

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 11 July 2026
7.30pm

Veronika Eberle violin
Dénes Várjon piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Violin Sonata (Sonatina) in D D384 (1816)
I. Allegro molto • II. Andante • III. Allegro vivace

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in E minor Op. 36a (1898-1900)
I. Langsam • II. Presto • III. Andante, piuttosto grave

Interval

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Violin Sonata No. 1 BB84 (1921)
I. Allegro appassionato • II. Adagio • III. Allegro



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Schubert's output for violin and piano amounts to only six compositions, four of them composed during his teenage years. The four violin sonatas, the first three published as Op. 137, date from 1816. Being early works contemporary with the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, they are not generally regarded as 'significant', but they should not be undervalued. Although Schubert called them sonatas, Anton Diabelli misguidedly published these pieces with the diminutive title of sonatinas, eight years after the composer's death. Clearly Schubert had serious ambitions regarding large-scale genres, having already composed more than a dozen string quartets, begun a few piano sonatas and completed several symphonies by 1816. He would have felt no self-consciousness in using the term sonata for these violin/piano compositions.

The First Sonata in D begins with a sunny *Allegro molto* characterised by simple, unpretentious melodies, the first quietly introduced in unison then repeated with some imitative writing. In the development the triadic intervals of the opening theme are stretched, before another imitative passage leads to the recapitulation. A late *pianissimo* unison statement – a variant of the opening – is followed by a *fortissimo* cadence. The *Andante* movement in A major has an *espressivo* middle section in the tonic minor, before the opening melody returns with graceful embellishment in semiquavers for the violin. In his teenage works Schubert often took a theme by Mozart as a model. For instance, the principal melody of this *Andante* resembles that of the equivalent movement from Mozart's Violin Sonata K305. The jaunty rondo-finale in 6/8 has contrasting episodes of more muscular character and subsequently Schubert precedes the final recall of the rondo-theme with a teasing, silent-bar hesitation.

Born in Empoli, **Busoni** was raised as an Italian (Italian father, a clarinettist, and German mother, a pianist) but lived in Berlin from 1894. He developed into one of the most influential musicians of his time – as a virtuoso pianist, composer, conductor, visionary writer and teacher. In the words of Wilhelm Kempff, he was 'a kind of Leonardo'. Sadly, his reputation as a virtuoso pianist has deflected attention away from his compositional legacy. The most important of his works are the opera *Doktor Faust*, the Second Violin Sonata and some of the piano music, which includes the *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* and a group of Elegies. However, we are more likely to find his name in the role of transcriber of many Bach pieces than as an original composer.

Busoni believed that his Second Violin Sonata (1898-1900) represented his Op. 1, marking the emergence of his mature compositional voice. A solemn chord progression leads to an essentially lyrical opening movement (initially marked *dolce*, *sostenuto*, then subsequently *dolcissimo*). The introduction of staccato triplet figures imparts a more urgent quality to a passage which culminates in an acceleration and rapid tumble into an animated section characterised by dotted rhythm. A return to the mood of the opening

winds down to the final bars. The exuberant second movement, a tarantella which follows *attacca*, Busoni described as 'like going into a thickly populated street on coming out of the Forum'. In this sonata the influence of Brahms is evident, but the composer Busoni revered above all was Bach. The extended finale, again following *attacca*, is dominated by a set of six wide-ranging variations on the chorale theme *Wie wohl ist mir*, taken from the second of Anna Magdalena Bach's notebooks but now believed to be not by Bach. Before this, in an introductory passage permeated by funereal dotted rhythm, Busoni foreshadows the chorale theme and includes a nostalgic quotation (*dolcissimo*) from the tarantella. The variations include a whimsical *alla marcia*, a *moto perpetuo*, a minor-key meditation and a fugue (*tranquillo assai*). The fifth variation intensifies towards a passionate climax, before receding into a tranquil coda. Among the several unifying inter-connections throughout the piece are the recall of a melody from the first movement, then a return to the very opening of the sonata.

Composed for the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi, **Bartók's** two sonatas for violin and piano embody some of his most uncompromising music. Similarly, the solo sonata presents formidable difficulties for performer and listener, while the two concertos are more idiomatic and arguably a degree less demanding. The opening pages of the First Sonata (composed 1921) are dramatic and challenging, with swirling arpeggios in the piano suggesting the sound of the cimbalom. The very wide intervals which begin to permeate the violin part prove to be a recurring feature. While the rhapsodic character and washes of sound connect with Impressionism, the passionate intensity and disturbing angularity are more akin to Expressionism. Contributing to the tension – periodically relieved by oases of calm – is the almost total melodic independence of each instrument. Beginning with a passage for unaccompanied violin, which includes a brief reference to the opening of Beethoven's C sharp minor Quartet, the central *Adagio* is one of the most lyrical movements in all Bartók, with *dolcissimo* and *grazioso* among the expression marks. In the more restless middle section, the influence of folk music is most obvious. (Astonishingly, Bartók collected more than 10,000 peasant melodies from various countries). Here, in this central section, the violin has to negotiate passages of double-stopping in minor ninths. Beginning with four bars of surprising harshness, the *Allegro* finale is a tremendously uninhibited example of Bartók's characteristic folk-dance idiom. Between the wild *moto perpetuo* sections there is relative respite: passages full of the characteristic Scotch-snap rhythm of Hungarian language and music, others in which the violinist plays an accompanying role with off-beat pizzicato chords. In some of the slower episodes of this extended finale there is conflict between the violin's seductive *grazioso* and the piano's grotesque stamping rhythm.

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