

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 24 October 2026
7.30pm

Midori violin
Özgür Aydin piano

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in G Op. 13 (1867)

*I. Lento doloroso – Allegro vivace •
II. Allegretto tranquillo • III. Allegro animato*

Thierry Escaich (b.1965)

Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire (The Reveries of
the solitary walker) (2026)

*I. Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du
soir • II. Les nuages ardents volaient dans la
lueur hagarde • III. Pluie, vapeur et vitesse •
IV. Il monte et devant lui l'immensité s'étend...*

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata in E minor K304 (1778)

I. Allegro • II. Tempo di Menuetto

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D minor Op. 121 (1851)

*I. Ziemlich langsam – Lebhaft • II. Sehr lebhaft •
III. Leise, einfach • IV. Bewegt*



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Thierry Escaich Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire

This piece can be seen as the wanderings of a walker through Nature (though sometimes an imaginary vision of the natural world). The piece opens on a slow, meditative walk punctuated by the violin's steady, regular eighth-note motif. On four occasions, however, various visions – all generated by natural phenomena – will interrupt the wanderer's meditation: a swirl of sounds and fragrances, then a whirl of clouds. In the next episode, sound waves clash and collide along a stronger, almost mechanical pulse before engaging in a relentless climb up majestic mountains, followed by an energetic recap combining all previous elements.

The four movements are directly inspired by the poetic visions of four major poets or artists and follow each other in an uninterrupted flow. In the first meditation, Baudelaire's 'sounds and scents turn in the evening air'. The second movement is a whimsical scherzo whirling around like Victor Hugo's 'flamboyant clouds [...] across the pale sky'. Driven by the forceful atmospheric fusion of weather and industry depicted in William Turner's onrushing vision of *Rain, Steam and Speed*, the third movement ends on a vision of the mountains that echoes Lamartine's exalted line: '[the walker] reaches the top, and infinity stretches out before his eyes...'

The initial 'walk' theme reappears between movements like a leitmotif but always in a new guise as the walker's perception of the poetical beauty of his surroundings evolves to become an almost life-changing experience, progressively leading to an exalted lyricism worthy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rêveries of the Solitary Walker*.

© Thierry Escaich

Grieg completed only five chamber works in his life, and three of them were violin sonatas. In 1900, he looked back on them as among his finest works, 'the first naïve, rich in ideas, the second national and the third with a wider horizon', as he put it. Sonata No. 2 was written in 1867, while the recently wed 24-year-old was on his honeymoon. That 'national' character, inspired by Norwegian folk music, was a growing concern for Grieg in the 1860s, as a trend of romantic nationalism swept the Norwegian arts. It was not just a personal path, but a civic calling – earlier in 1867 Grieg had co-founded a Norwegian Academy of Music.

The first movement of the Sonata begins with a deceptively melancholy G minor introduction, before giving way to an *Allegro* folk dance in G major, with snapping rhythms and off-beat accents. There is barely any transition before Grieg introduces the second subject, a gently rocking theme in B minor, as simple as a cradle song. That flair for melody and mercurial temperament run throughout the work: see how the second movement's tranquil main theme repeatedly erupts in passionate outbursts, and at times threatens to break into a scherzo. In the finale we return to the folk

dance, with the rustic sound of an open fifth drone in the piano, only now the melodic flights are more exuberant. Soon Grieg introduces another effortlessly simple song theme in the piano, and it's that which eventually returns to crown the work in majestic style.

Mozart was touring Europe as a child prodigy when he composed his first violin sonatas, which were among his earliest published works. So he was something of an experienced hand by the time he wrote K301, one of six produced in his early twenties while on a trip to Paris via Mannheim.

The Sonata has only two movements, and perhaps more surprisingly, is the only composition he ever wrote in E minor. Its opening theme has a nocturnal quality, given in bare octaves: first smooth, then agitated. But an affirmative second subject soon appears in the major key, and much of what follows is an interplay of severity and jollity. The second movement is a *Tempo di Menuetto*, with an expressive melody delicately introduced by the piano. A contrasting *dolce* section in the major is equally heartfelt, but Mozart dispels this lovely reverie with a stern coda to conclude the work.

Schumann's first and second violin sonatas were both composed in a flurry of creativity in the autumn of 1851, a period in which he also produced his Piano Trio Op. 110. The Sonata No. 2 was dedicated to the virtuoso Ferdinand David, for whom Mendelssohn had written his violin concerto – he had encouraged Schumann to write for violin and piano, while complaining about playing Beethoven sonatas over and over again. But it was actually the great Joseph Joachim who first performed this work, with the composer's wife Clara at the piano.

Joachim wrote to a friend about the Sonata: 'I consider it one of the finest compositions of our times in respect of its marvellous unity of feeling and its thematic significance. It overflows with noble passion, almost harsh and bitter in expression.' There is certainly a sense of furrowed brow in the first movement, with a dramatic chordal opening, upper line of which – after the slow introduction – becomes the violin's imposing main theme. An offbeat figure in the piano soon dominates, with an obsessive intensity that recalls Beethoven. This mood continues somewhat in the B minor scherzo, marked by driving rhythms and muscular chords, but it takes a surprising turn at the end when a chorale melody emerges in bright B major. The slow movement is in variation form, its gentle G major theme announced in pizzicato violin chords, before gaining strength in bowed notes and double stopping. Joachim wrote that the last movement, with its tempestuous flow of semiquavers, 'reminds one of the sea with its glorious waves of sound'. But there are tender moments here too, and Schumann balances the gloomy mood of the first movement with a D major coda that is notably lighter in spirit.

