

The Composer Speaks – Sophia Jani’s Violin Concerto

During the seven months I worked on this concerto, I did not live in the city that has long been my home. For a time, circumstances led me back to the place where I grew up — by a beautiful lake, surrounded by forests and within view of the distant Alps. The places where we spend our childhood and teenage years often hold a deep ambivalence. They evoke a sense of belonging and comfort, yet they also mirror the tensions of our own development: the wish to remain part of something and the urge to break away from it; the familiarity of the known and the pull of the unknown. Surprisingly, this return felt like an experience of great freedom, something it had not always been. I discovered familiar sights and people and began to see them through new eyes.

This violin concerto arose from the desire to approach what is deeply familiar with openness and curiosity — to see tradition as a source of renewal and to transform the known into something new.

Conceived as one continuous movement of about 20 minutes, the concerto combines elements of sonata form with a three-part structure following a fast–slow–fast trajectory. The central section, while resembling a slow movement, also absorbs aspects of a scherzo — thus extending the concerto’s hybrid spirit and blurring the boundaries between forms.

It is perhaps in the cadenza that this interplay of innovation and an awareness of tradition become most clearly apparent. Until the Classical era, the cadenza served mainly as a space for the soloist’s improvisation — a moment of individual display that stood outside the formal framework of the concerto. This changed with Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, in which the written-out cadenza, placed within the development, assumed a structural and modulatory role, becoming an integral part of the work’s dramaturgy. Since then, it seems to me that composers have continued to view the cadenza as an open field for experimentation and renewal. Building on this tradition, my own cadenza not only guides the music toward the key of the final section but also departs from the notion of being the most virtuosic moment in the concerto. Instead, it becomes the work’s anchor of stillness — a point of inward release where motion subsides, harmony expands, and the music finds a quiet clarity before rising once again into motion.

What moved me most about this process of relocation and rediscovery was the realization that change — both within ourselves and in how we relate to what is familiar — reveals new meanings in what we thought we already knew. The past remains present, yet it appears in a different light. At the heart of my process was the realization that the old cannot exist without the present, and the new can only grow healthily when it stands in a reflective relationship with the past. —**Sophia Jani**