

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 30 September 2023
3.00pm

This concert is supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust



Weinberg Focus Day 2

Linus Roth violin
Florian Uhlig piano

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano Op. 37 (1947)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Andantino •

III. Allegretto cantabile

Sonata No. 5 for violin and piano Op. 53 (1953)

I. Andante con moto • II. Allegro molto •

III. Allegro moderato • IV. Allegro - Andante

Sonata No. 6 for violin and piano Op. 136bis (1982)

I. Moderato • II. Adagio • III. Moderato



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When I first encountered the composer Mieczysław Weinberg in 2010 while performing his piano trio at a chamber music festival, I couldn't help but hope that he had composed more pieces for violin. To my surprise, a treasure trove awaited me. My heart raced with excitement as I discovered not only five sonatas and a sonatina for violin and piano, but also three solo violin sonatas, the *Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes*, three pieces, a Concertino with string orchestra and the grand Violin Concerto with symphony orchestra, which I had the privilege to première in Germany (2014), Ukraine, Estonia and various other places, as well as recording it.

Presenting Weinberg's complete violin chamber music, solo sonatas and some additional works in six concerts - three today and three before the pandemic in 2019 - is an unparalleled highlight in my performance career.

Weinberg was blessed, surrounded as he was by amazing cellists, pianists and violinists. David Oistrakh, who premièred several works, and Leonid Kogan, the dedicatee of the grand Violin Concerto, were just a few of the exceptional musicians who admired Weinberg's music. Mstislav Rostropovich also contributed by recording his Cello Concerto, while Emil Gilels performed and recorded his fourth piano sonata. Despite their efforts, it is unfortunate that the following generation of violinists who had studied in Moscow did not fully recognise the value of his compositions, even though they must have heard his music being performed often. A composer only gets forgotten when we, as musicians, neglect to play and share his music.

Weinberg dedicated the **Sonata No. 3 Op. 37** (1947) to Mikhail Fichtenholz, a well-known violinist and, like Oistrakh, a student of Pyotr Stolyarsky. By 1947, Fichtenholz had already fallen out of favour with the political powers and was mainly teaching at the Gnessin State Musical College. Weinberg's skill as a pianist himself is evident, and it comes as no surprise that the piano always serves as a musically equal partner, in line with the tradition of Beethoven and Brahms's sonatas. In this sonata, he truly discovered

his unique voice as a composer for the violin. The first movement is captivating, and the second movement is enriched with Jewish melodies, culminating in a third movement of remarkable strength and grandeur.

Sonata No. 5 Op. 53 (1953), dedicated to Shostakovich, showcases a rich tapestry of nuances and refinement, with the violin delicately fluttering through the piece, and moments of sweet and expressive melodies, particularly evident in the slow final movement. In the closing moments, Weinberg reminds the audience and the violinist of his pianistic nature by incorporating an extensive 50-bar piano solo, a rare feature in violin sonatas.

After completing the Fifth Sonata, Weinberg took a break from composing for the violin and piano for almost three decades. During this period, he focused on creating 12 symphonies, ten string quartets, three sonatas for solo violin and four for solo viola.

Just three weeks before heading into the recording studio in 2013 to record all the works for violin and piano, Edition Peermusic, who had done an incredible job publishing Weinberg's works, contacted me. They had just discovered **Sonata No. 6 Op. 136bis**, composed in 1982, and asked if I wanted to include it in the three-CD box set of all works for violin and piano. Without much hesitation, I eagerly accepted their offer and received the music as a PDF since it wasn't yet available for purchase as an edited score. Immediately, I immersed myself in the complexity of this very late piece.

It was evident that Weinberg had been profoundly influenced by learning more about the fate of his family, confirming that they were murdered in the SS labour camp at Trawniki. The work begins with an almost 50-bar long, hauntingly repetitive solo violin prologue. When I play it, I envision an image of an ice floe, a freshly calved growler with rugged corners and harsh edges. Weinberg dedicated this sonata to the memory of his mother.

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