

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Albert Combrink takes us *Inside the Concert* with notes on the programme

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Minor, Op.105, Arranged for Cello and Piano

1) Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck 2) Allegretto 3) Lebhaft



Schumann showed signs of mental instability in his late teens, and his struggle with depression was one of the main reasons why Clara Wieck was so vehemently opposed to their marriage. That Schumann would survive a suicide attempt and die at the age of 46 in a mental asylum, is as much a tragedy as it is rich material for romantic embellishment and analysis of the composer's music. Given also that Clara destroyed many of her husband's late works for fear of his mental state being judged through them, and that even the most mature of his works still predate the age at which, for example Brahms was even starting his "mature" period, an honest appraisal of his legacy becomes more complicated.

All three Violin Sonatas date from Schumann's rather unhappy tenure as music director for the City of Düsseldorf. Schumann was never an outstanding conductor, and the constant conflict with city administrators and musicians, drove him to his composition studio for refuge. He wrote and revised the Third and Fourth Symphonies and in 1851, the two Violin Sonatas, premiered by Clara and various violinists in their circle, from Joseph Wasielewski (Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra) to Joseph Joachim, Clara's long-time recital partner.

In Schumann's Violin Sonatas, the prominence of the piano parts are immediately noticeable, making these *Duo*-Sonatas in the full sense of the word. While written in relatively strict Sonata form, Schumann however pushes boundaries by continually switching material between the Major and Minor scales, an unsettling effect which adds a heightened sense of drama. The works also show some of the newest Romantic Era musical developments being explored by Franck, Wagner, Berlioz and Liszt, such as the process of cyclical works, which bring back earlier themes in a new and altered form. This provides both a mechanism for creating unity and coherence, as much as it allows for variation.

The first movement lives up to its tempo indication: '*With Passionate Expression*'. Rapid rivers of running semiquaver passages set up a rhapsodic and lyrical exploration of the darker range of the string instrument. The mood only occasionally settles into something calmer, but the serenity is inevitably short-lived and lands in an emphatic minor cadence.

The second movement is more tenderly playful, in the nature of an Intermezzo. The movement is virtually monothematic, with one main melodic idea expanded by the string instrument, and the piano is subservient until the final assertive iteration of the material. Within the deliberate charm of this movement, one encounters a questioning, irresolute character that ruffles the serenity of the main theme, surely reflecting Schumann's deteriorating mental state at the time of writing.

The short and concentrated Finale is a tightly structured Rondo: with the description of '*lively*' the excitable opening refrain appears multiple times while interspersed with contrasting sections. Piano and strings test their skills of fast running passages against each other.

The Violin Sonata is today performed on the Cello, an instrument which Schumann loved passionately and for which he wrote many important works: the Piano Quartet and Quintet, three String Quartets,

Five Pieces in Popular Style of 1849 and the *Three Fantasiestücke* Op.73, and the Cello Concerto. Music-lovers shall forever mourn the *Five Romances* of 1853, and other works, destroyed by Clara Schumann. Along with many of the shorter woodwind pieces, this sonata has been transcribed for cello in various versions. Anthony Philips elaborates: “Schumann’s mastery, as in song - so in instrumental music, lay above all else in the character piece. When, after years of pouring out piano works many of which are among the most cherished in the repertoire, he turned his attention to chamber music, it was natural to pursue his unique penchant for creating atmospheric tone-pictures by such devices as tempo contrasts and expressive modulations rather than through structure or specific instrumental colour—except, of course, in the unfailingly eloquent piano parts. This is why they can be performed so effectively by a variety of string and wind instruments, and why Schumann was often ready to tolerate and even recommend *ad libitum* alternatives to the designated scoring.”

Jan Willem Nelleke writes of his cello version of the work: ‘Schumann’s *Violin Sonata, Op. 105*, is special among violin sonatas because of its tone colour. The composer makes full use of the warm character of the G-string, and throughout Schumann seems to aim for a dark sonority. Indeed the range is unusually low for a violin, and typical violinistic virtuosity is noticeably absent. It seemed therefore consistent with the composer’s intentions to make an arrangement for cello and piano.’

