

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 30 September 2023
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust



Weinberg Focus Day 3

Linus Roth violin
Danjulo Ishizaka cello
Boris Kusnezow piano
Ilona Domnich soprano

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996) Sonata No. 3 for solo violin Op. 126 (1978)
Jewish Songs Op. 13 for voice and piano trio (1941-3) *arranged by Alexander Oratovski*
Einleitung • Brejtele • Viglid • Der jeger • Ofn grinem bergele • Der jesojmes brivele • Schluss
Nocturne from *3 Pieces* (1934-5)
Interval
Sonatina for violin and piano Op. 46 (1949)
I. Allegretto • II. Lento - Allegro • III. Allegro moderato - Lento
Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes Op. 47 No. 3 (1949)

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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.

After completing his Second Sonata for cello and piano in 1959, Weinberg chose to refrain from composing for the sonata genre involving strings and piano for nearly three decades. During this substantial period, he focused on writing 12 of his 22 symphonies, ten of his 17 string quartets, and a dozen sonatas for unaccompanied strings: three for solo violin, four for solo viola, four and a half for cello (including the revised Second Sonata), and even one each for double bass and bassoon, significantly enriching the repertoire for these less-commonly featured instruments.

The **Sonata No. 3 for solo violin Op. 126**, with a duration of almost 30 minutes, presents its own set of challenges. Beyond its share of technical difficulties, the one-movement structure requires uninterrupted performance, which is very unusual. In concerts, from its première in 1978 until recently, there were only two options: the soloist had to perform it from memory or rely on a page-turner, which, in my opinion, seemed a bit out of place in a solo recital. Thanks to technology, a solution has now emerged, and while I tend to prefer the traditional analogue and paper approach, in this sonata, I happily employ my iPad, allowing me to turn the pages by merely pressing a pedal on the floor.

This sonata is dedicated to the memory of Mieczysław's father, Shmil Weinberg, who was a composer and conductor at the Yiddish theater in Chişinău (then Kishinev) - although, in Mieczysław's words, 'not on a very high professional level' as a violinist. Considering that Weinberg knew, even if he didn't have it confirmed until a decade later, that his father also fell victim to the Holocaust, the sonata is not easily digestible. It poses a challenge for both performers and listeners, taking them on a journey through bustling double stops, fleeting high-pitched lyrical segments, resounding very high notes and trills, and ghostly tremors. It demands and deserves dedication from the listener, who will ultimately be rewarded with the discovery of true beauty mixed with almost brutal power of sound.

Weinberg wrote the **Jewish Songs Op. 13** during the two highly productive years (1941-3) after his escape to Tashkent. In 1945, for the second edition, he retitled them as 'Children's Songs' due to the rising antisemitism in Russia. The texts by Itzhok Lejb Peretz vividly reflect the everyday life of Eastern European Jewry - the humor and

melancholy of the verses can also be found in Weinberg's initially catchy melodies, which are, however, disrupted by changes in meter and key, dissonances, and rhythmic shifts.

Composed by the teenage Weinberg in Warsaw, the **3 Pieces for violin and piano** (1934-5) strongly evoke Szymanowski's sound world. The music carries an impressionistic quality, with lush textures and intense harmonies, showcasing Weinberg's nascent talent and vision. The *Nocturne* has become one of my favourite pieces by Weinberg, and despite being a youthful work, his voice speaks clearly to us - he deserves to be heard.

The **Sonatina for violin and piano Op. 46** exudes a lively and cheerful character, particularly in its first movement, which carries a light but still melancholic tone. The slow movement is probably one of the most touching pieces I know, a lament that brings to mind Jewish songs. Eventually, the Sonatina returns to its joyous and lyrical nature in the third movement. Created in 1949, it patiently awaited its première until 1955 when the eminent violinist Leonid Kogan presented it to the world. After this debut, it was dedicated to the esteemed composer Boris Tchaikovsky.

On 6 February 1953, David Oistrakh and Weinberg presented the première of the violin and piano version of the **Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes Op. 47 No. 3**, during a seemingly highly successful concert at the Moscow Conservatory. This event was unforgettable for the composer in more ways than one, as he was arrested the following night. He found himself confined to the infamous Lubyanka prison, located beneath the KGB headquarters, facing the threat of deportation or worse. (Miron Vovsi, his father-in-law's cousin and Stalin's personal physician, who had been arrested a few days earlier as part of the so-called 'Doctor's Plot', was already there.) Despite immense risk to himself (only five years had passed since he was denounced as a 'formalist'), Shostakovich bravely attempted to intervene on Weinberg's behalf. In April, Weinberg was released, though it is likely that Stalin's death on 5 March played a significant role, rather than Shostakovich's courageous actions. The swift transition from buoyant happiness to utter misery within a very short time frame could be considered symbolic of Weinberg's life and music, though it is regrettable that the happiness side was not more prevalent. Contrasts are a hallmark of Weinberg's style, often juxtaposing delicate sustained high notes with vigorous *fortissimo* passages.

The *Rhapsody* remains one of the most exuberant works of music, a fiery virtuoso piece that Oistrakh often included among his encores. While it's titled 'Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes', it would perhaps be more fittingly named 'Rhapsody on Jewish Themes', as it truly encapsulates the essence of Klezmer music. It is highly likely that Weinberg chose the term 'Moldavian' instead of 'Jewish' to navigate around potential censorship based on antisemitism.

