

Date du récital/Date of recital: *Monday, May 17th, 2021*

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Sonata No.1 in G Minor, BWV 1001 (excerpts)

I. Adagio

II. Fuga

The Sonata for Solo Violin comes from the set of the Three Sonatas and Three Partitas for Solo Violin, which J.S Bach composed in 1720. The whole set finally got to be published completely by Nikolaus Simrock in Bonn until in 1802, 12 years after Bach's death. There was no record on when and where the first performance of these six solos took place and by who. The earliest recording of the complete set was published and played by Yehudi Menuhin in 1936, followed by his own mentor, George Enescu, in 1940, who described this work as "The Himalayas of violinists". Today, this work has become one of the standard violin repertoires.

In Bach's era, the employment of basso continuo, the accompaniment part, was widely used. It was normally played on the lute or harpsichord. However, on the top of Bach's manuscript of the six solos, Bach wrote: *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato*. The words *Sei Solo* seems quite out of the context as the correct Italian for six solos should be *Sei Soli*. Did Bach really make a spelling mistake? Or he was deliberately telling the performers that "you are alone", which violinists should perform these pieces only with one bow and four strings.

All the three sonatas are in *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata) form: slow-fast-slow-fast. The first two movements of each sonata are in a pair of Adagio and Fuga. The opening movement of the G Minor, the Adagio, introduces the first sonata with its flowing, expressive, and highly ornamented figures. Even though virtuoso was not the goal of Bach, he was challenging the impossibility of polyphony playing on a single melody instrument by applying arpeggios across strings, multiple stopping, massive use of chords, etc. Particularly, the second movement, the G Minor Fuga, is a perfect representation of Bach's polyphonic writing. The piece starts with four repeated D, then C and B flat in the opening melody. Then, this one bar motif appears many times throughout the rest of the movement, passing between different voices, shown in different pitches. Interestingly, this D, C and B flat figures also reflects its tonal design of each section in which the first cadence lands on D minor, then C minor, followed by B-Flat major. With each new section comes in,

there are also subsequent differences in its texture, rhythms, registers, figuration yet still having the opening motif intertwined in between.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Four Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 75

- I. Allegro moderato**
- II. Allegro maestoso**
- III. Allegro appassionato**
- IV. Larghetto**

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904), as the first Bohemian composer to achieve worldwide recognition, frequently employed the style of folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia into 19th-century Romantic music. The Four Romantic Pieces, Op. 75 was written in January of 1887, in between composing his seventh and eighth symphonies. The pieces originally came from a set of bagatelles for two violin and viola which Dvořák wrote as a gift to a young amateur violinist to whom Dvořák rented a room in his house.

The four pieces originally had their own descriptive titles, which were removed by Dvořák when rearranging them for violin and piano. The set opens with a “Cavatina”, in which the violin presents a sweet and song-like melody over a gentle and flowing piano accompaniment. An energetic folk-like dance “Capriccio” in D Minor follows, built upon the vigorous opening theme characterized by the raised fourth leading to the dominant. The third piece, “Romance”, a dreamy and simple melody from the violin floating over a rippling accompaniment once again brings the music back to the opening. Yet, this time, the melody involves more intimate and dark characters. The last piece, “Elegy”, ends the set with a sorrowful and heartfelt violin theme over stable arpeggios chords from the piano, which leaves the listeners a reflective and introspective ending.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Tzigane

As one of the well-known virtuosic pieces for violins, *Tzigane* is a rhapsodic composition by the French composer Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). It was commissioned by and dedicated to the niece of the influential violinist Joseph Joachim, the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi. The first performance was held in London on April 26th, 1924, the same year as the publication, performed by the dedicatee, and with Henri Gil-Marchex at the piano (with luthéal).

Although the piece has only one movement, with an approximate duration of ten minutes, It clearly demonstrates expressive melody of chromaticism as well as brilliant violin techniques that was promoted by late romantic composer-virtuosi, Paganini and Sarasate. Violin techniques, such as continuous double-stops and octaves, fast running passages,

harmonics, left hand and right hand pizzicatos are shown in this piece. The piece opens with a dramatic virtuosic violin solo passage in the character of Gypsy music, followed by a humorous yet dancelike main section of the piece, which gathers ideas from the cadenza, and introduces two new themes that lead the music to the climax until the coda.

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)

Sonata No. 1 in A Major for Violin and Piano, Op. 13

- I. Allegro molto**
- II. Andante**
- III. Allegro vivo**
- IV. Allegro quasi presto**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), a composer, organist, pianist and teacher, was the most influential and leading French composer, whose music spans the timeline from Romanticism to Modernism. As the youngest child of a cultured family, Gabriel Fauré showed his music talent at an early age. His musical training started as early as nine years old when he was sent to the Ecole Niedermeyer Music College in Paris, where he was trained to be a church organist and choirmaster. Later on, by good fortune, he met his piano teacher, Camille Saint-Saëns, one of the greatest composers of the romantic era, who taught Fauré until death in 1921.

This violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major, as one of the most well-known pieces of Fauré's generation and to this day one of his most frequently played chamber works, was composed by him at the age of 31 in 1876, published and performed at a Société Nationale concert in 1877 with great success. It was dedicated to Paul Viardot, the son of Pauline Viardot (1821-1910) who was an impressively well-rounded musician: composer, pianist, and teacher, in addition to her singing career.

What Saint-Saëns had to say about this piece: "In this sonata you can find everything to tempt a gourmet: new forms, excellent modulations, unusual tone colors, and the use of unexpected rhythms," he wrote. "And a magic floats above everything, encompassing the whole work, causing the crowd of usual listeners to accept the unimagined audacity as something quite normal. With this work Monsieur Fauré takes his place among the masters."

Through the traditional *Sonata form* writing, the piece is in four movements (the first, second, and the last movement are in *Sonata Form*). Entering with the piano's perpetually moving arpeggios, in a flowing and rolling motion, the violin introduces this piece with a passionate, romantic, and dreamy character. The introverted and reflective of the second movement, *Andante*, is in between a sweeping waltz and perhaps a sleepy barcarolle. It starts with the sorrowful D minor key, rising and becoming more joyful, ending in D major. In contrast, the third movement, *Allegro vivo*, is a vivid and brilliant *Scherzo*, constructed by sparkling rhythms and light articulations. The finale, similar to the first movement, has this dreamy and yearning character that holds the sweetly rippling and expressive melody until the final chord.