

The NAXOS logo is a blue square with the word "NAXOS" in white, serif, all-caps font. Above the text is a stylized white graphic of a classical building facade with columns.

NAXOS

Robert
GROSLOT

Concerto
for Orchestra

Violin Concerto

Joanna Kurkowicz, Violin
Brussels Philharmonic
Robert Groslot



Robert Groslot (b. 1951)

Violin Concerto • Concerto for Orchestra

Concertos. There are concertos for the violin, but also for the sitar. For the trombone, but also for the recorder. For two pianos, electric guitar, harmonica, and even for water or paper. As far as the concerto is concerned, the sky is the limit.

The concerto genre plays a leading role in the musical *oeuvre* of Robert Groslot (born in Mechelen in 1951). With more than 20 concertos to his name, this Belgian composer holds strong views on the interaction between soloist and orchestra. In addition to concertos for the more traditional orchestral instruments, he has also composed concertos for organ, saxophone, or guitar. Appropriately, Groslot set out on his musical career as a concert pianist. He won the 1974 Alessandro Casagrande Competition, and four years later he was a laureate of the 1978 Queen Elisabeth Competition. Since then, he has performed worldwide with various renowned symphony orchestras. With over 100 albums to his name and more than 50 piano concertos in his repertoire, he is one of the most productive and successful Flemish pianists of his generation. Through his work as a piano teacher at various music institutes and as artistic director of the Antwerp Conservatoire, he has passed this professional expertise on to the next generation of concert pianists.

Groslot's experience as soloist and performer is also unmistakably incorporated into his musical signature, with the exploration of instrumental possibilities and playing techniques a fundamental constant in his concertante compositions. Yet the language of his concertos is not merely virtuosic or technically demanding; they are diverting as well as tasteful, being refined and rich in contrast; and their main priority is always to give pleasure to performer and listener alike. A second constant in Groslot's concerto *oeuvre* is his attention to form. In imitation of Franz Liszt, of whom he is a great admirer, Groslot almost always strives to achieve a one-movement construction that allows for huge diversity, despite an overarching tension curve.

The *Violin Concerto* from 2010 also keeps to this one-movement, through-composed form. The concerto begins with a brief, mysterious intro: above low strings and harp notes, one hears an extremely high, protracted melody in the solo part. The violin trill that concludes this ethereal phrase lights the fuse of the string section, which enters with a rapid initial passage. The solo violin launches an energetic and exciting stream of notes, relieved at times by subtle ornaments in piano, harp and vibraphone, or by playful pizzicati. Groslot dazzles the listener with the insertion of a scintillating little violin motif full of whistling flageolets, or with fluttering violin melodies above lively woodwinds. Suddenly, Wagnerian brass plunges the orchestra into a dark mood. The solo violin resumes its compelling melody, returning the music to a variation on the mysterious opening measures.

The solo cadenza following this fast passage is not so much virtuosic as theatrical. The violin takes several tentative explorative steps, to which at a certain moment the celesta responds. Imperceptibly, the cadenza blends into a brief, slow transition passage with expansively melodious cellos. This *Andante* reaches a climax, after which a motoric, Stravinskian piano kicks off a second fast passage. Just as in the first fast passage, this *Presto* comes to a standstill for a moment: but this time, it is a magical waltz passage, rather than a dark storm cloud, that presents itself to break the mood.

Low notes in the harp bring the *Presto* to a halt, after which a dreamy sequence is initiated. This is followed by a second, elegant waltz passage resulting in an ultra-high conclusion. Moments later, the music is interrupted by a dangerous, typically late-Romantic burst from the brass. Slowly but surely, the solo violin introduces a final fast passage. Groslot again deploys material from the first passage, but now the playfulness and optimism are stripped of their innocence. Gradually, the orchestral accompaniment becomes more threatening and gruesome, and the concerto finally concludes with a solo violin driven

forward by violent blows from the orchestra. It is probably no coincidence that the final musical gesture is quite similar to the beginning of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*.