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

Two Song Transcriptions: An die Musik D.547 & Nacht und Träume

Apart from cello parts in his quartets and trios and the *Arpeggione Sonata* for a now-extinct instrument closely resembling the cello, Schubert wrote no solo-works for the cello. Perhaps because he was a pianist and a violinist, he expressed himself mainly on these instruments. His contribution to music is



large-scale symphonies, piano sonatas and one of the richest treasure troves of Romantic Artsong. The vocal quality of the cello has inspired many transcriptions of songs, and the pure melodic joy of Schubert, has resulted in a never-ending set of encores and ‘stocking-fillers’.

An die Musik D.547 (*To Music*) is the quintessential hymn to the art of music. Sung as a retirement encore by many a singer, and notably even in a solo piano version by Gerald Moore, the song is one of Schubert’s most famous. Composed already in 1817 but only opportunistically published a decade later as Schubert was on his death bed, it has a harmonic simplicity, a sweeping but unassuming melody, and a strong bass line to add counterpoint to whatever timbre of soloist was selected. The poet thanks the holy and blessed art of music, for all the times it has transported them to a better world.

(Text by *Franz von Schober*)

O blessed art, how often in dark hours,
When the savage ring of life tightens round me,

Have you kindled warm love in my heart,
Have transported me to a better world!
Transported to a better world
Often a sigh has escaped from your harp,
A sweet, sacred harmony of yours

Has opened up the heavens to better times for me,
O blessed art, I thank you for that!
O blessed art, I thank you!

Nacht und Träume (*Night and Dreams*), published in 1825, is marked *Sehr langsam* (very slowly), and has only one dynamic marking throughout the entire song: *Pianissimo* (Extremely Soft)

(Text by Matthäus von Collin),

Holy night, you sink down;
Dreams are also falling
like your moonlight through the rooms,
Through the still breast of men.
They eavesdrop on them with pleasure;
Call when the day awakens:
Return, holy night!
Sweet dreams, come back!

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 40

1) *Allegro non troppo* 2) *Allegro* 3) *Largo* 4) *Allegro*



Written in 1934, very much in the style of the composer's large-scale symphonic works, Shostakovich's Sonata presents four virtuosic movements dripping with the cynicism, despair, and mockery the world had come to expect from this young man so at odds with the Soviet regime. Shostakovich had already received much criticism for his problematic musical sarcasm, but the severe artistic censure he was to suffer from the authorities was yet to come. He had made a very public return to a more accessible musical language in his internationally acclaimed opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, premiered earlier that year and this sonata reflects some of the writing of that opera. Shostakovich was blissfully in love with Elena Konstantinovskaya, a young translator with whom he had worked on the opera, and his wife- Nina, unhappy that the entanglement with the young lady had blossomed into a relationship, had left Moscow, suing for divorce.

Some of Shostakovich's most unabashed romantic themes are presented in the first movement, presenting the juxtaposition of acidity and lyricism which characterise the composer's best works. Waves of arpeggios and icy harmonics carry along a volatile Scherzo second movement, before giving way to a dark lament in the third movement. Dark and introspective, it explores a vast range of colour for both instruments. The finale is a strong and confident statement of symphonic proportions which recalls the frenzy of the second movement. The heroic ending remains defiant and acerbic. Shortly after the first performance of the work, it was discovered that Nina was pregnant with Shostakovich's child. He ended his relationship with Elena and re-married Nina. What was to follow, was a trying persecution from the Russian Cultural Office, which would test both to their limits.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Swedish cellist **Torleif Thedéen** is one of the most distinguished instrumentalists in the Nordic countries and enjoys an international profile as a recitalist, concerto soloist, recording artist and pedagogue. He is a first prize winner of international cello competitions, including the Casals Competition. He is Visiting Professor of cello at the Royal College of Music in London and Professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo.

In a career spanning four decades, Torleif has performed with some of the world's greatest orchestras, among them the Czech Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, DSO Berlin, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, The Hallé Orchestra, Moscow Philharmonic, City of Birmingham SO, Dresden philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic and BBC Philharmonic.

He has worked with conductors including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Paavo Berglund, Petrenko, Neeme Järvi, Paavo Järvi, Franz Welser-Möst, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Osmo Vänskä, Mario Venzago and Leif Segerstam. He continues to perform with all the major Nordic orchestras and enjoys a burgeoning relationship with orchestras and festivals in the Antipodes.

