

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 1 April 2025
7.30pm

Daniel Lozakovich violin
Alexandre Kantorow piano

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor Op. 45 (1887)

*I. Allegro molto ed appassionato •
II. Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza •
III. Allegro animato - Prestissimo*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

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

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

Interval

César Franck (1822-1890)

Violin Sonata in A (1886)

*I. Allegretto ben moderato • II. Allegro •
III. Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato •
IV. Allegretto poco mosso*



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Tonight's concert features three major Romantic works for violin and piano. All were written late in their composers' careers, and all are notable for their emotional range.

Edvard Grieg viewed his three violin sonatas as representing different phases of his creative development. While the First was 'naive, rich in ideas' and the Second 'national', the Third, written two decades later, explored 'wider horizons'. It was partly inspired by the playing of the young virtuoso Teresina Tua. She visited the composer at his home near Bergen in 1886, and he began work on the sonata soon after, completing it in January 1887. The première took place that December at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Grieg was the pianist, and the violinist was Adolph Brodsky, who six years earlier had given the première of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. The piece was an immediate success. It has come to be regarded as one of Grieg's finest chamber works, and he himself cited it as a personal favourite.

The passionate first movement's two main themes are respectively stormy and serene, with the first increasingly dominating the volatile central (development) section. While the tranquil second theme subsequently reasserts itself, the wild concluding section (coda) ends in near despair. Peace is restored in the gentle *Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza*, which opens with an exquisite piano solo. Its lyrical outer sections are offset by a fleet-footed central episode featuring violin pizzicatos (plucked notes). The movement ends tenderly with the violin soaring to ethereal heights. The *Finale*, like the first movement, contains two contrasting themes. The first is an energetic rustic dance with the melody passed between the two instruments; the second is soulful and songlike, and makes striking use of the violin's low register. Both themes are explored in depth through music that is alternately spirited, gentle and impassioned. A vertiginous coda ends the piece in a mood of exuberant joy.

In 1850, **Robert Schumann** took up the post of Municipal Music Director in Düsseldorf. He didn't enjoy the role due to his shyness and lack of conducting skill, and resigned in 1853. However, his work with the city's musicians inspired several chamber compositions, including his First Violin Sonata, composed in four days during September 1851. Following a private performance in October by Clara Schumann and the leader of the Düsseldorf orchestra, the official première took place in March 1852. Clara was again the pianist, and the violinist was Ferdinand David, dedicatee of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. While Clara enthusiastically described the first movement as 'elegiac' and the second as 'charming', Schumann was initially dissatisfied with the sonata. He only became reconciled to it after an 1853 performance by Joseph Joachim that he felt 'struck the inmost strings of the heart'.

The piece is notable for its fluctuations between melancholy minor and brighter major sonorities. Its first movement is marked 'with passionate expression' and contains intense violin-piano dialogue and a brooding main theme that contrasts with gentler subsidiary material. Darker emotions win out in the defiant coda. The mood

brightens in the *Allegretto*, where a demure recurring melody alternates with contrasting episodes, the first reflective, the second lively and with a hint of Central European folk music. The hushed closing bars include deliciously playful violin pizzicatos. Playfulness is also a key aspect of the finale, which is dominated by a scampering *moto perpetuo* theme. More lyrical music periodically breaks through, including a majestic recollection of the main theme of the first movement. However, the *moto perpetuo* music always returns, eventually sweeping the piece to a vibrant conclusion.

For many years, **César Franck** was primarily known as an organist and teacher. This changed after his infatuation with his pupil Augusta Holmès initiated a remarkably creative decade during which he produced most of his finest compositions, including the Violin Sonata. It was written in 1886 as a wedding present for the Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe, who gave the public première on 16 December that year, alongside the pianist Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène. The event was held at the Musée Moderne de Peinture in Brussels. As the museum would not allow artificial lighting, the performers ended up playing much of the piece in near darkness, from memory. Fortunately, Ysaÿe retained his enthusiasm for the sonata and regularly included it in subsequent recitals. It has remained a firm favourite with violinists ever since.

The two main themes of the *Allegretto ben moderato* are allocated to violin and piano respectively. The first is a lilting melody that will return throughout the work in various guises (Franck learnt this process of thematic transformation from his friend Franz Liszt), while the second is unashamedly romantic. Both here and in the third movement Franck employs sensual chromatic harmonies that recall Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* – surprisingly perhaps, bearing in mind his alleged dislike of the opera.

The tumultuous second movement begins with a virtuoso *piano toccata* – a compositional style designed to show off brilliant and rapid finger-work. (Franck himself was a superb pianist.) Although the ensuing music includes lyrical episodes, the dominant mood is one of agitation. The third movement opens in equally theatrical style, with dark-hued piano chords and quasi-improvisatory violin solos. Recollections of the sonata's opening theme gradually blossom into a flowing violin melody with delicate piano accompaniment. Its growing ardour creates an ambience of intense yearning.

Yearning turns to joy in the optimistic finale, which revisits music from all three previous movements. Its tuneful main theme is presented in canon, with the violin imitating the piano's melody after four beats – a symbol, according to the musicologist Roger Nichols, of marital happiness. In the brilliant final section, Franck narrows the gap between the instruments and quickens the tempo to end the sonata in a mood of breathless excitement.

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