

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 15 February 2022 7.30pm

Hyeyoon Park violin

Benjamin Grosvenor piano

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Violin Sonata in F K376 (1781)
I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondeau. Allegretto grazioso

Anton Webern (1883-1945) 4 Pieces for violin and piano Op. 7 (1910 rev. 1914)
Sehr langsam • Rasch • Sehr langsam • Bewegt

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) Violin Sonata in G minor (1916-7)
I. Allegro vivo • II. Intermède. Fantasque et léger • III. Finale. Très animé

Interval

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) Rhapsody No. 1 BB94a (1928 rev. 1929)
I. Lassú. Moderato • II. Friss. Allegretto moderato

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Fantasy in C D934 (1827)
*Andante molto - Allegretto - Andantino - Tempo I -
Allegro vivace - Allegretto - Presto*

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In 1781, **Mozart** moved from Salzburg, where he had been working with little enthusiasm at the court orchestra, to Vienna, to make his way as a composer and performer. This was a shift not just in geography, but also from child virtuoso to adult musician. His first priority was finding students to supply a dependable income and this was how he met the talented young pianist Josepha Barbara Auernhammer, his second ever student, to whom his collection of violin sonatas was dedicated. She had already decided on a life of performing and composing and the two began appearing frequently together in concerts.

The sonatas in this set of six make a break from the tradition of what were usually called Sonatas for Piano with Violin; here the violin becomes an equal and independent partner. As Jan Swafford puts it: '[Mozart] took a genre of which not all that much was expected, in this case a *Hausmusik* piece traditionally aimed toward reasonably expert lady pianists and often less expert male violinists...and made it into a model that would endure.'

The sonata opens with declamatory chords, softening into tuneful melodies that pass through a contrapuntal development, before moving into a stately slow movement whose violin writing involves traces of both the old style of accompaniment as well as the new soloistic presence. An upbeat *Rondeau* closes out the work.

The 4 Pieces Op. 7 were written in 1910, four years after **Webern** completed his studies with Arnold Schoenberg which included his introduction to 12-tone composition. Later analysts of the technique would come to refer to its major exponents as the 12-tone trinity, with Schoenberg as God the father, Alban Berg as God the son and Webern as the Holy Ghost, in reference to the phantasmic nature of many of his works, a quality that is especially evident in this set.

The music exists in the quietest range of sound, and the expression is distilled even further with the detail of every moment in the score; nothing is left to chance. In such a concentrated atmosphere (no movement uses more than 20 measures), we quickly develop a heightened sensitivity to every change. The odd movements are played as quietly as possible and make use of mutes and styles of playing with the wood of the bow. The even movements contain brief outbursts of fortissimo sound that never last against the murkiness of the music.

Composed 7 years later, but worlds away, **Debussy's** Violin Sonata is the composer's final major work, written in the midst of the Great War and his own terminal cancer. The work is influenced by a meeting with a Hungarian violinist in 1910 whose gregarious playing found its way into much of Debussy's string writing. Another influence comes from Pierrot and the other stock characters of the *Commedia dell'arte*, which had enchanted many

artists, writers and musicians in the late 1800s. Debussy's Pierrot, who appears from the early songs onwards, is far gentler and livelier than Schoenberg's, a malleable character, through whom emotions pass quickly and intensely.

The sonata opens in quiet darkness: two alternating chords in the piano on top of which enters the violin, pulling the music through a variety of moods and around unpredictable corners. The first movement passes between the serene and the highly expressive, ending in a plaintive Hungarian howl. The second movement is an interlude of puckish fantasy with a surprisingly tender theme at its heart. The *Finale* begins with the opening theme before taking us into a brilliantly coloured new world that Debussy described as 'tumultuous joy.' Debussy's final public performance was playing the piano part of this work with the violinist Gaston Poulet. He died the following year at 56.

Following the Hungarian influence in Debussy, the Rhapsody No. 1 by **Bartók** owes more to rustic fiddle playing. Bartók's goal was to take traditional Hungarian styles and place them in a western classical context. The music of the Rhapsody is in the slow-fast form of the Hungarian *csárdás*. The first part, the *Lassù*, is its own ABA structure with two themes using Transylvanian fiddle tunes that Bartók had collected, the first a heavy, dotted melody against a piano drone, the second a mournful long short rhythm. The second part is made up of five different themes, all virtuosic, that build to an exciting flourish that closes out the piece.

Composed just under one year before **Schubert's** early death at age 31, the Fantasy in C is his greatest work for the violin. Written as a showpiece for the young Bohemian violinist Josef Slavík, Schubert, in rare virtuosic form, places the extreme difficulties of both parts around beautiful melodies and the adventurous harmonic explorations which became central to his style in his last years.

The piece begins with flutters of piano tremolandi before the violin enters with tranquil long lines. This is underpinned by piano turns and shakes before this *Andante* comes to a semi-cadenza, leaving the violin on its highest E. Then arises an A minor *Allegretto* in the Hungarian style, with its mix of military march and folk tune. Running quavers in the piano lead us into A flat major and to the very heart of this unusually structured piece: a theme and variations on the song 'Sei mir gegrüsst,' a Rückert setting from 1822 that had become one of Schubert's most popular melodies. We pass through four variations before the opening flutters of the *Andante* come back, pivoting us into a fiery finale section that deposits us firmly and dextrously in our home C major.

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