

WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 17 September 2025
7.30pm

Christian Tetzlaff violin
Leif Ove Andsnes piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata in A K526 (1787)

I. Molto allegro • II. Andante • III. Presto

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

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

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

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor Op. 108 (1886-8)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Un poco presto e
con sentimento • IV. Presto agitato*

Donghoon Shin (b.1983)

Winter Sonata (2025) *UK première*

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Mozart entered his last big violin sonata into his catalogue on 24 September 1787. His next entry, the month after, was to be *Don Giovanni* – a work, one might think, very far from what is, certainly in its outer movements, a sunny and funny sonata. But perhaps the distance is not so very great. The opening movement, which charmingly slips in, is a dialogue in A major with folk-song tones, as is a celebrated number from the first act of the opera: ‘La ci darem la mano’. Then the slow movement, again in full sonata form, in D major, has a great deal to do with minor keys – not least D minor, *Don Giovanni*’s home base. Also, an atmosphere of starkness is created by the octaves that begin and recur, whether between the pianist’s hands or between violin and bass. Nor can the brilliant, intriguingly developed and often witty rondo quite obliterate the seriousness, though it tries.

The **Ravel** sonata, known as No. 2 since the publication in 1875 of a student movement, was begun in 1923 but not finished until 1927, after the opera *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. Its opening gesture comes from the pianist’s right hand: an unaccompanied melody in G with the freshness of a folksong. When the violin enters, it is with somewhat similar patterns, but adding up to a quite different whole. There are clear phases of second subject, very much abbreviated exposition repeat (just an echo), development and recapitulation, but in this last segment, as the piano recapitulates like crazy, the violin declines to do likewise. Ravel’s ‘Blues’ gives the violin a melody blued by glissando, developing except when it is shoved aside by pizzicato chords in a more intemperate section. The finale, sparked off by an idea remembered from the first movement, is nearly all semiquavers for the violin.

Brahms began his third and final violin sonata during a summer holiday at Thun, in Switzerland, in 1886, and finished it there two years later. There is no preparation before the violin comes in with the first movement’s main theme. Conversely, the milder second subject, in the relative major, F, is sung first by the piano alone. The notional development section, most unusually, is held stable by pulsing As in the left hand of the piano part, creating both a structural anomaly and a remarkable sound. Both have their effect. The recapitulation, which has the violin coming in with the principal theme but an octave lower, is broken off for a short second development in F sharp minor, after which the reprise continues to the second subject. Then there is a coda, where the violin brings back the opening theme at last in its original register and the pulsing returns, now on D.

The superb slow movement, in an enriched D major, is twofold, the principal melody coming round the second time an octave higher while the piano articulates the triplets that have been implicit from the start.

As usual, Brahms finds a gentler alternative to the scherzo: a movement of tentative growth, but becoming more decisive in its middle section. The presence of a D minor episode in a movement in F sharp minor nicely inverts the first movement’s scheme.

It is, however, the finale that connects most fully with the initial *Allegro*, whose challenge it precipitately takes up, in, of course, the same key of D minor. A sonata movement, it has a hymnlike second subject, played by the piano alone, and again some magnificent irregularities, including the forceful return of the main theme to drive the work to its conclusion, still in the minor, unalleviated.

The essence of sonata form, **Donghoon Shin** writes, ‘lies in its experimentation with harmonic direction and momentum’, before he goes on to describe his new *Winter Sonata* as ‘a study and homage to these experiments with musical form, especially as heard in Beethoven’s sonatas. This piece, which constantly moves between tonality and atonality, strongly implies harmonic direction and tonality, even when it achieves its highest level of dissonance and crosses the frontiers of atonality.’

It begins with a ‘winter theme’ in two layers: one for the piano, based on the notes G–A–B–C, the other presented by the violin as G–F#–Eb–F natural. The intervallic relationships and the motifs ‘drive the first section forward, gradually developing the music in a more atonal manner’.

‘After a short climax, the “spring theme” emerges in complete contrast: extremely lyrical, even naïve, beginning in F major (the key of Beethoven’s “Spring Sonata”) and progressing through flat keys, with endless modulations. However, the harmonic mixture from the piano (which is obviously from Beethoven’s music) subtly introduces small moments of unease and tension into this dream-like spring theme.

‘The development section is in two large parts, of which the first takes the winter theme and forms a character variation, experimenting with combinations of extended techniques and harmonic colourations. The second part is a twisted, almost mocking parody of Beethoven, with harmonic sequences, key changes, functional harmony, and harmonic mixtures – all presented in extreme forms. After seemingly endless repetitions, the material ultimately destroys itself, leading to the recapitulation. Following a brief repetition of the exposition, the coda emerges back into tonality, but this time, in F sharp major which is a full tritone away from the opening tonality of C. In an almost frantically hopeful, even manic atmosphere, the piece concludes with a strong reaffirmation of the tonic chord.

‘At first just a working title, *Winter Sonata* became fully appropriate as last winter’s gloomy weather, and horrific news, deeply influenced me as I composed the piece. Outside my studio window stands a big sycamore tree. A few years ago, during the spring of the pandemic, a pair of magpies built a large nest in its branches. While writing this piece, I waited for spring and for the magpies to appear. As the piece was being completed, they duly did so. It is often in such small things that we find hope.’

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