

Christian Tetzlaff, violin and Lars Vogt, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Sonata No. 7 in C Minor, Op. 30, No. 2 (1801-02)
Allegro con brio
Adagio cantabile
Scherzo. Allegro
Finale: Allegro - Presto

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2, Sz. 76 (1922)
Molto moderato
Allegretto

INTERMISSION

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Sonata for Piano and Violin in F Major, K. 377 (1781)
Allegro
Tema con variazioni. Andante
Tempo di menuetto, un poco allegretto

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Rondo in B Minor, D. 895 (1826)
Andante
Allegro - Più mosso

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Beethoven: Sonata No. 7 for Violin and Piano in C Minor, Op. 30, No. 2

When he wrote his three Op. 30 violin sonatas, in 1802, Ludwig van Beethoven was on the verge of his maturity as a composer. The C Minor Sonata is the most extroverted and obviously dramatic of the set, and its very key practically demands that we consider it in the company of such “heroic” C Minor works as his *Pathétique* Piano Sonata (Op. 13), Third Piano Concerto (Op. 37), *Coriolan* Overture (Op. 62) and Fifth Symphony (Op. 67). As with the Fifth Symphony, the theme that launches the C Minor Violin Sonata is an intense outburst that is hardly a melody but that nonetheless holds up to much exploration and development. And yet, the violence of this opening motif simmers rather than boils, at least at the outset, where it is announced *piano* by the piano. This abrupt motif drifts away in a descending chromatic pattern of notes, and then the violin takes it up, accompanied by urgent rumblings in the piano. An answering melody has a more cheerful, march-like character. Together these themes fuel most of the tense opening movement.

Employing A-flat Major for a suave slow movement following a tense C Minor opening movement was a Beethoven specialty; famous examples of this tonal architecture are also to be found in his Piano Sonata (Op. 10, No. 1), his *Pathétique* Sonata and his Fifth Symphony. The restrained elegance and rich harmony of the opening melody seems to point forward to Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words*. The movement ranges through five distinct episodes, visiting both extreme tenderness and forceful outbursts. It may be à propos to observe that this sonata is nearly contemporaneous with the composer’s heart-rending *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he lamented his encroaching deafness, by turns lashing out in anger and welling up with tenderness.

The Scherzo fully lives up to its name; packed with wit, this short ex-

pense banters with surprising rhythmic contrasts and even dresses up its Trio section with an unanticipated canon between the violin and the piano’s left-hand part. The Finale is as exciting as the Scherzo is wry. Its opening somewhat recalls the simmering gruffness of the first movement’s leading motif, and it unrolls through a palpably tight construction. On the final pages the tempo ratchets up to *Presto* for a thrilling conclusion.

Bartók: Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano, Sz. 76

Although Béla Bartók was never trained as a violinist, his instincts for the instrument proved uncannily nuanced. He wrote a number of works for violin and piano during his student years, including two sonatas (of a Brahmsian cast), two fantasies and several other movements; some are lost, and those that survived do not hold places in the active repertoire. In his maturity he enriched the instrument’s repertoire with such essential works as his two Sonatas for Violin and Piano (1921, 1922), two Rhapsodies for Violin and Orchestra (1928-29), 44 Duos for Two Violins (1931), and, at the very end of his life, a Sonata for Solo Violin (1944). Violinists were prominent members of his circle, including Stefi Geyer (a violin student with whom he was romantically infatuated) and the virtuosos Imre Waldbauer, Zoltán Székely, Ede Zathureczky and Jelly d’Arányi.

Waldbauer joined Bartók (as pianist) to play the premiere of the Sonata No. 2 on February 7, 1923, in Berlin, about three months after the piece was completed. It is an aggressive, dissonant work, veering closer to the modernism of Schoenberg than we usually expect of Bartók. This is not a 12-tone score, but it does echo the flavor of Schoenberg’s Expressionistic atonalism of the preceding decade. The first of the two movements is languorous, its widely spaced intervals yielding melodies that are not tightly tethered in a traditional sense, its harmonies intensifying the mys-

tery rather than grounding the music on an easily perceived tonic (although the composer insisted that the Second Sonata was basically in C Major).

