

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 20 September 2021 7.30pm

Esther Yoo violin

Yekwon Sunwoo piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor Op. 30 No. 2 (1801-2)

I. Allegro con brio • II. Adagio cantabile • III. Scherzo. Allegro – Trio • IV. Finale. Allegro

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Violin Sonata in G minor (1916-7)

I. Allegro vivo • II. Intermède: fantasque et léger • III. Finale: très animé

Interval

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962)

Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice Op. 6 (pub. 1911)

I. Recitativo • II. Scherzo-Caprice

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Morgen Op. 27 No. 4 (1894) *arranged by Max Reger*

Ständchen Op. 17 No. 2 (1886) *arranged by Walter Gieseeking*

Violin Sonata in E flat Op. 18 (1887)

I. Allegro, ma non troppo • II. Improvisation: Andante cantabile • III. Finale: Andante - Allegro

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In 1802, **Beethoven** stayed at Heiligenstadt, near Vienna. Whilst there, he completed the three violin sonatas, Op. 30, amongst several other pieces. Meanwhile, Beethoven's increasingly pronounced deafness heightened his personal despair. The Heiligenstadt Testament, a letter written to his brother Carl, relates: 'How can I, a musician, say to people 'I am deaf'? I shall defy this fate if I can [...] I only live for music.'

Beethoven employs the C minor key signature for the Violin Sonata No. 7. The pianist Charles Rosen observes, 'Beethoven in C minor has come to symbolize his artistic character: it reveals Beethoven as a Hero.' His developing compositional instincts take the sonata form away from Mozart's *concertante* style to a more personal medium, exploiting advances in violin technique and piano instrumental sonorities. The first movement begins, as the others do, with an intriguing piano motif. Upon entering, the violin lyrically ornaments the piano part. The brusque, march-like E flat major second theme reinforces the movement's overall character. Both middle movements are of a more positive temperament. The Adagio cantabile movement's intricate five-part structure is based on the thoughtful and lyrical opening theme. Beethoven considered omitting the brief and coarsely humorous Scherzo. The final movement makes manifest Beethoven's inner struggles. Initially in C minor, this rondo unsettles the listener, after which come three distinct and contrasting episodes. The daringly aggressive Presto coda builds in energy before ending unexpectedly in C major.

Debussy's Violin Sonata in G minor dates from 1916-17, when his terminal cancer had taken hold. His final completed composition, it is the third of an incomplete series of six sonatas. He wrote, 'I only completed this sonata to be rid of the thing, [it] will be interesting as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in wartime.' Debussy's interpretation of the violin-piano duo is distinctive: one instrument leads against the other's counter melody, rather than accompanying each other *per se*. This creates a different sonority and texture; the instruments challenge one another but, ultimately, are brought closer together. The first movement's poignant opening piano chords immediately transport the listener to a subdued, sad atmosphere. The movement is filled with rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity with an ongoing momentum, regardless of speed. By contrast, the middle movement is mostly light in tone, with capriciousness and coquettishness. The second theme is as melodious as it is sensuous. The final movement begins with running notes on the piano, punctuated with a melodic emphasis from the second theme of the previous movement. The violin then enters with a modified handling of the nostalgic theme from the sonata's opening. The movement, however, requires agility and confidence. Debussy employs an extremely wide

violin pitch range, whereas the pianist articulates tremolo-like tempi with an atmospheric lightness of touch.

The Austrian-American virtuoso violinist **Fritz Kreisler** published his *Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice* for solo violin in 1911. Dedicated to his 'master and friend', the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, it is typical of the works that Kreisler performed in recital. The opening recitative is almost improvisatory due to repeated 'ad libitum' indications. Its darkly hued G string theme requires the lyrical bowing for which Kreisler was famed. The quick-fire Scherzo contrasts by including virtuosic hallmarks, notably double-stopping and use of the higher register.

Reger, known for his organ compositions, was a noted pianist. 4 Lieder Op. 27 by **Richard Strauss** are among his many transcriptions of other composers' works. Strauss's 'Morgen' was written as a wedding present for his wife, the soprano Pauline de Ahna. Reger largely sticks to Strauss's writing, but he slightly embellishes the accompaniment. Into this, the vocal line dissolves as the transcription progresses. **Walter Gieseking** was a leading pianist of the 20th century. Like others, such as Artur Schnabel, he was also a prolific, if under-recognised composer.

Richard Strauss's father, principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, arranged for his son to have violin lessons with the orchestra's leader, Benno Walter, from the age of eight. The Violin Sonata in E flat, written in 1887, was his final chamber music composition before embarking on larger-scale orchestral tone poems. The first movement opens with a passionate, yet compact theme. It is recognisably his own, rather than influenced by Brahms or Schumann as earlier works had been. Strauss's advancing competence and confidence is heard in the rich harmonic palette, which is also applied to the development of a contrasting, fierce second theme. The movement's climax pushes at the bounds of sonata form. The central movement is sometimes played as a stand-alone piece, *Improvisation*. Within its ternary structure, initial passionate feelings acquiesce to the main theme which disintegrates in the middle section; a bold coda concludes matters. The final movement begins in sober mood before an uproarious *Allegro* ensues. After the introduction of two further contrasting themes, Strauss boldly shifts the development section to C major. Finally, Strauss struggles to contain the material within his chosen structure: the piano dominates the violin, which works hard to maintain its sprawling melodic line.

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