



FRENCH VIOLIN SONATAS

DEBUSSY, RAVEL & FRANCK



Kristóf Baráti *violin*



Klára Würtz *piano*

French Violin Sonatas

Claude Debussy 1862-1918

Violin Sonata L140 (1917)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 1. Allegro vivo | 4'32 |
| 2. Intermède, fantasque et léger | 4'04 |
| 3. Finale, très animé | 4'11 |

Maurice Ravel 1875-1937

Violin Sonata No.2 in G M77 (1923-27)

- | | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 4. Allegretto | 8'09 |
| 5. Blues. Moderato | 5'26 |
| 6. Perpetuum mobile, allegro | 3'46 |

César Franck 1822-1890

Violin Sonata in A FWV8 (1886)

- | | |
|---|------|
| 7. Allegretto ben moderato | 5'35 |
| 8. Allegro | 7'37 |
| 9. Recitativo-Fantasia,
ben moderato | 6'43 |
| 10. Allegretto poco mosso | 6'09 |

Kristóf Baráti *violin* Stradivarius 1703 “Lady Harmsworth”
Klára Würtz *piano*

Shortly after the first performance of his sonata for violin and piano on 5 May 1917, Claude Debussy wrote gloomily to a friend that it might be of some “documentary interest” as an example of what “a sick man can do in time of war”, an analysis which starkly encapsulates the circumstances of its composition. He was in great pain from the cancer that would kill him the following year, in acute financial difficulty and had suffered terribly from the shortages, particularly of coal, during the winter of 1916-7. He had begun work on a sonata for “piano and violin” (as he originally termed it) the previous spring, the third in a projected series of six chamber compositions, the first two (for cello and piano and flute, viola and harp) having appeared in 1915. As it turned out, he did not live to write the other three, and this sonata proved to be his final work. The war had aroused fiercely patriotic sentiments in Debussy which found an outlet both in nationalistic, not to say, chauvinistic compositions and at the other end of the spectrum, these chamber sonatas in which, as “Claude Debussy, musicien français” he looked back to “old French style”, evoking the spirit of Rameau and Couperin whom he greatly admired.

While the previous two sonatas embraced the Franckian cyclical technique, in which the movements are linked by thematic recollection, this one employs it sparingly, almost perfunctorily – the main theme from the opening movement recurring only once at the beginning of last, the central movement being musically independent. Despite this, Debussy considered the work as an integral whole and refused to engage the middle movement separately at what was to be his final public appearance in September 1917. The first movement opens with hushed piano chords and a tentative improvisatory violin line, settling into G minor before gaining momentum in a more lively E major middle section. The central movement, *Intermède* (Debussy chose archaic names for several of the late sonata movements) shares the marking *fantasque et léger* with the cello sonata and its jaunty rhythms recall the *Golliwogg's cakewalk* and *General Lavine* (Prelude II.6). He had immense difficulty with what he described as the “terrible finale”, rejecting the first version as an “awkward neighbour” to the

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Engineer: László Dobos

Production and Editing: Ibolya Tóth

Photos Kristóf Baráti: Marco Borggreve

Cover photo Klára Würtz: Hang Fook Man

Photo booklet Klára Würtz: Maurice Lammerts van Bueren

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previous two and working through four subsequent versions before ending up with “a simple idea which turns back on itself like a snake biting its own tail” and which “by one of those very human contradictions is full of happiness and uproar”.

Maurice Ravel began contemplating a violin sonata for his friend Hélène Jourdan-Morhange after her performance of his *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré* in late 1922. This was to become his second sonata for violin and piano after a previously unpublished single movement work in A minor, composed in 1898 for his fellow student George Enescu, appeared in 1975. However he made little progress, taking up and abandoning the work several times over the next few years and a scheduled premiere in April 1924 with the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi was cancelled, d'Arányi performing the hastily written *Tzigane* instead (Jourdan-Morhange had by then ceased performing after rheumatism affected her hands but she continued to advise on technical aspects of the work and was its eventual dedicatee). It was only finally completed under pressure from Ravel's publisher Durand who wished to include it in a concert on May 30 1927. Ravel only just made the deadline, arriving at the apartment of Enescu, who was to repeat the role he had performed almost thirty years before, on the day of the performance, the “ink still drying” on the manuscript according to Enescu's pupil, the eleven-year-old Yehudi Menuhin. Ravel and Enescu went through the work twice – the second time with Enescu playing from memory – and the performance that evening was a great success.

