

west | cork | music

West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021

with

OurConcerts.live

presents

Bantry and Beyond

Encore

31. Citizens of Everywhere (3)

Filmed at Studio 150 Bethlehemkerk, Amsterdam

Siobhán Doyle [violin]

Alexei Grynyuk [piano]

Schumann

Violin Sonata No.1 in A minor Op.105

Lili Boulanger

Deux Morceaux

Britten

Suite for violin and piano Op.6

Brahms

Violin Sonata in G major Op.78

Robert Schumann [1810-1856]

Violin Sonata in A minor Op.105 [1851]

1. *Mit leidenschaftlick Ausdruck*
2. *Allegretto*
3. *Lebhaft*

By 1850, when Schumann moved to Düsseldorf as their municipal Music Director, he was considered by many to be Germany's greatest living composer. Schumann was not a success as a conductor as he was gradually losing touch with reality but in the four years 1850-54 he hardly seemed to stop composing. For a long time these late works of Schumann were dismissed as the ramblings of a diseased mind, a campaign, it has to be said, begun by Clara, his long-suffering wife, who could never be accused of disloyalty. However posterity has grown kinder and we marvel that these works once were rejected.

His style had moved a long way from the miraculous youthful piano works, that unstoppable flow of ideas that seemed to trip up over each other in their desire to reach the page had been replaced by a more serious muse, who could replace unceasing invention with masterly structures and a sure grasp of form. Three violinists inspired this late flurry of violin music, Ferdinand David, leader of the famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and co-founder with Mendelssohn of the Leipzig Conservatory, Joseph Wasielewski leader of the orchestra in Düsseldorf and of course the young Joseph Joachim, already a famous virtuoso. The first two sonatas followed each other in the autumn of 1851, while the three works for Joachim date from his last autumn of sanity in 1854.

The First Sonata is cast in three movements, rather than four, with the Allegretto combining the functions of slow movement and scherzo. The addictive main theme, with its turbulent piano accompaniment, unfolds as though in a single breath and in a stroke of inspiration the second subject with its striking refrain flows unimpeded out of the transition. A similar overlap occurs at the start of the recapitulation. Here, as the development is still reaching its conclusion, the violin gives out the main subject's phrase in an achingly expressive broadened form, and the original tempo is not picked up again until the theme is already in mid-flow.

The Allegretto's main theme, with its phrases culminating in a *ritardando* followed by a long-held pause, is serene enough to afford the necessary feeling of repose between the Sonata's passionate outer movements. The first reprise of the theme gives way to an episode in a quicker tempo whose flow is touchingly interrupted by a long-held violin note behind which the sound of hunting-horns can be heard on the piano, changing from major to minor. At the end, with a gently rustling sound followed by two pizzicato chords, this delicately scored piece disappears into thin air.

Seemingly unstoppable semiquavers permeate the lively Finale not only in the movement's outer sections, but also in the passionate episode in the major at its centre. During the closing pages the violinist unobtrusively slips in the expressive version of the main theme

from the opening movement with an underlay of a new triplet rhythm in the piano, a brief interlude in the finale's restless motion.

Francis Humphrys

Lilli Boulanger [1893-1918]

Deux morceaux – Two Pieces for violin and piano [1911-1914]

1. *Nocturne*

2. *Cortège*

Like Schubert, Lili Boulanger was an extraordinarily gifted composer who died far too young – in her case she was only twenty-four when she died of tuberculosis. She was the daughter of a Russian princess and a French musician and grew in a musical family – her sister, Nadia, was also a composer as well as a highly sought after teacher, but Nadia herself recognised her younger sister's superior compositional talent and devoted much of her own time to helping Lili. Lili's talents were recognised while still a toddler, by Gabriel Fauré, who discovered that the two-year old had perfect pitch. Boulanger was the first woman in history to win the highly prestigious Prix de Rome when she was nineteen – many highly regarded composers never won this award, Ravel failed to win it five times. Although her father was seventy-seven when Lili was born, she had a close relationship with him and was greatly affected by his death in 1900. Many of her compositions dwell on grief and loss. She herself was chronically ill, which no doubt hampered the breadth of her creative output, but informs her style. She was greatly influenced stylistically by Debussy and her work is noted for colourful harmonies and instrumentation.

The *Deux morceaux* is a charming little piece that demands great clarity from the violinist. The first movement, *Nocturne*, demonstrates clear Parisian influences. A nocturne is a romantic character piece 'night music' and the exquisite opening subject, which is simple in itself, but then varied and expanded upon, is quite perfect for the form. The second movement, *Cortège*, seems a little misnamed, or perhaps Boulanger was being ironic. A cortege is a solemn procession, usually for a funeral, and the delightful running lines with the occasional pizzicato don't at all seem to fit the title. Throughout the piece, the very French Romantic influences are heard and many listeners may regret that the piece is over so soon.

