

# WIGMORE HALL

Friday 4 July 2025  
7.00pm

Veronika Eberle violin  
Dénes Várjon piano

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Rhapsody No. 2 BB96a (1928, rev. 1945)  
*I. Lassú. Moderato • II. Friss. Allegro moderato*

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*

*Interval*

Béla Bartók

Rhapsody No. 1 BB94a (1928, rev. 1929)  
*I. Lassú. Moderato • II. Friss. Allegretto moderato*

César Franck (1822-1890)

Sonata in A for violin and piano (1886)  
*I. Allegretto ben moderato • II. Allegro •  
III. Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato •  
IV. Allegretto poco mosso*



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**Béla Bartók** wrote his pair of Rhapsodies for two of the greatest violin virtuosos of the day, Joseph Szigeti and Zoltán Székely respectively, and he later made arrangements of the pieces for violin and orchestra. Written in 1928, they were intended as a lighter complement to his two complex and challenging earlier accompanied violin sonatas (1921 and 1922, both premièred in London). The Rhapsodies are cast in a two-part slow-fast form, reflecting the *lassù* and *friss* sections of the Hungarian *csárdás* and they are in effect sequences of authentic dance tunes, almost entirely Romanian. In these pieces we hear not only Bartók's fascination with folk music but also his desire to draw it into a distinctively modern idiom of classical (or so-called 'art') music.

The best-known of **Beethoven's** 10 violin sonatas, along with Op. 24 (the 'Spring', 1801), this penultimate instalment has immortalised the French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831), even though he never played it. It was in fact written for George Bridgetower, the celebrated violinist of West Indian and Polish descent, who was in the employ of the British Prince Regent (later George IV) at the time he visited Vienna in 1803. Beethoven found Bridgetower to be 'a very capable virtuoso with a complete command of his instrument' so he wrote this work for them to play together. Beethoven rushed to finish the sonata ahead of the first performance, in Vienna's Augarten at 8am on 24 May, waking up his pupil Ferdinand Ries at 4.30am to ask for help in copying out the violin part. In the end Bridgetower apparently read the second movement from Beethoven's manuscript, peering over the composer's shoulder. The friendship was not to last, however. The two men quarrelled over a woman for whom either Beethoven, or both men, had affection, and when the sonata was published in 1803 it was with a dedication to Kreutzer, whom Beethoven had first met in 1798: 'a dear, kind fellow', Beethoven noted, 'who, during his stay in Vienna, gave me a great deal of pleasure'. This sonata is unique among Beethoven's 10 violin sonatas in its richness of texture and the equal footing given to the violin. It is also the only one of Beethoven violin sonatas to open with a slow Introduction, a dramatic and expressive passage in which the violin and piano begin in a tentative dialogue and conclude in sync. There's a rich fund of contrasting themes in the main part of the first movement, the most rustic of which goes on to lead the development section, but the overall impression is of the driven energy generated by fast arpeggiations and alternating octaves, in both instruments. The second movement opens with a warm, stately theme, gently knowing in its teasing second-beat accents. This theme generates four variations, the first highly decorative for the piano. The violin is spotlighted in the second variation with fast staccato runs. The third variation takes a darker turn into the minor key and a

snaking treatment. The fourth variation is a sweet, soaring song for the violin, interrupted by an introspective mood which eloquently steers the remainder of the movement into the realm of poetic reflection. Berlioz would surely have had this movement in mind when he declared the 'Kreutzer' as 'one of the most sublime of all sonatas'. Beethoven transplanted a pre-existing finale into this sonata, one originally intended for his Sonata in A, Op. 30 No. 2, but which he thought too brilliant for that earlier sonata. An ebullient tarantella (a spirited, whirling Italian dance in 6/8 metre), the movement instead forms a fitting climax to this most ambitious and showy of Beethoven's violin sonatas.

Practically all the works by which we recognise **César Franck** today – fewer than a dozen major pieces, among them the symphonic poems *Le chasseur maudit* and *Psyché*, the Symphony in D minor, the Violin Sonata and the String Quartet – were written in a rich creative period during the last decade of his life. Perhaps his early growth had been stumped by an over-bearing, exploitative father; and it had certainly been difficult for him to find his place in musical Paris, as a Belgian with largely German heritage, an outlook inspired by Bach and Beethoven and an allegiance to Liszt and Wagner. As it turned out, he attracted a following of young French disciples, which became known as the 'bande à Franck'. Franck's influence was key to the forming of the Schola Cantorum conservatory in 1894. The poet and novelist Camille Mauclair (1872-1945) classed Franck's grand Romantic Violin Sonata as among a handful of the composer's 'masterpieces which will never fade'. Key to the essence of the work are the passionate, soaring melodies, the ingenuity and expression of Franck's chromatic harmonies and the sheer technical challenges of not only the violin but also the piano part, with its staggering density of writing (reminding us that Franck was an organist). Franck's use of 'thematic transformation', a technique developed after Liszt, means that themes return across movements, and new themes are related to earlier ones, giving the work an instinctive-sounding overall cohesion across its four movements. The finale, with the violin and piano often in canon, peals with bells – an apt conclusion for a sonata offered as a wedding gift to the Belgian violin virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe. In discussing Franck's musical hallmarks, Mauclair, who predicted the sonata's status as an enduring masterpiece, could have been describing this sonata: 'No-one else has that faculty of suave and sensuous mysticism, that unique charm, that serene plenitude of fervour, that purity of soaring melody, above all, that power of joy which springs from a religious effusion, that radiant whiteness resulting from a harmony at once ingenuous and ecstatic.'

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