Giora Schmidt: violin,
with Rohan deSilva: piano.

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

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg
Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

In June 1781 Mozart broke away from the two authority figures who had dominated his life to that point, Archbishop Colloredo and his father Leopold, and moved to Vienna. Having declared his independence, Mozart was under pressure to justify so bold a step, and he set out immediately to make a career as a free-lance musician in his adopted city. He gave concerts and took students, but he also recognized that there was a growing number of amateur musicians in Vienna who would gladly purchase and perform attractive new music. His first publication in Vienna was in fact composed directly for this market: during the summer of 1781 Mozart composed four new sonatas for violin and piano and published them that November (along with two sonatas composed earlier) as his Opus 2.

The title page of that set read "Six Sonatas for the Harpsichord, or Pianoforte with the accompaniment of a Violin," a description that has caused confusion because it seems to imply that the violin is superfluous and might be omitted with no loss of musical value. It is true that Mozart was working within the old form of the accompanied sonata, and it is true that the piano part often dominates textures in these sonatas. Still, the violin part is so important-and the musical argument so dependent on it-that they must be regarded as true duo-sonatas. An early reviewer in Hamburg went directly to this issue in his notice: " . . . the violin accompaniment is so ingeniously combined with the clavier part that both instruments are constantly kept in equal prominence; so that these sonatas call for as skilled a violinist as a clavier player."

The *Sonata in F Major* is not simply one of the finest of this set of six-this is one Mozart's finest sonatas. Its opening moments dispel the notion of the primacy of the piano in this music: that instrument may make the strong opening statement of the *Allegro*, but instantly the melodic line passes to the violin, and the two instruments engage in a sequence of exchanges. There is an unusual sweep and energy to this movement, which is quite compact: Mozart elides the development into the recapitulation so that suddenly we are in the home stretch even before we recognize that fact.

The mood changes completely with the central movement. It is in theme-and-variation

form, and the dark and dignified theme-in D minor-is taken through a series of six variations. This is the longest movement in the sonata, and it is a stunner, for the variations seem to grow in expressive power as they proceed. Each variation is in two parts, and the second is always longer and more ornate than the first. Across the first four variations, the theme seems to intensify on each appearance, and the music is marked both by strength and by chromatic expressiveness. Matters relax a little at the fifth variation, which moves into D major and sounds positively benign after what has gone before, and then Mozart concludes in a wholly original way: he goes back to D minor and casts the final variation as a siciliano, an old rocking dance whose name suggests the place of its origin. Many have noted the similarity between this variation and the final movement, also in variation form, of Mozart's *String Quartet in D Minor, K.421*, composed two years later-apparently this theme continued to haunt Mozart even after the sonata was published. Here it rises to an unexpected power, and then Mozart extends it into a long coda that brings the movement to its quiet close.

How does one conclude after so powerful a movement? Again, Mozart makes an unusual (and convincing) decision. He marks the last movement *Tempo di Minuetto*, but this music does not have the character of a minuet. Instead, it is a sort of slow rondo, built around a dignified main idea first stated by the piano. This simple melody will return throughout the movement, but Mozart separates these appearances with a series of sharply contrasted episodes-some melodic, some dramatic. The movement is rounded off with a long coda full of harmonic surprises, and finally this music fades very gently into silence.

It is a most impressive ending to a most impressive sonata.

Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, Opus 108

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg
Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Brahms spent the summer of 1886 at Lake Thun in Switzerland. He had just completed his *Fourth Symphony*, and now-in a house from which he had a view of the lake and a magnificent glacier-he turned to chamber music. That summer he completed three chamber works and began the *Violin Sonata in D Minor*, but he put the sonata aside while he wrote the *Zigeunerlieder* ("Gypsy Songs") and *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello*, grumbling that writing for stringed instruments should be left to "someone who understands fiddles better than I do." He returned to Lake Thun and completed his final violin sonata in the summer of 1888.

Despite Brahms' customary self deprecation, his writing for stringed instruments could be very convincing, and the *Third Violin Sonata* is brilliant music-not in the sense of being flashy but for the fusion of complex technique and passionate expression that marks Brahms' finest music. The violin's soaring, gypsy like main theme is so haunting that it is easy to miss the remarkable piano accompaniment: far below, the piano's quiet syncopated octaves move ominously forward, generating much of the music's tension. Piano alone has the second theme, with the violin quickly picking it up and soaring into its highest register. The development of these two ideas is disciplined and ingenious: in the piano's lowest register Brahms sets a pedal A and lets it pound a steady quarter note pulse for nearly 50 unbroken measures-beneath the powerful thematic development, the pedal notes hammers a tonal center (the dominant) insistently into the listener's ear. Its energy finally spent, this movement gradually dissolves on fragments of the violin's opening melody.

