

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 14 April 2025
7.30pm

Liza Ferschtman violin
Enrico Pace piano

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931)

Poème élégiaque Op. 12 (1892-3)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

From 24 Preludes Op. 34 (1932-3) arranged by Dmitri Tsyganov
for violin and piano

*Prelude in C sharp minor No. 10 • Prelude in D flat No. 15 •
Prelude in B flat minor No. 16 • Prelude in A flat No. 17 •
Prelude in D minor No. 24 • Prelude in A minor No. 2 •
Prelude in B minor No. 6 • Prelude in G minor No. 22*

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Suite for violin and piano Op. 6 (1935)

*I. Introduction • II. March • III. Moto perpetuo •
IV. Lullaby • V. Waltz*

Interval

Mark Simpson (b.1988)

An Essay of Love (2020)

César Franck (1822-1890)

Sonata in A for violin and piano (1886)

*I. Allegretto ben moderato • II. Allegro •
III. Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato •
IV. Allegretto poco mosso*



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Famous today for his masterful late Sonatas for solo violin, **Ysaÿe** busily composed throughout his playing career, taking his own works with him on his celebrated tours of Europe and beyond. His early efforts imitated the forms and styles of established violinist-composers such as Wieniawski, but with the *Poème élégiaque*, composed in 1892-3, he found a distinctive, sensuous and emotionally expansive style which would serve him well over the next few decades. A hallmark of the style is long, meandering melodic lines, evident here from the outset. A second, funeral episode then makes imaginative use of *scordatura*, the practice of tuning the violin's strings unconventionally: Ysaÿe asks for the bottom string to be tuned down a whole tone, for a moment of unexpected gravitas. Ernest Chausson was so taken with the piece that he wrote his own famous *Poème* in response, generously crediting Ysaÿe for much of the inspiration.

As Ysaÿe's career as a violinist was coming to an end, a much younger **Shostakovich** was himself turning away from a burgeoning career as a pianist. He spent much of 1931 and 1932 working on his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and only felt ready to return to writing for the piano upon its completion, early the following year. As so often, he wrote his *24 Preludes* for piano rapidly, completing almost one a day, keeping in mind the model of Chopin, whose progression through all the available keys he followed. The spiky, sardonic character of the music, however, was all his own. In turn, Dmitri Tsyganov (first violinist with the Beethoven Quartet, which premièred 13 of Shostakovich's 15 string quartets) arranged most of the *Preludes* for violin and piano, to compliments from the composer. The present selection of eight *Preludes* demonstrates Shostakovich's singular way with melodies which veer in unexpected directions with every other step.

Decades later, Shostakovich and **Britten** would become great friends, but while the slightly older Russian had made his name internationally by the mid-30s, Britten was just finding his mature voice. The Suite for Violin and Piano (1934-35) was the product of travels in Europe with his mother after the completion of studies at the Royal College of Music. He began the five-part work in Vienna, which perhaps explains the caustic Schoenbergian blast with which the violin commences the *Introduction*; what follows is a sequence of movements of dazzling freshness and imagination. Britten delights here in sidestepping expectation, from the least martial *March* imaginable, to something of a parody of a waltz, charming but somehow off-kilter. Britten himself gave the first performance of the complete suite in 1936 with Spanish violinist Antoino Brosa, two years after Henri Temianka and Betty Humby Beecham had first played the initial three completed movements, here at Wigmore Hall.

An Essay of Love by **Mark Simpson** unleashes a volcanic flow of intense feeling, surging towards a conclusion which turns to an awestruck whisper. Simpson, who won the 2006 BBC Young Musician of the Year competition as a clarinetist, has subsequently found acclaim as a composer, and this short work takes as its title the final words from Robert Frost's 1947 poem 'Too Anxious for Rivers'. It is also an artefact of early COVID-19 lockdown, premièred on Facebook by violinist Elena Urioste and pianist Tom Poster in April 2020, when artists of all kinds looked to connect with audiences in ways befitting the suspension of normal contact. Simpson was struck by the contrast between those who wanted to reach out with online art, and those who turned inward with intense introspection.

Though **Franck** spent much of his life in the organ loft, his name passed into immortality for music written for instruments other than his own. None of his works (with the possible exception of his lone Symphony of 1888) has endured like the Sonata for Violin and Piano, composed in 1886 as a wedding gift for Franck's young friend, Ysaÿe.

Ysaÿe, whose influence seemed to galvanise composers into writing some of their greatest works, championed the sonata tirelessly after giving the first performance on the afternoon of his wedding. A public première followed, on a December evening in Brussels; Vincent d'Indy later recalled that the museum hosting the performance had no artificial light, and as the sun set and the building fell into darkness, Ysaÿe and pianist Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène, unable to read their scores, had to play much of the new work from memory.

Franck defies expectation from the start of the work, substituting the typical sonata-form first-movement plan for a structure which alternates a first theme built on an unwavering 'skipping' rhythm with a second theme of wide-eyed wonder, which is only ever played by the piano. The first movement here has the feeling of a prelude, while the second holds tremendous weight and scale. The third holds a sombre, Bachian air; we can only wonder what the Ysaÿe's wedding guests made of the existential depths being probed by the music as the sun faded on a day of happy celebrations.

The flowing, genial opening of the finale presents its melody as a canon, the piano leading the way and the violin echoing what has just been heard. As so often in this sonata, however, we are reminded that this is far more than simply happy music for a happy time, as plunging and soaring material from the third movement is thunderously recalled. Franck's total command of the material, though, is clear from the manner in which the piano and violin find their way back to the original melody-in-canon, and its return to the heights of joy in the final moments.

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