

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 11 June 2024  
7.30pm

Elena Urioste violin  
Tom Poster piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata in E flat K302 (1778)

*I. Allegro • II. Rondeau. Andante grazioso*

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 80 (1938-46)

*I. Andante assai • II. Allegro brusco •  
III. Andante • IV. Allegrissimo*

*Interval*

Selections from *#UriPosteJukeBox*

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In the summer of 1777, **Mozart** – who had long sought a way out of his position at the provincial Salzburg court – petitioned his employer, Archbishop Colloredo, for a leave of absence. The Archbishop's response was to dismiss him as Konzertmeister. Soon afterwards he set off, accompanied by his mother, in search of new opportunities.

After visits to Munich and Augsburg (where he may have had an intimate relationship with his cousin Anna Thekla), the next stop was Mannheim. Here he not only fell in love with the 17-year-old singer Aloysia Weber but was also able to hear the famous court orchestra, which Charles Burney had described as an 'army of generals'. 'Excellent and very strong' was Mozart's verdict (though of the choir he wrote, 'you cannot imagine anything worse').

Mozart failed to obtain a position at Mannheim, but while in the city he produced, among other works, the piano sonatas K309 and K311 and four of the six sonatas 'with violin accompaniment' (K301-306) that he would complete and publish several months later in Paris. All four of the Mannheim sonatas follow the two-movement form of Joseph Schuster's 6 *Divertimenti* for harpsichord and violin that Mozart had encountered in Munich.

The opening of K302 in E flat is as bold as the Mannheim orchestra itself, launched with a fanfare and continuing with a crescendo building over a held bass note, imitating the 'steamroller' effect for which the Mannheim orchestra was known (the better-known Mannheim 'rocket' is a brilliant ascending flourish). It is a vigorous, ebullient movement overall, but a brief, expressive minor-key idea introduced in the piano is taken up again at the start of the short development section. Marked *Andante grazioso*, the second movement is a graceful rondo, its opening 'refrain' material (returning to the 'A' section) stamped with a long-short-short rhythm. The alternating episode begins with a skeletal staccato idea, more of an accompaniment than a main event, and sure enough this bare figure is later overlaid with the return of the main theme, before a simple but sublime coda.

**Prokofiev's** two violin sonatas both date from after his return to Russia in 1936, following 18 years spent in the USA and Europe. Unlike Rachmaninov, who remained in the USA after leaving Russia following the 1917 Revolution, Prokofiev was lured back to his homeland with the hope of certain privileges, including a passport enabling him to continue touring. But soon Prokofiev felt the immediate tremors of Stalin's political and cultural purges, during which friends and colleagues of the composer disappeared. It was amid these circumstances, in 1938, that Prokofiev began sketching his Violin Sonata No. 1. He completed the sonata only in 1946 (two years after his Violin Sonata No. 2, though this F minor sonata, because it was started first, became known as 'No. 1'). The first performance was given by David Oistrakh and Lev Oborin at the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 23 October 1946.

The sonata's arrangement in four movements that form a slow-fast-slow-fast pattern may be a reference to the Baroque church sonata (the composer's second wife, Mira

Mendelson, recalled that Prokofiev was prompted to write the sonata after listening to Handel). Prokofiev himself referred to this F minor sonata as 'more serious' than his other violin sonata, which is rather an understatement.

The first movement begins with a funereal theme in bare octaves on the piano, to which the violin responds cautiously before finding its voice in troubled two-part writing, a struggle emphasised by the often simpler, single line in the piano's right hand. Doleful and highly chromatic, the only release comes in passages of feather-light, muted violin scales marked *freddo* ('cold'), which Prokofiev told Oistrakh should sound 'like the wind in a graveyard'. Prokofiev's biographer Israel Nestyev saw the second movement as 'an image of brutal military power', and it opens with a confrontational barking figure marked *marcatissimo e pesante* ('as accented as possible, and heavy'). A defiant second idea in the violin (*eroico* – 'heroic') is soaring but also defiant.

The third movement is by contrast an escape to a welcome oasis of calm, the violin floating a sensual, otherworldly tune over the piano's transparent rippling figuration. The tension and anguish of the preceding movements here dissolve into rhapsodic freedom – at times exploring the violin's ethereal upper reaches while time is suspended. The finale appears on the surface to offer a distant end point from the dark pessimism of the first movement. It begins with a vigorous, rustic, dance-like tune, bouncing against the jagged alternations of 5, 7 and 8 quavers to the bar. This is followed by a theme of more easy-going charm and lyrical simplicity. Later, though, hammered octaves in the piano remind us of the barked opening of the second movement; then comes a return to the whispering graveyard scales of the first movement. The sonata ends not with these dissolving into thin air, as we might expect (or hope for), but with a dark, snaking coda that ends the sonata shrouded in uncertainty.

The second half of tonight's recital takes on an altogether different mood. Rather than presenting a fixed programme, Elena Urioste and Tom Poster will play items from the *#UriPosteJukeBox* – their collection of 90-plus short pieces that began life as video performances posted online during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Designed to keep their 'minds sharp, fingers busy and the community smiling', these light-hearted, front-room performances ranged from Florence Price to Édith Piaf, Edvard Grieg to tango king Carlos Gardel, Massenet to Maxwell Davies and Stephen Sondheim to Stevie Wonder. There were forays into the worlds of jazz, folk, pop, cinema and musicals – and that's not to mention sprinklings of accessorised attire and borderline buffoonery. True to the project's 'jukebox' spirit, tonight the audience will have the opportunity to vote on some of the items – via a very rigorous process to be introduced by the performers.

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