As a chamber musician, Torleif is familiar with the prestigious stages of the Wigmore Hall in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, Philharmonie in Berlin and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. He has appeared at the Prague Spring and the Verbier Festivals, and at the chamber music festivals in Schleswig-Holstein, Bordeaux, Oslo, Bath, Stavanger, Kuhmo and beyond. His collaborators have included Janine Jansen, Julian Rachlin, Itamar Golan, Maxim Rysanov, Leif Ove Andsnes, Marc-André Hamelin, Lars Anders Tomter, Henning Kraggerud, Roland Pöntinen and Martin Fröst.

Torleif's recordings have attracted numerous accolades. He was awarded the Edison Prize in 2018 for his recording of Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time with Martin Fröst, Lucas Debargue and Janine Jansen on the Sony label. His recording of the Shostakovich Cello Concertos won a Cannes Classical Award and his account of the Bach Cello Suites was selected as a 'Choice of the month' by BBC Music Magazine. His discography also includes the concertos of Dvořák, Elgar, Saint-Saens, Lalo, Kabalevsky, Lutoslawski and a wealth of contemporary music.

He plays the 1783 Guadagnini cello on loan from the Norwegian Dextra foundation, previously owned by M. Rostropovich.

Described as possessing a "wonderfully full sound" (*American Record Guide*) and a "polished, refined technique" (*Allmusic.com*), **Luis Magalhães** has achieved critical acclaim as both a soloist and a chamber musician. Born in Portugal and currently residing in Stellenbosch, South Africa, Luis's career as a pianist displays the cosmopolitanism typical of successful 21st century musicianship. Luis has played extensively across Europe with recent engagements in Germany, Austria, his native Portugal, Switzerland, amongst others. Beyond Europe, he has appeared on stages in Brazil, South Africa, China, Japan, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and on numerous occasions, the United States. Reflecting his eminence as an artist of global standing, Luis was bestowed the honour of being named a Yamaha International Artist.

Luis is active as a studio musician, and has collaborated with many remarkable recording artists including Frank Stadler (violin), Daniel Rowland (violin), Madeline Adkins (violin), Priya Mitchell (violin), Gareth Lubbe (viola), Julian Arp (cello) Peter Martens (cello), and James Austin Smith (oboe). The recording with Martens, featuring the complete cello sonatas of L. v. Beethoven, was awarded a coveted South African Music Award (SAMA) in 2011, while both violin recordings have received glowing reviews in *The Strad*. From 2000 to 2021 he formed part of TwoPianists Piano Duo and released four

critically acclaimed CDs. This collaboration with the pianist Nina Schumann has been compared to the celebrated Ashkenazy-Previn and Argerich-Freire duos (*American Record Guide*). Furthermore, he has engaged in more frequent duo collaboration with the violinist Alissa Margulis rendering rave reviews.

Luis's further activities in the recording industry include the co-founding of the independent label TwoPianists Records. The result has been both local and international accolades, such as a German Record Critic's Award in 2011. Luis's immersion in the world of classical music recording has extended to the role of producer, to which he brings a wealth of experience as a practicing musician of the highest calibre. As a promoter of classical music in South Africa, Luis is a co-founder of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, which has since 2004 become the premier classical music festival on African soil. He is also a co-founder of the biannual Stellenbosch International Piano Symposium. In October 2022, Luis was appointed Artist in Residence at Teatro Circo, Braga – Portugal, until end 2023.

Eminent musicianship always leaves a legacy in the form of tuition. Luis himself was a student of maestro Vladimir Viardo at the University of North Texas. He has since gone to teach students who have scooped up major awards and placings in National and International competitions. Luis was awarded a Doctorate in Music in Piano Performance from the University of Cape Town in 2011, and continues his association with university musical life with his appointment to an Associate Professorship at the University of Stellenbosch. Luis has also given extensive masterclass tuition including lessons at New York's fabled Juilliard School and numerous universities across Europe, Asia and the United States. As an expert pianist and educator, Luis has also served in the jury of many competitions including the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition for Young Musicians.