

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 20 March 2023
1.00pm

Francesca DeGo violin
Alessio Bax piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata in B flat K454 (1784)

I. Largo - Allegro • II. Andante • III. Allegretto

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Op. 78 (1878-9)

*I. Vivace ma non troppo • II. Adagio •
III. Allegro molto moderato*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF
WIGMORE HALL

30

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Francesca DeGo has a particular affection for **Mozart's** Violin Sonata in B flat K454 and has written about it:

'Mozart's simplicity and flamboyance coexist in perfect harmony. It happens to have been written for an Italian virtuosa, the violinist Regina Strinasacchi, a former student at the *Ospedale della Pietà* (where Vivaldi once had taught), whom Mozart had met in Vienna and whose playing he described as "alive with sentiment and taste".'

Written in April 1784 for a benefit concert given in the presence of Emperor Joseph II, Mozart composed the music so hurriedly that he wrote out only the violin part prior to the event. He accompanied Strinasacchi and played the keyboard part from memory, only later committing it to paper. Words such as grandeur and profundity are apt when considering this work; along with the E flat major K481 and the A major K526 sonatas it arguably constitutes the apex of Mozart's violin and piano duo output.

The *Allegro* first movement opens with a lengthy, slow introduction. The momentum inherent within much of the thematic material is somewhat understated initially, though this changes as the movement progresses. Unusually, the development section utilises new material: the staccato cadence motif that concludes the preceding exposition. This same staccato motif reappears in the coda before a sequence of piano arpeggios conclude the movement.

The second movement was originally marked as *Adagio*, but Mozart revised this to *Andante*. Strinasacchi's playing was admired for her ability to sustain slow melodic lines with a sensuous cantabile tone. Even Leopold, Mozart's intractable father and author of the foremost manual on violin technique, agreed. He wrote, 'No one plays an Adagio with more feeling; she puts her whole heart and soul into the melody and her tone is beautiful.' Mozart seems intent on exploiting this quality within the movement, yet his tempo marking decision indicates that he did not want it to sound ponderous.

The third movement is an *Allegretto* rather than the expected allegro. The two themes are respectively based upon a gavotte motif and a fanfare presented in unison. Together, they afford the performers moments for virtuosic display and opportunities to explore some of the tenderness in Mozart's sparkling writing.

Brahms destroyed at least three attempts at drafting a violin sonata before writing the three complete works we enjoy today. The only surviving evidence from his early efforts at grappling with the form is the *Scherzo* from the 'F-A-E' Sonata. This was written in 1853 as an unusual collaboration with Robert Schumann and his pupil Albert Dietrich for the violinist Joseph Joachim. Whilst on working holidays by the Wörthersee during the summers of 1878 and 1879, Brahms wrote his sole violin concerto, also dedicated to Joachim, and his Symphony No. 2. Alongside these two larger scale

works, Brahms composed the Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Op. 78.

Lacking a specified dedicatee, many commentators assume that Brahms also had Joachim in mind whilst writing the sonata, particularly as the composer and the violinist gave the work's première during a tour throughout Austria. Before that, though, Brahms sent the complete manuscript to Clara Schumann in July 1879, with a note that stated, 'I fear it is boring'. Clara was a famed pianist and noted composer in her own right, in addition to being the widow of Brahms's mentor, the composer Robert Schumann. For years, Clara and Brahms had privately acknowledged mutual feelings and their intimate association continued after Robert's death in 1856. Regarding the sonata, Clara responded to Brahms, 'I received it today and naturally played it through immediately, and afterwards had to cry my heart out for joy'. Her private diary, though, recorded some concerns over the first two movements.

The *Vivace ma non troppo* first movement focusses on the tussle for an equilibrium between the two instruments. The first theme is lyrical, extended with latent conflict in the rhythms of the two instruments. The second theme intensifies the earlier theme's lyrical character rather than providing a contrast to it. The movement's development section is notable for the dramatic accents in Brahms's writing.

The *Adagio* second movement is constructed from extended ternary form: A-B-A with a coda. The first theme, largely played by the piano, possesses great nobility and intimacy, which is later supported by the violin. The B section provides contrast, introducing funeral march-like passages that build in their dramatic intensity. When the A section repeats, both instruments achieve a remarkably sonorous collaboration. In February 1879, Brahms wrote the first 24 bars of the second movement on the back of a letter to Clara Schumann. Her son, Felix, also Brahms's godson, was dying from tuberculosis. Brahms confided, 'If you play what is overleaf really slowly it will perhaps tell you, more clearly than I otherwise could, with what affection I think about you and Felix.'

The *Allegro molto moderato* third movement, whilst reminiscent of the opening movement, continues the personal connections to Clara and Felix. The main theme extensively quotes Brahms's Op. 59 No. 3 song 'Regenlied'. This establishes the movement's mood, which the critic Eduard Hanslick described as one of 'resigned reconciliation'. Felix was a talented poet; Brahms set three of the boy's texts to music and gave the manuscripts to Clara as a birthday present in 1873. In this movement, written after Felix's death, Brahms bids an intensely personal farewell to his beloved godson. It appears that Brahms struggled with the tempo for this movement since no fewer than three drafts of it exist, each one at a slower tempo than its predecessor.

© Evan Dickerson 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.