

WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 5 May 2026
7.30pm

Pablo Barragán clarinet
Noa Wildschut violin
Amadeus Wiesensee piano

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Contrasts for violin, clarinet and piano BB116 (1938)

I. Verbunkos • II. Pihenő • III. Sebes

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Violin Sonata No. 3 in A minor 'dans le caractère
populaire roumain' Op. 25 (1926)

*I. Moderato malinconico • II. Andante sostenuto
e misterioso • III. Allegro con brio, ma non troppo
mosso*

Interval

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

Sonata for clarinet and piano Op. 28 (1945)

I. Allegro • II. Allegretto • III. Adagio

Paul Schoenfield (1947-2024)

Trio for clarinet, violin and piano (1990)

I. Freylakh • II. March • III. Nigun • IV. Kozatzke



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The folklore of Central Europe has long inspired classical composers, and this evening's programme features four works reflecting something of the turbulent 20th-century history of the region. **Bartók's** deeply-held anti-fascism led him to flee his native Hungary after the outbreak of the Second World War, and he arrived in New York in October 1940. He was not the only Hungarian to make that journey: that same year, the violinist Joseph Szigeti also settled in the United States. It was Szigeti, along with the American jazz clarinettist Benny Goodman, who in 1938 commissioned Bartók to write *Contrasts*. Goodman and Szigeti both hailed from the Jewish world of Central Europe – Goodman's parents came from Warsaw and Kaunas respectively, whereas Szigeti descended from a musical family with roots in Transylvania.

In *Contrasts*, Bartók paid homage to Szigeti's origins by quoting various Hungarian and Romanian melodies. The opening *Verbunkos* is a swaggering Hungarian dance once used to recruit soldiers. Then comes an introspective slow movement (the Hungarian word *pihenő* means 'rest' or 'relaxation'). One of Bartók's haunting nocturnes, it is full of uncanny twists and turns that seem anything but tranquil. The finale – *sebes* simply means fast – evokes the lopsided rhythms of traditional Bulgarian music. Although he was fascinated by folk culture, Bartók was never interested in narrow nationalism, advocating instead a radically inclusive form of musical cosmopolitanism. Moreover, as his collaboration with Goodman suggests, he was never nostalgic about the past, confessing to Szigeti that *Contrasts* was in part inspired by Ravel's bluesy Sonata for violin and piano (1923-7).

Enescu's prodigious musical gifts took him first to Vienna, where at the age of seven he became the youngest student ever to have enrolled at the city's conservatory, and then to Paris, where he studied both violin and composition. For much of the rest of his life, he would divide his time between his beloved France and his equally cherished homeland, giving concerts with leading performers such as Casals and Cortot, and devoting himself to composition during long summers spent in the Romanian countryside. In 1946, he left Romania for good, unable to accept communist rule.

The subtitle of the Violin Sonata No. 3 – composed in Paris in 1926 – is 'dans le caractère populaire roumain'. It is a carefully and considered description. Unlike Bartók, Enescu avoided using authentic folk material. Rather, he sought creative inspiration from Romanian traditional forms, such as the *doina*, an ornamented, improvisatory tune that some ethnomusicologists (Bartók included) have traced to the Middle East and even to Central Asia. The *doina* is often soulful in mood, something perfectly conveyed in the first movement of the sonata, marked *malinconico* (with melancholy). Cortot heard in the second movement 'an evocation in sound of the mysterious feeling of summer nights in Romania: below, the silent, endless, deserted plain; above, constellations leading off into infinity...' The third

movement is a heady dance in which Enescu conjures up the spontaneous virtuosity of Roma fiddlers and magically transforms the piano into a jangling cimbalom.

Unlike Bartók and Enescu, **Weinberg** was driven East, not West, by history. He was born in Warsaw in 1919 to parents who were both active in the city's Yiddish Theatre. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, he escaped first to Minsk in Belarus, before eventually settling in the Soviet capital, Moscow. There, he became a close friend of Shostakovich, leaving behind a legacy of some 22 symphonies, 17 quartets and seven operas. The complex question of Weinberg's nationality can be seen in the various ways his first name is given: Moisei (the Russian version of Moses), Mieczysław (Polish) and Mojsze (the Polish spelling of the Yiddish name, Moishe). To his friends, he was simply Mietek.

Weinberg composed his Sonata for clarinet and piano in the autumn of 1945, shortly after the end of the Second World War, yet there is little sense of triumph or even relief. Its opening *Allegro* is lyrical rather than celebratory, and the ensuing *Allegretto* is inflected with poignant echoes of the traditional Jewish folk music of Central Europe. The sonata closes with a pensive *Adagio* that attests, perhaps, to Weinberg's sense of grief. He had lost his parents and other members of his family in the Shoah, and much of his subsequent music sought to address the meaning of that catastrophe.

Schoenfield wrote his Trio for clarinet, violin and piano in 1990 at the request of the clarinettist David Shifrin. In it, Schoenfield honours the idiom of klezmer music that had long flourished in Central Europe, but which had been all but destroyed during the anti-Jewish violence of the 20th Century. The word *klezmer* (plural: *klezmerim*) originally referred to a musician in Yiddish-speaking Central Europe, but with time, it came to refer to the music itself. Drawing on an eclectic range of influences, klezmer music was heard at Jewish weddings and other important social functions. At the same time, Schoenfield nods to works by Bartók and others, which had similarly translated traditional folk music into the concert hall.

The opening movement is a vigorous dance number known as a *Frey lakh* (a Yiddish word related to the German *fröhlich*, or 'jolly'). Then comes a sinister march to be played 'grotesquely'. Schoenfield himself described it as 'bizarre and somewhat diabolical'. The third movement is entitled *Nigun*, a Hebrew word for melody. Here, Schoenfield pays tribute to the ecstatic, wordless songs of religious longing that were such a prominent feature of the Hassidic tradition. The mood picks up dramatically in the finale. This is a *Kozatzke*, originally a dance associated with the Cossack communities of Ukraine, but later taken up by keen-eared *klezmerim*.

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