In addition to a flourishing career as a concert pianist and piano teacher, Groslot has also been an active conductor for many years. He believes conducting to be an important source of inspiration for his composing. Thus, it was no coincidence that he added a *Concerto for Orchestra* to his list of works in 2016. His love of contrast and colour makes his choice of genre almost inevitable. The category of the 'concerto for orchestra' dates back to the Baroque concerto grosso, in which a small ensemble, or concertino, was set against the larger orchestral group. In 1925, Paul Hindemith set a trend with his *Concerto for Orchestra*, in which the orchestra is split into various groups, which are at times featured together, and at others separately. Since then, many composers have used the 'concerto for orchestra' as a means to contrast the different orchestral colours.

Groslot's *Concerto for Orchestra* surprises the listener with its refined variations in sound and virtuosic range of colours. The first movement bears the well-chosen title *Exordium*, a concept in classical rhetoric that is used to introduce a reasoned plea. Informing the audience, attracting attention and bringing the audience around to your line of thinking are the typical characteristics of the exordium, according to the art of public speaking. And Groslot's concerto does exactly that: the music does not start with a grand gesture, but with a highly precise oboe adding notes here and there above the vibraphone. A complex entity is created from that simple oboe motif, held together by recognisable, recurring patterns that continually return in various combinations of instruments, and are commented on and supplemented in different ways. Groslot has so much fun exploring novel sound combinations that he delays the entrance of his first real orchestral *tutti* until somewhere around the eighth minute.

The title of the second movement, *Hoketus*, refers to a rhythmic linear technique that produces an effect similar to the hiccups. The origin of the technique dates back to medieval French music, and has been recently embraced by post-minimalist composers such as Louis Andriessen for its rhythmically disorienting impact. Groslot uses the technique to involve all instruments in a virtuoso sparring match of accents and offbeat syncopations. An interesting addition is the reference to the rhetorical oboe figure from *Exordium*, which gravitates towards a passage in which woodwinds play a duet: a nod to the second movement of Bartók's famous *Concerto for Orchestra*, which also contains a '*giuoco delle coppie*', a 'game of duos'.

Nachtmusik, the title of the slow, third movement, evokes the impression of pleasant serenades or 'nocturnal' sound visions. Yet this nocturne is not 'cosmic' or quietly exalted, but earthy, lively and emotionally charged. At the beginning, searching solo melodies take precedence over unfathomable bass notes. Four times a mysterious burst from the brass forms a bridge between a suggested obscurity and a more dance-like music. At the end, the movement lays itself to rest with an elegiac solo for the cor anglais.

Conclusion, the last movement, synthesises the three prior movements into a brilliant finale. Thus the 'conclusion' of this composition is truly a 'con-clusion' in a rhetorical sense: not just the ending, but also the conclusion drawn from a coherent argument. This finale begins with musical themes from the previous movements, and gradually transforms itself into a protracted movement of growth, an increasingly frantic maelstrom in which all individual instrumental colours merge into the intoxicating sound of the symphonic *tutti*. In terms of orchestral colour, this finale is also a 'synthesis': the meticulously conceived combinations of instruments that typify the previous movements culminate in an overwhelming orchestral denouement.

Tom Janssens

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Joanna Kurkowicz



Photo: Cary Wolinsky

The prizewinning violinist, Joanna Kurkowicz, enjoys an active and versatile career as a soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and concertmaster. She has performed worldwide in such venues as Carnegie Hall in New York, Jordan Hall in Boston and the Große Saal in Salzburg, and has appeared as a soloist with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra and the Polish National Radio Orchestra in Katowice, among others, as well as with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra in which she currently serves as concertmaster. Kurkowicz is Artist in Residence at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and is on the faculty at Tufts University as well as New England Conservatory of Music. She is a strong advocate of contemporary music and has premiered many works by living composers and made several critically acclaimed recordings. She has been a guest artist at several renowned festivals. In 2010 she received the Diapason d'or award and the German Record Critics award for her Chandos recording of Grażyna Bacewicz's *Violin Concertos* with the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Łukasz Borowicz. Joanna Kurkowicz plays a violin made by Pietro Giovanni Guarneri in 1699. www.joannakurkowicz.com

