

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 15 September 2021 7.30pm

Leif Ove Andsnes piano

Christian Tetzlaff violin



In partnership with and supported by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in London

Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994)

Partita for violin and piano (1984)

I. Allegro giusto • II. Ad libitum • III. Largo • IV. Ad libitum • V. Presto

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Violin Sonata in F Op. 57 (1880)

I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Poco sostenuto • III. Allegro molto

Interval

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Violin Sonata No. 1 BB84 (1921)

I. Allegro appassionato • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

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This evening's composers came from different regions of eastern Europe and belonged to different generations, but the connections are stronger. Bartók recognized Dvořák as a predecessor in drawing on folk music; Lutosławski offered a much more definite acknowledgement: 'Studying the works of Bartók', he wrote, 'has been one of the fundamental lessons to be taken by the majority of composers of my generation'. But though we might afterwards reflect on these debts and alliances, we may find while listening that violin and piano thrust through all three compositions in essentially the same way, as lyrical voices in partnership.

Lutosławski wrote his Partita in 1984, for Pinchas Zukerman and Marc Neikrug. He chose the title 'to suggest', as he wrote, 'a few allusions to Baroque music, for example at the beginning of the first movement, in the main theme of the *Largo* and in the finale, which resembles a *gigue*.' These are the main movements, linked by sections headed '*Ad libitum*' – not because they need not be played, but rather for how the musicians here play independently of one another.

At this time Lutosławski was recuperating elements of his earlier, neoclassical style – themes, tonality, metrical rhythm – within the modernist manner he had developed during the preceding quarter-century. The first movement has much of the feel of a traditional sonata opener, putting forward two kinds of material – assertive and calm, both marked by three-note chromatic patterns such as will pervade the whole work – and developing these. But it breaks off before there can be any recapitulation.

The first '*Ad libitum*' prepares the slow movement, a lament that comes toward its culmination with ringing major chords in the piano. Introduced by the second '*Ad libitum*', the finale is in the compound metres of a *gigue*, but, at this speed, could be danced only by buzzing insects. It skids into a third '*Ad libitum*' shortly before it ends.

Dvořák wrote his Violin Sonata – his only published sonata – in two weeks in March 1880, just before resuming work on the concerto he had begun the year before. Close to the start we hear, rising in the violin, exactly the chromatic motif that featured so much in the Lutosławski piece. Here it is perhaps the grit in the oyster, but this oyster can deal with it. The sonata movement that continues goes along fine, the outdoorsy character of F major emphasized by turns of melody and rhythm suggestive of folk music.

The slow movement, in A, is again in sonata form, with a falling first theme and a second presented in dialogue. For his finale, Dvořák turns to his Slavonic dance style, with some turbulence before the end.

Joseph Joachim, probably the violinist Dvořák had in mind, played through the piece with him, and approved.

Bartók dedicated his two violin sonatas to Jelly d'Árányi, who, resident in England, returned to her home town of Budapest for a holiday in October 1921. She evidently made a great impression on the composer, as a musician and, somewhat to her embarrassment, as a woman. He at the time was preparing a recital in the city with another violinist, Zoltán Székely, to include the local première of Szymanowski's *Myths*, and this, too, impressed him, by its independent writing for the two instruments and its rich harmonic language. Thus doubly fired, he wrote his First Sonata for d'Árányi in just two months.

At the start, the two instruments defiantly maintain separate tracks, the piano rippling upwards against the line strenuously maintained by the violin. The piano works up a cloud in C sharp; the violin insists on C. The two notes most prominent in the violin part, C and E flat, are the only two omitted by the piano, while the violin avoids C sharp and its fifth, G sharp. Though pulled in alternative directions, the violin holds to variants of its initial line through the first part of the opening movement, which is succeeded by a slow middle section and then by music that more exposes than resolves contrasts. The whole movement – one of Bartók's most extended, in one of his lengthiest works – abounds with harmonic variety, from highly dissonant chords to (much more rarely) points of rest, all related to a group of six notes, e.g., reading downwards, A flat–C–F sharp–F–A–E flat. With shifts in register, this six-note group can become an enriched major-minor arpeggio, as in the piano at the close of the movement.

A long violin solo introduces the slow movement, briefly quoting as it does so the opening theme of Beethoven's Op. 131 quartet (in C sharp minor, the key Bartók regarded as this sonata's, too). What follows has something of the nature of a sonata form, with repeated exposition, development and recapitulation. After this comes a rondo finale that at last clasps the two instruments together. Finales in vigorous 2/4 are quite common in Bartók, and often they refer to folk dance rhythms. Here, though, one may more often have the sense of a chase, and particularly of the chase in *The Miraculous Mandarin* where the eerie stranger pursues the girl who has lured him up from the street. The final chord crushes together C sharp minor (piano left hand), C sharp major (piano right hand) and E major (violin).

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