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JAMES EHNES, VIOLIN & ORION WEISS, PIANO

SAT, MAR 13
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

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PROGRAM

Sonata in G Minor, D. 408

Franz Schubert

- I. Allegro giusto
- II. Andante
- III. Menuetto: Allegro vivace
- IV. Allegro moderato

(1797-1828)

Sonata No. 2

Sergei Prokofiev

in D Major, op. 94a

(1891-1953)

- I. Moderato
- II. Presto - Poco piu mosso del - Tempo I
- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro con brio - Poco meno mosso -
Tempo I - Poco meno mosso - Allegro con brio

Sonatine for Violin and Piano

Aaron Jay Kernis

- I. Oracle, Cetacea, Larkspur (b. 1960)
Oracular Proclamation - Allegro Sostenuto
Dolphinic Syncopation
Delphinium Pollination – Delicato
Allegro, Tempo 1
- II. Shaded Blue
- III. Catch That Train!

Sonata in D Minor, Op. 75

Camille Saint-Saëns

- I. Allegro agitato
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro moderato
- IV. Allegro molto

(1835-1921)

SCHUBERT: SONATA IN G MINOR, D. 408

As a young person, Schubert learned the violin and composed chamber music to perform with family and friends. The G Minor sonata, written in 1816 fits this scene. At the time, he was just beginning a teaching career while studying composition with Antonio Salieri on the side. Correspondingly, the music reflects a strong familiarity with classical models, but also Schubert's fledgling individuality — the melodic lines are intuitively graceful, and there is an acute awareness of harmonic subtlety.

The opening *Allegro giusto* is modeled on a Mozartean sonata in two main ways. First, there is the sound of the work, which is dominated by the piano. The violin is treated as a soloist for just a few select phrases, which is consistent with then-common expectations. Second, the movement adheres to a traditional structure. It quickly modulates away from its moody G Minor beginning towards more carefree tonal realms. But, following a lengthy central development, the gloom reappears to color the remainder of the movement.

The *Andante* resides primarily in E-flat Major, one of the friendlier keys explored in the first movement. In the spirit of conviviality, it features the violin more prominently as a melodic instrument. And yet, not quite as a lead soloist. Schubert makes use of the violin's lower register, supplying rich contralto lines to support the piano's soprano. This arrangement is flipped for two important passages, however. It is the violin that introduces the main melodic ideas, and also which leads the action through a blustery central section. The latter role is particularly significant, since it links this otherwise peaceful movement with the *Allegro giusto's* strife.

A fully liberated violin is finally presented in the *Menuetto*. It carries the action of this animated dance from beginning to end without objection from the piano. In fact, there's barely even a hint of harmonic protestation: the whole movement is cast in major keys, as if the blinds have been opened and the sunlight is streaming.

G Minor returns for the folk-influenced final movement, but only for a while; it is quickly abandoned for more welcoming climes. Additionally, the two instruments seem to have reached a consensus on how to operate in an equitable partnership. Both take turns in the spotlight, and share in the joys of this vigorous closer.

PROKOFIEV: SONATA IN D MAJOR, OP. 94A

Prokofiev spent most of World War II in relative comfort. He and his family had been evacuated from Moscow to various safer locations, where he was able to continue composing without interruption. The Opus 94 sonata comes from this time, beginning life as a flute sonata in 1943. At the urging (and with the assistance) of David Oistrakh, it was transcribed for violin the following year (so rendering Opus 94a). Though somewhat skittish, little of the war creeps into this piece, at least not overtly. Rather, it is lively and soulful, perhaps owing something to ideas the composer was simultaneously developing for stage and film works.

One of the opening Moderato's most striking features is its use of musical energy. The initial passage is languid, some rushing little figures and repeated notes notwithstanding. But these slight features, along with Prokofiev's characteristically slippery harmonic language, plant the seeds of future development. Embedded in the action of those figures, however ornamental they may seem, is an awareness of physicality – the player must move differently than they would in more typical lyrical passages. Building on this subtle gestural detail, motion is thematized, with the music behaving as if subject to the laws of physics. Passages alternate between those which build up stores of energy and those that provide release, sometimes unpredictably. The movement's central tension thus becomes a search for balance between motion and stasis, though the latter is inevitable. After all, what goes up must come down.