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A New Journey Through Musical Reveries

Thoughts from Midori on Thierry Escaich's new work

A walk through life begins when we enter this world, or perhaps even before. We spend our lives exploring our immediate surroundings and beyond, moving through expectations, disappointments, memories, dreams, failures, criticisms and questions, hoping that each step reveals something we did not know before.

When I began learning Thierry Escaich's new work for violin and piano – a piece he graciously wrote at my request and dedicated to me – there was not yet a title. Thierry had not yet given me the quotations and indications that would eventually form the basis of his work's four movements. There I was alone in my room, learning the notes, trying to understand what this new work might become. Would I ever break through and discover this new music's core, its true 'message' to our world?

Only later did Thierry reveal his title to me: *Les Réveries du promeneur solitaire* (The Reveries of the solitary walker). At that point, I began to envision the work through the possible images of a walker – someone moving through the world, observing, remembering, dreaming and discovering.

I first became aware of Thierry's music for violin through *Nun komm*, his solo violin work inspired by the ancient melody *Veni, redemptor gentium*, which became Luther's chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* and was later used by Bach. I encountered the piece while preparing my project of performing Bach's Sonatas and Partitas interspersed with contemporary works connected to or inspired by Bach. Among the four modern compositions I learned for that project, *Nun komm* particularly stayed with me. It was challenging to play, but there was something in its rhythmic tension and its emotional intensity that kept bringing me back to the work, something that I could not quite explain in words. It was an instinctive attraction to his way of shaping sound and time.

I later heard *Variations litaniques*, the compulsory work Thierry wrote for violin and orchestra for the final round of the 2024 Queen Elisabeth Competition. There again I responded to the rhythmic vitality and tension that had first attracted me in *Nun komm*, but the violin writing had developed into something much larger and more expansive. At that point, I knew that I wanted to commission a new violin and piano composition from Thierry and see where his imagination could next carry him, and us.

Learning a work that has never existed before is itself a kind of solitary walk. In my case, I have to play it many times, approach passages from different musical directions, allow new ideas to emerge and slowly discover what lies beneath and in between the written notes. And, since I enjoyed the rare privilege of working with a living composer, I could directly question Thierry: What do you imagine here? How do you hear this sound? Sometimes he would simply play a passage on the piano and the sonority he was seeking and the sentiment

within the music became clearer. Through that process, there comes a moment when I am no longer simply reading and playing notes. The music begins to flow, creating its own web of connections through my memories, experiences, knowledge and history – opening new doors of discovery.

Thierry Escaich opens *Les Réveries du promeneur solitaire* with a sort of preamble: a headlong journey of overlapping, shifting images, as though we have begun walking before we have had time to decide where we are going. Then four movements offer four very different landscapes along that journey.

'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,' Baudelaire writes. (In English, 'Sounds and scents turn in the evening air.') The first movement seems to me to enter a world where sound, scent, memory and atmosphere begin to turn around one another. Something is sensed rather than grasped; what is heard seems already to belong to memory.

'Les nuages volaient dans la lueur hagarde' from Hugo ('The clouds were drifting in the wild glow') opens a very different landscape. Here the walk becomes anxious and violent. In a rush of light and darkness, back and forth, images appear and disappear, as unpredictability itself becomes part of the experience. There is a sense that the world around the walker can change before there is time to comprehend it.

Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway* (in French, *Pluie, vapeur et vitesse*), brings movement into another dimension. Rain, vapor and speed seem to merge, and the walker is confronted with an overwhelming force of motion. I find myself imagining the great locomotive at the center of Turner's painting: for those inside the train, movement may carry dreams, hopes and the promise of somewhere beyond the present; for others, the same force could seem relentless, even threatening. In Thierry's music, motion itself becomes almost a physical presence.

And then Lamartine: 'Il monte et devant lui l'immensité s'étend.' ('He ascends, and before him immensity stretches out.') The walker climbs and suddenly the horizon opens. After the previous movement's vision of uncertainty, violence and speed, there is an encounter with immensity. I imagine standing before something much larger than oneself – engulfed in a vastness that contains both possibility and humility.

These images also led me to relate more deeply to the particular sound world of Thierry Escaich's music. Organist of the great cathedral, the Notre-Dame de Paris, as well as a composer, he belongs to a remarkable French tradition in which the organ has profoundly shaped the imagination of composers, and I hear that dimension vividly in this sonata. There is a search for sonority that can be grand and architectural, deep and resonant, emotionally courageous and capable of a very particular kind of drama. What an addition to the extraordinary lineage of French violin sonatas – from Saint-Saëns and Fauré through Franck and Ravel –

carrying some of that history within it while opening doors toward something that has not yet been imagined.

As performers, we inherit music that has been handed down to us. Commissioning new works is a way to expand upon that inheritance. Perhaps this is one of the reasons I find commissioning so meaningful: the possibility that something which begins so privately – with a composer imagining, a performer learning, two musicians searching together – might eventually move

beyond the people who first created it. I hope that this sonata will find its way into the lives of other violinists and pianists, who will breathe further life into this work through their own interpretations, their own memories and dreams. And through them, perhaps it will continue walking – toward new listeners, new possibilities and whatever lies beyond the horizon.

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