Ravel was interested in exploring what he considered the essential incompatibility of the two instruments and wrote for them accordingly, occasionally subverting their usual roles by giving the piano the initial lyrical statement and making the violin pound out the rhythmic figures in the second and third movements. The pastoral mood of the first was, according to Ravel, an expression of his nostalgic feelings for France, which he had just left on a trip to England, uniting a “large lyrical idea with.... a more concrete idea of the French countryside in its most every day nature,

which is to say villages, farms chickens” – their bucolic clucking first heard in the piano under the violin's opening statement of the theme. The syncopated rhythms of the second movement, *Blues* (which may actually have been written first) continues Ravel's love affair with jazz, and many detect within it echoes of Gershwin and Jelly Roll Morton, although as Ravel said, this was “stylized jazz, more French than American”. The violin's banjo-like strumming across all four strings and swooping glissandi were not however to Enescu's taste and he apparently detested this movement! Finding a suitable finale troubled Ravel as much as it had Debussy and his pupil Manuel Rosenthal witnessed the destruction of a version which Ravel liked very much but which did not fit the sonata, Ravel ruefully admitting that its replacement was “not so good but a good finale.” The frantic *perpetuum mobile*, which recycles material for the previous movements, continues his fascination with the machine-like ostinati of the *Bolero* and *la Valse* with the violin bearing the brunt of the furious onslaught, playing for 180 consecutive bars.

Towards the end of his life **César Franck** returned to the composition of chamber music, a genre which he had ignored for decades during which he concentrated on large scale orchestral, organ and choral works. The *Sonata in A Major* for violin and piano of 1886 is a marvellous example of this late rediscovery of the small scale, albeit in somewhat monumental form, its four movements being an example of a “tetralogical effort” that Debussy deliberately avoided in his own sonata. In 1858 Franck had promised to write a sonata for Liszt's daughter Cosima, possibly intended as a wedding present after her marriage to Hans von Bulow the previous year. Cosima however made no mention of ever receiving it, and if Franck had actually begun work, there are no surviving drafts or sketches to show whether he recycled any material in the later work. This was also intended as a wedding present for his compatriot Eugène Ysaÿe who married on 28 September 1886. Franck, unable to attend in person, sent his friend Charles Bordes with the manuscript which was presented to Ysaÿe at the reception. He insisted on playing it immediately

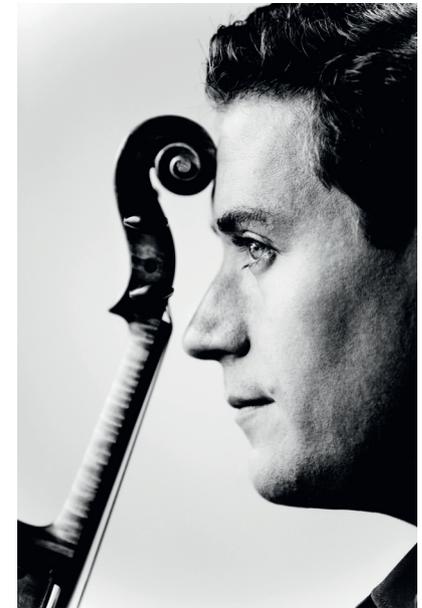
accompanied by Bordes' sister-in-law Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène who had travelled with him. Fortunately she had been shown the piece in advance by Franck and so did not have to sight read the prodigiously difficult piano part. She and Ysaÿe also gave the first public performance in the Museum of Modern Painting in Brussels, on the afternoon of 16 December. The work appeared late in the programme and by the time they had finished the first movement darkness was falling. The museum director however refused to allow any artificial lighting in the room, and so the musicians continued in the increasing gloom, playing from memory as it became impossible to read the music.

Vincent d'Indy, Franck's devoted pupil and acolyte, referred to this sonata, with some exaggeration, as "the first and purest model of the cyclical use of themes in sonata form" and although the concept of thematic recurrence and transformation had been explored by Beethoven and Schubert and fully developed by Liszt, Franck was certainly among the first to adopt it in his early chamber music and it was to become a signature characteristic of his later works. The principal theme constructed from rising and then falling thirds dominates and permeates the entire work. The first movement (originally intended to be slow but eventually marked *Allegretto* after Franck approved Ysaÿe's faster interpretation) is in modified sonata form, its yearning mood giving way to the passionate outburst of the following *Allegro* which the piano takes on a more virtuosic role without dominating the violin which comes to the fore in the contemplative central section. The *Recitativo Fantasia* surveys the material of the previous movements and introduces a new theme which is to play an important role in the finale which follows without a break, a canonic rondo ending in a hectic coda.

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Hungarian violinist **Kristóf Baráti** is recognised increasingly across the globe as a musician of extraordinary quality with a vast expressive range and impeccable technique. In 2014, at the age of 35, Baráti was awarded Hungary's highest cultural award, the Kossuth Prize, following in the footsteps of revered Hungarian artists such as András Schiff, György Ligeti and Iván Fischer. Applauded repeatedly for the poetry and eloquence that he brings to his playing, he has been described as "a true tonal aesthete of the highest order".

In recent seasons, Baráti has performed at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, at London's Royal Festival Hall with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and in 2019 he was the featured soloist in the opening concert of the Verbier Festival. Baráti has played with orchestras such as Zurich Tonhalle, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, ORF Vienna Radio Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, BBC Philharmonic and Hague Philharmonic orchestras. He performs regularly with Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra both in Russia and on tour around the world including in the US and China. Highlights of his 19/20 season include debuts with the Orchestre Symphonique



de Montreal, Hallé Orchestra, Haydn Orchestra and at Zarydye Hall with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra.

