WIGMORE HALL 125

Sunday 21 September 2025
7.30pm

Midori violin
Özgür Aydin piano

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)	3 Romances Op. 22 (1853) *Romance in D flat. Andante molto • Romance in G minor. Allegretto • Romance in B flat. Leidenschaftlich schnell*
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*
	Interval
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Violin Sonata No. 5 in F Op. 24 'Spring' (1800-1) *I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo • III. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio • IV. Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo*
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Violin Sonata No. 2 in G (1923-7) *I. Allegretto • II. Blues. Moderato • III. Perpetuum mobile. Allegro*

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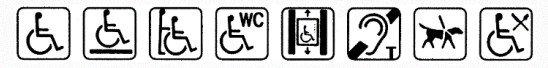

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As well as holding down a career as pianist, composer, teacher and editor, **Clara Schumann** spent six years of her life in pregnancy. Her *3 Romances* were dedicated to the violinist Joseph Joachim, with whom she gave more than 200 concerts over a period of 40 years. The first Romance is a longing, nocturnal song marked by a warm interweaving of the instruments. In the gently animated central section, Clara fashioned a passing motto from the opening five notes of husband Robert's first Violin Sonata (1851). The second Romance has the distinctive mix of innocence and eloquence characteristic of Robert's *Kinderszenen* ('Scenes from Childhood', 1838), not least in the fresh-as-spring trilling and skipping of its central section. The final Romance is a more urgent song than the first, underpinned by fast-rushing ripples in the piano, attesting to Clara's pianistic ability. She and Joachim performed the *3 Romances* together often, including for George V of Hanover, who declared himself to be 'completely ecstatic' with them.

Robert and Clara Schumann's first meeting with the 20-year-old **Johannes Brahms** occurred in October 1853, only a month after Clara had completed her *3 Romances*. Robert immediately recognised 'a genius' and Clara 'one of those who comes as if straight from God'. It was down partly to the Schumanns' heightened expectations and partly to the shadow of Beethoven's reputation that Brahms stalled for 14 years over writing his First Symphony. But by the time of his Violin Sonata in 1878-9 he had completed his Second Symphony, as well as a good deal of chamber music and the Violin Concerto. Like the Second Symphony – regarded as Brahms's 'Pastoral' – this Violin Sonata is fundamentally lyrical and genial in tone. Brahms's great gift for lyricism is especially on display in the first movement, whose opening dotted-rhythm figure becomes a feature throughout the sonata. The second theme is especially flowing but a further, chorale-like idea brings a troubled air, with its haunting accompanying tremolos. The richly sonorous, slowly unwinding *Adagio* is almost painfully expressive; and, although the pace picks up for the middle section, the mood (not least thanks to that dotted rhythm from the sonata's beginning) is of a funeral march. The finale starts with a quote from Brahms's earlier 'Regenlied' (Rain Song) and 'Nachklang' (Distant Echo) from the Op. 59 songs, including the pattering accompaniment. The slow-unfolding theme from the second movement makes a return before a serene coda. It's no surprise that Clara wrote to Brahms on 10 July 1879: 'I must send you a line to tell you how deeply moved I am by your Sonata. I received it today and of course played it through at once, and had to cry my heart out afterward for joy over it.'

The genial, bucolic note continues in **Ludwig van Beethoven**'s 'Spring' Sonata, the fifth of his 10 sonatas for violin and piano. Unlike its immediate successor – Op. 23 in A minor, composed in 1800 – this F major sonata (cast in the same key as Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony) exudes warmth. Beethoven scholar Lewis Lockwood regards it as 'one of the most ingratiating and beguiling works Beethoven ever wrote'. The naturally freewheeling opening theme – which Midori has called 'one of the most unforgettable melodies of all time' – is contrasted with a more urgent, rhythmically driven momentum. Piano and violin are equal conversational partners in the second movement, a theme-and-variations form, with the theme acquiring ravishing decorations (and one minor-key transformation) along the way. The *Scherzo* is as light as it is brief, the violin playfully trailing the piano. The central Trio section – comprising only 32 bars (two sections of eight bars, both of them repeated) – forms a contrast with its gushing scales. In the sonata's *Rondo* finale, the easy-going main idea alternates with two contrasting episodes to form an ABACABA pattern, the good-humoured interplay of the instruments continuing the sunny outlook.

Like **Maurice Ravel** himself, his Violin Sonata No. 2 is lean, precise and not a little insouciant. As far as the composer was concerned, this was his only violin sonata, though he had written a previous one while a student at the Paris Conservatoire; the earlier one remained unpublished until decades after his death. The Sonata No. 2 was a sonata not only for the modern age – its clean lines, expressive restraint and cool abstraction suggesting an art deco work – but also for the jazz age: American jazz had swept Paris in the 1920s, though Ravel's own trip to New York, where he met Gershwin, would come a year after the sonata was completed. The sonata's relatively long gestation is explained by the fact that Ravel during the same period composed the *Duo* for violin and cello as well as the opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* ('The Child and the Spells').

The first movement is dominated by a rhythmically supple, wistful theme, almost intangible. It is coloured by a gentle sway as well as by occasional trumpet-like, spitting incursions – of which Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, the work's dedicatee said, 'You need to hear Ravel, with his slightly nervous and square-edged fingers, attacking this passage!' A general impression of improvisational freedom is interrupted by angular arpeggio tremolos in the violin. The 'Blues' movement is one of Ravel's keenest references to jazz – with a strong kinship to the *Concerto for the Left Hand* that would follow in the next three years – but, as Ravel said, this was 'stylised jazz, more French than American in character'. The violin begins as a strumming banjo and relies on note-bending and -swooping; later, the violin's regular strumming accompanies a piano line whose 'swung' elements (of accent and rhythm) are written into the score. The *Perpetuum mobile* opens falteringly quoting the trumpet-like figure from the previous movement before taking off on its breathless, and technically hazardous, journey.