned date for the world première of the Berg Violin Concerto, in order to present the concerto at the next ISCM Festival in Barcelona, Spain, on 19 April, 1936. A letter soon arrived from Webern urging me to make every effort



Louis Krasner

to do this since he wished to conduct the Concerto himself as his memorial tribute to Berg. Of course I agreed and, in accordance with Webern's request, I arrived in Vienna several days in advance of the Barcelona rehearsals to enable us to study and work together on the manuscript of the new Berg work.

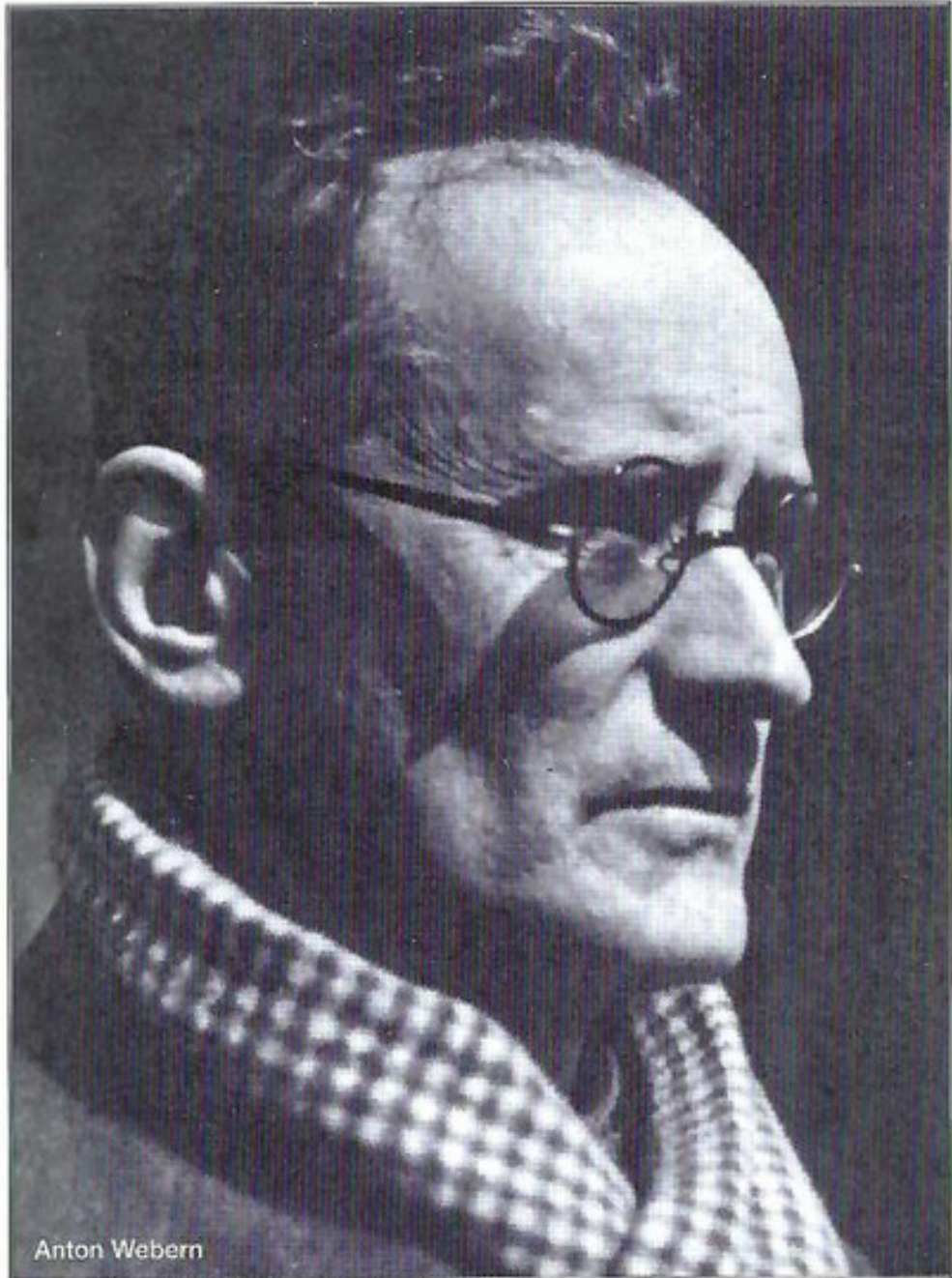
I was shocked when, upon my arrival in Vienna, I learned that Webern had suddenly just changed his mind and was now determined not to conduct the world première of the Berg Violin Concerto. No explanation was offered and the ISCM committee was deeply concerned about Webern's sensibilities and distressed condition. He must not be disturbed, I was warned. Only the question of substitute conductor was discussed. After much opposition on the part of the ISCM committee, it was only when I suggested that I might myself cancel, that the committee finally approved of my desire to visit Webern at his home in Moedling. I spent most of the following day with Webern, playing the Berg Concerto again and again while discussing its problems in considerable detail. Webern enjoyed it thoroughly. He finally relented and decided to stand by his original written promise to me to conduct the première at the Barcelona Festival. He made one condition: that we make the long journey through Germany – and together. After a day or two we travelled for almost 24 hours in a small train compartment and spent all night in intimate conversation.

