

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 6 February 2022 7.30pm

**James Ehnes** violin, viola

**Andrew Armstrong** piano

CLASSIC *f*M Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

**Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Op. 100 (1886)

*I. Allegro amabile • II. Andante tranquillo - Vivace •  
III. Allegretto grazioso, quasi Andante*

Viola Sonata in E flat Op. 120 No. 2 (1894)

*I. Allegro amabile • II. Allegro appassionato •  
III. Andante con moto - Allegro*

Interval

**Robert Schumann** (1810-1856)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D minor Op. 121 (1851)

*I. Ziemlich langsam - Lebhaft • II. Sehr lebhaft •  
III. Leise, einfach • IV. Bewegt*

## Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website:

[Wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

*Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.*

*In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.*

*Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.*

*Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.*



*Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.*

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG

Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



The summer of 1886 was a happy and productive one for **Johannes Brahms**. On holiday in the Swiss town of Thun, he composed a handful of Lieder as well as four major chamber works: the Piano Trio in C minor Op. 101, Second Cello Sonata Op. 99, and Violin Sonatas in A major and D minor Opp. 100 and 108. The Sonata we hear this evening, Op. 100, is also closely connected with a song from that same summer: 'Wie Melodien zieht es mir' Op. 105 No. 1.

Brahms's biographer Max Kalbeck tells us that this Sonata was composed 'in anticipation of the arrival of a dear friend' – namely the alto Hermine Spies, who was studying with Brahms's colleague Julius Stockhausen. Spies and Brahms seem to have become close friends in the 1870s, and the composer sent her manuscripts of several songs, as well as accompanying her in concert. Since Spies also gave the first known performances of 'Wie Melodien' (in a private residence, with Brahms at the piano), the song was clearly closely connected with her in Brahms's mind; and although it does not have a public dedication, it seems likely that Brahms gave her the manuscript as a gift.

The Sonata is in three movements rather than four, with the second serving as both slow movement and scherzo in alternation. The opening *Allegro amabile* (that is: 'sweet, loving') unfurls a beautifully long-breathed melody for both players, and it is here that we encounter a fragment of 'Wie Melodien zieht es mir', as the second theme. Brahms's close friend Elisabeth von Herzogenberg described this movement as 'a real caress', and whilst it has its moments of drama, the gentleness of that description seems entirely apt. The *Andante tranquillo*, singing and untroubled, eventually gives up its secret: a stamping, fun-filled *Vivace* dance lurks within it, and the two tempi alternate across the movement. Gracious, warm and expansive writing greets us again in the finale.

By the early 1890s, Brahms was heading for his 60th birthday and contemplating retirement. But he was prompted to continue by his encounter with the virtuoso clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld, who played in the Meiningen Court Orchestra (which had premièred Brahms's Fourth Symphony in 1885). Brahms was to compose four pieces for Mühlfeld in total – two sonatas, a trio and a quintet – as well as continuing to write other vocal and instrumental pieces over the course of the decade.

The Sonatas were written in the summer of 1894, and once they were finished the composer wrote to Mühlfeld to invite him to come and see the 'two modest sonatas' that he had recently completed. (They are not, of course, modest in the slightest! But this is typical Brahmsian humour.) Several private performances followed, allowing Brahms to share the pieces with his close friends, and make various adjustments – presumably steered in part by Mühlfeld, since Brahms had no personal experience of

playing the clarinet – before the Sonatas were given in public in 1895. Such was their reception that both had to be encores at the first performance, and within a few months, Brahms had finished preparing the scores for publication. Ever the pragmatist – and a clear admirer of the mellow tones of the viola – Brahms issued the pieces as *Zwei Sonaten für Clarinette (oder Bratsche) und Pianoforte*. The richly lyrical opening movement is followed by an impassioned *Allegro*, both with moments of positively orchestral writing for the pianist. The finale is a noble, lilting variation set with one tiny, entirely practical quirk: a pause marked before the still, pulsing variation at the centre of the movement. As beautiful an effect as this is, it was actually intended to allow Mühlfeld to pull out the bell of his clarinet to play his long, low notes better in tune.

**Robert Schumann** only wrote his first violin sonata in September 1851, at the prompting of the distinguished performer and leader of the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra, Ferdinand David. Chamber music remained central to the composer's thoughts over the next couple of months, with work on his Piano Trio in G minor Op. 110 followed by a return to violin music in late October. By early November the Second Grand Sonata for violin and piano was finished, although Schumann subsequently withheld it from publication to tinker with it further in the autumn of the following year. It was eventually published in September 1853, with David as the dedicatee. The first public performance, however, was given by the young virtuoso Joseph Joachim (who as a child prodigy had worked with Felix Mendelssohn), with Clara Schumann at the piano.

This Second Sonata spans four movements and has a greater sense of drama and turbulence than its predecessor. Perhaps most strikingly of all, given the composer's knack for flowing lyrical melodies – which feature prominently in the First Sonata – there is a deliberate avoidance of these in much of the Second. The focus lies instead on brisk chords (for both players – there is much double-stopping for the violinist), pointed textures and lines in which Schumann specifically asks the pianist not to be tempted to smooth over fast-moving passages with legato playing. There is also a preponderance of minor keys across all four movements – no wonder Joseph Joachim described it as a work that 'overflows with noble passion, almost harsh and bitter in expression, and the last movement reminds one of the sea with its glorious waves of sound.' The result is a piece full of anxious restlessness, high energy and a tightly-bound sense of thematic unity. Only at the close of the finale is a broad, major-key melody allowed to dominate, bringing the Sonata to its close in a rare blaze of sunshine.

© Katy Hamilton 2022

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*