WIGMORE HALL

Monday 12 October 2026
1.00pm

Elena Urioste violin
Tom Poster piano

Dora Pejačević (1885-1923)	Violin Sonata in D Op. 26 'Spring' (1909) *I. Allegro* *II. Andante con moto* *III. Allegro molto*
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)	Nocturne in B Op. 40 (1875)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)	Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor Op. 108 (1886-8) *I. Allegro* *II. Adagio* *III. Un poco presto e con sentiment* *IV. Presto agitato*

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The Croatian composer **Dora Pejačević** was born into a life of privilege: the child of Central European aristocrats, she spent most of her youth on the family estate of Našice, in the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia. Her musical gifts were soon recognised by her Hungarian mother, herself a talented pianist and singer, and Pejačević began to play both the piano and violin at an early age. She produced her first compositions before she reached her teens – at first mainly songs, piano works and short characteristic pieces for violin and piano – but by her mid-twenties she was writing more substantial chamber music works such as the Piano Quartet in D minor Op. 25 and the Violin Sonata Op. 26.

Up until this stage in her composing career, her music clearly shows the extent to which she had mastered the Romantic style inherited from composers such as Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, but by the end of the first decade of the 20th Century she was also beginning to reveal a more individual voice, as can be heard clearly in Op. 26 – the work that represents the culmination of her Romantic period. By now Pejačević had developed a keen intellectual curiosity and was increasingly determined to broaden her cultural and spiritual horizons. She read voraciously across a wide range of topics – including literature, philosophy, music, religion, history and the natural sciences – and soon came to prefer the company of fellow artists and intellectuals to that of members of the Central European nobility, to which she belonged by birth but which she came to despise for its superficiality and lack of any serious purpose. Her experiences during the First World War, when she volunteered for nursing work, were to make her even more acutely aware of the injustices engendered by social differences, and by the end of the war her sense of estrangement from her own class was complete.

During her early and unashamedly Romantic period, Pejačević often found inspiration in the natural world, a tendency that reached its peak in the rapturous opening of the Violin Sonata in D – an exuberant celebration of the coming of spring. The ecstatically soaring melodies of the opening *Allegro* give way to a dream-like slow movement, after which the pace picks up once again for the skittish tarantella that forms the finale – a movement overflowing with youthful élan.

Despite the two composers' widely divergent social backgrounds and the generational gap between them, Pejačević's 'Spring' Sonata still inhabits the same Romantic world of rich harmonies and expansive melodies as **Dvořák**'s *Nocturne*. For many years, the popular view of Dvořák was that he was an unsophisticated child of nature and an instinctive artist, from whom delightfully catchy tunes poured forth effortlessly. In fact, his creative personality was rather more nuanced than that. Occasionally, he tinkered endlessly with the same piece, recycling its music in a new context and extensively reworking the basic material. The *Nocturne* is a supreme example of this: it began life as the slow movement of a string quartet (written around 1870, but which remained unpublished during the composer's lifetime) and was later trimmed down and incorporated into his String Quintet No. 2 in G (1875). This was not to be the music's final resting place: Dvořák subsequently withdrew it from the quintet, adapted it further by adding a brief introduction, and in 1883 published it as a free-standing piece in three versions: for string orchestra, violin and piano, and piano four-hands. Through all its permutations, the *Nocturne* retained its original distinctive melodic freshness and opulent harmonic colouring.

Some of **Brahms**'s most celebrated late chamber music masterpieces were written during summer holidays spent in the mid-1880s in the picturesque Swiss resort of Hofstetten, on the shores of Lake Thun. The stunning Alpine scenery he encountered there was such a source of inspiration that he once famously declared the mountains and the lake to be 'so full of melodies that one has to be careful not to step on any'. The first summer spent in this idyllic retreat (1886) was the most productive and gave rise to a brace of works including the sunny Violin Sonata No. 2 in A, often referred to as the 'Thun' sonata. The Sonata No. 3 in D minor – the composer's final work in this genre – was begun that same summer but was for some reason not completed for another two years. A more sombre and dramatic work than either of its predecessors, it also initially gives the impression of being a weightier piece on account of its four movements as compared to their three. However, the serious drama is mostly confined to the outer sections, while the two middle movements – a songful *Adagio* and a playful, gossamer-light scherzo – are more lyrical and intermezzo-like.

The final form of the third movement was influenced by Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, a singer, pianist and composer who was one of Brahms's closest friends from the 1870s onwards. He often submitted his compositions to Herzogenberg, and her good opinion clearly mattered to him. She suggested to him that the violin double-stoppings at the beginning of the scherzo would sound more effective if played pizzicato (with the strings plucked rather than bowed), and though he decided against changing the opening bars, he adopted her suggestion when the same idea returns later in the movement.

The delicate and subtle scherzo throws into even greater relief the stormy finale, underlined by the 'Presto agitato' tempo marking. Like the third movement of Pejačević's 'Spring' Sonata, Brahms's finale is essentially a tarantella, but whereas hers is characterised by a youthful freshness, in his it is the sense of drama that predominates.

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