

A sepia-toned portrait of a man, likely Anton Bruckner, shown from the chest up in profile, facing right. He has dark, wavy hair and is wearing round-rimmed spectacles. He is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark bow tie. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Röntgen

Orchestral, Choral & Chamber Music

Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, Jac van Steen  
Netherlands Chamber Choir · Viotta Ensemble  
Alexander Kerr · Gregor Horsch · Sepp Grotenhuis

**Julius Röntgen 1855-1932**  
Orchestral, Choral & Chamber Music

**Serenade Op.14 (1876)**

- |                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| 1. Allegro tranquillo      | 8'36 |
| 2. Scherzo                 | 6'39 |
| 3. Andante con espressione | 6'43 |
| 4. Allegro molto vivace    | 6'14 |

**Viotta Ensemble**

Paul Verhey *flute* · Jan Spronk *oboe*  
Jacques Meertens *clarinet*  
Jos de Lange, Guus Dral *bassoon*  
Jacob Slagter, Peter Steinmann *French horn*

- |                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 5. Thema mit Variationen Op.17 (1878) | 10'24 |
|---------------------------------------|-------|

Wyneke Jordans, Leo van Doeselaar  
*piano with 4 hands*

**Motetten**

- |  |      |
|--|------|
| 6. Wieder den Frieden. Klage-, Anklage, und Trostgesang (1920) | 8'14 |
| 7. Gleichwie die grünen Blätter auf einem schönen Baum (1929)  | 4'19 |
| 8. Kommt her zu mir, alle die ihr mein begeeret (1929)         | 4'18 |

**Netherlands Chamber Choir**  
Uwe Gronostay *conductor*

- |                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 9. Symphony in C sharp minor (1930) | 18'22 |
|-------------------------------------|-------|

Roberta Alexander *soprano*

**Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra**  
Jac van Steen *conductor*

**Piano Trio in C minor Op.50 (1904)**

*for violin, cello and piano*

- |                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 10. Allegro non troppo e serioso | 7'28 |
| 11. Andante                      | 6'46 |
| 12. Allegro non troppo           | 6'06 |

**Sonata in F sharp minor Op.20**

(1879-1883)

*for violin and piano*

- |                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| 13. Allegro non troppo | 9'00 |
| 14. Andante            | 2'53 |
| 15. Agitato            | 8'01 |

**Sonata No.5 Op.56 in B minor**

(1907/10?)

*for cello and piano*

- |                               |      |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 16. Moderato                  | 5'45 |
| 17. Allegro con moto          | 4'30 |
| 18. Poco andante, teneramente | 4'34 |
| 19. Molto passionato e vivace | 6'51 |

Alexander Kerr *violin*

Gregor Horsch *cello*

Sepp Grotenhuis *piano*

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### Julius Röntgen (1855-1932)

Even in his own lifetime Johannes Brahms was a legendary figure and he behaved accordingly. Nevertheless, he was fumbling for words when in 1874, in the Leipzig *Gewandhaus*, he had to apologize to his younger colleague and friend Julius Röntgen, for 'stealing' the main theme of the latter's Serenade for seven Winds, Op.14. The old master from Vienna had come upon the handwritten score of Röntgen's appealing piece for winds some years earlier. Somehow the main theme of the first movement had stuck in his memory and Brahms used it, quite unwittingly, as the main theme of his *Second Symphony's* opening movement. In later years the anecdote of Brahms's borrowing from his Serenade would be recounted often and with relish by Julius Röntgen. It is a documented fact that Brahms, who had an extremely critical attitude towards the younger composers of his day, spoke favourably of Julius Röntgen. But other contemporaries and members of Röntgen's generation also held his works in high esteem, among them Franz Liszt, Joseph Joachim, Pablo Casals and Edvard Grieg. With the latter, a fellow student at the Leipzig Conservatory, Röntgen developed a lifelong and warm friendship. Grieg's piano piece *Sehnsucht nach Julius* is by no means the sole evidence of this friendship; after Grieg's death Röntgen finished his *String Quartet in F major* with so much taste and empathy that it is hardly perceivable that Grieg composed only half of the work.

