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Program Notes

Violin Sonata No 1. In A Major by Gabriel Fauré

Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major was composed between 1875-1876 and is dedicated to Paul Viardot, the violinist who premiered the piece with Fauré at the piano (Greed). According to Fauré, he hoped to express in his music "the eminently French qualities of taste, clarity and sense of proportion" as well as "the taste for clear thought, purity of form and sobriety" (Frang). Fauré's harmonic language has been compared to other French composers like Debussy and Ravel, although he "unquestionably established his own, unique musical style with innovations in modal and whole tone melody and a pliant harmony of subtle but constant modulation" (Christiansen). Also in his music, Fauré "suggests a new kind of extended tonality as a natural extension of tradition without breaking it in the manner of atonality or synthetic serialism" (Christiansen).

The first movement *Allegro Molto* is in a typical sonata form but the tonal colors emitted from Fauré's harmonies make the opening melody of the piece very poignant, so when this melody (played by the solo piano), is later joined by the violin at the recapitulation, it becomes this explosive moment that effectively ties in the traditional form of this movement while accommodating the flexibility of Fauré's beautiful harmonic motion in the development. The

second movement *Andante* is written in 9/8 as well as being in the form of a barcarolle, which traditionally is defined as a boating song of a Venetian gondolier. This gentle rocking motion, along with the darker colors of the key of D minor, create a very magical space in which the increasingly legato lines of the violin melody weave in and out of. The third movement *Allegro vivo* is a frantic Scherzo with rapid spicatto lines that pass between both instruments. These lines are first interjected with pizzicato chords but are later largely put aside structurally by an expanded middle section in minor where a melancholic melody takes over the scene. This movement finishes with a brisk and witty back-and-forth between the violin and piano that ends humorously quiet. The fourth movement *Allegro quasi presto* begins with a light piano pulse that is joined by a pastoral sounding violin melody. This movement is also in a sonata form, and recalls more of a 19th century late romantic style type of writing. Fauré's goal of balancing "emotion with restraint, beauty that is almost nonchalant, complexity without losing clarity, passion without losing poise" is definitely celebrated in this movement (Christiansen).

Solo Sonata No. 3 in D Minor "Ballade" by Eugène Ysaÿe

Eugène Ysaÿe was described by his contemporaries as "not only the greatest violinist living, but the greatest violinist that ever lived...Ysaÿe possesses the combined qualities of Vieuxtemps, Wieniawski, Sarasate and Joachim" (Niles). By understanding Ysaÿe's level of skill and dexterity as a performer, one can imagine why he could write such technically challenging music for solo violin. Ysaÿe wrote his six solo violin sonatas in 1923 – and in addition to being inspired by Bach's Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, each one was "inspired by and dedicated to a different contemporary violinist: Joseph Szigeti; Jacques Thibaud; Georges Enesco; Fritz Kreisler; Mathieu Crickboom and Manuel Quiroga" (Niles). In addition, Ysaÿe

was influenced by the artistic movements of his time like impressionism, symbolism and surrealism (Niles). One can definitely hear how these artistic movements informed the composer and may be considered a factor of why his music has moments of otherworldliness.

Ysaÿe's Sonata No. 3 in D minor is a ballade with two sections entitled: *Ballades; Lento molto sostenuto* and then *Allegro in tempo giusto e con bravura*. Each sonata was written to emulate the style of the person it was dedicated to, and in this case: his younger contemporary George Enescu, who was a Romanian composer (Head). It has almost manic changes in dynamics and grotesque contrasts between the dark and sinister chords in the lower register of the violin with rapid passages to the top of the register. There are moments of quiet and more improvisatory writing which are followed by sections of explosive outbursts of passion. One of the most memorable moments of this piece is the introduction of the melody at the beginning of the second *Allegro* section. Its irregular placement of accents and intense, focused sound resulting from the double stops gives it a rough, folky quality that highlights Ysaÿe's homage to Enescu.

Duo for Violin and Cello Op. 7 by Zoltán Kodály

Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist, and professor Zoltán Kodály was dedicated to expanding his country's musical culture through extensive research of folk music and incorporating what he learned into his pieces. He and Béla Bartók, another famous composer and musicologist, worked together "in compiling and editing more than 3,000 Hungarian folk songs... over a 10-year period, starting in 1905. Kodály and Bartók spent their summers touring Hungarian villages and recording songs on wax or jotting them down in notation as the villagers sang them. This pioneer effort resulted in a series of authoritative folk-song collections and

studies, starting in 1905 and extending over the next 60 years” (Hertz). This piece definitely reflects “Kodály's conviction that ‘The works of art that exert the most powerful influence... are those that express most fully the national characteristics of the artist’” (Darwin).

The first movement *Allegro serioso, non troppo* begins with a declamatory statement from the cello that is immediately interjected by the violin. This later melds into a seductive and tender melody that transforms with Kodály's juxtaposed rhythms, into a frantic tutti outburst that leaves one wondering what could be next. A modal melody emerges from a pizzicato accompaniment which is passed between the two instruments and serves as a primary source of material for the rest of the movement. The second movement *Adagio* sounds highly improvisatory and sounds much closer to traditional folk music than a ‘classical’ interpretation of it. It is also much more dissonant and at times even disturbing, with the violin screaming at the top of the register after a foreboding cello trill in the low register. Apparently, “Kodály's biographer László Eöszé speculates that it may reflect the composer's sense of foreboding on the imminence of World War I” (Hertz). The third movement *Maestoso-Presto* begins with a passionate violin solo interjected by the cello, and at the Presto section, the two instruments trade off the theme of accented quarter notes among rapid 8ths that appears at the end of this movement to finish off this exciting piece.

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