WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 3 April 2025
7.30pm

Anthony Marwood violin
Christoph Richter cello
Alasdair Beatson piano

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)	Romance in F minor Op. 11 (1873)
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	Violin Sonata (1914-5, rev. 1916-22) *I. Con moto • II. Ballada • III. Allegretto • IV. Adagio*
Antonín Dvořák	Sonatina in G Op. 100 (1893) *I. Allegro risoluto • II. Larghetto •* *III. Scherzo. Molto vivace • IV. Finale. Allegro*
	Interval
Antonín Dvořák	Piano Trio in F minor Op. 65 (1883) *I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Allegretto grazioso, meno mosso •* *III. Poco adagio • IV. Finale. Allegro con brio*

UNDER 35S

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Dvořak's first instrument was the violin – though he later made his living as a viola player – and his ability to create the most wonderful soaring melodies and satisfying string textures no doubt owes a great deal to his early familiarity with the violin.

The Romance in F minor was Dvořák's first solo work for the instrument. Its exact date of composition is unclear, but the piece shares some material with the second movement of his String Quartet No. 5 in F minor (1873), and the Dvořák scholar David Beveridge believes that it was likely to have been written in the same year.

The original version of the piece was scored for violin and orchestra, and was first performed by Josef Markus, the leader of Prague's Provisional Theatre Orchestra (in which Dvořák had played the viola for much of the previous decade) at a benefit concert in 1877. Dvořák also produced an arrangement with piano accompaniment for his friend, the violin virtuoso František Ondříček, who gave the first performance of his Violin Concerto (1879).

Unlike Dvořák, Janáček was not a string player, and although he made several attempts to compose a violin sonata during his studies in Leipzig and Vienna, it was not until 1914 – when he was already 60 – that he produced a sonata he felt was worthy of publication.

In the earlier part of his career, Janáček had been greatly influenced by Dvořák, but at around the turn of the century his musical style evolved into a highly original and modern continuation of the Czech tradition – with a specifically Moravian inflection. Though he aspired above all to be recognised as an opera composer and produced a relatively small amount of purely instrumental music, his output in this field contains some highly idiosyncratic works. These all demonstrate an unerring grasp of writing for instruments, yet human drama is never far below the surface, as can be heard clearly from the opening of his Violin Sonata. It was begun in the summer of 1914, during the early days of the First World War, and seems to convey a premonition that the fabric of life in the composer's homeland – for so many years dominated by Austria and the Habsburg monarchy – was about to change irrevocably.

Janáček had long chafed against the Czech lands' subservience to a German-speaking empire, and this feeling of resentment had prompted him to become a fervent Slavophile and to seek inspiration in Russian rather than Austrian culture. The protracted genesis of the Violin Sonata – which only reached its final form in 1922 – coincided with the composition of the opera *Kát'a Kabanová* (1921), based on a play by the Russian dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky, and the two works are similar in atmosphere and share some thematic similarities.

The Sonatina in G was the last chamber work written by Dvořák during his stay in the United States, and was also his final work for solo violin. Though he appreciated the recognition accorded to him in America, Dvořák was often homesick for Bohemia, but the presence of several of his children was a source of consolation, especially as two of them, Otilka and Toník (Antonín), were by then displaying signs of musical talent. These two were studying the piano and violin respectively, and the composer wrote the Sonatina for them to play together at a family gathering, and tailored the piece to their technical abilities – but as he later declared to his publisher, 'adults should also be able to amuse themselves with it.'

One of Dvořák's earlier chamber masterpieces, the Piano Trio in F minor, may also owe its origin to an event in the composer's private life. His mother had died just a few months before he embarked on this work, and it has been speculated that this could account for the unusually dark and brooding tone of the Trio. However, another possible explanation for the work's grave tone is that it could have arisen from Dvořák's need to convince a wider public that he was a serious composer worthy to stand alongside European contemporaries such as his friend and mentor Brahms. Of course, the two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive: his mother's death may have provided the initial impetus for the composition of the work and influenced its sombre colouring, but the seriousness of his approach to structure and thematic development may have been dictated by an urge to show that he was capable of producing more substantial pieces than the charming folk-inflected songs and dances for which he had become known. By the early 1880s, Dvořák was aware of having reached a crossroads in his career, and faced the quandary of whether to continue to write music in the vein of the *Moravian Duets* and *Slavonic Dances* with which he had made his name, or to try to establish himself as a composer of more ambitious works.

The hushed yet dramatic opening of the Trio was almost certainly intended to pay tribute to Brahms's Piano Quintet in F minor of 1864: the two works are in the same key, and both also begin with an earnestly questioning theme in octaves. This theme sets the tone for the rest of the work: instead of the spontaneous zest for life that had until then been characteristic of Dvořák's music, the dominant mood of the F minor trio is one of unease and defiance. However, the work is certainly not lacking in the composer's trademark melodic flair and rhythmic vigour – few passages in the entire chamber music literature can rival the exquisitely soaring melodies of the slow movement, and the rhythms of the *Allegro grazioso* and the *Finale* are every bit as infectious as those of the *Slavonic Dances*.