Julius Röntgen's oeuvre numbers over eight-hundred compositions spanning all classical genres. He wrote more than twenty symphonies (both in one and more movements), operas (one of which to a text by Strindberg), scores of solo-concertos and orchestral works, hundreds of songs and choral compositions, oratorios, orchestral songs, over a hundred piano pieces, duos, trios, quartets, quintets and a sextet for strings, and the wind septet used by Brahms. Röntgen would stop at nothing: whether it be a Dutch blues for cello or a piece for the local concert band in his last domicile Bilthoven: he would write it in no time. Composing was as natural to him as breathing. That high creative tension characterized him all his life, and was

stimulated in his early youth by his parents, who were musical too, and lovers of art.

It was during Röntgen's apprenticeship at the conservatory of Leipzig - the famous as well as notorious institution where Brahms was considered a suspicious modernist up to his *Deutsches Requiem* - that the original talent of the young composer and pianist was shaped. He studied piano with Louis Plaidy and Carl Reinecke, and counterpoint, fugue and harmony with Moritz Hauptmann. Later he went to München to study composition with Schubert's old friend Franz Lachner. Röntgen's arrival in 1878 in Amsterdam, where he became piano teacher at the music school and, later, co-founder and director of the conservatory, was of great significance. The high artistic level to which Röntgen was accustomed left its mark not only on the Amsterdam music school (the later conservatory), but also on the capital's music life in general. Röntgen's close contacts with international celebrities such as Brahms and Grieg were a major factor in their coming to Amsterdam.

Röntgen maintained close ties, however, with his native Leipzig all his life. His family lived there, his former fellow students were active in the Gewandhausorchester, or taught at the conservatory or elsewhere in the city. When the Thomascantor Karl Straube asked Röntgen in the late 1920s to write something for the famous Thomanerchor, Röntgen set to work immediately. He wrote eight motets of great difficulty, in some sense elaborating on the great cycles of motets Opp. 109 and 110 by Johannes Brahms. Röntgen's motets are more daring than those by Brahms, especially where harmony is concerned. The motet *Gleichwie die grünen Blätter auf einem schönen Baum* is one of the eight. The eight-part motet *Wider den Frieden. Klage-, Anklage- und Trostgesang* from 1920 for double choir is an answer to Röntgen's pacifist *Wider den Krieg* from 1914: the fatal year which saw the start of the First World War which was to cause a very serious cultural, economic and political crisis in Germany in 1918. But Röntgen's *Thema mit Variationen Op.17* from 1878 was composed long before that time. It is one of those works in which the composer's carefree musical nature comes to the fore from start to finish.

Röntgen composed most of his symphonies by the end of his life. Whereas his 'first' Symphony in C minor from 1910 - it was not numbered as such - still has four movements (just like his 'second' from the period 1928-1930), almost all of the symphonies Röntgen composed in 1930-1932 are in one movement. Röntgen's **Symphony in C sharp minor**, the second of that series, is dated '8. Mai 1930'. The other date 'Scheveningen, 6 Sept. 1931' probably refers to the first performance of the work. The symphony was dedicated to the German conductor Carl Schuricht (1880-1967), who conducted the traditional summer concerts in the Scheveningen Kurhaus on various occasions in the early 1930s. Although formally a one-movement work, the symphony has the character of a work in several movements: Andante mesto- Allegro agitato- Lento-Tempo I-Lento-Tempo I. There is a pastoral streak to the work which is expressed in the vocalise part for solo soprano. Anyone who hears a touch of Puccini here – especially the opening of the third act of *Tosca*, which also involves the painting of a rural, panoramic atmosphere by means of 'shepherds' songs - is not far off the mark. After all, all his life the composer Röntgen was open to all possible musical interpretations. And his music was of a catching and intriguing kind!

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*Translations: Caecile de Hoog*

### Chamber Music by Julius Röntgen

'As paterfamilias my father had his day organised precisely,' Röntgen's sixth and youngest son Joachim writes in his memoirs. 'The morning began with a bicycle ride around the Vondelpark. After breakfast he disappeared into his study where he remained until twelve o'clock dealing with his correspondence, composing and transcribing scores. [...] After lunch my father set off for the conservatory. He preferred to go on foot; on several occasions I accompanied him and observed how he would walk along the very edges of the canals (there were no cars parked there in those days) always deep in thought, probably composing.'

