

THREE CENTURIES OF CLASSICS

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 – 1791)

Sonata for violin and piano in G major K.379

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1. Adagio. Allegro | 11'15 |
| 2. Andantino cantabile | 10'44 |

Johannes BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Sonata for violin and piano n°2 in A major op.100

- | | |
|------------------------|------|
| 3. Allegro amabile | 9'00 |
| 4. Andante | 6'41 |
| 5. Allegretto grazioso | 5'48 |

Serge PROKOFIEV (1891 – 1953)

Extracts from the ballet "Chut (The Buffoon)"

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|---|------|
| 6. The Buffoon explains his clever plan | 1'46 |
| 7. The Merchant's dream | 1'25 |
| 8. The dead Buffoon comes to life again | 0'47 |
| 9. The inconsolable Merchant buries his fiancée | 1'33 |
| 10. Dance of the Buffoon's daughters | 1'03 |

Extracts from the ballet "Romeo & Juliet"

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 11. Masks | 4'21 |
| 12. Dance of the Caribbean girls | 2'07 |
| 13. Dance of the Knights | 1'58 |

Total time: 58'28

Irakly AVALIANI, piano - Patricia REIBAUD, violin

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Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 – 1791)

Sonata for violin and piano in G major K.379

In 1781, when he composed this sonata, Mozart had just broken with his old patron, the tyrannical archbishop Hiéronymus Colloredo, and had gone to Vienna to live as an independent composer. For Mozart, it was a period of intense emotion, with some bitterness and much recrimination, but mostly his life there was full of excitement and vitality.

While it is clear that the sonatas for violin and piano are not Mozart's most important works, this sonata is particularly interesting and provokes many questions. Firstly, consider its form: is it in two movements, or in three, with its vast introduction exposed first by the piano then confirmed by the violin, which is practically a movement in itself?

Then consider the keys and modes, where in the principal Allegro, an apparently serene G major gives way to G minor, a key that Mozart never used lightly and always indicated his deep personal implication in the composition. Also, the subtle way the melody unfolds and the use of different voices, combined with harmonic structures that require very sensitive playing, all show that this was intended to be a serious work and not just some light hearted entertainment.

The second movement is written in the form of a theme and variations, a commonly used form but used here with much imagination. The positive movement of the theme reminds us of a German lied or a little march. The piano plays the first variation, then the violin takes the second, with repeated notes over a background of arpeggios, while the third is ample and dynamic before the minor key of the fourth, thus respecting the tradition which required a variation in a minor key in a piece written largely in the major. In the fifth variation, the piano is punctuated by the pizzicati of the violin, where a lyrical melody is contrasted by sudden outbursts of energy. In the last variation, Mozart returns to a popular style and the movement ends on a bright and optimistic note.

Johannes BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Sonata for violin and piano n°2 in A major op.100

The most classical of the German romantics, Brahms was also one of the most erudite musicians of his time, with a profound knowledge of the works of the great masters of the past. This classical grounding helped

decide his musical orientation, because at a time when the most popular musical forms were the opera and the orchestral symphony, he had the courage to turn to other forms and it is in his chamber music, often looked down on by other innovators, that we find some of his most beautiful and profound thoughts.

It was in Switzerland on the banks of Lake Thun, which he visited every year, that in 1886 he wrote his second sonata for violin and piano, op. 100. His friend, the Swiss poet Wildmann, in whose house the sonata was first played, wrote a ballade for him in which the pastoral description of nature provokes fantasy and daydreaming. The poem does not have the depth of feeling of the sonata, but clearly shows the general feeling of serenity and well being they felt in such a beautiful place. This sentiment is felt right from the first bars of the *Allegro amabile*.

In this work, Brahms remains true to himself, and the first movement goes from sudden impetuous movement to moments of calm meditation. The music reflects the intellectual strength and depth that was the foundation on which he developed a rich, passionate and happy life, continually regenerated by contact with nature.