If the first movement followed the contours of natural forces, the second has something of the mechanical about it. Rhythmic complexity is foregrounded, through off-kilter repeated phrases and surprising accents. In tone, it trends towards the diabolical, but Prokofiev does a masterful job of maintaining a sense of good fun. He also diffuses the threat of relentless motion with a particularly weightless central section. It provides both aural relief for the audience and a little relaxation for the performers.

The Andante is an object lesson in how mid-tempo music can sustain a sense of intrigue without being overly dramatic. Its first phrase is almost naïve in tone and construction, signaling another patch of peaceful music. But subterranean harmonies soon lurch forward, delicately complicating the music's stability. Prokofiev's touch is even-keeled throughout, acknowledging

drama but maintaining a cool temperature. In doing so, this music contributes more ambiance than plot, further absorbing us into its world.

With the Finale, the investment in mood-setting pays off. From the Andante's atmosphere emerges a rich narrative form, through which we become participants in a grand story. The music borrows gestures and energies from earlier in the work, now steering them through colorful twists and turns. So windy is the writing, that a search for escape quickly becomes a critical issue. Eventually, one is discovered — this sonata of atmosphere and energy concludes with a well-earned declaration of triumph.

KERNIS: SONATINE FOR VIOLIN & PIANO

Sonatine is a very misleading title. The “ine” at the end of Sonata would imply a small-ish, intimate effort - a miniature sonata, but that's not the case here. This is a full fledged sonata - if anything is small about it, it's the 2nd movement, which is shorter and less conclusive than my usual extended slow movements.

No, the reason the title is Sonatine is that it rhymes with my daughter Delphine's name, and the piece is dedicated to her. She plays the violin (though doesn't plan to go on with it as a career), and she did give the actual premiere the 2nd movement at home last year. The originating idea was that I'd write a piece at her level of accomplishment, but as usual I went a bit further than that, giving her a piece to work up to. A few years before, I'd written First Club Date for her cellist brother, and so I certainly had to complete the circle of inspiration from my children. (Over the years I also wrote a number of other pieces inspired by those wonderful creatures.....)

The first movement has a bold opening, with a jazzy 2nd theme and a lyrical center. The name Delphine alludes to the Oracle at Delphi, dolphins and the Larkspur flower (also known as wild Delphinium), hence the title and slightly silly internal section headings listed above.

Delphine has often colored her hair blue, so the harmony of the 2nd movement also has slightly bluesy harmonies along with highly colorful highlights.

I've always loved bluegrass and music of the American vernacular, and wanted to write a train-influenced, bluegrass-inspired final movement that reminded me of that first nail-biting day my wife and I allowed our kids to take the subway on their own. So rather than making a new arrangement of Orange Blossom Special, I found an unaccompanied song sung by Sam Ballard from the Lomax folk song collection from 1934, and based the movement on it to end the piece as a rip-roaring end to Delphine's Sonatine.

I am thrilled that James Ehnes and Orion Weiss will give the world premiere!

– Aaron Jay Kernis

SAINT-SAËNS: SONATA IN D MINOR, OP. 75

In 1885, Saint-Saëns was a well-established figure on the European musical scene. He had made his reputation as a pianist and orchestral composer, but often sought refuge in chamber music. By removing the trappings of larger ensembles, he could focus on nuances of color, texture, and line. In this work, his first violin sonata, he does all that and more. In fact, so extravagant is the writing that it nearly betrays its status as a duo — the writing is large and dramatic, expressing feelings that push the limits of this humble ensemble.

As its tempo marking implies, the *Allegro agitato* has issues. To call it angsty would be an understatement: it is aggressive, confused, and determined all at once. Aside from the tumultuous harmonies and blizzard of pitches, the movement's rhythmic life is highly unstable. Saint-Saëns chose the rocking time signature of 6/8 as the movement's main meter, but he continuously disrupts it in disparate ways. As early as the first bar there are complex syncopations that make it difficult to discern a steady beat. And just when one is established, he adds single bars of 9/8 time, which thoroughly disrupt any sense of predictability. These features create an anxious environment, sufficiently profound as to cast shadows on the movement's more tranquil passages. Despite emphasizing longer, calmer lines, they do little to diffuse the situation.