The rehearsals began on the following morning as the first cannonades of the Spanish Civil War were heard in the distance. In Barcelona at the first rehearsal, it was this same Webern who stood before the Pau Casals Orchestra and it was in this same Vienna-Webern-Beethoven approach and manner that he asked the Spanish musicians to make music with him – to decipher the manuscript notes of the new Alban Berg Violin Concerto for its world première. He did just as he had done in Dr. Kurzmann's music room in Vienna before a handful of devoted musicians when he played and analysed a Beethoven piano sonata. His words were: "Every note has its own life". He pleaded and exhorted the players to feel the inner

content of one, two, or even three notes at a time – rehearsing repeatedly a single motive, one bar of music and, only finally, a two- or four-measure phrase. If any at all of the orchestra members had understood German, none could have understood Webern's soft-spoken 'Viennese brogue dialect'. They were perplexed and Webern was in despair.

After two rehearsals we had not covered more than three or four pages of the 76-page score. The third and final rehearsal began in utter consternation. At the behest of the orchestra players, I implored Webern repeatedly to play through the entire work in order to give the musicians an overall sense of the structure of the sonorities involved and of the total task before them. Webern agreed and promised to do this at once. But he was above all a composer, a creator for whom the realisation and performance of a work dwells in the mind. For Webern the life-blood of the music saturated and flowed through every one of its notes. Webern cherished every note and embraced each tone with his own living breath. Try as he might, he could no more proceed to the end of a serious composition, having knowingly left a single flawed note unattended painstakingly, than could a conscientious surgeon terminate his operation having left a flawed tendon or nerve in his patient's operated body. Our final rehearsal made no progress and for over half an hour created only further confusion and greater frustration. Suddenly, Webern snatched up the score and rushed from the stage. I could not catch up with him. Reaching his hotel, Webern locked himself in his room and soon disappeared.

Total doom seemed inevitable, and utter disaster was averted only when Ernst Křenek brought me urgent word that Webern desired me to play with the indomitable Hermann Scherchen, who now agreed finally to conduct and to carry on with the performance scheduled on the very next day. Scherchen had not yet seen the Berg score and allowed barely one half-hour of rehearsal time for it, at midnight, at a rehearsal reserved for his own contemporary music concert programme.



Anton Webern

The spiritual intensity of Webern's painstaking study and music-making remained etched in every musician's mind. Now, at the performance, the orchestra listened resolutely, played with overflowing hearts and soared to new unaccustomed heights. The emergency-responding conductor Hermann Scherchen was masterful and himself overwhelmed with the new music. As the final tender, eerie tones faded into nothingness, there was an awed and breathless silence in the entire auditorium. After long, motionless moments, the spell was broken when conductor Hermann Scherchen picked up the score and held the large Berg manuscript high in the air above his head. The audience sprang to its feet and responded with cheers and tumultuous applause. On stage, Scherchen, the orchestra players and I stood immobile and spellbound.

