

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 27 November 2023
1.00pm

Daniel Hope violin
Simon Crawford-Phillips piano

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Impromptu concertant in G flat (1903)

Jake Heggie (b.1961)

Fantasy Suite 1803 (2022) *UK première*
I. Constellations • II. Ghosts and Premonitions •
III. Passageways • IV. Towards Silence

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Sonatina in G Op. 100 (1893)
I. Allegro risoluto • II. Larghetto •
III. Scherzo. Molto vivace - Trio • IV. Finale. Allegro



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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The *Impromptu concertant* is one of several short concert pieces that **Enescu** wrote for a variety of instruments throughout his life, often as competition pieces for the Paris Conservatoire. Dating from 1903, the effusiveness of Enescu's youthful style is undeniably a major feature of the work. That it was published posthumously in 1958 also tells us something of Enescu's self-criticism regarding even the smallest elements of his *œuvre*. Although his output was large and covered practically every genre of music, only 33 works were assigned an opus number. A work of spontaneity from the opening piano flourish, the *Impromptu concertant's* two connected yet distinct parts enable audiences to appreciate the main influences on Enescu's compositional development. The first part finds both instruments intertwining their lines in a very Viennese manner that recalls Richard Strauss's lyricism at times whilst maintaining a sense of airy freedom. The second part is one of passionate expression for the violin against an accompaniment that draws upon Fauré, whose composition class Enescu was in alongside Ravel when a student himself at the Paris Conservatoire, without negating the influence of Brahms in the prominence given to its chord-based construction.

Jake Heggie is perhaps best known as a composer of contemporary operas, including *Dead Man Walking* which is acknowledged as the most performed new opera of the 21st Century. However, he is also a prolific composer of songs and chamber music. *Fantasy Suite 1803* was commissioned by the Beethoven-Haus, the site of the composer's birth in Bonn, of which Daniel Hope was President at the time. The première performance was given during the BTHVN WEEK 2022 series of concerts, in which Hope was accompanied by Lise de la Salle. Hope has since performed the work in concerts around the world, and today's recital is its UK première.

Heggie has remarked on the personal connection he has with Beethoven's music: 'I grew up in a small town in Ohio, and Beethoven was simply my childhood hero. When I was ten years old, my father took his own life. The world collapsed. Everything in me and around me was chaos. But in Beethoven I found support, refuge and strength. Just the fact that this music existed – that gave me hope at the time.' The *Fantasy Suite 1803* is so called because it draws inspiration from Beethoven's residency at the Theater an der Wien during that year, and from George Bridgetower, the Black violinist who sightread the first performance of the Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Op. 47 'Kreutzer' accompanied by Beethoven during that residency. Bridgetower was the original dedicatee of Beethoven's sonata, but this honour was withdrawn after an argument and instead assigned to Rodolphe Kreutzer, widely regarded as the leading violinist of the day. Kreutzer, in turn, thought ill of the sonata and refused to perform it. At the time of giving the première of Heggie's suite Daniel Hope commented, 'I have been fascinated by the virtuoso

Bridgetower for many years. For me, he represents the diversity of personalities who have impacted European music history. Beethoven believed passionately in a free and open society.'

Heggie has said that he drew upon many influences in writing his work - not least melodic shards from Beethoven's score, which pervade the writing like fleeting apparitions throughout the suite. He was also moved by reading Rita Dove's collection of poems *Sonata Mulattica*, titled using a quotation from Beethoven's original dedication. Written in four succinct movements, the suite muses on the atmosphere of Beethoven living alone above the theatre and dealing with the conflicting demands of inspiration and impending deafness. The first movement, titled *Constellations*, is slow yet free moving and carries an air of mystery. The second and third movements, respectively titled *Ghosts and Premonitions* and *Passageways*, focus on the Beethoven-Bridgetower relationship: the former is ominous in tone whilst the latter has a nervous quality that infers something about sight-reading Beethoven's score. The last movement, *Towards Silence*, could in part be a meditation on the breakdown between the two men.

Dvořák was Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York between 1892 and 1895, a position he found stressful due to its administrative demands. Frustratingly, he increasingly found that time for composition became limited to holidays at his lowa home at Spillville, where there was a Czech immigrant community. A few significant works were written during this time, however, including the String Quartet in F Op. 96 'American' and the Viola Quintet in E flat Op. 97. In common with both those works, the Sonatina in G Op. 100 reflects a stylistic change in his writing towards a simpler, more direct idiom. Listening to it, one is scarcely aware of the professional stress Dvořák experienced; it seems a carefree work. Written in November and early December 1893 as a present for his children Otýlie and Antonín to play, the work has often been popular with younger performers.

The Sonatina's opening movement begins abruptly and quickly changes to a more relaxed tone before the exposition section flows winsomely and the development section expounds upon the movement's initial thematic motif. The second movement *Larghetto* was inspired by the 53-foot-high Minnehaha Falls waterfall in Minnesota that Dvořák had visited earlier that year. It is simultaneously both inwardly reflective and radiant in its fusion of Indigenous American music with the Czech idioms of Dvořák's roots. The third movement *Scherzo* is full of joy and has boundless energy, whilst the fourth movement *Finale* finds several thematic ideas explored at length.

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