

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 January 2022 1.00pm

Henning Kraggerud violin

Ljubica Stojanovic piano

BBC
RADIO



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Amy Beach (1867-1944)

Romance Op. 23 (1893)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor Op. 45 (1886-7)

*I. Allegro molto ed appassionato • II. Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza •
III. Allegro animato - Prestissimo*

Henning Kraggerud (b.1973)

Romantartica (2021) *UK première of version for violin & piano*

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If she had been born a year ago, developmental psychologists would be queuing to study the infant mind of **Amy Beach**. The child of a long-established New England family, the Cheneys, she was blessed with remarkable intuitive abilities. Her mother, an accomplished amateur musician, nurtured what nature had given her daughter, so much so that by the age of one, young Amy could sing 40 melodies with pinpoint accuracy; she began inventing alto lines to harmonise with her mother's singing soon after and, by the time she was four, was composing fully-formed pieces in her head to perform on the piano. Her aural and keyboard skills were such that, long before receiving her first piano lessons from her mother, she could memorise anything she heard and replay it at will.

Amy's musical training continued after the Cheneys moved to Boston, where her mentors included the German-born pianist Carl Baermann, the influential music educator Percy Goetschius, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr and the surgeon Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, her senior by 24 years, whom she married in 1885. The new Mrs Beach, in line with the conventions of the time, abandoned her career as a concert pianist (apart from annual fundraising recitals for charities) to concentrate on the business of home-making; however, she was encouraged by her husband to compose and taught herself to do so by studying theoretical textbooks.

Beach secured her place among a loose confederacy of New England composers during the 1890s, thanks not least to her 'Gaelic' Symphony and Violin Sonata. The *Romance* for violin and piano, written in 1893, stands in a line of early works that encapsulate Beach's technical command and inventive flair. The composer and its dedicatee Maud Powell, America's first internationally acclaimed violin soloist, gave the work's première in July 1893 during the Women's Musical Congress in Chicago. *Romance* makes a virtue of the interplay of the violin's exquisite song without words and the piano's harmonically rich accompaniment.

During the late 1860s **Grieg** composed a series of chamber and piano pieces that helped raise his stock in the Norwegian capital, Christiania (Oslo), a small city with a stubbornly provincial outlook, little appreciation of culture and even less of Grieg's compositions. 'Everyone hates my music,' he wrote in July 1867, 'even the professional musicians.' Grieg dedicated his first violin sonata of 1865 to one of the few musicians in Christiania who appreciated his work, Johan Svendsen, an able violinist-composer and future champion of Grieg's music as permanent conductor of the city's Royal Theatre Orchestra. Grieg wrote another violin sonata two years later but did not return to the genre for almost two decades.

The Violin Sonata No. 3, created at the composer's home near Bergen between the autumn of 1886 and early the following year, establishes its dark mood with the presentation of two contrasting first subjects. The work's opening movement draws out elements of melancholy, especially so in its increasingly turbulent development

section. Grieg delivers respite from darkness in the sonata's slow movement, a charming 'Romanza' in E major, as beguiling as any of his *Lyric Pieces* for solo piano. The densely worked argument of the finale rises from Grieg's free approach to sonata form, modified here to include two expositions, both repeated. The expected development section is replaced by a succession of expressive contrasts achieved through bold modulations, prelude to the *Prestissimo* coda and the movement's glorious conclusion in C major.

Romanticism runs through **Henning Kraggerud's** recital programme, its enduring spirit rooted in a venerable artistic movement already a century old by the time Grieg composed his Third Violin Sonata. *Romantarctica*, which bears the subtitle *Heroes from the Past and Hopes for the Future*, was originally commissioned by the Arctic Philharmonic and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, respectively the world's most northerly and southernmost professional symphonic ensembles. It was first performed in Tromsø in February 2021 as a work for flute, viola and string orchestra, and has since been reworked to deliver, among others, versions for piano solo; violin, viola and piano; piano trio; and violin and piano. The latter, like its predecessors, evokes the extraordinary courage shown by Robert Falcon Scott, Roald Amundsen and all who embarked on mankind's first expeditions to the South Pole.

'I am inspired by the romanticism inherent in the voyages of the great explorers Scott and Amundsen and the many adventurers who faced the unknown with an unquenchable thirst,' writes Henning Kraggerud. 'I am also inspired by my musical heroes from the Romantic era to whom the great explorers were exposed growing up.' *Romantarctica* embraces the spirit of romantic heroism embedded in the psyches of those pioneering polar explorers. 'Even the tragic fates of Scott and his team, and the ones suffered similarly in the north by Amundsen later on, have elements of romanticism in their weave,' the composer observes. 'They were willing to die for their beliefs and dreams, or to protect the romanticized images they had created of themselves; Scott heading for the South Pole with ponies and gramophone recordings conjures up a scenery of tragedy but also of courage, faith and grand deeds and actions.'

Kraggerud's own hopes and dreams for the future are driven by a comparable leap of faith. 'I believe that all the exploring we ultimately need to undertake for the future of humanity is best done with a Romantic creative spirit not limited to conventional scientific thinking alone, but instead it will require us to jump willingly into the unknown without having clear answers.' *Romantarctica*, from its energetic canons depicting the race to the pole and recurrent funeral music to passages based on the composer's vast initial resource of preparatory improvisations, represents the fruits of a daring musical exploration, its score 'a playground where [the performer takes] the notation as a starting point' for musical adventure and inner discovery.

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