Brussels Philharmonic



Photo: Liesbet Peremans

The Brussels Philharmonic was founded in 1935 by the Belgian public broadcaster (NIR/INR). It enjoys an excellent reputation for performing premieres of new works and has collaborated with world-renowned composers such as Bartók, Stravinsky, Messiaen and Francesconi. The Brussels Philharmonic has made regular appearances in the major European capitals as well as tours to Japan and the US. In addition, the orchestra is internationally acclaimed for its expertise in film music, including the Oscar-winning score for *The Artist*. In addition to its ground-breaking initiatives, including a spin-off for film music, the establishment of a foundation for the purchase of string instruments (with Puilaetco Dewaay Private Bankers), and more recently the Tax Shelter, the orchestra embraces innovation in every area and all levels of its activities. The orchestra's recordings have been warmly received by the international press and awarded an ECHO Klassik, a Choc de Classica de l'année and a Diapason d'or de l'année, among others. The Brussels Philharmonic is an institution of the Flemish Community. www.brusselphilharmonic.be

Robert Groslot



Robert Groslot (b. 1951, Mechelen, Belgium) fuses Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Latin elements into a new and highly malleable language. Form, virtuosity, sound refinement, 'rediscovered' tonality and rhythmical adventure are the keystones of his music. Groslot often draws inspiration from other art forms, especially poetry and painting. His catalogue consists of large orchestral works, 20 concertos, three multimedia works and many solo and chamber music works. As a composer, Robert Groslot is largely self-taught. His broad experience both as a concert pianist and as a conductor, became the perfect breeding ground for his composing philosophy: to give profound joy to the performing musicians, while striving for the strongest possible impact on the listener. Robert Groslot started his musical career as a pianist. After winning the Alessandro Casagrande Competition (Terni) in 1974 and becoming a laureate at the Queen Elisabeth Competition (Brussels, 1978), he undertook concert trips across four continents through more than 20 countries. He has made many studio, radio and television recordings. Robert Groslot taught piano at several distinguished music institutions in Belgium and the Netherlands until 2009.

www.robertgroslot.eu

The concerto occupies a central place in the works of leading Belgian composer, pianist and conductor, Robert Groslot. His experience as a renowned soloist informs the instrumental possibilities and playing techniques of his compositions, which are notable for their refined and rich contrast. Conforming to his preference for one-movement structures, the *Violin Concerto* is laced with scintillating motifs both ethereal and playful as well as complex moods ranging from the dream-like and magical to the dark and violent. The *Concerto for Orchestra* is a meticulously structured and dazzlingly evocative showpiece.

Robert
GROSLOT
(b. 1951)

1	Violin Concerto (2010)	22:39
	(dedicated to Joanna Kurkowicz)	
	Concerto for Orchestra (2016)	37:29
2	I. Exordium	11:57
3	II. Hoketus	6:43
4	III. Nachtmusik	8:50
5	IV. Conclusion	9:51

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Joanna Kurkowicz, Violin **1**

Brussels Philharmonic • Robert Groslot

Recorded: 26–27 June 2017 **1**, 27–31 March 2017 **2–5** at Studio 4, Flagey, Brussels, Belgium

Producers: Stoffel de Laat **1**, Felicia Bockstael **2–5**,

Engineer: Steven Maes • Editors: Felicia Bockstael, Stoffel de Laat, Steven Maes

Booklet notes: Tom Janssens • Publisher: Groslot Music Editions

Cover image by Jag_cz (iStockphoto.com)