

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 8 January 2024  
1.00pm

Chloë Hanslip violin  
Danny Driver piano

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) Divertimento for violin and piano (1934)  
*I. Sinfonia • II. Danses Suisses • III. Scherzo •  
IV. Pas de deux. Adagio - Variation - Coda*

Arvo Pärt (b.1935) Spiegel im Spiegel (1978)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) Violin Sonata No. 2 in G (1923-7)  
*I. Allegretto • II. Blues. Moderato •  
III. Perpetuum mobile. Allegro*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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For those familiar with the iconoclastic music of **Igor Stravinsky's** early career, the opening of the *Divertimento* for violin and piano may come as something of a surprise. The scoring is glassily spare, and the melodies oscillate between lyrical yearning and gnarlier, dramatic passages that hark back to 19th-century Romanticism. Yet the same composer who in 1913 outraged all of Paris with his foot-stomping, savagely primal music for *The Rite of Spring* was also the creator of a very different ballet in 1928: *Le baiser de la fée* ('The fairy's kiss'). The ballet was commissioned in 1928 as a homage to the great Russian composer Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky on the 35th anniversary of his death. It was masterminded by the impresario and former dancer Ida Rubinstein, and the Russian painter Alexandre Benois, who suggested Stravinsky take the late composer's piano and chamber works as a musical starting point. It was a commission Stravinsky couldn't refuse. He had long admired Tchaikovsky, and commented that when working on the score for *Le baiser*, he found it hard to distinguish where Tchaikovsky's music ended, and his own compositions began.

Based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale *The Ice Maiden*, *Le baiser de la fée* is set among the mountains and lakes of Switzerland. The title refers to the kiss bestowed on the orphan Rudy at birth, marking him as the ice fairy's own. It is a tragic tale, as Rudy's love for the miller's daughter, Babette, is ultimately thwarted by his fateful connection to the Ice Maiden, who spirits him away on the eve of his wedding with another kiss. Stravinsky wrote that the tale, to him, 'suggested an allegory of Tchaikovsky himself. The fairy's kiss ... is also the muse marking Tchaikovsky at his birth - though the muse did not claim Tchaikovsky at his wedding as she did the young man in the ballet, but rather at the height of his powers.'

The heart-rending opening *Sinfonia* depicts Rudy's mother lost in a storm, while the *Danses Suisses* depict Rudy and Babette's engagement party, with a playful, lopsided folk dance at its heart. The *Scherzo* depicts the Fairy leading Rudy to Babette at the mill, full of mischief and skittish energy, while the *Divertimento* closes with a luscious *Pas de deux* - a duet between the lovers, in which a virtuosic violin line extends over a staccato piano accompaniment. There is a curious symmetry to the genesis of this *Divertimento*: from the piano and chamber music of Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky scored a full-scale orchestral ballet. From that ballet, he created a concert suite, from which this chamber reduction for violin and piano was produced.

Symmetry brings us to the next piece in the programme. Is it possible for our minds to comprehend the concept of infinity? And if so, can it

be conveyed in a work of art? Many would agree that with his 1978 masterpiece *Spiegel im Spiegel* ('Mirror in the mirror'), Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt** achieves the impossible. The components are deceptively simple: a lilting arpeggio figure in the piano's middle register, offset by a single low note in the left hand. A slow scale unfurls upwards in the violin, ending on the note, A. Then a single high note rings out from the piano, followed by the violin tune's mirror image: a descending scale, returning to A. From these minimalistic elements, repeating over a mesmerising ten minutes, Arvo Pärt conjures a vision of eternity - or rather, he creates a space of weightlessness, through which the mind and imagination can float freely.

The use of single piano notes counterbalancing a central tune is a compositional technique called *tintinnabuli*, invented by Pärt. A devout Orthodox Christian, he likened it to the sound of bells, and has described the piano part in this particular piece as a kind of 'guardian angel' to the melody. The effect is extraordinarily evocative and moving: little wonder that since its première at the Moscow Conservatoire, *Spiegel im Spiegel* has been used in multiple film soundtracks and theatre productions.

An airy lightness pervades **Maurice Ravel's** second sonata for violin and piano, which is restless in tempo, temperament and tonality. Beginning work on the Sonata in 1923, the French composer had written that the two instruments were 'essentially incompatible'. Yet if anything, this unusual viewpoint led him to create a lively work of great originality - albeit one he didn't complete for another four years.

The piano begins the dialogue with a playfully tumbling melody, echoed by the violin, and punctuated by impish interjections from the piano. Yet just as it all starts to feel a little detached and unsettling, Ravel reminds us that he was, after all, a composer living in the age of jazz, with the second movement: *Blues*. Against a backbeat of sharply staccato piano chords, the violin croons and wails, sliding around the fingerboard with abandon. Ravel's trademark precision is still there, but following a trip to America, he became intent on blurring the boundaries between jazz and the classical tradition, penning an article in 1928 entitled 'Take jazz seriously!' The perpetual motion of the final movement gives a dazzling, virtuoso conclusion to this work. Incompatible though the instruments may be, somehow, between the continuous vibrations of the violin, and the percussive decay of the piano's hammers and strings, Ravel manages to create a riveting conversation between two musical equals.

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