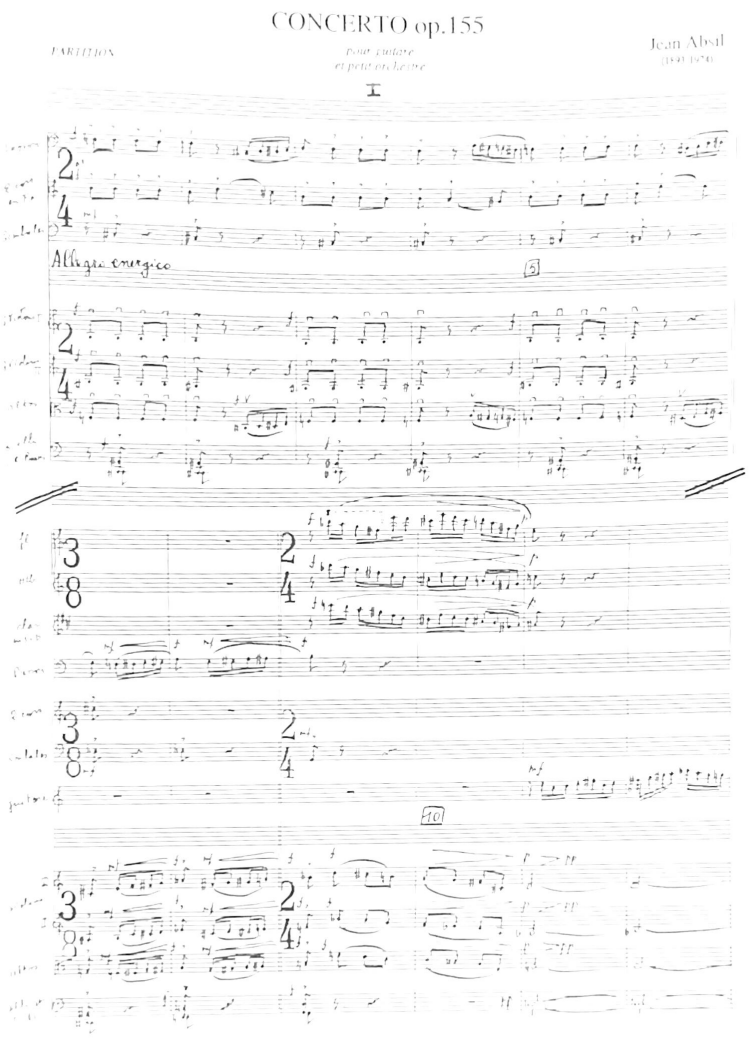Jean Absil – Guitar Concerto Op.155

World Premiere EPK

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World Premiere Details

World Premiere – Jean Absil: Guitar Concerto Op.155
Performed by **Sam Desmet** · Casco Phil Orchestra · Conductor **Benjamin Haemhouts**
June 15, 2025 · cc De Schakel · Waregem, Belgium

Press-Ready Summary

The world premiere of Jean Absil's *Guitar Concerto Op.155* took place on June 15, 2025, performed by Belgian guitarist **Sam Desmet** with **Casco Phil Orchestra** under conductor **Benjamin Haemhouts**. The concerto, composed but never performed during Absil's lifetime or afterward, remained in manuscript form until Italian composer and musicologist **Angelo Gilardino** introduced Desmet to the work in 2009. From this encounter, Desmet assisted in preparing the score for publication, culminating in the 2010 edition released by Edizioni Berben (now Curci). Archival research at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels later revealed an unpublished piano reduction, which Desmet fully transcribed into Sibelius—an essential resource in studying and preparing the concerto for performance. Although the manuscript bears no dedication, historical context strongly suggests the concerto was originally intended for guitarist **Nicolas Alfonso**. This premiere brings the work to public attention for the first time.

Background of the Project

The path leading to this world premiere began in **2009**, when Sam Desmet met Italian composer and musicologist **Angelo Gilardino** after performing a selection of his works. During that meeting, Gilardino shared a handwritten manuscript of Jean Absil's *Guitar Concerto Op.155* from his personal archives and asked for Desmet's assistance in preparing the score for publication. In **2010**, the edited orchestral score was published by **Edizioni Berben** (now **Edizioni Curci**). Further research at the **Royal Conservatory of Brussels** uncovered an unpublished piano reduction, which Desmet transcribed *note by note* into Sibelius. This reduction became essential in understanding the harmonic language, structure, and balance of the concerto.

Although the manuscript includes no dedicatee, historical evidence strongly suggests the concerto was intended for Belgian guitarist **Nicolas Alfonso**. With support from the **City of Waregem** and **Probus Potegem**, fifteen years of research and preparation culminated in the concerto's **first-ever public performance** on June 15, 2025.

Program Notes

Jean Absil's *Concerto pour guitare et petit orchestre* Op.155 reveals the composer's distinctive modernist voice—clear, direct, and vividly orchestrated. The outer movements unfold with rhythmic transparency and sharp motivic clarity, placing the guitar in active dialogue with the orchestral textures.The central movement offers a contrasting world of lyricism, shaped by shifting modal colors and Absil's refined harmonic palette. Throughout the concerto, the guitar is not treated as a decorative instrument, but as a true partner within a contemporary orchestral framework. This premiere brings a formerly unknown work of Belgian modernism into public view for the first time.

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Work Details

Duration: approx. 15 minutes

Movements: Allegro energico / Andante cantabile / Allegro moderato

Instrumentation:

- Guitar (soloist)
- 1 Flute
- 1 Oboe
- 1 Clarinet
- 1 Bassoon
- 2 Horns
- Percussion: 4 timbales, snare, xylophone, woodblocks, triangle
- 6 Violins I
- 5 Violins II
- 4 Altos
- 3 Cellos
- 2 Double basses
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Materials: Full score and orchestral parts available from **Edizioni Curci**

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