

West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021
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Bantry and Beyond

Festival Echoes

15. Cello Series (4)

Filmed at the Kasteel Amerongen, Netherlands

Anastasia Kobekina [cello]

Anna Fedorova [piano]

Schumann

Fantasiestücke Op.73

Schubert

Sonata in A minor D.821 'Arpeggione'

Maria Theresia von Paradis

Siciliane

Franck

Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano (transcribed for cello)

Robert Schumann [1810-1856]

Fantasiestücke Op.73

1. *Zart und mit Ausdruck – attacca*
2. *Lebhaft, leich – attacca*
3. *Rasch und mit Feuer*

The term *Fantasiestücke* appears so many times in Schumann's oeuvre that we are all entitled to get a bit confused. There is the added complication that works like this exist in versions for clarinet and violin as well. There are also two separate works for piano solo as well as the piano trio under the same title. Then there are two works simply called *Fantasie*, all of which adds up to a composer obsessed with the romantic power of imagination as opposed to the classical concern for form.

These three movements date from 1849 when Schumann was composing a series of miniatures for solo instruments with piano, possibly as a way of entertaining Clara, his wife, who was a spectacular concert pianist and was finding the endless demands of an ever-growing family increasingly frustrating. The commercial attraction of *Hausmusik* to publishers must also have weighed in the balance, the Schumann household was always under financial pressure. The original title was apparently *Soiréestücke*, perhaps an attempt on Schumann's part to focus on the social value of these magical pieces. Heinrich Heine wickedly defined a soirée as *enough light to provide illumination, enough mirrors to see your own reflection, enough people to be jostled hotly, enough sugared water and ice to cool down again*.

The three pieces are played without a break, which makes it clear that the three ternary shaped pieces were intended as a continuous suite. They change in mood from the wistful nostalgia of a transfigured song in A minor to the sunnier A major of the second piece with its wide leaps and echo-like trio. The third piece is governed by an urgent, impulsive ascending theme recalling the trio from its predecessor, while a quieter trio is needed to calm its impetuosity.

Francis Humphrys

Franz Schubert [1797-1828]

Sonata for Cello and Piano D.821 'Arpeggione' [1825]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Adagio –*
3. *Allegretto*

The Arpeggione was a strange instrument invented in 1823 by Johann Georg Stauffer in Vienna. Also known as the Guitarre d'Amour, it was derived from the Baroque viola da gamba. It was about the size of a cello with six strings and a fretboard but shaped like a guitar. Like the viola da gamba, it was held between the knees and played with a bow. Schubert's friend the cellist and guitarist Vincent Schuster mastered this odd creation and it was for him that Schubert wrote this delightful sonata in 1824. The instrument never caught on and was soon

abandoned, although Schuster wrote a playing method in 1825. The Sonata was published in a cello version in 1871, which is how it is usually played today, though the instrument went a fifth higher than the cello. The word Arpeggione is derived from *playing the harp*.

The piano opens the first movement, followed by the cello ten bars later; together they present a dark, unusually meditative theme for the first subject of a Sonata. However it does contain the seeds of a second, cheeky theme which quickly follows. A totally new lyrical melody follows later, beginning in the piano to a pizzicato accompaniment before being combined with the opening material, particularly the cheeky idea. The development swings back and forth between these well-contrasted elements in a most engaging fashion. The movement ends as it began with a calm sequence and two final chords. This may not be Schubert at his most profound but it is most entertaining and holds the listener's attention throughout.

The E major slow movement is the heart of the work – a wonderful, cantabile melody, as fine as any Schubert created for his best songs. It is a long soulful cantilena and rather than develop it to any degree, Schubert spins it out with great feeling. It leads straight into the subdued mood that opens the Rondo finale. The principal rondo theme is another lovely lyrical theme presented fully before moving to the first contrasting section or episode which brings back that cheeky idea from the first movement. A gentle dance-like second episode follows but the cheeky tune pushes its way in again, Schubert must have had a particular liking for it. The Sonata ends in a gentler mood bringing back the rondo theme at a leisurely pace, leading to a simple closure.

Ian Fox

Maria Theresia von Paradis [1759-1824]

Siciliane

Maria Theresia von Paradis was a famous blind pianist for whom Mozart wrote one of his piano concertos. She was reputed to have learnt 60 concertos by heart plus a repertoire of solo and religious works. In 1784 she performed 14 times in Paris. One reviewer wrote that one must have heard her to form an idea of 'the touch, the precision, the fluency and vividness of her playing'. While in Paris she also assisted in setting up a school for the blind. Like many virtuosos she also composed producing five operas and three cantatas. Later in life she turned to teaching and founded a music school in Vienna. Unfortunately the *Siciliane* attributed to her and often played by cellists is an arrangement by Samuel Dushkin of a theme from Tchaikovsky's Third Quartet. Dushkin was a violinist who performed with Stravinsky and arranged some of his ballet music for the two of them to perform. Kreisler also used to make arrangements that he passed off as recently discovered music from another era.

Francis Humphrys

César Franck [1822-1890]

Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano [1886]

1. *Allegretto ben moderato*
2. *Allegro*
3. *Recitativo - Fantasia*
4. *Allegretto poco mosso*

César Franck was a major figure in nineteenth century French music. His first instrument was the organ and it was as professor of organ that he was appointed to the Paris Conservatoire in 1871. His organ class quickly became an unofficial composition class and he gathered around him a circle of disciples, who were attracted by his teaching skill and his receptiveness to new ideas. His teaching was committed both to the strict classical form handed down from Beethoven and the harmonic innovations of late Romanticism. This did in some cases lead to self-indulgent excess, but in Franck's best works, such as the piano quintet, the quartet and this sonata, we are swept away by his lyrical passion.

The Violin Sonata is such a magnificent work that it has been hijacked by cellists (as today), violists and even flautists. It was written as a wedding gift for the Belgian violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe, whose skills were such that he performed it virtually at sight at the wedding celebrations on 26 September 1886. When the Sonata was premiered in Paris the next year, the enthusiasm was such that the finale had to be encored. Its popularity continues to the present day.

The sheer beauty of the instrumental writing lends the work instant accessibility, and Franck's perfectly judged control of instrumental balance and changing moods makes it equally rewarding for the players and the audience. It never descends to sentimentality or post-romantic indulgence, managing to combine rigorous development with inspirational freshness.

The sensuous opening sets the tone for the first movement as well as generating the thematic material for almost the entire movement. This theme recurs in both the fantasia and the finale. The turbulent second movement erupts explosively with its passionate declamation, long lines of fiery intensity that pause only for a brief moment of indecision. The closing bars reach such heights of passion that it is hard to imagine the music can possibly continue. The recitativo however makes no concessions, as the two instruments talk at each other before the fantasia develops the violinist's expressive powers to the full. The finale opens with an effortless canon, showing off the composer's skill at counterpoint but also harmoniously uniting the two players. Despite some big outbursts, the passion is now spent and the comparatively melodic theme holds sway for most of the movement; nonetheless the coda accelerates impressively to the well-deserved applause.

Francis Humphrys

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