The Alban Berg Violin Concerto had received its scheduled première at the Barcelona ISCM Festival on 19 April 1936, and Webern's spirit was present in the performance. Approximately two weeks later, in London, on 1 May 1936, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Webern was on the podium. The initial few minutes of Webern's first Berg Violin Concerto rehearsal began somewhat hesitatingly and with everyone's full awareness of the recent shattering Barcelona experience. The word had nevertheless been spread everywhere, that the Alban Berg Violin Concerto was one of the great works of the 20th century¹. Now, in rehearsal with the orchestra in London, Webern's manner and study approach was essentially no different than it had been in Barcelona with the Pau Casals Orchestra or in Vienna, teaching and performing before a handful of his students and assembled music devotees. To be sure, the London musicians were all of a different calibre and of another level of knowledge and experience. But in all human contact, and for all understanding and rapport, it is vital – and nowhere more so than in music-making and music-listening that, above all, both the sender and the receiver breathe on the same wavelength. All memorable music experiences have never been otherwise.

The BBC players in London also sensed and accepted

Webern as the personification and living symbol of all profound and humanity-charged music. They recognised that Webern's music-making recreated the supreme inspirational moment of the composer. The London orchestra was extraordinarily attentive, appreciative and fully supportive. Every syllable and every gesture of Webern was understood and lovingly heeded. Over a period of several days, Webern's inspiration and spirit hovered over and was felt within the entire BBC music establishment.

On the evening of the London concert performance, Webern stepped measuredly on to the conductor's podium and faced his intensively coached musicians individually and with deliberation. From the first moment of playing it was the same Webern who, I recalled, had transported himself and all his devoted listeners in Dr. Kurzmann's Vienna music room (including myself) into the spirit of Beethoven. Now, years later, standing on stage with Webern, before the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London, I felt again the transcendent music-making that I had experienced at Webern's intimate, revelatory lecture-performances in Vienna. Webern was again entranced and like a bodyless spirit.

Berg writing his memorial requiem for his beloved young friend, Manon Gropius, from his innermost depths knew, as he finally came upon the frantically and desperately sought 'right' Bach chorale, 'Es ist genug', (It is enough), that he was now composing his parting message for posterity. The arrival, at last, into Berg's hand of this very chorale could only have been divinely guided. It brought Berg elation but also the heavy realisation that he was now writing his very own requiem. Berg was also confident then that both Webern and I had also come to this profound recognition as well.

So it was, with this fearfully sad feeling, that Webern and I stood before the sympathetic, fine BBC musicians and played on that evening. I felt once more the unwordly music-making of Anton Webern, the composer, the friend and the kindred spirit of Alban Berg. This time, in London, Webern became Alban Berg. The atmosphere was

momentous – so heavy as to almost stifle the breath. Webern and the orchestra and I were all truly transported. As we played, I gradually stepped back sufficiently to place myself totally before Webern's piercing eyes and in his full grasp. Remembering the Barcelona tragedy, I wished the performance to become Webern's alone. Unfortunately, the solo violin was thereby somewhat distanced from the microphone. But for the musicians on stage, and for the BBC audience, the Webern concert performance première of the Alban Berg Violin Concerto was a solemn experience of reverent insight and pious spiritual devotion, just as Webern's Beethoven had been to his handful of adherents listening in the Vienna music room many years earlier. Now, in London, every note, every tone of the Alban Berg Violin Concerto was, indeed, allowed thoughtfully, unhurriedly and prayerfully to 'live out its own full life' – true to Webern's own life-long credo. Such was the conductor Anton Webern.

But the final word on 'Vienna's Three Modern Classicists' must come from Arnold Schoenberg himself. Writing near the end of his life, Schoenberg's words remain chiselled for all time. He wrote in June 1947: 'Let us – for the moment at least – forget all that might have at one time divided us. For there remains for our future what could only have begun to be realised posthumously: one will have to consider us three – Berg, Webern, Schoenberg – as a unity, a oneness, because we believed in ideals, once perceived, with intensity and selfless devotion; nor would we ever have been deterred from them, even if those who tried might have succeeded in confounding us, leading us astray.'

