

WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 16 October 2025
7.30pm

Fenella Humphreys violin
Martin Roscoe piano

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

5 Melodies Op. 35bis (1920-5)

*I. Andante • II. Lento ma non troppo •
III. Animato, ma non allegro • IV. Allegretto leggero e
scherzando • V. Andante non troppo*

Sally Beamish (b.1956)

Tracing (2025) *world première*

I. Ink • II. Silhouette • III. Shadows

Commissioned by Fenella Humphreys with support from The Fidelio
Charitable Trust, Vaughan Williams Foundation and Wigmore Hall

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Violin Sonata in F minor Op. 4 (1823)

*I. Adagio – Allegro moderato • II. Poco Adagio •
III. Allegro agitato*

Interval

Arthur Honegger (1892-1955)

Violin Sonata No. 2 (1919)

I. Allegro cantabile • II. Larghetto • III. Vivace assai

Adrian Sutton (b.1967)

Eulogy (2021) *London première*

Dorothy Howell (1898-1982)

Phantasy (1921)

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Suite (1922)

*I. Introductione • II. Serenata • III. Tarantella •
IV. Gavotta con due variazioni • V. Minuetto e finale*



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This programme is full of reflections that may also be contrasts: Prokofiev-Stravinsky, Mendelssohn-Honegger. **Prokofiev**, as we meet him at the start, had lately left the young Soviet Union and was in California with another émigré, the soprano Nina Koshetz. For her he wrote these 5 *Melodies* as a set of wordless songs, combining ostinatos with rich harmonies and exotic touches, as at the opening of the second number and its whole second part, where the melody is pentatonic, before a short reprise. In 1925 Prokofiev arranged the opus for violin, with help from his friend Paul Kochanski.

Sally Beamish has written of her new piece as follows:

'When Fenella Humphreys approached me about writing a piece for violin and piano, she had an image in her head: a picture by her artist father, which she had always loved as a child. Could I base the piece on this? However, on trying to find the original painting, she drew a blank. None of the family knew where it was, and Fenella started to trawl her memory for the image – sending me descriptions and even her own pencil sketches, to try and conjure up the beloved picture. But as she said, every time she tried to get close to the memory it disappeared further...

'The idea of memory has fed into the music, as well as Fenella's descriptions of the picture: a winter night scene, with a gnarled tree, a moon, a church – possibly clouds. It might have been in ink, with cross-hatching.

'The first movement is childlike and simple – a distant memory. It suggests the process of trying to pin down a half-remembered image.

'The second movement refers to the silhouette of a gnarled tree: stark, but strong and positive. The image was reassuring, and I have used a passacaglia, beginning on piano, with six repetitions. A recurring pattern of falling fifths suggests a child and a violin.

'The third movement depicts clouds scudding across a moon "that might have been red, or yellow, or white". The uncertainty of memory, the moonlight, the transience of the image, all pervade the music.

'Fenella's playing, and also Martin's, were important factors in the piece: I have written for both of them before, and could hear their sound as the piece took shape. I wanted to draw on their expressive qualities, but also to create a childlike simplicity.'

Mendelssohn was still a child when he wrote his F minor sonata, in the early summer of 1823, yet at the age of 14 he was already setting his sights on the greatest composer of the age: Beethoven. Beethovenian features include the sure momentum, even when the pace is steady, as well as the pressure put on small motifs and the formal irregularities. These last start with the unaccompanied, recitative-like violin solo that opens the work, leaving to introduce both sonata subjects, in F minor and, hymnic, A flat. The latter is duly recapitulated in F major, but the movement ends back in the minor, its *moderato* marking implying a tender melancholy. More A flat comes in the slow movement, but with its serenity

tested by chromatic harmony. After a stormier middle section, the song continues. The sonata-form finale, as its recapitulation closes, has the violin recall the solo that initiated the whole enterprise. There is then a fast coda, with a surprise ending.

Honegger started work on his Second Sonata in April 1919 in Le Havre, his birthplace, wrote the second movement in his ancestral Switzerland in the summer, and completed the work in November in Paris, where he had made his home. He and his future wife Andrée Vaurabourg gave the first public performance in February 1920. Soon after, Honegger met Ravel at a dinner and gained his verdict. 'My Second Sonata made a funny impression on him', he wrote to his parents. 'He hated the first movement but loved the other two.' We might wonder what bothered Ravel in the opening movement: most likely the fugal development. He surely appreciated the slow movement's steady ascent. As for the finale, who could resist? The whole piece is done in not much more than ten minutes.

Dorothy Howell's *Phantasy*, playing for 15 minutes or so, was commissioned by Walter Willson Cobbett and composed in 1921. It begins decisively with a violin recitative that serves as first subject, proceeding in dialogue with the piano before giving way to the contrasting second subject, a descending melody from the violin. There is a transition into a slow movement, in E. This is followed by a reminiscence of the work's opening to prompt a continuation and completion of the initial sonata movement, ending firmly in G minor. We go back across the channel for the first violin-piano suite **Stravinsky** made from his ballet *Pulcinella*, in 1925, this set of arrangements again for Kochanski. The second, renamed *Suite italienne*, followed in 1933. It is a pity that the second has so much overshadowed the first, which is a good deal more difficult for the violinist and correspondingly a good deal tangier. *Pulcinella* gives a twist to 18th-century pieces that were believed at the time to be by Pergolesi (though we now know that, of the movements in this suite, only the *Serenata* and the *Minuetto* are his, the rest by other composers of the time). This suite adds a further twist for ears used to the later version and therefore not to, for instance, the multiple stops of the *Introductione*, the colours of the *Serenata*, the glissandos of the *Minuetto*, and more.

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Eulogies, in spoken or written word form, often reflect on the character and achievements of those recently-deceased, many of whom have been lucky enough to have had wonderful people... friends and family... surround them in their lives.

I wanted this simple, short piece to stand more specifically as a eulogy, in wordless musical form, for all those who, for whatever reason, were less fortunate in that regard – perhaps no family, or few if any friends at the end to sing their praises – but whose life, character and achievements are equally as worthy of that praise and celebration.

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