The second movement has a more complex structure, combining as it does an *Andante* and two Scherzi. The lyrical melody of the *Andante* reminds us of Schubert, whose discreet influence is often present in Brahms's music and who possessed the same spirit of generosity and natural simplicity, as well as the strength given by his links to popular culture. The first *Scherzo* is spiritual, and revolves around a theme which repeats itself in many forms. In the second, we even find traces of some Hungarian dances.

The second movement leads directly to the third, an *Allegretto grazioso* (quasi andante) with a tempo that is quite slow for a finale. In this movement, Brahms uses the melody of one of his lieder *Meine Liebe ist grün wie des Fliederbusch*, proof of a need to sing which is omnipresent in his music. The movement sings with joy, but does not hide the complex facets of Brahms's personality, where moments of gravity in the second theme show the sombre Northern character whose rough exterior barely hides a profound tenderness. Finally, the sonata ends in the same spirit as it began, that of radiant confidence.

Serge PROKOFIEV (1891 – 1953)

Extracts from the ballets *Romeo & Juliet* and *The Buffoon* (Chout)

The musical futurist, the provocateur who took pleasure in aggraving the ear with "barbaric" harmonies and diabolical rhythms, was also the composer of the *Classical Symphony* and admired the rigorous and scientific approach of his predecessors. This heritage gave him an ability to adapt and renew himself, and paradoxically also gave him the flexibility to resolve

certain constraints. It also enabled him to maintain his own unique and recognisable style.

There were three main periods in Prokofiev's life: he made his debut as a composer in pre-revolutionary Russia, but in 1918 emigrated to the USA and spent the next fifteen years or so moving between USA and Europe with varying success. Finally, after having renewed contact with the USSR, he received his first commission from the Soviet state.

He soon returned to the USSR, and shared with Shostakovitch the honourable position of official composer to the Soviet Union, as well as the same ideological reprimands and censure. By a cruel irony of history, he died the same day as Stalin, the 5 March 1953.

During the period he spent in the West, Prokofiev worked several times with the Diaghilev's Russian Ballet. They first collaborated in the ballet *The Buffoon* (or *Chout*, whose full title was *The story of the Buffoon who out-buffooned seven other buffoons* or *L'Histoire du bouffon qui en berna sept autres*), inspired by two intertwined Russian folk tales whose crazy and irreverent humour verges on the surrealist. We will not find any rational explanation for this story of a buffoon who pretends to have found a whip that can raise the dead, which he sells to seven of his companions. He then dresses up as a woman and pretends to be his own sister in order to marry a rich merchant, in whose marriage bed he puts a female goat instead of himself...

The various facets of this music are illustrated by a small collection of extracts (transcribed for violin and piano by S. Sapojnikov), in which grotesque aggression alternates with deceptive contrasts and opposites.

In *The Buffoon explains his clever plan*, Prokofiev lets us guess the mood of the story through many glissandi and dense grating sounds. Then a sudden contrast is provided by *The Merchant's Dream*, in which we are carried away by one of those lyrical songs of which Prokofiev was a master, only to find that it is a prelude to more comedy in *The Buffoon's dead wife comes back to life*, done with such convincing precipitation that we are left in no doubt as to the health of the buffoon's wife. This is followed by a sad Russian melody for the scene where the *Inconsolable Merchant buries his fiancée* (which is in reality, the goat, which the merchant has treated so badly that it has died...), before the final energetic *Dance of the Buffoon's daughters*.

The *Romeo & Juliet* ballet, composed in 1935, was one of his first commissions from the Soviet state. Its music has been played all over the world, and its frequent use by the media has enable many of the pieces to become standard works in the repertoire of popular classical music. This is certainly the case for *Dance of the Knights*, which has lost nothing of the irresistible rhythmic force in its arpeggios written in the minor key, an astonishing demonstration of the art creating something new from

something old. The passion, present from the beginning, makes a striking contrast with the central part where the muted violin makes the lyricism even more mysterious.

In the *Dance of the Caribbean girls*, we are captivated by the grace and feline sensuality of the rhythm before listening to the aggressive rhythms of the *Masks*, where a gymnastic energy typical of Prokofiev enables us to visualise the movement even without the dancers.

Prokofiev may have his partisans and his critics, but one thing is certain: his music never bores us.

André Lischke