¹ See *The Origins of the Alban Berg Violin Concerto*. Alban Berg Symposium Wien, 1980, Tagungsbericht, edited by Rudolf Klein. Vienna, Universal Editions, 1981, pp.107-117.

The original, more extended, version of Professor Krasner's article was first published in the American journal *Fanfare* Nov/Dec 1987. pp.335-347

TRANSCRIBING THE RECORDINGS by Richard C. Burns

One evening in the spring of 1976, Louis Krasner came to see me carrying a shopping bag from which he produced a number of acetate disc recordings. These were mostly of his performances of the music of Berg and Schoenberg that he had arranged to be recorded off-the-air. The prize of the collection turned out to be nothing less than the second performance of the Berg Violin Concerto, with Anton Webern conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

I recall that, when I first became personally acquainted with Professor Krasner, about ten years previously, he had told me about this, the most memorable of his performances of the Berg Concerto, and that there was no recording of it in the BBC archives. The performance is even referred to in *Grove*. However, in the process of cleaning out his attic before moving to Brookline, Massachusetts, he discovered a trunk containing this forgotten recording that he had arranged to have recorded off the air some 40 years previously.

The recording was cut on eight acetate discs at 78rpm, recorded on one side. These included an introductory talk and a considerable pause between the two parts of the concerto, with some tuning. The recording was somewhat dull-sounding and, it turned out, had been recorded at a rather low level, so that many ticks, scraps and swishes were intrusive in the quieter passages. One bonus of the low recording level, however, is that the loudest passages were not noticeably over-recorded or worn. There was also hum on some sides and occasional bursts of cutter-head squeal. There was no overlapping of music from the end of one side of the beginning of the next but, fortunately, there was no gap in the music either.

We made a tape transfer of the records using our then newly-developed Packburn Transient Noise Suppressor, which rendered the recording listenable but still in need of much more technical effort. We could not find any organisation willing to undertake this work until 1984, when Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln commissioned us to prepare a tape that would receive its first broadcast on 9 February, 1985, the 100th anniversary of Berg's birth.

We know nothing about what went on in the way of dial-turning in the production of the BBC broadcast and, in addition, in the recording of the discs. Fortunately, we have had the benefit of Louis Krasner's critique in the production of the restoration, as a result of which instrumental balances, dynamics and the audibility of the violin have been improved over what the original discs had to offer.

This is certainly not a recording in which the violin easily dominates the orchestra, yet, in the final result, as embodied on this compact disc, the writer feels that the balances are fairly representative of what one would hear in the concert hall. The soloist is sometimes drowned out in the loud passages, but no more so than in actuality, save that the listener is not able to see the soloist bravely fiddling away amid the turmoil, as one would in the concert hall.

The restoration on this CD is addressed to the contemporary listener. It has had the benefit of much more technical effort than we had time to do for the 1985 version and also the benefit of Professor Krasner's input. In addition, we have been able to take advantage of some important signal processing devices that have become available in the past five years, including a few devices of our own invention.

GALIMIR STRING QUARTET

The Galimir Quartet of Vienna originated in 1929 as a talented family group, the violinist Felix Galimir (1910–99) performing with his sisters Adrienne, Renée and Marguerite. As champions of the Second Viennese School and other contemporary music, they made recordings of Ravel's Quartet (in 1934) and Milhaud's Seventh Quartet (in 1935), both supervised in the studio by the composers. They specialised in Alban Berg's Lyric Suite and invited the composer to their first public performance of it. After the concert Berg inscribed the leader's score: 'To Felix Galimir, the outstanding quartet leader – famous violinist, wonderful musician, in remembrance 9 April 1931'. The Galimirs played the Lyric Suite to Krasner early in 1935, when he was commissioning the Violin Concerto, and made the first recording of it in 1936. They had hoped to have Berg supervise the sessions but fortunately had been able to consult him about details of the score. The recording was awarded a Grand Prix du Disque. In the autumn of 1936 Felix and Renée Galimir joined the Palestine Orchestra and in 1938 Felix moved to the USA, where he formed a new Galimir Quartet whose personnel changed over the years. Adrienne Galimir became Mrs Louis Krasner.

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Galimir Quartet



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