

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 20 May 2024
1.00pm

Geneva Lewis violin
Georgijs Osokins piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Op. 100 (1886)

*I. Allegro amabile • II. Andante tranquillo - Vivace •
III. Allegretto grazioso, quasi andante*

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

Sonata in D minor Kk213

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Violin Sonata in E minor Op. 82 (1918)

I. Allegro • II. Romance. Andante • III. Allegro non troppo



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



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.

To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/audiencefund>

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**



Brahms's Second Violin Sonata in A Op. 100 was composed on the Thunersee during a summer break in 1886. The Swiss resort was 'so full of melodies', the composer explained, 'that one must be careful not to step on any'. One of his visitors in Switzerland was the contralto Hermine Spies, an object of Brahms's affection. Consequently, the surrounding landscape and their friendship combined to inspire numerous compositions, including a clutch of songs, the Second Cello Sonata in F Op. 99 and this Violin Sonata, which Brahms first performed with Joseph Hellmesberger Sr in Vienna the following December.

It is clearly a work 'for piano and violin', in that order, as indicated by the pianist taking a charming but purposeful lead. The work's radiant mood derives from its opening notes, which trace a motif from Walther von Stolzing's prize-winning 'Morgenlich leuchtend im rosigen Schein' at the end of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In contrast, the second subject recalls one of Brahms's own songs, 'Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn', from the Op. 105 group that he dedicated to Spies:

Yet when words come and capture them
And bring them before my eyes,
They turn pale like grey mist
And vanish like a breath.

More ardent still is the movement's third (wordless) theme, which comes to dominate the development, before the two earlier melodies return in the recapitulation and extended coda.

The middle movement sits somewhere between an *Andante* and a scherzo. Although unsettled, the Sonata's lyrical generosity nonetheless endures, as it does in the finale, featuring another allusion to the Op. 105 songs: the soulful 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer'. The *quasi andante* qualification of the tempo marking suggests something more reflective, with Brahms perhaps acknowledging that, for all his hopes, Hermine would remain only a friend. In this, there is a link to the composer's complex relationship with Clara Schumann, made even more tangible by the allusion to 'Meine Liebe ist grün' Op. 63 No. 5, with words by her son Felix (who had died in 1879). For all its lyrical contentment, then, this Sonata is perhaps symptomatic of more unrequited feelings.

Domenico Scarlatti followed his father Alessandro, uncle Francesco and brother Pietro into the family's musical trade. Born in Naples, he trained either in Rome or Venice, and performed in the most elevated circles on the Italian Peninsula. In 1705, aged 20, he was described by his father as 'an eagle whose wings are grown; he must not remain idle in the nest, and I must not hinder his flight'. As if taking these words literally, Scarlatti's life would prove wonderfully peripatetic, with roles in Rome, a possible visit to London and extended periods in Portugal and Spain, where he died in 1757.

The predominant musical form of Scarlatti's life was the keyboard sonata: 555 in all, and composed, it is thought,

for the composer's gifted pupil and patron Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal, later Queen of Spain. Each work is rooted in the skill of improvising over a *basso continuo*, though the sonatas reveal much greater virtuosity and ingenuity. It is no doubt thanks to Scarlatti that the established, formulaic processes of keyboard music at the time gave way to richer harmonic structures and more involved counterpoint, albeit always maintaining the spontaneity of invention.

The D minor Sonata is a case in point. The austerity of its initial gestures (and subsequent bassline) contrasts with the sequential suspensions that follow. Phrase lengths are mutable, with occasionally hasty cadences, while the probing of motifs ebbs and flows. At times, it has a sung-through quality, not least when heard in sixths, while at others it is pared back to the clipped style of a two-part invention. These contrasts are then made even clearer in the second half of the Sonata, with a grand peroration belying the occasional introspection of what has gone before. Unlike Scarlatti, **Elgar** was often beleaguered by composer's block and, following a long struggle with depression, his work was particularly sporadic during the 1920s and 1930s. There were sketches for an opera, *The Spanish Lady*, and his Third Symphony, but other works were few and, at best, insignificant. The last major orchestral music he wrote was the Cello Concerto, first heard in October 1919, just five months after the première of his String Quartet and Piano Quintet; this took place here at Wigmore Hall, when the chamber works were joined on the programme by Elgar's Violin Sonata, first heard at the Aeolian Hall on 21 March 1919.

Like much of Elgar's music at the time, the Sonata was composed at Brinkwells, a thatched cottage north of Fittleworth in West Sussex. Nostalgic and occasionally mournful, the work also has a sense of resolve; what Jerrold Northrop Moore called the 'cut-and-thrust dialogue of ferocity new to Elgar's music'. The headlong first movement could also be heard to recall the Violin Concerto, likewise written with WH 'Billy' Reed in mind, while the piano suggests rich orchestral textures.

The *Andante*, entitled *Romance*, is a waltzing companion to Elgar's earlier salon works. With its hesitancy and gaunt pizzicato, however, it cannot quite reclaim the lilting ease of youthful compositions such as *Chanson de matin* and *Salut d'amour*. When that soundworld finally returns at the beginning of the *Allegro non troppo*, the recollection is not without regret. Elgar compared the last movement to the autumnal *Finale* of his Second Symphony. And while there is a comparable strength of character, with flashes of the dauntless energy of the Sonata's opening movement, as well as an emphatic conclusion, its 'broad and soothing' sounds cannot entirely allay the reservations revealed by the work as a whole.

© Gavin Plumley 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.