

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 28 September 2024
7.30pm

Alina Ibragimova violin
Cédric Tiberghien piano

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Violin Sonata (1914-5, rev. 1916-22)
*I. Con moto • II. Ballada • III. Allegretto •
IV. Adagio*

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Violin Sonata No. 3 Op. 25 (1926)
*I. Moderato malinconico • II. Andante sostenuto
e misterioso • III. Allegro con brio, ma non troppo
mosso*

Interval

Gerald Barry (b.1952)

Triorchic Blues (1990/1992)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Op. 47 'Kreutzer' (1802-3)
*I. Adagio sostenuto - Presto • II. Andante con
variazioni • III. Finale. Presto*



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Janáček began working on his Violin Sonata in the lead-up to the First World War, and his own comments and those of his friends make it clear it was a response to those times. He had hopes that the advancing Russian troops would drive the ruling Austrians out of his native Czech lands, but the work seems more expressive of suffering than optimism: 'I have the impression of seeing the steel of weapons gleaming and, in the Violin Sonata, my heightened senses seem to hear their din,' wrote the composer. It should also be remembered that he was working simultaneously on the Sonata and his impassioned opera *Káťa Kabanová*, and both contain secret references to his unrequited love for Kamila Stösslová, a married woman 38 years his junior.

The Sonata is a work of immense originality, rooted in familiar forms and modes of expression, yet telling a new and intensely personal story. Completed in 1921, it is actually the third violin sonata Janáček wrote, the others having been composed in 1880 when he was studying in Leipzig. Neither of those student works was preserved, though there is some evidence that the second movement of the published Sonata was based on the third movement of the 'second' sonata – at any rate, this movement was published separately in 1915, with a different ending. That may be the secret of how effective it is as a recollection of happier times within a sonata that is otherwise deeply unsettling.

George Enescu – a virtuoso violinist and pianist, conductor, composer and teacher/mentor to many – was Romanian by birth, educated in Vienna and a long-term resident of Paris. He considered himself 'international', grounded in the Austro-German tradition but fascinated by Romanian folk music, and an important contributor to musical life in France.

Enescu's Third Violin Sonata is one of his most explicitly Romanian works, but it very deliberately does not quote any traditional melodies. It was composed in 1926, and published in 1933 with the subtitle 'dans le caractère populaire roumain'. This is often wrongly translated as 'in a Romanian style', in contradiction of the composer's intentions, clearly stated in a 1928 interview: 'I don't use the word "style" because that implies artifice, something constructed, whereas "character" implies something received and pre-existing.'

His ambition (as he went on to say in the same interview) was to create a new musical idiom through which the composers of his homeland could put a Romanian stamp on their work without needing to incorporate actual folksongs or dance tunes. So the violin part adopts the techniques of traditional fiddlers, including slides between the notes, while the piano sometimes imitates the cimbalom, the hammered dulcimer whose jangle permeates much Eastern European folk and café music. There are many other

gleanings from traditional music, some external (the structures and rhythms of specific dances), others more subtle or technical, such as the use of modal scales. The eerie opening of the slow movement is particularly memorable, with its evocation of the nocturnal sounds of the countryside.

Born in County Clare, **Gerald Barry** studied with two of the most iconoclastic figures in 20th-century avant-garde music, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mauricio Kagel. It's therefore unsurprising that his music can be teasing or even confrontational. *Triorchic Blues* first appeared in 1990 as a solo piano piece, commissioned for the following year's Dublin International Piano Competition. It has since been rearranged by the composer for several different instruments and instrumental combinations.

For this whirlwind of sound, Barry drew on musical material he had already sketched out while preparing to write his opera *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991-2). The title refers to a supposed physical attribute of the castrato singer Giusto Fernando Tenducci (c. 1735-90), who was able to father children even after his 'orchids' had been pruned, by dint of having had three instead of the usual two.

Finally this evening, **Beethoven's** ninth Violin Sonata is a big-boned work lasting over 40 minutes in performance – Beethoven himself compared it to a concerto. It was written when he had just embarked on the canon of orchestral and concertante works for which he would be most celebrated. The First Symphony and first two piano concertos were already under his belt.

The stimulus for writing the Sonata was the composer's meeting with the violinist George Bridgetower (1778-1860), the son of a Black father and a white German mother, both thought to have been in service to the Austro-Hungarian nobility. While George was still a child, the family moved to London, where he became a celebrated violin soloist. In 1802, while on a European tour, he encountered Beethoven and struck up an immediate rapport.

Beethoven quickly set to work on a new sonata for them to play together in Vienna. The original dedication was to Bridgetower, who performed the Sonata with Beethoven on 24 May 1803; the violinist had to read some of his part over the pianist's shoulder, because the composer had not had time to write it out on a separate sheet. Sadly, the two friends were soon to become enemies, after a drunken quarrel. For publication Beethoven re-dedicated the piece to Rodolphe Kreutzer, Paris's foremost violinist at that time. There is no record of Kreutzer ever having played it.

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