

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 July 2023
1.00pm

María Dueñas violin
Julien Quentin piano

- Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Op. 12 No. 1 (1797-8)
*I. Allegro con brio • II. Tema con variazioni.
Andante con moto • III. Rondo. Allegro*
- Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Violin Sonata in A D574 'Duo' (1817)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Presto •
III. Andantino • IV. Allegro vivace*
- Claude Debussy (1862-1918) Violin Sonata in G minor (1916-7)
*I. Allegro vivo • II. Intermède. Fantasque et léger •
III. Finale. Très animé*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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Beethoven wrote his first three violin sonatas in 1797 and 1798 and grouped them together as his Op. 12. The set was dedicated to Antonio Salieri, his former teacher, who was still held in high regard. In common with the practice of the time, the works were titled 'Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin', which indicated that the violin accompanied the piano. Like its partners, the Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Op. 12 No. 1 demonstrates that Beethoven had subsumed the models of Mozart and Haydn, yet at times Beethoven treats the instruments almost as equals.

The first movement *Allegro con brio* opens with a daring upward unison flourish from the two instruments, which marks out a vigorous spirit missing from the works of his predecessors. Following this, the violin embarks on a lyrical path, whereas the piano launches headlong into a barrage of semiquavers. Along the way, several unexpected key signatures and remote tonalities are explored. The second movement *Andante con moto* is written in A major. It complies with convention by presenting a theme, albeit of two parts which is heard first on the piano and then the violin, before a set of four variations follows. The piano takes precedence in the first variation with discrete contributions from the violin. For the second variation the violin takes an almost rhapsodic approach above the piano accompaniment. The third variation shifts to A minor; the writing searches for and achieves both parity between the instruments and an increased sense of passion. The last variation returns to the major key and concludes the movement in a serene fashion. The final movement *Rondo. Allegro* is typical early Beethoven. Respectful one moment, jocular and rough-humoured the next as he toys with both rhythm and different timbres. This could well have led an early reviewer in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* to remark that the sonata amounted to 'A striving for strange modulations' and 'a heaping up of difficulties.' Such comments, however, mattered little to Beethoven who delighted in its success with the concert-going public.

Schubert's Violin Sonata in A D574 'Duo' was written in August 1817. Much of that year had been devoted to instrumental composition. The piano sonatas and chamber music written around that time increasingly displayed the 20-year-old composer's assurance in technical matters of harmony, rhythm, melody and form. In particular, the violin part is more complex than in any of the three violin sonatas Schubert had composed in the previous year. Although largely based on the classical sonata, this work demonstrates a marked equality between the two instruments. This possibly accounts for why the publisher Diabelli erroneously assigned it the 'Duo' title when it was printed in 1851.

The key of A major lends the first movement *Allegro moderato* a mood of expansive pleasure and ease that reflects somewhat the joys of summer. The violin's soaring part is given a counterpoint by the left-hand part for the piano. Schubert's sense of rhythmic capriciousness is manifest throughout the work but perhaps nowhere more than in the *Scherzo* second movement, which might have taken Beethoven as its model. Listen in particular for the leaps of pitch in the violin part and notice how the dynamics change without warning. Despite this formal deviation, the *Scherzo's* trio section adheres to strict classical form. The bittersweet tone of the *Andantino* third movement is reinforced by chromatic semitone modulations between mediant and dominant, whose implications are exploited to great effect. That the *Scherzo* appears before the *Andantino*, reversing the customary arrangement of inner movements, only serves to heighten the impact of the last movement. The brisk *Allegro vivace* finale features a theme that yields much, as it is treated with a very Schubertian mix of joviality and capricious sleight of hand. The movement's main theme was later reused in a transposed form within the Cotillon in E flat D976.

Debussy's Violin Sonata in G minor dates from 1916-7, when his terminal cancer had taken hold. His final completed composition, it was the third of an incomplete series of six sonatas. He wrote, 'I only completed this sonata to be rid of the thing, [it] will be interesting as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in wartime.' Debussy's interpretation of the violin-piano duo is distinctive: one instrument leads against the other's counter-melody, rather than accompanying each other *per se*. This creates a different sonority and texture; the instruments challenge one another but, ultimately, are brought closer together. The first movement's poignant opening piano chords immediately transport the listener to a subdued, sad atmosphere. The movement is filled with rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity with an ongoing momentum, regardless of speed. By contrast, the middle movement is mostly light in tone, with capriciousness and coquettishness. The second theme is as melodious as it is sensuous. The final movement begins with running notes on the piano, punctuated with a melodic emphasis from the second theme of the previous movement. The violin then enters with a modified handling of the nostalgic theme from the sonata's opening. The movement, however, requires agility and confidence. Debussy employs an extremely wide violin pitch range, whereas the pianist articulates tremolo-like tempi with an atmospheric lightness of touch.

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