



Tilford Bach Society



Bartosz Woroch - violin
Caroline Palmer - piano

Violin sonatas by
Brahms, Mozart & Schubert

1 April 2017

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Programme

One of the challenges for composers writing pieces for violin and piano is the balance between the instruments. The modern concert grand can hold its own against a full orchestra, but in the classical period it did not have the sustaining power of the modern instrument. Mozart modestly called his 1781 sonatas "Piano sonatas with violin accompaniment", perhaps because he would be playing the piano part and wanted it given equal prominence. Brahms also entitled his A major Sonata "Sonata for piano and violin" perhaps emphasising the equality of the instruments.

At the same time as the piano was evolving, the violin was also developing - the baroque instrument became the modern concert violin and the baroque bow gave way to the current (Tourte) bow capable of greater pressure developing a stronger sound. The great characteristic of the violin is the ability to sustain a note almost indefinitely. Once a key has been depressed on the piano a note cannot be altered but just dies away. On the violin, however, the volume and tone of each note can be changed giving the violin characteristics that match the human voice. This provides a lyrical quality which means that sustained melodic lines can be held over the piano accompaniment as in a song. All three composers were also wonderful song writers, with Schubert and Brahms excelling in long beautiful melodies which spill over into their instrumental music; both composers quoting songs in the pieces played today.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Sonata No.27 in G major K.379

Adagio - Allegro; Andantino cantabile - Adagio - Allegretto

This sonata was composed while Mozart was in the service of Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg. Described in a letter to his father as "a sonata with violin accompaniment", it was first played by Mozart and Antonio Brunetti, the Archbishop's concertmaster, on April 8th 1781. Composed the previous evening, he only had time to write out the violin part and retained the piano part in his head for the concert!

In keeping with Mozart's description, the piano plays the major role, leading with the themes and with one solo variation. The piece opens with a serious adagio followed by an intense allegro in G minor. The final movement is a sunny theme and variations. The fifth variation with the violin playing pizzicato is marked adagio and is followed by a restatement of the theme at a faster paced allegretto ending with a brief coda.

Interval

Drinks are free but donations to costs are much appreciated

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Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)
Violin Sonata No 2 in A major Op. 100

Allegro amabile

Andante tranquillo – Vivace – Andante – Vivace di piu – Andante – Vivace

Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

Brahms composed this sonata in the summer of 1886 whilst on holiday by Lake Thun in Switzerland and it reflects the good spirits of the composer during his vacation. Interestingly, the sonata is sometimes referred to as the "Meistersinger" Sonata because of the similarity between the first three notes of the first movement and those of "Walther's Prize Song" from Wagner's Der Meistersinger.

The first movement is relaxed and lyrical, with the piano taking the initial lead. The second subject is developed out of a motif taken from the lied "Wie Melodien zieht es mir", a song where the poet compares melodies to the scent of flowers. For the sonata's middle movement, Brahms achieves the semblance of a larger four-movement structure by combining the roles of Adagio and Scherzo in contrasting sections. The opening andante tranquillo in F major is contrasted against a D minor vivace. Each is heard twice before the Andante returns for a third time to evenly round out the movement's form. However, it is the vivace that has the final say. A relaxed and graceful Rondo serves as the sonata's finale.

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)
Fantasy in C Major D. 934

Andante molto – Allegretto – Andantino – Allegro – Allegretto – Presto

The impetus for this composition was given by the arrival in Vienna of a young Bohemian violin virtuoso, Josef Slavik, who first performed it on 20th January 1828. A musical "Fantasy" has no fixed musical form and in this case consists of a slow introduction followed by a classical fast-slow-fast sequence played without pause. The second slow episode consists of variations on Schubert's song Sei mir gegrüsst (I Greet You) which is an ecstatic confession of love.

After suspenseful piano tremolos, the violin slowly develops a sustained melodic line above the piano figuration. The violin melody slowly leads into a playful fast movement with a jaunty "Hungarian" style, which alternates between A minor and A Major and visits a number of secondary keys as well. It is followed by an "Andantino," in which we hear the song theme Sei mir gegrüsst followed by three increasingly pyrotechnical variations on it that take nothing away from the ardour of the poetic feeling; on the contrary, their almost superhuman difficulty is commensurate with the larger-than-life emotions in the song.

One of the work's great surprises is how, after the third variation, an astonishing transition takes us back to the dark drama of the introduction. This section, however, is much shorter now than it was the first time, and is soon relieved by a dashing allegro in C Major. Just before the conclusion, a dramatic modulation brings back the melody of Sei mir gegrüsst, in all its original, pure lyricism. All that remains is a short "Presto" coda, to return us rather abruptly to the ground after the blissful dream evoked in the song. Schubert's violin fantasy was not well received at the Vienna premiere. but it is now recognised as one of the peaks of the violin repertoire requiring an immaculate virtuoso technique and lyrical rendition to deliver its full musical impact.

Notes by Trevor Gray

Bartosz Woroch was born in Poznan, Poland and studied at the Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznan, the Hochschule der Kunste Berne and with Louise Hopkins at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he is now a professor. He was supported by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2011. Recent concert highlights include recitals at Wigmore Hall, and The Phillips Collection Washington D.C.

He has recorded a solo CD "Dancer on a Tightrope" for Champs Hill Records and Berg's Chamber Concerto with Britten Sinfonia and pianist Mei Yi Foo.

Between 2012-2015 he worked with Sinfonia Cymru as soloist, leader and director, culminating in the orchestra's first ever international collaboration, of which he was artistic director.

A committed chamber musician, over the last year Bartosz has given recitals throughout Europe with the Lutoslawski Quartet, recently undertaking a residency at IRCAM in Paris. He continues to explore the world of the solo violin, each concert having its roots in JS Bach's Sonatas and Partitas, giving recitals throughout the UK and in Poland.



Caroline Palmer studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama with Edith Vogel and later continued her studies with Peter Wallfisch and Hans Keller. She was a finalist in the Busoni competition and has played in the USA and in much of Europe. Well-known as both a solo pianist and chamber musician, she has recorded for British, Swiss, French, German and Italian radio stations and has made televised appearances in Italy and Bulgaria.

Caroline's latest CDs include the cello sonatas of Saint-Saens, Faure and Busoni and the Brahms violin sonatas with Krzysztof Smietana. She has made numerous recordings as soloist and chamber musician for the BBC.

Caroline has been a piano professor at the Guildhall since 1990, where she coaches chamber repertoire as well as teaching individual students.

Next Farnham Concerts

Saturday 29 April: 7-30pm

Philip Higham

Bach solo cello suites 2, 3 & 5

St Andrew's Church, Farnham, GU9 7PW

Saturday 20 May: 7-30pm

Pegasus Choir

Bach Ascension Oratorio and Motet

St Andrew's Church, Farnham, GU9 7PW