To me, this masterpiece stands on the same elevated level as Ravel's *Tzigane* in terms of virtuosity, compositional excellence, and emotional impact.

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Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

Jewish Songs Op. 13 for voice and piano trio

(1941-3)

arranged by Alexander Oratovski

IL Peretz

Einleitung

La la la...

Brejtele

Brejtele, brejtele, brejtele
klejn,
A brejtele, sol dos koj lech
dik zajn
Un zind gschvind in ojvele
arajn,
Genug in ojvele gesesn.
Am am am am am am
am.
Ojf gegesn.

Vigliid

Kezele stil. Majzele
stil.
Majn ojzerl schojn schlofn
vil.
Kelbele, kelbele, nit
gemeht,
Un majn ojzerl nist
gevekt.
Voje venis't du vintele,
Schtiler, schtiler, schtiler
hintele.
Un mojl far bajs dos zingele,
Schlofn vil majn ingele.
Ajluli, ajluli, - a.

Der jeger

Jankele vil a jeger
zajn,
Jankele vil in vald
arajn,
Schisn vil er nor a
ber
Vu nemt men gever?

Unser Jankele derzet,
In a vinkl a besem
schtet,
Mitn besem er vet
jogn,
Jogn un a grojsn ber
derschlofn.

Introduction

La la la...

Bread roll

Bread roll, bread roll, little
bread roll,
a bread roll, round as can
be,
and now quickly into the
oven -
enough sitting in the oven.
Nom nom nom nom nom
nom nom.
All eaten up!

Lullaby

Hush, little cat. Hush, little
mice.
My little treasure wants to
sleep.
Little calf, little calf, don't
make a sound,
and don't wake my little
treasure.
Little wind, be calm;
be still, be still, be still,
little dog.
And curb your tongue,
my angel wants to sleep.
Lully, lullay.

The hunter

Jankele wants to be a
hunter,
Jankele wants to go into
the forest,
he just wants to shoot a
bear -
where has his rifle gone?

Our Jankele sees
a broom standing in a
corner -
with the broom he'll go
hunting,
hunt and strike a big bear.

In schtub kon er mer nit
blajbn,
Vil dem besem unter hejbn,
Schverer besem kert sich
iber
Un der jeger falt ariber!

Nit kejn ber un nit kejn hos,
Un geschlofn sich di nos.
Er vil schojn nit mer in vald
arajn,
Er vil schojn nit kajn jeger
sajn...

Ofn grinem bergele

Ofn grinem bergele
Vakst a jung bejmele,
Vil dos bejmele nischt
schlofn.

Di levone tut es strofn,
Zajt zu dremlen bejmele,
Ofn grinem bergele:

Asoj sogn ojch di schtern
Nor dos bejml vil nit hern,
vil nit machn zu di ojgn.

Is a vintl zu geflojgn,
'Bejml, bejml, rujig sajn'
Un soklt es, un vikt es ejn.

A, a, vigt aher un vigt
ahin,
Schlofn must a benml
grin,
Dremlen mus dos grine
bejmele.

Dremlt ajn dos bejmele
Ofn grinem bergele,
Dremlt ajn dos bejmele.

He can't sit at home any
longer,
aims to lift up the broom -
the wretched broom falls
over
and the hunter goes with it!

No bear and no hare either,
just a bump on the nose!
He no longer wants to go
into the forest,
he no longer wants to be
a hunter...

On the green little hill

On the green little hill
a little tree keeps watch,
this little tree will not
sleep.

The moon tells it off:
time to sleep, little tree
on the little green hill.

The stars say just the same,
but the tree will not listen,
will not close its eyes.

A little breeze blows by,
'Tree, tree, be at peace';
rocks it and lulls it to sleep.

Ah, ah, rocked this way
and that,
the green tree must go to
sleep,
the little green tree must
fall asleep.

The little tree goes to sleep
on the little green hill,
the little tree goes to sleep.

Der jesojmes brivele

Der mamen scrajbt ir ejnzik
kind,
Hojb es of du liber vint,
Un trog aruf of jener
velt.
Zu der mameschis
gezelt:

Nist zu trinkn, nist zu
esn,
Un si hejsn dich
fargesn.
Schlofn of a hartn kastn,
Ich ken schlofn, ich ken fastn.

Un di schverste lastn
trogn,
So in si mich nit schlogn,
Mame mutter, mame
mutter!

Sej viln mich nor vejnen hern,
Un ich mame hop kajn trenn,
Lig ich mameschi un ziter,
Is mir biter mame
mutter.

Schluss

La la la...

The orphan's letter

To her mother, her only
child writes;
take it with you, dear wind,
and carry it all over the
world.
This is the story she told
her mother:

Nothing to drink, nothing
to eat,
and they told me to
forget you.
Sleeping on a hard crate,
I can sleep, I can fast.

And the hardest load to
carry,
so they don't beat me -
mama, mother! Mama,
mother!

They only want to hear
me cry,
and I, mother, have no tears,
I lie here, mother, and shiver,
it's bitter here, mama,
mother.

Conclusion

La la la...