The last instance of attempted tranquility leads without interruption to the *Adagio*. With this new tempo, the second movement realizes what the first's contrasting sections aspired

to become. It is generally peaceful, lyrical, and warm. But still, a bit of nervous energy radiates through against-the-grain note groupings, and repeated-note textures. Blanketing these vulnerable moments, though, are luminous cascades of sound that provide much needed comfort and calm.

After a pause, the Allegro moderato returns to a minor-key landscape, but with much less at stake than in the first movement. Instead, we get a scherzo-like movement that dances through predictable (yet inventive) phrases and figures. Periodically, the lyrical is mixed with the rhythmic to give the movement shape and momentum. Enough of the latter is generated to lead, again without a break, to the final movement.

An uninterrupted stream of 704 sixteenth notes in the violin initiates the Allegro molto. For context, that's a lot; at the tempo marked by the composer, it's a little more than 11 individual notes per second. So, suffice it to say that some of the first movement's anxious energy has returned for a reprise. There is one notable difference, however: the gloomy key of D Minor has been replaced by lustrous D Major. All the physical work required to produce those notes now serves a more celebratory function, and it celebrates a lot. Saint-Saëns wrote several extended patches of development, without ever letting up on the vigor. To an extent, this balances against the heft of the first movement, but it is also simply exciting in its own right. Once that final cadence sounds, you will likely want to applause just as much as the performers want to collapse! (Though, even virtually, your appreciation will surely keep them upright for at least a bow or two.)

JAMES EHNES, VIOLIN

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after violinists on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest of many of the world's most respected conductors including Ashkenazy, Alsop, Sir Andrew Davis, Denève, Elder, Ivan Fischer, Gardner, Paavo Järvi, Mena, Nosedá, Robertson and Runnicles. Ehnes's long list of orchestras includes, amongst others, the Boston, Chicago, London, NHK and Vienna Symphony Orchestras, the Los Angeles, New York, Munich and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras, and the Cleveland, Philadelphia, Philharmonia and DSO Berlin orchestras.

Recent orchestral highlights include the MET Orchestra at Carnegie Hall with Nosedá, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig with Shelley, San Francisco Symphony with Janowski, Frankfurt Radio Symphony with Orozco-Estrada, London Symphony with Harding, and Munich Philharmonic with van Zweden, as well as his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Lincoln Center in spring 2019. In 2019/20, Ehnes is Artist in Residence with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, which includes performances of the Elgar Concerto with Luisi, a play/direct programme led by Ehnes, and a chamber music programme. In 2017, Ehnes premiered the Aaron-Jay Kernis Violin Concerto with the Toronto, Seattle and Dallas Symphony Orchestras, and gave further performances of the piece with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

Alongside his concerto work, James Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule. He performs regularly at the Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Symphony Center Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Ravinia, Montreux, Chaise-Dieu, the White Nights Festival in St Petersburg, Verbier Festival, Festival de Pâques in Aix, and in 2018 he undertook a recital tour to the Far East, including performances in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. As part of the Beethoven celebrations, Ehnes has been invited to perform the complete cycle of Beethoven Sonatas at the Wigmore Hall throughout 2019/20. Elsewhere Ehnes performs the Beethoven Sonatas at Dresden Music Festival, Prague Spring Festival, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, at Aspen Music Festival (as part of a multi-year residency) and at Bravo Vail Festival during his residency week also including the Violin Concerto and Triple Concerto with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Runnicles. In 2016, Ehnes undertook a cross-Canada recital tour, performing in each of the country's provinces and territories, to celebrate his 40th birthday.

