

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 14 February 2022 1.00pm

**Augustin Hadelich** violin

**Charles Owen** piano



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827)

Violin Sonata No. 5 in F Op. 24 'Spring' (1800-1)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo •*

*III. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio • IV. Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo*

**Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson** (1932-2004)

Louisiana Blues Strut: A Cakewalk (2002)

Blue/s Forms for solo violin (1972)

*Plain Blue/s • Just Blue/s • Jettin' Blue/s*

**Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in G (1923-7)

*I. Allegretto • II. Blues. Moderato • III. Perpetuum mobile. Allegro*

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Alongside his compositional work, **Ludwig van Beethoven** was a pianist – but he was also a competent violinist, and showed particular interest in expanding the repertoire for that instrument. Beethoven played the violin during his Bonn years and took lessons in Vienna. Yet the French school of violin playing appealed more to Beethoven than that of many violinists closer to home, whom he sometimes found frustrating; he objected to a technical complaint from his teacher Ignaz Schuppanzigh with, ‘What do I care for your miserable fiddle when the spirit moves me?’.

Beethoven wrote ten sonatas for violin and piano, all but one of which were composed between 1797 and 1803. When he returned to Vienna from a stay in Budapest in July 1800, he set about writing a number of chamber works, including the Fourth and Fifth Violin Sonatas Opp. 23 and 24, which were completed during 1800-1. They were conceived as a pair and were both dedicated to – and possibly written for – Count Moritz von Fries, a banker and patron of the arts whom Beethoven called ‘Good Count Fries’.

The two sonatas were originally published together in 1801 as Beethoven’s Op. 23, but were soon reissued under separate opus numbers. The nickname of the ‘Spring’ Sonata No. 5 in F, Op. 24, was coined after Beethoven’s death but is so in keeping with the work’s charming freshness that the soubriquet has stuck. The ‘Frühlingssonate’ is sunny and untroubled – probably the most Mozartian of all Beethoven’s violin sonatas – but is not merely cheerful, boasting a wealth of invention and drama. It was also the first of Beethoven’s violin sonatas to include a full-blown *Scherzo* movement, as opposed to the flirtations with the form heard in the preceding sonata’s *scherzoso*.

This unprecedented additional movement contributes to the ‘Spring’ Sonata’s generous nature. It opens with a novel ten-bar violin phrase with an unpredictable mixture of long and short notes, covering a wide range. The piano takes up the theme, accompanied by the violin. An assertive secondary melody dips into minor-key territory, and moments of suspense punctuate the movement’s elegance and clarity.

Beethoven’s creation of thematic links between the movements of this sonata was also innovative: the second movement’s melody is derived from the first’s main theme. This tender melody slowly reveals itself in the piano’s right hand before being taken up by the violin, contrasted with a concise, quirky *Scherzo* of playful rhythmic ambiguity, the violin echoing the piano one beat behind. The *Rondo*-finale is characterised by a Mozartian melody, but is further distinguished by suspensions, small motivic units and some unexpected modulations.

**Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson** was an African American composer, named after Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Raised and educated in New York before becoming a faculty member of Brooklyn College, Perkinson wrote concert works, film scores, and arrangements for Marvin Gaye among many others, blending Romanticism and

neoclassical counterpoint with the blues, spirituals and folk music. *Louisiana Blues Strut: A Cakewalk* for solo violin is full of syncopated swagger articulated via a range of virtuosic techniques, including glissandi and double and triple stopping. The cakewalk developed in the 19th Century among communities of Black slaves forced to labour on plantations – of which there were many in Louisiana – and the dance’s mock formality may have been a subtle way of lampooning their oppressors.

Perkinson’s *Blue/s Forms* for solo violin opens with ‘Plain Blue/s’, in which double stopping and portamento are interspersed with melodic lines that dance around tonality and meter with a sense of looseness and freedom. ‘Just Blue/s’ takes this principle even further, marked *Very free* and proceeding with languor and introspection, whereas ‘Jettin’ Blue/s’ is an animated finale of defiantly unfettered dynamism and energy.

WC Handy’s blues band brought the St Louis blues to Paris in the 1920s, and **Maurice Ravel** was so inspired that he incorporated the style into the second movement of his Violin Sonata No. 2 in G. He had made a stuttering start when it came to writing a violin sonata: his first attempt, no more than a single movement, dates from 1897 and was published posthumously. Nearly three decades later, Ravel wrote his Violin Sonata No. 2 for perhaps his closest female friend, violinist Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, for whom he had already considered writing a concerto. Jourdan-Morhange would never perform Ravel’s sonata as it was at around this time that her career was cut short by rheumatism. This tragedy is likely to have contributed to the length of time taken by Ravel to complete the piece: he started work in 1923 but in January 1924 wrote to Manuel de Falla: ‘I thought I would finish my Violin Sonata towards the beginning of February. I have just abandoned it... my depression is worse than ever.’

When Ravel did at last complete the sonata, he dedicated it to Jourdan-Morhange; George Enescu gave the first performance with Ravel at the piano. Rather than trying to unify the timbres of violin and piano in this work, Ravel sought to accentuate their differences, even incompatibilities. The first movement juxtaposes the piano’s brittle timbres with the violin’s inherent lyricism, its wistful lines thrown into relief by the piano’s haunting parallel chords, pithy interjections and almost Bach-like figurations.

Jourdan-Morhange, like Ravel, adored jazz, and in the second movement *Blues* Ravel uses pizzicato to create a jangling sonority – reminiscent of a mandolin or ukulele – as well as improvisatory, jazzy lines that would not have sounded out of place had they emanated from the violin of Stéphane Grappelli. The finale is a *Perpetuum mobile* that plays with motifs heard in the earlier movements. The violin part is propelled onwards as though compelled by some nervous energy, building towards the vigorous final bars.

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