This was Julius Röntgen in his Amsterdam period. He was a co-founder of the Amsterdam Conservatory and the man who had exerted a major influence on the construction of a new concert hall in Amsterdam. On his recommendation the Amsterdam Concertgebouw was modelled on the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, advice for which the Netherlands can be grateful since it has resulted in one of the finest concert halls in the world.

As a composer Röntgen left behind an oeuvre of around 600 works. As well as the sense of form of the classical romantic school, his music is also imbued with the appreciation of nature and brisk folklore of the Scandinavian music of his time. With his astonishing energy and his enthusiasm for their music Röntgen was a vital supporter of his physically weaker colleagues Edvard Grieg and Carl Nielsen.

Julius Röntgen's musical roots were in Leipzig. It was there that his half-Dutch half-German father, Deventer-born violinist Engelbert Röntgen, received his training at the excellent conservatory founded by Mendelssohn. It was there that Engelbert rose to become first violinist of the influential Gewandhaus Orchester. Julius Röntgen's mother was the French-German pianist Pauline Klengel, who gave young Julius his first piano lessons. In his book about Edvard Grieg, Julius Röntgen recalls the musical climate in his youth. 'One time my father [...] came to me with Grieg's Violin Sonata in F major, which had been sent to him for his opinion, and shook his

head as he showed me the opening: “Look here, a work in F Major that begins with an E Minor chord!” [...] Richard Wagner was regarded as the Anti-Christ.’ Brahms was not that well known and even less well understood.’

Julius Röntgen’s **Violin Sonata Op.20** in F-sharp minor is dedicated to his father and, of the three works on this album, is the one which best reflects the musical atmosphere of his youth. Röntgen composed the first version of the violin sonata in 1879, just before his first marriage to Amanda Maier. She was a Swedish violinist, a student of his father. Amanda once played solo with the Gewandhaus Orchester in the violin concerto she wrote herself. In Stockholm she was the first woman to take the ‘Musikdirektör-eksamen’ and therefore the first qualified woman conductor in Sweden.

In 1883 Julius and Amanda played the revised version of the *Violin Sonata Op.20* in F-sharp minor at a musical soiree in Utrecht also attended by Clara Schumann. Röntgen wrote to his parents: ‘At R’s [Johan van Riemsdijk] where there was a large company, she [Clara Schumann] first played together with Mrs Engelmann the *Variations for Two Pianos* by [Robert] Schumann, then Amanda and I played my F-sharp minor Violin Sonata, which went very well, and Mrs Schumann an organ fugue by Bach, the B Major Romanze by Schumann and the Paganini piece in E major [Paganini’s *Caprice*, adapted for piano by Schumann]. [...] They all kept talking about my F-sharp minor Violin Sonata, Mrs Schumann too thought it a very fine piece.’

In February 1896, Clara Schumann described Julius Röntgen in a letter to Johannes Brahms: ‘He has remained a child, so innocent, pure, open, enthusiastic. You will remember his almost comical naive and nervous way of behaving from the past. He is also so careless in all his gestures that many people have asked me, can he really be taken seriously? But we certainly can and must take him seriously. It is a long time since I have had so much pleasure from anyone’s company!’

Amanda Maier died at an early age in 1894. She bore him two sons: Engelbert and Julius junior, with whom Röntgen formed a successful piano trio. Engelbert Jr made a career as a solo cellist in Europe and America. Julius Jr was known as ‘Lula’ to avoid

confusion with his father. On June 10th 1907 Julius Sr wrote to Grieg: ‘[...] I have made another cello sonata and will soon be travelling to Paris with it, to play through it with Casals. Engelbert has been there since July 1st and Lula is coming next week for a couple of days - it should be fun! Engelbert writes very enthusiastically about his tuition by Casals. That he is an utter genius, how he develops all technique from a purely musical point of view. The musical phrase determines the fingering. That way all virtuosity is in the service of the artwork.’