The heartfelt *Adagio* consists of a long spanned melody (built on short metric units-the marking is 3/8) that develops by repetition; the music rises in intensity until the double stopped violin soars high above the piano, then falls back to end peacefully. Brahms titled the third movement *Un poco presto e con sentimento*, though the particular sentiment he had in mind remains uncertain. In any case, this shadowy, quicksilvery movement is based

on echo effects as bits of theme are tossed between the two instruments. The movement comes to a shimmering close: piano arpeggios spill downward, and the music vanishes in two quick strokes.

By contrast, the *Presto agitato* finale hammers along a pounding 6/8 meter. The movement is aptly titled: this is agitated music, restless and driven. At moments it sounds frankly symphonic, as if the music demands the resources of a full symphony orchestra to project its furious character properly. Brahms marks the violin's thematic entrance passionato, but he needn't have bothered-that character is amply clear from the music itself. Even the noble second theme, first announced by the piano, does little to dispel the driven quality of this music. The complex development presents the performers with difficult problems of ensemble, and the very ending feels cataclysmic: the music slows, then suddenly rips forward to the cascading smashes of sound that bring this sonata to its powerful close.

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born August 22, 1862, Saint Germain en Laye
Died March 25, 1918, Paris

Debussy's final years were wretched. He developed colon cancer in 1909 and underwent a painful operation, radiation therapy, and drug treatment. It was all to no avail, and the disease took its steady course. The onslaught of World War I in 1914 further depressed him, but it also sparked a wave of nationalistic fervor, and he set about writing a set of six sonatas for different combinations of instruments. It may seem strange that the iconoclastic Debussy would return in his final years to so structured a form as the sonata, but he specified that his model was the French sonata of the eighteenth century and not the classical German sonata. To make his point-and his nationalistic sympathies-even more clear, Debussy signed the scores of these works "Claude Debussy, musicien français."

Debussy lived to complete only three of the projected six sonatas: a *Cello Sonata* (1915); a *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* (1916); and the *Violin Sonata*, completed in April 1917. It was to be his final work, and it gave him a great deal of difficulty. From the depths of his gloom, he wrote to a friend: "This sonata will be interesting from a documentary viewpoint and as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war." Debussy played the piano at the premiere on May 5, 1917, and performed it again in September at what proved to be his final public appearance. His deteriorating health confined him to his room thereafter, and he died the following March.

For all Debussy's dark comments, the *Violin Sonata* is a brilliant work, alternating fantastic and exotic outbursts with more somber and reflective moments. In three concise movements, the sonata lasts only about thirteen minutes. Debussy deliberately obscures both meter and key over the first few measures of the *Allegro vivo*, and only gradually does the music settle into G minor. The haunting beginning of the movement feels subdued, almost ascetic, but the dancing middle section in E major is more animated. Debussy brings back the opening material and rounds off the movement with a *con fuoco coda*.

The second movement brings a sharp change of mood after the brutal close of the first. Debussy marks it *fantasque et léger* ("Fantastic [or fanciful] and light"), and the violin opens with a series of leaps, swirls, and trills before settling into the near hypnotic main idea. The second subject, marked "sweet and expressive," slides languorously on glissandos and arpeggios, and the movement comes to a quiet close. Over rippling chords, the finale offers a quick reminiscence of the very opening of the sonata, and then this theme disappears for good and the finale's real theme leaps to life. It is a shower of triplet sixteenths that rockets upward and comes swirling back down: the composer described it as "a theme turning back on itself like a serpent biting its own tail." There are some sultry interludes along the way, full of glissandos, broken chords, rubato, and trills, but finally the swirling energy of the main theme drives the music to its animated close.

Debussy may have been unhappy about this music while working on it, but once done he felt more comfortable with it, writing to a friend: "In keeping with the contradictory spirit of human nature, it is full of joyous tumult . . . Beware in the future of works which appear to inhabit the skies; often they are the product of a dark, morose mind."