This work also reveals glimpses of Bartók’s characteristic folk inspiration. The violin sometimes suggests “speech-music,” as if articulating spoken language through the rhythms and melodic inflections; and that instrument’s rampant use of glissando may also allude to folk style. The faster second movement flows forth without any substantial break. Here the folk inspiration is more apparent and the Schoenberg influence less so. Indeed, Stravinsky may seem more of a model, thanks to the brash *Petrushka*-like chords in bitonal superimposition. Another impetus may be Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, especially in textural matters. Bartók was fascinated by his music when he composed his violin-and-piano sonatas, and he had recently performed in Szymanowski’s *Mythes* (for violin and piano) in concert.

Mozart: Sonata in F Major for Violin and Piano, K. 377

In November 1781, the firm of Artaria & Company published a group of six violin sonatas as Mozart’s Opus 2. The set bears a dedication to Josepha Barbara Auernhammer. She was the daughter of an economic councilor in Vienna, and shortly after Mozart’s arrival in Vienna she became his piano pupil. She had an unrequited crush on Mozart. He wrote to his father that he actively disliked her, found her unattractive, and considered her “the most aggravating female I know.” Still, he esteemed her enough to dedicate to her these six sonatas, as well as (in 1785) his famous set of Variations on “Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman,” a rite of passage for generations of piano students. He also wrote his Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major (K.448/375a) to play with her and unveiled that piece at a concert at her family’s home. Josepha Auernhammer ended up marrying someone else, and her daughter carried on the family’s mu-

sical distinction, becoming an accomplished singer and numbering among her pupils the great soprano Henriette Sontag.

The “Op. 2” Sonatas circulated widely. An anonymous *Report from Italy* published in Carl Friedrich Cramer’s *Magazin der Musik* on July 9, 1784, reads: “Mozart’s sonatas with obbligato violin please me greatly. They are very difficult to play. Admittedly the melodies are not at all new, but the accompaniment of the violin is masterly.” The characterization of Mozart’s instrumental music as inordinately difficult, even insurmountably so, was not unusual at that time, with complaints being particularly vociferous in Italy — ironically, since it was always vaunted as the native soil of great string playing.

The F Major Sonata (K. 377) from “Op. 2” was composed during the summer of 1781, just after Mozart moved to Vienna from his native Salzburg. Its opening movement is a marvel of energy and formal ingenuity. The work’s emotional heart is the middle movement, a set of ominous variations that prefigures the corresponding section of the masterly D Minor String Quartet (K. 421), which would follow two years later. There is nothing formulaic about the concluding minuet movement. Again, structural originality is at play as the Menuetto proper (a study in bashfulness) alternates with more unbuttoned Trio sections and all of the material is subjected to imaginative processes of variation.

Schubert: Rondo in B Minor for Violin and Piano, D. 895

Franz Schubert had the good fortune to be born into a musically inclined family. Music-making was an indispensable pastime in the family’s household, and from an early age our composer played viola while working through the quartet repertoire with his father and brothers. He would go on to focus on singing when, in 1808, he was admitted to the Choir of the Court Chapel, a prestigious appoint-

ment that included a full scholarship, with room and board, to the Kaiserlich-königliches Stadtkonvikt (Imperial and Royal City College), which offered the best education available in Vienna to youngsters from non-aristocratic families. As an adult, the piano would be his personal performance medium, but he continued to play viola in the orchestra that gathered regularly at the homes of friends.

Nonetheless, he produced no music to specifically feature the viola and only six works to spotlight the violin. In March and April 1816, he composed three unpretentious sonatas for violin (D. 384, 385, and 408 — they were titled “sonatinas” when published, posthumously in 1836), and a fourth followed in 1817 (D. 574 — it was first published as a “Duo” in 1851). Not until late 1826 did he return to the medium, composing his Rondo in B Minor, a far more dramatic and vociferous piece in which an extended, harmonically peripatetic *Andante* introduction leads to an *Allegro* main section in sonata-rondo form, the whole wending from B Minor to eventual B Major and concluding in a take-no-prisoners coda. Schubert wrote it for the violinist Josef Slavík, a Czech violinist who moved to Vienna that year and created a sensation at his debut recital there in April. Frédéric Chopin called him “a second Paganini” and wrote that “he knows how to enchant the listener, how to move men to tears.”

Slavík and the pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet played this work at a soirée hosted by the publisher Domanico Artaria, apparently at the outset of 1827, with the composer in attendance; this was probably its premiere. Artaria published the piece that April, titling it *Rondeau brillant*, which seems an apt description. A year later, Slavík programmed it again, this time along with the Fantasia in C Major (D. 934), which Schubert had gone on to write for him, the last of his compositions for solo violin.

James M. Keller