

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 18 November 2021 7.30pm

Julia Fischer violin

Yulianna Avdeeva piano



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata in E flat K26 (1766)

I. Allegro molto • II. Adagio poco andante • III. Rondo. Allegro

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Violin Sonata No. 2 Op. 6 (1899)

I. Assez mouvementé • II. Tranquillement • III. Vif

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor Op. 105 (1851)

I. Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck • II. Allegretto • III. Lebhaft

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Tzigane (1924)

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Tonight's programme brings together two very early works with two rather later 'firsts'. We begin with the nine-year-old **Mozart**, on his first major international tour. Having scored major successes in Germany and England, the Mozart family were in the Netherlands by the autumn of 1765, when Wolfgang and Nannerl performed to Princess Carolina of Orange-Nassau – then acting regent of the Netherlands. Early the following year, ahead of the coronation of Carolina's brother, Wolfgang composed a set of six sonatas 'for keyboard with violin accompaniment', dedicated to the Princess. They were published as his Op. 4 that same year – and we hear the first of this opus, the Violin Sonata in E flat K26. It is a compact and jaunty piece; and as the title suggests, the violin is there as a means of enhancing the keyboard writing, rather than the other way around. The central movement provides a sombre moment of C minor, dotted and stately, although there are some sweetly lyrical moments too – before we reach the easy-going *Rondo* that closes the sonata.

There have not been many composers who were already assigning opus numbers at the age of nine! And indeed, whilst the next piece we hear is considered an early work, its author was rather older when he finished it. The Romanian composer **George Enescu** completed his Violin Sonata No. 2 Op. 6 in 1899, when he was 17 years old, and considered it to be one of his first pieces in which he was audibly 'becoming myself', after several years of study at the Paris Conservatoire with Massenet and later Fauré. (Enescu's vast compositional output from childhood – including symphonies, overtures and cantatas, concertos, sonatas and many other pieces – was not published, as Mozart's had been.) This Violin Sonata seems balanced between old and new musical worlds: rich piano writing at once Brahmsian and hinting at Fauré and Debussy; and an approach to tonality that is one moment clouded, and then entirely straightforward.

The first movement is unsettled and anticipatory, piano and violin entering together in bare octaves to trace a sinuous, chromatic opening line. The following *Tranquille* hints most directly at Fauré in its melodic contours, with a rich, rocking middle section; and this movement leads directly into the lively finale, where the harmonic grounding suddenly becomes surer as both players bounce and skip around their instruments. The anxiety of the Sonata's opening gives way to lively fun, and a quasi-orchestral Romantic climax subsides into whispered closing phrases, each delivered with a cheeky wink.

Enescu and Mozart were both fine violinists and pianists, and it is therefore no surprise that duo sonatas should appear early in their output. The remaining two pieces we hear this evening fall rather later in the worklists of their composers. **Robert Schumann's** Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor Op. 105 was only completed in 1851, just three years before his breakdown, and was mostly likely begun at the prompting of Ferdinand David, Mendelssohn's concert master in

Leipzig. In 1850, David wrote to congratulate Schumann on his *Fantasiestücke* Op. 73 for clarinet and piano, and asked him directly: 'Why is it that you don't write anything for violin and piano? There is such a shortage of well-written new works and I can't think of anybody who could do it better than you. How nice it would be if you were to write something of that sort now, that I could then play to you with your wife.'

The following autumn, Schumann wrote not one but two violin sonatas back-to-back, with this first piece being completed in just five days. He made further adjustments before the first public performance was given, in March 1852, by Ferdinand David (accompanied, of course, by Clara Schumann), and it was largely well-received, though the finale puzzled some listeners. The opening movement is highly reminiscent of the 'fantasie'-style pieces that David had admired, dark and brooding (and, like Enescu, Schumann asks the player to deliver certain passages on a low string, to colour the sound in a particular way). The central *Allegretto* feels narrative, like Schumann's *Märchenbilder* Op. 113 of the same year: moments of skittishness are contrasted with long-breathed melancholy melodies, and later still we hear ghostly fanfares in the piano. The finale is taut and strident at its opening, though there are moments of warm lyricism later which seem to reconcile the earlier movements in a fitting, if determinedly minor-key, conclusion.

In July 1922, **Maurice Ravel** heard the Hungarian virtuoso Jelly d'Arányi perform his Sonata for violin and cello at the house of a mutual acquaintance in London. Later that evening, Ravel asked d'Arányi to play some 'gypsy' melodies, and was so delighted by what he heard that he demanded tune after tune, until around five o'clock in the morning – by which time all but the composer and performer were too exhausted to go on! Inspired by both the music and d'Arányi's virtuosic and spirited playing, he resolved to compose a *Rhapsodie de Concert* for her, based upon Hungarian melodies – though it was two more years before he finally completed *Tzigane*.

D'Arányi was presented with the score just a few days before its London première in April 1924, and the piece caused a sensation with audience and critics alike. It is not difficult to see why: Ravel's virtuosic showpiece demands a fierce and brilliant technique, with its rapid harmonics, quadruple stops and brilliant *moto perpetuo* passages. The piece gradually gathers energy, beginning with a substantial unaccompanied *Lento quasi cadenza*; and by constantly building and relaxing the tempo and tension over the rest of the work, the final *accelerando* takes on an even greater sense of excitement and urgency, which is heightened by spectacular technical fireworks.

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