Habanera, Opus 21, No. 2
Romanza Andaluza, Opus 22, No. 1

PABLO DE SARASATE
Born March 10, 1844, Pamplona
Died September 20, 1908, Biarritz

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Red-Headed League*, Sherlock Holmes suggests to Watson that they might take the afternoon off: "'Sarasate plays at St. James's Hall this afternoon,' he remarked. 'What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?'" Watson reports that Holmes, himself a fine violinist, very much enjoyed Sarasate's playing: "All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music."

Holmes, like all of Europe, was captivated by the Spanish virtuoso-composer Pablo de Sarasate, who toured not only Europe but also North and South America, playing his own compositions and the music of others. So great a players was Sarasate that he inspired many works now a part of the standard repertory. Saint-Saëns' *Violin Concerto No. 3* and *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*, Lalo's Symphonie espagnole, and Wieniawski's *Violin Concerto No. 2* were all written for him. (Those interested in Sarasate the violinist should know that in 1904 he made some of the earliest commercial recordings, and these are now available on compact disc.)

As composer, Sarasate's fame today rests primarily on his *Carmen Fantasy* and *Zigeunerweisen*, both showpieces for violin and orchestra, but in his own day Sarasate was famous for his many compositions of a specifically Spanish character. Principal among these were his four sets of *Spanish Dances*, published between 1878 and 1882. This program offers two of these *Spanish Dances*, the *Habanera* from Sarasate's Opus 22 and the *Romanza Andaluza* from his Opus 21. From a purely technical point of view, these two dances offer a virtual compendium of violin technique: double- and triple-stopping, artificial harmonics, passages in octaves, huge skips, and left-handed pizzicatos-this music is every bit as hard as it sounds. At the same time, these dances offer some charming music. The Habanera is an old dance in duple time and of Cuban origin (the title reminds us that it came from Havana); Sarasate's *Habanera* has a fiery beginning, and then he offers a series of increasingly complex variations on this tune before the dance rushes to its exciting close. By contrast, the *Romanza Andaluza* is more lyric. This is music that evokes the atmosphere of Andalusia, that region in southern Spain famous for its wine, citrus, and Moorish and gypsy influences. One is certainly aware of that last influence here, as the *Romanza* moves from its sultry beginning to a quiet close.

Tzigane

MAURICE RAVEL
Born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Basses Pyrennes
Died December 28, 1937, Paris

In the summer of 1922, just as he began his orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Ravel visited England for several concerts of his music, and in London he heard a

performance of his brand new *Sonata for Violin and Cello* by Jelly d'Aranyi and Hans Kindler. Jelly d'Aranyi must have been a very impressive violinist, for every composer who heard her was swept away by her playing-and by her personality (Bartók was one of the many who fell in love with her). Ravel was so impressed that he stayed after the concert and talked her into playing gypsy tunes from her native Hungary for him-and he kept her there until 5 A.M. the next morning, playing for him.

Tzigane probably got its start that night. Inspired by both d'Aranyi's playing and the fiery gypsy tunes, Ravel set out to write a virtuoso showpiece for the violin based on gypsy like melodies (the title *Tzigane* means simply "gypsy"). Its composition was much delayed, however, and Ravel did not complete *Tzigane* for another two years. Trying to preserve a distinctly Hungarian flavor, he wrote *Tzigane* for violin with the accompaniment of lutheal, a device which-when attached to a piano-gave the piano a jangling sound typical of the Hungarian cimbalon. The first performance, by Jelly d'Aranyi with piano accompaniment, took place in London on April 26, 1924, and later that year Ravel prepared an orchestral accompaniment. In whatever form it is heard, Tzigane remains an audience favorite.

It is unusual for a French composer to be so drawn to gypsy music. Usually it was the composer from central Europe-Liszt, Brahms, Joachim, Hubay-who felt the charm of this music, but Ravel enters fully into the spirit and creates a virtuoso showpiece redolent of gypsy campfires and smoldering dance tunes. *Tzigane* opens with a long cadenza (nearly half the length of the entire piece) that keeps the violinist solely on the G string across the span of the entire first page. While *Tzigane* seems drenched in an authentic gypsy spirit, all of its themes are Ravel's own, composed in the spirit of the tunes he heard d'Aranyi play late that night. Gradually the accompaniment enters, and the piece takes off. *Tzigane* is quite episodic, and across its blazing second half Ravel demands such techniques from the violinist as artificial harmonics, left hand pizzicatos, complex multiple stops, and sustained octave passages. Over the final pages the tempo gradually accelerates until *Tzigane* rushes to its scorching close, marked *Presto*.