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Béla BARTÓK Sonata for Violin and Piano (1903)

Richard STRAUSS Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 18

Levon Ambarsumian, violin
Anatoly Sheludyakov, piano

Richard STRAUSS

- [1]. Allegro ma non troppo 11:34
- [2]. IMPROVISATION Andante cantabile 8:13
- [3]. FINALE Andante-Allegro 8:50

Béla BARTÓK

- [4]. Allegro moderato (molto rubato) 9:59
- [5]. Andante 9:16
- [6]. Vivace 8:04

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STRAUSS Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 18



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Richard Strauss (1864-1949). Sonata for Violin and Piano op.18

Richard Strauss wrote only five instrumental chamber works: a sonata for violin, for cello, for piano, a string quartet, and a piano quartet. All these works belong to Strauss' first period, and demonstrate the young composer's respect for traditional forms, showing clear influence of Strauss' great predecessors- Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms.

The violin sonata op. 18 (1887) was the last piece of chamber music that Strauss wrote, and it is definitely the finest and most popular of these early works. Strauss valued the Sonata very highly, performing it himself well into the 1930s. Written just one year before the symphonic poem *Don Juan*, the violin sonata, while based on a traditional sonata model, unfolds new expressive characteristics of future operas and symphonic poems.

The work opens with a broadly-proportioned *Allegro non troppo*, written in a traditional sonata form. At the same time the young Strauss is already unable to hide his true self: the solemn chords of the first theme, the powerfully melodic second theme, the richness of modulations, and dense chromatic harmony all build to the climax of operatic proportions.

The second movement, *Andante cantabile* (subtitled *Improvisation*) was composed last. Curiously, not long after its premiere, *Improvisation* was published as a separate composition, and appeared in concerts independently from the rest of the Sonata. The movement is written in three-part form, the stormy middle part framed by the expansive lyrical episodes. The rich and seductive opening melody of the violin evokes emotional slow movements of Beethoven and Brahms sonatas, while the piano part of the middle section recalls the accompaniment of Schubert's *Erlkonig*.

The Finale (*Allegro*) opens with a solemn piano introduction of nine measures, using the slowed down material of the main theme. The violin bursts forth with passages of great brilliance and powerful chords. This movement is less restrained than the other two, soaring melodic lines interposed with scherzo-like passages of motivic development. The work ends with triumphant recapitulation and coda.

Bela Bartok (1881-1945). Sonata for Violin and Piano

The Sonata for Violin and Piano was composed in 1903 and premiered in Budapest on January 25, 1904 by Bartok and Hungarian violinist Jeno Hubay. At the time Bartok was studying piano at the Budapest Academy with Istvan Thomas, a pupil of Liszt, and composition with Janos Koessler. Another important musical influence on young Bartok was Richard Strauss, whom he met at the Budapest performance of Strauss' works in 1902. Since the Sonata was written before Bartok's collaboration with Zoltan Kodaly in collection, arrangement, and study of folk music, the work bears little resemblance to Bartok's mature style. Influences of Liszt and Strauss are clearly heard throughout the piece.

After discovering the importance of folk music and embarking on numerous collecting trips in 1905, Bartok's compositional language underwent tremendous transformation. The composer embraced this new path, vehemently rejecting his youthful compositions- the symphonic poem *Kossuth*, the 1905 piano quintet, and the 1903 violin sonata. As a result, the Sonata was not published during Bartok's lifetime. The work first appeared in print in 1964. In 1968 it was prepared for *Editio Musica* publication by Andre Gertler - a famous violinist, professor at Bruxelles Conservatory, and a personal friend of Bartok.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato (molto rubato)* is in traditional sonata form. The calm piano introduction is followed by the principal theme in the violin- the beautiful descending E minor melody. The fugal opening of the development builds to climax and is followed by recapitulation and coda. The principal violin theme of the opening returns triumphantly in E major just before the end, and then is sung again peacefully in its original form. The movement ends calmly on the last fleeting fragment of the main theme.

The A minor *Andante* is the most original of the three movements and was written somewhat later than the rest of the Sonata. It is a theme and six variations. The somber theme is presented first by solo violin, and then repeated in the same dark manner by piano. The distinct Hungarian character of this movement is most apparent in the second variation- a gradual *accelerando* in a dance

reminiscent of Brahms' *Hungarian dances*, and fifth variation, with its gypsy flavor of energetic tremolos and passionate melody on the G string of the violin. The mysterious coda returns to the somber mood of the opening.

The last movement is a lively Rondo dominated by the E minor Hungarian dance theme returning four times as a refrain. A song-like second theme (*tranquillo*) appears in the corresponding major key, first G, and the second time E. The coda is filled with skillful modulations on the initial theme and concludes with dazzling virtuosity in E major.

Levon Ambartsumian studied in the Moscow Central Music School and then in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where his teachers were Felix Andrievski, Yury Yankelevitch, Leonid Kogan and Igor Bezrodny. In 1977 he became the First Prize winner of Zagreb International Violin Competition headed by Henryk Szeryng. Two years later he was a prizewinner of the Montreal International Competition, and in 1981 he won the All-Union Violin Competition in Riga. Levon Ambartsumian was distinguished as Honored Artist of Armenia in 1988 and Honored Artist of Russia in 1997. He has collaborated with conductors and composers such as Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Fedoseev, Maxim Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, Alfred Schnittke, and many others. Mr. Ambartsumian performed in the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Brazil, South Korea and Japan. In 1989 Ambartsumian founded the Moscow Chamber Orchestra ARCO which regularly performed in Russia and abroad and now resides in Athens, Georgia, USA.

Mr. Ambartsumian joined the faculty of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory in 1978 where he taught for 15 years. For two years, he was a Visiting Professor at Indiana University School of Music (Bloomington, Indiana). In 1995 Ambartsumian accepted the position of Franklin Professor of Violin at the University of Georgia School of Music (Athens, Georgia).

Mr. Ambartsumian devotes himself to contemporary Russian, Armenian and American Music and has made several important world premiers. He has released several CD's including music by Vivaldi,

Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Wieniawski, Sarasate, Stravinsky, Bartok, Shostakovich, Schnittke, Bronner, Arutiunian and other contemporary composers.

As a teacher, Mr. Ambartsumian has given master classes in Russia, Armenia, South Korea, Canada, Brazil, France and Portugal. His former students hold principal positions in major European orchestras in Germany, France, Portugal, and Denmark, and many have been prizewinners at international Violin competitions. Levon Ambartsumian performs on a violin made by Mikhail Azoian, Moscow.

Anatoly Sheludyakov was born in Moscow, where he graduated from the Gnessin Music Institute and completed his postgraduate studies there under Professor Anatoly Vedernikov. He also graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in the composition class of Tikhon Khrennikov.

In 1977, Mr. Sheludyakov was the winner of the All Soviet Piano Competition as well as the winner of the Russian National Piano Competition. He has performed solo concerts with orchestras, solo recitals, and chamber music performances in the most prestigious concert halls in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other major cities in Russia, USA, Germany, France, Italy, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, China and Australia. He has recorded sixteen CDs under different Russian and American labels.

Anatoly Sheludyakov was distinguished as Honored Artist of Russia in 1999. His repertoire includes the major works for piano solo, piano with orchestra, and chamber music of the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary periods. He has been an assistant professor of piano at Gnessin Institute of Moscow and has maintained a private piano studio. His recent performances include four appearances at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Currently Mr. Sheludyakov is an Artist in Residence at the University of Georgia, USA.