Helen Dawson

Benjamin Britten [1913-1976]***Suite for violin and piano*** [1934]

1. *March: Allegro alla Marcia*
2. *Lullaby: Lento tranquillo*
3. *Waltz: Vivace e rubato*

This Suite is a very early piece by Britten, composed in Vienna. After the death of his father early in 1934 he set off on a European trip accompanied by his mother. They travelled to Basle, Salzburg, Vienna, Munich and Paris. They went a lot of opera especially Wagner, Richard Strauss, Verdi and a performance of *Die Fledermaus* in Vienna, quite possibly the famous production by Weinhardt conducted by Korngold. This trip confirmed all his worst misgivings about the state of English music, performance and teaching. The musical infrastructure that even minor German cities took for granted simply did not exist.

The Suite was begun in a hotel room in Vienna, curiously his last movement Waltz mirrors the Finale of Korngold's second quartet also composed that year. Britten's work feels a bit like series of musical experiments, which could account for its success at the ISCM festival in Barcelona. The work was originally in five movements but the March, Lullaby and Waltz are the only ones where the score is readily available.

Britten clearly enjoyed writing the witty little March, mocking established forms was a favourite occupation. The *Lento tranquillo* Lullaby blossoms briefly into a quiet and gentle melody closing in the heights at the limit of hearing. The far from Viennese waltz tests the virtuosity of both players as they strive to hide the dance behind a torrent of notes.

Francis Humphrys

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]***Violin Sonata in G major Op.78*** [1879]

1. *Vivace ma non troppo*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro molto moderato*

Dearest Johannes, I must send you word to tell you how deeply affected I am by your sonata. I received it today and naturally I played through it right away and afterwards, out of joy, I had a really good cry over it. After the first fine, enchanting movement, and the second, you can imagine my delight when in the third, I rediscovered my so ardently beloved melody with its delightful eighth-note rhythm! I say my because I do not believe there is a single person who perceives this melody as joyously and as wistfully as I. After all that wonderful delight, then the last movement as well! My pen is poor, but my heart beats for you in emotion and gratitude, and in spirit I press your hand.....Farewell, dear Johannes. Your faithful Clara.

The G major Sonata was dedicated to Clara Schumann's son Felix, who was also Brahms' godson. Felix had died of TB after a long illness earlier in 1879, thus the funeral march in the

Adagio. Although this wonderful sonata, one of the greatest masterpieces of the genre, has a sunny and sensuous reputation, the music casts many a shadow as Clara's emotional reaction to the score suggests.

It's not worth playing through more than once, and you would have to have a nice, soft rainy evening to give the proper mood, wrote Brahms to his friend Theodor Billroth, when he sent him the score. *Not worth playing through more than once* is hardly posterity's view, as Brahms of course knew. His friend quickly figured out the riddle of the *nice, soft rainy evening* for the motif that dominates the whole work is taken from Brahms' song *Regenlied*. This is the melody that so excited Clara, *Pour down raindrops; reawaken in me the dreams I dreamed in childhood*, is how the song went but the melody itself, with its mood of nostalgia and regret, harked back to Brahms' and Clara's shared past.

This radiant sonata was written immediately after the glorious violin concerto, indeed Brahms brought the score to his great friend and musical advisor, the violinist and composer Joseph Joachim, before the proofs of the concerto were completed. Some commentators even feel that the sonata's slow movement was Brahms' original idea for the concerto's slow movement. The dotted rhythm that sets the opening theme in motion pervades the whole work as does the little phrase itself, whose seeming artlessness is of the kind that conceals art. This unifying motif dominates the first movement and reappears in both the other movements and is intimately related to the *Regenlied* theme. This richly expressive opening leads to an inspired transition passage, where the piano gently reflects on the theme accompanied by the violin's hushed lower-register double-stopping. Out of this magical atmosphere emerges one of Brahms' most ecstatic lyrical creations, a glowing second subject that could define beauty. This mood of melodious well-being is soon lost in the development as the music slips into the minor key and passion takes the place of lyricism. However, like Mozart, Brahms could cast shadows without hiding the sun and the music soon returns to the rhapsodic flow of melody.

The E flat Adagio is cast in an extended ABA form, haunted throughout its outer sections by the grim dotted rhythm of a funeral march, while the central section looks at beauty with the saddened eye of experience. The famous and much-loved finale is a surprisingly gentle movement in its evocation of childhood innocence seen across the years-wide gulf of experience. The movement evolves as a rondo, the main episode taking up the Adagio's second theme and developing it within the context of the rondo's wandering and obsessive figuration. The coda of the whole work is an even richer synthesis of ideas, scraps of themes from the finale and the adagio are interwoven as the harmony melts back into the long-abandoned G major, the piano textures thin out and the opening theme of the whole work is recalled, its place now clear, and the circle closes on a finally tranquil major-key diminuendo. No wonder Clara was moved to tears.

Francis Humphrys

Thank you for watching