As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with leading artists such as Andsnes, Capuçon, Lortie, Lugansky, Yo-Yo Ma, Tamestit, Vogler and Yuja Wang. In 2010, he formally established the Ehnes Quartet, with whom he has performed in Europe at venues including the Wigmore Hall, Auditorium du Louvre in Paris and Théâtre du Jeu de Paume in Aix, amongst others. Ehnes is the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including a Grammy Award (2019) for his live recording of Aaron Jay Kernis' Violin Concerto with the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot, and a Gramophone Award for his live recording of the Elgar Concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davis. His recording of the Korngold, Barber and Walton violin concertos won a Grammy Award for 'Best Instrumental Soloist Performance' and a JUNO award for 'Best Classical Album of the Year'. His recording of the Paganini Caprices earned him universal praise, with Diapason writing of the disc, "Ehnes confirms the predictions of Erick Friedman, eminent student of Heifetz: 'there is only one like him born every hundred years'." Recent releases include sonatas by Beethoven, Debussy, Elgar and Respighi, and concertos by Walton, Britten, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Strauss, as well as the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Andrew Manze, which was released in October 2017 (Onyx Classics).

Ehnes began violin studies at the age of five, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin aged nine, and made his orchestra debut with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal aged 13. He continued his studies with Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music upon his graduation in 1997. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and in 2010 was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada. Ehnes was awarded the 2017 Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the Instrumentalist category.

James Ehnes plays the "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715.

ORION WEISS, PIANO

One of the most sought-after soloists in his generation of young American musicians, the pianist **Orion Weiss** has performed with the major American orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic. His deeply felt and exceptionally crafted performances go far beyond his technical mastery and have won him worldwide acclaim.

His 2018-19 season sees him beginning that season with the Lucerne Festival and ending with the Minnesota Orchestra, with performances for the Denver Friends of Chamber Music, the University of Iowa, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Albany Symphony, the Kennedy Center's Fortas Series, the 92nd Street Y, and the Broad Stage in between. In 2017-18 Orion performed Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, toured with James Ehnes, and soloed with twelve orchestras around the United States. Other highlights of recent seasons include his third performance with the Chicago Symphony, a North American tour with the world-famous Salzburg Marionette Theater in a performance of Debussy's *La Boîte à Joujou*, the release of his recording of Christopher Rouse's *Seeing*, and recordings of the complete Gershwin works for piano and orchestra with his longtime collaborators the Buffalo Philharmonic and JoAnn Falletta.

Named the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year in September 2010, in the summer of 2011 Weiss made his debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood as a last-minute replacement for Leon Fleisher. In recent seasons, he has also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and in duo summer concerts with the New York Philharmonic at both Lincoln Center and the Bravo! Vail Valley Festival. In 2005, he toured Israel with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Itzhak Perlman.

Also known for his affinity and enthusiasm for chamber music, Weiss performs regularly with the violinists Augustin Hadelich, William Hagen, Benjamin Beilman, James Ehnes, and Arnaud Sussman; the pianist Shai Wosner; and the cellist Julie Albers; and the Ariel, Parker, and Pacifica Quartets. As a recitalist and chamber musician, Weiss has appeared across the U.S. at venues and festivals including Lincoln Center, the Ravinia Festival, Sheldon Concert Hall, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society SummerFest, Chamber Music Northwest, the Bard Music Festival, the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, the Kennedy Center, and Spivey Hall. He won the 2005 William Petschek Recital Award at Juilliard, and made his New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall that April. Also in 2005 he

made his European debut in a recital at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. He was a member of the Chamber Music Society Two program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center from 2002-2004, which included his appearance in the opening concert of the Society's 2002-2003 season at Alice Tully Hall performing Ravel's La Valse with Shai Wosner.

Weiss's impressive list of awards included the Gilmore Young Artist Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Gina Bachauer Scholarship at the Juilliard School and the Mieczyslaw Munz Scholarship. A native of Lyndhurst, OH, Weiss attended the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with Paul Schenly, Daniel Shapiro, Sergei Babayan, Kathryn Brown, and Edith Reed. In February of 1999, Weiss made his Cleveland Orchestra debut performing Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1. In March 1999, with less than 24 hours' notice, Weiss stepped in to replace André Watts for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. He was immediately invited to return to the Orchestra for a performance of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto in October 1999. In 2004, he graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax.



Alsarah talking to students at Durham School of the Arts.

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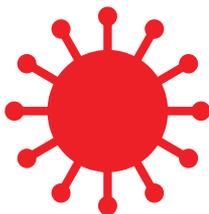
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