

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 26 September 2021 7.30pm

Young Soloists of the Kronberg Academy

Lara Boschkor violin

Diyang Mei viola

Erica Piccotti cello

Karolina Errera viola

Ivan Karizna cello

Vadim Gluzman violin

Pēteris Vasks (b.1946)

The Fruit of Silence (2013 rev. 2016)

Lara Boschkor violin

Vadim Gluzman violin

Diyang Mei viola

Erica Piccotti cello

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Sonata in C for 2 violins Op. 56 (1932)

I. Andante cantabile • II. Allegro • III. Commodo (quasi Allegretto) • IV. Allegro con brio

Vadim Gluzman violin

Lara Boschkor violin

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Souvenir de Florence Op. 70 (1890 rev. 1891-2)

I. Allegro con spirito • II. Adagio cantabile e con moto • III. Allegro moderato • IV. Allegro vivace

Vadim Gluzman violin

Lara Boschkor violin

Karolina Errera viola

Diyang Mei viola

Ivan Karizna cello

Erica Piccotti cello

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On the eve of the 20th Century, the French author Émile Faguet surveyed the breakneck pace of scientific change before speculating that it would surely wane in the decades to come. 'Everything suggests that the speed of communications will not continue to increase,' he observed. The period of peace and stability that Faguet and countless others desired was not to be, despite attempts by artists and craftspeople to promote an idealised version of the pre-industrial past. The turbulence of our own times, so often rooted in lightning-fast, ill-considered communications, is hardly conducive to calm contemplation. It is perhaps unsurprising to discover that millions turned to silent prayer and private meditation during the early months of the pandemic. Where that leads is anyone's guess. Yet it seems likely that the appetite for stillness and the benefits it brings is set to increase.

The Fruit of Silence rises from **Pēteris Vasks's** personal engagement with the life of the spirit, or as it might be more accurately described, that which matters more than getting and spending or clinging to an identity. The Latvian composer's work began life in 2013 as a setting for unaccompanied choir of words by Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu, more familiar as Mother Teresa, the controversial missionary nun and Nobel Peace Prize winner. The five-line prayer employs the rhetorical trick of anaphora, the repetition of a phrase and its subtle transformation to reinforce its unequivocal message:

The fruit of silence is prayer.

The fruit of silence is faith.

The fruit of silence is love.

The fruit of silence is service.

The fruit of silence is peace.

Vasks wrote his piece for the admirable Latvian Chamber Choir, taking advantage of its collective ability to sustain long melodic lines. He subsequently made versions for choir and piano, choir and string orchestra, piano quintet and string quartet. The latter leaves the four string players to project a subtle arrangement of the original as a song without words, intensified by the first violin's occasional shifts into the upper register and the full ensemble's sonorous voicings of Vasks' chorale-like composition.

Overseas exile appeared more attractive to **Sergei Prokofiev** than the prospect of remaining in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917. He decided to leave for the United States the following spring, received official permission to travel from Anatoly Lunacharsky, the highly cultured People's Commissar for Enlightenment, and settled (although often restless) in Europe in 1922. After 19 years abroad, he returned to Moscow with his young family and, for a time, served the Soviet regime's propaganda purposes as an internationally renowned symbol of the power and prestige of musical life under Stalin. His homecoming in 1936 was prefaced by a period in which Prokofiev made three trips to the Soviet Union, performing on tour and exploring the nature of socialist art; the Soviets in turn commissioned works from him, the film score for *Lieutenant Kijé* (1932-33) among them.

The Sonata for 2 violins played a part in Prokofiev's rapprochement with Russia. The piece, commissioned in 1932 for the inaugural concert

of Triton, the composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud's Paris-based society for the promotion of contemporary chamber music, was written during Prokofiev's summer vacation near St Tropez. He took the score with him on his third visit to the Soviet Union a few months later and, no doubt to Ferroud's displeasure, handed it to Dmitri Tsyganov and Vasily Shirinsky, founder members of the Beethoven Quartet, who gave the sonata's first performance in Moscow on 27 November 1932. On his return to Paris, Prokofiev invited Robert Soetens and Samuel Dushkin to give the work's Triton première.

In his autobiography, published in the Soviet Union in 1941, the composer recalled why he chose to write a work for two violins. 'Listening to bad music sometimes inspires good ideas...,' he observed. 'After once hearing an unsuccessful piece for two violins without piano accompaniment, it struck me that in spite of the apparent limitations of such a duet one could make it interesting enough to listen to for ten or fifteen minutes.' The Sonata immediately commands attention with a sinuous solo melody that is soon shared by both instruments. The second movement's agitated dialogue, launched and punctuated by a percussive chordal figure, finds momentary peace yet no resolution in its trio section. Wistful reflection runs through the *Commodo (quasi Allegretto)* for muted violins, a slow movement of delicate contrasts and seductive lyricism. Those qualities are brushed aside by the rondo finale's folklike opening solo fiddle tune and the movement's growing swagger.

In October 1886, soon after receiving honorary membership of the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society, **Tchaikovsky** wrote to its chairman, the violinist Eugen Albrecht, with a pledge to 'dedicate some sort of chamber work' to the organisation. Ten months passed before he decided that that work should be for string sextet. 'I jotted down sketches for a string sextet, but with little enthusiasm...,' he noted in July 1887 in a letter to the young composer Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov. 'I haven't the slightest inclination to work...'

Tchaikovsky abandoned his sketches but not the idea of writing a sextet; he returned to it again in the spring of 1890 and set to work in earnest that summer, discovering that composing for six strings was no easy matter. He sent news of the finished score to Albrecht that August, asking for his honest opinion on its 'technical shortcomings', and revised its third and fourth movements after hearing a private performance of the piece towards the year's end. The process of revision continued after its public première in December 1890 and culminated during a trip to Paris in January 1892 when Tchaikovsky rewrote the third movement's middle section and parts of the first and fourth movements.

Souvenir de Florence was most probably named for the duet for violin and cello in the *Adagio*, sketched in outline during the composer's stay in Florence to work on his opera *The Queen of Spades*. The work's title belies the distinctly Russian character of its melodies and rich sonorities, especially those of its glorious third and fourth movements.

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