As early as 1904, Röntgen described a concert by Pablo Casals to Grieg: ‘Hearing him play one of the solo sonatas by Bach is an indescribable pleasure.’ Röntgen wrote to his second wife from Paris saying he had found Casals sprawled on a sofa in his dressing gown while his wife Suggia played the cello next to him. Without getting dressed Casals immediately launched into the newly-written Cello Sonata Op.56 with Röntgen and played it brilliantly. ‘Everything sounded just as I had imagined and I was overcome with joy. [...] After playing we went into the garden. To celebrate, Casals turned on the fountains and a splashing waterfall, Suggia brought out Spanish wine, the blackbirds sang - [it was] the most wonderful summer evening!’

The **Cello Sonata Op.56** was written in June 1907 during Röntgen’s second marriage, to his piano student Mien des Amorie van der Hoeven. Röntgen dedicated the sonata to the memory of his dear friend Senno Tiefenthal, a partner in the Boissevain & Co. bank. Following his death Röntgen wrote to Grieg on December the 6th of the previous year: ‘With him a great deal of joy disappears from my life, he was like a brother who supported me in everything in word and deed and moreover with the greatest imaginable pleasure’ and Grieg wrote back to him: ‘When I think of “Volendam” now! The memory of the wonderful hours spent there with you two and the Tiefenthals almost feels like touching a wound!’ In memory of Tiefenthal, Röntgen incorporated into the third movement of the sonata a passage from the final chorus of the *Matthäus-Passion: Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder*. Röntgen quoted only the melody sung by the tenor in the middle verse to the words *Euer*

*Grab und Leichenstein soll dem ängstlichen Gewissen ein bequemes Ruhekrissen und der Seelen Ruhstatt sein.* Röntgen carried on a correspondence with the Leipzig conductor Heinrich von Herzogenberg and the Bach biographer Philipp Spitta about the instrumentation and interpretation of the *Matthäus-Passion* which he conducted many times. Röntgen in fact conducted the first ever performance in collaboration with the Concertgebouw Orchestra on April 25th 1891, almost a month after Easter...

The **Piano Trio Op.50** in C minor was written shortly after the birth of Röntgen's fifth son, Frants Edvard. Röntgen wrote to Edvard Grieg on May 13th 1904: 'In that very period when little Frants Edvard arrived, I was in the same condition mentally as Mien was physically. In my case a Trio was delivered, which I finished on my birthday [May 9th] and played many times that day with the boys.'

The Trio was dedicated to the Danish composer Carl Nielsen, whom Julius Röntgen had got to know at Slot Fuglsang. The Röntgens spent many a summer in this castle on the Danish island of Laaland. At Fuglsang music was made in complete freedom by an elite group of musicians and composers from many countries. According to Nielsen's daughter Søs (Anne Marie), the Trio was first performed there on September 2nd 1904. Nielsen in turn dedicated his *Helios Overture* to Röntgen. Röntgen was Nielsen's first really enthusiastic admirer outside of Denmark. On September 20th 1904 Nielsen wrote to Röntgen: 'I must say, the new Trio is the most characteristic of the works of yours that I learned at Fuglsang. It is carried along by an extremely individual and compelling musical current, which despite its modern content seems to have its roots in the vicinity of Schubert.'

The Trio Op.56 later won an award at the 'Concours International de Musique' in Paris. Grieg wrote from Hop in Norway on July 9th 1907 to congratulate Röntgen: 'Hurrah for the happy Lula-father in the Trio lottery! As I always say: justice eventually comes to him who has ...patience.'

The fact that this trio has now been recorded on album by the first violinist and solo cellist of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra is completely in the tradition of

Julius Röntgen. In 1920 he wrote from Amsterdam to his foremost musical partner, the baritone Johannes Messchaert: 'I will soon be looking back at 50 years in Amsterdam and the amazing thing is, that I still don't feel old, although I certainly am'. He was an unbelievably strong man, who carried the musical life of his time on his back like an Atlas.

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*with thanks to Jurriaan and Julius Röntgen*