A regular recital and chamber music player, Baráti has performed with partners such as Mischa Maisky, Bashmet, Pace, Bavouzet, Kocsis and Kashkashian amongst others. He performs every year at the White Nights Festival and in 2019 made his debut at the Seattle Chamber Music and Aspen Festivals. In 2016 he made a sensational debut at the Verbier Festival when he performed the complete solo Sonatas and Partitas of Bach, and has since been back every year. Recital highlights in 2019/20 include a tour of North America including performances in New York City and Washington and his debut at Mexico's International Festival Cervantino.

Baráti has an extensive discography which includes the five Mozart concerti, the complete Beethoven and Brahms sonatas with Klára Würtz, and Ysaÿe solo sonatas for Brilliant Classics, and Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo violin on the Berlin Classics label. Of his disc of encores "The Soul of Lady Harmsworth" recorded in 2016, *Gramophone* magazine said "for those who like to hear the violin played at its sweet and acrobatic best, then Baráti is out of the top drawer."

Having spent much of his childhood in Venezuela, where he played as soloist with many of the country's leading orchestras, Baráti returned to Budapest to study at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music and was later mentored by Eduard Wulfson, himself a student of Milstein and Menuhin. Still resident in Budapest, Baráti performs regularly across Hungary and together with István Vardái, Baráti is Artistic Director of the Kaposvár International Chamber Music Festival. Baráti plays the 1703 "Lady Harmsworth" Stradivarius, by kind arrangement with the Stradivarius Society of Chicago.

"A Genuine Podium Phenomenon" Zoltán Kocsis

Through her innate musical intuition and imagination Klára Würtz is able to convey the essential musical message of the works she performs, both structurally and emotionally. By her extraordinary charisma she has the rare capacity to keep her audience spellbound. The complete naturalness, the beauty of her tone and her immaculate technical command make her a favourite and beloved artist with audiences all over the world.

Although she has an extensive repertoire her main strength and focus is on the Classical and Romantic repertoire. As prolific recording artist she made more than 40 albums, ranging from Mozart to Bartók. Her recording of the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas was met with great critical acclaim:

"Sensational! Würtz' pianistic finesse, her inclination to let the phrases breathe and "sing", her superb and fastidious equilibrium, and, above all, her inclination to leave well enough alone and let the music speak for itself, represent "centric" Mozart tradition at its attractive best." (Harris Goldsmith in International Record Review). After a concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Haitink the Boston Globe wrote: "Würtz, who



has the best recording of the complete Mozart piano sonatas to her credit, played with the same elegant, spirited style, command of dynamics, and lambent tone that is so admirable on the CD's". Another highly successful recording project is of the piano works by Robert Schumann, a composer with whom she has a strong affinity. Jed Distler wrote on Classicstoday.com: "Würtz' performances unquestionably hold their turf alongside the reference versions. In Kreisleriana for instance she matches Radu Lupu's poetry and sweep, while imparting more shape and meaning...Klára Würtz's will be the finest complete Schumann cycle to have been recorded by one pianist".

Though not claiming to be a "specialist" Klára has a special place in her heart for Franz Schubert. Richard Dyer (Boston Globe) speaks of the "inner radiance of her sound", while Fanfare Classical Magazine rates her Impromptus recording "in the exalted company of Schnabel, Brendel, Lupu, Zimerman and Perahia..this is very natural and distinctive music-making at a very high level". Her other solo recordings include works by Bartók, Kodály, Janáček, Liszt, Chopin and Debussy. She recorded piano concertos by Mozart, Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Bartók. An avid chamber music player she recorded the Beethoven and Brahms violin sonatas with Kristóf Baráti ("Reference recording" according to the leading German newspaper), Beethoven's cello sonatas with Timora Rosler, Kodály cello sonatas with István Várdai, and piano trios by Schubert and Mendelssohn with the Klaviertrio Amsterdam.

From early childhood on Klára was immersed in music. From her 5-th year she joined the famous Hungarian Radio & Television Children's Choir, with which she made extensive international tours. At seventeen she entered the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest where she studied with such iconic teachers as Zoltán Kocsis, Ferenc Rados and György Kurtág. Later she received scholarship from András Schiff for his chamber music courses in Prussia Cove, UK. In 1985 she won the First Prize in the Ettore Pozzoli Competition in Milan. In 1988 she was a prize winner in the Dublin International Competition and the only one to carry away a contract with an international agency: she signed up with Columbia Artist Management in New

York and played over a hundred concerts in the USA and Canada, at the Ravinia Festival and the Kennedy Center in Washington, with a.o. the Czech Philharmonic under Jiri Belohlavek. She played in the International Piano Festival of Williamstown, the Newport Festival, the Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, La Roque d'Anthéron (France), at the Mozarteum during the Salzburg Festival, with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer. She played chamber music with Janine Jansen, Dimitri Makhtin, Alexander Kniazev, the Pavel Haas Quartet and conductors Bernard Haitink, Theodore Kuchar, Marco Boni, Dirk Vermeulen, Justus Frantz.

Klára Würtz teaches at the Conservatory of Utrecht, and she lives with her husband and daughter in Amsterdam.